Private sorrow in the public domain: the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials

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Certificate of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge and belief, understand that it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Charles Sturt University or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Charles Sturt University or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

I agree that this thesis be accessible for the purpose of study and research in accordance with the normal conditions established by the Executive Director, Library Services, Charles Sturt University or nominee, for the care, loan and reproduction of theses, subject to confidentiality provisions as approved by the University.

Name: Susan Margaret Welsh

Signature:

Date: Monday 19th June, 2017
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God bless you all.
Ethics Approval

Approval Number – 2012/182

Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
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Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Publications

Conference Presentations

Oxford Round Table International Conference on Religion, Brasenose College, Oxford University, England, 28th July to 1st August 2013

Australian Grief and Bereavement Conference 2014, Bayview Eden, Melbourne, Australia, 26th to 28th March 2014

Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre, Melbourne, Australia, 9th to 12th July 2014
Abstract

The focus of this research was the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials, their meanings and roles in the bereavement process. An exploratory, qualitative study, it examined the meanings attributed to the memorials, drawing on hermeneutics and phenomenology. Critical social work theory also formed a major part of the conceptual framework.

Findings from a thematic analysis of data from fourteen semi-structured interviews, which explored the lived experience of people who have placed roadside memorials, were considered in the light of findings from a visual analysis of fifty memorial sites and a comprehensive literature review. This triangulation of methods supported a rigorous approach to the interpretations of the findings and conclusions drawn.

Roadside memorials are important in bereavement for the people who construct them, reinforcing that grieving is a personal and individual experience. Moreover, the findings support the newer theories of grief, emphasising the role of both continuing bonds and meaning-making. Implications for policy and practice conclude the thesis.
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List of Terminology and Abbreviations

**AASW**—Australian Association of Social Workers—the national professional body for social workers in Australia.

**Crash versus accident**—In this thesis I will use the term “crash” rather than “accident”. Although the word accident was used by the participants, and the expression “motor vehicle accident” (MVA) is still commonly used in medical settings, its use “implies that there was no cause of the crash and therefore the person that caused the crash is absolved of responsibility” (Breen, 2006, p. 144). Conversely, the use of the word crash seeks to question the assumption that road deaths are not preventable, and are not the fault of either an individual or governments, road authorities or the motoring industry itself (Blanchard, Hickling, & Kuhn, 2003; Breen, 2006, Stewart & Lord, 2002). Further, Reid and Reid (2001, p. 342) emphasised that deaths caused by drink-driving are anything but accidents; they are preventable deaths, caused by the irresponsible choices and actions of another. For this reason, the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) organisation stresses the term should become “motor vehicle crash” (MVC), not MVA.

**DSM-5**—Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—the fifth edition of the American Psychiatric Association’s tool for the diagnosis and classification of all psychiatric conditions. Recommendations for appropriate treatment plans and guidance for health care providers/insurers are often dependent upon the DSM diagnosis and classification.
LGA—Local Government Area—Regional council areas in Australia are referred to as LGAs.

MADD—Mothers Against Drunk Driving—a not-for-profit organisation in the United States and Canada that seeks to “end drunk driving, help fight drugged driving, support the victims of these violent crimes, and prevent underage drinking” (MADD, 2016). They also strive for stricter drink driving policies and penalties.

NRMA—National Roads and Motorists’ Association—the NSW organisation dealing with motoring and road issues.

PTSD—Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder—a form of anxiety disorder, usually developed after experiencing a traumatic event. Flashbacks and feelings of fear, horror, anxiety, anger, numbness, sadness and hopelessness contribute to the ongoing distress of sufferers (Sane Australia, n. d.).

NSW RMS—New South Wales Roads and Maritime Services—the state government body overseeing all road and maritime issues within NSW.

RTA—Roads and Traffic Authority (now known as RMS).

SES—State Emergency Services—Australia-wide volunteer organisation, providing emergency help following disasters.
SCC—Shoalhaven City Council—the local government area in NSW where part of this research is situated.

TAFE—Technical and Further Education—provides post-secondary education in Australia.

VicRoads—Victoria Roads—the Victorian Government’s road organisation.
Prologue—Poem

Little White Cross

Little White Cross
Along the way
You beckoned my thoughts
As I passed you today.

What was your story?
What was your name?
Who loved you so much
a cross here they claim?

Were you a victim
of alcohol’s scorn?
Or sweet, tiny baby
who never was born?

Little white cross
Along the way
A tear fell for you
As I passed you today.

Pamela R. Blaine November 1, 2000

This thesis reports on a qualitative research study on memorialisation, exploring the role of roadside memorials in the bereavement process of those affected by motor vehicle fatalities. Preliminary reading highlighted the significance of the actual place of death to people who are grieving. Roadside memorials become a “sacred site” for many, marking the precise spot where their loved one passed from life to death (Clark & Franzmann, 2002, 2006; Everett, 2000, 2002; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Larson-Miller, 2005; Smith, 1999, 2003; Weisser, 2004). Added to this, an increase in cremation has seen a decline in the
centrality of the cemetery (Johnson, 1992), with loved ones’ ashes frequently being kept in an urn or scattered at a meaningful location (Dickinson, 2012; Hockey, Kellahe, & Prendergast, 2007). Many people touched by traffic fatalities report that this place of death is more significant to them, more emotionally and spiritually connected to their loved one, even if a gravesite exists (Clark & Franzmann, 2002, 2006; Everett, 2002; Suter, 2010; Weisser, 2004). Memorialisation at the roadside appears to be a new sacred site for many.

The placement of roadside memorials has become a growing socio-cultural phenomenon in recent years, across different cultures and countries. There is evidence that death along the roadside was marked in the ancient world (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Weisser, 2004), so it is by no means a new trend. The growing rate of roadside memorials is, however, new (Doss, 2002, 2008; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Weisser, 2004). Doss (2008, p. 5) referred to it as “memorial mania” and “a veritable explosion of public monument-making in the United States and Europe.”

In addition, the issue of roadside memorials has become a controversial one in recent times. It has been attracting considerable attention in Australia—through talkback radio, television programs, newspaper articles, academic research and journal articles as well as various Australian councils reviewing their policies on roadside memorials (see, for example, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Queensland, n. d.; VicRoads, Victoria, 2015; and Main Roads, Western Australia, 2010). The debate centres around driver distraction and potential safety issues caused by the proliferation of roadside memorials beside Australia’s roads, along with a questioning of the right of individuals to “inflict” their private grief on others in such a public place, hence the title of my study: Private sorrow
In the public domain: the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials. The size and disrepair of some sites are also highlighted in the controversy surrounding such public memorials.

Thanatology and the bereavement field are a particular passion of mine. Sprague (2005, p. 168) noted that researchers should be able to explain their reasons for having an interest in the area under investigation. This interest stemmed from my social work honours thesis exploring paternal grief and men’s experiences following perinatal death, and from working in the oncology and palliative care field as a bereavement counsellor. Added to this, roadside crosses first caught my attention a number of years ago while travelling around New Zealand with my four children. These memorials caused me to think about my own driving as well as wondering about the victim and the bereaved family and friends. A few years later, a local radio announcement piqued my curiosity. A public outcry had ensued when a local South Coast (New South Wales) council considered removing existing roadside crosses and banning future ones from being erected. Council believed the increasing number of roadside memorials was bad for tourism, and that unkempt and neglected sites were creating eyesores. Memorials were also seen as a distraction and a potential danger to others. The council, however, was forced to abandon this motion. As a social worker in the grief and loss field, as a mother of young adults and as a member of a community with a high incidence of road fatalities, this incident of public activism further aroused my interest and curiosity. I was keen to find out why roadside memorials were meaningful for bereaved families and friends. My passion was ignited and this research project was born.
I have never experienced the death of a loved one from a traffic fatality, and have therefore never been involved with establishing such a memorial. Like many ordinary Australians, however, I am affected by them during every road trip I undertake, even on daily trips into town for work or shopping. As a social worker at the local hospital, I was involved with counselling a couple who survived a multiple victim traffic fatality. Two crosses for the victims were erected, and each time I pass these the painful and tragic reminders of that day are revisited for me.

As a mother of four young adults, three of whom are males, I was well aware that my children’s ages and genders closely fitted the statistic and demographic of fatal car crash victims. Added to this, I knew I would be interviewing parents with whom I would closely identify. As a researcher, these unescapable factors all had to be personally acknowledged and dealt with. Additionally, in May 2013 my youngest son, who was nineteen at the time, went on a solo bicycle road trip to and from Cairns in Northern Queensland (some 6000 kilometres) and, knowing my current research focus, asked me before he left that if he died while on the road would I put up a roadside memorial for him? What a question! So, my “mothering” role, my “professional” role and my “researcher” role are all interwoven on this research journey. They are all embedded in who I am, my worldview, the paradigm I operate in, my ontological and epistemological basis.

This was further exemplified upon a recent trip to Canada in April, 2015. Prior to leaving Australia, I had been reading an article by Belshaw and Purvey (2009) about roadside memorials in British Columbia (Canada). Upon seeing a number of memorials in Canada, and reflecting on this article, it reinforced that even on holidays I am engaged in my
research, being unable (or unwilling) to step out of the researcher role. This demonstrates how—as will be discussed in Chapter 2—Husserl’s (1966) notion of “bracketing” our experiences is perhaps unattainable; rather, Heidegger’s (1978) notion of “bridling” our experiences is more achievable, as they come with us everywhere, even on a skiing trip. In the same way, travelling to Sydney on Easter Sunday, 2015, I witnessed for the very first time someone stopped at a roadside memorial, changing flowers and maintaining the site. This was profoundly interesting for me, as I had recently read another article where the author (Bednar, 2004) stated that he had never seen anyone stopped at a roadside memorial. Again, even on holidays the research followed me, it is embedded in who I am. As Gadamer (1975) recommended, it is important to note that my experiences, my historicity, are integral to my research process. I brought all of this to the interviews and carried the research process with me.

**Connection to Social Work**

Social work theory and practice occur in the nexus between the personal and the political, the personal and society, the private and the public. We work in the spaces between the individual and social constructs. My ontological paradigm is underpinned by the core social work values and the profession’s Code of Ethics (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010). Therefore, a critical social work framework is helpful for my research, looking at the personal and the political and the links between the two (Ife, 1999; Pease & Fook, 1999a, 1999b). I employed a combination of theoretical perspectives—critical social work, phenomenology and hermeneutics—as together these provided the most appropriate theoretical approach, to allow me to understand the experience of people dealing with their grief following road fatalities. During the
initial stages of my research journey, I also considered the use of other “lenses” and theories to view this phenomenon of roadside memorials. Among these were postmodernism, interpretivism, dramaturgy, Jungian analysis, iconography, Barthian semiotics and visual analysis. Each approach would undoubtedly have provided rich and varied layers to my research. However, as I am operating from a critical social work paradigm, my ontology, epistemology and discourse all reflect this perspective. Professionals from different disciplines, such as anthropologists, sociologists, cultural geographers, folklorists, poets and artists, have studied roadside memorials through different lenses, with a different ontological and epistemological basis.

The social work profession has a wealth of insight into working with people who are bereaved, and those who are struggling to come to terms with such a loss. To be effective, social workers need to be cognisant of thanatological research and theories, to inform and guide our day to day practice. The psychosocial model of grief and bereavement informs the social work perspectives of grief and loss. This model acknowledges that relationships are a crucial component of human existence (Bowlby, 1977, 1980; Klass, 2006; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996). Further, we seek to maintain a tie to our loved one who has died. This psychosocial perspective, along with other more dominant discourses on grief theory, will be discussed more fully in Chapter Three.

I am interested to explore the meanings of roadside memorials for people (using a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach), as well as arrive at policy implications for legislative bodies (using critical social work). As I am a social worker undertaking social work research, examining the meanings people attach to roadside memorials and
contributing to policy development I adopted a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, coupled with critical social work theory. The epistemological base behind critical social work, phenomenology and hermeneutics and my rationale for employing them, are outlined in the following chapter.

Interestingly, there is currently a dearth of literature from an Australian social work perspective that seeks to examine the “lived experience” (Husserl, 1966) of building and maintaining a roadside memorial. These gaps in the existing knowledge base became the impetus for the current study.

**Significance of the study**

This research is significant for a number of reasons. It has the potential to assist people dealing with bereavement, increasing understanding and awareness about their decision to erect roadside memorials in public places in the face of the current levels of debate and controversy. The findings of the study add to the knowledge base and professional practice surrounding grief and loss and the comfort and solace roadside memorials may give to those bereaved by road crashes. Equally important, the study provides significant implications for policymakers in their approaches to policy and legislation covering the placement of roadside memorials.

My study has significance for the wider community. Roadside memorials are in most people’s awareness and my research contributes to the public debate surrounding them. It also raises questions about cemeteries and traditional mourning practices, namely if these are still relevant for people today in the midst of current social, cultural
and generational changes regarding death and burial practices. My research uncovers a bigger picture than simply a focus on roadside memorials.

This research is timely, as a growing number of councils and states in Australia are considering their policies regarding the placement of roadside memorials due to the current heightened debate.

Research aims and lines of inquiry

The aims of this research are framed within a social work perspective. As the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics (2010, p. 7) states:

> The social work profession promotes social change . . . Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments . . .

There are four central aims. The first aim is to examine the meanings and role of roadside memorials in the bereavement process, asking if they help in this process, and if so, how and why? Related questions include: why is there such a growing number of roadside memorials across Australia, what do they mean and what do they signify to bereaved families and friends? Clark and Franzmann (2006) noted that, “scholars have yet to assert with confidence the reasons why roadside memorials are erected . . .” (p. 594). To date, this phenomenon of erecting memorials along Australian roadways to mark deaths has not been comprehensively investigated from this particular angle.

The second aim is to contribute to the public debate concerning roadside memorials, to increase community understanding and raise awareness about the placement of roadside memorials and the role they have in bereavement. Thus, this research aims for
professional advocacy (political consequences) by assisting those bereaved on a personal level to feel heard, understood and have their loss validated by others.

A third aim is to inform and contribute to the professional knowledge base of grief and loss in relation to roadside memorials; to appreciate the meaningful role roadside memorials can have in bereavement; and to better understand what interventions may help or hinder those bereaved by motor vehicle crashes. This enables us to assist people who have been affected by roadside trauma and death.

The fourth aim is to inform the New South Wales (NSW) Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and other government policymakers as they prepare legislation covering the placement of roadside memorials; it is not merely to seek an understanding and interpretation of people’s experiences with roadside memorials. Rather, I seek to enable change, my work has a political agenda and outcome. As summarised by Ife (1999, p. 129):

one of the central aims of critical theory is to enable people to be empowered through equipping them with the tools to analyse their own experiences by relating them to social and political structures (the personal is political) and thus to take action.

Some suggestions for policy are therefore made, with a view to assisting government and other relevant organisations in their future policies and directives surrounding roadside memorials.

Following an extensive review of the literature, these research aims were refined into four lines of inquiry:

1. What is the meaning and significance of, and the role played by, roadside memorials? Do they, and if so, how do they assist those who are grieving?
2. How does the role of the roadside memorial compare to the cemetery or graveside? Do these two sites serve the same, or different, functions?

3. What can be learnt from the memorials themselves—their physical characteristics such as wording used and the icons or personal mementos left there?

4. What policy and practice implications can be gleaned from the research findings?

**Physical context of the study**

The setting for the research was initially intended to be within the Shoalhaven Local Government Area (LGA), on the South Coast of New South Wales (NSW), approximately one hundred and sixty kilometres from the centre of Sydney. This stretches from Berry in the north to just past Ulladulla in the south, west to Kangaroo Valley and east to Jervis Bay. It is one of the largest local government areas in the state, covering 4660 square kilometres, with a length of approximately one hundred and thirty kilometres and a width of eighty kilometres (Shoalhaven City Council, SCC, n. d.). A collaborative body, PHocus (Upgrade the Princes Highway now), was formed on September 19th 2003, to address growing concerns about the safety issues along this stretch of the Princes Highway. At this time it was stated that, “the Princes Highway has the worst crash and casualty rate of the key routes in southeast NSW” (NRMA Road Audit, 2014). In 2011, the National Roads and Motorists’ Association (NRMA) again highlighted the main road—the Princes Highway—as “one of the worst sections of highway in the country” (Carless, 2011). Further, Evans, Director South Coast Region NRMA (2014) in the Director’s Foreword of The Princes Highway Audit (NRMA 2014) stated:
South of Jervis Bay Road, the Princes Highway remains, to a large extent, a death trap. Tragically, 45 people died and a further 1401 were injured on the Princes Highway over the five year period 2008–2012. Already this year, eight people have lost their lives … sections of the Highway—particularly south of Jervis Bay—that haven’t been upgraded continue to claim innocent lives at an alarming rate.

Wolstenholm, from the NRMA, and McTiernan and Brisbane, both from the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB—a research and consultative body to the road and transport industry), were the authors of the *Princes Highway Strategic Road Improvement Plan*, a part of The Princes Highway Audit. They iterate the dangerous nature of this stretch of road, stating:

. . . to the south of Jervis Bay Road, there are 16 sections of the Highway that are considered a persistently high risk to road users, with 523 casualty crashes, including 22 fatal crashes occurring in the 2008–2012 period . . . Exposure to this persistently high risk is much greater for the local communities and people travelling on the southern sections of the Highway, with almost 300 km of the Highway classed as high risk compared to just over 30 km in the northern section (Wolstenholm, McTiernan, & Brisbane, 2014, p. i).

More recently, the RMS Minister, Duncan Gay, referred to the Princes Highway as the “Forgotten Highway”, stating that, “The Princes Highway has long been the forgotten highway of this state” (McInerney, 2016). Many lives are thus claimed on the roads in the Shoalhaven LGA each year. According to the information from both SCC and the RMS there were one hundred and seventy-seven fatalities in the Shoalhaven LGA between March 18th, 1996 and June 3rd, 2015. This became the period available for investigation—computerised records were not kept prior to this date, and June 3rd 2015 became my cut-off date for the research project.

While the Shoalhaven LGA was originally intended to be the geographical boundary for both the interviews and observation of sites component of the study, in the end it was the boundary for the observation of sites only. As it proved difficult to recruit
participants from this area alone, the geographical boundary for interviews was extended to include the whole of Australia, with approval from Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

**Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is divided into thirteen chapters. Chapter One provides the ontological framework and introduction and background to the study.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical approaches underpinning the research: critical social work theory, phenomenology and hermeneutics, and provides the rationale behind these choices.

Chapter Three outlines the current literature in the field of grief and loss and considers how thanatological understandings have developed over time.

Chapters Four and Five examine the existing literature specifically related to roadside memorialisation, and identifies limitations and gaps in the knowledge base that provide the impetus for this research.

Chapter Six explains the research methodology employed in the interview component of the study, and demonstrates how both the semi-structured interviews and the interviewing process are underpinned by the hermeneutic phenomenological approach taken. Research rigour, the ethical considerations in doing such “high risk” research, the recruitment and interviewing process, the transcribing stages and finally the analysis and interpretation of findings are discussed.
Chapter Seven discusses the physical observation of fifty sites undertaken as part of the research process. The photographing and observation of these sites is outlined, and the process of examining the material generated from this is highlighted. An interpretation of this rich visual material is provided.

Chapter Eight introduces the fourteen research participants and provides an overview of their experiences and situations. Their motivations for being involved in the study are revealed.

Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven present the interview findings and examine the experiences of the research participants. The commonalities and differences between the participants are discussed in the light of the lines of inquiry, comparing the findings with the literature reviewed.

Chapter Twelve provides some implications for policy and practice, as well as suggestions by the participants for others so bereaved. It also considers the unexpected outcomes and opportunities generated by the research, including the level of community interest and debate sparked by radio interviews Australia-wide.

Chapter Thirteen draws the thesis to a close, summarising the findings, discussing the strengths and limitations of the current study and suggesting avenues for future research.

Having positioned myself as a researcher within my ontological framework, including outlining my study’s connection to social work practice, the significance of the study, the research aims and lines of inquiry, and the overall shape of the thesis, I now turn to the theoretical framework that underpins this study. Chapter Two discusses the
epistemological base, considering critical social work theory, the phenomenological framework and hermeneutics.
CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

[Roadside memorials] help to keep memories alive and support the memory-making process, they work against the terror of forgetting, and they provide the deceased with social identities in the world of the living (Nešporová & Stahl, 2014, p. 30).

Theoretical perspectives

The research is an exploratory, qualitative, empirical study, underpinned by the theoretical perspectives of critical social work theory, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. Theory is a lens through which we may make tentative interpretations of the world; with a different lens the researcher is able to gain a different view and a different interpretation of the same phenomenon. I therefore employ different theories to consider this phenomenon—as Benzecry (2015, p. 1) so imaginatively described it, I “go into the field armed with a theoretical helmet with interchangeable lenses . . . [and] each theory provides a different lens” through which to view the phenomenon of roadside memorials.

Theoretical framework—Critical Social Work theory

Social work takes a multidimensional approach to issues and situations, looking at both the personal and the political (Ife, 1999). Drawing on the work of authors such as Ife (1999), Pease and Fook (1999a, 1999b) and Fook (2012), I link the personal to the political, and seek to enact change as a result of my research. As argued by the above authors, social work needs to be more progressive, more emancipatory and more radical, looking at the bigger picture—the personal and the political. As social workers, individual casework is not enough. Rather we need to address inequalities and power imbalances—in society, in structures, in discourse—if change is to happen. Challenging
the dominant discourse is indeed the very essence of radical, progressive social work. My research is located within this radical/critical tradition—I am therefore also looking at political outcomes, rather than focusing on individual outcomes alone.

Critical social work is about hearing from the marginalised and engaging with and including multiple realities and the lived experiences of all, not just the majority. Changes within society or challenges to structural inequalities can arise from research adopting such a perspective. Hence, critical social work theory and practice forms a part of my ontological and conceptual framework. Critical social work is an offshoot of the older Marxist–based social work theory, with added components of both poststructuralism and postmodernism. Postmodernism—a philosophical stance of the late 20th century—was a reaction against the previously taken-for-granted assumptions and values of earlier times. It encompasses the notions of pluralism and individualism; there is no one universal truth but rather many ways of knowing; many perspectives of the one phenomenon. Postmodernism, stated Davies (2002, p. 228) is:

eclectic and selective of bits of beliefs . . . it depicts an individualistic world shaken free from lifestyles grounded in tradition or voluntary commitment to collective creeds and ideologies; aloof from any accepted way of thinking and acting, the individual stands alone in a world of fragmented images, sounds and smells.

Operating from this critical social work perspective allows for a research agenda with outcomes that have a political and social change function. As I am exploring existing roadside memorial policies, and providing implications for future policies, this study is more than simply a hermeneutic phenomenological piece of research. It is now critical social work. If I were a purely hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, I wouldn’t be interested in suggesting implications for policy and practice; I would be looking at
unearting meanings people ascribe to entities or phenomena. However, I am not merely a hermeneutic researcher; I aim to see a broader outcome from my work in the form of implications for policy and practice, leading to potential changes. In addition, I consider roadside memorials from the micro, meso and macro viewpoints—the individual context/the local or organisational context/the societal and cultural context. Roadside memorials are not simply personal acts or individualised sites of mourning and remembrance; they represent a cultural shift and societal change in attitudes to death, mourning and burial practices.

**Methodology—Phenomenological framework**

Phenomenology, along with hermeneutics, provides a useful approach to underpin this research. Husserl (1859–1938) was the founder of phenomenology, a term primarily signifying a methodological concept, a scientific study of an entity—considering not “the what” but “the how” of a phenomenon (Heidegger, 1978). The word is derived from the Greek words *phainomenon*—that which appears, and *logos*—study. The expression in the Greek referred to something “showing itself”, or becoming manifest and visible; being brought into the light of day. Hence, “the expression ‘*phenomenon*’ signifies *that which shows itself in itself*” (Heidegger, 1978, p. 51, author’s italics). In Greek, the expression “phenomenon” also signifies that which looks like something, that which is *semblant*, having a resemblance. An entity may show itself like one thing, but in actuality it is not it, it merely has the appearance of being that thing.

The object of phenomenological research is to uncover that which is hidden, that does not readily show itself, but belongs to another entity that does manifest or show itself. Thus, in this research, the roadside memorial is the tangible, showing itself entity, but
the meaning behind its construction is hidden, and is hence the object of my research (Heidegger, 1978, p. 59). Heidegger explained it this way: “Phenomenology means . . .
to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself
from itself. This is the formal meaning of that branch of research which calls itself
‘phenomenology’” (1978, p. 58). Heidegger further explained that the meaning of an
entity may have once been known, but has since become hidden, buried over, or
disguised. Alternatively, it has never been known, and is, as yet, undiscovered (1978, pp.
60–61).

The overarching aim of phenomenological research is to understand the experiences
and phenomenon from the participant’s first-hand perspective, from their lived
experience and situated reality (Husserl, 1966). In order to do this, Husserl advocated
“bracketing”,—putting aside preconceived ideas and past experiences. He argued that
unless the researcher remains objective, putting aside pre-interpretations, the results
would be tainted. As the researcher I would see what I want to see, perhaps not what
the research participants are really saying. Following Husserl’s mandate, any pre-
interpretation or preconceived ideas by me must be acknowledged but then discarded.
Husserl also posited the notion of “phenomenological reduction”, meaning that one’s
judgments are bracketed and then questioned. In a similar vein, Merleau-Ponty (1962)
suggested that our judgments and our preconceived thoughts need to be suspended; to
be put out of play. This was not to be seen as denying them, rather, they must be
acknowledged but not allowed to interfere with the research process at hand (Sadala &
Adorno, 2002).
For Husserl, then, research is a transcendental and objective exercise, in which we as the researcher suspend our own beliefs, our own worldviews, our own experiences and paradigms. Lowes and Prowse (2001, p. 471) thus referred to Husserl advocating a “transcendental phenomenology”. In this approach, the researcher must bracket (following Husserl’s approach, see above) or preferably “bridle” (see discussion below) their preconceived understandings or preconceived notions. I aimed to see this phenomenon from the perspective of those who have first-hand knowledge of building and maintaining roadside memorials, seeking to uncover how they construct the meaning of their roadside memorial, what it represents for them. It must not be pre-interpreted by us as the researcher; it must not be based on our prior knowledge (Thompson, 1990). The phenomenological approach requires me to get out of my frame of reference and into the participants’ frames of reference instead. Phenomenological research requires us to let go of our usual tendency to interpret the world as we see it. Rather, we must study the phenomenon or experience from the others’ perspectives, bridling our own assumptions and pre-conceived ideas (Heidegger, 1978). Essentially, phenomenology considers the philosophical perception of “things”: how reality is perceived and understood in human consciousness. What do certain things mean to different people? How do we as humans experience and perceive different phenomena?

As Lester (1999, p. 1) noted, this is done by:

- gathering ‘deep’ information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews . . . and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s) . . . Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom . . . Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions.
Phenomenology is thus a study of people’s subjective and everyday experiences, taken from the point of view of the subject. It requires us to put in abeyance our previous understandings, looking simply at the things, the phenomena under investigation. As Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nystrom (2008, p. 121) noted, the phenomenological attitude means that we cannot make definite what is indefinite. In line with Husserl, van Manen (1997, p. 9) went on to define phenomenology as:

the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualise, categorise or reflect on it . . . Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences.

As a hermeneutic phenomenological study, this research explored the lived experience and situated knowledge of bereaved people’s lives, attempting to understand the placement and significance of roadside memorials from their perspective. The study focused on the meanings behind the establishment of roadside memorials, what significance is ascribed to their use; attempts are made to “uncover the unseen”. By interviewing family members and friends who have built roadside memorials, hearing their personal stories and viewing their reality through their lens, it becomes possible to gain new insights into the phenomenon of roadside memorials and to understand why they are so important in the bereavement process for many people.

The notion of bridling is a central concept in hermeneutic phenomenological research. Unlike the concept of bracketing posited by Husserl (1966), Heidegger suggested that bridling is a more realistic approach. This entails “holding on to the reins” and keeping our preconceived ideas, experiences and views in check. The Greek word translated as paradigm means a lens—we “see” through paradigms and lenses, this is how we view the world and attempt to make sense of it. As social workers, and as researchers, we
must put our social work lens and our own personal lens to one side, focusing instead on the lived experience of our participants. Pre-understanding, self-reflection and self-awareness are crucial for the researcher (Dahlberg et al., 2008). As phenomenological researchers, our aim is to make the “invisible aspects of the world visible” (Dahlberg et al., 2008, p. 121); to see what is well-known in a new light. Dahlberg et al. (2008) likened this to being as tourists in one’s own town, seeing old things in new ways and getting rid of presumptions and previously held beliefs. This, they asserted, is the very core of phenomenology, hermeneutics and lifeworld research: not imposing ourselves upon the things, in this case, roadside memorials, and what they represent for those who are bereaved though road crashes. Further, as Dahlberg et al. (2008) explained:

openness never can be absolute . . . there is no absolute one—and—only truth. There exists no scientific tabula rasa, no researcher is a ‘blank document’, and there exists no ‘uncontaminated’ place from which to start and work on a research project. [There is] an inescapable context for all research (p. 125).

Benzecry (2015) maintained that we can never really know another person’s experience or reality; rather we can only attempt to interpret what we think they have said, and this may not be either fact or reality. As researchers we are thus limited in how well we can understand another person’s experience, despite their attempts to tell us. We can therefore only hope for a “good enough” interpretation. The participants are the storytellers and we are the listeners, but we each come to the research with two different sets of meanings or understandings about the one topic—in this case roadside memorials. We need to recognise that what we hear is only an interpretation, a reconstruction, and not necessarily a reality (Benzecry, 2015, p. 3).
Benzecry referred to Mannheim’s paradox: that “we are always bound to be subjects of our own context and—to a certain extent—blind to it” (2015, p. 5). I am a subject or participant in my own research because I have my own experiences and views on roadside memorials, and have been affected by them on a personal level. My “foregrounding” and own personal experience comes into play, I am not a *tabula rasa*.

Phenomenological approaches to research thus acknowledge that as researchers, we cannot be rid of our personal beliefs, our theories, our assumptions, our worldviews, our paradigms, but we can restrain them through the notion of bridling espoused by Heidegger and others. We can thus remain open to newer meanings and not fall into the trap of making “definite what is indefinite” as warned by Dahlberg et al. (2008, p. 129). Rather, we allow the phenomenon to show itself, to be made manifest and visible.

Gadamer (1975) and Dilthey (1988) likewise advocated that researchers employ bridling rather than bracketing. Dilthey coined the term “pre-understanding”, whereas Gadamer, who was influenced by both Husserl and Heidegger, preferred the term “prejudices” (Dahlberg et al, 2008, p. 137–138). This concept of prejudice, along with historicity, is central to Gadamer’s philosophy. He put forward the value of understanding the fore-meaning that precedes every phenomenon one tries to understand. According to Gadamer, we must be aware of and open to our own prejudices, and then suspend them. Likewise, our historicity—our childhood, our upbringing, our education, our experiences—must be placed to one side if we are to remain open and alert for newer understandings of the phenomenon we are studying (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Bell (2009, p. 85) further explained this notion of historicity referred to by Heidegger, whereby our past, our present and even our hopes and plans
for the future influence how we interact with, and the meanings we ascribe to, other people and other entities. Our historicity comes with us in the research process, therefore the primary hermeneutical task is “to be aware of one’s own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one’s own fore-meanings” (Gadamer, 1994, p. 269).

Some feminist and humanist researchers now question and even refute the possibility of undertaking research without any preconceptions or biases (Lester, 1999). They emphasise the importance of clearly showing how meanings and interpretations have been placed on any research findings. Additionally, they advocate “making the researcher visible in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer” (Lester, 1999, p. 1). These recommendations are echoed by Benzecry (2015).

Nevertheless, Dahlberg et al. (2008) asked, can we really even be aware of our own pre-understandings? Probably not, they conceded, as it “lies deep, dormant and implicit” (Smith 2007, cited in Dahlberg et al., p. 136). Our pre-understandings and pre-conceived assumptions are often deeply embedded in our subconscious, and are therefore very difficult to recognise. This remains one of the biggest challenges in phenomenological research.

**Epistemology—Hermeneutic framework**

Philosophers such as Schleiermacher (1977), Hegel (1977) and Dilthey (1988) are acknowledged as the founders of hermeneutics, a branch of philosophical inquiry that was originally associated with the interpretation of words and Biblical text (Gadamer,
The term “hermeneutics” comes from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret or to understand (Crotty, 1998). As Crotty pointed out:

> there is an obvious link between *hermeneuein* and the god Hermes. Hermes is the fleet-footed divine messenger (he has wings on his feet!). As a messenger, he is bearer of knowledge and understanding. His task is to explain to humans the decisions of the gods. Whether *hermeneuein* derives from Hermes or the other way round is not certain (1998, p. 88).

Scriptural hermeneutics was thus the forerunner of today’s hermeneutics, and was employed to delve into the mysteries of biblical texts and attempts to uncover the hidden meanings therein. The *context* of a given passage of scripture was important, looking at the whole and parts together. As Gadamer (1975)—a pupil of Heidegger—noted, one cannot just look at say one passage of Scripture, we need to look at it in the light of the whole Bible. There is a circular relationship between the whole and the parts. This notion of the “hermeneutic circle” will be returned to shortly.

The branch of hermeneutics developed by Heidegger (1978) offered a useful framework to explore the experiences of people who construct roadside memorials. This approach suggests that to understand any phenomena—in this instance, roadside memorials—we need to explore the lived experience of those directly affected and involved. By seeking out the experiential knowledge of those who build and maintain roadside memorials, and attempting to understand the placement and significance of these sites from their perspective, it becomes possible to better understand their reality. I therefore sought the first-hand experience and situated knowledge of people who have built roadside memorials following the loss of their loved one in a road crash. The hermeneutic paradigm was helpful for addressing the research aims and lines of inquiry. It allowed me to focus on those who intimately know and understand this phenomenon of
roadside memorialisation, and to hear directly from the families and friends who have built such memorials. In focusing on the meanings behind the phenomenon of roadside memorials, and what significance is ascribed to their use, it becomes possible to “uncover the unseen” (Heidegger, 1978).

Heidegger was a pupil of Husserl’s, yet he disagreed with his teacher’s approach, claiming it is both impossible and undesirable to bracket one’s own experiences and beliefs. Instead, he advocated that researchers remain subjective and co-participate in the interview process; the phenomenological interview thus becomes co-created between the researcher and the participant (Lowes & Prowse, 2001). As Lowes and Prowse (2001, p. 474) continued:

> Researchers subscribing to Heideggerian philosophy acknowledge that they can only interpret something according to their own beliefs, experiences and preconceptions, which are a legitimate part of the research process and should not be left out. Thus, the phenomenological interview, based on the philosophy of Heidegger, incorporates the researcher’s preconceptions in the generation of data. Indeed, this is a defining characteristic of the Heideggerian phenomenological interview and research process.

Wendt and Boylan (2008) and Breen (2006, p. 67) likewise referred to a “co-construction” of the interview process, whereby they are “conversational in nature and position the informants as partners in the co-construction of knowledge by allowing each informant to share his or her unique perspectives and experiences.” The interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee is a core component of hermeneutic phenomenological interviewing and research. We are not objective, detached observers; rather we bring our own experiences and pre-conceived thoughts to the research and interview process.
Our context, history and background are therefore important. “Being-in-the-world” is a key component of hermeneutic phenomenology (Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, & Spence, 2008). Heidegger (1978, p. 27) pondered the fundamental question of the meaning of being, and coined the term dasein (literally translated as “being-there”) as a central tenet of his philosophical inquiry. For Heidegger, the philosophical concept of being is the most universal concept, although he conceded it is an undefinable concept nevertheless (1978, p. 22). Heidegger also enunciated the ontological perspective of hermeneutics, hence the theory of being is a central inquiry for hermeneutic researchers. This understanding of being (Dasein) had a three-fold structure according to Heidegger: “attuning to the past, articulating the situation in the present, and pressing forward to the new possibilities of the future” (Paterson & Higgs 2005, p. 346).

In this way, our very being, our paradigm, our historicity is central to our research process. As a researcher adhering to a hermeneutic approach, I aimed to understand how the people I encountered construct the meanings of their roadside memorials; how they perceived such sites. As Lowes and Prowse (2001, p. 478) stated, “interviewer subjectivity is strongly viewed as a desirable and unavoidable component of Heideggerian phenomenological interviewing; compatible with the central tenets of Heidegger’s philosophy.” Coupled with researcher subjectivity, historicity and being-in-the-world, my voice is likewise visible in this thesis—an “authorial presence” is felt (Geertz, 1988). I observe and report on the phenomenon of roadside memorials, yet I also bring my thoughts and my experiences to the research. As recommended by a number of writers, I have a stance, a voice, a persona in my work (Etherington, 2004;
Hyland, 2000; Kamler, 2001; Kamler & Thomson, 2006). The bracketing advocated by Husserl is deemed both unachievable and undesirable.

Heidegger also developed the idea of the hermeneutic circle, in which the researcher attempts to understand the whole phenomenon by looking at its individual parts, moving cyclically backwards and forwards from the whole to the parts, to gradually increase one’s understanding of the whole phenomenon (Crotty, 1998; Heidegger, 1978; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The hermeneutic circle, further explained by Higgs, Horsfall and Grace (2009, p. 62) is one in which the “parts and whole (of the text and the emerging interpretation) are related to each other and give meaning, one to the other”. The researcher gains an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation by becoming a part of this hermeneutic circle, moving between the parts and the whole in a cyclical, repetitive motion (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). As we do this, our knowledge increases, and a place of reflection becomes possible. As I interview those who have built roadside memorials, as I visit and observe and document the physicality of actual sites, as I speak with “interested others”, as I document my thoughts and experiences in a journal, and as I continue to delve into the literature relating to roadside memorials, my knowledge, my perceptions and my very being is challenged and changed from within. I am truly embedded in my research; it becomes a part of who I am. The hermeneutic circle is operating.

Extending the metaphor of the hermeneutic circle, Gadamer (1975, 1994) coined another helpful term: “fusion of horizons”. For Gadamer, a “horizon” is a way to conceptualise understanding, as this is as far as one can see, one’s vision and understanding is limited. Having an “encounter” with another—who can see further
afield; who has a different understanding because they can see a different horizon—
leads us to have an extended view, a greater understanding, as our old and new horizons
merge. This process of understanding from another’s perspective is termed a fusion of
horizons (Gadamer, 1975, 1994). Thus, different interpretations of the same
phenomenon are explored and “are brought together through dialogue to produce
shared understanding” (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 343). By interviewing a range of
people who have built or maintain roadside memorials, and hearing their different
views, interpretations and meanings ascribed to this phenomenon, I, the researcher, am
able to glean a more complete understanding of the phenomenon, and they in turn hear
and share others’ understandings, reflecting on their own experiences. This fusion of
horizons leads to a greater understanding, and appreciation of, the phenomenon under
investigation. The researcher, operating in a hermeneutic paradigm, thus draws on both
metaphors of the hermeneutic circle and the fusion of horizons, and these combined
concepts create a “hermeneutic spiral” (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, p. 343). This entails
spiralling back and forth from text to context; from the parts to the whole, from our
understandings to the “others” understandings, their horizon to our horizon. Osborne
(2007, p. 12) described it as “a movement between the horizon of the text and the
horizon of the reader that spirals nearer and nearer toward the intended meaning of
the text and its significance . . .”

Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology is thus one of the chosen theoretical
perspectives for this research project. As Higgs et al. (2009, p. 61) explained, “hermeneutics is especially useful for exploring phenomena that have complex, multi-
layered meanings and can be viewed from a number of different perspectives”. As
roadside memorials have a range of meanings and varying roles for different people and different cultures, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was appropriate.

This chapter has discussed the theoretical frameworks that underpin my study, and has discussed the reasons why they are my preferred approaches for studying the phenomenon of roadside memorials. The following chapters (3–5) provide the context of the study, considering the literature surrounding grief, bereavement and memorialisation, as well as the current literature on the phenomenon of roadside memorials.
CHAPTER THREE: MOURNING AND MEMORIALISATION

At that spot, the seemingly nondescript public roadside changed into an intense private place of grief (Klaassens, Groote & Huigen, 2009, p. 199).

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical perspectives underpinning this research, and established the rationale for these approaches. I now turn to the literature on both thanatology and roadside memorials, to establish the context of this current study. In this chapter I consider definitions of terms such as loss, grief, mourning, bereavement and thanatology. I then provide a very brief overview of the theories informing current understandings of grief and loss, showing how this has changed over time. Additionally, the role of memorialisation in bereavement is highlighted.

Definitions

In dealing with a topic where there is so much written and spoken about in the public sphere there is a tendency for key terms to lose their precision. Definitions used in everyday parlance may blur the distinctions between these terms or use them interchangeably. Some of these popular definitions and understandings of grief and bereavement are flawed and unhelpful for those who grieve, whereas others are more in keeping with the newer theories of grief that acknowledge the desire people have to integrate the death of a loved one into their lives and maintain continuing bonds. It is important that we use precise terminology and are able to differentiate between terms. Additionally, we need to be sensitive to the perhaps less precise meanings used by others in their everyday life. Defining and having a shared meaning of these key terms
is central to being able to accurately research this topic. Thus, the following definitions are given:

**Loss** is the actual event of losing someone or something, defined by Costello (2011, p. 6) as being deprived of something we value, including material losses. Small (2001, p. 20) described loss as, “the state of being deprived of, or being without, something one has had”.

**Grief** is the normal, autonomic reaction to loss and includes physical symptoms as well as psychological, behavioural, social and spiritual reactions. It is understood to be a deep mental anguish coupled with emotional suffering, with responses such as crying, sleep deprivation, anxiety, agitation, somatic disturbances, loss of appetite, restlessness, physical aches and pains along with a wide range of other symptoms (Costello, 2011; Hockey, Katz, & Small, 2001). Doss (2006, p. 301) succinctly defined the term grief as “the expression of deep emotional anguish, usually about death and loss.”

**Mourning** is a socially and culturally determined period of time during which the signs of grief (as listed above) are made visible (Costello, 2011; Hockey et al., 2001). Mourning periods are generally time-limited, and are characterised by public and private rituals such as holding funeral or memorial services, leaving flags at half-mast, and, until more recent times, wearing black clothing and refraining from social outings. In some cultures, wailing, keening and “sitting shiva” are practiced. Again, Doss (2006, p. 301) defined mourning as “the ritualized practices that help assuage . . . anguish” while Gamble (2007, p. 68) noted that mourning refers as much to tears as it does to rituals, ceremonies and public or private activities. Mourning practices, being culturally determined, have undergone significant changes in contemporary Australian society. Due to these
changes, some argue that new ways of memorialising and mourning the dead are needed (Margry & Sanchez-Carretero, 2011), hence the rise in practices such as roadside memorialisation and online memorial sites (Bailey, Bell, & Kennedy, 2014; Bell, Bailey, & Kennedy, 2015; Cann, 2014; Gibson, 2011).

**Bereavement** is the term used to encompass the entire process following the death of a loved one, including all the social and cultural nuances that go with this. It is not a state of being, but rather a complex process, accompanied by a range of intense emotional and behavioural responses. Prominent Australian theorist on grief and loss, Raphael (1992, p. 33), offered a succinct differentiation between the terms—“loss is the state of being deprived of, or of being without, something one has previously had. Grief is the pain and suffering experienced after loss; mourning is a period of time during which signs of grief are made visible; and bereavement is the process of losing a close relationship”. Bereavement is thus the overarching process of losing that close relationship and includes the initial shock and disbelief, the mourning period and the ongoing pain and suffering of grief.

Finally, **thanatology** is derived from the Greek word *thanatos* meaning death, and is the study of death and dying. Other concepts and terms prevalent within thanatological literature include anticipatory grief, pathological or abnormal grief, complicated grief, unresolved grief, disenfranchised grief, multiple grief and survivor guilt. These terms have attracted much attention over the years, and although important, they are beyond the scope and focus of this thesis (for more detail, see Corr, 1999, 2002; Doka, 1989, 2001, 2002; Field & Filanosky, 2009; Gamble, 2007; Jacobs & Prigerson, 2000; Larsson, 2009; Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1986, 1995; Raphael, 1992; Worden, 2002; amongst
The focus of thanatology is primarily on the social and psychological aspects of death and dying (Bardi, 1981, p. 1) and the focus of this study is within the context of death where a roadside memorial has been erected.

**Grief and bereavement theory**

This research draws upon the psychodynamic and medical foundations of traditional grief and loss theory. Our understandings of grief have undergone significant changes over the years. Guided by the current theoretical frameworks of grief and loss it now incorporates contemporary sociological and psychosocial theories and concepts such as attachment theory and continuing bonds.

As one of the original theorists in the field, Freud believed that grief was a “disease”; a passive state that would eventually pass, with “closure” as the goal. With his psychoanalytic background, he viewed grief as “something that would free the ego from attachment to the deceased and, in so doing, allow new attachments to be formed” (Small, 2001, p. 24). In his classic work, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), Freud argued that grief needed to be “worked through”, and that the grief-stricken needed to break the bonds that tied them to the deceased (decathect) in order that their ego could become “free and uninhibited again”. He believed that it was psychologically dangerous to have attachments to the dead, and that if the grieving person was unable to disconnect, to break those bonds and move on, they would be “dysfunctionally subsumed by self-serving melancholia” (Freud, 1917, p. 245). Although Freud did not use the term “decathexis”, his notion of relinquishing ties and withdrawing emotional energy (libidio) from the deceased loved one became the standard model of bereavement for many years. Freud espoused that the trapped energy (or libidio)
towards the lost loved one caused pain and grief and once the bereaved person had disconnected from the love object they were then free to reconnect (recathect) with another love object and so enjoy life and experience pleasure once more (Hagman, 2001, p. 15). Freud and subsequent therapists believed that “with the successful completion of the work of mourning all ties to the lost object are relinquished and premorbid functioning restored” (Hagman, 2001, p. 15).

Freud (1917, 1957) thus emphasised the importance of severing the ties, letting go, and moving on; grief was viewed “as a disruptive and debilitating emotion” (Doss, 2006, p. 301). Freud’s theories have been challenged over the years, with more modern understandings of grief and newer models of bereavement proposed. Doss (2006) for example, challenged “Freudian understandings of mourning as something to be ‘worked through’ quickly and privately . . . [saying that] new modes of mourning are public and continuous” (p. 295). In later years, following the deaths of his adult daughter and then his young grandson, Freud did revise and redefine his theories and acknowledged that grief is never ending (Chauvel, 2005). Despite this, his notions of withdrawing from the loved one and relinquishing ties (decathexis), closure and moving on have remained, and still underpin the dominant discourse of grief and loss today (Breen, 2006; Doss, 2002, 2006).

Parkes (1986) is another prominent theorist who has contributed to our understanding of grief and the healing process, drawing attention to how grief affects both mental and physical health. He identified grief as a “process and not a state” and maintained that “grief is not a set of symptoms which start after a loss and then gradually fade away” (1986, p. 444). Along with a number of other theorists (see below), Parkes subscribed to
a stage or task-based model of grief, describing four phases of grief—numbness, pining, depression and recovery. Like Engel (1961), Parkes used a medical analogy to describe recovering from grief, likening it to a physical wound that needs time and attention to heal successfully. Parkes and Prigerson (2013, p. 5) noted that:

On the whole, grief resembles a physical injury more closely than any other type of illness. The loss may be spoken of as a ‘blow’. As in the case of a physical injury, the ‘wound’ gradually heals; at least, it usually does. But occasionally complications set in, healing is delayed, or a further injury reopens a healing wound. In such cases abnormal forms arise, which may even be complicated by the onset of other illness. Sometimes it seems that the outcome may be fatal.

Kübler-Ross (1984) and Worden (1991, 2002) likewise espoused stage or task-based models of grief and “grief work”. Kübler-Ross’ well-known five-stage model remains predominant in both professional and lay understandings of grief, and includes the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Worden believed that grief was not just a passive state that we are subjected to, but rather was an active process, aided by what he termed the four tasks of mourning: to accept the reality of the loss; to work through the pain of grief; to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing; and finally to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life (Worden, 1991, pp. 10–16). Worden asserted that these tasks of mourning must be followed to allow the body to return to its usual state of functioning (Miller, 2003). Yet, Worden himself questioned if mourning is ever truly finished: “mourning is a long-term process, and the culmination will not be to a pre-grief state” (1991 p. 18). Rather, this state becomes the “new normal”.

Like many theorists, Shuchter and Zisook (1987, 1993) disagreed with the stage or task-based models, seeing grief expression as more varied, not a “linear process with
concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid phrases that vary from person to person” (1993, p. 23). Likewise, Cann (2014, p. 12) noted that:

to speak of grief in such simplistic terms as ‘stages to be moved through’ does not do justice to the dramatic shifts that sometimes occur in the landscape of loss, nor does it take into account the complex social web of relationships that are affected by that loss.

Additionally, the word “process” implies acceptance of the dominant discourse: that grief is a short-term, finite process with stages or tasks to work through and a gradual detachment and decathexis from the loved one being the end goal (Miller, 2003).

This criticism of the dominant discourse of grief that adheres to the theories proposed by Freud, Lindemann, Parkes and others, that is, that grief is a process to be worked through—stages/tasks/phases—with eventual detachment from the loved one and “recovery”, all within a finite time period, has been reiterated by Breen (2006). Anything that does not follow this pattern is then termed “pathological” or “complicated” (p. 85).

As Breen noted, this has led to grief being viewed through a medical lens, and hence persistent and complex bereavement disorder (PCBD) is now included in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013, p. 289) as a classifiable psychiatric disorder (see Chapter Twelve).

The transferability of early grief theories to other grief situations such deaths caused by road crashes has been challenged by Breen (2006). As she explained, the older grief theories emerged following research done on, “North American, white, middle class, middle aged to elderly women after the death of their husbands following an illness” (Breen, 2006, p. 32), and this grief has few similarities with the grief following violent, unexpected, preventable, untimely deaths, especially of young people, which often is the case for road deaths. Indeed, parents mourning the loss of a child through a car crash have little in common with elderly grieving widows (Spooren, Henderick, & Jannes,
2001). Despite this, “these older stage-based paradigms continue to inform public policy and dominate Western and lay professional expectations of bereavement” (Bailey et al., 2014, p. 82).

Later theorists, such as Raphael (1992), and Silverman and Klass (1996), saw grief as a normal human reaction to loss (not a disease), in which we have an active role to play. The desire for the bereaved person is not to experience decathexis and closure as Freud maintained, rather it is for continuing bonds with the loved one and, as Silverman and Klass (1996, p. 19) asserted, the loss “affects the mourner for the rest of his or her life. People are changed by the experience; they do not get over it, and part of the change is a transformed but continuing relationship with the deceased.”

Perhaps the biggest disagreement amongst all the thanatological theories, however, surrounds the idea of “closure” or “acceptance”. Kübler-Ross (1984) and Parkes (1986), for example, are quite clear that the period of bereavement does have a definite endpoint—a time when the bereaved person finally accepts the death and achieves closure. Others, for example Raphael (1992) and Bowlby (1980) refute this, and assert that the person’s reality and life as they know it has changed irrevocably. Things will never be the same again and the experience of grief will be carried for a lifetime. Rather than the terms closure or acceptance the terms resolution, integration or assimilation are more applicable. The bereaved person learns to integrate their loss into the new reality of their existence.

Bowlby (1980) has contributed much to the newer understandings of grief. Like many other theorists, Bowlby also described phases of mourning—numbness; yearning, searching and anger; disorganisation and despair; and reorganisation. Yet, taking a
psychosexual approach, Bowlby is renowned for his attachment theory, a model of grief extrapolated from the attachment and bonding process of children to their parents (or primary caregiver) and vice versa. Bowlby asserted that we are biologically programmed to attach and bond with our offspring. Attachment theory has broadened our understanding and knowledge of the process of grief and bereavement: it is because we love that we grieve; it is the breaking of these attachments and bonds that join us to others that is so painful (Miller, 2003). In this way, Bowlby’s contribution to the field of grief and loss has been notable. Indeed, as Worden (1991, p. 7) stated, “before one can fully comprehend the impact of a loss and the human behaviour associated with it, one must have some understanding of the meaning of attachment.”

A further advancement in contemporary understandings of bereavement has come via the theory of “continuing bonds” posited by Klass et al. in 1996. Rather than relinquishing the ties that bind us to the deceased and disengaging from them (decathexis), continuing bonds emphasises the need to remember our loved ones, to seek to have an ongoing relationship with them, and to incorporate them into our daily lives. Concepts such as closure and moving on, espoused by Freud (1917, 1957) and others, are rejected. As Suter (2010, p. 58) explained, “The bereaved do not ‘get over’ their grief and there is no sense of ‘closure’. The grieving process does not end when the last of the funeral flowers are thrown away.” Rather, new developments in the treatment of grief and bereavement “look beyond decathexis and relinquishment to the central goal of continuity in mourning” (Hagman, 2001, p. 21) and recognise that concepts such as continuing bonds and preserving attachments to the deceased are important components of normal bereavement. The pain of loss can, perhaps, be
transcended by maintaining meaningful relationships with the dead (Hagman, 2001). Continuing dialogue with the deceased is important, noted Kaplan (1995), who maintained that “the human experience of loss is about our ongoing and everlasting dialogue with the dead” (p. 16). This important role of continuing bonds is further declared by Shapiro (1996), who noted that, “Grief is resolved through the creation of a loving, growing relationship with the dead that recognizes the new psychological or spiritual (rather than corporeal) dimensions of the relationship” (p. 552). Similarly, Neimeyer et al., 2002) noted that, “one of the most fundamental recent changes in grief theory has been the growing recognition of the importance of continuing bonds with the deceased, in place of the immensely influential psychodynamic concept of withdrawing ‘emotional energy’ from the lost loved one in order to ‘invest’ it elsewhere” (p. 37). Maintaining connections and continuing bonds are now viewed as being helpful and adaptive in bereavement, whereas withdrawing and decathexis are believed to hinder the process of adaptation and integration following loss.

Studies undertaken among bereaved Chinese individuals by Chan, Chow, Ho, Tsui, Tin, Koo, and Koo (2005), and Woo and Chan (2010) have extended the theory of continuing bonds. Chan et al. (2005) found that continuing bonds with the deceased, along with meaning-making, contributed to more favourable bereavement outcomes. Drawing on this research, Woo and Chan (2010, p. 43) noted that continuing bonds:

can be separated into two main categories: continuing bonds initiated by the bereaved and continuing bonds initiated by the deceased. The former include conversations with the deceased’s photo, visits to the graveyard, doing things that were done with the deceased when he or she was alive, finishing the deceased’s unfinished business, giving regular offerings to the deceased, laying ashes of the deceased, and communication with the deceased through a spiritual medium. Continuing bonds initiated by the deceased include feeling, hearing, or seeing the deceased after their death, meeting the deceased in dreams, experiencing a visit by the deceased seven days after the deceased’s death, and witnessing the deceased’s return in the form of an insect.
Continuing bonds and preserving the memory of loved ones who have died is now considered to be an important part of bereavement (Chan et al., 2005; Field & Filanosky, 2009; Hagman, 2001; Kaplan, 1995; Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006; Shapiro, 1996; Woo & Chan, 2010). Furthermore, memorialisation—such as building roadside memorials—can be seen as “the physical expression of an ongoing relationship with the person who has died—a position consistent with a continuing bonds theoretical approach” (Woodthorpe, 2011, p. 31). Roadside memorials are a demonstration of this desire to maintain relationships, even after death, and hence building such a memorial is an integral part of bereavement for many people.

Recent research by Bailey et al. (2014) and Bell et al. (2015) into the phenomenon of online memorialisation, using sites such as Facebook for a platform, highlights another attempt by grief-stricken people to continue a relationship with the deceased. They found sites were a way of keeping the deceased “alive”, and also served as a memorial to their loved one and as a means of bringing people together, gaining support and reaching out to others. Bailey et al. (2014, p. 72) noted that online memorial sites “have implications for continuing bonds . . . and the continuing social presence of the dead.” Bell et al. (2015) continued this research and explained that:

Advocates of continuing bonds assert that the emotional relationship between the bereaved and the deceased is in continual flux. This creates social momentum that is key to driving the grieving process. As such, there is no end point or goal with regard to grief. Rather, grief represents a shifting social encounter and connection that is an ever-present aspect of the personal and social realm of the bereaved. Continuing bonds describe how individuals establish an inner representation of the deceased to maintain a link or some sort of relationship after the death. This bond is dynamic and ongoing . . . (p. 376).

Like the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials, this phenomenon has been increasing over the past ten years with the evolution of social media, and demonstrates
new ways of mourning, as people seek to find meaning in untimely deaths and strive to continue relationships beyond the grave. New mourning practices such as these will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

Mourners may seek to preserve the identities of their deceased loved ones through “bonding activities” and the use of meaningful or sanctified objects (Unruh, 1983, Gibson, 2004, 2010). Objects, which may have once been ordinary, become extraordinary and even sacred after a death, their meanings and values transformed (Gibson, 2004, 2010). To a passer-by of a roadside memorial, the placement of seemingly ordinary, lowly or even abject mementos may cause them to ponder the meaning that is ascribed to this ordinary, everyday object. Bailey et al. (2014, p. 79) referred to these as:

traditional mourning objects—namely, physical objects that are imbued with particular emotional resonance and which consequently take on additional significance after the death of a loved one. These can be objects that belonged to the deceased, such as a lock of hair or a watch, or repository objects such as a photograph album or gravestone, which serve as visual and material markers for preserving the identity and memory of the deceased.

This is similar to the concept of a “linking object” proposed by Volkan (1972), or Doss’ (2006, p. 298) “tokens of remembrance”. Many such linking object items, including photographs of the deceased (Johnson, 1999), are routinely left at roadside memorials. They are imbued with meanings for those who leave them and, along with other means, constitute an attempt to continue the bonds that tie us to loved ones who have died.

**Traumatic loss**

An exploration of the sudden, unexpected, untimely, and often violent and traumatic deaths resulting from car crashes, and the subsequent experience of grief, is incomplete
without reference to the important concept of traumatic loss. An exploration of the concept of traumatic loss and the loss of the assumptive world (Kauffman, 2002), along with its existential and psychological effects on those who are bereaved is beyond the constraints and scope of the thesis, however, the following is offered as a brief summary.

Profound and traumatic loss challenges and even violates our assumptions and core beliefs about the world – our assumptive and presumptive world. In this paradigm, the world is a safe, just and benevolent place, we are worthy and deserving of good things happening to us, we have a measure of control over our lives, and we can find meaning and significance in our world and the events that happen to us (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kauffman, 2002; Neimeyer et al., 2010). As Parkes (in Kauffman, 2002, p. 238) noted, from “birth we are building up a set of assumptions about the world . . . The assumptive world is not a static world; we are constantly adding to and refining it in the light of new information”. When a traumatic loss occurs, such as a death caused by a car crash, this world as we have constructed it, with all our assumptions, is undermined, challenged, shattered and violated. The world becomes dangerous, unpredictable, beyond our control, and unjust. Our previous assumptions no longer ring true, and we are forced to create new ones (Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Kauffman, 2002; Parkes, 2002; Rando, 1993).

Added to this loss of our safe, protected world, argued Kauffman (2002), traumatic loss creates “basic woundedness”, a fragmentation of our very self, exposing the self and the soul. The “set of illusions that shelter[ed] the human soul (Kauffman, 2002, p. 206) is shattered. Further, Kauffman (2002, p. 206) added that “traumatization is an exposure of the self in which the self fragments, loses its protective illusions and value, and hides
in unnameable shame”. Along with this shame and loss of self, helplessness, fear, panic and anxiety become the hallmarks of traumatic loss and traumatic grief, as the bereaved person struggles to hold together that which has been torn apart and attempts to re-create a new, safe world. New assumptions and a desperate search for meaning ensue.

**Significance of meaning-making**

The importance of meanings was first raised by Frankl (1945), with his concept of “logotherapy”. Frankl’s work centred on the questions: What is the meaning of my life? What is the meaning and significance of death? Can we discover the meaning of life through suffering? And, if we can see a meaning in this suffering does this help alleviate the pain of our loss? (Miller, 2003). Frankl’s search for purpose and meaning, and his subsequent logotherapy, arose following his horrific experiences in four Nazi concentration camps. In his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1945), Frankl theorised that the main motivating force for all humanity is to find meaning and purpose in life, despite dire circumstances. Unlike Freud’s work, logotherapy focused on the future aspects of one’s life; it was not retrospective or introspective like psychoanalysis. Frankl also explained what he termed the “tragic triad”—guilt, death and suffering—that all humans are exposed to. We can, Frankl maintained, transcend these, and find meaning, purpose and fulfilment despite these tragic events in our lives (Devoe, 2012). A re-evaluation of one’s “fundamental values” and life’s direction can result from tragic experiences (Moodley & Costa, 2006, p. 39).

Neimeyer (2000) went on to elaborate the meaning-making aspect of bereavement. He agreed with Frankl, that humans are meaning-makers, and as such we search for purpose and significance in our world and the things that happen to us. Neimeyer...
posited that as humans we attempt to reconstruct the meanings of life following trauma, and that such trauma is in fact a violation and disruption of our previously held assumptions (Janoff-Bulman, 1989). Using a narrative approach to grief therapy, Neimeyer, Botella, Herrero, Pacheco, Figuerra and Werner-Wildner (2002) demonstrated how “life stories” can be challenged and disrupted by traumatic loss, such as deaths caused by car crashes, and how therapeutic interventions that attempt to construct meanings and make sense of such loss can be a positive way to adapt and cope. The authors noted that, “profound disruptions of our self-narratives occasioned by loss call for ‘narrative repair’, whose goal is . . . to construct an account in which both people and events can be rendered once again meaningful” (2002, pp. 33-34). Making sense, finding positive outcomes, searching for meaning, reconstructing identities or rewriting self-narratives are all attempts to cope with and perhaps transcend profound loss.

Such attempts are not merely a paradigm shift or positive reframing of adverse events (Neimeyer et al., 2002). Rather, they “represent . . . a profound reorganization of one’s constructions of self and world” (p. 36) and a search for new meaning and significance. Indeed, as documented by others, grief can be a transformative experience, leading to post-traumatic growth and a new sense of self, the world and spirituality (Klass, 1999; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).

Grieving thus becomes a process of searching for meaning and meaning reconstruction, rather than a series of stages or tasks to move through. Assisting those who are bereaved search for meanings, beyond mere trivialising or positive reframing, is an important component of grief therapy (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & van Dyke Stringer,
These authors explored the use of strategies in grief interventions such as narrative retelling, therapeutic writing, visualisation and a focus on metaphorical language to help the bereaved reconstruct meaning following a profound loss. Their aim was to “help clients re-establish a coherent self-narrative that integrates the loss while also permitting their life story to move forward along new lines” (p. 73).

Neimeyer et al. (2010) develop this constructionist approach to bereavement and one’s search for meaning in the aftermath of loss. They maintain that there are two ways to approach meaning-making. The first is an attempt to “assimilate the loss experience into their pre-loss beliefs and self-narratives”, the second is an attempt to “accommodate to the loss by reorganising, deepening or expanding their beliefs or self-narratives to embrace the reality of the loss” (2010, p. 74). These two approaches have the same end goal – an attempt to "seek to re-establish a coherent self-narrative and resolution of the incongruence between the reality of the loss and one’s sense of meaning” (p. 75). Being able to make sense or meaning out of otherwise senseless, meaningless deaths can indicate a less intense and prolonged grief and an earlier adjustment to bereavement (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Klass, 1999; Neimeyer et al., 2002). Those who do find meaning may experience grief that is less intense, they may have increased well-being, they may report less mental distress, better physical health and immune function, along with increased marital satisfaction compared with others who struggle to find any meaning in their loss (Neimeyer et al., 2010, p. 75). Some people, however, may never be able to find meanings in their loss, and may suffer somatic and emotional distress for the rest of their lives. Meaning-making remains, nevertheless an adaptive and helpful way of integrating profound loss into one’s new existence in the wake of tragedy.
Meaning-making and a search for other positive outcomes can take many forms. Such positives outcomes may include “a reassessment of priorities, increased empathy and compassion, development of personal strength, living with ‘purpose’ and in the present, losing the fear of death, increased spiritual understanding, improved interpersonal relationships, and changes in employment relating to their experiences of loss” (Breen, 2006, p. 35). Similarly, the term “post-traumatic growth” was coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun in 1995, and referred to the notion that something positive and meaningful can be found through the death of a loved one, and furthermore, the bereaved individual “grows” as a result of this tragedy.

Ideas from positive or existential psychology have had an influence on thinking about grief and loss in recent years. Miller and Harvey (2001), examining the interface of positive psychology with a psychology of loss, claimed that a loss can be an “intrinsically positive event that inherently builds human strength” (p. 314). They agreed that this may not be the case for all and stated:

> we recognise that many who have experienced a major loss will find it difficult (or even impossible) to comprehend how they can even begin to turn their loss into a source of strength. Parents who have lost children frequently report such feelings (2001, p. 316).

These findings are echoed by Rubin (1993), Uren and Wastell (2002) and Bush (2007) following their work with bereaved parents and research into perinatal bereavement. Bonanno (2001, 2004, 2005, 2008) also studied resilience and the coping mechanisms of bereaved people. He agreed that grief can be a positive experience with potentially favourable outcomes for some and concluded that most people are quite resilient after both grief and PTSD/trauma exposure. Bonanno (2004) conceded that it is only a small number of people who will need professional help following grief or trauma. Positive
psychology can be helpful for some people, and many bereaved individuals can overcome their grief and suffering and enjoy life once again. Many others, however, find the loss can be too overwhelming, and no amount of “meaning” can bring relief from their pain (Bonanno, 2004).

Bereavement is a very individual experience, which is negotiated differently by all; there is no universal, one-size-fits-all approach (Stroebe, 2001; Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 1999, 2001). Imposing time-limits on roadside memorials does not take this difference and individuality into account. Bonanno’s research (2004, 2008), considering trajectories of bereavement and the related individual differences in timeframes of grief, thus sheds light on discussions of time-limits proposed for roadside memorials.

Studies of resilience and meaning-making by others such as Chan and Chan (2011), Davis et al., (1998), along with Bonanno (2004, 2005, 2008), found that perhaps individuals and indeed communities can be strengthened through tragedies such as road fatalities, and these can be seen as building social capital and social cohesion (Willis, Cameron, & Igoe, 1997). Roadside memorials may then be a sign of a healthy community. The proponents of existential or positive psychology, logotherapy and meaning-making would agree with Bonanno and Davis et al.’s assertions.

As discussed above, theories and models of grief are continually being expanded upon and contested, and different disciplines approach grief and loss in varying ways. The newer psychosocial model—as opposed to older medical, scientific or psychodynamic models—is gaining acceptance amongst many professionals in the grief and loss field. Social work perspectives of grief and loss are informed by this psychosocial model of grief and bereavement, acknowledging that relationships are an important component
of human existence and because of this we seek to maintain a tie to our loved one who has died (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1996). There are two distinct models driving grief interventions and thus two approaches to bereavement counselling: the first, a psychological approach encouraging adaptation and a “breaking of the bonds”; the second a psychosocial approach encouraging integration and continuing bonds (Stroebe et al., 1996; Woodthorpe, 2011). From the psychosocial and sociological perspectives, the role of memorialisation in bereavement is thus crucial—how we incorporate our loved ones into our ongoing lives and ensure that they are never forgotten. Roadside memorials have a role to play in this, and are an example of these continuing bonds (Bailey et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2005; Hagman, 2001; Klass et al., 1996; Rosenblatt, 1996; Shapiro, 1996; Stroebe & Schut, 2005; Watkins, 2011; Woo & Chan, 2010).

Likewise, Doss (2006, p. 301) noted that “spontaneous memorials embody the increasingly accepted contemporary understandings of continued, rather than severed, bonds between the living and the dead.” Roadside memorials help to maintain a relationship with deceased loved ones; they enable an ongoing dialogue with the dead (MacConville & McQuillan, 2010, p. 197). Many bereaved people talk about their fears that others will forget the deceased loved one, and memorials and other ways are sought to ensure that they are kept “alive” in people’s memories (Everett, 2002; MacConville, 2010; MacConville & McQuillan, 2005, 2009, 2010).

These newer psychosocial perspectives and understandings of grief and loss challenge the popular and dominant discourse of grief that pervades society. For example, in one episode of the hit American television show The Simpsons (Brooks, 1991), reference was
made to the five stages of grief posited by Kübler-Ross; as it was in the popular movie *The Bucket List* (Reiner, 2007), where the lead characters, Carter and Edward, played by Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson respectively, were both facing death as patients on a cancer ward. There are many other examples of this recognition of the stage-based theory of grief.

Conversely, other Australian movies—such as *Lantana* (Lawrence, 2001) and *Look Both Ways* (Watt, 2005)—deal with the issues of grief and memorialisation by adhering to a sociological paradigm, acknowledging the individual and personalised nature of coping with grief and travelling the journey of loss. From this perspective grief is not a linear, stage-based process with a finite end point, rather it is non-linear, cyclical and often life-long journey.

**Changes in burial practices**

Historically, the individualisation of graves in cemeteries was only for the rich. Gravesites were therefore homogenous in appearance, with only small variations, and it was the “Great War [that] . . . became the ‘great leveller’” (Watkins, 2011, p. 14), resulting in “equality in death” (Watkins, 2011, p. 14): rich and poor were buried together. Changes in Western practices of burying the dead occurred after 1914 when, “The War Office realised that the proper care of war graves would boost morale of the troops and comfort the bereaved relatives at home” (Suter, 2010, p. 51). Prior to this, deceased service personnel were thrown together in unmarked graves. Further, Kong (1999) pointed out that the British War Graves Commission instituted a policy of uniformity for war graves, in order that all would be commemorated for an equal sacrifice, whether wealthy or poor. Hence, War Cemeteries are comprised of row after
row of identical white crosses, with no delineation according to wealth or class and no individualisation. This lack of individualisation is in sharp contrast to roadside memorials, where difference and uniqueness abounds.

Cremation was commonly practised in Neolithic times, with the dead being burned for sanitation rather than religious reasons (Watkins, 2014). Later, Catholicism banned cremation, believing that the body itself was integral for the afterlife, hence burials became more common. By the 1960s however, there was a worldwide acceptance of cremation and the Roman Catholic Church lifted its ban, deeming the soul, not the physical body, was integral in the afterlife. As Watkins (2011, p. 20) explained, “Although the Catholic Church had previously banned cremation because it denied an integral Catholic doctrine of bodily resurrection, a papal directive removed this edict in 1963, with the first Australian Catholic Crematorium opening at Rookwood in Sydney in 2007.”

In addition, there was a general decline in religiosity after World War 1, resulting in a general rejection of organised religion (Suter, 2010). Klaassens, Groote and Huigen (2009) similarly drew attention to the “changing attitudes in Western society regarding death, funerals and mourning rituals. Death-negating practices seem to gradually give way to greater expressiveness in public mourning” (p. 188). As such, people are seeking individualised and personalised meaning-making (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006; Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000; Neimeyer, 2000). This is sometimes reflected by the preference for modern songs instead of hymns, personal eulogies and “open mics” instead of sermons, PowerPoint presentations showcasing the life of the deceased, and a request that mourners wear bright colours instead of the traditional black. Despite this move away from organised religion, people nevertheless still
continue to seek spiritual guidance and meaningful rites of passage to help them through such times of loss, and are hence creating new rituals, more meaningful and relevant for today.

The rejection of organised religion and traditional church practices is further discussed by others such as Dickinson and Hoffman (2010); Haney, Leimer, and Lowery (1997); and Weisser (2004). As Dickinson and Hoffman (2010, p. 165) asserted, “Roadside memorials indicate a desire to reconstruct new forms of ritualised mourning because traditional mourning practices are old fashioned and inadequate.” Or, perhaps as Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 588) suggested, people feel that their grief is:

not fully assuaged by the church in a funeral or by the state in a cemetery or crematorium . . . They are willing to take grief out of the confines of the cemetery and beyond the emotional and spiritual boundaries of the church, to construct for themselves a new sacred place . . .

A corresponding move to introduce new cemetery spaces—“green cemeteries”, with gardens and lawns but no marked gravesites or headstones—has been largely rejected (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010; Watkins, 2011). This would indicate that an essential part of our humanity is the need to remember, to mark places of burial, to memorialise. We want to remember and, in turn, be remembered (Watkins, 2011).

Dickinson and Hoffmann (2010), echoing Clark and Franzmann’s (2006) earlier findings, pointed out that “the construction of memorials may fit within a larger context of decreasing interest in church-based rituals and an increasing tendency to view spiritual authority resting with the individual conscience” (p. 162). Again, this represents “a willingness to take spiritual matters out of the hands of the church and to divert spiritual energy in new directions” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 595).
Memorialisation practices

A growing body of work has considered the role of memorialisation in bereavement, and where roadside memorialisation fits within this broader context. Thanatourism also known as dark tourism (Johanson, 2012; Walter, 2009) or grief tourism is becoming a growing phenomenon, with people feeling a need to visit the actual site of death or tragedy. Humans have long had a fascination with death, and there appears to be a quality of poignancy at sites such as battle grounds, convict camps and locations where people have died in disasters: people are drawn to such memorial sites (Johanson, 2012). Furthermore, war time memorials and graves are an important part of military history, marking the battlefields where soldiers were killed, to commemorate and remember the tragic loss of lives at these places (Larsson, 2009; Mayo, 1988; Stephens, 2007). Indeed, “war memorials are a significant feature of the Australian landscape. Thousands were erected after the First World War in towns and suburbs across the nation as a community focus for memory, grief, and pride of their soldiers lost in the war” (Stephens, 2007, p. 241). White crosses abound on the fields of the Somme in France and Flanders in Belgium and each year ever-growing numbers of people are making a pilgrimage to Gallipoli on Anzac Day, to remember the lost (Suter, 2010, p. 58). There is a revival and growth of interest in the Gallipoli (Dardanelles) battlefield and attendance at dawn services, both in Turkey and at home in Australia, especially by young people. Memorialisation is thus an important part of human history and postmodern society, and memorials such as these have been in existence for decades.

There is a considerable history of memorialisation that does not diminish the role or function of the grave or final burial place (or site of disposal of the ashes). There is an
ethereal, existential quality about the locale of the end of one’s life that is different to the final resting place. This has recently been highlighted in Australia (2014) with the families of victims of flight MH17; some have chosen to fly to the Ukraine to visit the site of their loved ones’ deaths. For others, however, this is too difficult a journey to make; too horrific a place to visit (personal communication with family of young Australian man killed, November 24, 2014).

Utilising a landscape architecture lens, Ware (2007) examined the concept of “anti-memorials” or alternate memorials in Australia, whereby a group of invisible or marginalised people are memorialised. These counter memorials, she declared, offer an alternate reading of Australian history, for example an overshadowing of Aboriginal and Indigenous history with Australian and British history. Wearable memorials—such as AIDS badges, Red Ribbons, and Daffodils—are also discussed, in the context of memorialisation and honouring and remembering those other than heroes or the rich and famous. A Stolen Generation Memorial Competition in 2001, a Road-as-shrine project in the LaTrobe Valley, Victoria in 2003, and an anti-memorial to heroin overdose victims are further examples of alternate memorials examined by Ware.

“Churches and other religious institutions have lost their monopoly over how death is marked” (Suter, 2010, p. 56). A recent Australian example of this was documented on the television show The Project (Campbell, 2014) on Wednesday, 18th June, 2014. A family had decided to turn their mother’s and grandmother’s ashes into fireworks, so they “could go out with a bang” and bring joy to others. A special family ceremony and celebration was held, during which the fireworks containing their loved ones’ ashes were let off. This was described as a very special and emotional ceremony, much more
positive and meaningful than a religious interment or keeping the ashes at home in an urn. Their deceased relatives were not religious or spiritual, therefore a religious tradition was deemed inappropriate. This example illustrates the movement away from structured religion and traditional churches in our postmodern society, and reinforces the belief that people are seeking new ritual practices and their own ways to deal with death, burials and grief (Calder, 2007; Cann, 2014; Hockey et al., 2007; Margry & Sanchez-Carretero, 2011).

This increasing public display of grief has been referred to as a “late modern or post-modern phenomenon” (Cohen, 2013, p. 344), and some authors pinpoint the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 as the turning point (Campbell, 2013; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Klaassens et al., 2009; Moodley & Costa, 2006). The essentially private nature of mourning has given way to much greater expressiveness, especially if the victim was famous or made famous by the enormity of the event and its media coverage (Klaassens, Groote, & Vanclay, 2013; Weisser, 2004). Countering this, however, is the very public outpourings of grief for unknown, ordinary people—the Lindt siege in Sydney’s Martin Place in December 2014 is a prime example of this, as is the “Ground Zero” site in New York and other sites of death resulting from terrorist attacks or mass shootings.

**Online and other memorialisation practices**

For many years newspapers have encouraged both obituaries and *In Memoriam, or In Loving Memory of* notices (Watkins, 2011)—a way for people to remind others of their loss, to increase community connectedness and solidarity, to offer love and support to the bereaved. An underlying belief may also be that their deceased loved one can see—
and approve of—such gestures (Cann, 2014). Other forms of memorialisation and mourning rituals are now taking root: social media sites, tattoos, T-shirt remembrances and car decals commemorating those who have died (Bailey et al., 2014; Bell et al., 2015; Cann, 2014; Gibson, 2011).

The changing face of the expression of grief, using online platforms such as Facebook, blogs, discussion boards, Twitter and You Tube, rather than more traditional newspaper eulogies and death notices, was discussed by Gibson (2013) during an ABC radio program (Life Matters). Her research revealed how these newer forms of grief expression may help to break down isolation and foster connectedness. Online sites have a role to play in keeping the memory of the deceased person alive, in connectedness and in continuing bonds. With photographs or notices posted online on the anniversary of the death it reminds others: think of me today. Email me. Remember the deceased also. If family or friends live interstate or overseas, this enables connection and the ability to offer support and condolences.

Both roadside memorial sites and Internet memorial sites “mimic graveyard or cemetery memorials . . . [and] virtual memorials may . . . become the chosen or dominant spaces for memorialisation, replacing real world geographical spaces and places” (Gibson, 2007, p. 170). In a major city cemetery in Perth, Australia, for example, mourners are given the choice of both a physical gravesite and an Internet web memorial (Gibson, 2007).

Online memorial sites thus represent new ways to express grief. Not all family members may be happy with these new ways (Gibson, 2007), finding such public outpourings too distressing or an unwanted intrusion into their private grief during such an intense time
of intra-psychic turmoil where they are simply struggling to cope and are unable to deal with the “outside world” or anyone else’s needs.

Discussing social media and the role it plays in modern forms of grief and mourning, Gibson (2011) noted that, “media culture, particularly the Internet, blurs or renders defunct many boundaries such as that between public and private . . .” (p. 150). In addition, people can gather within minutes of a fatality: “spontaneous memorials . . . are now commonplace because of the immediacy of mass media communications. Within minutes, citizens affected by a locally occurring death-event can alert others and visit physical and/or virtual sites to pay respect with messages, flowers and other artefacts” (pp. 147–148). This immediacy is likewise mentioned by Bell et al. (2015).

Research examining the use of online sites—for families and friends bereaved through suicide—is extended by Bailey et al. (2014) and Bell et al. (2015), with similar findings to previous studies: these sites are examples of the newer ways of expressing grief; of practising continuing bonds; of preserving the memory of the deceased and communicating with the deceased as well as the living.

Exploring the rise and role of virtual memorials, Cann (2014) maintained that eulogies and obituaries display a similar narrative, within an older discourse; whereas online sites are located within the newer discourse. The United States (US) have taken virtual memorialisation to even higher levels, with commercial Internet memorials being sold with funeral packages; websites building avatars of the deceased that captures likeness and gestures via photographs and videos; interactive tombstones complete with barcodes that link to Smartphones, displaying video and audio clips of the deceased when they were alive. Some roadside memorials also contain barcodes linked to social
media sites. In this way, a virtual community of the bereaved can now visit the “gravesite” anywhere in the world, at any time. Proponents of these newer forms of memorialisation maintain they assist with continuing bonds and maintaining relationships with the dead. Opponents declare they are too macabre, too public, and an invasion of privacy. Regardless, the material world has now been irrevocably linked to the virtual world.

Other modern practices of mourning—having bodiless memorials, tattoo memorials, T-shirt remembrances and car decal memorials—are further explored by Cann (2014). She maintained that death and dying have become displaced in contemporary Western society, having been removed from the home, community and church. Death and corpses are now the business of the state and funeral homes, with most people having little experience with either in their everyday lives. Cann (2014, p. 13) explained that this has led to a “marginalisation of the discourse of grieving” and the “disenfranchisement of mourning”, with bereavement no longer being recognised, along with older traditions such as mourning periods, extended periods of time off work to grieve, and a social acknowledgment of the status of being a bereaved person. She argued that grief must be acknowledged and recognised, hence newer forms of memorialisation and rituals are emerging to counteract this loss of older traditions. Additionally, Cann maintained people have a need and desire to be publicly recognised as a grieving person: car decals, tattoos, T-shirts and online sites address this need.

Tattoo memorials are well-documented by Cann (2014). Mentioned and forbidden in the Bible, (Leviticus 19:28 "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD”, Holy Bible, 1979), they are an old custom that is reemerging
in contemporary society. Like car decals, tattoos open the way for conversations about
the deceased, with strangers as well as friends. Additionally, the physical act of tattooing
is a ritual in itself, encompassing pain, laden with meaning and involving a cathartic
cutting of the flesh. Cremains (cremated remains) are sometimes used in the tattoo ink,
so that the ash of the loved one becomes embedded into the skin. For many, such
practices may appear macabre and disrespectful to the deceased; for others they are a
central part of their memorial-making and grief work.

Car decals have become popular in the US in the last twenty years, growing out of the
car bumper sticker campaign of the mid 1980s by MADD as a social protest against drink
driving (Cann, 2014). It is not widely observed in other cultures, although in recent years
has begun to make its way to Australia, with some examples shown below in Figure 1.
Car decals are described as “moving shrines”, a way to carry the dead around in a less permanent way than a tattoo. Cann (2014) reiterated that such decals also display one’s status as a mourner and link one to a community of mourners, in a socially sanctioned way.

Cann then compared Western society to other societies such as Chinese and Japanese, who, with Buddhist and Shinto customs, practice ancestor worship and maintain shrines in their homes, believing that the spirit continues to live on in the ancestral home, watching over the living. The dead remain in the realm of the living; they are not displaced and banished as they are in Western society. For this reason, roadside
memorials are deemed unnecessary, and are therefore rarely seen in Eastern cultures (Cann, 2014).

Cann’s views, however, need to be contested and challenged, as her premise that bodies are hidden away and banished stems from a Western perspective, which is not indicative of other cultures’ and societies’ practices. In many Pacific Islander communities or Eastern countries, for example, bodies are prepared in the home and laid out for viewing by family and community members. Open coffins and public viewings are similarly a part of many Roman Catholic mourning rituals.

**Spontaneous memorials**

Roadside memorials can be viewed as a subset of the increasing phenomenon of spontaneous memorialisation (Clark & Cheshire, 2004; Petersson, 2007a, 2009; Reid, 2003; Santino, 2004), emerging as a response to the search for newer, more relevant, mourning practices. Ware (2007, p. 76) pointed out that “this process does not replace traditional funerary rites; instead it emerges as an adjunct ritual which extends the opportunity for other types of mourning.” The term “spontaneous shrine” was coined by Santino (2001), referring to the marking of a site for an untimely death that is not officially sanctioned or endorsed by church or government authority, and is not in the normally prescribed places such as cemetery, church or funeral home (Haney et al., 1997).

Spontaneous memorialisation is characterised by private, individualised acts of mourning which are displayed publicly; they are not formally organised at their inception; they often occur at the site of death (Leimer, 1998a, pp. 21–24) and, “unlike
traditional funeral rites which occur at set times and continue for a set duration, spontaneous memorials ebb and flow” (Leimer, 1998a, p. 77). These spontaneous memorials are “*ad hoc* ephemeral memorials (as distinct from stone or other permanent memorials) . . . [that have] suddenly become a fact of contemporary life.” Suter (2010, p. 51).

The spontaneous memorialisation that followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 is claimed by researchers such as Belshaw and Purvey (2009) to have raised public awareness of spontaneous memorialisation, although they pointed out the phenomenon of roadside memorials in British Columbia, Canada, predate her death. Similarly, Moodley and Costa (2006), and Suter (2010, p. 51) raised this outpouring of “spontaneous laying of wreaths and other items at the royal households” as a new phenomenon for the normally reserved, “stiff upper lip” British, claiming a “new public mood” (p. 51) swept Britain following Princess Diana’s death. The media validated the use of such memorials by covering the death and the actions of the people as they claimed public space for their private mourning (Clark & Franzmann, 2006).

Spontaneous memorialisation is likewise discussed by others who have documented their use for sudden, unexpected, or violent deaths where loved ones have had no opportunity for “goodbyes”—such as the American tragedies of bombings, massacres and mass shootings (Collins & Rhine, 2003; Doss, 2006, 2008, 2010; Fast, 2003; Grider, 2007a; Haney et al., 1997; Jorgensen-Earp & Lanzilotti, 1998; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010; Reid, 2003; Senie, 1999, 2016; Weisser, 2004). Fast (2003) commented on the Columbine shootings and the spontaneous memorials erected in 1999, and concluded that many grief projects (such as building and maintaining roadside memorials) are best
understood within the context of Worden’s (1991, 2002) task model of grieving. Being able to do something, and processing grief through positive actions, proves helpful for many (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Bonanno, 2008; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Grider, 2001; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Klaassens et al., 2009).

A recent example in Australia of spontaneous memorialisation occurred with the Lindt Café siege in Sydney in December 2014. A spontaneous memorial was erected within hours, with people flocking to the site to lay flowers and other tokens to honour the dead and express sympathy and solidarity with the families and friends left bereft by such tragedy. These spontaneous memorials, according to Doss, are also “memory aids. They specifically function to remember the recently, suddenly dead: they make their loss visible and public” (2006, pp. 299–300).

The growing body of literature concerning spontaneous memorials, especially for mass shootings and acts of terrorism, sheds valuable light on the phenomenon of roadside memorialisation, demonstrating the importance of marking the exact place of death, as well as honouring and commemorating the deceased.

Changes in mourning traditions and the loss of older religious rituals surrounding death and burials have thus led to the emergence of newer forms of death practices and memorialisation. The postmodern world has etched out differing forms of spirituality and meanings associated with death, along with the importance of the site of death, and this is being reflected in practices such as roadside memorialisation. This research seeks to explore these changes and consider the role and meanings attached to memorials along the roadside.
The field of thanatology has thus undergone gradual changes in recent times, moving away from the stage and task-based models, to the more current cyclical or spiral, and integrative models of grief. These approaches to bereavement acknowledge that grief may ebb and flow, moving backwards and forwards between intense pain and acceptance, then back to deep sorrow. Grief is cyclical, not linear, in nature. It is these newer theoretical frameworks that underpin this research and study. Like Breen (2006) and others, I contest the dominant discourse in which grief is described in terms of stages or tasks to be completed, with the inherent notion that an “end” is achievable. Grief is not a linear process with identifiable stages; rather it is an individual journey with many twists and turns, and the desired outcome is a continuation of the relationship with the deceased, albeit in an altered form. It is integrating the loss into one’s life that is desirable, not a breaking of the relationship, or closure and moving on.

In the next two chapters I turn to the literature on roadside memorialisation and discuss how this phenomenon connects with the aforementioned grief and loss theories. I also demonstrate the gaps in knowledge that this current study seeks to address.
CHAPTER FOUR: SETTING THE SCENE

We say that the hour of death cannot be forecast, but when we say this we imagine that hour as placed in an obscure and distant future. It never occurs to us that it has any connection with the day already begun or that death could arrive this same afternoon, this afternoon which is so certain and which has every hour filled in advance (Proust, 1921).

The next two chapters offer an overview of the existing literature on roadside memorials, considering the key authors and their research and the main themes and conclusions drawn. The debate and controversy surrounding such sites will also be addressed and gaps in the research highlighted.

The origins of roadside memorials

It is generally believed that the practice of marking sites of death along the roadside has Latin American origins, dating back to the 16th century (Clark, 2007; Doss 2006; Everett, 2002, 2007; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Kennerly, 2002, 2005; Monger, 1997; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014; Petersson, 2009; Suter, 2010; Weisser, 2004). The custom began with Spanish descansos (resting places), whereby the resting places of coffins on their way from the church to the burial grounds were marked along the way (Anaya, Chavez, & Arellano, 1995; Arellano, 1986; Barrera, 1991; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Henzel, 1991, 1995). This was later extended to travellers who died suddenly, and, following Roman Catholic traditions, were buried with markers placed on the side of the road so that other passing travellers could say a prayer for the repose of the souls of those who had not received their “last rites” from a priest (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Klaassens et al., 2009; Klaassens et al., 2013).
The practice may have had earlier origins, with Clark and Cheshire (2004) noting that pre-historic traders in Central Europe buried the deceased along the trade trailways, while Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 580) made mention of roadside memorials’ history and origin from Britain, where it is believed gypsies were buried where they died. Early examples of roadside memorialisation are likewise cited by Monger (1997, p. 113), who described crosses being painted on walls or cut into turf to mark the sites of fatal accidents. In Australia, the practice is a relatively new phenomenon, traced back to the late 1980s (Clark & Cheshire, 2004).

While Roman Catholic traditions may have had an influence on the erecting of memorial crosses at the exact spot where a person died, before the last rites were able to be administered, today these crosses and markings either display a certain “religious hybridity” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 7) or have no religious traces at all. These once religious memorials have perhaps now become secular commemorations to lost lives.

**Roadside memorials—an international phenomenon?**

Historians, folklorists, anthropologists, sociologists, criminologists, geographers, poets, novelists, filmmakers and other related disciplines have undertaken a myriad of research and exploration into the international phenomenon of roadside memorials. A variety of names given to these memorials has been documented by an American folklorist, Everett (2007), including *crucitas, descansos*, memorial assemblages, roadside crosses, spontaneous memorials, roadside memorials, roadside shrines, spontaneous shrines, memorial markers, and memorial crosses. Belshaw and Purvey (2007) referred to them as RDMs—roadside death memorials; while Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998) made mention of their Greek name, *proskynetari*; and Petersson (2009, p. 75) documented
that in Sweden they are referred to as an *offerkast*, with piles of stones or sticks left at the site of death. Their names—and the forms they take—thus vary from country to country. Despite these differences, in the 21st century they appear to be increasing and becoming ubiquitous in many societies, particularly in Western societies (Hartig & Dunn, 1998).

There is also a growing body of research into the phenomenon emerging from non-Western countries, indicating how widespread this practice has become (Cohen, 2013; Henzel, 1995; Reyes-Cortez, 2012). There is considerable diversity between countries and cultures in how roadside memorials are constructed, and the meanings ascribed to them, reflecting different cultures and beliefs. These more recent explorations of the phenomenon in different countries and societies around the world have uncovered some key differences, as well as many similarities.

Studying the practice in Mexico, Henzel (1991, 1995) documented the insights into Mexican culture, religion, and history that roadside memorial construction and form provide. In Mexico roadside memorials are known as *cruces* (crosses), and are erected to mark the locations of traffic fatalities. Their form is a combination of “European Catholic traditions and Indigenous Indian customs” (Henzel, 1995, p. 95).

Looking at roadside memorials in Hong Kong through a cultural geography lens, Kong (1999, p. 3) saw such sites, or “deathscapes” as she termed them, as “‘symbolic landscapes’ which ‘produce and sustain social meaning.’” Such spaces become contested domains—sacred versus secular. Kong posed an interesting question: do sites of memorialisation differ in construction depending on who builds it, men or women? Is there in fact a “‘genderedness’ of these landscapes”? (p. 6). Kong is also one of the few
researchers, who raised policy issues relating to roadside memorial construction, noting that:

. . . policy-makers also hope that these memorials may serve as warnings to careless drivers” (p. 5). . . [and], “in studying deathscapes . . . there is also opportunity for policy-makers and planners to be made aware of the multiplicities of landscape meanings and to take account of such multiplicities in landscape/urban design and planning (p. 12).

Additionally, Kong (1999) noted that in Hong Kong, the Chinese are forced to practice cremation, not burial, due to the scarcity of land and sanitation issues. As cemeteries are still regarded by traditional Chinese people as symbolic places for geomancy and ancestor worship this leads to conflict regarding “fengshui (geomantic) considerations and ancestor worship” (p. 4). In Hong Kong there is no burial site to visit. The Hong Kong experience, however, cannot be extrapolated to the whole of China. In China, roadside memorials are not erected at the site of fatal car crashes; rather the family will burn paper “money” at a special ceremony at the spot to “please the gods” (personal communication, Y. Liu, 2011).

A Roadside Memorials Project was launched in 2009 by Jipson, an American researcher and criminologist. His aim was to “assess family and community outcomes in the aftermath of an automobile accident, which led to the placement of roadside memorials.” He interviewed more than 300 people who either built or maintained such sites, the majority of whom were women—mothers, sisters or wives of the crash victim. In addition, he undertook a content analysis of written documents pertaining to roadside memorials and an analysis of the laws within the fifty US states. His aim was to explore the “symbolic, emotional, social and criminological components of roadside memorials” (2009, p. 2). His key finding was that the roadside memorial was more
meaningful for those he interviewed than the gravestone in the cemetery (Jipson, 2009, p. 10).

Further research in the United States, from a geographical perspective, was undertaken by Weisser (2004) who adopted the term “micro sacred site”. She noted that roadside memorials are used to mark the place where the victim died, rather than where the body is laid to rest. Her research uncovered four main characteristics that determine the construction of these micro sacred sites. These are: the age of the victim, the number of days elapsed since the death, the private or public use of the land, and whether it was in an urban, rural or transitional zone (5.1). She concluded that the initial construction relied on the age of the deceased, (the younger the victim the more likely a memorial is built), while the maintenance and preservation of the memorial was influenced by the location of the site and its proximity to the victim’s home.

No reference to the gender of the victim was made in Weisser’s (2004) research, whereas others such as Clark (2004), Hartig and Dunn (1998), Owens (2006), and Zimmerman (1995) maintained that gender plays a significant role in the decision to build a roadside memorial. They found that memorials for males outnumbered those for females.

Bednar (2004) conducted field research photographing sites and exploring the visual components and material culture of roadside memorials in Texas and New Mexico. Like Weisser (2004), Bednar noted that some sites were clearly visible yet others were hidden away and easily overlooked. His focus was how roadside memorials are constructed and contested; how they create tensions within communities due to their private yet public nature—as they sit “between private and public tragedy, private and
public memory, private and public culture, and private and public space” (p. i). Similarly, in 2012, Reyes-Cortez studied the conflict arising in Mexico City within the boundaries between private, domestic and public displays of mourning.

Bednar, discussing private grief in a public landscape, asked what do roadside memorials “say” to passing motorists? How and what does the site communicate to outsiders? “Are they so personal that they are illegible to those of us ‘outside the code’? You know the objects are meaningful to someone, but what do they mean to you the visitor?” (2004, p. 1). Yet, as Bednar also pointed out, some are so very confronting with no ambiguity at all: “a cross emblazoned with silk flowers spelling the word ‘MOM’” (p. 1).

Roadside memorials are built for those left behind to have “a place to physically embody their grief over time” (Bednar, 2004, p. 3) and to do so publically. “A roadside memorial not only says ‘I remember you, and I will remember you’, but also ‘I want the community to remember you’” (pp. 3–4, author’s italics).

Viewing roadside memorials through a cultural performance lens, Kennerly (2002) visited and photographed many sites in the US, seeking the “performances” and “performers” at these roadside shrines. She kept detailed field notes documenting her research and her reactions to the sites she was encountering. Kennerly (2002, p. 233) noted that the oft-forgotten “performers” at the scenes of fatal car crashes — “the ambulance crew, the operators of the jaws of life, the tow-truck driver, the cops on the scene, the clean-up crew”—all have a role to play along with the grieving family and friends. Yet, it is these performers in the background who are often the most vocal in their opposition of the establishment of roadside memorials, not wanting a permanent reminder of such a traumatic scene (Breen, 2006; Gamble, 2007; Suter, 2010).
Attempting to understand the heated debate surrounding roadside memorials in a planned community known as The Woodlands in Texas, US, Everett (2007) utilised a triangulation of methods: participant observation, interviews with memorial makers and community members, and email correspondence with the committee officials who governed the area. Many residents and committee members saw roadside crosses as detracting from “the beauty of our natural forested environment” (p. 133) and an unwelcome reminder of drink driving, speed and other youthful acts of foolishness in their image conscious community. Everett’s aim was to understand both sides of the debate and controversy in the tight knit community, where many guidelines and restrictions applied to all matters of resident’s lives and homes. She commented, “they didn’t want this in their daily routine, to see these things” (p. 130). Her research and interviews with those directly affected by the deaths in this community led Everett to conclude, despite the protestations, that the memorials in this community were “undeniably crucial to the young adults’ grieving process, and indeed owed [their] existence to them” (p. 126). Everett further noted that, “one of the most salient issues in the memorial marker controversy . . . [is] the proper way to grieve, and further, who has the power to delineate the boundaries of the appropriate, particularly in the public sphere” (p. 130).

Using an anthropological lens, roadside memorials are public, “multi-vocal, polysemic” ritual symbols of death that, “. . . perform multi-tiered functions that serve to accommodate multiple processes, some of which include: memory construction, grief facilitation, and reclamation of space” (Wagner, 2008, p. v). Wagner’s (2008) study in Southern Texas, US, incorporating an analysis of twenty sites and interviews with seven
community members who regularly passed by roadside memorials, drew some helpful conclusions and insights into the perceived meanings behind roadside memorials from “outsiders”. Her research, however, did not include the voices and lived experiences of “memorial constructors”, seeking instead to hear solely from those who pass them by. Questions such as: “Why are these roadside memorials constructed?” (p. 106), “Do you think these roadside memorials are a sacred space?” (p. 109), and “Why do they build them in this place?” (p. 112) can only be guessed at by her interviewees. She compared her findings to those of an earlier study by Everett (2002), who conversely had interviewed memorial constructors who were able to provide valuable insights into the reasons for why and how they built their sites. Wagner concluded that the three elements of “death, space and memory” (p. 122), found within roadside memorial construction, contributed to the processing of grief through the establishment and enactment of meaningful rituals.

In British Columbia (BC), Canada, the number of roadside memorials has increased over the past fifteen to twenty years. Belshaw and Purvey (2009), as historians, considered such memorials within the context of the area’s social history. They examined the medicalisation of death, and the changing rituals and attitudes in Western societies about grief practices and mourning rituals, with, for example, cemeteries often now being on the outskirts of towns, hidden away out of sight. The authors also discussed the worldwide, global context of roadside memorials and documented a summary of their survey findings of fifty sites, with photographs, examined as “material culture”. They found that the majority of such sites were for teens and males, concurring with Hartig and Dunn’s (1998) earlier Australian research. In their conclusion, Belshaw and
Purvey posited that British Columbia’s roadside memorials are examples of modern mourning, in the context of secular values versus religious tradition and as a result the government is treading carefully when deciding upon policies governing them. While this study has provided useful insights into the phenomenon in a country similar to Australia, and has likewise discussed the issue of policy and legislation covering such sites, it has not sought the experiential knowledge of those who have built roadside memorials.

Roadside memorials have been studied through a cultural geography lens. Klaassens et al. (2009) photographed about 150 sites from a database of over 300 sites in the Netherlands. They interviewed twenty-four bereaved people who had established such sites. Their findings led them to conclude that marking the exact geographical location of the crash is crucial, as it signifies a transformative event has occurred: the passing of the victim from life to death. Klaassens et al. (2009) expanded upon the earlier work of Klaassens, Groote and Breen (2007), who had found that friends tended to build spontaneous memorials whereas families established more enduring, permanent sites. They found that the sites are important as places to communicate with both the deceased and the community, and an attempt to make meaning out of a senseless tragedy.

Roadside memorials can therefore be “read” or interpreted in a myriad of ways by a range of disciplines or individuals. Many of these international studies, whilst useful and informative, do not contain first-hand accounts from those who have established roadside memorials. Additionally, despite a variety of lenses and paradigms, the social
work perspective is missing, along with any concrete implications for policy formulation covering such memorials.

The use of the cross

The First Amendment in the US Constitution concerns freedom of religion, and a separation of church and state. The use of a Christian cross in public spaces in America is thus fraught with controversy (Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Everett, 2002, 2007; Grider, 2007a; McNearney, 2006; Roberts & Shurtleff, 2006; Ross, 1998). In Australia, no legislation exists that demands a separation of church and state and Australian roadside memorials encompass a broad range of spiritual and religious beliefs. Crosses, Buddhist prayer flags, crystals and other mementos are common. In the Australian context, the Channel Nine evening news regularly uses a photograph of a white cross behind the newsreader when a fatal car crash is being reported (e.g. Wednesday 17th September 2014). A cross “can thus be interpreted as a euphemistic symbol rather than denoting religiosity” (Klaassens et al., 2013, p. 155).

Indeed, crosses are frequently used by people who have no church affiliation, leading Clark and Franzmann (2006, pp. 590–591)—following their comparative research looking at Australia and New Zealand—to remark that:

one might assume that these are Christian memorials . . . but they are generally markers of death and sacredness rather than purely Christian symbols . . . The memorial cross has become a symbol of amorphous spirituality easily detached from any particular institution.

The cross is not necessarily seen as a religious icon, but rather a culturally understood symbol of death (Clark & Franzmann, 2002, 2006; Daum, 2012; Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010).
Faith was found to be a low priority in people’s reasons for building a roadside memorial that incorporated a cross (Collins & Rhine, 2003). Their research, conducted in the US, suggested that the use of a cross is simply a culturally accepted and recognisable symbol of death, rather than an expression of religious faith. This is echoed by Clark and Cheshire (2004), who compared memorials in Australia and Texas, US, while Dickinson and Hoffman (2010) mentioned that, in the US, a crucifix is sometimes added, to possibly express a more overt religious belief. In the Republic of Ireland, MacConville and McQuillan (2005, 2009, 2010) noted that the notion of separation of church and state is a foreign one, where crosses in the public arena are accepted, being a culturally endorsed, Catholic symbol.

Similarly, comparative research undertaken by Nešporová and Stahl (2014) in the Czech Republic and Romania found that crosses were still used in the majority (65%) of roadside memorials in the Czech Republic, despite it being a secular country, post-communism. However, “whereas many non-believers in the Czech Republic mainly regard it as a sign of death and danger in relation to traffic accidents, in Romania the cross retains a very strong religious and devotional significance” (p. 28).

Comparative research

A number of comparative studies have been undertaken, to elicit greater understandings of the phenomenon of roadside memorials and their ubiquitous nature in a global context. This section covers comparative research conducted in Thailand, the Czech Republic and Romania, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Australia and the United States, and Australia and New Zealand.
Roadside memorials are “a recent and rare occurrence in Thailand” (Cohen, 2013, p. 350) and Cohen argued that, “though the creation of such memorials might have been motivated by similar sentiments as in the West, they were soon incorporated into the popular Thai magico-religious belief complex” (p. 345). Unlike Western roadside memorials, which are often temporary, private and anonymous, Thai sites are permanent, public, personalised and the Thai religious and administrative authorities “quietly tolerate” (p. 360) them despite not being aligned with Thailand’s mainstream Buddhist religion. As the spirit is believed to hover over the site of death, “spirit houses” are erected to accommodate, appease and placate the spirit. Votive objects such as stereotyped figurines are left at these shrines, which are “renovated and embellished” (p. 356) and grow bigger over time (compared to Western sites which often become neglected or removed over time).

In both the Czech Republic and Romania, Nešporová and Stahl (2014) found that roadside memorials played two contrasting roles, stemming from two different meanings. In the Czech Republic (a secular, communist country) preserving the memory of the dead was important. In Romania (where a Christian religious revival had occurred) it was the soul and the afterlife that was meaningful, and marking the site of death with a memorial was a crucial aspect of their religious rituals. Nešporová and Stahl asked: “are roadside memorials a part of a collection of institutional mortuary rituals . . . or a culturally determined form of expressing grief?” (p. 23). In order to answer this they studied one hundred memorials, conducted thirty interviews with the general public and undertook one case study. In the Czech Republic, sixty-five per cent of the sample had crosses; this jumped to ninety-eight per cent of the sample in Romania, reflecting the
different religious beliefs between the two countries. In Romania, priests are called in
to bless roadside memorials and conduct services at the site, complete with incense and
holy water, in a bid to keep the devil away. In both countries roadside memorials for
males outnumbered those for females, with the average age being between twenty and
twenty-nine.

This comparative research by Nešporová and Stahl (2014) has shed light on the different
roles and meanings attached to roadside memorials in two countries with diametrically
opposed religious beliefs. For religious Romania, the roadside memorial is laden with
spiritual significance and has a protective function (p. 32); for the secular Czech Republic
the roadside memorial’s function is tied up with preserving the memory of the deceased
and hence working against the “terror of forgetting” (p. 30). The contrasting functions
of roadside memorials having “spiritual or even supernatural significance” compared to
being “a marker of purely human grief” was noted much earlier by Henzel (1995, p. 100),
studying roadside memorials in Mexico.

Other research has compared practices of creating roadside memorials between
Western countries such as NSW, Australia and Texas, US (Clark & Cheshire, 2004),
Australia and New Zealand (Clark & Franzmann, 2006), Northern Ireland and the
Republic of Ireland (MacConville & McQuillan, 2010). In 2004, Clark (historian) and
Cheshire (journalist) examined more than 120 roadside memorials in NSW, Australia and
Texas, US. Their study revealed that both peculiarities and constants were present
between the two countries, and that differences were mainly “expressions of ethnicity,
sub-culture, religious heritage, or individuality” (p. 204). Enough constants were found
to “indicate that roadside memorials, wherever they occur, are part of the same
international phenomenon” (p. 204) and the practice of establishing such sites is “identical in concept and purpose” (p. 215).

One of the main differences found between the two countries was that Australian sites were less patriotic (indicated by a lack of Australian flags) compared to their North American counterparts, and were also less overtly Roman Catholic, with a dearth of religious symbols such as crucifixes. The authors concluded that roadside memorialisation is a “response to a variety of factors—motoring trends, ethnic and cultural traditions, historical precedents, post-modernism, globalization, and individualism—none of which is the prerogative of any one locale or any one culture” (p. 219).

Qualitative research in 2006, based on photographing and analysing 430 sites across Australia and New Zealand and studying international newspaper articles relating to this way of memorialisation was conducted by Clark (historian) and Franzmann (religious studies scholar) (2006, p. 584). Due to the controversial, individualised, unofficial and unsanctioned (p. 582) nature of roadside memorials, Clark and Franzmann deemed them to be challenges to authority. The aim of their research was to consider the “authority” assumed by grieving members of society to claim public land as their own and in doing so to “challenge the authority of the church and the government as official purveyors and regulators of mourning ritual” (p. 579). Gibson (2011, p. 152) later echoed this claim, stating that:

The emergence of spontaneous shrines and memorials in public spaces . . . suggests the ordinary citizen feels entitled to public recognition beyond officially sanctioned categories of death events such as war, natural disaster, or mass murder. By erecting publically visible memorials ordinary citizens make a claim on public space, transforming an area of land into a personalised site of memory, loss and mourning.
Research undertaken in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland by MacConville and McQuillan (2010) considered the forms, functions and public responses to roadside memorials. Originally the custom of roadside cairns was used to mark sudden deaths, to which passers-by would “add a stone to the heap . . . to bless oneself and say a prayer [for the deceased person] at the site” (p. 201). What was originally a response by family and friends of the victim has broadened to include a larger public audience, with whole communities now involved (p. 195). The Republic of Ireland has a different response to such memorials from Northern Ireland, due to their Catholic traditions and what is deemed as acceptable public mourning rituals. In the former, roadside memorials are seen as a “continuation of a tradition of marking death in open places” (p. 196, authors’ italics) whereas in the latter such memorials are not generally accepted as a desirable part of any cultural traditions and have a “troublesome” and “disruptive nature” (p. 197). MacConville and McQuillan also noted that in the Republic of Ireland, political deaths, deaths from wars, uprisings, executions and civil unrest, are likewise marked by spontaneous and personal memorials (p. 202). In Northern Ireland such memorials are discouraged as they “can evoke conflicting and highly charged responses” (p. 202).

While these comparative studies—analysing physical sites and seeking public responses to such sites—have increased our knowledge of roadside memorialisation in an international context, most have stopped short of considering the meanings roadside memorials have for those who build and maintain them, and the role they play in bereavement. In this instance, only Nešporová and Stahl (2014) sought the lived
experience of mourners—a gap in the research surrounding roadside memorials clearly exists. However, several Australian studies seek to address this gap.

### Roadside memorials in Australia

Early Australian research, in Newcastle, NSW, approached the phenomenon through a cultural geographical lens (Hartig & Dunn, 1998). Their study aimed to “unravel the multiplicity of meanings within roadside memorials” claiming that “roadside memorials generate interpretations and impacts well beyond an intended private expression of grief” (p. 5). They also considered the function and role of roadside memorials in relation to young men and notions of masculinity, exploring if roadside memorials are a male or youth cultural phenomenon. This was subsequently studied by Calder in 2007, with the effects of roadside memorials on young men’s driving behaviour later addressed by Tay (2009) and Tang, Wu, Caccetta and Huang (2011).

Over a five year period, Hartig and Dunn compared records of all road fatalities with actual memorial sites. Utilizing four sources of materials—RTA (now RMS) road fatality data to map and then analyse sites; interviews with government and key institutional informants; in-depth interviews with (an unspecified number of) relatives who had built roadside memorials and lastly a questionnaire survey of 316 motorists to “gauge driver reaction to roadside memorials” (1998, p. 7). They found that a multiplicity of meanings were generated by roadside memorials. The two most common were a way for families to come to terms with their loss, and a secondary effect was warning motorists to be cautious, even to slow down. In addition, Hartig and Dunn found that the majority of sites in this urban area were for young males and appeared to celebrate speed; with car parts such as speedometers often incorporated into the memorial. They suggested that
if they are to have “utility as road safety messages aimed at young men [they would need] to be seen as a condemnation rather than glorification of problematic hyper-masculinity” (1998, p. 19). Hartig and Dunn did acknowledge that their area under consideration had a higher rate of young men, with patriarchal and misogynistic tendencies due to the large number of mines and industry in the region (p. 14), which may have influenced their findings. Nevertheless, they concluded that roadside memorials do indeed reinforce the problematic social construction of masculinity and aggression and that such memorials “need to be re-read as symbolic of societal flaws; of a wasteful road toll, and a testament to dominant and problematic strains of masculinity” (p. 5).

A folklore lens was used when Smith (1999) conducted research into the phenomenon in rural northern NSW, Australia. Describing roadside memorials as a noteworthy folk custom, he found it rare at that time for sites to be large and elaborate: he found no sites with photos, no long messages. He likewise observed that it was rare to see people at the sites, most of which appeared to be transient, with few maintained long term. Smith also considered roadside memorial use as a criticism of highways, and a way of maintaining public rage at the number of highway deaths. He noted, “In essence, this is an attempt to declare and maintain a public grief against the seeming anonymity and erasure of most highway deaths” (p. 105) and stated, “Though I have observed no example of a memorial directly accusing the authorities of poor road quality, the roadside memorials should still be read as a silent criticism of local road conditions” (p. 104).
Despite both studies being Australian there were a number of key differences between the findings of Smith (1999) and Hartig and Dunn (1998). Hartig and Dunn’s major finding, for example, was the existence of a strong gender link highlighting “youth machismo, heroic aggression, a disregard for safety and egocentrism” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 5). Smith found this not to be the case, with evidence of memorials for both genders.

Folklore studies such as Smith’s are important. As Smith noted, “it is rare to know of the actual details prompting the commemoration” (1999, p. 103). For this reason, a hermeneutic phenomenological study, seeking the experiences of those who do establish these sites of commemoration, is warranted.

The idea that roadside memorials presuppose an assumption of individual authority to use a public space was expanded on in Clark and Franzmann’s (2006) comparative study. By examining roadside memorials as they relate to heritage and history, Clark also deemed their placement along the roads as a “challenge to the functionalism of the modern roadside” (2009, p. 23). Roadside memorials help to preserve the memory of the deceased, as is reiterated in others’ research (Bailey et al., 2014; Collins & Opie, 2010; Doss, 2006; Klaassens et al., 2009; Hallam & Hockey, 2001; MacConville, 2006, 2010; Petersson, 2007a; Wagner, 2008; Weisser, 2004). Clark pointed out that they give a “human dimension” (2009, p. 34) to the statistics, reminding us of the faces behind these tragedies occurring on Australian roads.

Using an architectural lens, roadside memorials allow disenfranchised mourners—those not close enough to participate in the funeral or not permitted to attend—to be incorporated in the grieving process (Ware, 2007, p. 77).
Considering disenfranchised grief, Gamble (2007), also an architect, undertook research encompassing both cemetery visits (conducted in 1997) and chat room meetings (in 2003) and arrived at some helpful conclusions about grief and memorial spaces. Drawing on Doka (1989, 2002) and Corr’s (1999, 2002) work, she posited that roadside memorials become a site for anchoring memories to a specific location, especially for those mourners who may feel disenfranchised. Additionally, roadside memorials provide a socially sanctioned site for young men to visit and mourn at, in contrast to cemeteries where they may be treated with suspicion and disdain. Gamble further pointed out that even though roadside memorials are not burial sites, many nevertheless may operate as places where people deposit ashes (p. 64).

One of the few Australian studies that sought to address the role of roadside memorials in the journey of grief was conducted by Clark and Tidswell in 2010. The focus of their research was on “matters of religiosity” (p. 23) and the “stories embedded behind the data” (p. 22): the experience of grief by those who build such memorials. Asking a set thirty questions to sixteen interviewees, or “memorial makers” (p. 23), their focus was centred upon why roadside memorials were built, the style and choice of mementos, religious beliefs, the funeral service itself, and if the memorials are subsequently visited. The authors concluded that roadside memorials provide a place to focus grief; they represent “a place of continuity where people can communicate with the dead person” (p. 23) and they are therefore an important means to help grieving people, “even when the family or friends may have other sites associated with the death, such as ashes or a grave site in a cemetery. The site is important, and may take precedence over other sites
such as a cemetery . . .” (p. 23). This notion of “mirror sites”—one or more sites providing a focal point for mourning—is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

In conclusion, Clark and Tidswell (2010) stated that there was a dearth of research into the relationship between grief and roadside memorials, noting:

research specifically addressing the relationship between grief and roadside memorials remains embryonic and limited . . . Even though we know a connection exists between grief and roadside memorial construction, we know frustratingly little about how that connection works and what it may or may not achieve (p. 22).

Research is thus needed to “understand the grieving life of the memorial maker” (Clark & Tidswell, 2010, p. 22), a gap the present study seeks to address.

The changing trends of memorialisation rituals and the funeral industry has been studied by a former funeral director turned historian (Watkins, 2011). Her research, in South Australia, sought to gain understandings of these new trends and directions, which has seen memorialisation taking place away from the traditional cemetery. The increasing rate of cremation was identified as one of the most significant changes, resulting in novel options of memorialisation as fewer families inter ashes in traditional cemeteries or columbaria. Drawing on Hockey et al.’s (2007) study of the disposition of cremains (the funeral industry’s term for cremated remains) Watkins noted that ashes are often placed in more meaningful places, at home or scattered somewhere significant to the deceased, or to the family members. Other changes have occurred due to the restrictions in many cemeteries: limiting dimensions of headstones, prohibiting the placement of ornaments and the use of flowers being restricted to one standardised vase (p. 35). Cemetery visitations are therefore decreasing, and this is further compounded by the removal of modern cemeteries to the outskirts of cities, rather than
being centrally located within the urban area or local church yard. With a correlating change in the public expression of grief, manifested in more openness and expressiveness, many are finding such restrictions in cemeteries unappealing, and therefore choose their own way to memorialise their loved ones. Watkins also referred to Bachelor’s (2001a) research, which examined twenty-three case studies through a sociological lens, exploring the reasons people visit cemeteries and the actions they perform while there.

The increase in virtual memorials in cyberspace and the impact this has on the reliance on the cemetery for memorialisation rituals is also considered by Watkins (2011) (See also Bailey et al., 2014; Bell et al., 2015; Gibson, 2011). Finally, the “Green Movement” is well-explained by Watkins: the eco-friendly, environmental movement that would see biodegradable coffins built from sustainable materials, bodies not embalmed or prepared with chemical preservatives, and the lack of headstones marking individual sites. Despite their growth in both the UK and the US, such green cemeteries have not proven popular in Australia. Watkins posited that this may be because “it is difficult to envisage a cultural world without memorialisation and tangible forms of remembrance” (p. 63). She provided a cautionary warning that perhaps as humans we desire and “need to maintain links with that past which has shaped the present” (p. 75); we desire to have memories of our existence continue, despite death.

We are reminded by Watkins (2011) that traditional cemeteries record valuable aspects of a community’s heritage. With the decrease in the importance and relevance of cemeteries for many, this valuable history may eventually die along with its people.
These Australian studies are noteworthy beginnings, but do not go far enough to explain the role and meanings behind roadside memorial construction for bereaved people. Without hearing the stories and experiences of “memorial makers” or seeking their experiential knowledge to guide policy and legislation covering roadside memorials, a gap in our knowledge base exists. This study aims to fill this gap.

**Alternative lenses focused on roadside memorialisation**

Away from academia, artists, photographers, poets, filmmakers and novelists have been intent on examining roadside memorial sites and forms, adding valuable insights into this phenomenon. This includes Australian Glenn Campbell, a Darwin-based photo-journalist, who “took a series of images of roadside memorials on outback roads and discovered some of the stories behind these silent memorials” (Bannister & Petch, 2010). These were arranged in a free exhibition on display in 2010 at the Darwin Festival: *Shrine: An exhibition of tributes to lives lost on Australia’s outback roads*, with the exhibition then touring the Northern Territory in 2012 (Bannister & Petch, 2010). Similarly, an American artist, David Nance, has taken many photographs of roadside memorials over the years, and noted:

> I had some reservations about using these intensely personal phenomena as the subject of a photographic study. Roadside memorials represent a very private experience. At the same time, roadside memorials reside in extremely public space. It is a nearly universal feature of such memorials, that they face the highway. As private as they are, they clearly evidence the understanding—indeed, the expectation—that they will be seen by a passing stranger (2004).

Photographing such private yet public sites of mourning led Nance to conclude that, “there is no ‘right’ way to mourn. These memorials are reflections of genuine emotions
experienced by real people, and they are surely entitled to be respected” (cited in Senie, 2016, p. 53).

Other American artists, such as Watson (2015, p. 140) used the “visual language of human roadside memorial” images to highlight the plight of roadkill. Poets and novelists have similarly been drawn into the fascination with roadside memorials. An abundance of poems exists—such as those cited in the prologue and epilogue of this thesis—along with a novel entitled *Roadside Crosses* by Jeffery Deaver (2009) about a killer who erects roadside memorials “not in memoriam, but as announcements of his intention to kill.”

Short films, documentaries, television programs and radio programs have also sought to explore and explain the phenomenon of roadside memorials. In 2007 Villannueva produced and directed a documentary film entitled *Resting Places*, written by Kipikash (2007). This work focused on three mothers who maintain roadside memorials and explored the controversy that surrounds such sites.

In Australia several television and radio programs have likewise explored the interest in, and controversy behind, such private tributes in the public domain. These include the Channel Nine program *60 Minutes* and their story entitled “Road Shrines” (O’Donnell, 2006); the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) television program *Compass* “Roadside Memorials” (Edmondson, 2006); the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) *Insight* program “Good Grief” (Worthington, 2012); and the Channel Seven program *Today Tonight* segment, “Grief Tax” (Sculley, 2013).

Radio coverage includes the *Encounter* program “White Lines, White Crosses”, aired on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) Radio National (Busch, 2003); an ABC
Radio program *Life Matters* segment entitled “Death, Grief and Memorialisation in Cyberspace” (Gibson, 2013); while radio station ABC 97.3 aired a segment in September, 2013, interviewing the Asset Manager and General Manager of the RMS, discussing their policy and treatment of roadside memorials. Many other television broadcasts and radio station programs, in Australia and overseas, have similarly focused on this phenomenon.

**Collective memorials**

In both Australia and overseas, the use of public, group memorials is becoming a common practice. Nešporová and Stahl (2014) discussed large scale public transport disasters and the establishment of official, collective memorials to honour multiple victims. They pondered that the motivation behind such memorials:

> seems not only to have been a public display of grief, or even a form of apology from local officials who might feel themselves indirectly to blame, but an attempt to discourage the erection of personal and illegal memorials at or near such sites (p. 26).

This is similar to the circumstances in the Australian towns of Clybucca (Kempsey) and Cowper (Grafton), where collective memorials were established to commemorate the multiple victims of intercity coach crashes (see *Figure 2* below). Smith (1999) discussed these large scale memorials for the Kempsey and Grafton bus crashes, where 35 and 20 people died respectively. These were built because of the fear of an “uncontrolled proliferation of individual memorials cluttering the roadside. What was produced was a formal shrine of the kind more often associated with war memorials, even to the provision of two flagpoles” (p. 106). In a similar vein, the Tarcutta Truck Drivers’ Memorial Wall lists and honours truck drivers killed on Australian roads, with an Annual Day of Remembrance conducted at the site each October (see *Figure 3* below). The NSW
town of Grafton also has a Truck Drivers’ Memorial Wall, established in 2004. A memorial service is held here each January, to honour truck drivers who have died while working. “It’s a chance to get together every year and talk about those who are on the wall and make sure we remember them”, said Gai Bailey, from the Grafton Truck Drivers’ Memorial Wall committee (Potter, 2014).

Figure 2: Clybucca bus disaster memorial

[Image of Clybucca bus disaster memorial]

A collective, public mourning ritual called “Time of Remembrance” was instigated in 2001 in Victoria, organised by a group of individuals and organisations concerned with road safety and the effects of road trauma. Designed to honour and remember those who had died on Victorian roads, the service included speeches and prayers from various religious traditions. Red balloons were released, corresponding to the number of road fatalities in that year. This became an annual event in Melbourne, Victoria, and was subsequently mirrored in other Australian states including Queensland and Tasmania (Calder, 2007). In 2009 a steering committee was formed in Melbourne, attempting to establish a physical collective memorial for road crash victims, and to declare a national day of remembrance for all road victims. This was proposed to be held on the third Sunday in November, the same day designated by the United Nations for their World Remembrance Day for Road Crash Victims (spokesperson for Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, personal communication, May 7, 2013).
The placement of roadside memorials is growing internationally. As discussed above, research has been conducted in numerous countries by a range of differing professions using a variety of lenses. Despite this growing body of literature, however, little Australian research has been undertaken using a hermeneutic phenomenological lens, seeking the lived experiences of those who have built such memorials. In addition, there appears to be no research from the social work perspective, and few suggesting implications for policymakers who are seeking to legislate such practices. These gaps, then, becomes the focus and impetus for this research project. The next chapter continues the exploration and appraisal of the literature surrounding roadside memorialisation.
CHAPTER FIVE: THEMES ARISING FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The non-grieving can see memorials as an intrusion upon their space (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 587).

The previous chapter considered the origins of roadside memorials and studies from both international and Australian researchers. Despite a few cultural and religious differences between countries, a number of similarities in the forms, functions, and roles of memorials are apparent. This chapter discusses these commonalities and the key themes about roadside memorial construction, roles and meanings across the body of literature.

Importance of personalising the site with artefacts and mementos

The importance of roadside memorials as strongly personal and individualised places, often reflecting the character or hobbies of the deceased, is highlighted throughout the literature. This is compared to the strict rules and regulations often imposed—unless one is prepared to pay considerable sums of money—in cemeteries and crematoria, where guidelines relating to plaques, headstones, size of structures and amount of memorabilia allowed are enforced (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Kennerly, 2002, 2005; Kong, 1999; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010; Santino, 2004, 2005; Watkins, 2011). Hartig and Dunn (1998, p. 17) noted that:

People may have a desire for an extended appropriation of memorial space, such as the site where their loved one has died. The personalising of the space is possible with roadside memorials, with personal objects and other signifiers incorporated into the site.
Tensions and difficulties arise, however, from people building their own memorials instead of the “standardized traditional mourning customs offered by a variety of established and institutionalized religious traditions” (Thalson, 2006, pp. 201–202).

The importance of personalising the site, of “expressing the deceased’s identity and social person”, is echoed by Petersson (2007a, p. 3). Roadside memorials are “intensely personal expressions of grief” not expressed in a cemetery monument or plaque (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 584). Cemetery regulations are restrictive, as Daum (2012) noted, arguing that perhaps a new cemetery culture that recognises mourners’ individual needs and subjective wishes is warranted. He posited that being threatened with sanctions at the cemetery adds to the suffering of already distressed mourners. Further, “cemeteries may impose limitations that stipulate what items can and cannot be placed at gravesites. Loved ones may feel alienated by these conditions, thus choosing to memorialise the accident location, allowing greater freedom and creativity in their grieving” (Weisser, 2004, 2.6). Adding to this, some “shrine builders complain that cemeteries are cold, lonely and forbidding or that they are over-regulated, uninviting, and don’t allow for the practice of leaving meaningful items at the grave” (Kennerly, 2002, p. 251).

The reason for placing artefacts, mementos, icons or symbols at the site of fatal road crashes is well-explained by Richardson (2001) and Weisser (2004). As our experiences in life are transient, humans need ways to recall such experiences, and this is usually done through remembrance or telling and re-telling the story to others. Tangible artefacts can assist with this process, hence the popular practice of bringing symbolic items, personal mementos and religious icons to roadside memorials and burial sites (Tuan, 1980).
Most memorials include a cross, although wide variation exists regarding colour, shape and materials used (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Reid & Reid, 2001). Exceptions to this include many parts of the US as noted, where the separation of church and state restrict the use of a Christian cross (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010; Doss, 2006; Everett, 2002, 2007; Grider, 2007a, 2007b; McNearney, 2006; Ross, 1998); Thailand where a spirit house is more common (Cohen, 2013), and the Netherlands, one of the most secularised countries in the world, lacking in religious iconography. Only seventeen per cent of sites in the Netherlands include crosses—plaques, trees and rocks are more common (Klaassens et al., 2009)

In addition to the cross in many Western countries, a range of other mementos and artefacts are used to personalise and individualise the site. Most have flowers, and many include the first name of the deceased, perhaps with date of death and age of the victim recorded (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Klaassens et al., 2009; Reid & Reid, 2001). Nicknames also feature in Australian-based studies (Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Smith 1999, 2003). Frequently memorials are attached to the object of impact, for example trees, power poles and safety railings.

Many roadside memorials appear to symbolise the victims’ innocence and tenderness, with teenagers and young people often memorialised as children: stuffed animals and toys are commonly left at such sites, suggesting innocence and vulnerability (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Klaassens et al., 2007; Klaassens et al., 2009). Objects such as teddy bears “signify the desire to provide comfort to someone left alone in the dark” (Fast, 2003, p. 490). The widespread use of both butterflies and angels, and the symbolism and significance attached to these items—depicting rebirth, the transience and fragility of
human life, and other religious beliefs—is referred to by both Clark and Franzmann (2006) and Klaassens et al. (2013).

These observations contrast with earlier research conducted by Hartig and Dunn (1998) who found a more youth machismo, aggressive, tough and heroic element in the artefacts left at sites: objects of death—car parts and alcohol—were frequently used to adorn the site. Beer and spirit bottles left at sites, with the intention of “sharing a drink with their mate” are similarly highlighted in the research (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Clark & Cheshire, 2004; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Daum, 2012; Gibson, 2011; Kennerly, 2002).

Research undertaken by Klaassens et al. (2009) found that seventy-five per cent of sites were for those under twenty-five years of age. They also added that the younger the victim, the more likely a roadside memorial is built. An investigation of memorials in Romania and the Czech Republic led the study’s authors, Nešporová and Stahl (2014), to concur with the earlier conclusions reached by Hartig and Dunn in Australia in 1998. Nešporová and Stahl’s findings indicated that the victims were usually young (twenty-six years old on average) and male (sixty-eight per cent of sites). Other researchers have come to similar conclusions, with Gibson (2011, p. 155) noting that, “like war memorials, roadside memorials are statistically dominated by male fatalities” and Daum (2012, p. 44) succinctly stating that, “the dead are mostly young people, about twenty, rarely more than thirty years old.” From this research, spanning many years and across different countries and cultures, it would appear that roadside memorials are predominately a male or youth cultural phenomenon.

The common practice of leaving candles or solar lights at roadside memorials is documented by Nešporová and Stahl (2014). They explained it thus:
Sudden death was . . . deeply deplored and feared . . . [being] considered highly dangerous for the soul of the deceased . . . The entire community would mourn those whose life had ended unexpectedly, since they had died alone, without anyone to light a candle for them. The presence of light was essential, as it was believed to clear the way for the soul into the world beyond, helping it to reach its Creator. In the absence of light, bad spirits could interfere, misleading the soul from the right path and thus causing it to wander the world of the living, disturbing it. This threat could be avoided only by the performance of specific rituals (p. 32).

The parallelism between objects left at gravesites and objects left at roadside memorials has also been documented (Campbell, 2013; Daum, 2012; Klaassens et al., 2013; Richardson, 2001; Weisser, 2004). Mementos left at both sites, termed “linking objects” by Volkan (1972), are an example of continuing bonds. The use of photographs on roadside memorials and in cemeteries are likewise seen as linking objects, helping to maintain a relationship with the deceased as well as helping the wider community to remember the victim (Johnson, 1999).

**The function of roadside memorials**

Six key functions emerge from the literature: to commemorate and honour the dead, to provide a place for “continuing bonds” and ongoing communication, to mark the exact location of death, to mark the site as sacred, to act as a warning and safety message, and to enable the grief-stricken family or friends an outlet to do something. The literature indicates that some of these functions are universal, whereas others differ between countries and are culturally determined. Further, roadside memorials can be read in a multitude of ways: the intended meaning of the families or friends who build such sites could be very different to the meanings attached to them by passing drivers or regulatory bodies. There are thus multiple messages of roadside memorials: “messages of grief, love, remembrance, personal identity, salvation, as well as practical messages of road safety” (Gibson, 2007, p. 165).
Further, “roadside crosses are symbolically representative of on-going grief work” providing solace to grieving family and friends (Everett, 2002, p. 99). Similarly, “the functions of such memorials are to assist in the process of bereavement . . . they are cultural manifestations of grief, mourning and memorialisation” (Klaassens et al., 2013, p. 146). Raising questions such as—are roadside memorials for the survivors or for the deceased? Are they to help the deceased get to heaven, or to help us live on earth?—Nešporová and Stahl (2014) concluded that their role is multi-faceted. Their findings concurred with earlier work by Kong (1999), who referred to roadside memorials as “deathscapes” with multiple meanings, and Wagner (2008) who referred to their “multivocal and polysemic symbolism.” These roles and functions of roadside memorials will now be discussed in more detail.

To commemorate and honour the dead

Past studies, which have included interviews with families and friends of the victims, came to the conclusion that the primary role of roadside memorials is to commemorate and remember the deceased; to keep them “alive” in the memory of those still living and to act as a means of continuing the bonds beyond death (Everett, 2002; Excell, 2004; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Klaassens et al., 2009; Klass et al., 1996; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014; Petersson & Wingren, 2011; Rosenblatt, 1996; Sanders, 2010; Santino, 2001; Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

To enable continuing bonds and ongoing communication

Maintaining relationships and continuing bonds are important roles facilitated by roadside memorialisation. Collins and Rhine (2003) conducted fourteen interviews with
“memorial-makers” in Colorado, asking seventeen questions exploring the issue of the importance of the precise placement and positioning of memorials, thereby marking “sacred ground”. Their study concluded that the majority of roadside memorials were established in order to continue the connection with loved ones, not to “let go” or “say goodbye”. Collins and Rhine (2003, p. 228, authors italics) suggested that these phrases illustrate the belief “that the deceased sees or knows what is taking place at the site of . . . death”. Further, it represents a belief that the loved one has departed, rather than is deceased.

Other research concurred, emphasising that roadside memorials provide a place to communicate with the dead (Nešporová, 2008, 2011; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014). This site, it is argued, is more significant than the gravesite for many people, as it was the last place their loved one was alive; their soul left their body at that place. Other researchers point out that it is also a place where fellow mourners and community members can communicate with each other, as well as with the deceased person (Klaassens et al., 2009). The immediate family and friends and the wider community share the site, leaving messages, meeting to share a drink or a story, honking horns or flashing lights as they go past. Thus, “memorialised places can be seen as settings for social interaction and performative events, directed to different audiences” (Klaassens et al., 2009, p. 196).

This focus for communication is echoed by others, who explain that for many, the site of death becomes the place for ongoing dialogue with the deceased loved one (Everett, 2002; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010). The latter cited a poignant example of such continuing bonds and on-going dialogue at roadside memorial sites:
From a study of roadside memorials on one major route way . . . we recorded a delicate metal cross, erected to a child who died in 1949 aged 9 years . . . Fresh flowers were placed at the memorial on the occasion of her 55th anniversary, clearly demonstrating that this is an enduring site of remembrance and continuing connection (MacConville & McQuillan, 2010, pp. 197–198).

The community value of roadside memorials, along with the debate and controversy prompted by them, is addressed by Gibson (2011), who noted:

> Whether or not private memorials have community value and meaning for anyone beyond those who erected them is invariably the crux of political and media debate about their legitimacy. When the word community emerges in public discourse it operates on both sides of the debate as a mediating and bridging concept between the public/private binary (p. 152).

Despite the controversy, others declare that roadside memorials can be seen as an important bridge between the individual and society—helping with social cohesion and connectedness (Jipson, Becker, and Byers, 2008). As social beings, we need to share life’s peaks and valleys, and rituals and traditions are a central component in this, leading to whole and healthy societies. Roadside memorials, maintained Jipson et al. (2008), thus have an important role in building social capital.

**To mark the exact location of the death**

The importance of place is a crucial concept. The memorial marks the exact place of death, and is seen by some as a threshold between heaven and earth, “between the world of the living and the world of the dead” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 589). It marks a place to leave a ritual offering, as well as indicating a pilgrimage site to come and see what others have left (Grider, 2001).

One of the most common themes emerging from the literature deals with this importance of marking “place” and many researchers discuss the significance of the
actual spot of the death as being of central importance and significance to the bereaved (Cann, 2014; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Daum, 2012; Doss, 2006; Everett, 2000, 2002; Gamble, 2007; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Kennerly, 2002, 2005; Klaassens et al., 2009; Kong, 1999; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010; McNearney, 2006; Nešporová, 2008, 2011; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014; Smith, 1999, 2003; Weir, 2002; Weisser, 2004; Wood, 2009; Zimmerman 1995, 1997). Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 593) succinctly stated that “roadside memorials bear silent witness to the importance of place . . . The place becomes important because it is invested with the emotional energy of loss, grief and the processes of remembering.” They discussed a mother’s desire to put the roadside memorial for her son on the exact spot, explaining that this spot “becomes sacred and is imbued with ritualized meaning by the creation of a memorials marker as a focus for grief and communication” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 591). For some, this place is bittersweet, marking the loved one’s death and end on this earth, but the beginning of their new life in heaven. As one grief-stricken father lamented, “It’s where my daughter’s life here on earth ended and her life in heaven started” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 592).

Place is imbued with meaning; it is a focus for grief and a place for communication. Further, “the place of memorialisation is important because of the memories of the living and the meaning assigned to the location in the context of grief and loss” (Cann, 2014, p. 22, authors italics). Cultural codes, according to Doss (2006, p. 306), “include siting the memorial directly at or as close as possible to the locus of death.”

Looking at roadside memorials through a geographical lens, Weisser explained the difference between public and private places, and the fact that a single place may have
different meanings for different people: the notion of “duality of place”. Weir (2002) conducted research in Mexico, through the lenses of geography and anthropology, in an effort to try and understand why marking the exact location of death appears to be so imperative. His research was a multi-method, cross-disciplinary triangulation, using a geographic survey of over 9000 artefacts in nearly 7000 locations. Fourteen per cent of these sites were analysed in minute detail, leading Weir to conclude that the predominant themes associated with the practice included religion, emotion and culture.

In a similar vein, Wood’s (2009) research in Perth, Australia, through the lens of lived geography, found roadside memorials to be a “ritual space . . . part of a symbolic landscape” (p. 161). He questioned if the exact location of death necessitated the establishment of a lasting memorial on that “holy ground” and concluded that there was a strong belief by many “that the presence of the deceased can be felt” (p. 161) at the site. Additionally, the “spatial production” of such conceptual and symbolic landscapes “reintroduces a sense of community . . . where intimate meanings can be shared in comm(on) unity” (p. 161).

Looking at roadside memorials from a cultural geographical perspective in the Netherlands, Klaassens et al. (2009) undertook an analysis of “place meanings”, and looked at “the way in which meanings are attached to places and the roles that such place meanings play in dealing with all matters of life” (p. 188). To do this, interviews with twenty-four bereaved people were conducted, which captured the stories and motivations of the bereaved people, and the meanings attached to these sites. Interestingly, they found that friends of the victim tended to hastily erect a temporary
memorial, whereas parents spent time and effort planning and erecting a more permanent structure: “Friends seem to have a more pressing and urgent need to memorialise the event of the accident and the loss, whereas parents seem to memorialise the deceased in a more enduring way” (2009, p. 191).

Roadside memorial sites are often in “transitional zones or liminal zones—spaces of movement, and spaces between places of destination” (Gibson, 2007, p. 171). Gibson pointed out that as road fatalities are “deaths in transit. The driver and or passengers are travelling between home and work, home and holidays—they are not anchored . . .” (p. 171). Roadside memorials help to “anchor” the space: “the memorial turns ‘space’ into place—it is a way of giving meaning to and anchoring a space with a specific identity, association and memory landscape” (Gibson, 2007, p. 171). Gamble (2007) likewise referred to roadside memorials as anchoring memory to a specific location.

Even if the victim does not clinically die at that location, but dies later elsewhere, that place is still seen as where they were last really “alive”. Weisser questioned if “the fact that not all of the victims die at the scene of the accident affect memorial placement?” (2004, 2.6) She referred to earlier research conducted by Zimmerman (1995), who did not find that the place of death (for example, crash site versus hospital) made a difference in his study of thirty-one roadside memorials in Kentucky, US. Zimmerman (1995) stated that memorials for people who actually died at the scene versus people who died later are virtually undistinguishable. Smith’s (1999) research arrived at the same conclusion: that place is significant, even if the victim did not actually die at the roadside. It was here that life as they knew it, ended. He noted:
... the place is rich with significance in some way. Perhaps it may signify the last (fatal) choice the driver made—his or her speed on the corner, over-correction of a skid, lack of concentration, or lapse into drowsiness... it may mark human vulnerability to external factors beyond one’s control—a patch of oil on the road, an animal suddenly appearing on road, an on-coming vehicle on wrong side of road (p. 107).

In summary, MacConville and McQuillan (2010, p. 197) quoted one family member, who reflected that, “the roadside memorial marked ‘where he lost his life and where he will always be ... I won’t go out to the cemetery because that’s not where he is ... he is here at the cross’”. Comments such as “this is where I see him best” from a father, and “this is holy ground” from a mother mourning her teenage son likewise reflect this sentiment (Collins & Rhine, 2003, p. 221). Because the exact site of death is so significant—marking “the ultimate transformative event that has taken place: from life to death” (Klaassens et al., 2009, p. 187)—many reject suggestions of a collective or general monument (discussed above) in memory of all victims of traffic deaths (Klaassens et al., 2009; Klaassens et al., 2013). Additionally, such collective memorials are not individualised or personalised, therefore do not reflect the character or life of the deceased.

To mark the site as sacred, laden with spiritual significance

The spiritual significance of the place of death is a further theme documented in the literature (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Collins & Rhine, 2003; McNearney, 2006; Petersson, 2007a, 2007b; Smith, 1999, 2003; Weir, 2002; Wood, 2009). Sentiments are expressed that as this was the last place their loved one was alive it is laden with significance and a sense of closeness, being regarded as a sacred site (Hartig & Dunn, 1998; MacConville & McQuillan, 2009, 2010; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014; Smith 1999). These sites indicate a broad spirituality and encompass a range of religious beliefs—
Christian crosses are placed alongside football jerseys, stuffed toys, religious insignia, alcohol bottles and photographs. The place of death becomes “rich with significance and worthy of reverential behaviour” (Smith, 1999, p. 103). Many bereaved people say they feel more connected to their loved one here, than in the cemetery where the final resting place is. As Suter (2010, p. 51) noted: “Death has moved out of the cemetery.”

The belief for some that the deceased’s spirit lingers on at the place of death increases the sacredness of these sites (Cann, 2014; Cohen, 2013; Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Petersson, 2009; Weisser, 2004). These sacred sites are sometimes believed to facilitate access to supernatural power and are termed “mystic-religious sites” by Jackson and Henrie (1983). This is echoed in Cohen’s (2013) study into Thai culture and their beliefs regarding the spirit life and the role of roadside memorials in placating the dead. In a similar vein, Dickinson and Hoffman (2010, p. 164) explained that:

> there is a belief among some individuals that the soul tends to linger on for some time after death and has the power to trouble the living if necessary precautions are not taken. The construction of the cross, therefore, could help persuade the dead soul not to haunt or harm passers-by.

Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 590) pointed out however, that:

> contrary to traditional religious ideas that the souls of those killed tragically may continue to ‘haunt’ the area of death in a state of unrest, there appear to be only positive ideas about the presence of the deceased linked with roadside memorials. There is no hint of unrest or a haunting presence. There seems little doubt among those who erect the memorials, or have an association with them, that the deceased is actually in heaven.

The literature makes a number of references to families and friends embarking on a pilgrimage to visit these sacred sites; sites laden with sacred meaning and seen as being “holy ground” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Daum, 2012; Everett, 2000; Gibson, 2011; Grider, 2007a; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Larson-Miller, 2005; Smith,
Gibson (2011, p. 157) noted that this pilgrimage-like visitation “is another aspect of informal public memorials: the extent to which they signify an ongoing practice of mourning through ritual attendance and maintenance.” Such pilgrimages are often conducted on special days, such as the birthday of the victim as well as the anniversary of the crash. Other special days such as Christmas, Mothers’ Day, and Fathers’ Day are also times of visitation (Clark & Cheshire, 2004). Pilgrimages and visitations to the roadside are undertaken because many feel that the death site is more appropriate to commemorate than the cemetery, because the deceased was never alive at the gravesite as they were at the crash location (Everett, 2002, pp. 95–96). Suter (2010) likewise found that some bereaved people feel closer and more connected with the deceased at the site of death rather than at the cemetery or gravesite.

The practice is seen as a private and individual pilgrimage, with flowers “being placed as a form of remembrance and respect—an act of love, but also a cathartic act” (Monger, 1997, p. 114). In Greece, large and elaborate shrines are built along the roadside, with the Greek word for such a roadside memorial being “proskynitari which is related to proskynima—pilgrimage” (Monger, 1997, p. 113). Families visit the shrine, lighting lamps that represent the soul of the deceased, offering prayers, and leaving religious icons behind. Similar practices are conducted in Iran (Monger, 1997).

The differences perceived between “sacred” spaces and “profane” spaces was analysed by Dickinson and Hoffman (2010), who succinctly explained this by quoting the French sociologist Durkheim (1915):

> the essence of religion is to divide the world into profane and sacred spheres or dimensions. Whatever a group designates as ‘sacred’, whether a totem animal or a roadside memorial, is to be approached and treated with respect and reverence. The spot
where the roadside memorial is placed may be considered sacred, holy ground, yet not all members of the public recognise the location of the memorial as sacred (cited in Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010, p. 164).

It is this difference of opinion concerning what makes a place sacred or holy, as opposed to profane or ordinary, which underpins much of the heated debate surrounding the establishment of roadside memorials on public land.

To act as a cautionary device and use in road safety campaigns

Many claim that these reminders on the roadsides have a warning function for other drivers, to alert them to the dangers inherent on that stretch of road (Clark, 2004; Clark & Tidswell, 2010; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Daum, 2012; Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Doss, 2006; Everett, 2002; Excell, 2004; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Klaassens et al., 2009; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010; Monger, 1997; Nešporová, 2008; Santino, 2001; Tang et al., 2011). Gibson (2011, p. 156) stated:

Roadside memorials are sometimes debated and justified for their public safety function because they may remind people to slow down, to be aware that death is not absent from where they are now approaching. And like the official public memorials they speak of the human condition of mortality, the tragedy and sadness of lives cut short.

The public safety or warning function is claimed by some to be a secondary function, an afterthought, not the primary intended function (Collins & Rhine, 2003).

Confusion exists around the use of roadside memorials or similar objects in road safety campaigns. On the one hand, some governments and councils are seeking to ban or discourage roadside memorials; on the other hand they are being seen as promoting positive messages and warnings to other motorists. As Everett (2002, p. 118) pointed out, “It is difficult for city, county, and state officials to condemn emotionally charged
objects that might encourage motorists to slow down, be more alert, or think twice before driving while intoxicated.”

Because road deaths statistically exceed deaths caused by war and are “are open-ended, ongoing tragedies that have a past, present and future” (Gibson, 2011, p. 156) government bodies around the world are concerned about the number of road fatalities and continually seek new ways to deliver road safety messages. Extending the role of roadside memorials, many government departments, both in Australia and overseas, use these roadside memorials as a strategic component of road safety campaigns. Clark and Cheshire (2004) noted that in America in the 1950s and 1960s the Departments of Transport (DOTs) in several states used white crosses as part of a road safety initiative, in an attempt to warn drivers about dangerous stretches of highways. A similar campaign was used in the US in the 1940s and 1950s, where Arizona’s Highway Patrol placed a series of white crosses at the site of actual traffic fatalities (Collins & Opie, 2010), comparable to the Wangaratta (Australian) campaign mentioned below.

Similar campaigns continue in America, such as the “Adopt-A-Highway” or MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) campaigns, where the victim’s name is placed below a message such as ‘Please Don’t Drink and Drive. In memory of . . .’ (Doss, 2006, p. 303). Campaigns with grim warnings such as MADD carry a strong protest or political message and are the outcome of an organised political movement against drink driving (Everett, 2002; Klaassens et al., 2009).

Over the years, numerous campaigns have been used in Australia. One recent example, which has been anecdotally successful (C. Coleman, personal communication, April 17, 2014) is the campaign by VicRoads and the Victorian Police in Wangaratta over the
Easter periods in both 2014 and 2015. This featured twelve white crosses along a fifty kilometre stretch of the Hume Freeway, with each cross marking the exact spot where a life was lost (Prime 7, 2015). The Police Sergeant who initiated this campaign was pleased to report that there were no fatalities over the 2014 Easter period. They had positive feedback from the community and planned to replicate the campaign over other holiday periods (Dean, 2014).

A second Australian example is the Fatality Free Friday road safety campaign run in NSW each May, which aims to achieve fatality free Fridays for the whole month. People can “pledge” to drive safely and encourage others to do the same. Caltex petrol stations supported the campaign, displaying the sign below on their bowsers, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4: Fatality Free Friday campaign advertisement**

![Fatality Free Friday campaign advertisement](image_url)
In 2013, the Sydney Opera House displayed 1193 number plates—one for each life lost on Australian roads that year.

At the local level, SCC joined in with the *Fatality Free Friday* campaign, and in 2013 they placed nine pairs of shoes on display, representing the nine people who had died on the Shoalhaven’s road so far that year (January to April). Different sizes and types of shoes were used, to reflect the different ages, genders and personalities; to help make people aware that road deaths are not simply statistics, they are real people (K. Wiseham, personal communication, June 5, 2013).

Another road safety message, photographed in country Victoria in 2014, is displayed below in *Figure 5*.

*Figure 5: Touched by the road toll campaign*

Elsewhere, numerous other road safety campaigns have the same goal: to reduce the shocking number of road fatalities world-wide. Seeing the success of Victoria’s road safety campaigns used since the early 1990s, New Zealand has also used high impact billboards to deliver a safety message. One, featuring:

a white cross on a speedometer, makes the link between speeding and higher risk of fatality in the event of a crash. These hard-hitting billboards, along with graphic television clips and newspaper and magazine advertisements, are part of an ongoing road safety advertising campaign . . . Since 1995 it is estimated that this campaign, together with police enforcement, has saved 300 lives (Pawson, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the charity RoadPeace was started in 1992 and aimed to support the bereaved and those critically injured in crashes (MacConville & McQuillan, 2010). In 2003 they also developed a program called Remember Me, providing standardised memorials to be placed at the site of fatal crashes by the bereaved family or friends. In an effort to be non-denominational and non-religious, these memorials are not crosses; they are black A4 signs depicting a red anemone (Remember Me, n. d., RoadPeace, 2009).

Similarly, in 1996, Leeds City Council in the UK held a Posy Day, where:

posies were laid at the site of road fatalities to raise awareness of road safety . . . A Suffolk M.P. has suggested that memorials should be placed alongside the A140 road (where there were ten road fatalities in 1996) in the hope that they would ‘make drivers think about the dangers of the road’ (Monger, 1997, p. 114).

Often, government endorsed, official, standardised memorial markers are:

uniform in style, size and purpose, and secular in orientation. They are regulated, static and intentionally lacking in any form of individuality. Except for the Remember Me markers sponsored by Roadpeace in Britain, they usually carry no names, messages, or sentimental touches (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 585).
Australian examples of such markers are found in the states of Tasmania and South Australia (see section on Policies, below).

The growing “ghostbike” phenomenon is another campaign attempting to draw attention to the untimely deaths of cyclists (Cann, 2014; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010). Starting as a grassroots political organisation in Missouri, US in 2003, its agenda was to increase driver awareness of cyclists, address issues of safety, and memorialise those who had died while riding. Old bicycles are spray painted white and left at the sites of fatalities, often with names, dates and other mementos (GhostBikes, n. d.), as illustrated in Figure 6.
As with roadside memorials, this use of public space for private memorialisation has led to protests and tensions arising between the family and friends mourning a loss and the general public. The bereaved may attempt to “reclaim” public space as sacred and significant, resulting in a tense intersection of sacred and secular, private and public (Clark & Franzmann, 2006).

Despite this tension surrounding private memorials in public places, some councils and governments tolerate or even replicate such memorials as discussed above, in the hope that they “may serve as warnings to careless or carefree drivers” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998,
and have a positive effect on driver behaviour. However, research into privately placed roadside memorials, and their effectiveness in changing drivers’ behaviour, has been contradictory. Notwithstanding their widespread use in road safety campaigns, some researchers claim that the use of roadside memorials, crosses or even ghostbikes have limited effect on driver safety or driver behaviour. In America, “while gaining numbers of states are adopting them, official roadside memorials have had little impact on curtailing highway deaths or managing spontaneous memorials” (Doss, 2006, p. 303).

Research undertaken by Tay, Churchill and de Barros (2011)—to “understand the effects of roadside memorials on drivers’ behaviour” (p. 485)—concurred, noting that such memorials, whether personal or as part of a government campaign, had little or no effect on driver behaviour. They concluded that roadside memorials “did not have any effect on traffic speeds or . . . following too closely” (p. 485). Motorists have possibly become de-sensitised or even blasé due to the increasing number of such tributes.

Conversely, in their research, Tang et al. (2011) found that roadside memorials do improve traffic safety, by enhancing traffic flow and “decreasing risk and velocity” (p. 3845) and in earlier research, Hartig and Dunn (1998) noted that drivers—except older males—reported slowing down and driving more calmly and thoughtfully. Anecdotal evidence suggests that people do slow down or adjust their driving behaviour upon seeing roadside memorials.

A “doing”/meaning-making/logotherapy

A further theme which arises from the literature centres upon the physical act of building a roadside memorial; seen as doing something positive with grief (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Bonanno, 2008; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Grider, 2001; Hartig & Dunn,
For many, taking action and putting energy and emotion into building and maintaining a roadside memorial brings a measure of purpose, accomplishment and comfort (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 587). Kennerly (2002, p. 230, authors italics) noted that “In the complex and often ambiguous process of grief and mourning, acts of making and visiting shrines do seem to have an impact on the individual and communal need to do something in response to seemingly senseless events.” Building a roadside memorial is perhaps one way of coping with grief, giving the bereaved a task to perform; an act of love to honour their loved one with (Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010). It is seen as “a way to give meaning to an otherwise senseless death” (Klaassens et al., 2009, p. 187), because:

Immediately after the accident the bereaved fill a gap in their existence by doing something, through which their loved ones are remembered . . . the construction, visits to and maintenance of these places play a central role in their lives and in the grief process. (Klaassens et al., 2009, pp. 198—199).

Frankl’s (1945) work and his concept of logotherapy—an attempt to make meaning from exposure to the “tragic triad” of guilt, death and suffering—is reiterated by others who see the construction of roadside memorials as an expression of a search for meaning; making something positive out of a senseless tragedy or adverse event (Chan & Chan, 2011; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Clark & Tidswell, 2010; Collins & Opie, 2010; Currier et al., 2006; Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Ho, Chan, & Ho, 2004; Neimeyer, 2000). Similarly, the notion of post-traumatic growth espoused by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) is a part of the bereavement experience for some.

Research considering whether grief can be a positive experience with favourable outcomes, has concluded that this was the case for many people (Bonanno, 2008; Chan
An anthropologist and folklorist, Grider (2001) echoed this, maintaining that building a roadside memorial gives people a sense of purpose. She noted that tributes emerge quickly, often within hours of the crash and remain as a central focus for the “liminal period” between the actual death and the burial. Grider goes on to say, however, that “after the funeral, when shrines are removed, the sacred space returns to a secular space and the graveyard becomes the place to leave mementos” (Grider, 2001, p. 2). Findings by others such as Clark and Franzmann (2006) contest this, reporting that both sites remain significant for many people.

**Organised religion versus new ways of memorialising the dead**

Church attendance in the Western world (outside the US) is declining, yet there is “an increasing interest in spirituality generally. There is a hunger which the established faiths are not satisfying” (Suter, 2010, p. 57). Some researchers see the increasing phenomenon of roadside memorials signifying a shift in spiritual or religious values in contemporary society. Others view it as a conscious and deliberate move away from organised religion and the traditions of churches and state-run cemeteries, maintaining that the church and its practices have lost relevance and significance for modern life. (Calder, 2007; Cann, 2014; Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Cohen, 2013; 2006; Santino, 2005; Thalson, 2006; Weisser, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995, 1997). Most roadside memorials, “are unrelated to institutional religion, and lack denominational markers” stated Cohen (2013, p. 344). People are seeking other avenues of grieving and new mourning rituals, away from organised religion. Indeed, “the customary ceremonies associated with death, like funerals, may not provide enough of
an outlet for some people’s grief, which is why they may seek other avenues of relief, such as building roadside memorials” (Weisser, 2004, 2.6).

Death has become “sanitised” in modern Western society (Cann, 2014; Clark & Cheshire, 2004; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Suter, 2010). Death is indeed “regulated, absent and invisible in our society” (Gibson, 2011); hidden away in hospitals or aged care facilities. In the West, unlike in many Eastern or Indigenous communities, we are no longer accustomed to seeing death or corpses in our private homes. Added to this, medical advancements mean that people are living longer, resulting in a “death-denying” Western society (Klaassens et al., 2013). For this reason, “sudden death, such as through road accidents, is all the more shocking . . . and the bereaved are left traumatized by the sudden loss” (Suter, 2010, p. 57).

Mourning rituals in contemporary Western societies have undergone changes over the years, from very public outpourings—community funeral processions, wearing of black clothing, wailing, definite time periods of mourning—to more private and contained expressions of grief: a “stiff upper lip” mentality brought from the English heritage. As Baptist (2010, p. 295) remarked, “Once when loved ones died, we tenderly washed the body on the kitchen table, dressed them in their finest clothes, and placed them in the heart of the home for visitation by family, relatives, and friends.” Additionally, “cemeteries have migrated from town centre to urban edge” (Baptist, 2010, p. 295), and regular visits to the cemetery are becoming the exception for many in Western countries.

Cemetery visitations have decreased in recent years as many families now choose other ways to memorialise their loved ones, away from the confines of the traditional
cemetery (Watkins, 2011). With the increasing secularisation of society there has been a corresponding move away from the notion of “traditional sites within consecrated cemetery precincts” (Watkins, 2011, p. 57). Earlier, Kong (1999, p. 11) had sagely asked, “What about those groups and individuals for which the dispersal of ash remains of their dead in various places or in rivers and seas leaves no material place . . . What new rituals evolve as means to cope?” Many have no connection with a cemetery or crematorium, and are left wondering what to do with the ashes of their loved ones. These changes, maintained Cann (2014), have left many floundering in times of loss. For this reason, new, meaningful rituals are needed, to replace the older, less relevant ways. This can be interpreted as the growing “failure to see importance or meaning in church-based rituals and an increasing tendency to see spiritual authority resting with the individual conscience” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 582). They quote one father who proclaimed “I’m not religious and to me that’s no way to remember Michael. Marking the spot [where he died in a car crash] would be a solace to us . . .” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 583). Clark and Franzmann continued, stating that:

the modern construction of roadside memorials may be a specific expression, perhaps, of a bigger phenomenon, a current groundswell of disregarding institutional forms that once sufficed for the crisis moments of life . . . While memorials and shrines may have existed by the roadside during periods of higher religiosity in the past, the renewed interest and attraction in their construction currently cannot be argued to have the same context. Those who construct memorials now often speak of not finding meaning in the rituals of conventional religion and see their memorials either as an alternative or even in outright opposition to conventional religion (2006, p. 583).

The notion of “mirror sites”, and a comparison between the significance of the roadside memorial with the grave, is a worthwhile line of inquiry. Gamble (2007) pointed out that a number of sites may be significant for those who mourn, including a bedroom, a roadside cross, a gravesite, a niche where the ashes are kept, or an urn which holds the
cremains. For some, this may be a cause of conflict or guilt, with the perceived need to care for more than one place, psychologically as well as physically. Mourners may find they are caring for one or more of these mirror sites due to a dissatisfaction with cemetery regulations, coupled with a desire to mark the site of the crash as well as maintain other sacred or special sites. Bachelor (2004, 2007) and Clark and Franzmann (2006) also considered the concept of mirror sites, with the latter concluding that the roadside memorial appeared to hold greater significance for many. They noted that:

for an increasing number of contemporary mourners the cemetery is divorced from the places and paraphernalia of personal meaning. Cemetery management may even regulate how the dead are remembered, restricting the size, structure and nature . . . so that there is little scope for individual expression (p. 592).

Because roadside memorials are not formal spaces like cemeteries they allow and even encourage greater expressions of creativity (Nešporová & Stahl, 2014). Likewise, Gibson (2011) found in her research that new ways of mourning are focused on the site of death, rather than the place where the remains lie. This is in contrast to earlier research conducted by Petersson in 2007, who observed that roadside memorials are not intended to be a replacement for the gravesite, but are rather an additional way of preserving the memory of the deceased and keeping their identity and social presence in the land of the living. Collins and Opie (2010, p. 107) summed this up, pointing out that roadside memorials are “not sequestered from daily life, as are cemeteries . . .”

As discussed in Chapter Three, along with Internet based expressions of grief other new phenomena have emerged—tattoo memorials, T-shirt remembrances and the use of decals on cars—to commemorate the deaths of loved ones. These new ways of remembering and memorialising deceased loved ones represent significant changes in
mourning practices, and the use of roadside memorials is an important part of this new terrain (Cann, 2014). The contemporary and growing phenomenon of roadside memorials may likewise be seen as a way for mourners to have a personalised space to visit, given the tighter regulations in modern cemeteries, exacerbated by the increasing trend towards lawn cemeteries—with rows of homogenous plaques—and gardens of remembrance.

**Factors that influence the establishment of a roadside memorial**

Examining the factors that influence the erection of a roadside memorial, Weisser (2004, 3.3) conducted research in the US, and concluded that there are six variables. These are: urban versus rural setting; frequency of street maintenance, mowing or roadwork construction; drug and alcohol involvement in the deaths; age and sex of the victim; the loved ones’ reasons; and distance of the site from home. From these six variables, her research arrived at four main characteristics that determine if a roadside memorial is built. Firstly, the site of the crash: a memorial is more likely to be established if it is in a rural setting, not an urban setting, and is in close proximity to the family home. Weisser also noted that the physical location of the site (i.e. proximity to home) was critical to the life expectancy of the roadside memorial. Secondly, the nature of the crash may influence if a memorial is built. Due to the social stigma of driving while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, such fatalities may not be marked with a roadside memorial. Thirdly, the age of the victim may have some bearing on the establishment of a memorial. The younger the victim, the more likely a memorial is built. It appeared that gender was not a contributing influence. Finally, the wishes of the family may determine if and when such a memorial is established, and the form it will take.
Other studies have also documented that the distance between the site of death and the family home is influential in the establishment and maintenance of a roadside memorial (Bednar, 2004, 2011; Henzel, 1995; Klaassens, 2011; Klaassens et al., 2009; Owens, 2006). If the site is being passed regularly, or is within a ten kilometre radius of the family home (Klaassens, 2011; Klaassens et al., 2009) it is more likely that a memorial will be built. Henzel (1995, in Weisser, 2004, 3.3.4) reiterated this:

The closer the victim’s loved ones, who would construct and maintain the roadside memorial live, relative to the accident site, the more likely they are to erect and preserve a marker. Moreover, if loved ones frequently journey past the accident site, this can also lead to a higher likelihood of memorial placements.

Research undertaken by Clark and Tidswell (2010, p. 23) concurred, documenting that:

One of the two interviewees who erected a memorial a year after the tragedy was hindered from doing anything earlier by the prohibitive distance she lived from the accident site. In this case the memorial could not function as the key focus for her grief, and she relied on other personal resources to help her deal with her grief.

Additionally, the term “distance decay” was coined by Owens (2006) referring to the likelihood of memorials far from the family home becoming neglected and falling into disrepair.

While the above research has added to the knowledge base surrounding roadside memorial construction, these studies stop short of considering the role such memorials play in bereavement, and the meanings ascribed to these sites. However, Clark and Tidswell (2010) do consider roadside memorials and the grieving process, and state that there is a dearth of research into this:

research specifically addressing the relationship between grief and roadside memorials remains embryonic and limited . . . Even though we know a connection exists between grief and RM construction, we know frustratingly little about how that connection works and what it may or may not achieve (p. 22).
More contemporary Australian research addressing these issues, especially through a social work lens, will therefore significantly add to the existing literature.

Policies concerning roadside memorials

There are many differing policies and guidelines surrounding roadside memorials, both in Australia and overseas. The United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Germany have all tried various programs and trials to reduce road tolls and address the growing use of roadside memorials following road deaths. In the US, for example, each of the fifty states have differing policies, encompassing elements such as time and size limits; permissible locations and, as discussed above, issues in relation to the separation of church and state, with the use of a Christian cross seen as promoting religion (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010; Doss 2006; Jipson et al., 2008; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010).

A comprehensive study of the laws in the US aimed at controlling roadside memorials was undertaken by Jipson et al. in 2008. The effects on local communities were examined, with their findings indicating that roadside shrines are tolerated by most as “permissible commemorations”. In a similar way Dickinson and Hoffmann (2010), using their sociology and anthropology lenses, conducted research into the policies regarding the establishment of roadside memorials in different states of the US. By sending out postal questionnaires to the relevant Departments of Transportation (DOTs), they found that twenty three out of fifty US states had a policy of some kind, with some being more specific than others. General guidelines addressed size, location and time-limits. Some states also had a road safety campaign as well as a policy governing roadside memorials, for example a Fatality Marker program in Montana; Driving Under the Influence program in Illinois and Washington; X Marks the Spot—Why Die? Drive Safely program in South
Dakota; Adopt-A-Highway programs and MADD campaigns in various states and Green Memorial projects (where trees are planted in memory of road crash victims). Regarding green memorials and memorial gardens, however, Dickinson and Hoffmann (2010, p. 163) noted it is “unlikely that memorial gardens will replace individual memorials constructed by friends and family”, as, for many, the location of the actual death is given greater importance than the final resting place of the deceased. Overall, Dickinson and Hoffman (2010) found that the various DOTs were sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of grieving families and friends, while needing to balance this with safety issues and maintenance operations (p. 163).

In Canada, surveys by Churchill and Tay (2008) and Tay (2009) found similar results to their American neighbours—the primary concerns of the authorities were focused on issues of safety, maintenance and driver distraction. These concerns were likewise balanced against compassion and empathy for those who were mourning the death of a loved one.

In the Netherlands, research undertaken by Klaassens et al. in 2009 found that no uniform policy existed, with only general guidelines addressing safety issues and time-limits (three to five years) suggested. Occasional complaints from neighbours were documented, but most memorials were tolerated by the authorities as long as they did not pose safety hazards.

In contrast, Germany took a proactive response and adopted a novel idea—electronic billboards along the roadside that can display the names of deceased people, along with messages from their bereaved family or friends (M. Smith, personal communication, August 20, 2010).
The Australian context is similar to the United States, Canada and the Netherlands, with policies differing from state to state and council to council. A balance between compassion and safety for all road users is sought, with elements such as time-limits, size constraints, adjacent landowners’ rights and risk management considered. In the Shoalhaven LGA the policy of the RMS is adopted, which has a compassionate and empathic approach to the needs of bereaved people establishing roadside memorials, so long as they are not a danger to other road users (NSW RMS, 2015b).

In contrast to other states and council regions, Western Australia has a comprehensive state-wide policy. It is underpinned by both respect and compassion for the family and friends, and safety of all road users. The policy addresses issues such as maintaining a data base and register of contact details, timeframes of five years (after which time the family are contacted via the register to see if they wish to continue to keep the memorial in place) and size dimensions. If a roadside memorial structure is deemed not appropriate (for example on a dangerous intersection or busy street) alternatives such as plaques, decal stickers to place on traffic lights or power poles or concrete pavers to go in footpaths are available. The WA government supply these alternative memorials and will assist families with their installation.

In writing their policy, the WA government were aware that roadside memorials play a significant role in helping bereaved people—they provide a “tangible record of a life lived”—as well as conveying a strong road safety message. They also acknowledge the need to personalise the memorial, hence allow flowers, toys and other personal effects to be securely tied to the roadside memorial. In contrast to other states’ or councils’ regulations, WA will also allow roadside memorials on Freeways. These are to be
installed by their staff, however stopping at or visiting such sites is not permissible for
safety reasons. The WA government was also aware of the distress roadside memorials
may cause to nearby residents, so they are prohibited a certain distance from dwellings.
In this way, they are balancing community needs, sensitivity, and road safety.

The Australian Capital Territory’s (ACT) Roadside Memorial Policy has recently been
amended; previously such memorials were banned. The ACT will now “respect” a
memorial if it is well maintained; is not blocking drivers’ line of sight; or causing a
distraction (see ACT Roadside Memorial Policy, 2010). Similarly, parts of Tasmania, and
South Australia have policies that are currently under review. In South Australia, for
example, a red and black road crash marker program began in 1999, where red markers
signifying injury and black markers denoting death are placed on the highway. The
standard reflective roadside guideposts, painted red or black, are installed by the
Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure (DTEI)—now known as the
Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure—or community groups/road
safety committees. Up until 2001, delineators were used on the posts in the form of
crosses for black posts and a vertical strip for red, to indicate the numbers of those killed
or injured. Crosses are no longer used, being deemed not necessarily an appropriate
representation of the families’ beliefs. Additionally, adjacent landowners are consulted,
to ensure no objections are raised. A register and data base with dates, locations and
details of family to contact is maintained. The crash markers are left in place for five
years, and removed following consultation with family members. No crosses or other
types of structures are permitted, which is explained in the Operational Instruction 19.5
(2008) thus: “A roadside crash marker acts as a road safety message and not as a
memorial to accident victims.” However, this does not stop grieving family and friends from doing what they want to do, as noted by Ware (2007, p. 77):

They [SA road authorities] also felt that the homemade markers that were littering the freeways were unsightly and could cause further accidents. A recent survey after five years of this practice has concluded that the formal markers are either added to and appropriated by mourners or simply removed.

This situation in SA indicates that there is contest between the needs of the people who erect roadside memorials and the directives of the government, evidenced by people adding to or removing formal markers. Outcomes of the 2013 policy review about these issues is still pending.

Some local government areas in the Australian state of Tasmania developed a similar policy (introduced in 2010) placing black posts with a small red cross to mark a death, and a red post to signify an injury, as shown in Figure 7. The following reasoning was given by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) News, September, 2010:

The working group implemented the program to raise awareness of road trauma at the sites of fatal and serious injury crashes in order to remind drivers that everyone is at risk of a crash. Black markers are used to identify the locations of fatal crashes and people involved in serious injury crashes can request installation of a red marker.
Figure 7: Tasmanian Crash Markers Road Safety Initiative


Figure 8: Use of personalised cross in addition to official Crash Marker

On a recent trip to Tasmania I noted that approximately seven out of ten of these black markers also had a more personal and individualised roadside memorial nearby (see Figure 8 above). This may indicate that a standardised, generic structure is not sufficient for grieving families. Some argue that the state is blind to the primary role of such memorials, or is trying to control people’s grief and mourning—what you can and cannot do as a bereaved citizen. This control used to belong to the church, perhaps this is why some people are choosing to defy both state and church by erecting their own memorials, as they see fit.

Due to the increasing debate and controversy surrounding this growing phenomenon of roadside memorials, policies regulating their use and placement are under the spotlight and both local councils and state governments in Australia are attempting to negotiate and regulate use of private, individualised roadside memorials in public spaces (Gibson, 2011, p. 151). This is indeed a dynamic field in Australia, as policies are under review and many policymakers are seeking community feedback in order to address both community and individual needs. The time is ripe for research into their role and meanings for contemporary Australians.

**Debate and controversy: Private sorrow in the public domain**

Before undertaking this research, I was aware that roadside memorials have prompted debate and controversy. They simultaneously bring comfort and solace for many, yet also cause angst and anger for others. I am neither for nor against such tributes, indeed such a dichotomy, or thinking in Cartesian dualist terms, is simplistic and unhelpful.
Roadside memorials have very different meanings for different people, as this research documents.

A brief exploration of the notion of “public” is warranted. The boundaries between public and private life have been considered by Habermas (1989) and Campbell (2013), with Campbell asking, what indeed makes a sphere “public”. She argued that the public sphere now consists of multiplicity, plurality, heterogeneity, with new public spheres emerging with the Internet, digitalised communication technologies, and virtual public spheres (pp. 526–527). In summary Campbell noted that, “roadside memorials incite a sometimes highly charged politics about, for example, the boundaries of public/private life, risk management and the minimization of harm, the regulation of grief, the social ownership of public space and the authority of expertise” (p. 538). It is this debate about private versus public life and space, and the impact this has on the phenomenon of roadside memorialisation, that attention is now turned to.

The placement of private roadside memorials in the public domain has sparked heated debate Australia-wide and internationally (Ross, 1998). Five key themes were identified by Kennerly (2002, p. 237): the public versus private issue, distraction to other drivers, sites becoming neglected and untidy eyesores, the re/traumatisation of others, and the issue of separation of church and state (in the US).

The issue of public space being used for private purposes has attracted much attention, in academic writings as well as in the popular media. Indeed, “the current practice of erecting roadside memorials challenges accepted ideas of the roadside as public not private space, as secular not sacred space” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 586). This is a common theme within the literature—is it permissible to allow private grief in the public
domain; private sorrows to spill out onto public spaces? (Burk, 2003; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Everett, 2000, 2002; Klaassens et al., 2009; Kong, 1999; Suter, 2010; Weisser, 2004; Welsh, 2014). Conflict and tensions exist between mourners, members of the public—including nearby homeowners—and the authorities (Hartig & Dunn, 1998). Suter (2010, p. 54) added that a “more general form of controversy is whether such memorials are a help or a hindrance to society in general.”

In order to examine private grief in public places, Burk (2003) studied two monuments erected following violence against women, in Vancouver, Canada. He considered the private emotion of grief displayed in a public place, confounding “the distinctions between private and public, personal and collective, memory and erasure” (p. 317). Additionally, Burk discussed the struggles over understanding the notion of “public” and how public space can be or should be “defended”. As Suter (2010, p. 53) noted, “The memorial in effect transforms public land into private sacred space” and debate and controversy naturally follows such a transformation. Similarly:

boundaries between the public and private sphere have changed . . . Establishing private memorials in public spaces brings death into the public sphere. This process runs counter to the trend in Western societies of being death-denying, where the public expression of grief is essentially taboo . . . (Klaassens et al., 2013, p. 146).

Boundaries in contemporary society are becoming less delineated, with a merging of what was formerly seen as either public or private space. As Campbell (2013) asserted, the digital age has created new public spheres and boundaries between private and public life are becoming blurred.

Nevertheless, Jipson (2009), a sociologist/criminologist, questioned the appropriateness of memorials in public spaces. He investigated why roadside memorials are built, and
the responses and reactions by the local communities towards these memorials. His research found that the debate was focused upon issues of “unnecessary and morbid reminders” of accidental deaths and distraction to other drivers, making the roads less safe. Other studies reiterated this concern for driver distraction (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010; Sanders, 2010; Smith, 1999; Tay, 2009).

In Australia, police, government and road safety organisations are concerned that drivers’ attention may be taken off the road as they pass these visual reminders of lives lost, ironically possibly causing further loss of life (RMS; VicRoads, ACT Roadside Memorial Policy, 2010). Additionally, stopping to visit or tend a memorial also poses risks, as many are located in dangerous positions. Policies legislating roadside memorial construction therefore emphasise safety for all road users as the paramount concern.

Adding to the controversy is the opinion that roadside memorials often become unkempt and neglected (King, 2013), turning into “macabre eyesores” (Urbina, 2006). Others point out the “vitriolic discourse on the aesthetics of memorial sites as well as the dangers they pose . . .” (Campbell, 2013, p. 537). An interesting question was raised by Zimmerman (1995): if a roadside memorial is neglected, does this indicate that it may have served its purpose, and is no longer needed? Perhaps a natural time-limit does exist for some. Or, perhaps “there will be a gradual decline of the practice [visiting] at individual sites after several years, once the memorialisation has served its purpose—in the same way that the number of flowers on a grave decreases over the years” (Smith, 1999, p. 107). For this reason, some believe that a time-limit should be enforced, after which memorials should be removed, because, “a memorial that decays, that gets lost
in the landscape much like the overgrown graves of centuries-old cemeteries, signifies the death of living memory or the transitional passage of grief beyond needing to maintain contact with the particular site” (Gibson, 2011, p. 158).

Such a proposition raises the question of how long grief lasts—a topic that was debated on the SBS Insight program, entitled “Good Grief” (Worthington, 2012). The challenge of answering this, and deciding upon acceptable timeframes for memorials to be allowed to remain to mark the site of a tragedy, continues.

The issue of re/traumatising others, or inflicting grief on others, is a further theme identified in the literature and in the media. Is it fair, asks Weisser (2004) for example, for nearby homeowners to have a constant and permanent view of a memorial commemorating a road fatality? Others observed that, “home owners who live near the site where [a] cross is erected want it removed because it reminds them of the horror of the accident and the night they went to the aid of the accident victims” (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010, p. 163).

The impact of seeing roadside memorials in our everyday life adds to the debate. They “remind viewers that everyone . . . inevitably faces death, often unexpectedly” (Everett 2002, p. 109). In addition, “their location, outside of the conventional and acceptable contexts such as cemeteries . . . disrupts attempts to contain these reminders of mortality” (MacConville & McQuillan 2010, p. 207). As Petersson (2009—cited in Gibson, 2011, p. 146) noted:

Unpredictable encounters with roadside memorials, or memorial decorations from the living world, like toys, photographs, or personal items, may function as catalysts in revealing the ever-present powers of death and turning the space of ordinary life upside down by exposing its temporariness and fragility.
Invisible deaths are hence made visible by roadside memorials and death neutral places are now being marked (Gibson, 2011). Through these unexpected encounters we are forced to face our own mortality. Moreover, roadside memorials disrupt our everyday life and travels. They are visual reminders that we are mortal beings, not immune from the often fatal consequences of car crashes:

Roadside memorials re-mark the scene of a death in the landscape, thereby working against the modern accident response system of clearing accident sites [including washing away signs of blood] and restoring sites to death’s modern invisibility . . . After the death scene is erased from public visibility on the landscape, memorials erected at the site remind strangers of what they did not witness but can perhaps, in the aftermath, imagine and empathically respond to. Roadside memorials signify that a life or the possibility of survival ended here, while you, the traveller, continue onwards beyond the here and now. In other words, roadside memorials symbolically and spatially juxtapose the stasis of death with the movement of life (Gibson, 2011, p. 150).

Roadside memorialisation is a personal grief with a very public artefact, with an equally public message (Hartig & Dunn, 1998). Public reactions vary, for example seeing a mother putting flowers at a roadside memorial prompted one passer-by to comment, “I know this was sad, but it’s not fair on me to have to look at these flowers” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 588). For others, seeing a father tending a memorial provided a chance for the passer-by to talk to him about his son, and gave that father a chance to keep his son alive in others’ memories too. “To others, it may be a reminder that they do not wish to encounter on a regular basis” (Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010, p. 162). A common community belief, namely that “. . . the roadside is an inappropriate place to memorialize the dead. It is doing a disservice to the deceased by forcing the public to remember them in such a depressive manner” was noted by Weisser (2004, 2.6).

Many believe that such an overt expression of private sorrow in a public place is too confronting, too uncomfortable (Smith, 1999). Increasing numbers of police and
ambulance personnel, for example, are reported to be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), resulting firstly from the trauma of attending scenes of carnage on the roads, and then being forced to relive it as they pass by the roadside memorial for that victim. Suter (2010, p. 55) noted that “Highway emergency staff being reminded on a regular basis of a particular tragedy in which they had to serve may trigger all sorts of psychological reactions, including post-traumatic stress disorder.”

Due to their frequent exposure to road crash victims, Gamble (2007, p. 62) posited that “professionals such as emergency workers and medical staff” fall with the category of disenfranchised mourners as described by Doka (1998, 2001, 2002), as “grieving relatives may demand or expect that professionals will support them. This often entails the expectation that the professionals do not experience their own grief” (Gamble, 2007, p. 62).

Because of these issues, “spontaneous memorials are often scorned as fetishistic for their obsessive materiality and manic mourning: their excessive physical and emotional properties are deemed ‘too much’ for the public sphere; their overwrought dimensions seemingly strain the boundaries between good taste and vulgarity” (Doss, 2006, p. 298).

An American online satirical news platform, The Onion, has satirised such sites, making reference to the confusing, tasteless and seemingly random items placed at the scene (The Onion, 2013).

The problem of vandalism and graffiti also emerges in an analysis of the controversy such sites cause. Doss (2006, p. 303) recounted the situation whereby a local resident: decided to remove a spontaneous roadside memorial made of crosses and artificial flowers that he had driven past every day for several years to and from work. ‘I had gone through a lot of personal turmoil myself . . . (and) I didn’t appreciate somebody else
throwing their hurt and sorrow out for the public view, as if it was more important than someone else’s hurt or losses.

Other research documents similar acts of vandalism to such sites, emanating from this tension and controversy (Dickinson & Hoffmann, 2010; Doss, 2006; Everett, 2002, 2007; Klaassens et al., 2009; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010; Mayo, 1988; Smith, 1999; Weisser, 2004). This vandalism occurs, despite such acts being seen as “sacilegious . . . and abominable” by most (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 10). Likewise, Mayo (1988, p. 63) pointed out that “these spaces or artifacts [sic] become hallowed ground, and any blemish like trash or graffiti is a sacrilege to the persons whose memory is being commemorated.” After an act of vandalism to, and removal of, a roadside memorial in Colorado, the court ruled in favour of the defendant, claiming that the “roadside cross [was] ‘litter’ not [a] ‘venerated object’” (Doss, 2006, p. 315).

In her 2007 study of roadside memorials in the planned community of The Woodlands, Texas, US, Everett pointed out that memorials for four youths were defaced and later removed as the local residents did not want their area to look bad, or the youths to look bad, as such crosses and reminders of youth drunkenness did not “portray the perfect family atmosphere . . . [or] a religious and morally correct community” (p. 134). One of Everett’s interviewees therefore concluded that an “image problem” (p. 134) was a large part of the “memorial marker debate” (p. 134). She concluded that, “although the perception of such sites as sacred space is often assumed by those who study the phenomena, the fact that they are often the target of vandalism indicates . . . that their status is contested” (p. 128).
Graffiti and the defacing of memorial sites was also discussed by Gibson (2011). She recounted the situation at Snapper Rocks on the Gold Coast, Australia, where twenty-eight memorials were on the beach, commemorating a diverse range of locals’ deaths. A councillor saw these as defacing public property with unauthorised plaques, turning the city into a graveyard. Gibson (2011, p. 152) pointed out that:

...the boundaries between grief and public space are much more porous and ungovernable as ashes are ritually scattered in oceans, on beaches and in parks all the time. At issue then is the making visible of death and private grief in public, shared spaces.

Conversely, in his Australian study in 1999, Smith found no evidence of vandalism, accrediting this to being in a rural area, not an urban area, therefore posing “less intrusion of another’s ‘sacred space’ into one’s own ‘domestic space’ as is seen in urban contexts” (p. 107). It would be interesting to see if this was still the case, given that his study was conducted over fifteen years ago.

Size limits and allowable structures has also become a topic weighing into the debate. Some Australian councils and overseas countries have imposed size limits or only allow the use of standardised structures to alleviate this problem (see previous discussion under Policies).

Finally, some administrative problems of roadside memorial placement need addressing. This includes who owns them and who is responsible for maintaining them; how long they should stay in place; and what will happen to memorials when roads needs to be widened, power poles need replacing, or maintenance crews need to remove them to mow or do repair work by the roadside. Whose responsibility it is to notify the families concerned, and the reaction they may be met with, becomes a further issue to consider. This scenario happened recently at South Nowra, in the Shoalhaven
LGA, where major road works were being undertaken and several roadside memorials needed to be removed to allow the widening of the highway. Official notices were placed on the memorials, attempting to contact those connected to them. A register of contact details, as maintained in WA, would alleviate some of these issues. A recent article in *The Cairns Post* highlighted a similar dilemma (Uhr, 2015).

The placement of private roadside memorials in the public domain is, therefore, a controversial and growing field. Policies and legislative reforms are afoot. As mentioned above, various countries overseas, and states and councils in Australia, are reviewing their use and seeking to introduce legislation governing their existence. Some areas have banned roadside memorials altogether. Others permit only government sponsored, standardised crash markers. Still others allow memorials of a specific size and form, for prescribed time periods. Other areas have no policies in place.

Having reviewed the current literature exploring the phenomenon of roadside memorials, and highlighting the debate and controversy such sites cause, several gaps in our understanding about bereavement and the role of roadside memorials become apparent. While these studies have considered roadside memorials through a variety of lenses their work has stopped short of making a contribution to policymakers to assist with legislation covering the establishment of such sacred sites. Additionally, in all these valuable studies there is a lack of psychosocial, qualitative research in which those who have built these roadside memorials have been asked to tell their story, to give an insight into their lived experience. A social work lens, utilising a phenomenological approach to such research provides a worthy alternative because phenomenological research “is concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the individual,"
‘bracketing’ taken-for-granted assumptions and usual ways of perceiving” (Heidegger, 1978). The effects of policy on people who build roadside memorials, and their opinions about these policies, is similarly under-researched. In addition, research specifically examining this notorious geographic area for road crashes, from a hermeneutic phenomenological and social work perspective, provides a useful comparison to the earlier Australian study of Hartig and Dunn (1998). The next chapter outlines the research methodology employed in the interview component of this study, with the following chapter (7) providing both the methodology for, and the findings of, the observation and analysis of fifty local sites.
CHAPTER SIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Roadside memorials are a tangible record of a life lived (Roadside Memorials Policy and Guidelines, Western Australia, 2010).

In the previous three chapters I have explained the context of my research, outlining the theoretical approaches to grief and loss as well as the research already undertaken into roadside memorials. I have established that although a wealth of literature exists in this field, from a wide range of professional voices, there nevertheless remains a dearth of research from the social work profession, especially in relation to how roadside memorials have a role to play in the bereavement process. Fostering community understanding and awareness of the role and functions of roadside memorials, coupled with increasing the professional knowledge base to assist with bereavement therapy interventions are likewise warranted. Additionally, the issue of policies covering roadside memorials, and how these may affect those who are grieving following road deaths, is under-researched. These are the gaps I address.

The four research aims of this study are to explore the role and meanings of roadside memorials in the bereavement process; to contribute to the public debate concerning roadside memorials and to increase community understandings of their importance; to inform and contribute to the professional knowledge base of grief and loss; and to provide some suggestions for policymakers. From these aims, coupled with a review of the literature, four lines of inquiry emerged:

1. What is the meaning and significance of, and the role played by, roadside memorials? Do they, and if so, how do they assist those who are grieving?
2. How does the role of the roadside memorial compare to the cemetery or graveside? Do these two sites serve the same, or different, functions?

3. What can be learnt from the memorials themselves—their physical characteristics such as wording used and the icons or personal mementos left there?

4. What policy and practice implications can be gleaned from the research findings?

In order to address these lines of inquiry, and to add to the rigour of qualitative research, a triangulation of research methods is employed—namely an appraisal of the literature, semi-structured interviews, and the observation and photography of fifty roadside memorials. This chapter describes the methodology underpinning the study, with a detailed discussion of the interview component, and the intricacies of the research design and its implementation. The methodology pertaining to the observation of fifty sites is explicated in the following chapter.

**Research design**

The four main aims of this research, as outlined in Chapter One, were to explore the meanings and role of roadside memorials in the bereavement process; to increase community awareness and understandings of this role and to contribute to the public debate surrounding their placement; to extend the professional knowledge base of grief and loss in relation to roadside memorials and to inform policy covering roadside memorials. The research lines of inquiry were closely tied to these aims, and emerged following a comprehensive search of the literature that identified a number of gaps. These gaps included a dearth of research from a hermeneutic phenomenological
paradigm; a lack of studies encompassing a contemporary Australian social work perspective and few studies that sought to directly inform or influence policy.

In order to address these aims and lines of inquiry the study was based on a triangulation of methods. Firstly, a review of the literature was undertaken, to see the scope that the research covers and the parameters of the knowledge base. Secondly, fourteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews, using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, were conducted to gain bereaved people’s insights and contributions. Finally, an analysis of fifty local roadside memorials was conducted, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The findings of the literature review were then compared with the findings uncovered from the interviews and visual content analysis of the memorials themselves.

Adhering to a phenomenological research paradigm, a detailed journal encompassing the entire research period was maintained to record a plethora of information and personal reflections. The use of this journal enabled me to keep a detailed and accurate account of the total research journey. In this, every step was documented, from concrete tasks and processes to the more subjective thoughts, reactions and feelings encountered along the way. Field notes, personal thoughts and musings, the observation of sites and their significant features, the content of the interviews, including both the verbal and nonverbal components, and the significance of the literature and its relevance and applicability to the stories I uncovered through the interview process were documented. This was a helpful exercise and added to my understanding of the phenomenon and my processing of the rich qualitative information being gathered. This was particularly evident after fieldwork and visiting the memorials
of participants that were closer to my home. I noted in this journal, for example, how such visits—seeing the roadside memorial that had been discussed in the interview, knowing a little about the person it was commemorating and the family or friends who had built it, as well as the circumstances of the death, perhaps seeing their photograph on the memorial—had a profound impact. Having this private, first-hand information reinforced the strength of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach—hearing the stories directly from those involved. It likewise reinforced the differences between Husserl’s and Heidegger’s approaches—I am not a *tabula rasa*; I can perhaps bridle but not bracket my thoughts and experiences (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

As a side note, I often wrote in this journal away from my office, in serene and peaceful outdoor settings. This enabled me to ensure an element of self-care was addressed, in the midst of the sadness and sorrow of the interview and observation process.

**Ethical considerations**

There were a number of ethical considerations to address in such an emotionally-laden area of study. In line with good ethical practice, the four ethical pillars, as described by Diener and Crandall (1978) were addressed. These are: ensuring that there is no harm to participants, no lack of informed consent, no invasion of privacy and no deception. Likewise, the four ethical principles—autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice—as outlined by Beauchamp and Childress (2009) were adhered to. In the same way, Miles and Huberman’s (1994) description of ethical issues to consider were incorporated into the research design. These included worthiness of the research at hand, obtaining informed consent, weighing up the benefits and risks for participants, operating with honesty and integrity, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality.
To ensure that all the above ethical considerations and issues were dealt with satisfactorily, an “Application for approval for use of human participants or materials in research” and the necessary Information Statement and Consent Forms for research participants were submitted to Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (see Appendices One and Two). Approval from the Ethics Committee was duly granted.

The potential risks to the participants, as documented in the HREC application, included “invasion of privacy, psychological or mental stress, possible embarrassment, anxiety, discomfort”. As I dealt with such a high risk issue I needed to ensure that the benefits of my research outweighed the risks to the participants. It was possible that re-telling their stories and delving into their grief may have elicited painful memories and re-traumatised the participants, so I needed to have ways to minimise these risks. I was therefore alert to signs of undue distress throughout the interviews, and suggested stopping the proceedings if necessary. In this way I addressed the ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence. In addition I provided each participant with a list of counsellors to contact following the interviews, if follow-up counselling was needed. These included local Community Health Centres, Lifeline and free bereavement support services (see Appendix Three). Following the social work principles of equity, accessibility and justice, only free services were listed.

By way of introduction, I explained the nature and purpose of the study; how the research issue was decided upon; and how the information collected would be analysed and disseminated. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions relating to the nature and aims of the research project. The confidentiality of the
participants, their right to privacy and their right to withdraw at any time were all assured. Permission to use a digital recorder was sought from each participant, with the understanding that all recordings would be erased at the conclusion of the research period. Secure storage of recorded material and transcripts were similarly discussed. These steps ensured that the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, autonomy, honesty and integrity were adhered to.

A further ethical requirement was the use of a confidentiality agreement for the transcriber(s). The University provided an official agreement, this however was quite lengthy and confusing, overladen with legal jargon (see Appendix Four). After discussion with the Ethics Committee and my supervisors, it was decided that a separate, more specific form was needed. As no pro forma existed, I devised one for the purpose of this study, with input and guidance from the supervisory team, and final approval from the Ethics Committee was granted (see Appendix Five). The transcriber I initially employed signed both of these forms, however, due to unforeseen circumstances, they were unable to continue transcribing after three interviews and I needed to employ the services of a professional transcription company for the remaining interviews. The company had a non-disclosure form for their transcriptionists to sign (see Appendix Six), as well as a policy in place that addressed counselling or debriefing for their transcriptionists if required. This was another ethical consideration to address, given the potentially distressing and sensitive nature of the interviews being transcribed.

During the course of the research period, it became necessary to reapply to the Ethics Committee to extend the geographical boundaries of the research. The original application covered interviewing only those in my immediate LGA, however due to the
slow uptake from the local area and the burgeoning interest from all over Australia following the radio interviews I decided I would need to extend this geographical boundary. Following an application to the Committee, permission was granted. This now meant that most of the interviews needed to be conducted by telephone rather than face-to-face.

The amount of time elapsed since a fatality presented a further ethical issue to consider—that of beneficence and non-maleficence. It was essential to weigh up the potential benefits of gaining valuable insights against the risk of potential harm to the participant involved. I needed to ensure that any participants who had suffered a recent loss were not re-traumatised through engaging in the research. After discussion with my supervisors it was decided that an exclusion period of twelve months since a bereavement would possibly safeguard any newly bereaved people. Nevertheless, I was contacted by two participants who were keen to contribute to the study despite having had more recent losses (five months and ten months). Again, after discussion with the supervisory team and the participants themselves it was decided to include them in the research.

Addressing the ethical principles of privacy and confidentiality presented a challenge with some of the participants’ roadside memorials that were personalised and therefore easily identifiable. This is the very nature of roadside memorials—intensely private sites yet out in the public domain. Discussions with my supervisors led to the conclusion that as these sites were already in public spaces the ethical implications were negligible.

As taking photographs of local sites was a part of my research methodology (as discussed in the following chapter), the ethical issues relating to this came under considerable
scrutiny by peers and colleagues. (It should be noted here that these are for sites primarily other than those of my participants. In fact, only one local site was linked to a participant. Where possible, I did travel and photograph other participants’ sites, however these photographs are not included in my analysis). I received ethical clearance from the Committee to use such photographic material, as it was deemed that the sites are in the public domain and anyone is free to photograph, visit, or add to such sites. Nevertheless, peers raised their concerns and hesitations, and questioned if it was appropriate to use photos without the family’s permission? I was also questioned if it was too distressing, too emotional, too confrontational to use such photographs, particularly in PowerPoint presentations at conferences and seminars? Yet, this is the very nature of my research and these roadside memorials under study. They are for “real” people, with “real” names and “real” ages. They were somebody’s father or mother or son or daughter or friend. They are in the public domain, there is a cross-over between private sorrow in the public domain, hence the title of my thesis. Perhaps roadside memorials are intended to be distressing and emotional and confrontational. Nevertheless, I heeded these concerns and included a warning statement as part of my introduction at conference presentations. This informed the audience that I would be using photographs of real memorials taken around Australia, and that some may know of these sites or be familiar with the circumstances behind them. By forewarning the audience I aimed to minimise undue distress.

Finally, undertaking ethical social work research obliged me to make sure that the stories and voices of my participants are heard, that their views are disseminated to the wider community, to policymakers, to professionals. I am ethically bound to do this,
Appendix Seven: AASW Code of Ethics–Research) in the hope that it may make a difference to councils and policy decisions and therefore to the wider population.

There has thus been a range of ethical implications that needed to be taken into account in conducting this research. This discussion has shown how the criteria for ethical research outlined above by Diener and Crandall (1978), Beauchamp and Childress (1982) and Miles and Huberman (1994) were adhered to.

Designing the semi-structured interviews

Given the hermeneutic and phenomenological methodology of this study, the semi-structured interviews were designed to encourage the participants to tell their story, to bring their perspective and experiences to the fore. It is their lived experience that was sought, an unfolding of their unique story. As noted by van Manen (1997, p. 66), interviews of this nature have two primary purposes: to explore and gather “experiential narrative material” that helps to develop “a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” and to become “a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience.”

The interviews therefore needed minimum structure and maximum depth. To achieve this, in-depth, semi-structured, recursive interviews were used. Being participant-led, the interview structures allowed for the ebb and flow of their thoughts, it was by no means a rigid, linear, questionnaire style approach. An interview schedule with dot points was devised to depict this (see Appendix Eight), and was used flexibly, as a guide or prompt for myself. In addition, the interview schedule was informed by the literature, and aimed to ensure that the research questions under inquiry were addressed (see
Lines of Inquiry, Introduction). The interview schedule evolved over the course of the interviewing period, as further questions were included, deleted or reworded as required.

Pilot testing

Pretesting (Richards, 2009) or pilot testing of the interviews was a key part of the research methodology. This process enabled me to ensure that the questions were clear, non-ambiguous and well-structured. To avoid misinterpretations, I needed to make sure that people would understand the questions/interview prompts. Did the questions represent what people may want to tell me about, would they address my lines of inquiry? Importantly, would they be participant-driven, not researcher-driven? Pilot testing likewise helped alert me to some unexpected responses as well as assisted me in thinking about how I was going to code the responses. The interview prompts were thus able to be refined after the pilot interviews, as well as after each “real” interview, as the nature of hermeneutic phenomenology meant that I would be modifying the questions as I proceeded. Indeed, pretesting of the questions occurred naturally with the first few “real” participants I interviewed.

I conducted two pilot interviews with friends, who purely role-played, having no experience of the type of trauma and loss I was researching. They had no forewarning as to what types of questions they may be asked; rather I requested that they imagine a scenario and we would proceed from there. They were given a few days to prepare for this pilot test. We also had a debriefing session immediately after the interview, to ensure they were not unduly traumatised or would continue “in character” after the conclusion of the interview.
The pilot tests resulted in some refining and rewording of the questions, and a re-ordering of the questions. As mentioned earlier, to allow the interviews to flow in a semi-structured way a strict order was not adhered to in the actual interviews, as I was keen for the participants to just tell their stories in their own time and way, with the occasional prompt from me. Further, the pilot testing gave me the opportunity to try out the digital recording device and experiment with background noises, volumes and so on, to ensure that the recorded interviews were clear and audible. It also allowed me to practice transferring the data to my computer and storing it safely immediately after each interview.

**Recruitment and selection of participants**

To recruit participants I initially planned to place advertisements in the local paper, contact the local police for information, or speak with funeral homes. I quickly realised the latter two methods were not ethically sound. Instead, following all the necessary ethical procedures and with Ethics Committee approval, I liaised with the Charles Sturt University media team and prepared a media release (see Appendix Nine). This was sent to a number of local, Sydney and Canberra newspapers, including *The Milton-Ulladulla Times* (my local area), the *Bay Post* (Batemans Bay), the *Moruya Examiner*, the *South Coast Register*, the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, the *Illawarra Mercury*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Chronicle* (Canberra), *Canberra City News*, the *Kiama Independent* and the *Lake Times*. Recruitment of four participants occurred through these press releases.

Several regional newspapers also contacted me to do further interviews, including *The Milton-Ulladulla Times* (my local paper), *The Port Macquarie News*, the *Sutherland Shire...*
Leader, the Kiama Independent, the Central Western Daily (Orange), and a Charles Sturt University student paper (see Appendix Ten for examples of three such articles). Gradually, my research was becoming known and community interest in it was increasing. Consequently, I received many emails and telephone calls from community members eager to tell me their stories, experiences and thoughts on roadside memorials. These comments, however, remain outside the scope of this study, as only people who had roadside memorials were able to be included.

The media team also arranged a number of interviews on radio stations Australia-wide. Thirteen radio interviews were conducted, which enabled me to reach people right around Australia. These included ABC Riverina, ABC Goulburn-Murray, ABC WA, ABC Bega, ABC Brisbane—Weekends with Warren and ABC Brisbane 11—with Moyd and Loretta, ABC Adelaide, ABC Canberra, ABC Illawarra, 1.98 FM, and Bathurst CSU student radio. Three participants were recruited through these original radio interviews.

As with the newspaper coverage, the radio interviews sparked a flood of interest from listeners Australia-wide, with talkback radio programs encouraging people to air their views on the radio or to contact me directly. As a result I was contacted directly by fifty-two listeners, with equal numbers being either for or against such memorials. Many offered suggestions for policy, including time-limits, restrictions on the amount of artefacts allowed, the establishment of collective memorials for all road victims and perhaps a signifier on each site showing the cause of the crash, as a warning for others. Seven emergency services personnel/police officers/fire-fighters were among the people who contacted me, and all were strongly opposed to such tributes in the public domain, citing that they added to their ongoing battles with PTSD. Messages from many
others were also put up on the radio stations’ Facebook pages, generating lively debate. This demonstrates that the issue of roadside memorials is a topic that interests people and motivates them to write or call, and could be a worthwhile avenue for future research. People have strong opinions about these memorials and are keen to air their opinions. It is certainly a highly contested area, and further research into the public’s views is warranted.

In addition to the media releases and radio interviews I placed over fifty flyers (see Appendix Eleven) advertising the research in the local hospital, community health centres, doctors’ surgeries, Centrelink, Community Resource Centre, town libraries, community noticeboards, shopping centres and so on. Flyers were also distributed after conference presentations and seminars. Interestingly, only two participants were recruited through this means, despite numerous emails and telephone calls from radio listeners and people who had seen the flyers around town. Many viewpoints were shared, the “pros and cons” were aired, and many helpful suggestions were made. My research thus generated a high level of interest amongst community members. This is a topic that touches so many and everyone appeared to have a story to share or a concern to be raised.

The remainder of the participants for the study came through word of mouth (3) and via other participants (2)—the latter referred to as the “snowball” method. The participants were thus recruited using a variety of methods, and, being self-selected were willing contributors to the research study.

Because this was a hermeneutic research project, the group of participants was a purposive, nonprobability sample, (or self-selected group) chosen for a definite reason.
The primary criterion for inclusion was having the relevant experience—a roadside memorial established for a loved one. To adhere to the ethical guidelines, participants also needed to be over the age of eighteen. The study did not aim to be representative of the whole population, nor did it aim to have generalisable findings, as these were not relevant or congruent with a qualitative, hermeneutic inquiry. As Bryman (2004, p. 333) explained, the participants were chosen on the “basis of wanting to interview people who are relevant to the research questions.”

I aimed to interview between ten and twenty participants, as is compatible within the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm. I was seeking depth of experiences, not quantity of participants. I was hoping to have a mix of adult males and females, younger and older, from differing cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. This would provide a greater variety of participants, to enable a richer source of material to be generated and an interesting comparative analysis made. In reality, however, those recruited were simply people who volunteered, or self-selected. The final number of participants was fourteen, coming from all over Australia. A more detailed description of these participants is provided in Chapter Eight.

**Contacting the participants**

Contact with the research participants was initially made by either email or telephone call. We discussed my background and interest in the area under investigation, the nature of my research and the interview process itself. Questions were raised and answered, including issues such as confidentiality, practicalities such as length of time needed for the interviews, how and where these would be conducted, and how the information would be disseminated. If the respondent was still willing to be involved, an
information statement and consent forms were emailed or posted (again, see Appendices One and Two). These were then signed and returned. We then decided upon times and dates for the interviews. Due to geographical constraints, nine out of the fourteen interviews were conducted over the telephone. The remaining five interviews were conducted face-to-face. Extensive consideration was given as to where these face-to-face interviews would be conducted. After discussion with my supervisors, a neutral place was initially deemed most appropriate, rather than in private homes or work places. Professional counselling rooms, hospital facilities and church offices were decided against. I wanted to ensure the space was neutral, quiet and private, where we could talk undisturbed. I contacted the manager of the local TAFE (Technical and Further Education) college, and made arrangements to have the use of one of their rooms. Interestingly, I gave the local participants the choice of using the TAFE room or their own homes, and they all preferred to have the interview take place in their homes. Each felt they would be more comfortable in their own environment. Likewise, the out of town participants chose their own homes over a coffee shop (not ideal anyway) or a quiet place such as a library room. In retrospect, meeting in their private homes was beneficial; they appeared more relaxed and the interviews became more conversational and less formal than if they had been undertaken elsewhere. Another added benefit was that I was invited to look at photographs, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, memorial gardens and the like. Additionally, face-to-face interviews provided a greater feeling of connectedness and engagement than is usually possible with telephone contact. All of these added an extra layer to the interview itself, allowing me a deeper insight into the lived experience of the participants. As Creswell (2007) noted, this thick description provided a richer meaning to interviews than that afforded by the telephone interviews.
The interview process

Each interview, whether telephone or face-to-face, began with a set introduction, in which I discussed issues surrounding confidentiality and privacy and the nature and purpose of the research. Any questions were addressed before we began. I also sought permission to digitally record the session and all were comfortable with this. I then stressed that this was not a therapeutic interview, and pointed out the contact details of counsellors (included in the Information Statements) if follow up counselling was needed. The session then moved on to demographic details, followed by their reasons or motivations to participate in, and contribute to, the research. These concrete, more practical aspects allowed participants to “settle in” before we moved on to the more emotive and subjective elements of the interview.

I then asked the question “What were your thoughts about roadside memorials prior to your loss?” that aimed to assist participants to be reflective, before the focus was turned onto their memorial. Once I sensed a level of rapport and engagement had been achieved, I asked them to tell me about their experiences: who the memorial was for, how it came into being, who built it, what it looked like and what personal items were included, what it meant for them at the time, and what it means for them now, the difference between the cemetery (if they have a place there) and the roadside.

Open-ended questions were used, to allow any unexpected thoughts or ideas to emerge (Conroy, 2003), and “to encourage reflection and rich description of ideas and experience [and] to explore more deeply participants’ responses to the . . . key research questions” (Paterson & Higgs, 2005, pp. 348, 352). Verbal prompts and cues such as “mmm” and “can you tell me more about . . .” and “I see” were used to draw out the
participants as needed. Allowing silences and pauses was likewise important, and acknowledging the pain and emotion that bubbled to the surface at times was imperative. Even though the interviewing style for hermeneutic phenomenological research needs to be fluid and participant-led it was nevertheless necessary that I covered all the terrain and gained responses that would enable me to address the identified lines of inquiry. The use of the interview schedule, with its prompts and pointers to guide me, was invaluable and ensured key areas were covered. As talk about the actual death of their loved one was inevitable the challenge was to ensure it remained a research interview and not a therapeutic interview or counselling session. A key challenge for me was to remain vigilant that I and each participant clearly understood my role as researcher, not counsellor.

The concluding questions focused on suggestions for policymakers and councils, as well as advice they would offer others in the same situation. As the “experts” by lived experience in this area, I was keen to hear their thoughts based on their first-hand experiences. Giving a voice to the voiceless is a core tenet of social work practice, and a number of participants later thanked me for this rare opportunity to tell their story in this way.

At the conclusion of the interviews I sought permission to contact each participant if I needed clarity on something that was said, and I likewise invited them to contact me if they thought of something else to add. In addition, I asked if they would like to see a copy of the interview transcript, to read through and make sure their thoughts had been captured correctly. This member-checking was done to address elements of rigour, as discussed above (Creswell, 2007).
Throughout this process all my social work counselling skills were employed—rapport building to gain trust and willingness to talk about such a sensitive and personal subject, active listening, probes and prompts, silences, gentle questioning (Alston & Bowles, 2012; Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 1997; Shulman, 1999; Zastrow, 1995). Being a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, my foremost aim was to encourage the participants to tell me their first-hand experiences, to share their stories with minimal structure or interruption. This approach is the core of hermeneutic phenomenological research. This hermeneutic style of interviewing was challenging, and at times I needed to check myself, to ensure I allowed the participants to tell their story, their lived experiences and not follow my “agenda”. This became apparent with the very first interviewee, as he had such a different and unexpected story to tell, compared with those I had read in the literature. A number of the questions I had planned to ask were simply not relevant—challenging my preconceived ideas and expectations and causing me to bridle my preunderstandings and presumptions, as explained by Dahlberg et al. (2008).

My initial desire was to contact each participant a few days after their interview, to ensure they were not overly traumatised. After discussion with my supervisors, however, this was decided against, as it was made clear to each participant that the interview was not a counselling or therapeutic interview, but was purely a research interview.

As well as being aware of potential trauma to participants, I was aware of the need for my own self-care. The stories of trauma and loss I was hearing naturally impacted me. I was not a detached, objective researcher or impartial observer (Lester, 1999); there was
a potential danger for me as the researcher to suffer from vicarious trauma. I managed this primarily through debriefing with my supervisors and having an avenue for external supervision if needed. In addition, I chose to do a lot of my work outside and away from home—at the beach, by the water or in parks—and that helped to put all my research into perspective.

Thus, through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach of in-depth, semi-structured interviews I was able to uncover a rich and poignant account of roadside memorials—their meanings and significance and the role they play in the lives of people experiencing grief and loss following fatal car crashes.

**The transcribing process**

I listened to each digital recording as soon as possible after the interview, noting the key points and my initial impressions. I listened for the pauses, the tones, the tears, the laughter, the unspoken nuances, in order for a rich and thick description to emerge. As Richards (2009) suggested, all of this was done as the initial approach to data analysis, before any software was utilised.

The interviews were then uploaded to my computer and sent via a secure site to a transcription company. Due to time constraints, I decided to employ the services of an outside transcriber. This was initially someone known well to me, who wasbriefed about confidentiality, the secure storage of the interviews and the use of pseudonyms in all typed transcripts. The relevant confidentiality forms were signed (see Appendices Four and Five). We also discussed that all recordings would be deleted as soon as practicable after transcribing, and all typed transcripts as soon as I had proof read them. Discussions
were likewise had about the possible risk of vicarious trauma. Due to unforeseen circumstances, after three interviews she was unable to continue and I needed to employ a transcription company for the remainder of the interviews. Their contractors also signed the necessary confidentiality paperwork (see Appendix Six). I requested names be changed to the assigned pseudonyms, and I then manually changed place names and other potentially identifying details. If the transcriptionist was unable to hear a section clearly, that section was time stamped for me to re-listen to and fill in the missing details. This happened regularly, but as I was familiar with the interviews and could accurately recall the portion in question I was able to attend to this as a matter of course.

In the spirit of phenomenological inquiry, where profanities were used by three participants, they are reproduced in the quotes using only the first and last letters of the word, linked by asterisks. This was done to soften the words, in the interests of general readership, whilst still retaining the depth of emotion expressed by participants. As mentioned below, member-checking of the transcripts ensued, with participants approving this modified format of their original phrases.

Once I was satisfied that the transcript was an accurate and true account of the interview, I emailed it to each of the relevant participants for them to read through and make comments or changes as needed. This was part of the member-checking procedure, to ensure that rigour was achieved (Creswell, 2007). Two of the participants made minor changes, and another two did not respond at all.
Interpretation of the interviews

As I am employing a qualitative, hermeneutic methodology, the language and terminology of positivist and quantitative methodology—such as data and data analysis—are used with caution. While these terms originate from positivist, empirical research paradigms they remain compatible with a hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm (Benzecry 2015; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Additionally, as Richards (2009) pointed out, data is made, not collected in qualitative research. Therefore, all the literature readings, my field notes and journal entries, my personal reflections, emails and telephone calls from interested parties, my observations and photographs of local sites—as well as the interviews themselves—make up the “data set” (Silverman, 1999). As noted previously, a triangulation of methods—interviews, literature reviews and the observational analysis of memorials themselves—was utilised to ensure a rich and detailed study unfolded.

Given the range of methodologies, a large amount of material was generated that needed to be coded, categorised and analysed in a coherent manner. To assist with organising this, I employed a number of strategies, one of which was following the three stages summarised by Sarantakos (1998): data reduction, data organisation and data interpretation. The previous two chapters outlined the rich material gleaned through the literature review, and the following chapter will discuss the depth of material gathered from the visual analysis of the fifty roadside memorials. Below I outline how I organised the material generated from the fourteen interviews, in order to begin the interpretation and analysis of this rich data.
First, a cover sheet (see Appendix Twelve) was designed, to place at the front of each interview transcript. On this, I recorded the demographic details of each participant and a summary of their story and experiences, along with a few salient quotes and key themes that arose during the interview. This was helpful in two ways: it helped me see their details at a glance, plus it preserved their uniqueness and personhood which was especially important once computer software—QSR NVivo—was employed. This assisted me with “keeping the big picture” and not losing the individual person within the NVivo analysis, as such computer software can cause the whole person to become fragmented and disjointed. While helpful, NVivo was used with caution, as I did not want to become too enmeshed with statistics and numerical profiles of the participants, it was their words and stories I was seeking—themes and commonalities or differences rather than a statistical analysis of how many said x or y. For this reason, Saldaña (2013) recommended a mix of manual and computer assisted analysis, to preserve the individuality and uniqueness or each person.

Second, I produced a spreadsheet showing each participant’s details (see Appendix Thirteen). This included their pseudonym, age, gender, age of the deceased, relationship to the deceased, gender of the deceased, time elapsed since the death, year of the death, time of the death, who built the roadside memorial, its proximity to home, the structure and form of the roadside memorial, whether there were ashes or a cemetery site, if both sites were visited, how the participant was recruited, if it was a face-to-face or telephone interview, and the date of the interview.

Third, I used genograms to assist me create a picture and context of each participant and how they “fitted” into the life of the deceased (see Appendix Fourteen). Using
genograms proved to be a very helpful visual tool and, combined with listening to each interview many times, using the cover sheets with the demographic details and pertinent quotes readily accessible, and recording information on a visual spreadsheet, enabled me to in organise my thoughts and keep each participant “separate” and “real”.

Fourth, I kept a detailed journal throughout the research to record notes, reflections, ideas, questions and emerging themes, as recommended by Paterson and Higgs (2005).

A core concept within hermeneutic research is the hermeneutic circle, the spiralling between the parts and the whole—in this case, the whole text of the individual interview and the smaller quotes and ideas that emerged, as well as a comparison between the whole of the interviews put together as well as each individual interview. Analysis therefore occurred not just within each interview, but rather across all the interviews.

Paterson & Higgs (2005, p. 353) further recommended this “repeated cycling between the parts and the whole to make sense of the phenomenon in relation to the texts . . .”

To begin the interpretation process, I immersed myself in the interviews, listening to each one many times. Key words, underlying emotions and repetitive phrases were noted through this “deep immersion” (Paterson & Higgs, 2005) in the text. Comparisons with ideas and themes in the existing literature were noted in my journal. I focused on the interview as a whole, rather than breaking it down unnecessarily, as I wanted to ensure that the sense of the participant and the totality of their experience was not lost. Additionally, I was conscious of returning to the lines of inquiry to ensure that these were being addressed and highlighted in my analysis. I continually asked myself—what is the theme arising here, what are they really saying there? The recurring words and themes gradually became evident, and I tentatively began to assign codes, categories
and themes to the transcribed interviews. The initial coding was thus done “by hand”. Word documents were created, with a code word or theme heading on each page, into which I copied and pasted pertinent quotes. This was a slow and laborious process, but in the early stages, before I felt proficient with NVivo, it proved the best way for me to begin to code and interpret the interviews.

Various types of coding are used in qualitative research. Some refer to descriptive, interpretive and thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), while others refer to open, axial and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 2008). Descriptive, topic and analytical coding are likewise the preferred terms by others such as Richards (2009) and are utilised in NVivo computer software. Regardless of the terminology, however, the process of coding began with a careful listening and re-listening to the interviews, and reading and rereading the transcripts. I noted how many participants mentioned x or y and how many comments were made around the subject of a or b. I then selected broader ideas and concepts and gradually “collapsed” or refined these down into a manageable number. I began with nearly fifty codes, eventually collapsing these down into about twenty codes. From these codes, a number of core categories were developed, and these were then built up into a number of key themes. The initial codes are displayed in Appendix Fifteen, and the overarching themes are discussed in detail in Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven. These themes also form the basis of the policy and practice implications that follow in Chapter Twelve.

Most of the interpretation of the rich qualitative information generated by the interviews was thus done manually. Once I had an overview of the core codes and themes that had emerged, I then utilised a data-management system using QSR NVivo
computer software to store and organise the data. Each interview was entered into the computer software, along with my initial codes, and a careful analysis was undertaken. Concepts and categories were coded, following the grounded theory approach of initial, focused and theoretical coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 2008). Relationships between categories were sought, keeping in mind the central question—“What is the main story?” Themes identified were coupled with supporting quotes from the interviews, attempting to seek answers to the research lines of inquiry (Silverman, 1999). Tag clouds, memo-writing, matrix data display and other useful functions were employed (Saldaña 2013). The NVivo software enabled me to confirm my initial findings and ensure that the themes I had reached manually were accurate, meaningful and relevant to my lines of inquiry. Paterson and Higgs (2005, p. 350) provide a useful summary of the process I was undertaking:

This process resulted in clarifying and testing the bigger picture, using hermeneutic analysis with constant comparison between the parts (text items) and the whole (the emerging interpretation of the phenomenon) by repeatedly reviewing the NVivo analysis documents and then returning to the original transcripts and the researcher’s journal.

Adopting an “open-ended approach to the relationship between theory and data” as suggested by Benzecry (2015, p. 6) was useful. Employing such an iterative approach allowed for the “data collection and analysis to proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other” (Bryman 2004, p. 401). This thematic data analysis and interpretation identified emerging trends, themes and commonalities, providing a clear picture of the participants’ lived experiences. As Charmaz (2009, p. 21) suggested, I looked at contexts, scenes and situations carefully, focusing on “specific words and phrases to which participants seem to attribute particular meaning.” Clearer understandings of the role of roadside memorials in the lives of those experiencing
bereavement was gained. Likewise, answers to some of the research lines of inquiry become apparent.

By following both Glaser and Stauss’ (1967) and Sarantakos’ (1998) models of data analysis I have captured the richness and complexities of the lived experiences of the participants and addressed the lines of inquiry. A discussion of these findings is presented in Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven of the thesis, where patterns, trends and recurring themes are discussed and attempts are made to interpret these findings in light of the earlier literature review.

**Research rigour**

All research, whether qualitative or quantitative, must be reliable and credible. The quantitative research measures of reliability, internal or external validity, generalisability or objectivity are not applicable to qualitative research or compatible with the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm. Instead, the use of more appropriate concepts such as credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability are adopted (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nagy & Viney, 1994; Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

To ensure that my research design and findings had integrity, were credible, and achieved “rigour” I followed Creswell’s (2007) recommendation that at least two out of a possible eight strategies were employed. Creswell identified “prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review or debriefing, negative case analysis, reflexivity, member-checking, thick description and external audits” as the eight strategies that will ensure rigour in qualitative research. I adopted several of these
in my research design, namely triangulation, peer review with colleagues, reflexivity, member-checking, thick description and keeping an audit trail. Additionally, one of the participants fell under Creswell’s label of being a “negative case analysis”. As this phrase fits more within the parameters of quantitative research, I adopt the term “exception” instead. I discuss this exception in more detail in Chapter Twelve.

Triangulation of methods was demonstrated through the use of various sources and avenues of data collection, namely the semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants; the observation, photography and analysis of fifty sites; and a careful appraisal of the existing literature. This triangulation of methods uncovered a detailed account of roadside memorials—their significance and the role they play in the lives of people experiencing grief and loss.

The strategy of peer review was achieved through presenting and discussing my research at University seminars with colleagues as well as my presentation of papers at several conferences. These included the Oxford Round Table International Conference on Religion at Oxford University, England in August 2013; the Australian Grief and Bereavement Conference 2014, in Melbourne, Australia in March 2014 and the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development, also in Melbourne, Australia in July 2014. This allowed me to discuss my research—its aims, methodologies and preliminary findings—to an audience of peers and related professionals. In this way, others were able to comment on my work and theoretical approaches, to ask questions that prompted me to think in different directions, to offer suggestions or helpful critique. As a result of these factors my research world expanded.
Reflexivity was addressed through my use of a journal (see above) and through talking with my supervisors during the research process, reflecting on the content of interviews themselves as well as how these affect or impact me as the researcher. Careful discussions surrounding methodologies, confidentiality issues, the interpretation of data and site observations, amongst others, added to the reflexivity of the research process.

Member-checking was another of Creswell’s recommendations I adopted. After the interviews I asked each participant if they would be willing to read through the completed transcript of their interview, to confirm that their thoughts and insights had been captured correctly. All but one agreed to this, and minor changes to the transcripts were made where required.

Thick description was achieved by various methods. Firstly, the use of a journal as discussed above. Secondly, the interviews themselves provided rich, qualitative material contributing to the thick description advocated by Creswell. Finally, the photography and observation of sites, along with the photographs sent to me by some participants, added further thick description to the research process. Five out of the fourteen participants offered photographs of their roadside memorials via email, one sent photos of the actual car wreckage and site of the crash. A particularly sobering photograph was included in this—their deceased daughter in the hospital—echoing Johnson’s (1999) claim that taking photographs of the recently deceased person is found helpful by some. Another participant sent me a photograph showing her partner hammering the roadside memorial into the ground—again, this was an emotional image to process, adding another rich layer to the research and collection of information. In conjunction with this,
I also visited some of the participants’ roadside memorials, and this added another dimension to my research. Seeing these sites, after having listened to the stories behind them, was a powerful and moving experience. This reiterates how researchers using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach are intimately involved in their work. It was impossible to remain a detached, objective observer. Powerful, rich meanings and thick description were inescapable.

More layers of understanding and richness were added through the email contact with some participants after the interviews, either as a component of member-checking once they had read through their transcript, or after I had visited their physical roadside memorial. One participant stated she was “thrilled” and “touched” that I had been to visit the roadside memorial for her son; another explained how she had viewed visiting the site for her mother in a different way since our interview, and had noted these thoughts and experiences in an online “blog” for others to read. Such correspondence added depth and richness to the research process, reiterating again that I am not separate from the research, I cannot bracket my experiences or my thoughts as Husserl mandated.

The final strategy I employed to ensure the research was both rigorous and credible was keeping an audit trail. A diary, the reflective journal, manual coding notes and other writings provided a credible external audit trail.

Paterson and Higgs (2005) further suggested the notion of “plausibility” to ensure and enhance rigour. They noted, “Plausibility is concerned with determining whether the findings of the study (description, explanation, or theory) ‘fit’ the data from which they were derived” (p. 352). This can be addressed, they maintained, “by providing
transparency of the method and detailed discussion of the findings including many original participant quotes in the primary research report related to the . . . research questions, richly grounding these answers in research texts” (p. 352). Adhering to the strategies recommended by both Paterson and Higgs (2005) and Creswell (2007) ensured that the research was rigorous, dependable and credible.

**Unintentional fieldwork**

A part of the triangulation of research methods included the observation of fifty roadside memorials in my local government area (LGA). This intentional fieldwork will be discussed in the following chapter. Additionally, however, in my travels around Australia I inadvertently undertook extra “fieldwork”; as discussed above the research had become embedded in who I am and in my everyday life and it was difficult to set the “researcher role” to one side. A trip to Tasmania, for example, revealed their crash marker program, with red and black posts used to signify injuries and fatalities. As discussed in Chapter Five, I noticed with interest that a number of these official, standardised markers also had unofficial, individualised memorials built alongside them.

Similarly, a trip to Western Australia became fieldwork as I photographed sites, noticing a large diversity in their appearance, the number of sites with two or three crosses, and the extensive use of photographs of the victims—many of whom were young men. One region (in the Castle Rock/Albany area) had erected large signs, depicting the number of road fatalities in the past year. Upon my return home I corresponded with a government official from this region, discussing their road safety initiatives and the effectiveness of such signs, along with other personalised memorials (D. Kellie, personal communication, April 29, 2013).
Visits to the Tarcutta Truck Drivers’ Memorial and the Clybucca (Kempsey) Bus Crash Memorial were another part of the unintentional fieldwork, increasing my knowledge and understandings of roadside memorialisation.

Other unintentional fieldwork occurred simply driving between my home town and other neighbouring towns. I would notice sites had been recently visited, with new flowers or other signs of recent activity, and found myself wondering why this was happening, did it coincide with a special date or significant occasion? Or where the family or friends visiting the site as they were passing through the area? On one occasion—and only once—I noticed someone stopped at a site, changing flowers and tidying up. I had to resist the urge to pull over and ask them their story! This would certainly have been in breach of my ethical conduct.

This unintentional fieldwork, coupled with the intentional fieldwork discussed in the next chapter, was an emotional, thought-provoking and rich experience, extending my knowledge gleaned through both the literature review and the interviews. Bednar (2004, p. 3) described fieldwork as “intense and surreal” and a “ghoulish” and macabre occupation—listening to the news and watching the paper “for new deathsites to contemplate and photograph.” His experiences resonated with me, and reinforced once again the fact that I am deeply embedded in the research process; I am not a detached, impartial observer. Bracketing my experiences is both impossible and undesirable.

This chapter has outlined the methodology and methods I employed in undertaking the interview stage of this research. The following chapter introduces the fieldwork undertaken as part of the research triangulation and provides a discussion of the methodology used. An overview of the fifty roadside memorials visited and
photographed is also presented. Conclusions drawn from an analysis of these sites are discussed.
CHAPTER SEVEN: SILENT SENTINELS? THE MEANINGS AND MESSAGES OF ROADSIDE MEMORIALS

I drive past one on the way to uni and there’s new—I see people there pretty much every week changing the flowers, or changing different parts of it and that’s really special to see, to see that continuing. Yeah, it’s just a really good reminder to see how I suppose, people loved, I don’t know who the person was but how much they loved them and they are still caring for them (Emma).

Having outlined the methodology relating to the interview component of the research in the previous chapter, this chapter outlines the methodology used to observe, photograph and analyse fifty sites. It also reports on the myriad of forms and potential meanings and messages uncovered in this analysis. On the surface roadside memorials appear to be silent sentinels. Closer examination, scratching beneath the surface—literally and metaphorically—showed that roadside memorials are not silent sentinels at all. Analysing these fifty sites was a physical journey, a research journey and an emotional journey.

Before continuing it is important to note that two of the participants’ roadside memorials were located within the area under study and are therefore included in this discussion. These two sites—and their owners’ identity—remain anonymous however. The remaining twelve participants’ roadside memorials were all located outside of the Shoalhaven LGA, although I did visit and photograph six of these, and four participants sent me photographs of their memorials as well.

The physical journey (Methodology)

As outlined in Chapter One, the geographical setting for this component of the study was within the Shoalhaven LGA. I obtained road crash fatality data—recording one
hundred and fifty-one sites—including maps and spreadsheets, from SCC (SCC, 2015) and the RMS (NSW RMS, 2015a), some of which is publicly available and some restricted. Given my research purposes, credibility, and university ethics approval, access was granted to view these documents. This enabled me to plot, visit and photograph local roadside memorials. To assist with data collection and collation, I devised an “Observation Template” (see Appendix Sixteen).

This included information on the date the site was visited, its location and Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates if possible, any names, dates of birth or death, ages of victims, epitaphs or messages, the main artefacts or “ancillary objects” (Klaassens et al., 2013) used—such as flowers, signs of recent activity, and the general appearance. I was sometimes able to glean more information about the actual crash from the data supplied by the RMS, for example, how the crash occurred: head on, overtaking, off the road into an object, pedestrian fatality, the direction the car was travelling, the type of road, whether it was daylight or darkness or dusk, the weather conditions, for example wet or dry, the number of people killed and injured.

In addition to these objective elements, I sought the more subjective emotions and expressions aroused, underlying the phenomenon of such memorials. Perhaps they were celebrating life, capturing the identity of the victim. Or, possibly they could be interpreted as angry accusations pointing at unsafe, poorly maintained roads. The symbolism used, and what these might mean was considered. To assist with this process I made field notes in my journal, documenting extra details about each site, including my emotional reactions to these “sacred sites”. These are discussed in The Emotional Journey section of this chapter.
In my attempts to visit the sites of these documented fatalities, to determine if roadside memorials were established, I discovered that many sites had no visible memorials at all. As Suter (2010, p. 53) noted, in Australia “it has been estimated that about 20 per cent of the scenes of fatal road accidents are now commemorated by spontaneous ad hoc memorials.” Likewise, Clark and Tidswell (2010) estimated that only twenty per cent of road fatalities are commemorated with roadside markers, while Gibson (2011, p. 150) pointed out that “not all road fatalities are placemarked by memorialisation.” It is difficult to determine the exact percentages for the Shoalhaven LGA. I was able to locate approximately sixty visible roadside memorials out of the one hundred and fifty-one recorded; this would indicate that about forty per cent of sites of fatalities are marked with a memorial of some kind. Fifty sites were documented and analysed for this study, which is approximately thirty-three per cent of the total number of fatalities recorded.

By immersing myself in the physicality of these sites—looking at them, photographing them, pondering their more ephemeral and intangible aspects, and recording my reactions to them—a rich visual and emotive content analysis emerged, providing two layers of interpretation. The first was a quantitative and objective perspective, the second was a more qualitative and subjective layer. Roadside memorials do indeed have both a material and an expressive capacity, a tangible and intangible element (Campbell, 2013, p. 533).

In a similar vein to the study conducted by Klaassens et al. (2013) I coded and categorised the features of each site, considering the primary structure as well as counting the frequencies of the different elements or ancillary objects outlined above.
Initial codes were refined as necessary, with other codes or categories added during the process.

I then attempted to interpret these observations, acknowledging that the subjectivity of the meanings meant that I could never really be certain I had interpreted them correctly. Perhaps my research can only be “good enough” (Benzecry, 2015, p. 8) due to the very nature of such emotive, individual and potentially hidden meanings behind artefacts or texts contained with roadside memorials. These ordinary, everyday objects—such as a body board fin, a skateboard deck, even a motorcycle helmet—become imbued and laden with meaning for the relatives and friends, taking on a new, sacred meaning after death, which may not be apparent to outsiders (Tuan, 1980). As Gibson (2010) documented, once abject or even profane objects can become sacred, “. . . the emotional and memorial value of objects is . . . awakened in bereavement . . .” (p. 62). Gibson also pointed out that the belief or “magical thinking” (p. 58) that the essence or aura of the deceased person remains on an object they wore or touched is held by some.

As a side issue, it was important for me to be aware of my personal danger in stopping at and visiting such sites alongside the road. By their very nature, many memorials are positioned in dangerous locations and I was very aware of the ironic twist if I became the next victim needing a roadside memorial. This was also echoed by Bednar (2004), along with a photographer from Nowra who contacted me about his passion for photographing roadside memorials (D. Smythe, personal communication, June 25, 2014).
The research journey (Findings)

Fifty roadside memorials were examined, and a few of these photographs are included in this chapter. Some of these memorialised more than one person, with two or more victims included in the one site (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Example of memorial for multiple victims

In order to begin to code and categorise all the various mementos and artefacts contained within these roadside memorials I devised a spreadsheet (see Appendix Seventeen). Subsequently, a number of tables and charts are included in this discussion to highlight pertinent aspects of the findings.
My analysis uncovered similar trends to those identified in the literature. Forty of the fifty sites had a cross as the main structure; the remaining ten had only flowers marking the spot. Thirty-four sites incorporated both a cross and floral tributes (see Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Features of memorials**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cross</th>
<th>Flowers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-six were attached to existing structures such as trees (15), guard rails (4), power poles (3) or other structures (4) including fencing, fence posts and street signs. The remaining twenty-four memorials were free standing (see Chart 2).
My analysis further showed that the use of a first name was common (a total of 35 sites, some of which also included middle or last names), whereas middle and last names were not as common. Klaassens et al. (2013, p. 156) posited that “the lack of the last name makes the death site less formal and more personal places of remembrance . . . ” Nicknames also featured in four of the sites, and this can be seen as adding to the personalisation and informality of the site. Thirteen sites had no names (see Chart 3).
The age of the victim was stated in only thirteen of the sites. Coupled with additional information gleaned from the media and the RMS and SCC data, the ages of a further twelve victims could be established. Echoing the findings in the literature review, those under the age of twenty were the most represented. This can be further broken down into: eleven were under twenty years of age, four were between twenty and thirty, five were between thirty and forty, two were between forty and fifty and three were over the age of fifty (see Chart 4).

On the other hand, the gender of the victim was apparent in thirty-seven of the sites—twenty-six were for males, eleven for females (see Chart 5). Hartig and Dunn’s (1998) study, as outlined in Chapter Four, revealed a similar proportion, indicating a male, youth dominated prevalence. Gibson (2011) and Daum (2012) likewise echo this finding, with Daum noting, “the dead are mostly young people, about twenty, rarely more than thirty years old” (p. 44).
A further inclusion on roadside memorials can be the date of the death, and occasionally the date of the victim’s birth. In my analysis, thirty-two memorials had no dates at all;
eleven included both the date of birth and the date of death, while seven only listed the date of death (see Chart 6).

**Chart 6: Dates listed on memorials**

Besides the main structure of the memorial—such as a cross or floral tributes—a wide variety of personal mementos, artefacts or ancillary objects were left, to personalise or individualise the sites. Forty-three of the fifty sites included extra objects. *Table 1* (below) provides a breakdown of these. Not included in *Table 1* are “one-off” mementos such as a body board fin (see *Figure 10* below), a firefighter’s helmet and medal, matchbox cars, a dreamcatcher, a snow globe, a motorcycle vest, a cricket ball, football colours, a wind chime, a scarf, an engraved tile, and a pushbike chain.

Klaassens et al. (2013) and Clark and Franzmann (2006) made reference to the widespread use of both butterflies and angels, and the symbolism and significance attached to these items. My observations found only five sites included butterflies, with three incorporating angels.
Table 1: Objects at roadside memorials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inscription/messages/notes</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lights</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol bottles/cans</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian flags</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plants</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photos of deceased</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poems</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butterflies</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffed toys</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas/Easter/other celebrations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious insignia</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car parts from wreckage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* More than one artefact on 43 of the memorials

Figure 10: Memorial for Jaye, with body board fin

Eleven sites contained alcohol cans or bottles, as shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: Memorial adorned with cans of alcohol**

![Image of memorial adorned with cans of alcohol](Welsh, S. M. (Photographer). (2013).)

It is important to note that the above objects are usually inexpensive, everyday items, yet they carry heavily laden sentimental or emotional value, as documented by Gibson (2010). They are placed at roadside memorials for a myriad of reasons, to personalise and individualise the site. Their true meanings and value may never be fully understood or gleaned from a casual glance. In reality, even if passers-by do stop to examine these memorials more closely, the meanings and relevance behind such personal mementos may remain a mystery. An object may be assigned one meaning by us, the passer-by, yet have a very different meaning for the person who placed it at the memorial.

The notion of different people seeing different things depending on their “glance” ties in with the concept of the “sociological gaze” introduced by the philosopher Foucault (1963). The term was originally used by Foucault to refer to the “gaze” being used to
control people on mass, by instilling fear in individuals to assist in governing society. As a social control method, the gaze of the judge, the police officer, the teacher, the manager, the priest, the psychiatrist, or the doctor created a subconscious fear of being watched. In current times, this is perceived to be achieved through cameras such as CCTV (closed circuit television), clocking on and off at work, supervisors monitoring employees movements (including online activities) and so on. The sociological understanding of the examining gaze has now been extended and used in other ways: the theory of the male gaze (films and advertisements created to please the heterosexual male audience with scantily clad women, cameras lingering on women’s bodies longer than needed and so on), and the tourist gaze (again, relating to the sexualisation of women).

This concept of gaze is very relevant in my research: how I look at the roadside memorials, how others perhaps look at me as I am looking at the roadside memorials; the way my gaze has changed once I know the stories behind the site or the people involved; how my gaze is different to say the families or the local councils (who may see them as an eyesore or off-putting to tourists) or even the state governments who may want to change policy and practice around roadside memorial installation. The variety of gazes also extends to the average motorist who may only casually glance at them as they drive by, or the nearby residents who are seeing the site every day—as depicted in Figure 12 below—to emergency service personnel who may be disenfranchised mourners (Doka, 1998, 2001, 2002) and psychologically affected by seeing these visual reminders of previous trauma. At one site a Jehovah’s Witness tract entitled What hope for dead loved ones? had been left, taped to the power pole in a waterproof plastic bag,
This immediately raised questions for me such as: Do other people have a “right” to leave things such as this? How would the family react? This demonstrates again the concept of gaze. One “reading” of this could be that for the Jehovah’s Witnesses who had placed the tract, the roadside memorial possibly represented an opportunity for witnessing to the bereaved family and friends. Alternatively, the tract may have been put there by a relative for the comfort and solace of the people he or she cared about. Perhaps the family or friends of the deceased had put it there, for others to see. A variety of gazes and reasons are possible.

**Figure 12: Memorial adjacent to homes**

As I will discuss later, perhaps a part of my role, and a practice implication, is to be a mediator of this gaze: a roadside memorial may look like an invasion of public space with
private grief, or a neglected eyesore, but when the story behind the site is known there is a whole other narrative occurring—grief, loss, sadness, tragedy. In this way the concept of gaze is important to consider.

The emotional journey (Reflections)

Being involved in the task of driving around looking for, stopping at, and photographing reminders of death along the roads was without question an emotional journey, as was the interviewing component of this research. Reiterating Heidegger, it was impossible for me to bracket or sometimes even bridle my own emotional reactions as Dahlberg et al. (2008) suggested. Indeed, being a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher, such distancing would have been undesirable. I was embedded in the research process; I was not an impartial observer or researcher. Instead, by immersing myself in both these sites and the interviews I was able to experience the richness and depth of emotions evoked by roadside memorials. In addition, such immersion aided in my achieving Creswell’s (2007) concepts of thick description and prolonged engagement and persistent observation, adding to the rigour of my work.

My approach to this stage of the research and data collection was similar to Klaassens et al. (2009, p. 190), who noted, “We tried to visit as many of them as possible, in order to ascertain the design and to check whether they included any information on the victims and/or the accident.” Bednar (2004) and Weisser (2004) both noted that some sites are readily seen yet others are hidden away and easily overlooked. Likewise, I encountered problems finding and identifying some sites, despite having a map plotted with the sites of fatalities and the data supplied by SCC and the RMS. Many were
overgrown, hidden, or so neglected and weather beaten they were hard to see. Others appeared to have been removed. Many sites evidently had never been marked.

After photographing the sites I could find from various angles, I then looked carefully at each memento or artefact, allowing myself to touch, to think, to feel, to reflect. The objective, tangible details of each site were recorded in the “Observation Template”, along with the more subjective musings in my field notes journal. When I look back at my journal over this period of time I notice how often sadness and heaviness have been a key theme. Many entries describe the sense of grief and empathy I felt, coupled with curiosity at some sites, wondering who the victim was, why the site had recently been refreshed, who are the people who visit and maintain these memorials? I considered questions such as: Who built this? Where are they now? Do they live nearby? Do they ever visit it? What do they do? Has it helped them? What has this roadside memorial meant to them? These, indeed, are all related to my lines of inquiry. Often my thoughts also went to the person who died—who they were, what happened, what caused their death? Additionally, the more elaborate memorials, or the ones I remember hearing about and seeing in the newspapers, had a strong impact on me. One memorial, for example, had a photo of a young mum—this was hard hitting, seeing a name and a face at the site, along with messages from her children to her (see Figure 13 below).
The memorials for young people likewise touched a raw nerve for me, as a mother of four young adults. All in all, conducting this fieldwork was very powerful and very raw, while yielding a wealth of data. In many ways visiting these sites was a confronting and macabre exercise, yet at the same time a fascinating and invaluable one. I realised that immersing myself in these memorials was an essential part of the research process. After a time, I experienced almost a revelation, an “epiphany” about the importance of direct experience with a phenomenon, in the form of an analogy of how to understand a dog. It occurred to me that the best way to understand roadside memorials was the same as the best way to understand dogs—by firmly locating myself in the research. If I were doing a thesis on the nature of dogs, I could read all about dogs, interview people who owned dogs, even watch movies about dogs. However, to really get an
understanding of dogs I would need to pat them, touch them, smell them, interact with them. This is the best way to understand dogs and what they are like. So it is with roadside memorials. It is not enough just to read about them and talk to people who have built them—I needed to see them, touch them, experience them myself to really grasp their nuances and the physicality of them. We all come to any phenomenon or topic of exploration with pre-interpretations and preconceived ideas, which need to be tested and challenged. Again, this reiterates Heidegger’s declaration that we cannot separate our experiences and our thoughts from our research. I do have my own personal experiences and thoughts about roadside memorials, and this does colour my research and affect the research process itself. As a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher I cannot remain purely objective.

My experiences on this emotional journey are echoed by fellow researchers such as Bednar (2004). Reading his narrative essay resonated with me, as I was doing similar field work collecting photographs and observations of roadside memorials. He stated: “it’s an odd space to inhabit. Part of you hopes that you will see no sites at all, that no one else has died . . . Part of you hopes there are more—for ‘research purposes’ . . . [you] feel the conflict in your gut”. Again, he described feeling self-conscious and “almost shameful” stopping at sites, at strangers’ memorials, as though you are intruding and looking through “other people’s stuff”. I too was very conscious of other motorists seeing me and wondering what I was doing, how dare I stop and take photos and invade such a personal place of intimacy? It is so personal and yet so public.

Additionally, Bednar noted existential and introspective questions that arose during his field work experience which resonated with me, namely:
Would I want [wife and child] to put up a memorial if I died taking this picture? What would I hope it ‘said’ about me? What would it look like? . . . What if they were hit in our parked car and died while I was out of the car taking pictures? How would I mark the space? Would I answer these questions differently if it happened closer to home, where I could visit more often? (p. 4).

Would I want my family to build a roadside memorial in my honour if I died? This relates closely to the question mentioned earlier by my youngest son, on his bicycle trip to and from Cairns (see Introduction).

As mentioned previously, my researcher role and private life have been intertwined throughout this journey. Consequently, as we have travelled around Australia, and overseas, I have observed and photographed many other roadside memorials in addition to the fifty I analyse in this thesis. A few of these are the ones built by those I interviewed, which added another dimension to my understanding. In conclusion, visiting the sites, taking the photographs and documenting them, uploading them on the computer, and analysing them in depth was a sobering task. It was indeed an emotional journey, filled with much sadness and an awareness of so many lives lost.

The interpretation of sites visited

As Benzecry (2015, p. 8) noted, I now aim to provide an “interpretation of the world [I’ve] been engaged with during [my] fieldwork.” What did the observations of these fifty sites tell me about roadside memorials and their role in bereavement? Their individuality, their personality, their difference, their sameness, their variety all spoke volumes, as loudly as the words of an interview. The richness and diversity of these roadside memorials—these “silent sentinels”—shouts out an array of messages, loudly and persistently.
Firstly, the personalising and individualising of a roadside memorial is important: forty-three of the fifty sites had more than simply a cross or some flowers. The variety of structures and forms, along with the individuality displayed in the use of mementos and artefacts is evidently a meaningful component of roadside memorials. Despite this wide variety of forms, a number of commonalities were also evident: names, nicknames, dates, personal messages, notes, mementos of a personal nature, individual touches. As Nešporová and Stahl (2014) noted, such personal details give a glimpse of the identity of the person being commemorated and “suggests a desire for personalised places of remembrance” Klaassens et al. (2013, p. 155). This will be explored in more detail in Chapter Twelve, in a discussion of the policy implications arising from this research.

Secondly, the majority of memorials appear to be built at the actual place of death. The importance of place—and marking the precise spot where the crash and/or death occurred—is thus a further message portrayed by these not so silent sentinels. Comparing the location of the fatal crashes from the data provided by the RMS and SCC, with the positioning on the roadsides, it appeared that the memorial is established as near to the place of the collision as possible. These findings echo the literature that documented that the place of death is significant to the bereaved families and friends.

The desire of grieving family and friends to have continuing bonds or an ongoing relationship with their deceased loved one is the third message evident from an analysis of roadside memorials in the Shoalhaven LGA. Articles left at the site—linking objects—are an example of continuing bonds. The use of photographs on many memorials is similarly an example of a linking object, used to preserve the memory of the deceased as posited by Johnson (1999). As Weisser (2004, 2.6) noted, “these articles are indicative
of the attempt by surviving loved ones to incorporate the victim into their current lives.”
The prevalence of notes, personal messages and inscriptions such as “Forever remembered. Forever missed” and “Your memory we treasure. Loving you always, forgetting you never” and “RIP Bro” and “Lived life to the fullest. Ride free Dad” and “What it meant to lose you, no one can ever know, every day is lonely, I wish you didn’t have to go. No longer in my life to share, but in my heart you’re always there. Love you always, my little Maxie” and “Peace out brother” also exemplify this. The roadside memorial provides a place for the bereaved to communicate with their loved one, as echoed in the literature by Everett (2002), Klaassens et al. (2009) and others. This is a key role of roadside memorials.

Linked to this, my analysis and interpretation of these highly personalised sites also suggests a fourth role and message is to ensure that the victim is remembered by others, and is not forgotten or “hidden away in a cemetery” as some have suggested (Belshaw & Purvey 2009). The sites photographed below, (Figure 14 and Figure 15), are two such examples of highly personalised and individualised memorials.
Figure 14: Memorial for Nick


Figure 15: Memorial for Jen

Some researchers have posited that the role of roadside memorials is perhaps a warning function to other motorists. As Everett (2002) and Weisser (2004) suggested, this may be a secondary role, and my experience points to the primary role being to ensure the loved one is remembered by others, even those who never knew them.

Fifth, the use of a cross in forty of the fifty memorials is notable, given that other religious icons feature in only four sites. As identified in the literature review, the use of the Christian cross does not necessarily denote an affiliation with the Christian faith; rather it is seen as a universally understood symbol of death. Nevertheless, a number of inscriptions and messages do make reference to God, angels or the afterlife. Examples include: “In God’s hands. Always in our hearts. Forever young” and “A golden heart stopped beating. Hard working hands at rest. God broke our hearts to prove to us, He only takes the best” and “We miss you so much, now you are with the angels and we will be together soon. Love always, Mum”. As also discussed in the literature, perhaps the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials indicates a move away from organised religion or state sanctioned burial practices, and a desire for people to commemorate their loved ones in a more relevant and meaningful way, despite the continued use of the traditional Christian cross.

A sixth message depicted is that the use of personal mementos and artefacts can be seen as a way of transforming the site of horror into a place of love and beauty and a way to show nurturing and continuing care to the deceased (Hallam & Hockey, 2001; Klaassens et al., 2013; Petersson & Wingren, 2011). Clark and Cheshire (2004, p. 210) remarked that mementos “bring animation to a place from which life has been removed.” Campbell (2013, p. 534) noted that such tributes attempt to rehabilitate or
transform the roadside (with its noise, litter and profanity) into a scared landscape, a personal memorial site.

In most cases, any evidence of the actual means of death—car wreckage, broken glass, disturbed plant life, twisted signposts or guard rails, even blood—are swiftly removed. Gibson (2011, p. 150) stated that, “after the death scene is erased from public visibility in the landscape, memorials [are] erected . . .” In their place items of beauty and love and nurturing are left—floral tributes, notes and other personal touches.

A seventh message gleaned from this analysis of memorials relates to the perceived dissatisfaction with the restrictions and regulations in modern cemeteries. The literature review (e.g. Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Watkins, 2011; Weisser, 2004) documented the growing dissatisfaction of families and friends who feel curtailed in their desire to honour their loved ones in personalised ways. The strict rules and regulations of cemeteries are seen to promote a homogenous, and therefore impersonal, approach to commemoration. For many, the roadside memorial allows more freedom and individualising of their loved ones’ site. The sites under consideration in this research support this viewpoint.

Finally, Hartig and Dunn (1998) spoke of the ephemeral nature of some sites, with only flowers laid at the site, which of course do not last. This has certainly been the case with two local sites within minutes of my home. Both sites had flowers laid immediately, which have not been replaced since the time of the crash. More permanent fixtures have not been established. An example of one of these sites is shown below in Figure 16.
A meta-data analysis or meta-narrative can also be achieved through the in-depth analysis of sites such as these. For example, many of the sites included only first names, with no other personal information such as surnames, dates of birth or death, or even gender. This lack of personal details reflects the very intimate and personal nature of roadside memorials, despite their placement in the public domain. It is understood that the family and friends connected with the site will already know such private details as dates of birth or death, or surnames and genders. Unlike in the cemetery and on the gravestone, where full names and dates are provided for the public record, roadside memorials retain an element of privacy and intimacy, despite their very public placement.

The above are examples of some of the messages gathered from the observation of roadside memorials undertaken as part of this research. Combining this rich data with
the participant interviews and existing literature, a growing understanding of the role of roadside memorials in bereavement can be achieved.

“Refreshed” sites

During my travels looking at roadside memorials, and indeed my day-to-day driving around the local region, I have noticed that thirteen of the original fifty sites photographed and analysed have been “refreshed”. Has this been a coincidence, or a result of extra attention with media releases, flyers and radio interviews detailing my research? Gibson (2011), Clark and Franzmann (2006), Kennerly (2002) and others also documented this ongoing activity at sites. As noted by Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 590):

Memorials frequently contain evidence of ongoing activity beyond their construction. New mementos may be added during visits to the memorial, so that the site grows and develops, sometimes decorated for seasonal holidays. Some mementos are left by friends, others by strangers who are simply moved by the occasion. The family may then take comfort from this ongoing display of affection.

I also documented such changes to sites, noting for example that a brand new cross with fresh flowers had been left at one older site, with a piece of wreckage left at the base of the tree, as shown in Figure 17. The dates did not appear to correspond to the anniversary of the crash, nor the birthdate of the victim, so I mused why this had been done now? Perhaps the family were visiting the area? In my field notes I wrote that I would love to be able to talk to the people involved. I had heard about one researcher who left notes at roadside memorials to request family to contact her. It was beyond the scope of my ethical boundaries to do likewise, however, despite my curiosity. The fact remains that for many, these sites have an enduring role, beyond the initial grieving
period. Twenty-three of the sites visited were indeed over ten years old, with twenty-four sites showing signs of recent activity. Tangible evidence that grief never ends.

**Figure 17: Example of a refreshed site**

![Example of a refreshed site](image)


Chapter Seven has explored what I, as an outsider, have noticed. Yet roadside memorials are so unique and in many ways “unreadable” in that we may never know, just by looking at them, how and why they have been important for people. For this reason it is necessary to speak directly with those who have established them. It is by employing a triangulation of methods in my research approach that will provide a more nuanced and meaningful way to understand the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials and their role in the grieving process. The discussion, therefore, now turns to the research participants themselves. Chapter Eight provides an overview of the fourteen participants who volunteered to be interviewed, with vignettes of each being presented. An exploration of their motivation to participate in this study is also conducted.
CHAPTER EIGHT: OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

…it is not the ordinariness of the materials used or cost of the structure that is important, rather it is their symbolic and emotional power; they are rich with meaning (Klaassens et al., 2013, p. 147).

The previous chapter has described the roadside memorials photographed and analyzed as part of the research process. I now turn to the participants themselves—the people who self-selected and volunteered to be interviewed. An overview of the whole group is given, along with a brief vignette of each participant. Some salient thoughts and key quotes are recorded; these will be expanded upon in the chapters to follow where I will discuss the themes and findings from the data analysis. Finally, I consider the motivations of the participants to be interviewed for the study.

Due to the hermeneutic phenomenological nature of this research, it was imperative to retain a sense of the participants’ “personhood”, and not fall into the positivist mode of breaking down the interviews into disjointed and fragmented pieces. To this end, I have included a brief vignette of each person to contextualise their situations and to ensure their whole story and experiences remain in the foreground of the research process and findings. These are arranged chronologically, in order of interview. To preserve anonymity pseudonyms are used throughout the entire thesis.

Introducing the group as a whole

Fourteen participants were involved in this study, three men and eleven women. Their ages ranged from twenty to in the seventies. The relationships to their lost loved ones included mother (5), father (2), partner (1), wife (1), sister (2), daughter (1) and friend (2), as displayed in Chart 7.
The deceased loved ones’ ages ranged from fifteen years to seventy-six years; seven were males and seven were females. The cause of the deaths varied considerably; two were motorcyclists, one was a pedestrian, three were head-on collisions, kangaroos were a factor in two, with speed, fatigue and drink-driving causing the remainder. Eight were single-person crashes. The time elapsed since the death ranged between five months and twenty years. Proximity to home was varied, and ranged between less than two kilometres to over four hundred and eighty kilometres. Eight out of the fourteen memorials were built by the friends of the deceased, with family members accounting for the remaining six. Yet, nearly all the people who volunteered to participate in this study were family members; only two of the fourteen were friends of the deceased. Finally, ten out of the fourteen memorial sites were comprised of crosses, some also included flowers, photos, plaques and other mementos. Only one site was completely unadorned. A more detailed documentation of these and other details is located in Appendix Thirteen.
It has been noted that two of the participants’ memorials were located within the Shoalhaven LGA, and were therefore included in the analysis of fifty local sites discussed in the previous chapter.

**Vignettes of each participant**

**Trevor**

Trevor contacted me via email after seeing an article about my research in his local newspaper and our interview took place at his home, in May 2013. Trevor was the forty-six year old partner of “Mary”, who died in 2001 at the age of thirty-four. He was the driver of the car, sustaining serious and lifelong injuries as a result of the crash. This occurred thirty kilometres from their home, on a winding section of road, late at night.

At the time of interview, it was twelve years since Mary had died. Trevor’s story was quite different to other accounts of roadside memorials in the literature. As this was my first interview it reinforced to me how phenomenological interviewing needs to remain person-centred, not researcher-driven. As Trevor was in hospital for some months after the crash, it was a friend of his who decided to build the roadside memorial:

*I didn’t construct the memorial . . . cross. A mate of mine did that when I was in hospital—yeah, it was quite nice . . . It’s . . . just a cross and just says [her name]. It was like, being a carpenter, it was like well-constructed, rebated into the timber, really schmick. I had a couple of other female friends who knew of [her] who would visit and go and hang some sort of jewellery on it and things like that.*

Trevor had a different story to tell, as not only did he not construct the cross, he had no input into his partner’s funeral or burial proceedings. Mary was from Scotland, and her parents came out to Australia and took their daughter’s body back home, to be buried there. For this reason, the roadside memorial takes on an even more significant role for
Trevor, as he has no ashes, no gravesite to visit, nothing tangible at all of his late partner. Essentially, Trevor felt that the roadside memorial was a place he still gets drawn back to, to say “hey” and to think, to meditate, to remember his partner. Twelve years later, the site retains a central role in Trevor’s bereavement.

**Jill**

Jill was recruited by word of mouth, and our interview was conducted over the telephone in June 2013. At the time of interview, Jill was fifty years old; her eighteen-year-old son had died in a car crash eleven years prior. He had hit a kangaroo, and died just seven kilometres from their home. It was her son’s friends who decided they wanted to put up a memorial and Jill could see this was important for them. She was involved in the design and placing of the memorial, and described that day as being:

> Very traumatic . . . gut wrenching . . . the cross was nailed to the tree that Greg had hit with his car . . . I was nailing this thing where my son had died.

The roadside memorial, which was made up of a cross with a plaque and her son’s photo, was originally attached to the tree he hit. This later had to be relocated as the tree was removed, deemed to be a potential hazard to other motorists. A garden, with painted river stones inscribed with some of her son’s qualities, surrounds the new site. Other mementos come and go over time.

The site has remained a significant and focal point for Jill and her family as well as her son’s mates. She commented:

> . . . it became quite a significant—well, for us, I mean I had never thought of doing that [putting up a memorial] but for us it did become a significant place and we still go out there every year because I don’t have his ashes at the cemetery. I have his ashes here at the house. And I had some of his ashes siphoned off for my ex-husband and he scattered them at the tree. So—and that’s the place where he died . . . Most people
don’t know—may not know exactly where their loved one died or when or anything—do you know what I mean? But we know exactly the place of death, yeah, and we know pretty much the time. Yeah, so, like, we even know the exact time, so for years I’ve gone out at the exact time that he died . . . He died on the scene. So that is the place he died. He didn’t get taken to hospital. He was—he ruptured his aorta from the seatbelt and so he—yeah.

Jill also commented that her son’s memorial has remained significant for the whole community, and she believes it “. . . keeps the community connected . . .” Jill also draws comfort and solace from knowing that others continue to visit her son’s site. She likes the fact that it is there and that other people go there as well:

. . . it has meaning to other people . . . I mean—it’s always my grief, but I have drawn a huge comfort from the fact that other people care and remember him . . . That has been lovely . . . and really, really important.

Cathy

Cathy heard about my research on her local radio station, and contacted me, very keen to be involved in the research even though she has never visited her son’s roadside memorial. I was intrigued by her initial story, outlined in her email, that she had a roadside memorial for a loved one but had chosen to never see it. Further, Cathy was personally against such sites and felt a black post (as used in some parts of Australia) is more acceptable. Creswell (2007) would refer to Cathy as a negative case analysis. Perhaps the term exception is more appropriate within the parameters of phenomenological methodology. Regardless, Cathy and I had a telephone interview, in July 2013.

At the time of interview Cathy was in her seventies, and her thirty-five year old son had died eight years earlier. He was riding a motorcycle and crashed into a guardrail, over
130 kilometres from Cathy’s home. One of his friends made the cross, which Cathy saw before it was placed at the site of his death. She recounted:

I’ve never been to my—I’ve seen the cross that one of my son’s friends made to put for him. You cannot see it from the road. I know it had to be taken away because the Council did some work, but you couldn’t even see it before that because it would only be about, I suppose, 30 centimetres high . . . it’s small. It’s made—one of his best friends is a metal worker, and he made it. And it is beautiful. I saw it before they put it up.

Cathy’s daughter-in-law and grandchildren visit the site, along with his friends; Cathy herself has no desire to see the place where her son died. She simply stated:

I just never felt it was necessary . . . I’ve got memories . . . I have a memorial garden at my house . . . our little garden in memory of him . . . [But], his friends go there on his birthday or on the anniversary of his death. They actually stand there and have a drink with him . . . And my grandchildren—his children—go, and they will just leave one live flower.

Despite Cathy’s own aversion to roadside memorials, including the one for her son, she acknowledges that for some people they may be helpful:

You’ve gotta do something that’s gonna help your grief . . . yes, and if that’s what it takes . . . I think it’s a place that people do go and visit because it’s the last place their loved one was on the earth . . . I think you do need something to help your grief . . . I’ve got a lot of faith and [that helps].

As Cathy’s story is an exception, in that she has never visited the roadside memorial and it has had no role in her journey of grief, I will return to her story in more detail in Chapter Twelve.

**Rhonda**

Rhonda joined my research through an example of a snowball effect in that she was recruited via a previous participant. Rhonda was an acquaintance of Jill, who had also lost a son the same age and around the same time as herself. Jill mentioned this mother
to me during our interview, and offered to contact her with my details, to see if she was interested or willing to be interviewed. Subsequently, Rhonda did email me and thus became the fourth participant. Our interview was conducted by telephone, in July 2013.

Rhonda was in her sixties at the time of our interview, and had lost her eighteen year old son eleven years earlier. He died in a collision with a truck early one morning, only three kilometres from the family home. The roadside memorial was built by one of his three brothers, and is comprised of a light blue cross, with dragons painted on the structure. His name and a photo are also included and Rhonda was passionate about his photo being included on the memorial to show:

... he’s not just a name, he is a face with the name ...

The cross has played an important role for Rhonda and her family, as well as the local community and her son’s mates:

It was an outlet for my other children to be able to give something to him too. ... in his remembrance because I guess the cemetery and doing that was done by his father and I—whereas the boys sort of had more to do with putting the roadside memorial together...

For Rhonda, the roadside memorial has a role to play in managing her grief. As the site is so close to home, she drives past it frequently, and reflected that:

As we drive past ... [I’ll] always acknowledge him as you go past ... As I go past ... I can sort of say hello and let him know that he’s still there in the heart even though he probably knows more than I do. If you believe in the afterlife that—that yes ... it’s just my way of being able to sort of say “Hello” as I go by ... I’m certainly glad that we have put it there.
Fred

Fred, who was seventy, contacted me after seeing a media release in his local newspaper. He was the former mayor of his town, and very aware of the controversy and debate surrounding roadside memorials, as well as council policies attempting to regulate such sites. Our interview was conducted by telephone, in July 2013.

Fred’s son had died in a head-on, two car collision, twelve years prior to our interview, when he was aged twenty-four-and-a-half. His sister, Fred’s daughter, survived the crash. The crash happened over two and a half hours away from Fred’s home; despite this distance he and his wife visit the site three or four times a year, on the anniversary of his death, on his birthday, at Christmas. It was not until about six months after their son’s death that Fred and his wife built the roadside memorial. It took their daughter, who was in the car with her brother, six or seven years before she could revisit the site. The memorial consists of a simple white cross, with his name, dates of birth and death, and a few plants and flowers. It is cemented onto the side of the road on a steep embankment. In discussing what the roadside memorial means to him, Fred commented that:

. . . we . . . see that as the last place that he was alive. And it’s sort of become . . . like a bit of a shrine, every time we go there we . . . make that link to when he was still with us . . . It helps . . . it does. It certainly did in the first five or six years. It had more effect on us than it does now. I guess time tends to heal a lot of things . . .

For Fred and his wife, the cemetery is also a place of great comfort and solace. In fact, Fred confided that:

. . . for the first nine or ten years . . . we used to visit his grave every day. And it’s probably only in the last couple of years that we don’t go every day. My wife still goes . . . at least five times a week . . . We know that he’s buried there and we always like to
go and see him. The cemetery is where he is and that is very significant. And the roadside memorial, you know, has a different meaning but it’s still an important one to us.

Fred touched on another noteworthy aspect about the role of roadside memorials, namely as a warning to other drivers about the dangers of the road. This is certainly a sentiment echoed in the literature (Clark & Tidswell, 2010; Doss, 2006; Santino, 2001), as well as by other participants in this study, and will be explored in greater detail in the coming discussion.

Allan

Allan was recruited via word of mouth, and our interview was conducted in his home in July 2013. At the time of interview, he was sixty-two, and had lost his nineteen-year-old daughter six years ago—only minutes away from home. Interestingly, Allan himself is writing a book about the roadside memorial established for his daughter, as it has undergone several changes during the years. Originally his daughter’s cross was painted red; it was then changed to pink, as this was her favourite colour. It later became the target of vandalism and was removed and thrown down an embankment. After this, the family cemented it in place:

Our response was to put a couple of tons of concrete <laughs> on the bottom of it. And nobody’s moving it except the RTA, so now it’s in the direct line of fire of the thingo [new freeway].

The roadside memorial has had to be moved to make way for largescale roadworks, and as Allan explained the company involved have been extremely helpful, sensitive and understanding of the family’s needs. At the time of our interview Allan was in two minds about whether he would want the site reassembled, as an expressway was going to be
built over that exact site, and the cross would need to be moved to a slightly different location. (Interestingly, I noted in June 2015, with the completion of the roadworks, the cross has in fact been reinstated, a little further up the hill from its original position).

It was his daughter’s friends and boyfriend who first built the memorial:

That was their first response . . . It was important to them, really important to them. I mean, for a young guy who’s just lost his girlfriend, every week, [he] would drive down from [xxxx] and stick a brand-new, expensive bunch of native flowers there every Monday evening. Went on for a couple of years. Don’t know how much money it cost him. But there was obviously a role for that. This is something that he could do and somewhere where he could do it. It’s only ritual, but really important . . . we didn’t know that it would act as a focus for people . . . It’s now adults who leave things around on her birthday and on anniversaries.

For Allan, the roadside memorial has played a very significant role in his journey of grief:

It’s very special. It’s one of those times that I spend time with my daughter . . . I have a number of rituals. But one of them is you go past it, as I do most days, and I blow it a kiss. And coming home, I blow it a kiss, too. And I say, ‘One day closer’ . . .

Allan raised a thought-provoking issue, that of proximity to home. He wondered if his daughter had died a long way from home—such as the Hay Plains or Broken Hill—if a cross would have been erected and if this would be meaningful for him. This observation is mentioned by a number of other participants in this study, as well as being echoed in the literature (Clark & Tidswell, 2010).

Dianne contacted me after seeing the flyer in her local shopping area. She was the seventh participant interviewed, and this was conducted at her home in July 2013. Dianne was forty-three years old at that time, and her husband had been killed on a motorcycle ten years previously. He was thirty-five, leaving Dianne a widow with three
young children. During our initial telephone conversation, Dianne indicated that she thought I may be interested to hear her story as she believed it would be very different to other peoples. This was because their roadside memorial is made of natural materials and is hidden away, not visible to people going past. The roadside memorial that Dianne established was thus for her and her children’s sake:

... [it was] a privacy thing but more so in that I wasn’t really doing it for anybody else. It was really just for me and the kids and it marked a spot... So they [the children] know that, I know that... I didn’t want anybody else...

To mark the site, a tree was planted and a large boulder from their nearby property was moved to the site and a wire structure of fish swimming—representing the family all swimming together—was laid into the rock. The words “Forever Connected” are included, along with a plaque inscribed with his name, nickname, age, date of the crash and the words “Tragically Killed Here”. Unlike other roadside memorials that may be very visible to passers-by—and often intentionally so—Dianne preferred her site to be private, hidden away, unnoticeable. The memorial nevertheless has a central role in her family’s life and grief. As she commented:

I couldn’t imagine not having that spot marked... I couldn’t imagine—I mean and almost like marked exactly as to where he was. It’s literally right where he landed and where he was... I sat at the accident site a lot after, with that sense of, almost guilt really, of feeling I’d let him down. I wasn’t there; I hadn’t held his hand. Like, and almost saying to him, ‘You held my hand through three births, and I wasn’t there to hold your hand when you needed me’... I went there every month at the time that he died... almost pretending I was sitting with him...

Due to the nature of his crash [involving multiple motorcycles] his body was taken to the nearest hospital, without Dianne being aware of the circumstances or knowledge of his death. Information was slow to be given to her; she thought he was badly injured but still alive. Dianne described a distressing series of events and mix ups, and a lack of
empathy and assistance at the hospital where she was given only a short period of time with her husband’s body. For this reason, she feels that the scene of the crash is more laden with importance and significance for her:

*I forever struggle with the fact that I wasn’t there to hold his hand and that I wasn’t there when he died, and that I didn’t get that chance, even after he’d died, his body was there for about six hours and no-one ever told me . . . I didn’t get that time out there . . . So that makes the accident site . . . a big part of it, probably almost more than the cemetery I guess . . .*

The ten year anniversary of Dianne’s husband’s death was approaching at the time of our interview, and Dianne was struggling with going to visit the site for this occasion. The other victim—who caused the crash that killed her husband—also has a roadside memorial nearby. The family of this man will visit the site on that day also, which continues to cause Dianne considerable pain and anger.

So, Dianne’s experiences and story sheds a different light on the placement and function of roadside memorials. Hers marks a private grief, hidden away from passing motorists, rather than a recognizable, public memorial that may also have a warning message for other road users.

**Kelly**

Kelly (aged forty-three) heard about my research via the radio and emailed me, keen to be involved in the study. We conducted the interview via the telephone in July 2013, just ten months after her seventeen year old daughter had been killed in a single car crash four minutes from the family home. Kelly had subsequently suffered the loss of her twenty-nine day old twin baby daughter just five and a half months after her elder daughter’s death, so I was concerned and ethically unsure if and how to proceed. After
discussions with both the supervisory team and Kelly herself, we decided to continue. Given the rawness and freshness of her losses, I was careful during the interview to watch for signs of undue distress and was prepared to stop the interview if needed. Kelly however—the mother of twelve children (two now deceased)—was determined to tell her story.

The roadside memorial is a very large and elaborate one, with a cross the same height as her daughter, a tree adorned with many trinkets, mementos, photos, flowers, artwork, letters, solar lights—even large false eyelashes. Its proximity to the family home means that Kelly and the family drive past it every day, and are constantly adding to it.

For Kelly, the roadside memorial for her daughter plays a large role in the local tightknit community, as well as for her own family:

*It’s not only for us, it’s for the whole community . . . they all go there and do things to it, take things to it . . . People write and put letters at the tree . . . I think they feel like they’re leaving her a message . . . it’s a huge thing for the family because the kids are like—every time we go past it we say, “Good morning, Annie!” “Say hello to Annie!” The kids, like my two-and-a-half goes, “Morning, Annie” because it’s all about reminding them who she was . . .

The actual place of the roadside memorial holds special significance for Kelly. This is reiterated throughout the literature (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Gamble, 2007; Kong, 1999) as well as in the other participants’ experiences. Kelly described it thus:

* . . . because she actually died at that particular spot, and it’s where the cross is, is the actual spot that she took her last breath, that’s a very special place. It’s hard to explain . . .

Like a number of the other participants, Kelly had very strong views about the policies surrounding roadside memorials, especially the use of black crash markers. These will be considered in the coming chapters.
Molly

The ninth participant to join this research was Molly, who emailed me after seeing the flyer in her local library. Our interview was held over the telephone, in August 2013. Like Cathy, Molly had a very different experience to impart with some helpful insights into the phenomenon of roadside memorials. Using Creswell’s (2007) terminology her story could also be seen as a negative case analysis, or exception. Molly, in fact, has no physical roadside memorial marking the site of her brother’s death twenty years ago. He was just seventeen at the time of his death, Molly herself was only nineteen and tragically, it was Molly and her boyfriend at the time who discovered the single vehicle crash and found her brother already deceased. As Molly explains, twenty years ago roadside memorials were not as prevalent as they are today, so the family never really considered building such a memorial. Rather, as she wrote in her initial email:

_The site of his accident was a paddock but has been turned into a fruit orchard by the farmer and we always use this as a way to visualize and remember him when we drive past the site . . ._

Molly went on to explain that as the site was not marked all those years ago, some of the family are now unsure of the exact location:

_We all drive past there now, and my dad couldn’t even tell you exactly where the spot is anymore. And when I was telling him about your research he said, ‘Oh, it’s at such and such.’ I went, ‘No it’s not, it’s not there. It’s the orchard.’ And he sort of started to argue and mum goes, ‘Don’t you argue with her. She knows exactly where it is! <laughs>’_

Despite no physical roadside memorial, Molly stated that nevertheless the site still retains significance for her, and when she drives past it she has a look and says “hello”.
Over the years, Molly and her cousins have discussed erecting a memorial of some kind, but have never gone ahead with it. Molly identified that one of the things stopping her from building a memorial is the impact it may have on the farmer who owns the paddock where her brother was killed:

\[\ldots as much as it could have been a comfort to us and our family, I guess there have been times where I’ve thought would it be—how really would it affect the farmer who has to see it every day? \ldots \text{[W]e know it’s our grief, we don’t have to put that on the farmer because it is right on the road and their house is like right there . . . We wouldn’t see it every day. We wouldn’t be going past there every day. He would have to live with it there knowing that that had happened there, you know, like I think that’s probably part and parcel of the way I think and it could be a reason why I’ve never really gone through with doing it. Because it’s at a paddock, it’s on a fence, in front of someone’s house . . . and it’s like, what would it do for them because, you know, it could have been beneficial for us, but would it have been detrimental to him or his family having to look at that all the time?}\]

This last point made by Molly is echoed throughout the debate and controversy surrounding such public memorials—is it fair to impose one’s private grief on others? As Everett (2007, p. 130) pointed out, local residents don’t “want to be reminded of (drunk-driving) deaths, and they [don’t] want this in their daily routine, to see these things.” I will be returning to this issue in the chapters to come.

Lisa

Lisa contacted me after seeing a media release about my research in her local paper. Our interview was conducted over the telephone, in August 2013. Lisa was aged forty-one at that time, and had lost her young fifteen-year-old son—a passenger in the car—five years previously. Her son’s mates placed the original memorial, immediately after the crash:

\[As soon as the news broke out . . . people started gravitating to that site . . . Kids, his mates, well they started it . . . they did it all and now I see that value . . . I think . . . that’s where they feel close. He was a guitarist so there was, you know, like band shirts\]
even—they put down a pick, a like, a guitar pick. They laid out clumps of dirt in the shape of a cross . . . candles and parts of the car were there. I think I threw them away ‘cause that to me was like, that was the evil <laughs> you know, and I was like ‘No!’

[Later they put] this big, huge cross that was nailed or gaffer taped around [the power pole] which they’d all signed. And then there was—on another plaque that they had done like woodwork and they’d engraved all their names and, you know, how much they love him and all that . . . [We just have] a metal cross on the post, now. And it’s about ten centimetres high or maybe fifteen.

This immediacy of memorials appearing straight after the crash is echoed in the literature (Bell et al., 2015; Gibson, 2011) as well as by other participants such as Kelly and Allan.

Paradoxically, roadside memorials can be a source of both torment and solace, as was the case for Lisa. The roadside memorial that was erected for her son by his mates is a place of very mixed emotions. On the one hand, she stated it is a horrible place, where she finds:

. . . you’re asking yourself too many questions—‘what, what, what?’ My husband has never driven down that road . . .

Countering this, however, Lisa acknowledges that “it was just beautiful” and that it is at the roadside memorial that she has found some comfort and solace, especially seeing all his mates gathered there:

. . . [its] an enormous place of you know, like people grieving and being so upset . . . it was just beautiful . . . I think that’s where they [his mates] feel close . . . I do go down that road way sometimes . . . to check to see if the cross is still there! <laughs> . . . Maybe that’s the mother, the caretaker part of me too . . . I think it helped knowing that there were people there that cared. So I think that his death has not gone unnoticed, that people cared . . .

Despite this, it is really at the cemetery where her son is buried that Lisa prefers to visit and spend time with her son—another example of Creswell’s (2007) negative case
analysis or exception. The cemetery has now become the focal point, rather than the roadside memorial.

Lisa provided rich insights into the role of the memorial and the cemetery for her and her family. Interestingly, however, most of her comments related to her son’s mates and their need for the memorial, rather than her own need.

Emma

Emma read about my research in her local newspaper, and made contact with me via email. Our interview was conducted over the telephone, in October 2013. Emma was the youngest participant in this project, being just twenty years old; her loss was likewise the most recent—only five months had passed since her friend’s death. As per the ethical guidelines discussed above, we established that she was free to discontinue the interview if it became unduly distressing and even withdraw from the research if needed. Nevertheless, Emma was very keen to be involved. Emma’s nineteen-year-old girlfriend had been killed in a single car crash, involving a kangaroo, over 470 kilometres from the family home, as her friend had moved away for university. For this reason, the roadside memorial was constructed by her friend’s new university peers, not the family members. Emma, at the time of our interview, had only been to visit the site once, a week after the crash occurred. This was to attend the funeral. Her friend’s favourite colour was purple, so the site was decorated with a number of purple trinkets, purple ribbons and purple flowers. The cross to come was likewise to be painted purple. Emma explained that it was the new university friends who were responsible for building the memorial as her friend’s family were so far away and were taking their daughter’s death “very hard”.

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For Emma, visiting the actual site and having the opportunity to try and piece the details together and “make sense of” the crash has been really helpful. She commented:

... I found it very comforting... being able to go there and piece it all together in my own mind was really helpful for me.

Emma had also visited the cemetery, where her friend’s ashes are interred, and her responses to questions about this experience echo a number of other participants in this study. She related how:

That was sort of different for me, I guess because it’s not like—she got cremated so her ashes are there but that’s not—I don’t feel like that’s her there, if that makes sense... That’s sort of just a symbol of her, so I don't have—I don't feel as connected to that spot as I do to the roadside one.

As will be discussed in the coming chapters, the cemetery holds little appeal for many bereaved people, especially with the changes in burial practices and the increasing rate of cremation. Perhaps this is a reason why the site of death—in this case the roadside memorial—is becoming a focal point for many (Kennerly, 2002).

Finally, Emma discussed at length her thoughts on standardised memorial posts replacing personalised sites. In summary, she commented:

I think that if there was just a... sort of, for example, the Tasmania one with the black with the red cross that sort of dehumanizes the whole situation... If it was just a black post, I don’t think I would want to visit that spot because that does take away a lot of the emotion that comes with it and, yeah, I wouldn’t want it to be—something that, that signifies her and her entire life by just a black pole... if it was just a black post it would continue to be depressing but being able to individualise them I think it does make it special.

Meg

Meg was recruited after hearing one of the radio interviews aired on her local station. She emailed me with some photographs of her roadside memorial, erected for a female
friend who had been struck and killed while walking along the road one evening. Our interview, over the telephone, was held in November 2013. At the time of the interview, Meg was in her fifties; her friend was aged thirty-two, and the death had occurred two years ago. The original cross was built by the partner of her friend; it was hit by another car and destroyed so Meg and her partner then placed a second, larger cross further along the road. For Meg, this roadside memorial represents a place she can go to, to talk to her friend, to tell her what’s going on, to feel her and be close to her. She commented that:

[I] just put some flowers there, make sure everything’s alright. Tell her what’s going on.

One of the issues that Meg, along with others in this study, is convinced about is the role that roadside memorials can play in promoting safer driver behaviour. As she emphasised:

I think that they’re an excellent reminder of issues that happen on the road. I think that they’re far more powerful than any advertising on television. I think people turn off you know, a good ad. When I said good ad, I mean an effective ad . . . But every time I go past a roadside memorial, I know someone real, who’s really lost their life there, and that we all have to be mindful.

Kate

Kate, aged fifty-nine, was the second last participant interviewed for this research, recruited via word of mouth. Our interview was held in her home in November 2013. Along with Molly and Dianne, Kate’s story is a little different in that the site of her mother’s death is not marked with a recognisable or large memorial. Rather, a single rose marks the spot where her seventy-six year old mother died four years ago in a head-on collision, just fifteen kilometres from home. The reason for this, explained Kate, is
that her father is a very private man and was against such a public expression of his private grief. The family discussed placing a cross at the site:

“Well, how about we make a cross and we put it at the side of the road?” And Dad said, “Oh, no. I don’t want to do that.” So obviously, that was where it dropped. He’s a very private man. He doesn’t share his thoughts and emotions easily. I think he thought it was a bit too public a thing . . . And I do know that it was months afterwards he got—it was quite a while afterwards—he got my brother to take him out to where it was. He didn’t wanna go before that . . .

Kate, however, wanted and needed to mark the site by the roadside and expressed her reasons thus:

. . . every anniversary I go and place a rose at the site with a note from my brother, my sister, and myself. Just sort of—yeah, I guess it’s just—I mean, it’s not <chuckles>—obviously, she’s not gonna see it. I guess it’s just to—yeah, it’s sort of a way of not losing her, I guess, like keeping her close, acknowledging how important she was to us, that we miss her.

Her father goes to the cemetery each week after church to tend the plot where the ashes are interred; Kate however has only been there a couple of time as it is at the roadside that she feels the most comfort and connection to her mother. She stated:

I’ve only done that [gone to the cemetery] a couple of times. I think I kind of identify more with where she actually died as to where her ashes are, which is a bit strange really. I did go down there one day when I was feeling really—like down to the cemetery and just sort of told her I wish she were still here . . . I don’t know. It sounds crazy but it’s not really—yeah, the life isn’t there . . . Whereas the point where she died is where she lost her life . . . [For] Dad—I think the cemetery is where his connection is because that’s where he goes . . . In one sense, probably for self-preservation really because I don’t—he couldn’t cope, I don’t think, with thinking too much about where she actually died and how. But, yeah, certainly for me and, and I suspect, my brother—I’m not quite sure about my sister—I think the road, like where she actually died is the strongest connection.

She continued, explaining that visiting the site is a place where she can pray and talk to her mother, gaining some comfort and solace when she is feeling down. Kate’s story extends the definition of “roadside memorial” and highlights that a roadside memorial
can be as simple as a single flower; it is the significance attached to the actual place that marks it as sacred or set apart for the grieving person. Her mother’s name was Rose, so for Kate the act of placing a symbolic rose at the place of death is laden with emotion and significance for her. The uniqueness and individuality of roadside memorials becomes apparent with each experience and story told.

Rebecca

The final interview participant was Rebecca. Her involvement came about through a second example of the snowball method as her father, Allan, was also a participant. He emailed me some months after our interview, indicating that his daughter may be willing to be included in the research. I was keen to hear her story, as I was curious to compare the two accounts—one a father and one a sister—and their differing reactions to the same roadside memorial and its role in their grief. In this way, Rebecca joined the study, and enabled a rich comparison between her father’s story and her own. Rebecca and I exchanged a few text messages and arranged a face-to-face interview in her home, in May 2014. At the time of the interview Rebecca was aged thirty-one, and seven years had elapsed since the death of her then nineteen-year-old sister, only two kilometres from home. The cross for her sister was originally put up by the boyfriend, and as Rebecca noted if he had not done it then she and her two other sisters would have done so. She would never have allowed the site to go unmarked. In the months and years that followed, Rebecca commented that going to the site brought her a sense of calmness and peace:

*I didn’t actually mind going up there. Dad found it very difficult. And towards the end I would go up with dad. I quite liked being there . . . Because I guess it’s where Mia last was . . . I felt quite calm there, which is odd because the accident, and I still can’t deal*
Because the site of the crash was on such a busy highway, in a dangerous place to stop and to visit, a bench with a plaque was placed at a local headland, overlooking the ocean. It is there that Rebecca also likes to go and remember her sister.

As her father had explained to me in our interview, the roadside memorial had to be moved temporarily for major roadworks, and Rebecca expressed how traumatic this was, and is, for her:

So, dad and I took it out. We got this cute note from whoever runs the road works, saying that it would be excavated out because that was the smallest tool that they had to get it out. (Due to an act of vandalism—where the cross had been removed and tossed over the edge of the road—the cross had been concreted into the ground, hence the need for an excavator). <laughs> Yeah. Dad said, “We’re happy to go up and take it out.” And they said, “That’s difficult because you’re on land and if something happens then we’re liable.” So we kind of had these few hours on a Sunday where we were allowed to go up and do it, so dad and I did it . . . We’d planted plants around it, too, so we got those all out. That was sad, and I didn’t realise, that really affected me, getting, moving the cross. I don’t know why, but that was sad. That was hard to do. Dad and I did that together...

Rebecca then described how the actual hillside and road where her sister died is being removed, and the angst this is causing her. Rebecca’s comments reiterate the importance of place, and the actual place of death, being so significant, and therefore the importance of marking the site with a roadside memorial. Rebecca explained that she struggled with the concept of the actual hill and road no longer existing, and how that affected her grief and ability to process such loss. Adding to this is the dilemma of what to do with the original cross when the roadworks are completed—should it be reinstated or not? The family were undecided at the time of interview. Rebecca herself said:
I don’t think I want it back anymore . . . It is interesting. And I often talk to random people about it, too, just to get their opinion. Some say, without question, it should go back up . . . Some definitely say, without question, it needs to go back up. Others say it’s been long enough, there’s no need for it to go back up—which I find hard to accept, but I’m not going to . . . it’s their opinion . . . when anyone talks to me about roadside memorials, I just think, until it’s your sister or brother or son or daughter, then come talk to me. Like, you can say whatever you want but until that’s your person, don’t bother trying to argue with me . . . Just don’t do it. But that’s fine, because everyone has got their opinion, and whether they tell me or not, they’re still going to have an opinion. And then some have said that, but then said “but obviously it’s your choice, it’s your sister . . . your parent’s daughter, it’s up to you guys—whatever you guys want.”

As a side note, the cross has now been reinstated upon completion of the new highway. Perhaps one of the most interesting and illuminating insights into roadside memorials came for me during the final stage of this interview with Rebecca. She mentioned something that no one else had, nor had I read about it in the literature, namely the fact that her sister would have wanted such a memorial established; that it would have been something she was pleased to see, and happy to be remembered by people in this way. This will be explained more fully in Chapter Nine. Rebecca, along with the other participants, thus had a wealth of richness to add to my understandings of the role of roadside memorials in the journey of grief.

**Motivations to participate**

Before concluding this chapter that has introduced the research participants, I record below some of the reasons given by participants as their motivation to be involved in the study and volunteering to be interviewed about such a sensitive and private subject. Each participant was asked this question near the beginning of the interview and a number of themes arose from this exploration. Most had a number of reasons why they had volunteered to be a part of the study. These will now be discussed.
To add to the debate, to raise community awareness, and to contribute to policy

These points were mentioned by the nine of the participants—a desire to share their story in order to add to the debate and to help others understand the importance of roadside memorials; to bring the issue of roadside memorials and the central role they play into the public’s awareness and to contribute to policy. The following comments capture this motivation:

Oh, because . . . I think it’s a topic that should be, you know, further explored and I do think there needs to be good policy on it. And I think any research on bereavement is useful as well. ‘Cause I think it’s such a silent topic . . . It’s a bit of a controversial issue . . . ‘Cause we’ve had some very controversial stuff happen in xxxx, for example, where roadside memorials have been taken down. And then they started policing it—well, not policing it but developing policy that’s very constraining as well that I think has been the outcome there. I think people who have roadside memorials put in place should really be speaking out so that other people can hear what they’ve got to say. (Jill)

Oh, look, I think any sort of investigation or inquiry that may result in some sort of formalisation of what we see out on roads and highways I think will be a good thing, I’ve always supported roadside memorials, and crosses, and marks where people have deceased and that’s probably the reason that I participated. I genuinely believe that it does help the grieving relatives that are left behind. (Fred)

You know, I went through a little bit of—of that time when I went to put it up and I asked for permission and then it was, it sort of sounded like I was not going to be able to get it. And I think I just recall that—you know—the moment, and I thought, “Oh people really don’t understand the ins and outs about all of this.” (Lisa)

The above comments demonstrate the altruistic desire of the participants to make a difference, to bring about social change and influence policy covering roadside memorials. Their private, intrapersonal grief has widened to a broader systemic interplay including others; a social change role has developed. This highlights the theoretical perspective of critical social work that underpins this research—a consideration of the micro-meso-macro, the personal and the political, and a desire to enact change at both personal and societal levels.
The topic was seen as a worthy one, which resonated with them

Three of the fourteen participants described how the media releases or flyers had “jumped out at them”, almost beckoning them to become involved in what they saw as a worthy topic. They felt a connection to the area under investigation and a desire to contribute to the research. The following comments illustrate this well:

I saw your ad, it kind of reached out and touched me and I thought, well . . . [and] I believe it’s a worthy topic. (Trevor)

Well I saw your sign in the shop window in xxxx. And I guess, well obviously it jumped out at me because we were in that situation . . . (Dianne)

Well, reading the article, it obviously caught my, you know, interest. (Lisa)

A desire to help in the research process

Interestingly, four of the participants were keen to be involved to “help my cause”. They reported feeling that it was:

I believe it’s a nice thing for me to do to help your cause, which is a great cause . . . (Trevor)

Because I see these memorials on the side of the road all the time and it wasn’t until it happened to me that I actually realised the importance of them. So I thought, oh, well, I can help you out because now I have this real connection, an emotional connection, I guess, with them. (Emma)

I think that my approach to it [the roadside memorial] is possibly—I mean I haven’t conducted the research or interviews that you have, but I think that my approach to what I wanted is possibly different to some . . . So I probably wanted to share mine as maybe a different . . . Like as I said I’m presuming or guessing that some of the interviews that you’re doing are people who’ve made—like the ones that you see—the big ones and the flowers . . . And ours is so different that I thought well that would give you a different . . . perspective. (Dianne)
Because I can and I guess you have a very limited group of people that are related to the people in roadside memorials. So I’m one of those people, so I thought it’s only right that I [do]. (Rebecca)

**As a form of self-help**

As discussed in Chapter Six, it was emphasised to the participants that the purpose of the interviews was purely for research, not for therapeutic means. Nevertheless, three of the participants identified that they hoped to gain a measure of help or positivity for themselves through talking about their experiences. The following comments exemplify this:

... in the back of my mind I hoped and believed I would get some sort of positivity and help out of this topic. (Trevor)

Because I do like to talk about my son. I guess the biggest fear is that these children you loved so much and they offered so much and you’re just fearful that, one day they may just slip from people’s minds. So, yeah. (Rhonda)

... it’s probably good for me to talk about it too. (Rebecca)

**Helping a fellow student**

Two of the participants stated that, being fellow students (or past students), they had been willing to be involved as they were empathetic to the challenges of undertaking research and recruiting participants:

... because you’re a fellow student. <laughs> That’s another reason and we should help each other do our research. (Jill)

‘Cause I’ve got a doctorate myself, I’ve been through the process.<laughs> I like to know why and sort of how and work through issues, and I’m writing a book on this [his roadside memorial] ... (Allan)
These responses show the varied reasons why the participants agreed to be included in this study. As Sprague (2005) noted, seeking the experiences and opinions of those affected by major life experiences is an empowering outcome of involvement in research and gives a voice to those who may not have had an opportunity to be heard in the past. The AASW Code of Ethics (2010), as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, ethically obliges me as the researcher to ensure that these voices are heard.

These, then, are the people who have informed this research project, along with their motivations to participate. Each has a unique story to tell and distinctive experience to share, adding to the richness and complexity of the issue under consideration. By utilising phenomenological research methodology a sense of the participants lived experience and personal reality has been achieved, that allows for meaningful and rewarding research to be undertaken. In the following chapters—Nine, Ten and Eleven—I present the analytical interpretation of the interview findings, exploring the codes, categories and core themes that were generated from the interview data.
CHAPTER NINE: STORIES FROM THE ROADSIDE

Obviously, the power of roadside memorials derives from the fact that they remind us of our mortality—and, perhaps more significantly, of the mortality of those we love. Roadside memorials are so effective at this, because they confront us with the reality of death as an actual event that arrives for a particular person, at a particular place, at a particular time (Nance, 2004).

In the previous chapter I introduced the fourteen participants who were interviewed, giving a brief overview of their stories and lived experiences. In the following three chapters, I turn to a more in-depth analysis and examination of these interviews. Nine of the fourteen interviews were conducted over the telephone, the remaining five interviews were face-to-face, in the participants’ homes. The length of the interviews ranged from fifty minutes to seventy-five minutes. The interviews took place between May, 2013 and May, 2014.

The process of analysing the interviews encompassed both an analysis within each interview as well as across all the interviews. As discussed in Chapter Six, NVivo software was utilised to a degree, with care taken to ensure that fragmentation of the interviews did not occur or that the uniqueness of the participants’ personhood was not lost in the process. Following Saldaña’s (2013) recommendations, a mix of manual and computer assisted analysis (NVivo) was used for coding and categorising the rich information arising through the interview process. Through a careful process of listening and re-listening to each interview, and reading and re-reading each transcript many times, forty-eight initial codes were identified (again, see Appendix Fifteen). These were chosen on the basis of the frequency participants mentioned them and the emphasis and significance attached to them. These forty-eight codes were then reduced to ten categories. Seeking out the linkages and similarities between codes achieved this, and
codes that were related to each other were merged and grouped accordingly. The ten categories arrived at through this analytical process are listed below:

1. Crash site is significant, spiritually and emotionally
2. A spiritual connection exists at the site of death
3. The changing role of cemeteries
4. Roadside memorials provide great solace and comfort
5. Roadside memorials are often initiated by friends, not family
6. Proximity to home is a factor in the building and maintaining of memorials
7. Roadside memorials have a community role
8. Roadside memorials serve as a warning to others
9. Standardised structures would not suffice
10. Roadside memorials provide a place to communicate, to have continuing bonds

From these ten categories, four major themes and key findings have been identified, along with five minor themes. The criteria used to differentiate between the major and minor themes centred upon the number of participants who raised the issue, the frequency with which participants referred to the topic, the passion with which it was discussed, and the overall sense that it was a central issue for the majority of participants. The minor themes were not mentioned by all of the participants nor with the same passion and frequency as the major themes. They are still noteworthy as all voices are important to hear and acknowledge in hermeneutic phenomenological research. Individual experience has weight and significance, and it is important to listen to—and learn from—all who are willing to share their stories. Those themes classified as minor are likewise relevant for future research.
The four major themes are as follows:

**Theme One:** Crash site is significant

Within this first theme, a further five subthemes emerged as it became apparent that a number of components, and a range of nuances and meanings, comprised this overarching theme. These components include: a spiritual connection exists at the site of death; the roadside memorial is a place to communicate, to have continuing bonds with the deceased and to aid in preserving the memory of the deceased; roadside memorials provide great solace and comfort; roadside memorials have a community role and lastly the belief that cemeteries are becoming less relevant, due to changes in burials and an increase in cremation. The five subthemes illuminate *why* the place where the crash occurred—regardless if the loved died there or elsewhere—is so significant.

**Theme Two:** The importance of personalising the site

**Theme Three:** Proximity to home

**Theme Four:** Roadside memorials serve as a warning to others

In addition to these four major or principal themes that emerged across all the interviews, another five minor or secondary themes were generated from this study. They include: empathy and connectedness with others’ roadside memorials; a belief that they will see their loved one again; a belief that something positive has been gained through the tragedy; roadside memorials are often initiated by friends, not family and lastly, tensions or differences between generations or other family members.
Chapter Nine and Ten address the four major themes, while Chapter Eleven explores the five minor themes. Discussion of the literature supporting or challenging the findings of this study follows immediately after discussion of the themes in each chapter. These chapters will show how the themes and findings relate to the initial lines of inquiry and research aims that were introduced in Chapter One.

**Theme One: Crash site is significant**

For twelve of the participants the crash site was also the place of death; for two others—Trevor and Fred—their loved ones died later as a result of their injuries. The site of the crash is still pivotal for these men and throughout the interviews all but one of the participants expressed that this actual site was very significant. Cathy was the exception, and acknowledged that while the place was not significant for her personally, she was aware that it was meaningful for her son’s partner, their children and his mates. The importance of this place—regardless of where the actual death occurred—emerged strongly as a central theme in this research. The following quote from Fred illustrates the importance of marking the actual site of the crash:

> We sort of see that as the last place he was alive. And it’s sort of become . . . like a bit of a shrine, every time we go there, we sort of make that link to when he was still with us . . . it worked for us in the sense that, as I say, every time we go there, you know, we stand there and think well, this is the last place that, you know, he was alive.

> We visit it on regular occasions. I’d say probably three or four times a year . . . Look, I suppose what it really means, you know, I mean, whenever I’m there I think this is the last place on this earth that he was alive. And from there he was put on a helicopter and flown away to a hospital but died on route. So I guess that’s what I think. Yeah, it’s a place where he left this life. (Fred)

Like Fred, Trevor pointed out that his partner did not die at the scene of the crash, but nearly a week later in hospital. He explained it this way:
... her spirit would have left her body when the machine was turned off in xxxx Hospital on 10th January... But, for me, she didn’t die at the roadside she died in hospital so there is no significance there for her passing there. She struggled with severe head injuries and internal injuries for over a week before she decided to shuffle on to some other place; not calling it heaven, not calling it hell. Just wherever her energies went to. (Trevor)

Trevor originally stated that the roadside site held no significance for him, yet he does return there from time to time to talk to her, to feel her presence, to seek solace. He said:

*But yeah it’s just you know I believe it’s an important thing to have... [on the last visit]*
I actually took a spray can and just did a few xes and zeros like kisses and crosses, and hugs... *had a bottle of beer and slept by the memorial in the night time, had a cry.* Yeah. (Trevor)

Trevor’s story, although different, contains the same emphasis on the importance of place. The parents of Trevor’s partner took their daughter’s body back to the United Kingdom, so for Trevor, there is no gravesite or other place to visit. The roadside memorial, built by his friend, remains pivotal in his grieving:

*It’s the only thing, literally. I have photos. Yeah, yeah, it’s the only thing really. You have scars on your body and various other things. But, yes, there is no actual gravesite, no headstone, um which I think people need to have to grieve... the roadside memorial gives a... feeling of closeness... You just get drawn back to the place where you feel you should go and say hey, even though it does also signify the site of an horrific car accident...* (Trevor)

Fred and Trevor’s experiences supports research by Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998), who found that shrines are often built at the last place of consciousness, not necessarily the place of death. They found that once the critically injured victim is in an ambulance or on the way to hospital, the family or friends may feel they are unable to do anything more, and this can lead to blame and guilt, a belief of having failed them or having not been there for them. They noted that, “Survivors face the guilt that they were not in attendance at the death, that the victims were ripped and not eased from this
world . . . [coupled with] an intense sense of guilt that the mourner was unable to prevent the victim’s death” (1998, p. 159, 163).

Comments from the other twelve participants, whose loved ones did die at the scene of the crash, continue to emphasise this theme of the importance of place. Emma said:

*I found it helpful to go there because especially being so far away, I didn’t know the area that it was in so I didn’t know how it happened and it was helpful for me to piece things together and to—it’s a really special place for me now because that’s where she last was and that’s . . . yeah, where she took her last breath so that’s very important for me.* (Emma)

Rhonda likewise reiterated the importance of marking the place, the exact spot where her son died:

*I think it [building the roadside memorial] was just a statement to say, this is where we lost you . . . you . . . will always be in our memory when we go past you.* (Rhonda)

Several other participants—for example Allan, Linda and Jill—referred to the fact that the place of death is also significant for others in the community. Jill commented:

*I think regardless of whether it [the roadside memorial] was there, every time I drove past that place, it’s a significant place. But regardless, I would always think about him. So the thing is that you always think about your children anyway, every day. It doesn’t matter if they’re alive or dead. You think about your children every day. I think most parents do that . . . I think regardless of whether it was there I think it would be significant anyway but I think that fact that it’s there and other people go there as well and the fact that we’ve made it nice—and it has meaning to other people, it has more meaning to us, if you get what I mean?* (Jill)

On the other hand, Cathy had no personal attachment to the site of her son’s fatal motorcycle crash. As previously mentioned, Cathy was the only participant who has never visited the actual site of death, or the memorial established for her son. Despite this, she does acknowledge that for others it can be important. Cathy recognised that:

*I think it’s a place that people do go and visit because it’s the last place their loved one was on the earth.* (Cathy)
Molly and Kate differ from the other participants because neither of them have actual memorials marking the place of their loved ones’ deaths. Despite this, they both still feel a connection with the site, and attribute it with a sense of sacredness and specialness. As Molly explained, her brother’s car crashed into a paddock that has now become an orchard. Despite the passing of twenty years, the place of her brother’s death remains laden with meaning and significance. She said:

_The paddock where his car was found become an orchard and every now and then it sort of blooms up and it’s really nice but the majority of the time it’s just really old raggedy brambles . . . [I] go down there every now and then, just have a look . . . and then I might say hello . . . as I drive past . . . I’ll sort of have a look and sometimes I think, “Oh that paddock’s horrible. I wish it would bloom flowers or they’d plant something else there.”_ (Molly)

Similarly, Kate expressed that even though her father requested no permanent memorial, the place of her mother’s death remains a very special site for her. She noted:

_I mean, in a sense, it is a memorial. It’s just not marked as such, yeah . . . we pass it every time we go anywhere . . . [and] you always think, “Ah, that’s where Mum died.”_ (Kate)

Dianne likewise remarked that having the exact location of her husband’s death marked was very important—for herself but also for their children, to ensure that the precise spot would not become forgotten over time:

_But the actual spot—I couldn’t imagine going back at a later time and saying to the kids, oh, you know, it was around here somewhere or—Do you know like, “I think it was kind of here,” or, “the accident happened here,” and I think he landed—so I don’t have to do that . . . It’s literally right where he landed and where he was. So they know that, I know that . . . And that’s all that matters . . . So it marks a spot for us and for anybody who knew him . . .

So we planted a tree . . . And we brought a rock from our five acres, from our block—I should say a boulder, ‘cos it’s big . . . And that was probably done quite quickly. I think the day after the accident we put balloons and marked the spot . . . So we—the spot was marked with a stick which I think his mates—one of his mates did straight away._ (Dianne)
As Dianne mentioned, the site was marked “straight away”, reiterating research by Zimmerman (1995) who found that most roadside memorials are erected within seven days of the death. Another participant (Lisa) also mentioned this, saying that her son’s friends constructed the memorial immediately, and perhaps the site served a purpose as a place to go in that in-between time before the funeral. She felt it gave her son’s mates something to do right away, before the funeral. Reid and Reid, (2001, p. 351) capture the immediacy mentioned by Lisa, noting that “the purpose of the site may serve as an immediate place for remembering the deceased before they are buried in the cemetery.” This reinforces Leimer’s (1998b) observation that building a roadside memorial right away gives the shocked and bewildered mourners something to do, a way to act quickly and directly to something that is otherwise totally out of their control. The immediacy of friends gathering at the site of fatal crashes is likewise documented by others such as Bell et al. (2015) and Gibson (2011).

Perhaps the importance of place is most clearly shown when the roadside memorial has to be moved. Allan’s retelling of his experience and feelings about the exact location of death being important sheds great insight into this discussion. At the time of interview, Allan’s daughter’s roadside memorial was about to be temporarily removed due to major roadworks. So major, in fact, that when it came time to replace the memorial Allan was aware that it would be in a slightly different location, as the actual hillside would be removed and the road realigned. He explained it this way:

*I mean, it’s there; you can see the scars of where the fire was. The road is still damaged. We’ve put some bushes around it. You’d probably be—you hardly see it now because it’s got the barricades, and they’re about to put an expressway over it. And I might feel different about it then when it’s not in exactly the same place.* (Allan)
Some weeks after our interview, I received an email from Allan, explaining that the memorial had now been removed and that “It has been interesting since the cross went. Quite an empty feeling driving past—only the area of melted road left now.” He had not expected this feeling, it was almost another loss—the loss of his “ritual” of waving to her each time he passed the cross. As noted by Bell et al. (2015, p. 383), “memorials can become sanctified to such a degree that their loss is almost as tragic for the survivor as the death itself.” Allan’s comments clearly echo this.

The removal of her sister’s roadside memorial presented an existential crisis for Rebecca—if the physical place does not exist anymore, did it even happen? Rebecca’s experience and feelings about the importance of the exact location are similar to her father Allan’s:

The other thing that, now they’re starting to take away, like, the hill’s changed and things are moving back. That’s also quite upsetting, which I didn’t know I’d have a problem with, because it’s almost like, now the spot and the road where Mia died don’t exist. The cross doesn’t exist. She never existed, in my head. I know it’s not true, but I just find, like, memories start to fade and, yeah, you try and hold on to everything and . . . I used to picture her on the Sunday afternoon driving round the hill, as I did, losing control. I used to just imagine it. And even though it was horrific, I liked it, because I was thinking of her, and kind of putting myself in the situation, thinking what she last thought and it made me feel close. And then now that spot, the road’s moving, and I no longer go around that corner . . . Yeah, so it’s weird—that spot no longer existing . . . Yeah, it just not—Now things aren’t the same. It’s changed . . . But as long as we still have that cross, now dad’s starting to talk about—he’s talking to people about what we should do after the road works are completed. And he’s gone from—“it definitely goes back” to—“I don’t think I want it back anymore” and now we’re sitting at different wave lengths on that . . .

I think it will go back up. But it will be weird because it won’t be in the spot, because the spot no longer exists or the spot won’t exist so it still won’t be the same . . . The road is going to be all different. Literally where she died is gone . . . Like she didn’t die because it doesn’t exist where she died . . . it’s literally not there, so logistically the cross would be—I don’t even know the road—what’s it going to end up like, I don’t know where it could or couldn’t go back. Maybe it goes up on the headland next to the chair which is coincidentally next to the cemetery, I don’t know. We’ll cross that bridge, I think we’re another one or two years off even making that decision, so we’re not losing too much sleep over it. (Rebecca)
Rebecca goes on to explain her thoughts about why it is meaningful for her to have the spot marked, expressing that:

There’s no way we would have just left it. Another fellow who died [nearby], his family or friends never put up a memorial. And I still go past that and feel sadness . . . because there’s just nothing there. It’s like nothing happened, like he was there, gone, and then nothing . . . And I didn’t know him . . . I still have a little thought for his family when I go past there. But I think it’s sad that there’s just not something—I don’t know why, I haven’t figured out why that is, but I just feel sad. (Rebecca)

She also talked at some length about the whole process of removing her sister’s roadside memorial, and the distressing effect this had on her, despite the compassionate and empathic treatment they received from the roadwork company and the RMS. Her father Allan likewise commented on and praised the efforts of the RMS and road builders, noting their respect and compassion. Dianne, who told how her memorial had been accidently struck by the council mower—who promptly contacted her to assure her it was okay and more care would be taken in the future—echoes this experience.

Like Allan and Rebecca, Rhonda mentioned that her son’s cross may also need to be removed one day to make way for major roadworks, hence the exact spot may no longer be able to be marked with their memorial:

. . . in a few years’ time . . . they are looking at doing up the xxxx Highway. If they do the xxxx Highway up and duplicate it, that will take our memorial away. I have looked in yyyy where there’s been memorials on roads and they’ve changed them and they have moved the memorial back a little bit but still left it there. And I have wondered whether that same consideration would be done to those that are already there on the road . . . So yes, that would be something that if they did so, that would probably be quite hard to sort of do . . . I think I’d still sort of try and put my own up somewhere even if I came to an agreement with the property that was on the edge of the road. <laughs> I’d ask the person if I could put it on the fence line. I don’t know why, I think it’s just ‘cause as I . . . go past, I can sort of say hello and let him know that he’s still there in the heart even though he probably knows more than I do. (Rhonda)

These experiences are likewise referred to in the literature (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Weisser, 2004; Zimmerman, 1995, 1997). Weisser (2004, 3.3.1) noted, for example, that
“Roadway improvements can cause the removal of micro sacred sites, especially if these changes drastically alter the roadway.” To assist families in this situation, the new VicRoads Roadside Memorial Policy (August 2015) aims to contact families “to make arrangements for their [memorials] storage, protection or relocation in accordance with family wishes” if roadworks require the temporary removal of such memorials.

The above comments by participants clearly illustrate the importance of place in their individual journeys of grief and bereavement. Other research has also highlighted the importance of place in understanding the phenomenon of roadside memorials (Clark, 2007; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Clark & Tidswell, 2010; Collins & Rhine, 2003; Daum, 2012; Doss, 2006; Everett, 2000, 2002; Klaassens et al., 2009; MacConville & McQuillan, 2009, 2010; McNearney, 2006; Nešporová & Stahl, 2014; Smith, 1999, 2003; Wagner, 2008; Weir, 2002; Weisser, 2004; Wood, 2009). Roadside memorials are important because they mark the place where the loved one was last alive, rather than where they had died (Klaassens, 2011). The focus at these memorials centres on the life, not the death. This is in contrast to cemeteries, where the mortal remains may be laid to rest, and where death is the overriding focus. Wagner (2008, p. 1) referred to such a place as being the “nexus of memory, space and death”, and therefore it is a significant and emotionally-laden location. Thus, roadside memorials have many roles, and one of the major roles is to mark a place; to show that that particular spot has meaning, relevance, and a sense of sacredness for the ones left behind (Everett, 2002).

**A spiritual connection exists at the crash site or site of death**

The first subtheme within the major theme of importance of place is that of a spiritual connection existing at the crash site or site of death. Reiterating the discussion in the
literature review in Chapter Four, many of the roadside memorials analysed in this study are not religious at all, with teddy bears, football jerseys, car parts, alcohol and new age symbols left as mementos rather than crosses or other religious objects. Despite the lack of traditional church affiliation for a number of the participants, ten people reported that they nevertheless felt a spiritual connection with their loved one by the roadside.

Dianne, Kelly and Meg expressed this feeling of spiritual connection in various ways:

Yeah . . . that’s kind of where his soul is, where he left . . . kinda where his soul, his spirit left his body. (Dianne)

It’s hard to explain . . . You can feel them, you can feel them, and that’s really important . . . The tree is like God to them [the siblings], this is our place to worship, this is our place where we go to see Annie, and be with Annie, and feel Annie. (Kelly)

Meg explained that for her, the roadside memorial was a place to be spiritually close with her friend, to talk to her and to tell her “what’s going on” . . .

I talk to her there. I believe that the spirit lives on . . . even though I can’t see a physical body, that person’s spirit knows that we’re there with them and they’re with us . . . Because I believe, you know, I totally believe that while ever we speak about people like this, their spirit . . . It’s a personal thing. It’s a new sort of thing for me really because I’ve always been a bit scared of dying. I don’t know if it’s because I’m getting older and when you get older, you sort of change your thoughts about these things. I’m not so scared anymore. So I believe that the spirit lives on. I’m not talking from a Christian’s perspective at all. So none of us really know so I believe that that makes the person—If it’s a spirit, it’s never gone. So therefore, even though I can’t see a physical body, that person’s spirit knows that we’re there with them and they’re with us. So you sort of feel this. (Meg)

Lisa spoke of her son’s friends having a connection with him at the site of death, especially in the early days before the funeral was held:

. . . that’s where they feel close. That’s where, they haven’t been able to go anywhere or do anything else but go there ‘cause that was the last place that he was . . . They had a shrine, I guess, for Cody, at that site . . . I think they moved on to the cemetery later . . . I think they—yeah just felt a connection [at the site] until he was buried . . . it’s because they’ve got nowhere else to grieve. They haven’t had a funeral. They haven’t had like a—there hasn’t been a burial and I guess, if someone’s cremated then
they’re waiting for the funeral. But until then, there is nowhere else. It’s what I feel, I think that that’s what it feels like—they want to be where the person was when they passed. In regards to a vehicle accident—I guess when someone’s died in the hospital, people, if they’re close enough, they want to be there, too. And then when they’ve passed, then they move on. But it just feels a bit different, with the road. (Lisa)

Kate had likewise mentioned that it is the site of her mother’s death that elicits the strongest connection for her and her siblings, although not for her father. In a slightly different way, Cathy mentioned that:

. . . when I pass things—a cross on the road—I always say a prayer for the family. It’s just a thing I do. I am a church person, and when I pass I always think about the parents, when I pass, or their friends and everything, and it’s a good opportunity just to offer up a little prayer. (Cathy)

A wealth of literature exists documenting that many bereaved people feel a spiritual connection with their loved one at the actual site of death, rather than at the cemetery where the mortal remains lie (e.g. Collins & Rhine, 2003; Smith, 1999; Suter, 2010; Weir, 2002; Wood, 2009). Indeed, “despite the secularisation of roadside memorials they remain sacred landscapes . . . and command a certain reverence” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 10). Ten of the participants in this research echo the findings of these earlier studies. They mention that the site is seen as “sacred” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998), holy or “hallowed ground” (Mayo, 1988, p. 63); the last place that their loved was alive, and many hold a belief that the spirit left the body at this place (Reid & Reid, 2001).

A place to communicate, continuing bonds, preserve memory.

The second subtheme to emerge is that roadside memorials provide a place to communicate, to have continuing bonds with the deceased, and to preserve their memory. The lived experiences of the participants in this research demonstrate this role in communication and continuing the bonds with their deceased loved ones. Jill referred
to her son’s memorial being the “linking object” for her and others in their small community:

Do you know it’s actually the linking—it’s the linking object and look, I know I know the theory as well, but it’s the—it comes from continuing the bond. [Authors] . . . talk about different ways that people have linking themselves to the person who died. Yeah, and I guess that’s—our way.

And continually talking about him [is important] because that was the other thing, like, I wanted this stuff to be in people’s faces because I’m damned if anyone’s forgetting my son. (Jill)

Like Jill, Rhonda expressed her fear that people may forget her son over time, and felt that the roadside memorial is one way of ensuring his memory lives on. Rhonda stated:

[If there was no memorial] I would feel I haven’t put that memory of him there. No, that’s not the word. I would feel that I’m not sort of showing that remembrance of him or something. I don’t know what it is—it’s just to sort of say, Alex, you are in our hearts.

I left the permanent texta, so on the back of his cross they [his friends] just write little things. If they’re there and going past, yeah . . . It’s an outlet for them [friends].

I guess it probably comes down to the relationship you had with your child too, as to why you wanna do so much to keep them alive. I mean, he was just such a giving and lovable child and he would come up in a mall and give me a cuddle in front of all his friends, it didn’t embarrass him to say hello to you like that . . . So you sort of—you know they’re around but you just want that touch every now and again, but, which will never be. (Rhonda)

Jill and Rhonda’s fears—that others may forget their sons—is consistent with the literature. Many bereaved people talk about their fears that others will forget the deceased loved one and memorials and other ways are sought to ensure that they are kept alive in people’s memories (Everett, 2002; MacConville & McQuillan, 2010). In this way, roadside memorials “help to keep memories alive and support the memory-making process, they work against the terror of forgetting, and they provide the deceased with social identities in the world of the living” (Nešporová & Stahl, 2014, p. 30).
Kelly was aware how meaningful her daughter’s “Tree” is to the bereaved friends, and how they used it to communicate with her, via letters and cards. She explained it this way:

. . . there’s photos, framed photos put around the base of the tree and there’s lots of letters. People write and put letters at the tree because it’s a form of expressing how they feel and what they miss. Like I read them. I think they feel like they’re leaving her a message . . . [T]he younger generation is just different and they’re better at outpouring their emotion. They’re more open with their feelings than, say, my mum’s generation, which is a good thing because psychologically, that’s probably the better way of handling it and they’ve got somewhere to go and they write the things down which is really important. They put them at the tree, like, when she has a birthday, she gets birthday cards. At Christmas, she got Christmas decorations taken to the tree. Valentine’s Day, she had Valentine’s Day cards . . . We change the candles on certain anniversaries and birthdays and Mother’s Days and we always buy helium balloons and take them up there. (Kelly)

Kelly added: . . . and it makes you feel that she’s still here. (Kelly)

The above comments by Kelly reflects research by Jorgensen-Earp and Lanzilotti (1998, p. 162) who noted, “in our minds, the dead are still tied to earthly time and presumably still care about holidays”, which shows why sites frequently have cards or other decorations and gifts left for special occasions such as birthdays, Christmases, Valentines Days.

Kelly continued describing how the site has a significant role to play in communication and continuing the bonds of love that tie her and her family to her daughter:

Every time I go shopping, I’ll buy flowers or something for the tree. When I’m buying something for the other kids, ’cause I feel like I’m still buying something for her . . . I feel like I’m still parenting her. That’s why, I guess, it’s a huge thing for the family because the kids are like—every time we go past it we say, "Good morning, Annie!" "Say hello to Annie!" The kids, like my two-and-a-half goes, “Morning, Annie” because it’s all about reminding them who she was . . .

[Her friends have] got somewhere to put some things. Like they’re not gonna bring them to me. They’re not gonna put them at the urn here. They’ve got to have
somewhere to put them and that’s where they take them and I’m happy. I’m stoked, because she’s loved and she’s been cared for . . . because they all have a drink and then they bring her one and leave it at the tree.

Yeah ‘cause imagine if that wasn’t there, I’d still look at the tree every day and it would just be naked and you’d be thinking “Oh my God! How unloved is that?” It’s like she just didn’t exist . . . It’s hard to explain. (Kelly)

Kelly’s comment—“I feel like I’m still parenting her” echoes the assertion by Klaassens et al. (2013, p. 145) that “parents continue their role as nurturers” despite the death of their children. Carefully choosing items and caring for a site are all a part of “continuing care” of the deceased (Petersson & Wingren, 2011). “To buy, collect and give things to the deceased reflects a care that continues even after death” noted Petersson (2009, pp. 81–83), and for Kelly, being able to buy her daughter gifts, and take them to the tree, was a very meaningful, symbolic gesture and a part of her dealing with such a loss.

Allan explained how he has a ritual, where he blows the roadside memorial a kiss each morning and says “one day closer” each evening as he drives home from work. This is a powerful example of the role of such memorials in communication and continuing bonds; how significant the roadside memorial is for him; and how he expresses his yearning to be reunited with his daughter. He also added that the memorial plays a role in his daughter’s friends’ grief and their remembrance of her:

But these people wanted to remember, and they had every right to put something there that said tangibly, “We will not forget.” (Allan)

For Lisa, one of the central roles of the roadside memorial for her young son was to ensure that others knew a life had been lost at that spot; to communicate this message to others, as a warning as well as an act of remembrance:
Lisa also spoke of the role it has for her son’s friends in being a place to communicate with him:

. . . all the letters that they left . . . And poems and letters and yes, they were mostly boys, some of the girls did do stuff. I think there was one girl in particular – so she wrote a lot of stuff, she did armbands for them or wristbands that said “RIP Hendo.” But straight away, tokens started piling up around the tree and so did the flowers and band stuff, music stuff, and CDs, and yeah and plaques and stuff that they’d done. (Lisa)

Molly explained that she says hello to her brother sometimes as she drives past, and that a group did meet there on the tenth anniversary:

. . . [I] just drive past every now and then I might say hello . . . We have been there once on the ten year anniversary. My sisters and I met my cousin there and my cousin was there first and the farmer sort of came out and asked what he was doing, why he was hanging around and he just explained about the accident and that me and my sisters were gonna come and just stand there . . . we didn’t stay very long. (Molly)

Kate and Trevor succinctly described the roadside memorials’ role in communication:

I’m here. I miss you. I love you. I wish I could’ve—I wish could’ve done something. (Kate)

I . . . see it fairly regularly. Just give a bit of a shout at it as I [am] driving past, in my mind—“hey girl”—as most people do. (Trevor)

Rebecca offered a unique contribution, demonstrating the role of roadside memorials in preserving memories. She believed her sister would have wanted the memorial; that it would have been her desire to be publicly remembered in this way; that no one would ever forget her or where she died. The roadside memorial is for her, as much as for the family and friends. This is a new insight into the role and meanings of roadside memorials and as such represents an important contribution to the existing knowledge base. Furthermore, it raises an interesting question: how many of us have conversations
about this kind of thing before we die? We may discuss cremation versus burial, or organ
donation (Gibson, 2010; Lock, 2002), or even what sort of funeral we would like, but
never the issue of having a roadside memorial or not in the event of a road fatality.
Rebecca described her thoughts on the issue this way:

Because as I said to you, even though it was traumatic, I still liked it [going to the cross].
I always—The minute Mia died in such—one such a dramatic, such a dramatic way—
such an obscenely graphic and disturbing way, on such, the only place that you have to
drive past, that you can’t take another road, or you can’t, like, that was just her, she
had to just make . . . She wasn’t just going to fade away with cancer or do something,
she was going to go out with a bang, and she did. And she did it to the biggest degree
that she could. And maybe for me, I know that Mia would want that cross there,
because I know she wouldn’t want people forgetting her or thinking that they were,
yeah . . . she always would want, yeah, to have a little spot, have a little pink cross,
have a little thing. She’d never want to just be forgotten. She wasn’t that person, so . .
. Yeah. She definitely would have wanted a cross and a pink one! . . . She was a 19-year-
old girl, too. I mean, the cross is very her. But, yeah, she definitely would want that
cross there, so that comes into my . . . And I think she would have, and maybe that’s
why I like going there, too, because we were looking after it for her. (Rebecca)

Rebecca’s reflections on the meaning of the cross established for her sister, were thus
exceptional and insightful. As a researcher, this was a real “aha moment”, with a totally
unique and surprising insight into the potential roles of roadside memorials. No one else
mentioned what Rebecca did, nor have I found any literature exploring this concept.

The grief literature now talks about the vital role of continuing bonds—that is, keeping
a relationship going with the deceased person—rather than the outdated and unhelpful
notion of closure or severing all ties with the deceased (see, for example, Chan et al.,
2005; Doss, 2006; MacConville, 2006, 2011; Neimeyer et al., 2006; Wagner, 2008; Woo
& Chan, 2010. For a full discussion of continuing bonds, refer to Chapter Three).
Preserving the memory of the loved one, and having a place to communicate and spend
time with them, are equally important. Some may choose to do this at the cemetery,
the columbarium or at some other special place; for others the roadside memorial is the
chosen place. As discussed by Klaassens et al. (2009, p. 188), communication occurs not just between the grieving and the deceased, but with the wider community as well. Roadside memorials fill an important need by assisting this communication, as well as having a role in preserving the memory of the loved one. Continuing bonds, communication and preserving memories are all fulfilled via roadside memorials. The roadside memorial helps to keep people alive socially, included in the land of the living, referred to, by Bailey et al. (2014, p. 72), as “the continuing social presence of the dead.”

**Roadside memorials provide great solace and comfort**

The third subtheme identified is that roadside memorials provide solace and comfort. Even Cathy, who herself does not visit the site, acknowledges it is a source of comfort and plays a key role in her son’s family and friends’ expression of grief. Comments from other participants aptly illustrate this theme of solace and comfort:

*It is a site where you can basically meditate . . . I believe you can go there and you can think. Open up your mind, and thinking is a powerful thing and asking questions and you have to think and just try to work out lots of things. Ask yourself questions—how, lots of how things, how can you improve, how can you do this, what can you take out from a loss of a person.*

*You try to avoid the question why and s**t like that which is one of the most silly questions people ask themselves in a tragedy because there is definitely no answer to that . . . What I get out of it [going to the memorial] is some sort of cathartic thingies—reactions, feelings.* (Trevor)

* . . . for me . . . it’s a very positive thing and it’s a very comforting thing. [And], it’s an important statement of the family. It’s a visible representation of Mia. It’s a tangible expression of Mia. Yeah, that is important . . . that’s an expression of love . . . (Allan)*

*[My husband] goes on the way home from work . . . I like to go late at night when it’s dark, when there’s no one on the road. I sort of like the privacy when I go, or at 5:30 in the morning, I go . . . I like to go on my own . . . and I just go up in my pyjamas. Sometimes, I get out of the car and sometimes I don’t. I just sit there and look and on Sundays . . . if Sunday is really nice and dry, [my husband] and I go up there.*
It’s like, a part of you. You can’t imagine life without it. I’d be devastated if they told us we’d have to pull it down . . . We just love it. I just can’t imagine my life without it. It’d be like her death all over again if I had to get rid of it. It’s all we have. Like we have her urn at home, like her ashes are here and all that sort of things here, but . . . (Kelly)

The following comments by Lisa, Fred and Rebecca demonstrate the nuances and differences in meanings, as well as the commonalities, in the way in which the roadside memorial plays a pivotal role in providing solace and comfort in such dark times. For Lisa, knowing that others went to the memorial for her son was comforting:

I think it helped knowing that there were people there that cared, okay. So I think that—that his death has not gone unnoticed, that people cared and that there was attention to that and that I was able to find someone if I needed. Like in the early stages, you know, like I knew I could go there and there’d be somebody there, I used to think maybe if I go there, Cody would know who would be there to help me. And I couldn’t relate sometimes to the adults around me. I think by being next to the youth I was able to sort of feel closer to him at that time, having that common thing . . . We couldn’t go anywhere else, I think that was important and . . . I think it did help . . . (Lisa)

Fred mentioned that the passing of time has eased his pain, and that the level of comfort the roadside memorial provided in the earlier years has changed over time:

I think it does [help]. It certainly did in the first five or six years. It had more effect on us than it does now. I guess time tends to heal a lot of things. It’s not that we’ve forgotten about anything, but we’re now in a better position to be able to talk about it and deal with it. (Fred)

Rebecca’s comments highlight the paradox of seeking and finding comfort at the place of an horrific crash that claimed the life of her younger sister. Even though she cannot “deal well” with the crash, the site nevertheless provides comfort:

I quite liked being there...<Softly> Because I guess it’s where Mia last was. Yeah, I don’t know, because it was Mia, yeah. Yeah, so I quite liked being there . . . I felt quite calm there, which is odd because the accident, and I still can’t deal well with the accident. That’s where it happened, but I’ve been able to isolate the two I guess.

I felt okay at the cross. I wouldn’t have gone up there had dad not wanted help to do the cross. I think maybe that was half of it, too. I knew I was helping dad because dad couldn’t do it by himself. So I knew I was helping him, so I think that was a big factor of that, which I felt really good about . . . I went up there for dad, but being there, I felt
good being there. Whereas dad felt just quite distressed and sad, I actually felt calm and okay.

I used to feel quite happy going past the cross, and I wonder why it always has to reflect sadness. Like that’s people’s automatic thought . . . and I know for some other people it’s like, “Oh, that’s Mia” . . . It doesn’t have to be sad; it can just be a thought of—like, “Hey, Mia.” Though I do understand where they came from but I don’t know why it automatically has to be a sad thing. (Rebecca)

Emma agreed with Rebecca’s thoughts, saying that, paradoxically, it can be a “nice place” as well as a sad place:

Lots of people think that it’s a really sad place but, yes, it is a sad place but it’s also sort of a nice place as well to go and visit, to remember her . . . I found it very comforting . . . I did sort of reminisce while I was there . . . (Emma)

The following comments from Rhonda and Jill likewise show how the roadside memorial can provide solace and comfort:

It’s just to sort of say, Alex, you are in our hearts. This is one way of sort of saying every year, I go up and I replace—he’s got—it’s blue, so I find blue flowers, whether cornflowers, lavender and I tie them to the cross and then at the base of it, I put two white roses and five red roses because that’s what we put in the coffin with him. My husband and I gave him a white rose each and his brothers gave him a red. So I put them at the base, every year. Even now, years on, <laughs>, I do that every year and replace them.

And then at his first anniversary, we all met there and kind of acknowledged that it was twelve months down the track, yeah. We all came back out there on that morning because we believe it was somewhere around quarter past six in the morning.

We go every year, and it still happens, eleven years down the track. (Rhonda)

Jill continued:

We added to the site . . . because we—my daughter and I and Greg’s girlfriend, we had these big river stones that another one of his friends had given me. We painted them all to capture different parts of what he was like. So, you know, one had a kite flying free and one was a hand and we did different words like “courage” and “strength” . . . But we did all these different rocks and we took them out there . . . I can still go past now and different people will leave different—there’ll be things left out there like on his birthday and stuff like that. People doing special things, because they’re remembering him . . . The kids, they haven’t been here for a while and they come back and they’re remembering him. And that’s a tremend—I think that’s a great source of comfort to see that.
I think the grieving parents and all the people who put up the memorials, there’s no way they’re going to forget. And I think those memorials do carry a lot of significance. And as I said to you, when they did the 60 Minutes thing [television program] I actually wrote in for that as an advocate to have them in place. I do feel quite passionately about it. (Jill)

Kate and Molly’s experiences differ from the other participants in that they do not have actual roadside memorials, nevertheless the site of their loved ones death is still a sacred and meaningful place, and a place where they continue to draw a measure of comfort and solace. Kate explained it this way:

Yeah, and even just sometimes when I’ve been feeling particularly alone or upset. If I’ve been driving past, I’ve just sort of pulled over and not even necessarily got out but just sort of stopped there. Yeah . . . I kind of pray. Yeah, just sort of—well, in a sense, talk to her and wishing—just sort of saying, “Mum, I need you. Why aren’t you here?” Yeah, kind of, like you come to a sort of peace. Yeah, I’ve cried many a time <chuckles> . . . But then, you sort of pull yourself together and go again. And, you know, like—I mean, as time goes on—at first it was really hard, having to—’cause you couldn’t go anywhere without passing there. And it was really hard for a long time. But now, as time goes on—I mean, sometimes even now, I get past it and think, “Oh, I didn’t think,” yeah. (Kate)

Molly, whose brother died over twenty years ago at a time when roadside memorials were less prevalent in Australia (Clark & Franzmann, 2006), described her experiences of the comfort she derives from the site like this:

It’s probably the biggest thing that shaped my whole life into who I am—and I guess it’s comforting to go past the paddock ’cause every now and then I’ll go out of my way just to drive that way and sort of just see it . . . I guess ‘cause then I can really know that he was really real. He wasn’t just a figment of my imagination or someone that I’ve made up all these years. Like even there’s photos and memories but you know, that can fade and you can forget what voices sound like and that. I think sometimes it’s though you grow apart and you can feel all the different emotions and you go, yep he really, really was real and, you know, he really was there and I’m sort of not insane! <laughs>. (Molly)

For many their grief “finds expression and some solace in the erection and maintenance of a memorial at the site of the death” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 16). Further, “It is quite common for groups of friends to gather at memorials in personal vigils to grieve together
and to employ self-designed rituals in the process” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 593). This is likewise a theme echoed in this research, with all of the participants describing how the memorial has—and continues to—provide much solace and comfort.

Further, for six of the participants, the roadside memorial continues to have a central role despite the passing of over ten years. This answers Smith’s (1999, p. 107), question, that is, “if there will be a gradual decline of the practice [visiting] at individual sites after several years, once the memorialisation has served its purpose—in the same way that the number of flowers on a grave decreases over the years?”

**Roadside memorials have a community role**

The fourth subtheme generated from this research is that roadside memorials have an important role to play in local communities. Knowing that other members of the community visit the site, and are reminded of both the deceased and their family, were important for six of the participants interviewed in this study. Ownership of the memorial by the affected community was a common theme. Likewise, people who may not have had close connections with the deceased or the family show respect and care, perhaps honking their horn in solidarity as they pass by. The following quotes exemplify this community role:

*This is a really little community. Xxxx’s a very tiny community. She went to school here and then she went to the high school just the next suburb up. She had to go down this road to get [there]. She worked at the local McDonald’s. She had heaps of friends. She also worked in the canteen at the local football. She was a really good kid. Anyway . . . So it’s not only for us, it’s for the whole community because Annie went to the local high school and worked at the local McDonalds and she had many friends, see? So, they all go there and do things to it, take things to it and drop things off there . . . Yeah, it is a community thing; it’s not just for us. We look at it like that too. It’s not just ours, it’s the community’s and anyone that knew her, goes there. It’s a beautiful place . . . Not only for me but for all the community that knew her. All the kids still come in here;*
her friends still come in here to see us. They go to the tree; we call it The Tree, Annie’s Tree. They go to the tree and they come here and they hang out. (Kelly)

It’s amazing the amount of people that go past and still see it and like it’s—and I think after ten years nearly, it was—it’s starting to rot in the ground a little bit, the bottom of the cross. And people would sort of see me and they go, “Oh look the cross is on a little bit of a slant. Did you know that?” And I’d go yes, I know, so we went up and we took it out, put a stake in there, steel stake, painted it blue, the same colour and put it all back up and everyone was happy! <laughs> And the people driving past that knew him and would sort of see the cross is still there. <laughs> And it’s quite funny to think that it’s not just us that acknowledge it there. And if we’re up there and people go past, it’s quite strange because it’s right on the side of the highway and you come over a hill and so people are sort of travelling to go down the hill. So they’re travelling pretty fast, but if they see us there or anyone there, they slow down as they go past and—or they might just give you a toot of the horn or something to acknowledge that you’re there and they’re thinking of you too . . . Even this long after it, it still happens, yes. So it is nice . . . The whole community cares. (Rhonda)

I think it is really important not only for them but for—yeah, not only just for the family but for the friends and everyone who knew them. It is a very important part of the whole, I guess, mourning process. Very important for that, I think. Yeah, just a really good way to celebrate their lives. (Emma)

I think it was the community’s need to really—His mates, their need to do something for him straightaway . . . And for his brothers and his sister as well. So they organised it. [On the day the cross was erected] I think my parents were there as well—so my husband, my ex-husband was there because my ex-husband is the father of Greg. All of my ex-husbands’ family were there and a lot of the family from xxxx; from our home town . . . Yeah, it was such a big gathering. Well, see, the whole community had been involved in—Many of the people in the community had been involved in getting him out the car as well because, we don’t have—it’s all volunteer SES and bush fire brigade. We’re members of the bush fire brigade and it was our bush fire brigade that had to go and—and the SES. So it was pretty confronting for everyone.

. . . and look, kids go out there and some of his mates leave a can of beer sometimes, that sort of thing. There’s a key there. I’ve got no idea what the significance of that is . . . people have gone out and put roses out there, and other bits for the garden, some people on his anniversary just take out flowers.

When we hide our people, hide our grief, or hide our memorials away in a cemetery—who goes there? Apart from the family. And so yeah, it keeps the community connected around—I don’t know. Like, we’re not pushing that away. (Jill)

Allan was told by the RMS (when his daughter’s memorial would have to be temporarily removed due to roadworks) that the memorial is important to preserve because:
“This is part of the history of the town.” And it is. It is. She was so much a part of, not just this town but, you know, the area . . . as I’ve said, it’s now adults who leave things around on her birthday and on anniversaries . . . we definitely know who one of the adults is that does it, and she had no particular relationship to Mia, none in particular . . .

And, yeah, so that’s—the cross has its own story to tell of why it has become a symbol of, value, that people have value to a community. And they will talk about it with me. They will talk about the cross. I suppose it’s one way of talking about Mia without doing that. It’s easier to be oblique, but it’s a huge reminder. (Allan)

The above comment by Allan reflects Riches and Dawson’s (1998) discussion about tangible objects that can assist with continuing bonds and provide a catalyst for talking about and remembering the deceased.

Rebecca likewise mentioned that their close-knit community was deeply affected by her sister’s death, and that other people in the community would stop and put things at her sister’s memorial:

People would stop and put little things around it following the accident . . . And then ongoing, less and less as the years went by. But on anniversaries and birthdays and things like that—particularly probably in the first two years following her death.

I know when people drive past Mia’s cross, because still if I meet someone for the first time, and they found out I’m a (surname), their face goes white and they tell me. It’s like they know where they were when it happened and they tell me all about it and then ask me about the cross and tell me that when they drive past it they think of Mia and this and that. Yeah . . . But then I’ve had a few people tell me that when they drive past it’s quite distressing for them, which I want to giggle at because I think, you know, seriously, <laughs> get a grip. But then a lot of people and quite overwhelmingly I get told that people like to drive past because it’s either a reminder for them . . . of something the town’s gone through. It provokes some kind of reaction, generally positive. I’ve had no one actually say to me that they go around it and they see it and they think the world’s s**t or burst into tears or whatever. It’s usually something productive or personally emotional for them . . . And sometimes they say they think of our family every time they go around there . . . Which, again, is not a negative thing. (Rebecca)

This research has demonstrated, as Monger (1997, p. 114) claimed, that roadside memorials are not simply acts of remembrance; they are also acts of “solidarity, a symbolic coming together of the community in mourning, and an expression of
strangers’ support for the bereaved.” Roadside crosses are messages to the whole community, urging them to remember the departed as they pass by the cross on the side of the road (Barrera, 1991). Further, such sites “often become the focal point not only for community mourning but also for community consternation” and are used to further political protests about the factors surrounding road fatalities (Kennerly, 2002, p. 244). It is often small, rural towns, on busy highways, that are affected by road fatalities. The victim, and their family, are therefore known to many in these tight-knit communities. Also, as Breen (2006, pp. 232–233) documented:

It is open to speculation whether or not the experience of informants living in rural areas might be ‘easier’ given the potential for closer relational and community links in rural communities or it might be ‘worse’, given the significantly higher rate of crash fatalities, the potential for crash deaths to affect all members within small communities, and less support infrastructure in rural areas.

This can lead to a sense of “ownership” of the memorial by the townsfolk, as found in the current study. Further, roadside memorials “serve as impromptu public sphere(s) which bring together the deceased, the bereaved, other bereaved, and members of the public in a communion of empathy and commemoration” (Campbell, 2013, p. 531).

The changing role of cemeteries

The fifth and final subtheme considers changes in burial practices, the increase in cremation and the changing role and significance of cemeteries. Modern cemeteries are losing their significance for many bereaved people, especially with the increase in cremation and the subsequent scattering of ashes (Dickinson, 2012; Hockey et al., 2007; Watkins, 2011). There is a growing trend to place ashes elsewhere, rather than leaving them at the crematorium or keeping them in an urn at home (Hockey et al., 2007).
Once I had established if their loved one had a site in a cemetery, each of the participants were asked to comment on their preference over the cemetery and the roadside memorial. Eleven out of the fourteen participants felt that the roadside memorial was equally or more significant for them than the cemetery, with six explaining that they did not in fact have their loved ones remains—either body or ashes—interred there. The lack of a gravesite or place where ashes are interred has led to a corresponding lack of a focal point for mourning practices. With no official site to visit on anniversaries or other significant occasions, many are left feeling confused and floundering. The following comments from Cathy and Kelly are indicative of this dilemma:

\[\ldots\] he is not placed anywhere. And we will eventually put his ashes out to sea so, you know, we’re not going to have a grave or—at a crematorium or something. There’s gonna be nowhere where you can actually physically go, so you have to have your own place.

My daughter-in-law has his ashes, and he loved the sea and he only had one ticket left to get his skipper’s ticket. And we always intended, and we probably will, take his ashes and spread them out at sea. (Cathy)

\ldots But we have her urn and ashes here at home, in the dining room, so she’s here every meal . . . She’s in our dining room and you get used to it. It doesn’t bother you. At first, you think, “Oh my God I’ve got an urn in my house. Okay, this is a bit different, never thought I’d have to have this. Okay, how do I feel, sort of thing?” And it just was right and after a while you just don’t—I’m really fussy with the dust and I don’t like her urn getting dusty so I dust her and I’ll walk past and I’ll touch her and say “I’m here.” (Kelly)

Rebecca and her father, Allan, both discussed the ashes for their sister/daughter, and the fact that there is no cemetery, only the roadside memorial and a seat placed by Council overlooking the ocean. Rebecca explained it thus:

No, we haven’t done anything yet; dad’s got the ashes at home . . . He’s never been ready to do anything with them . . . And it’s never been too much of a concern for any of us. I think we eventually will. I think there’ll come a time when we will plant a tree up on the headland or something and put the ashes under there. So I don’t think she will ever have a spot, but there is a chair up on the headland that the Council put in,
and it’s got a plaque on it and it’s dedicated to Mia. So mum and dad go up and clean that. And the people that know Mia know it’s up there and it’s beautiful. Looks over xxxx Harbour south and north, like yeah . . . Yes, so it’s just beautiful . . . Yeah, I often run over the headland. I just do a little detour around the chair, or sit on the chair while I’m up there.

I feel the same, [at both sites] calm and I guess close to Mia, yeah, close, and much more relaxed [at the headland chair] because there’s not cars zooming past and yeah . . . So you can do that at the chair if you so wish. Yeah, you can sit there for an hour and just watch—You see dolphins sometimes . . . Whales and whatever else . . . Yeah, so that, I guess, will become the new spot, but I find I never really have to—I’ve never needed to go to a spot. Like, a lot of people go to cemeteries and things on anniversaries or when they feel they need to go. I’ve never felt I’d necessarily—if there wasn’t a spot anywhere, it probably still wouldn’t phase me. (Rebecca)

Her father Allan said:

. . . the ashes are just the ashes. They’re downstairs . . . That’s different, because I struggle with just burying them or dispersing them over water or something like that, which I did with my father’s ashes. That was no problem at all . . . I don’t go down and look at them or anything. I don’t know. I don’t go down and they’re never touched, never seen . . . And that’s not important, but getting rid of them would be important. So the kids know that if they haven’t gone beforehand, they’re going with me. (Allan)

Despite her mother having been cremated and her ashes placed in the local cemetery, it is the roadside that continues to draw Kate. As she explained, her father tends the spot in the cemetery, and visits each week after church, but for Kate the site of death is the more meaningful place:

_Dad purchased a—it’s one of those circular—like a family sort of garden spot for ashes, and there’s a tree there, and he goes down and tends it, like every week, I think . . . On his way home from church, he goes to the cemetery, yeah . . . I’ve only done that a couple of times. I think I kind of identify more with where she actually died as to where her ashes are, which is a bit strange really. I did go down there one day when I was feeling really—like down to the cemetery and just sort of told her I wish she were still here._

_[But], the life isn’t there . . . whereas the point where she died is where she lost her life . . . Like my brother and sister have asked me to put something on her grave—which I do. I put a rosebud in the cemetery, but I also go and put it at the site._ (Kate)
Further comments from participants in this study illustrate the changing nature of burial practices and the role of the cemetery and how this has impacted their lives. Kelly explained her experiences:

No, there's no cemetery . . . I had problems with putting her body in the damp, dark ground with the water and watching her rot—thinking of her rotting, right? So I couldn't cope with that. So to me, I know this sounds horrible but burning her was the easier option and you still got to keep her ashes; whereas, when you bury them you're not allowed to have them at home. So, the idea of having her at home was an encouragement . . . So there isn't somewhere to go but because she actually died at that particular spot, and it's where the cross is, is the actual spot that she last took her last breath, that's a very special place. It's hard to explain. [And] . . . the biggest problem I have with cemeteries, how often do you go there? Is it a nice place to visit? No, who wants to go into that environment? Like I've been there for my kids' funerals and I walk around and look at all these plaques in the ground and I just think they're cold. There's nothing personal about them, they're generic. There are millions of them, right? You go to a tree. It's everything about Annie on that tree, like everything, and you can feel her. You can't feel someone in the cemetery. It's cold and you go there twice a year. You go there for their birthday perhaps and you go for Christmas and you put flowers there like everyone else and you go to a bin and you get your little cup out and you go and put it, the same cup that everyone else uses. It's cold. I wouldn't want (it). (Kelly)

Likewise, Rhonda felt no connection to her son in the cemetery, noting that “he wasn’t there.” In contrast, she recounted how her youngest son was drawn to the cemetery to talk things over with his elder brother:

But it did take me a good five years, five and a half years to do anything up there, [at the cemetery] because in my mind, he was just under a layer of dirt in there, he wasn’t there. And then I guess when you put a slab up, that’s it, that’s absolutely final. But his youngest brother, who was only 14 at the time, he used to go up there. If ever anything good happened to him or that, he’d go and sit with him and he’d be told before we were told . . . Then he said, “I’ve been up and told Alex such and such and such and such” and I’d say “Oh that’s good.” (Rhonda)

This comment by Rhonda mirrors findings by Clark and Tidswell (2010, p. 24), who noted, “family coming to chat with the deceased about current events and family happenings”.

Interestingly, Rhonda also spoke of her son’s friends and brothers preferring to go to the cemetery, not the roadside memorial, on his birthday and anniversary. This may be
related to the fact that the site of her son’s death is on a busy highway, on a bend, so is perhaps not the best place to congregate and spend hours drinking and talking. She described it like this:

. . . so every year—and it still happens, even happened this year, which is eleven years down the track—a group of his friends still, from xxxx and there’s probably eight of them come out. They have dinner here with me and then they go and sit with him for about two hours at the cemetery. And—But this year there was a group of young ones down at the pub who knew him too and they said, you know, let’s all go up to the cemetery. So I think there was about fifteen of them there and they just sat and they drink. Leave a drink with him, leave a cigarette with him and I’m not allowed touch them because they like to come back out and see if it is still there!—Just sit and talk. Yeah . . . That still happens every year, every single year . . . so we still have the dinner here for whoever wants to come out <laughs> and then they just—yeah about 10 o’clock my boys and those friends and then whoever, they just all meet up at the cemetery till—at one stage the neighbours who lived up there had sort of spoke to me about it and I told them what was happening and they said ahh—but that’s fine, they know now, because they can be there ‘til one or two in the morning . . . So they’ll do it again on his birthday. They do it on his anniversary and on his birthday. (Rhonda)

Jill and others likewise reiterated the findings of previous research that documented the growing importance of place of death over burial sites. The following quotes from Jill and Molly highlight these sentiments:

Yeah, there’s nothing personal about it, really, at the cemetery, is there? . . . The cemetery to me just seemed irrelevant to my son’s life. I mean, it was just the place where the crematorium is and to have a farewell, I guess, for him. You know, like the funeral. It was the place to have the funeral and to have his body cremated and that was it . . . I don’t go to a cemetery to have—to see anyone’s ashes in a wall or in a rose garden. And in fact, I’ve got a plaque here [at home]. My sons and my daughter and my husband and I and another fellow who was living at the house at the time, we made a reflection pond at our block, at our house and we’ve got a plaque here that you would have in a cemetery but we’ve got it here. And that’s for him. It’s a reflection pool with a water feature leading into it . . . And we can sit and – sit when it’s running and things like—which it’s not at the moment. It’s not even full. <laughs> So, you know, we would sit there or go to the tree. Like I—yeah, I don’t know about cemeteries really. (Jill)

So when my brother passed away and the family sort of scoped the arrangements they found him a place right with my grandparents. So he’s got a plaque and his ashes are interred with my grandparents there at xxxx. I don’t—very rarely go there. Like I’m not sure, maybe my philosophy is they sort of visit you there when you’re there, most of the time they’re around you. And to the point where I have a thirteen year old and a nine year old and the first time I ever took them there was last August when my other grandmother passed away and the funeral was there. So that was the only—first time
I've ever taken my children there. And I think for my sisters and I, we very rarely go there.

I feel him around me all the time. I think it was part and parcel of the very strong connection we had. I still feel him, so—and it was like his best friend that—I came home from North Queensland once and he said come on, let’s go up the cemetery and spend time with them. And I actually felt like I was there more for my brother’s best friend than I was for myself. ’Cause I just felt like yeah he’s always around me. (Molly)

Dianne explained that for her, the roadside memorial is the place she feels the most connection to her husband, but for her in-laws, the cemetery is very important:

And then we took him home to xxxx. So he’s buried—we buried him at xxxx cemetery . . . So we took him back to xxxx and more for his family than for me . . . the cemetery is three hours away . . . we don’t go there a lot. It was more for the in-laws than for me. It gave them somewhere to go and somewhere to grieve. (Dianne)

Like Dianne’s in-laws, others like Lisa, Fred and Meg stated that the cemetery is their preferred place to visit, to contemplate, to connect with their loved ones. Lisa stated:

I went myself to the roadside for a couple of years but I find that too difficult. I think that it’s just a—you know, a horrible, horrible place and so I prefer to go to the cemetery, yeah . . . It’s [the cemetery] also a beautiful place, of quietness and reflection. They do try and keep the special things, they’re pretty generous really, compared to some that I’ve heard. We can always have like, four things of flowers there. We also purchased a plot across from Cody. So you get kind of like, get to know like all the stories of other people, it’s like another culture. Yeah, like the gardener will say this one, you know, died then and this one then and this one then and so, yeah. And occasionally you’re there and you might see someone that you know is really upset and you sort of have this look and you know when someone wants to be approached or not. Yeah, so all those sort of things that go on.

And yeah, the cemetery or in our home or like we’re—I’m a Christian. I believe that he’s with God now. And that his resting place daily is in the cemetery. I still believe that and knowing that he’s buried there, he’s not cremated. That it still has some, you know, relevance to respecting that place . . . I tend to go to the—well I do now—the anniversary at the cemetery. I think I did in the first couple of years though go back to the site and lay something. (Lisa)

Fred noted:

. . . he was buried in the xxxx Lawn Cemetery. He’s got a headstone and there’s a picture of him there. And for the first nine or ten years, we
used to visit his grave every day. And it’s probably only in the last couple of years that we don’t go every day. My wife still goes probably at least five times a week. But the other thing is, too, that we’ve moved from xxxx to yyyy which means that we’re not as close to the cemetery as we used to be but, you know, we know that he’s buried there and we always like to go and see him . . . Ah, yes, obviously the cemetery is where he is and that is very significant. And the roadside memorial, you know, has a different meaning but it’s still an important one to us. (Fred)

Meg said:

And I go up there to [the cemetery]. I’ve taken a can of bourbon up and sat down—drank that . . . I don't like to think about her lying dead. But I do like to go there because her spot is really the best spot in the whole cemetery. So it’s—I go and tell her, "Geez, you’ve got a good spot here." . . . It's a fairly old cemetery, xxxx. It's not a large cemetery, but it's reasonably big for what the town is . . . And she's in the family plot and she's right under the biggest tree and it's just ginormous. xxxx is renowned for its big trees. And so, you just kind of drive and you know exactly where she is because you just look over to this tree and that's where she is. (Meg)

These findings correlate with existing literature, with Everett (2002), for example, pointing out that fewer people are being drawn to the cemetery—they are becoming meaningless places for many. It is the roadside where their loved one was last alive, and this is where the richest meaning and significance lies. Furthermore, Everett goes on to explain that institutional religion offers little comfort for many, a sentiment expressed by a number of other writers (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Dickinson & Hoffman, 2010; Haney et al., 1997; Weisser, 2004).

Grider (2001), an anthropologist and folklorist, contested the importance of the place of death, stating that, after the funeral, when many spontaneous shrines are removed, the sacred space returns to a secular space and the cemetery becomes the place to visit and leave mementos (p. 2). Findings by others such as Clark and Franzmann (2006) contest this, as do the findings from this current study, as the majority of participants maintained both the site by the roadside as well as a cemetery site, if one existed.
Furthermore, changes in burial practices, and an increase in cremation, has seen a corresponding decrease in the use of cemeteries, even for interment of ashes, as evidenced by comments from the participants in this research. Many are choosing to scatter their loved ones ashes or keep them at home or in other significant places. This “trend towards cremation, which often involves the ashes being placed behind a plaque on a brick wall, has meant that families no longer have a ‘personalised space’ to visit, as was available in a cemetery. The roadside memorial may fill this gap” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 17). Additionally, as mentioned earlier, ashes are routinely scattered. The result of these changes in burial practices means that for many, there is no longer a physical place to visit and pay respects or honour the deceased, no focal point for grief (Bachelor, 2001a, 2001b, 2004; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Kennerly, 2002; Weisser, 2004). As Weisser (2004, 2.6) commented:

. . . there may be situations where there is no gravesite . . . [due to] the increasing trend . . . to be cremated instead of being buried. This results in the surviving loved ones not having a physical place to go and mourn . . . [or] the site of death may be more readily accessible than the gravesite.

This rising incidence of cremation, and there being therefore no burial site to visit, is significant in the growing popularity of roadside memorials (Kennerly, 2002). With the popularity of cremation there is a lack of physical connection between the mourners and the deceased via the gravesite. Now, “the trend towards scattering ashes at a place of significance for the deceased suggests a desire to express the value of place in our lives and to honor that connection for the dead” (Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 593). Laquer, (1993, p. 190, cited in Clark & Franzmann, 2006, p. 592) extends this further. He commented that loved ones were possibly never at the cemetery in life, and were
“unknown to each other in life and [are now] thrown together in a place with which they might have had only the most transitory acquaintance.”

As illustrated by the rich and candid accounts from the participants, the site of the crash is very significant, spiritually and emotionally. Roadside memorials have a number of roles: they provide a spiritual link to the deceased; they are a place to communicate with the deceased and enter into continuing bonds with loved ones; they provide solace and comfort; they have a community role and they fulfil needs that perhaps cemeteries no longer do in contemporary society, including Australia. This chapter has thus introduced the first of the four main themes, and its five subthemes, that emerged from this study. The following chapter considers the remaining three major themes, along with a discussion of how these relate both to the literature and the initial research aims and lines of inquiry introduced in Chapter One.
CHAPTER TEN: MESSAGES AND MEMENTOS

I drive by all the time and say, ‘Hey, baby, I miss you’ (McCarthy, 1997).

Chapter Nine discussed the first major theme, along with its five subthemes, arising from the lived experiences of the participants in this study. Chapter Ten continues with these rich stories, and details the remaining three major themes: the importance of personalising the site; proximity to home being a factor in roadside memorials being built and maintained; and roadside memorials serving as a warning to others.

Theme Two: The importance of personalising the site

Of the thirteen participants who had a memorial in place, they agreed unanimously that personalising and individualising the site was imperative and this was consequently the second theme that emerged strongly from this research. Eleven of the participants had names and/or dates on their memorial, and a further three had photographs. Besides these highly personalised and individualised items, all also had many—not just one—other personalised touches. The participants spoke of the variety of ways they had made their site personal and unique: a guitar pick (Lisa), false eyelashes (Kelly), dragons (Rhonda), jewellery (Trevor), painted river stones (Jill), artwork depicting the family swimming together as fish (Dianne), a rose (Kate), pot plants and flowers (Fred), gold plaque and wild flowers (Meg) and the use of the deceased’s favourite colour—pink (Allan), blue (Rhonda), yellow (Kelly), purple (Emma). The participants described how these personal touches had been added to their roadside memorial, making it, indeed, theirs—as unique and special and individual as the person it is commemorating. To be replaced or limited to a non-descript black post—nameless, faceless, genderless—was
an abhorrent prospect. Consequently, the inappropriateness and unsatisfactory use of
generic, standardised structures instead of personalised memorials was strongly
opposed by thirteen of the participants, with Cathy being the only one who thought they
were a good idea. This was mainly due to the fact that:

I really, really dislike all the crosses. It’s not so much the crosses I dislike. It’s the—all
the artificial flowers people put all over them. I wouldn’t mind them if they were just
plain crosses or even a different sort of a cross. I just hate all those artificial flowers—
it upsets me because I think they look untidy . . . the artificial flowers that have been
left in the weather are horrible.

But I do think it might be nicer just to have the little black post with—I could just see
the black post with a little plaque on it. I think that would be inconspicuous, but the
person passing it would know that that was their post. You don’t need necessarily to
know who it was . . . (Cathy)

The remaining participants, however, had strong views against such standardised crash
markers, and the need to create an individualised site to honour and commemorate
their loved ones is strongly reiterated in this study. The following quotes exemplify the
strong emotions evoked by such a policy:

Black’s horrible. Black is not Mia. Wouldn’t have it . . . Yeah, bright pink . . . That’s Mia.
This is a statement about the girl . . . This is not a government statistic. This is a human
life that’s been lost. No, a black post—there’s no way I’d have black associated with
Mia in any way, shape, or form. If they put one in, I’d take it out . . . I’d get an axe and
cut it out. (Allan)

I’d find it hard putting a black one there . . . I don’t try and associate it too much with
black, with dark days . . . He was—he loved blue so his cross was painted light blue . . .
and—dragons—for some reason, he liked the strength of them or whatever. So these
have been . . . painted on his cross with his name and a photo of him . . . So he’s not just
a name, he is a face with the name. (Rhonda)

The placing of photographs on the memorials, as mentioned by Rhonda, is likewise
echoed by others such as Jill. For these mothers, a photograph of their son was a very
meaningful and important aspect of the roadside tribute. Their love for their “gorgeous” sons, and their desire for others to remember them, is palpable:

I think that would be awful. I would have to go and do something else, I think . . . It wouldn’t—it’s nothing about connecting you to the person at all . . . That’s very impersonal. Like, what is the significance of that? No, see our cross has got a photo of him on it. You know, that I update, when it fades . . . You know, so people know—because for me, it’s about—it wasn’t just someone died there. A person died there and this is what he looked like. He was young and gorgeous . . . I guess I’m a bit more conscious of how passionately I do feel about it. And I guess if anyone wanted to take it down I’d probably rip their throat out! <laughs> Not really, I just say that, you know. <laughs> You know what I mean? Like, I’d really react very strongly . . . (Jill)

Every roadside memorial the participants spoke of, and every roadside memorial I visited and photographed for this study, was uniquely different, as is reiterated in the literature. The following quote from Emma illustrates this uniqueness and difference:

. . . we were driving past so many on the way to get to hers. There were like pink ones and then there was like a blue one and all sorts of different colours and every one was different, and different shapes and the writing was all different and we stopped at a few along the way just to see what had happened there and it was amazing to see that difference and see the uniqueness of each person that we drove past. (Emma)

From the heart-felt responses given by thirteen of the fourteen participants it is very clear that humanizing and personalising the site is a vital factor in the meanings and roles of roadside memorials for grieving individuals; their loved one is not just a statistic, a “black post”. Indeed, by individualising sites the victim, “can not simply be another road crash statistic”, as noted by Clark and Cheshire (2004, p. 211). Perhaps this represents an existential belief, that as humans, we have meaning and significance. Rebecca’s comments further reiterate the opposition to standardised structures replacing personalised, individualised roadside memorials. She referred to the fact that her sister was not simply a statistic:
Yeah, I wouldn’t sit with a black post . . . I’d be surprised if you found a family that’s happy having the black post . . . Because I think, again, that if you’re just going to have a black post, you might as well have nothing. It’s just missing, I don’t know . . .

No. And, it makes them a statistic, which they are, but I really struggled particularly when, at the end of 2007, results would come out and there’d been you know, three deaths in New South Wales, and I knew Mia was one of those three and she is a statistic. And that just makes them more of a statistic, having a black post, because you can already look up stuff and see your own sibling on, as a statistic. And I had this experience once. I went to see a specialist and he needed to get the family tree. So he’s doing his little, the round circle with the crosses, the male, female, then the four girls. And I explained Mia. He just did this big thingo to one of them. [Crossed it out] <Laughs> But I think a black post would be almost doing the same thing. It’s like, “Oh, yeah, gone, black post.” . . . Yeah, statistic!—So, I don’t think that would go down well . . . (Rebecca)

Emma, Dianne and Kelly were likewise quite vocal in their opposition to generic markers, with Dianne stating:

"Stuff you. We’ll do what we want . . . Yeah, I don’t know how I would be about, like you say, a black thing marking the spot. (Dianne)

Kelly added:

I just probably would be oppositional . . . what we have is personal . . . I think that would depersonalise it because it’s just like putting up just a generic sign everywhere . . . No, it doesn’t reflect the person. It doesn’t individualise it and it doesn’t give us anything to give back to her . . . I don’t want it to be generic. They would still—no matter what they did, the kids would still bring things there and the kids would still—it would still look the same in five minutes because the kids would just go back and fix it the way they like it. (Kelly)

Kelly further noted that her daughter’s site had many, many mementos and unique touches, and was constantly being added to by both herself and her daughter’s friends. This was seen as a very significant and meaningful part of their coping with such grief:

There are lots of artificial flowers, and then there is the cross and there’s a chair that’s—Because yellow was her favourite colour, so the kids bought her a picnic chair and painted it yellow and they have lots of solar lights and bits and pieces. Annie always wore false eyelashes so, you know the ones you buy for your car? They put them on the tree. The kids put them on the tree. She was an artist and she painted, so the kids in her art class took art there and there’s photos, framed photos put around the base of the tree and there’s lots of letters. (Kelly)
Fred simply said “I think people wanna be individual about it” while Meg and Kate spoke of their reactions if councils or policymakers tried to ban them:

I’m not happy with the (local) council full stop for anything. So like if they tried to take Toni’s bloody memorial down, given the circumstance and given the whole situation, it wouldn’t be pretty . . . I think guidelines are a good idea. No taller than this, no wider than that. Stuff like that, that allows people scope.

It’s too cut and dried and cold . . . You’re dealing with people’s emotions . . . No, and that’s why the Tasmanian thing doesn’t work . . . ’Cause we’re not like that. There’s not one person on this planet that’s the same as another person. (Meg)

I mean, okay, you ban it. What? So it’s gonna stop people who really wanna do it? Of course not! (Kate)

It is through the use of personal details such as names, ages, dates of birth or death, messages, photos and other personal mementos that help to create, celebrate and honour the uniqueness of the deceased individual—as is also discussed in the literature (see, for example, Belshaw & Purvey, 2009; Doss, 2006; Klaassens et al., 2009; Klaassens et al., 2013; Petersson, 2007a, 2007b). The use of names and dates expresses, “the deceased’s identity and social person” (Petersson, 2007a, p. 3) and often sites will have “stylistic flourishes that assert the deceased’s individuality” (Belshaw & Purvey, 2009). The leaving of poems, notes and cards at sites is seen as a gesture of love, respect and sympathy (Hallam & Hockey, 2001). Further:

textual and visual information in the form of photographs, dates of birth/death, family names, messages, cards, plaques . . . not only personalize and humanize the desolate locations of roadside deaths, but they also privatize and formalize these small corners of the public domain for the exclusive use of friends, family and well-wishers of the deceased (Campbell, 2013, p. 536, authors italics).

Referring to mementos as “funerary objects” Doss (2006, p. 299) stated that:

the things chosen satisfy the emotional needs of the bereaved . . . Flowers symbolize the beauty and brevity of life, as do balloons; condolence cards and handwritten poems give
voice to the grief-stricken and permit conversations with (and confessions to) the deceased; teddy bears intimate innocence lost.

As noted earlier by Hartig and Dunn (1998, p. 10), “Many of the sites incorporated personal effects of the deceased . . . and these personal belongings had a richly symbolic role, serving as . . . artefacts of death.” This symbolic role and the transformation of everyday objects following death is extended by Gibson (2004, 2010), as discussed previously.

Participants’ statements—such as Rebecca’s—about statistics is supported in the literature. Suter for example, (2010, p. 55), noted:

memorials also personalize and individualize each death. In an Australian television documentary (Compass), Dr Clark has claimed that road trauma is an ‘invisible death . . . [people are] just seen as a statistic.’ The roadside memorial shows that the person was someone’s wife or husband, son or daughter, mother or father.

Similarly, as noted by Campbell (2013, pp. 542–543), “Roadside tributes constitute an everyday visibilization of the ‘real’ people and the personal tragedies which are lost from view in anonymous, aggregated (national) datasets”.

Other sentiments expressed by participants reflect previous literature, such as studies by Doss (2006), Haney et al. (1997) and Weisser (2004), among others. Doss (2006, p. 304), for example, claimed that, “Spontaneous roadside memorials embody an active, sacred engagement with the deceased; they are not merely, as the state might have it, cautionary signs but material reminders of ongoing relationships between the living and the dead.” Doss further quoted a mother who stated, “My daughter was seventeen. An official road sign wouldn’t have been her. It was not a statement of her life” (2006, p. 304). Similarly, the dubious merits of having government-sponsored signs was raised by
Weisser (2004) who questioned if they could or would meet people’s needs. Perhaps, as Leimer (1998b) claimed, bereaved people need “the healing balm of roadside memorials”. The findings in this study certainly agree with these assertions. The desire—need—for the memorials to reflect individuality, personality, difference, is a strong rhetoric throughout all the interviews, including Cathy’s.

The message for policymakers and local councils has clearly emerged from those interviewed in this research. The need for individualised tributes to their loved ones, reflecting uniqueness and personality, is essential. Standardised, generic markers will not suffice. This implication for policy and for legislators will be expanded upon in Chapter Twelve.

**Theme Three: Proximity to home**

The third theme or key finding generated from this research centres around the correlation between a roadside memorial being built, visited and maintained, and its proximity to the home of the family or friends. The closer the site is to home, the more likely a roadside memorial is established. Eleven of the fourteen participants’ memorials were less than thirty kilometres from their home, with eight being under ten kilometres from home. This physical closeness was frequently referred to and seen to be a source of comfort for those who raised it. Being close to home, although painful in many ways, was paradoxically comforting as it provided frequent opportunities to say hello while passing by as well as allowing regular visits to add extra mementos or to care for and maintain the site.
For example, Allan discussed that having his daughter’s cross just minutes from home was helpful for him. He reflected:

. . . if it had happened overseas or if it had happened in Broken Hill or something like that . . . I don’t know how I’d feel about it. I don’t know if I—if it had happened on the Hay Plains, for example, and I was not sure of where on the Hay Plains it was and there was no cross. So I don’t know how I’d feel. But all I know is that there’s a cross up there, and it’s got Mia’s name on it, and it’s where she died. And that’s—it’s been really helpful . . . if it were far away, I’d feel a bit lost I think. (Allan)

Allan’s thoughts illustrate that if sites are within a certain radius of the family home and are being passed daily or regularly, they become even more important and central in bereavement as “the roadside memorials are placed into everyday life as it is being lived” (Klaassens et al., 2009, p. 194). This is certainly the case for Kelly and her family:

See, Annie died just around the corner from our house, so we drive past it every day. We can’t get out of here without driving past it . . . We’re probably lucky that we do live very close because it makes it easy. But—and we don’t have to drive five hours or something, you know? . . . I suppose it’s a more extensive one because of that. I think if we lived a fair distance, it wouldn’t be as vast. But because we live close, every time I go shopping, I’ll buy some flowers or a fairy or something for the tree. When I’m buying something for the other kids, ‘cause I feel like I’m still buying for her . . . If it was in another state or in another country, it would be impossible. It’s literally four minutes from my house to that tree. You can walk from my house to that tree and I’ve timed it because two days after she died, I got in my car to drive it to see what the conditions were like, where the sun was, and tried to understand why she hit this tree and I timed it. I did under the speed limit. The outside time, the longest it would take, would be four minutes. (Kelly)

Jill also spoke of the proximity to the family home as being a significant factor in the roadside memorial for her son. Like Allan, she did not know what they would have chosen to do if he had died overseas or far away. But, because it is close by:

I just go whenever I want to. I just go out there and sit . . . We have to drive past where he died whenever we go to xxxx. So, you know, whenever we go past we go, “Hi Greg!” you know? So, yeah . . . ‘cause I’m driving past there at least three days a week, four or five days a week . . .
Not everyone feels the need to put up a roadside memorial . . . on the xxxx Highway there’s a lot of truck accidents, for example, fatalities and not everyone does it because it doesn’t have as much connection because it’s not their area. So this is—like Greg died seven kilometres from where he lived and that’s why it’s so potent I think, for us. Whereas if he had died on a road in Cambodia—I don’t know why I’m choosing that, but I’m not going to go and build a memorial in Cambodia because that’s not going to have the same meaning, I don’t think. I think it’s something to do with proximity to home. (Jill)

Like Jill, Rhonda lives only three kilometres from the site of her son’s crash, and spoke sadly of the fact that:

*He was only three kilometres from home . . . We have to go past him all the time, every time we go to town and come home, yeah.* (Rhonda)

Kate’s mother likewise died close to home—“Yeah, so she was nearly home. You know, like the spot from there—from xxxx, it’s what only about 15 Ks or something?”—and even though no official memorial exists, apart from the occasional single rose, Kate passes the site every time she needs to drive north of her home.

For others, like Cathy and Emma, the site of the crash is not near where they live. Despite this, roadside memorials have been established by friends who live nearer to the site. As mentioned previously, Cathy has never been to visit her son’s memorial, which is located close to where his partner and children live. She explained:

. . . it’s a long way away because we live in xxxx, and he was killed down near yyyy Bay . . . But his partner and his children—they would pass it almost every day, where he died, because they’ve got to pass there. I went down a few weeks ago and had to go past it a couple of times, and I did look to see if I could see it, you know. I couldn’t see it, and I didn’t like to ask . . . my daughter-in-law . . . And I was going to ask my grandson, but it upsets him so I didn’t ask . . . (Cathy)

Emma’s feelings about the placement of the roadside memorial for her friend was different to the others interviewed in this study, as she believed that if the memorial was close by to her home, she may be reluctant to visit it or drive along that particular
road. Instead, because it is some 475 kilometres from her home, she stated she will be more inclined to visit it when she is able. Her response was:

*Even though it is far away, I’m still going to go visit, so if it was at home—I don’t know. I think it’s different because the way it happened was very country, a kangaroo involved, that sort of thing, whereas back at home, I don’t know if I could still drive along those roads the same way or visit. I guess I would visit but I don’t think I’d be able to visit as regularly and I don’t think I’d be able to still be talking about it now if it was so close, if that makes sense.* (Emma)

Dianne’s experience likewise differed from others, as her husband had died just nine kilometres from the family home, but the family had since moved several hours away. She has established other memorials—a memorial wall, and a tree that’s “*similar to the one that I planted at the accident site*”—at the new house and now only visits the roadside memorial on significant occasions or when they are travelling past.

Eleven of the participants in this study concur with findings from earlier research that examined the link between proximity to the family home and the building and maintenance of a roadside memorial—the closer to home, the more likely a site is established. As discussed in the literature review, a number of authors have examined this link (Bednar, 2004; Clark & Tidswell, 2010; Henzel, 1995; Klaassens et al., 2013; Owens, 2006; Weisser, 2004), with Weisser’s research, for example, showing that the decision to both build and then maintain a roadside memorial (or “micro sacred site” as she referred to them) is determined by the site’s location and proximity to home.

Bednar (2004, 2011) and Weisser (2004) also found that the physical location of the site (i.e. proximity to home) was critical to the life expectancy of the roadside memorial, while Owens (2006) used the term “distance decay” to illustrate the effect on memorials where loved ones were not nearby to maintain and care for them.
Listening to the stories and experiences of the participants, proximity to home appears to be a significant factor in the establishment of roadside memorials, and their ongoing upkeep. The findings of this study thus agree with findings by Klaassens et al. (2013) and Weisser (2004), among others.

Theme Four: Roadside memorials serve as a warning to others

The fourth theme that emerged from this research is that roadside memorials may also serve as a warning to other motorists about the inherent dangers on the road, even though this may not have been an initial intention in the decision to build a roadside memorial. Eleven of the participants spoke at length about the role of roadside memorials in encouraging safer driving, and two participants stressed how these tributes can be much more powerful than official or government-endorsed road safety campaigns. Trevor, for example, stated:

*If just one roadside memorial will help save a young life well . . . sweet, job done . . . I believe it is more effective than a stupid sign . . . whenever you see a cross you know somebody’s actually lost their life . . .*

*I believe it is more effective than a stupid dumb arse sign that says old black spot area . . . If you see a cross there you know somebody’s actually lost their life. It’s pretty very serious. Speed kills. Cars are dangerous.*

*So, yeah, it’s a wake-up call . . . it’s a reality check, it’s something that people need to have. Hopefully it may make people think . . .* (Trevor)

Kelly agreed with Trevor, saying that such memorials may in fact be more effective than speed signs or government endorsed safety messages:

* . . . it’s better than an RTA speed sign because it makes people aware how dangerous that piece of road is. When you see one, you think, “Wow! Someone died there.” “Wow! This is a dangerous road.”*
Yes, I think it is a reminder for the rest of society that accidents do happen as easily as that and the roadside memorials are like a big speed sign as far as I’m concerned. I don’t understand why they would think they were a distraction or anything else because all it does is reiterate to society that this is a dangerous road and a death has occurred here. Be careful. Like I just don’t understand why anyone would think it was negative thing. (Kelly)

Conversely, Cathy was opposed to individualised roadside memorials, preferring instead a standardised marker such as the black posts used in South Australia and parts of Tasmania. She believed such markers could have a key role to play in road safety campaigns, explaining it thus:

I think we do need reminding about road tolls, and I do think those black posts are fabulous because they’re part of the road works anyway, and I think that they could have—I wouldn’t mind seeing that on the side of the road, with a little brass plaque or a little plaque on it . . . and it doesn’t have to be big. It could just be a tiny, little thing just on the post. I think we do need reminding about the road toll and that—and if you see something you think well . . . I think it sort of cautions you that that might be a black spot. (Cathy)

Four of the participants mentioned that roadside memorials may have a dual function—memorialisation and warning—even though the original intent was focused on commemoration and memorialisation. Fred’s comments illustrate this:

Roadside memorials, I think, have another hidden message on them and that is, you know, that if you’re driving along the highway . . . and drive past one of those things, you know, there’s an automatic reaction which is sort of suddenly you need to put your foot on the brake or slow down or if you don’t do any of that you at least think, “Oh, gee, someone was killed here. I just better be a bit more careful.” So I think it is a reminder and it can be useful I think for people to slow down. (Fred)

Rebecca’s comment was similar. For her, roadside memorials are for both memorialisation and caution:

I get told that people like to drive past [her sister’s cross] because it’s either a reminder for them to drive sensibly, a reminder of Mia, a reminder of their children, about road safety. (Rebecca)
For Lisa, whose young son died as a passenger in a crash caused by drink-driving, roadside memorials have the potential to be used effectively in drink-driving and speeding campaigns. She commented that:

>You know, it just might help. I guess having seen a cross just might help one person think, you know, ‘What happened here? Is this a dangerous spot?’ . . . maybe that it’s more of people will remember that there was a car crash there. That people will remember that maybe, if they knew the story—drink driving does kill people, speed does kill people and that maybe Planning and Roads will remember that two people have died in that exact same spot and they have both been young male.

Yeah, so maybe if there was a campaign about, you know, like probably more about it like road deaths and they used the crosses in there and say, you know, something like—everywhere you see one of this means one person has died and—which could equal to a whole community suffering from this or something—I don’t know. (Lisa)

In the same vein, Jill believed roadside memorials are important reminders to all road users to be careful, as well as being helpful for the grieving families. Being a strong advocate for roadside memorials, she wrote letters supporting their place on the roadside to the television program *60 Minutes*, after they aired a segment discussing the controversy surrounding such memorials.

Kate and Emma both succinctly summed up these thoughts, with Kate saying “I think it [roadside memorial] is a reminder for the rest of society that accidents do happen as easily as that . . . you just – you think, ‘Oh, my goodness. Be careful’” and Emma adding, “Oh, okay. So this must be an area where I need to take extra caution.”

Responses by the participants in this study have highlighted the role of roadside memorials in promoting road safety and serving as warnings to other motorists, even though this may not have been the original intention. This is likewise discussed in the literature—the main purpose of roadside memorials is to memorialise the deceased, yet a secondary, perhaps unintended function, is to act as a safety message or cautionary
device (Bednar 2004; Everett 2002; Kennerly, 2002; Monger, 1997; Weisser 2004). Some argue that, “Motorists are jolted by these intrusions of the sacred into everyday space, and as they flash by they serve as reminders of mortality and of the real possibility of motor vehicle accidents” (Hartig & Dunn, 1998, p. 10). Others argue that we become desensitised and even blasé, because they are so prevalent. Despite studies by Churchill and Tay (2008), who found that people did not in fact alter their driving behaviour upon seeing roadside memorials, other research, (Tang et al., 2011; along with anecdotal accounts) documented that drivers do indeed slow down or think about their own driving habits and mortality after seeing such reminders of others’ deaths. As discussed in Chapter Five, roadside crosses have been used effectively in many road safety campaigns, in Australia and overseas.

The warning role of roadside memorials has thus been a consistent theme expressed by the participants in this study. This is an important finding—which correlates with the literature—as it has strong implications for policy and practice around roadside memorial legislation. The implications for policy will be discussed further in Chapter Twelve.

In this chapter the remaining three themes that arose from the research have been documented, with supporting quotes from the interviews. In the next chapter the focus now centres upon the five minor themes and commonalities expressed by the participants, along with a brief discussion of a few exceptions.
CHAPTER ELEVEN: MEANINGS AND MEMORABILIA

... memorials are first and foremost messages of love to the dead. They communicate grief in a more intimate way... (Gibson, 2011, p. 157).

Chapters Nine and Ten have considered the four major themes that emerged from the research. This chapter now posits that another five minor or secondary themes are likewise worthy of being noted. They are classified as minor because they were not mentioned by all of the participants or with the same passion and frequency as the major themes. These themes include: empathy and connectedness with others’ roadside memorials; a belief that they will see their loved one again; a belief that something positive has been gained through the tragedy; roadside memorials are often initiated by friends, not family, and tensions or differences between generations or other family members. Each theme is discussed in turn, with supporting quotes from the participants. An explanation of how the themes and findings are related to both the existing body of literature as well as the lines of inquiry and research aims detailed in Chapter One is provided. The conclusion of the chapter looks at some exceptions that came to light during the research.

Empathy and connectedness with others’ roadside memorials

Each participant was asked to comment on their responses to others’ roadside memorials—before and after their own losses—and almost without exception they expressed a feeling of empathy and connectedness with others’ pain. Some felt this connectedness so strongly that they wanted to offer advice or suggestions for others so bereaved (see Chapter Twelve). More telling, however, was the fact that for many of the
participants their understandings of why roadside memorials are erected had grown, their “gaze” (Foucault, 1963) had changed. They had undergone major changes in how they viewed the world and others’ grief and pain, now that they were “in the club”, to use Rhonda’s term:

I don’t think anyone can fully [understand] until you have to go through it, as we used to say it’s a very exclusive club that nobody really wants to belong to. (Rhonda)

In addition to some of the participants’ gazes being altered, their pre-understandings (Dilthey, 1988) and prejudices (Gadamer, 1994) were challenged. Before they had their own personal experience with a roadside memorial they did not understand or grasp how significant and meaningful such a site could be. This changed irrevocably with the death of their loved ones.

Rhonda continued:

I used to drive past them and think those poor, poor people. But it never hit home and as I said now, I drive past them and it hits home as to what they actually did go through and are going through . . . . (Rhonda)

Likewise, Jill explained:

Well, look, I live on the xxxx Highway so there’s quite of few on the xxxx Highway and I had of course seen quite a few. I guess, prior I don’t think I really understood why they were there and I don’t think I had—I wasn’t opposed to them but I don’t think I had a view one way or another. It wasn’t something I thought about I suppose. I knew they were there. I wasn’t opposed to it. I just felt, you know, I guess quite accepting might be the way I’d explain it. (Jill)

Fred had a similar comment to make about other memorials he had seen prior to his son’s death:

I suppose I didn’t have a tremendously strong view about them except that I always saw them as a reminder of some sort of sad occasion that would’ve occurred in that location and some person being killed there. (Fred)
Allan’s response was interesting as he mentioned that he actually read the messages on others’ memorials. This would indicate that he stopped his car and got out to read these messages; it was not just a casual glance out the window as he drove by. He reported feeling a measure of comfort from seeing other memorials:

I mean—I know I’m not alone. And I read them, because it’s somebody . . . These are real people, and they deserve our respect. They didn’t want to die at that age . . .

It’s beautiful. It says to me this kid was loved . . . It is a thing of beauty. I mean, there’s no horror to it. (Allan)

Kelly highlighted the feeling held by a few of the participants, namely that she never expected it would be her tending a roadside memorial:

I didn’t imagine it would ever be me that would be looking after one . . . (Kelly)

Lisa’s comments highlighted the shift in gaze and pre-understanding that occurred for her:

. . . before, I didn’t get it, I compared it to like, “Well why do people do that when like, someone dies when they’re in hospital, or a different setting, you don’t see people putting crosses up on walls and so forth.” But my mind changed . . . and now I see that value, you know . . . (Lisa)

Emma talked about having a “connection” now, to others who have been through a similar tragedy:

So, we drive a lot of places around Australia so we’d always see them and I guess I didn’t really [understand]—I sort of feel empathy towards the families of the people, but I didn’t really . . . have that deep connection. I just thought, “Okay, like that’s so sad someone’s passed away there,” but I didn’t have, yeah, that connection with it before. (Emma)

Rebecca noted:

I didn’t think I—I noticed them, whenever I went past them, and would feel sad just looking at them, and particularly if you could see, if you could get an idea of—sometimes you can tell the age of the person that’s died, or you can tell a bit about what’s happened. So I just used to always notice them, but I don’t think I had an opinion on them. For me, in my head, that’s just what happened if someone was killed. The family put a little thing up, or whoever it was. (Rebecca)
This growing connection and empathy with others—strangers—is highlighted by the above responses. Participants spoke of having a gaze of compassion now that they had a shared experience with others bereaved through road fatalities. This contrasts with a gaze of judgement by many opponents of roadside memorials, perhaps those who have not been affected on a personal level by such a tragedy. There appears to be a dearth of literature examining the above, that is, the reactions of those bereaved by road fatalities to others’ roadside memorials. As such, this research project takes a significant first step and acts as a springboard into future research in this direction. I will return to this in Chapter Thirteen.

**Belief that they will see their loved one again**

The second minor theme was the hope or belief that the participants would one day see, and be with, their loved ones again. Both Kate and Lisa referred to their Christian faith providing a measure of comfort. Kate noted:

> . . . And I mean, as a Christian, too, you know—like Mum was a Christian, and I believe that I’ll see her again, which is a great comfort. But at the same time, it still doesn’t ease the loss now. (Kate)

Lisa simply said “I’m a Christian. I believe that he’s with God now.” Allan likewise expressed his faith, and the comfort he derived from knowing he will be with his daughter again, that each day he is “one day closer.”

Dianne explained that she and her husband were not “church-goers”, but:

> We were really spiritual. We’d done Reiki together. We were really spiritual and had that whole spiritual belief, but we weren’t church-goers . . . [so] from that spiritual perspective, I struggled. In that first few days when you’re trying to make all those decisions, I struggled with church and we weren’t church-goers. (Dianne)
Dianne continued to explain that she and a friend designed a wire and fibreglass sculpture to place on top of the rock that formed her roadside memorial. This sculpture depicted her family as fishes, with her husband as the kingfish (he loved fishing), their son as a mini-kingfish, and Dianne and their daughters as angels all huddled close together, with the baby:

\[... under my wing because she was so little and only such a baby. All the fish are in the heart and forever swimming together as always and showing an eternal connection of our souls, so yeah. (Dianne)\]

Kelly—who in the space of five-and-a-half months had lost both her seventeen-year-old daughter, and her twenty-nine-day-old baby twin daughter—went to seek comfort from a clairvoyant. Kelly recollected:

\[I actually went to a clairvoyant you know, and she said that Annie had a baby in her arms, and she didn’t know about [the baby]. ... Yeah, that warmed my soul – yeah, that was enough. (Kelly)\]

The belief in seeing and being with the deceased again can be a source of comfort and solace (Breen, 2006, p. 23) and this was expressed by four of the participants in this study.

Despite not asking participants a direct question regarding their spiritual or religious beliefs I was nevertheless provided with the above statements of belief and conviction. The stories demonstrate the wide range of beliefs and spiritual realities, and the measure of comfort and hope these provide for loved ones “left behind”. This reinforces the literature (see Cann, 2014; Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Everett 2002; Santino, 2005; Thalson, 2006) that posits that even though organised religion and traditional church-
going may no longer be relevant for many, people are still seeking their own forms of meaning-making and spiritual rituals.

Belief that something positive has been gained through the tragedy

The notion of “post-traumatic growth”—a belief that a positive meaning can be found through the death of a loved one, and that the bereaved individual “grows” as a result of this tragedy—is the third minor theme that emerged through this research. Eleven of the fourteen participants spoke passionately about their experiences of this positive growth, despite the undeniable grief and tragedy of their loss. Allan, for example, is writing a book about the story behind his daughter’s cross, which he states has been an enjoyable process and has enabled him to put things in perspective:

The cross has its own story to tell of why it has become a symbol of, value, that people have value to a community . . . and I’m writing a book on this, which I’m quite enjoying and it helps put things in perspective. [It’s about] what the cross has meant at various times to various people. It’s got its own story. And because it’s got its own story, I think that story should be told if someone’s interested to hear that story. It just hasn’t stuck and sat up there. (Allan)

Allan’s daughter Rebecca commented that, “I live life probably ten times more because of Mia’s [her sister’s] death.” Rebecca has also written an In Memoriam piece for the local paper each year:

. . . I do a thing on behalf of the sisters in The Mxxxx (local newspaper) every year in memorial—The girls [her sisters] don’t care whether I do it or not—I do it on the three of our behalfs—mum and dad don’t want to be involved, which is fine. I just do it for my sisters. But I know Mia would want that in there every year, as much as we—I like—I find it therapeutic. It takes me months. I get the wording just so, correct, everything about it. It’s like my little, every year, my little thing . . . And it differs and it’s interesting because each year it obviously means something different because time’s passed, situations have changed . . . Yeah. So every year the message on that is very different. I do—I spend hours and hours and hours and tears and all types of things, just trying to depict exactly what that year is. And so I find it quite therapeutic. And then the girls always love it. (Rebecca)
Like Allan and Rebecca, Kate sought to alleviate her grief through writing, and has kept a “blog” documenting her journey of grief following her mother’s death. Kate hoped that this may bring a measure of comfort to others going through a similar situation. In the latest “instalment” in this blog Kate mentioned our interview and explained to readers how this had made her think about her actions and reactions at the fifth year anniversary visit to both the site and the cemetery. Kate contacted me at that time to let me know that she was really conscious of her thoughts and feelings when she visited both the site and the cemetery on the anniversary. She said she was very upset and teary at the site, yet felt nothing—just nothing, no connection—at the cemetery. She found this experience—after our interview—really interesting, as she found that she was almost looking at herself as an outsider, watching what she was doing from afar. She stated that it really helped her to see things in a different way and think about what she was doing and why.

Kate also drew comfort from the fact that her young granddaughter was named after her mother, (the would-be great-grandmother), stating her mum “would have been so excited and proud about that.” To know that other people were with her mother before she died, offering support and holding her hand, gave solace to Kate:

. . . it’s comforting to know that someone was holding her hand. She wasn’t alone . . . And apparently, there were a lot of . . . people who stopped . . . people were trying to comfort her and so, yeah, that’s good to know. (Kate)

Another participant, Lisa, also commented on the cathartic and healing benefits of writing, and the help it may bring to other grieving people. She would one day like to write a book, for her late son’s friends, on the ways they have grieved and how this can be different to how others may grieve. Lisa explained it this way:
I think part of what I would like to do one day, and I’ve said to the kids that I still know—they’re all 21 now which is—to me they’ll always be kids—is to write a book on the way you’ve grieved. I guess this part of my interest is because—and it makes it easier to not to think about it myself personally but how grief has spirals, down, down, you lose the plot,—is you do grieve differently. (Lisa)

At the time of her son’s death, she arranged for shirts that had *RIP Hendo* on them for his mates, as well as raising money for the organisation “Enough is Enough”. This is a Not for Profit Anti Violence Movement, started in 1994 by Ken Marslew, whose son was killed by armed robbers while delivering pizzas. They work with schools, courts, jails, rehabilitation services and the like, raising awareness about bullying and violence. The organisation also has a road trauma network, drug and alcohol management, and offers counselling and support. Lisa continued:

*Like we’ve had shirts that had RIP Hendo for his mates and it said “Enough is Enough” after that. I got permission from “Enough is Enough” to put that on there, on the back of these T-shirts and then we raised money and gave some to “Enough is Enough” as well. So there’s different ways to try and help them, as well. (Lisa)*

Her involvement with the “Enough is Enough” program was another positive experience identified by Lisa. The organisation talked with the local council about building a memorial wall for victims of road fatalities, and also instigated an annual Road Toll Remembrance Day in the local area. In addition, the organisation encouraged families to plant trees in honour and remembrance of road crash victims at the local park. As Lisa recalled:

*. . . not long after he died—about four weeks later—they asked us, “Would you like to come to this memorial service?” And it was very fresh, very sad but we . . . got to plant this tree. So one of them, we call it “Cody’s tree,” and it’s now huge, so yeah, it was planted—Everyone just lined up there—some of the parents—and we planted these trees. (Lisa)*
Other instances of “Green Memorial” projects—where trees are planted in memory of road crash victims—are documented by Dickinson and Hoffman (2010) and Watkins (2011).

Following the death of her son, Jill initiated a number of community events, lobbied governments, wrote into 60 Minutes as an advocate for roadside memorials following a television segment and “got defensive driving courses running for all the country kids.”

She further explained how:

. . . we didn’t want flowers at the funeral so we asked for donations to go to xxxx High School and we built a memorial kitchen there, [her son was an apprentice chef] and we ran a raffle and did all this lobbying the government—I wanted this stuff to be in people’s faces because I’m damned if anyone’s forgetting my son . . . And the other thing that’s happened too is that because of the kangaroo area, and it was a black spot area, the council actually got money to do roadworks there so they had to cut down the tree . . . The council—before they did it, they came out and they said, “Look, are you okay if we do take out—we’re gonna have to cut down the tree ’cause we’re expanding the road so no one else has an accident, of course.” I said, “I’m fine with that” because I’ve had signs erected and all of that kind of stuff ’cause I didn’t want anything to happen to anyone else. (Jill)

Jill explained that even though it was difficult to see the tree of impact removed, she was relieved that the chances of another fatality at that spot was likewise removed. Jill also spoke of the positive “side effects” her personal tragedy has had for her work with other bereaved people. She stated that being able to draw on her own experience of bereavement, as well as the theory, has been helpful:

The good thing about it is that because I have had my own experience I guess, and done so much research on it myself, I can draw on theory and talk about the experience of bereavement I suppose—which I think has been useful with people I’ve worked with, yeah. (Jill)

Kelly is another participant who spoke of some positive outcomes following the death of her daughter. As she explained:
Annie always wore her Ugg boots to school and she wasn’t supposed to and the school rang me up the other day that they’re gonna have an Annie Uggie Day and the money raised is gonna go to a driver program for all the children at school to do in year 11 so they become better drivers . . . [T]he teacher said they’ve had lots of complaints from the general public about the kids’ driving, so they wanna improve the kids driving and because of Annie’s accident, they’re gonna use her as the, sort of metaphor about safe driving. Was I opposed to that? I said “Not at all. I don’t mind at all. Annie would love that. She would love to help . . .” (Kelly)

In addition, Kelly had lost her father just three years prior to losing her seventeen-year-old daughter as well as her baby daughter and spoke of how this:

. . . puts it all in perspective, you know? And when mum has a whinge about dad I just look at her and say, "Mum, you’re telling me nothing Mum." Dad was 72. He was blessed. If I live to be 72 years old, I’ll be happy, you know, because it puts it all in perspective . . . you realise how precious every day is . . .” (Kelly)

Dianne has likewise been able to describe some positive outcomes from the death of her husband, with two surf boats being named in his honour along with a memorial plaque presented to the surf club. She continued:

*He also built a playground down the road for our local play group. So, they renamed the playground in his honour. So, that was unveiled on Australia Day after he passed away. Because he was a local builder and because obviously, we were involved in the playgroup with the little ones.* (Dianne)

Allan and Rebecca (father and daughter), had a similar experience to Dianne, with their local Council initiating an annual *Trainee Apprenticeship of the Year* award in their daughter’s/sister’s honour, as she had worked at Council until her death. The Council also erected a seat up on a nearby headland in her memory. For these family members, the fact that their loved ones were being honoured and remembered was a source of pride, comfort and solace.

Rhonda meets occasionally with a few others who have also lost their children, and explained that:
we get together and just have coffee every now and again. Unfortunately, most of our talk is around our children <laughs> that we’ve lost. I guess that helps us because we know how each one is thinking and feeling so, we don’t look at the other person and think, “Aren’t they over it yet?” “Aren’t they doing this?” Or “Aren’t they doing that?” You know. You just let them go and you know exactly where they’re coming from . . . (Rhonda)

Rhonda’s experiences echo Breen’s (2006) findings: that many bereaved people seek out others who have had a similar experience and draw great comfort and support from such interaction. Existing networks of family and friends may prove to be insufficient or even unhelpful, with judgemental attitudes encouraging them to “move on” or to “be strong, don’t cry” as well as offering empty platitudes. As Breen (2006, p. 194) summarised, in a nurturing environment such as a support group (whether formal or informal):

a connection or bond was forged by the loss because of the realisation that others understand their thoughts and feelings. Rather than thinking they have to avoid certain topics or act ‘happy’ despite their true feelings, the bereaved could express their emotions without embarrassment or judgement. As a result, their experiences were normalised because they were recognised as real and authentic. The connection legitimised their experiences, enabling them to talk about topics they felt unable to share with others. Even after the passing of many years, talking about their losses was easier with others with a similar experience and was especially useful when feeling low.

Rhonda certainly finds this to be the case.

Despite the death of her thirty-five-year-old son, Cathy stated she nevertheless felt “blessed” and explained it thus:

. . . you know, I remember when Aaron was killed and somebody came and said to me—somebody I didn’t know very well came and said to me, “Oh, that’s a terrible thing.” And they said, “I’ve lost a child, but it wouldn’t be nearly as bad as you because I lost my child at birth. And I said to her, “I think that’s worse.” I said, “I’ve got a big—I’ve got memories. I’ve got a whole life that I can sit and think upon, and you’ve only got a life that, what might have been. What do you—” Well, you know, when you first fall pregnant and then you think oh yes, you just, you have all these fantasies about what’s going to happen . . . And I said to her, “None of those have been fulfilled for you.” I said, “You know, some of my memories are good; some are bad; some are
Cathy’s sentiment that she is “blessed” as she has a “whole life” of memories of her son that she can “sit and think upon” echoes earlier research by Chan and Chan (2011, p. 158), who noted that, in Frankl’s (1945) logotherapy, “it is emphasized that the past does not vanish and no one can seize our past . . . These propositions may encourage bereaved persons to look back to the past and re-experience those meaningful moments.”

Being able to appreciate the time she did have with her son, and comparing that amount of time to others, enabled Cathy to see the positives in her tragedy, and perhaps ease her pain and loss to some degree. This notion of post-traumatic growth, or seeing the positives arising from a tragedy, is thus echoed by a number of the participants in this study. Trevor likewise agreed with this sentiment, as his partner was an organ donor and:

\[\ldots \text{some of her organs [were] used for transplants. So, she, I think she maybe helped out at least five people in the world . . .} \] (Trevor)

Gibson (2010, p. 61) discussed organ donation, referring to it as a “gift”. She noted that:

Death makes possible the practice of giving and extending one’s existence, in object form, beyond one’s own self-conscious, bodily existence. The modern medical technology and practice of organ donation offers a paradigm of ‘the gift’ where the subject consents (although not always) to turn their body into part-objects in order to extend the life of another . . . Lock (2002) argues that, like any gift, something of the person is imagined as embodied in the object—the given organ.

Trevor goes on to further explain that following the crash that claimed his partner’s life, the road was realigned and the camber changed to prevent future crashes. In addition,
Trevor himself was left with a permanent physical disability as a result of the crash, and as he commented:

You do move on, because time does heal most wounds. But if you end up with a permanent reminder, i.e. a physical disability which reminds you daily of the previous accident . . . [He trails off lost in thought at this point, to later add] . . . as you are driving along and you happen to see other sites and your heart goes out to other people. And so maybe for your work it might be also character building for other people to feel for total strangers and try to understand that somebody else has lost somebody on that particular eucalyptus macullata spotty gum . . . (Trevor)

For Molly, the sadness of losing her brother over twenty years ago has remained with her, yet she draws a certain comfort from knowing that:

. . . the paddock where his car was found become an orchard and every now and then it sort of blooms up and it’s really nice . . . And the people, they make lots of jams and stuff with their produce and that’s always out the front. So, you know, you can stop and buy fruit and produce from them and from the paddock where it happened and I still do sometimes think it’s a bit ironic that, you know, such stuff could have come from the ground where such tragedy occurred but then I think maybe it’s just all meant to be. (Molly)

She has also been able to “reframe” the tragedy and see parts of it in a more positive light, reminiscing, for example, how she has:

. . . done like a lot of sort of healing and thinking about it and I know that, you know, it was meant to be and just little things that have happened and been said and it was sort of meant to be and . . . you can’t bring them back. You can’t change it. And I guess the luckiest thing I guess was there was none of our friends with him . . . (Molly)

Molly further commented that losing her brother at such a young age has certainly shaped who she is today, and has given her resilience and coping strategies to get through other life challenges. She remarked:

Like then you have people, you know, getting on your case or giving you grief over stupid little stuff or, you know, you always have little tiffs with people and you just think, are you really serious? Like, there is so much more to life than, you know, you’re gonna get cranky and like carry on about that. And I just sort of did shut down a lot. Walk away from people ‘cause sometimes I just think, are you kidding? Like, come on!
I get more harder on myself ‘cause like what makes people upset in their life can be different to what I think is upsetting and deal with them. I do know people do comment that I deal with life very differently than most people and have a very different outlook on life and see the world through such different eyes and I don’t know if it’s from, you know, part—I do think it’s part and parcel from losing my brother so early and, you know, other family things that have happened and I don’t know. It’s probably the biggest thing that shaped my whole life into who I am. . . You go, if I can get through that I can get through a lot. . . I surprise myself sometimes when I think I just can’t handle one more knock and then another knock comes and you go like, yeah I survived that, wow! . . . That was a challenge! Yeah and I quite often think, oh my gosh! Like how much stronger do I have to be. Like really? Like I quite sometimes stand there and look up at the sky and go how much stronger do I have to be—not really? You get no answers and then you just keep going and usually the positive eventually shines and you go, oh okay, all right. That’s what it’s about. (Molly)

The participants’ experiences of post-traumatic growth and attempts at meaning-making is consistent with previous research in the area (Bonanno, 2008; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2001; Chan & Chan, 2011; Everett, 2002; Ho et. al, 2004; Moodley & Costa, 2006; Neimeyer, 2000; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). The idea of making meaning out of a tragedy or a senseless death (Everett, 2002) is similar to Frankl’s (1945) concept of logotherapy—finding meanings and purpose in exposure to the ‘tragic triad’ of guilt, death and suffering. Bonanno’s (2008) research likewise considered whether grief can be a positive experience with favourable outcomes, and found that this is the case for many mourners. We want our loved ones’ lives to have meant something; not to be a pointless statistic. By seeking an element of “good” in their death we are perhaps able to reframe this loss, giving their life—and their death—meaning. As documented by Breen (2006, p. 35), Neimeyer (1998) “argued that the search for meaning following bereavement is central to the process of grief.” Interestingly, Breen’s (2006) study of bereaved individuals in WA (Australia) found no evidence of this experience within her “sample” group. In contrast post-traumatic growth, along with other tenets of positive psychology, is evident in eleven out of the fourteen participants in this current study.
This is something that has not been addressed adequately in previous studies concerning roadside memorials.

**Roadside memorials are often initiated by friends, not family**

The question of who built or instigated the roadside memorial—family or friends—is the fourth minor theme emerging from this research. Nine out of the fourteen participants said that, if there was a memorial, it was established by the friends of the victim, and these have all been permanent memorials, rather than temporary tributes. Four of the participants indicated that if others had not decided to mark the site with a permanent memorial they may not have even thought about it or done so themselves, yet in hindsight they are very glad such a memorial exists. Lisa, for example, did not initially see the value in her son’s mates establishing a roadside memorial, but later came to see it as an important part of their—and her—expression of grief. Despite the paradox for Lisa of it being a “horrible place”, she continues to drive past it from time to time, to ensure it is still in place: “occasionally I’ll drive past and make sure it’s still there.” She further recalled:

. . . (a) father phoned me one day and I still recall standing on the back deck and he called me and he said, “I’m so sorry I’ve never phoned you but, you know, I knew Cody a lot and he used to come and stay at our place, he was a little bit naughty sometimes! I, you know, had a lot of time for him and obviously my boys loved him and I wanna make something. I’ve made this cross and it’s got—‘Rest in peace, Cody. Gone too soon.’ Or something like that—and he said, “I’m just gonna place it on there, it’s simple, it’s small and shouldn’t detract from anything else.” And I agreed to that, that was lovely. (Lisa)

In the same way, Jill explained that it was her son’s friends who initiated the roadside memorial:
Well, we actually didn’t [build it]. It didn’t come from us, in actual fact. It came from my son’s friends here in xxxx. They decided that they wanted to put up a memorial . . . His mates, [it was] their need to do something for him straightaway. Yeah, straightaway. And for his brothers and his sister as well. So they organised it. They asked, if, did we mind and of course we said, “No, that’s fine,” because I knew, I could see it was important to them . . . So they organised it all within—I think that was before his funeral even.

On the day that they were putting it up, they invited us out to come and bang the nails in, actually, so that the cross was nailed to the tree that Greg had hit with his car.

And as I say, it wasn’t something that we went about doing. I don’t know if I would have done it, either. It’s because the kids thought about doing it. (Jill)

Allan had a similar story to tell. It was his daughter’s friends who arranged the memorial, and he noted that he found it interesting that this was their first response. He was also surprised that the memorial would act as a focus for others to gather at, to mourn and express their grief:

Her friends organised it . . . this was their first response . . . It was important to them, really important to them . . . we went up there the next day. There was a wooden cross that one of Mia’s friends had organised with some other friends and they’d driven into the ground. And it was interesting that that was their first response. And there was a lot of flowers around it. There was a lot of teddy bears, notes, lots of notes. And we were surprised because, one, we didn’t know it was going be there and two we didn’t know that it would act as a focus for people. (Allan)

For Emma, the death of her friend occurred four hundred and seventy-five kilometres away from the family home, so it was all of the newer university friends who organised the tribute to be placed at the site of death. As she pointed out:

So, her family was down here so she’d moved away for uni so all the uni students and all of the uni families did everything up there for the family down here . . . Her family are obviously taking it very hard so a lot of her friends up there have done most of it for the family. (Emma)

Kelly also spoke of the initial memorial being instigated by her daughter’s friends, and later added to by herself and her family:
It just happened because within—like we went to the accident site, the car was being removed and we went to the hospital to ID her body and by the time I went back past the tree, there were kids already there with flowers.

Yeah, they just came. There was kids parked all around it, with their music on, just sitting, watching the tree. In awe, of what just happened, and by the time the funeral happened, we had to use a Ute to remove all the dead flowers. It was full of flowers, and then we started to put artificial flowers there because they lasted longer and then they started bringing—like, quite often, there are lots of little stuffed animals and bits and pieces and little ornament things, and fairies, garden gnomes, metal flower stakes and someone brought a Barbie doll and at least four bottles of alcohol, like, drinks for her, because they all have a drink and then they bring her one and leave it at the tree. (Kelly)

Meg’s experience was different to the others, in that the original memorial for her friend was built by the victim’s boyfriend, but was later hit by another car and destroyed. Meg and her partner then rebuilt a second memorial. As she recollected:

. . . the first one got hit by another car and was busted up and we went up there and we were just walking along and lo and behold—we found the little tiny plaque that was on the cross. So we took that, picked that up and took that home and then constructed one that’s a little bit more substantial. We moved it about seven feet to where there’s a culvert . . . with his [the boyfriend’s] blessing. We asked him what he wanted us to do. (Meg)

Another four participants—Cathy, Fred, Dianne and Kate—said that it was themselves or the immediate family who established the roadside memorial, with no reference to input from the deceased’s friends. Molly, who has no physical memorial for her brother, was obviously unable to comment on this question.

As discussed in the literature review, studies by Everett (2002), Clark and Tidswell (2010) and Klaassens et al. (2009) asserted that friends tended to build spontaneous, temporary memorials whereas families established more permanent memorials, some time after the tragedy. For example, Klaassens et al. (2009, p. 191) noted, “Friends seem to have a more pressing and urgent need to memorialise the event of the accident and
the loss, whereas parents seem to memorialise the deceased in a more enduring way.”

As such, my findings do not agree with these studies. Even though it was friends rather than family who built the majority of the memorials, they have been permanent—albeit in flux—memorials, and not temporary tributes.

The findings of this study also differ significantly with research conducted by Hartig and Dunn (1998). They examined roadside memorials in the Newcastle (NSW, Australia) area, and concluded that these were primarily built by friends of the mainly male victims, and were intended to depict youth machismo, aggression, heroism and tough masculinity. In addition, the use of car parts and alcohol were frequently used in these memorials (see Literature Review for a full discussion). The findings of this study did not concur with Hartig and Dunn’s, as the number of male victims equalled the number of female victims and sites for the male victims did not depict any traces of youth machismo or tough masculinity. One possible explanation could be due to the very different socioeconomic and demographic profile of the two areas.

Despite these differences, comments by participants such as Jill, Allan and Kelly, regarding their initial surprise at a memorial being established by the friends of their children, is echoed in the findings of Weissner (2004, 2.6) who found that:

Situations have been documented where some of the survivors did not feel the necessity to commemorate the location of the accident, but a marker was constructed by another person(s) anyway. Yet, those originally neutral regarding the micro sacred site may later participate in activities at the memorial, such as upkeep or visiting on anniversaries.

This is certainly the case for these participants, who regularly visit the memorial and update or maintain the site even though it was initially established by friends.
Tensions or differences between generations or other family members

The fifth minor theme to emerge is the differences or tensions between family members in a number of areas including their grieving styles; their ability to talk and express emotion; their thoughts about the sites themselves and ideas about the ashes and what to do with them. Ten of the participants mentioned such tensions and many indicated that they were unprepared for dealing with such differences. For example, Lisa’s husband and son cannot bear to drive down the road—let alone visit the site—where their son/brother was killed as a fifteen year old passenger. She described how:

. . . when I was taken to that site, my husband never did . . . my husband has never driven down that road, xxxx Avenue . . . Yep, yep, he just goes off, if I ever happen to try and talk to him about it . . . Nathan, my son, doesn’t like it either . . . And my son, Nathan, finds it hard to go there [the cemetery] now and so does my husband.

And to be considerate of the other family members as well, like, all the other bits and pieces I’ve saved, I’ll just keep them away in the cupboard, yeah, try not to upset the other people in my family. (Lisa)

Lisa’s actions—taking notes and “other bits and pieces” from her son’s site and keeping them at home for “one day”—is echoed in the literature. Klaassens et al. (2013, p. 157) described a similar situation, with a mother storing “material objects” from her daughter’s memorial in “her daughter’s former bedroom.” Kelly likewise mentioned that she has a number of the articles left at her daughter’s site put away, as they have been replaced by newer mementos.

Further examples of the tensions between family members is evident in Kate’s story. As mentioned earlier, Kate’s father did not want a roadside memorial established for his wife (Kate’s mother), despite Kate and her siblings wanting to have some kind of marker
of this sacred site. To respect their father’s wishes, they simply place a single rose at the site on significant occasions.

Jill’s ex-husband (the father of their son) had to move away from their town where the crash occurred, finding it too difficult driving past the site. Jill explained it thus:

*My ex-husband—it’s interesting too that different people handle it in different ways. My ex-husband actually left xxxx—’cause he lived in xxxx as well. He actually left xxxx within a couple of years and maybe it’s because he was finding it difficult driving past and now he’s left the area altogether. Yeah, it’s a very different sort of response.* (Jill)

Meg likewise mentioned that the boyfriend of her friend decided to move away from the town where the death occurred, finding it too difficult to have to frequently pass the site. Rebecca likewise commented on the differences within her family as they each came to terms with her sister’s death, and the subsequent memorial built by the roadside. She said:

*Mum would never—mum never went up there . . . Mum used to just go and keep buying all these bright fake flowers for the cross which was . . . and obviously that was fulfilling some kind of need mum had. Dad needed to go there to keep making it nice. I just needed it to be there.* (Rebecca)

As well as tensions and differences, there can also be ambivalence or even opposition by family members, as is the case with Cathy. She has never visited the roadside memorial for her son, built by his mates. Perhaps for Cathy and others like her “the memory of how the person died may simply be too painful” (Barrera, 1991, p. 281); the recollection of how a loved one died too excruciating to be memorialised (Everett, 2002, p. 80). As mentioned above, Lisa agreed with this sentiment, describing the site of her son’s death as “a horrible, horrible place”.

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A further point of contention—or perhaps a generational difference—lies with the attitudes towards the ashes of the loved one. The experiences of both Jill and Kelly exemplify this. Kelly, for example, told how her father-in-law reacted to the presence of the urn containing her daughter’s ashes being a part of birthday celebrations:

They can’t even look at the urn in the house. I put the urn—I brought the urn home the day of my son’s birthday, right? And I put the urn next to the birthday cake for the photos as if to say she’s home for the party and my father-in-law wanted to move it away from the cake because he didn’t want it in the photo, because he’s old school. So, I said “No . . . she’s at the party. She’s here. I brought her home today and I want to remember and he was like oohh!—He’s 73 years old. (Kelly)

Jill’s story was similar:

. . . no one knows that’s where his ashes are, but they’re on the kitchen bench <laughs> because he wanted to be—well, he was an apprentice chef . . . Yeah, so he’s on the kitchen bench. And actually my father said to me, “Oh, what’s in here? You know, in the box on there?” I said, “Oh, Greg.” And he goes, “Oh, that’s not good. You should move that.” <laughs> So he was quite uncomfortable but we’re very comfortable. (Jill)

Gibson (2010, p. 61) captures both Kelly and Jill’s thoughts, pointing out that there is a market:

. . . particularly in the USA, for ornamental urns which display and domesticate death. The dead are literally and symbolically, via an aesthetic object, reincorporated into the home and family . . . The contemporary ritual of placing the dead in ornamental urns for display suggests a re-signification of the dead as dwelling, rather than resting, amongst and within the spaces and places of the living rather than amongst the community of the dead . . .

Other researchers, for example Martin and Doka (2000) and Miller (2003), explored the differences between genders in their grieving styles and found that tensions can arise due to these differences and misunderstandings. Bell et al. (2015) also refer to such tensions amongst those who manage their grief in different ways (in their case, the use of Facebook or other online forums). “Our participants highlighted tensions between public and private expressions of grief and emphasised a growing sense of uneasiness created by these new forms of memorialising/mourning . . .” (p. 385). Agreeing with
Walter (2015), the authors pointed out that there is a “potential for conflict [which] can also arise as different ways of mourning become more apparent to others, but not necessarily more understood” (p. 385).

In this way, differences and tensions between family members, friends or even generations was a common theme documented in this study. Again, this is not something that has been explicitly explored in previous research, and thus adds to the knowledge base in roadside memorial research. This could well prove to be a worthwhile avenue for future research.

**Exceptions or negative case analyses**

On this research journey I encountered one negative case analysis (Creswell, 2007) or exception, where one of the participants—Cathy—felt that having a roadside memorial had not, in fact, provided solace or comfort for her in any way, although she did acknowledge it was visited frequently by other family members and friends. Cathy herself has never been to see the memorial or the place where her son died, preferring instead to remember him in a memorial garden at her home. With her Christian faith, Cathy felt that the place of his death was not significant; in addition, she “dislikes” crosses and artificial flowers by the roadside, and was the only participant in favour of the black post initiative (see previous discussion).

Four other participants (Dianne, Kate, Molly and Lisa) were also exceptions, as their stories differed significantly from the group as a whole. Dianne, for example, wanted the roadside memorial for her husband to be hidden away and private. She did not want strangers looking at it or wondering what had happened there, nor did she want it to be
a visible reminder or warning for other road users. It was for her and her children, as well as close friends or family. This compares with most people (in both the literature and in this study), who say they want others to see it; to know that their loved one died at that spot; to be a potential warning for others. In fact, on our first contact via telephone, Dianne explained that her story may be very different to others’ and hence may be useful for my research for that very reason.

Dianne’s memorial also differed from others in that she chose only natural features, rather than the usual cross and flowers and mementos. She explained it like this:

I wanted it to be natural. I guess I didn’t want it to stand out for every man and his dog . . . I didn’t want them to, you know, and again I go, blending in with the natural environment and, yeah and not drawing attention to other people that don’t need to know or yeah . . .

I don’t mind people going, I don’t mind people knowing and I know other friends that were possibly friends with him that maybe weren’t close to me and they know. But I think it’s nice from an environmental perspective too I guess. I’m a bit more like that— a bit alternative, a bit hippy—You know, I just wanted it to be natural.

She continued:

. . . [you] wouldn’t even see it unless you—in fact the person who caused the accident who died straight away, his friends and family have put something—and it’s across the other side of the road and probably about 50 to 100 metres further down the road. His would jump out at you, now if you—That would almost probably deter away from even seeing ours . . . But if you knew that there was an accident there, it might lead you to stop because of his and then possibly you would walk across the road and go looking, you may find it. But—you wouldn’t see ours . . . (Dianne)

Kate’s experience is also an exception, as her family do not have a cross or other visible mark at the site where her mother died, except for a single rose placed on the anniversary. Despite this, she feels a great connection with her mother at the site and mentioned that it is this place that holds the most significance for her. The cemetery where her mother’s ashes are interred, feels cold and impersonal for Kate. Kate’s
experience of her roadside memorial thus extends my initial definition of a roadside memorial. Even if there is no visible or tangible marker, these places still remain sacred sites, laden with symbolism and significance and providing comfort and solace.

Molly’s story is similar to Kate’s in that the site of her brother’s death over twenty years ago (when roadside memorials were not as common in Australia) is not marked with a physical or tangible memorial yet nevertheless holds great significance for Molly. As mentioned earlier, Molly raised an additional interesting point, and that was her concern for the owner of the farm/paddock, and the impact this may have had on him and his family if a memorial had been erected at that site.

Molly continued:

*I actually look at a lot of the memorials and sometimes I think . . . A few of my cousins have talked about it but nothing’s ever really been done . . . And I cannot tell you why, like I look at other memorials and it’s one thing I do look at on the side of the road and all that and sort of go “hmmm.” And I don’t judge or think any of it but I go, “Oh, we never really did anything,” but it’s sort of . . . like we all know where it is like ‘cause of the orchard being there.*

*I’ve thought about it like I said when I’ve seen other ones I go, “Oh I wonder if we should really just maybe put something on the fence.” And I think, “No, I don’t really need to.” I was quite a lot like—when it comes to the twenty year anniversary or the ten year I did really wanna get some of his friends and some of our closer family members together and like sit there like through the night. But I’ve never actually got around to organising it . . .

*And I still do think about it—like I won’t lie. I still do think about it like seeing your thing made me start thinking about it again. And well, you know, weeks go past and you go, well yeah like, nuh! We just, we know where it is and we can go and sit there and like I said, like the farmer’s been out before. We have quick chats and he’s all cool with it. (Molly)*

So for Molly, like Kate, the lack of a physical memorial is unimportant. The important thing for them is that the site of the tragedy is significant and comforting, regardless of any tangible marker.
The final participant whose experience is an exception is Lisa. She sees the roadside memorial site for her young son as a “horrible place” and “too difficult” to visit, explaining that these days she prefers to go to the cemetery, which she described as beautiful and peaceful. (Her son’s memorial is on a very busy main road in a city suburb). Lisa acknowledged that his mates (who built the memorial) needed it however, especially before the funeral when they had nowhere else to congregate. Lisa’s feelings are echoed in research by Klaassens et al. (2009). They found that some of the people they interviewed chose not to visit the site, either because the site of the crash was too painful and traumatic to visit or because they felt no need to go, or no connection to their loved one there.

Clark and Tidswell (2010, p. 24) further noted that:

There was a sense among the interviewees that, whilst erecting the memorial was important, and the site continues to be important as a place to gather and remember and reflect, for some it is not enough and visiting the site actually inhibits the healing process. One interviewee likened the act of visiting the memorial to taking off a bandage from a wound too early, disturbing the wound before learning how to take the bandage off without causing the wound to bleed again.

So, even amongst the research participants there are a variety of meanings and thoughts and preferences. The richness of hermeneutic phenomenological research such as this study is that the lived experiences, the nuances, the variety of meanings and realities, are unearthed. In regard to roadside memorials, there can be no right or wrong, there is indeed no room for Cartesian dualism or dichotomies. Roadside memorials are laden with significance and meanings for those who erect them. This current study is merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg, and further research is therefore warranted to better understand their role in modern society.
This chapter concludes the examination and discussion of the themes and findings generated in this research. The four major and the five minor themes have been detailed, using the candid, rich and honest voices of the research participants. The next chapter offers suggestions and implications for both policy and practice.
CHAPTER TWELVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Roadside crosses are a way of saying to the departed loved one, ‘I will remember you always, but I also want for the community to remember you as they come face-to-face with the cross on the roadside’ (Barrera, 1991, cited in Bednar 2004).

The key findings and themes unearthed through the in-depth component of this research have been presented in the previous three chapters. The results from the in-depth interviews have provided a rich and detailed account of the role and meanings of roadside memorials. In this chapter some implications for policy and practice are provided as are some suggestions made by the participants for others so bereaved. Implications for social workers and other professionals who work with bereaved people are considered. Finally, a number of unexpected outcomes that arose from the research process are highlighted.

Critical social work is embedded in an emancipatory approach, hence my research sought not only to hear people’s stories and lived experiences, but to inform policy and legislation covering roadside memorial implementation, and to suggest practice implications for those who work with bereaved individuals. Unexpectedly, nine participants indicated that they wanted to contribute to the research in order to influence policy, as well as assisting others in the same situation. The participants, along with myself as the researcher, wanted to be active agents of change and impact policy and legislation covering roadside memorialisation. Thus a critical social work approach, linking the personal to the political, by contributing to assisting others in the same situation, as well as affected communities and policy (micro, meso and macro levels),
also resonated for the participants in this study even though they did not use this terminology.

Implications for policymakers

Given that people were motivated to participate in order to contribute to the research and to help others, it is not surprising that they were keen to offer opinions about policy options in the light of their own experiences. From the participants’ stories it is clear that roadside memorials play a very important role in the bereavement process. Roadside memorials do not simply contain a road safety message or act as statistical markers. Rather, they play an important role in the bereavement process for many mourners. For this reason, it is important that roadside memorials be permitted to retain their individuality and personality. Policymakers need to understand that, even though roadside memorials can act as a warning to others about road safety, the participants in this study indicated that their primary purpose was to honour the loved ones they had lost; they are shrines to the people who have died.

Overwhelmingly, the participants articulated that it was not until after their loss that they realised the importance of roadside memorials. Prior to their firsthand experience, the participants commented that they had given them little thought, and did not realise how significant it would become for them and their families or the friends involved. This included those who did not actually build the memorial. One participant (Kelly) commented that most policymakers were probably “old school”, with no personal experience of such tragedy, and therefore were ill-equipped to be making such decisions. As Kelly pointed out, the younger generations are seeking new ways of
mourning; they are more expressive, more open. The “stiff upper lip” of previous generations is not helpful. Kelly explained it like this:

> I suppose the councillors who’re making the decision, they’re in their 60s. They’re gonna feel like that but if they’re in their 20s, they’re not . . . I think it is a generation thing . . . the council people—councillors—are probably thinking “Oh God, we’ve got to make a rule about this because this is getting out of hand,” but they don’t—they obviously haven’t lost a child. (Kelly)

As current generations are seeking newer forms of mourning and expression for their grief, be that in online platforms such as Facebook, car decals, tattooing or through roadside memorials (Bailey et al., 2014; Bell et al., 2015; Cann, 2014) the traditional mourning objects and mourning practices are no longer relevant for many. From this research it is clear that uniform, standardised, generic memorials or markers will not suffice. Policymakers need to take this into account, allowing memorials to be built, possibly within certain guidelines such as those implemented by the Australian states of Western Australia and Victoria (Main Roads, WA, 2010; VicRoads, 2015). Public safety must remain the highest priority for policymakers, while still allowing freedom to express the individuality and personality of the deceased.

Results from this study suggest the following directions for policy in relation to roadside memorials: use individualised memorials rather than generic markers; develop guidelines addressing the scope and size of memorials; introduce a register with contact details; use roadside memorials in road safety campaigns, and finally, include the input of those who have experienced road deaths, and have subsequently established a roadside memorial, into policy decision-making. These will now be addressed in turn.
Individualised memorials

All but one of the participants (Cathy) were vehemently opposed to standardised markers, citing a lack of individuality and uniqueness, as well as the belief that such a standardised marker reduced their deceased loved one to a mere road toll statistic; a faceless number. This represents a clear message for policymakers/councils who are considering developing or reviewing their roadside memorial policies (see section below). Jill said she would advocate in favour of memorials, because:

they remind people that someone died there... I think it’s the most potent—I mean council’s really about maintaining roads and I think that’s the most potent reminder you can have—that being on a road, you’ve got to be careful. For that reason I think they’re useful and I think they’re fantastic for family. And if families want to put them up I think they should be allowed to. I don’t think they should be in the middle of the road. <laughs> I think they should be in a safe place but if I think if you get caught up in all the rigmarole about policing it, if you like, you’ll just get families that then rebel anyway and then you’ve got—then that becomes, like, if someone put up something that didn’t comply with regulations, then you’ve got to go and what? Negotiate with them at a time of grief? (Jill)

As a former mayor, Fred’s advice was to ensure that the memorial, although individualised, did not pose a traffic hazard or distraction for other motorists:

Oh, I’d say as long as it’s a—they don’t go overboard with it, you know, that it’s a simple cross with some details on it and perhaps a pot of some flowers growing there, I think it, they should do it and it should be allowed to be done providing they don’t obstruct traffic—common sense among these things has to prevail. And then, you know, if you wanted to put an outrageous monument there and create obstructions and all sorts of other problems, then I think there would have to be some intervention. But if it’s simply a cross on the side of the road and there’s a couple of pot plants of flowers growing and the like I can’t see that it affects anyone. (Fred)

Guidelines

In response to questions about guidelines to include in policy decisions, four participants suggested that guidelines surrounding roadside memorial construction could be formulated, which allow flexibility and which take into account factors such as size,
materials used, placement, and possibly timeframes. The need for flexibility and allowing personal expression were highlighted, along with a discussion regarding the upkeep of memorials, and whose responsibility this should be. The imposition of timeframes certainly sparked controversy, with Rebecca for example declaring:

*I find that interesting, too, because grief never ends. You don’t just get over things. Why would you suddenly remove the cross after X amount of years? Does it no longer suddenly mean anything? So, for me, time’s a bit ridiculous . . . Yeah, time, I find that a weird one . . . So you say “right, it’s been ten years and three days, the cross has to come out now.”* (Rebecca)

Further suggestions for guidelines were offered by Rebecca and Meg. Rebecca discussed the need for some kind of restriction on both size and the amount of mementos permitted, saying that some memorials can in fact become dangerous distractions for other motorists:

*[T]here’s one . . . which basically takes over a whole tree. I think there does need to be some kind of policy or restriction on what it can involve because, that’s quite a distraction, without question . . . Like that’s a physical—As you’re driving along, it’s a huge distraction, whereas Mia’s cross I didn’t find—it wasn’t like “Whoa, look at that!” . . . Yes, so I do think there needs to be some kind of policy around roadside memorials . . . I do think that they have to be maintained or there needs to be some kind of way of making sure they are maintained. Like I’ve said, we always would go up there every couple of months then take the weeds out.* (Rebecca)

Meg pointed out the need to consider all those involved in the establishment of private memorials in the public domain, including the families involved, others impacted by the crash and/or the placement of the memorial, and council:

*They could maybe suggest that there’s some guidelines . . . [for] roadside memorials? What’s expected of people? I think that’s a better attack than to just not have it. Yes, and I think that one has to look at it from both sides, the people, the families, and council.* (Meg)
Lisa continued with a further suggestion that someone needs to be responsible for keeping roadside memorials from falling into disrepair and becoming neglected eyesores:

I think . . . someone should take care of the site. Look, I don’t think it’s fair on the closest people to the person that’s passed to have to do that, unless they want to. But someone should be responsible for keeping it safe, cleaning up . . . I guess you need someone to be a person of key responsibility. Otherwise, the council could come and move it all. I guess maybe that’s some of the conditions but then they need to clarify to people what is the stuff that there are going to move—if it’s just leaving bags of, you know, flowers there, to them is that offensive? So they have to have some sort of guidelines, I guess, on what they wouldn’t take away because that could destroy someone, as well, if they turn up and all the stuff is just gone. (Lisa)

Register

The use of a register of roadside memorials, as adopted by WA for example, was another suggestion supported by two of the participants in this group. Dianne and Rebecca said the following:

I would be okay with registering it . . . I wouldn’t mind registering it, like you said, if there was register, I would do that to say, “Yes, I've created that and yes, here's my details.” (Dianne)

There’s so many roadside memorials in New South Wales. Trying to get them all to make them—So I don't think that's going to work, but I agree with the register—I think something needs to be done, because you do see the ones that get out of control. And there’s no regulating body, and everyone’s emotional, and it’s, how do you—you know? You need ‘police’ of roadside memorials. (Rebecca)

A register was seen as useful, to enable government bodies to have the contact details of the builders of memorials, should the need arise to contact them in case of roadworks, maintenance issues or if the site became unkempt or a distraction to others.
Road safety campaigns

Several of the participants in this study had suggestions for policymakers concerning road safety campaigns and ways to minimise the number of deaths on Australian roads. Trevor, for example, felt that a visual and factual approach could be useful, using powerful images of smashed vehicles coupled with “actual facts and numbers”:

*I would like to see a half decent sign even just popped away in a roadside pull over area where basically RTA [now RMS] could have a big picture of a smashed up Kombi hitting a truck or whatever, just stating a bit more actual facts and numbers of the amount of people that lose their lives on the road.* (Trevor)

In a similar vein Lisa suggested the use of roadside crosses to mark the place where someone had actually died, coupled with educational campaigns to prevent the death from happening in the first place:

*Yeah, so maybe if there was a campaign about, you know, like probably more about it like road deaths and they used the crosses in there and say, you know, something like—everywhere you see one of this means one person has died and—which could equal to a whole community suffering from this or something—I don’t know . . . I think maybe they need to concentrate on what leads up to the roadside memorial. They need to probably have a focus group, they need to possibly campaign at a higher level for different types of advertising. Education, schools.* (Lisa)

These comments support the findings in the literature (Clark, 2004; Clark & Cheshire, 2004; Collins & Opie, 2010; Everett, 2002) who also found that roadside memorials have a significant and potent role to play in road safety awareness campaigns.

Include input of memorial-makers into policy decision-making

This chapter has outlined participants’ suggestions for policy in relation to, and road safety campaigns incorporating, roadside memorials. Clearly people with this lived
experience have valuable perspectives which are currently not included in decision-making processes about roadside memorials. As both Jill and Trevor maintained:

I think people who have roadside memorials put in place should really be speaking out so that other people can hear what they’ve got to say. (Jill)

Because I reckon people who are going to write about this chosen topic they should speak to get advice from the horses’ mouth… (Trevor)

Lisa and Rebecca likewise added that others outside the situation have little understanding, so it is important to hear from those with first-hand knowledge:

You know, I went through a little bit of—of that time when I went to put it up and I asked for permission and then it was, it sort of sounded like I was not going to be able to get it. And I think I just recall that—you know—the moment, and I thought, “Oh people really don’t understand the ins and outs about all of this.” (Lisa)

...when anyone talks to me about roadside memorials, I just think, until it’s your sister or brother or son or daughter, then come talk to me. Like, you can say whatever you want but until that’s your person, don’t bother trying to argue with me...Just don’t do it. (Rebecca)

In a follow-up email Kelly simply said: Thank you so much for giving us a voice. This study has thus sought to ensure that the voices of bereaved families and friends are heard. A recommendation emerging from this research therefore, is that policymakers develop strategies to include those who have the wisdom born of lived experience to participate as partners in policy development and decision-making processes.

Suggestions for others so bereaved

Each participant was asked for their suggestions for others who may be dealing with their own loss and grief following a road fatality. Most felt that placing a roadside memorial was a very individual decision. As Rhonda and Dianne described:
If that’s what they want to do, absolutely. I would not enforce it on them. No, I would not sort of—no, I wouldn’t recommend it. I would say to them, “How do you feel?” And if they feel that’s what they want, then I would be more than willing to go and help them do it if they haven’t got a lot of family around to help them do it. (Rhonda)

I think it’s a real—it’s such a personal thing. If somebody asked me, “How was that for you?” I would share what I’ve pretty much shared with you. I would tell them why it was important to me and why I wanted to do it, and why I did what I did, making it natural. But then, I would always just say, “But that might not be what you want. And if you don’t want to mark that spot because it’s pain and you don’t want to be there, then don’t.” And if they didn’t have young children, see I might not of if I . . . As I said, if I didn’t have the children, I would have cremated him . . . So, I think everybody—if they didn’t have young children, they might not do it that way. (Dianne)

Others, like Lisa, Cathy and Rebecca, believed it was a helpful and positive thing to do and would encourage others to do likewise, as the following quotes illustrate:

Yeah, I would recommend it (Lisa)

If it would help their grief, definitely. (Cathy)

I’d say if you want to, yes. (Rebecca)

Trevor was a little more forthright in his advice, declaring:

F**k mate, give it a shot. If you don’t dig it, if yeah well then, remove it. But give it a shot. If it’s going to help you in any shape, manner or form, um console yourself and help deal with the tragedy you have just suffered well then f**k yeah, bring it on. (Trevor)

Implications for social work practice/other practitioners

Along with other professionals such as police, psychologists, counsellors, and road trauma support workers, to name a few, social workers are strategically positioned to support and advocate for those suffering a loss following a road fatality. The participants in this study identified a number of key issues that present solid opportunities for social workers and other practitioners to consider and implement into their work practices.
The first implication is for practitioners to understand that roadside memorials have a number of functions and play an essential role in the bereavement process, for example, preserving the memory of deceased loved ones, as reiterated by this research as well as the existing literature (Bailey et al., 2014; Doss, 2006; MacConville, 2010; Petersson, 2007a, 2007b; Watkins, 2011; Weisser, 2004).

Another implication for practice to emerge concerns the need for understanding the diversity in grief experiences and needs, as reiterated in Bell et al. (2015). From the responses of the participants it is clear that no two experiences of grief are alike and this is demonstrated by the range of experiences and stories in this small group. Despite the common ground, vast differences were apparent, and this has implications not just for roadside memorial policies and construction, but an acknowledgement that “one size does not fit all”. As Meg commented: “‘Cause we’re not like that. There’s not one person on this planet that’s the same as another person.” This implication is supported by the newer grief theories, whereby the uniqueness of individual grief is acknowledged and the older stage or phase based models are discouraged. This outdated yet still dominant discourse needs to be challenged and the newer understandings of grief need to be reinforced at both a professional and layperson’s level (Breen, 2006). The continuation of bonds, and preserving the memory of the loved one, are to be encouraged, and unhelpful notions of closure and moving on are to be discouraged.

A further implication for practice involves a careful critique of the latest edition (May 2013) of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), with its removal of the “bereavement exclusion”—“meaning in effect that anyone can receive a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder two weeks after the death of a child, parent,
spouse, friend, or anyone” (Attig, Corless, Gilbert, Larson, Mckissock, Roth...Worden, 2013, emphasis added). The DSM-5 now lists grief as a mental disorder, causing alarm for many involved in bereavement support. According to the authors who attended the International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement in British Columbia Canada, and included Attig et al., this has “serious implications for the millions of people who are coping with the death of a child, spouse, parent, friend, or other loved one” (Attig et al., 2013). The DSM is the psychiatry “gold standard” and is used by insurance companies to assess who is or is not covered by their insurance policies. In this latest edition, as mentioned above, a person experiencing grief can now be assessed as having a Major Depressive Disorder, just two weeks after experiencing the death of a loved one (Cann, 2014, p. 11). Moreover Cann declared that “the American Psychiatric Association (APA) has pathologized grief so that it is no longer a meaningful or helpful part of everyday existence.” Cann (2014, p. 11) continued:

While some herald this reclassification as a positive change because it allows for grief counseling to be reimbursed by insurance providers, classifying bereavement as depression after two weeks furthers the stigma of grief in our society and reveals how far we have moved from a time when grief and mourning were not only accepted but expected.

A parallel implication is seen with the current Australian Medicare provisions, whereby a limited six sessions—potentially able to be increased to twelve sessions—are available for grief and loss counselling. This medical model, driven also by economic factors, subscribes to the older paradigms and understandings of grief and does not take into account the unique, individualised and ongoing nature of bereavement. This current research supports the newer models of bereavement, including actively integrating the loss into life as it is now, seeking to maintain continuing bonds with the deceased, and attempting to make meaning out of the loss.
Importantly, the majority of road fatality victims are young people (Daum, 2012; Hartig & Dunn, 1998; Gibson, 2011); additionally, many road fatalities are the result of driving while under the influence of alcohol, the latter estimated to be between twenty-five and thirty percent in Australia (Australian Transport Council, 2011; Victoria Transport Accident Commission, 2012). Given that drink-driving carries such stigma in our society, these deaths have the potential to put pressure on the stricken family and friends. The growing phenomenon of roadside memorials could be read as a way of resisting the stigma attached to road deaths caused by drink-driving or speeding, a way of claiming back the right to grieve death caused by such socially frowned upon and stigmatised actions. Celebrating and honouring the deceased, regardless of the cause of death, becomes possible with roadside memorialisation. Indeed, three participants did acknowledge that alcohol and speed were the cause of their loved ones’ deaths, while another two stated that fatigue was the contributing factor, with one victim falling asleep at the wheel.

Further, young people—friends of the victim—may feel that they can play an active part in celebrating and commemorating the death of their friend at the roadside, whereas the immediate family plan the funeral and the cemetery or crematorium services. Young people may thus be disenfranchised, having no role in—or even invitation to—the more formal rituals (Gamble, 2007; Ware, 2007).

Likewise, the grief and shock from unexpected, untimely and traumatic deaths of young people can lead to complicated grief or prolonged grief (Bonnano, 2004; Jacobs & Prigerson, 2000). The thanatological literature documents that the severity of grief is influenced by a number of factors such as the age of the deceased (younger deaths seen
as untimely), the cause of the death (sudden, traumatic or horrific), the closeness of the relationship with the deceased (parents, siblings, children), the support networks available for the bereaved and a sense of guilt or responsibility for the death (the driver) (Breen, 2006; Kauffman, 2002; Martin & Doka, 2000; Parkes, 1986; Rando, 1984, 1993; Spooren et al., 2001; Stroebe & Schut, 1999, 2005). As Kelly so poignantly stated:

I think it’s easier when the person’s older than you than younger than you. Your children aren’t supposed to die before you are. (Kelly)

Because most road deaths contain many if not all of these factors, this is an indicator that the grief experiences may indeed reflect elements of either complicated or prolonged grief. Acknowledging the intensely painful and complex grief following road crashes—and the potential for complicated, prolonged or disenfranchised grief to develop—is important, without categorising or pathologising these as a mental illness, warranting medical or psychiatric intervention. Finally, as referred to above, the diagnosing and labelling of “normal” grief as a psychiatric condition has serious implications for both professionals and their clients. This, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis. Suffice to say, the findings of this study reinforce the need for professionals working in the field of thanatology to be cognisant and well-trained, in order to provide timely, effective and expert service provision.

Significant other issues were raised by one participant—Dianne—concerning the necessity to address serious issues surrounding how death notifications are given, and how hospitals and morgues deal with the families of victims of road fatalities. Because her concerns are so noteworthy, yet are not addressing the specific lines of inquiry of
this research and are beyond the scope of this thesis they are included as Appendix Eighteen, and warrant future research.

Thus, a number of implications for practice have been identified. Understanding the role of roadside memorials in the bereavement process and the theory behind continuing bonds is imperative. Likewise, an awareness of the diversity in grief experiences and needs of individual mourners is important, along with a knowledge that road fatalities can lead to stigma and judgement, especially if these deaths were the result of alcohol or speeding. A careful critique of the DSM-5, and its pathologising of grief as a mental disorder, is similarly warranted, to ensure that the normal grief of those affected by road deaths is not medicalised and unnecessarily treated with medication.

One of the intended aims of this research was to assist social workers and other professionals who work with bereaved people to understand the support needs of such clients. Additionally, the research has opened the door for ongoing debate and discussion, as well as raising public awareness about the roles, meanings and significance of roadside memorials for bereaved individuals and communities.

**Unexpected outcomes**

A number of unexpected outcomes and opportunities arose during the research period. These were not linked to or specifically addressing the lines of inquiry or research aims yet are an important outcome of the research nevertheless, and demonstrate that social research is not conducted in a vacuum or sterile laboratory. Social researchers are a part of the world we are researching; as Heidegger (1978) explained “being-in-the-world” is
crucial. Hermeneutic phenomenological research explicitly demands such an approach (Crotty, 1998; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Smythe et al., 2008).

The first unexpected outcome of the research was the flood of emails and telephone calls I received as a result of the radio interviews that were aired Australia-wide, as well as the talkback on the radio programs generated by these interviews. People from all walks of life were keen and motivated enough to contact me and tell me their stories and thoughts about roadside memorials, even though the majority did not have their “own” site and were therefore not eligible to become participants of the study. They voiced a wide range of reasons detailing why they were for or against such private memorials in the public domain, as well as some helpful suggestions. Their comments are certainly useful for future research into this controversial area.

Among the people who contacted me were several professionals directly affected by roadside memorials in the course of their work. For this reason, I draw attention to the issue of both direct and vicarious trauma and the question of how the relevant professionals deal with this. Perhaps in practice it is too easy to say we are “okay”, when we are not “okay” at all. Are there enough supports and opportunities for debriefing? Is there adequate supervision available? Are we taught how to self-care so that we can competently care for others? As the experiences in this thesis reveal, the pain, horror and senseless tragedy of road fatalities are traumatic for the families and friends directly affected; yet, the frontline workers are also potentially subjected to a high level of direct trauma, as detailed in Chapter Five. Tellingly, I received unsolicited yet heated opposition to roadside memorials from seven emergency service personnel such as police, ambulance officers, fire fighters and State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers,
who experienced the presence of such sites as triggers that contributed to their ongoing trauma/PTSD. For these service personnel, permanent, visible and highly personalised memorials were very distressing. Additionally, the contact I had with such professionals reinforces that I was very much an active participant in this research process, I was not merely a detached, objective observer of the participants’ experiences. Being faced with the trauma of others—both the participants’ and the professionals’—added to my own experiences of vicarious trauma as I listened to participants’ stories, visited physical sites, and heard the pain of service personnel. In this way, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach underpinning this research led to some unanticipated yet richly rewarding outcomes.

What, then, are the practice implications for managing the trauma and potential disenfranchised grief (Doka, 1998, 2001, 2002) of SES volunteers, ambulance officers and paramedics, police, emergency department and other hospital staff, morgue and forensic workers and counsellors, including social workers? This thesis is a distilled, removed experience, in that even though most of the deaths occurred many years ago, the depth of emotion, the vividness and pain, remain fresh and evident in the participants’ stories. What happens to professionals who are immersed in this work at the time of the crash and face these tragedies regularly? The practice implications are therefore imperative to address.

Other unexpected outcomes and opportunities arose via contact from three government departments, seeking advice and input into their roadside memorial policies. These included Moreton Bay Regional Council in Queensland, VicRoads in Victoria and Main Roads, Western Australia. Each area was reviewing their roadside
memorial policies, and one region had faced opposition to the proposed removal of existing memorials. I found this interesting, as it was this very same scenario in my local area, a number of years ago, that had initially sparked my interest and piqued my curiosity as to the role, meanings and significance of roadside memorials.

Having researched a number of Australian government and councils’ policies, (including, for example, Forbes Shire Council, 2006; Greater Shepparton City Council, 2013; Shoalhaven City Council, n. d., and South Australia’s Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, 2016) and following feedback from the general public as well as the participants’ experiences, I was able to offer some suggestions to each department.

The main aspects to consider in developing some guidelines and a roadside memorial policy were: ensuring a balance between the needs of the bereaved and safety for all road users; possible size constraints; a register so families can be contacted for issues such as road maintenance or neglect and respect for nearby property owners. Empathy and compassion for the bereaved needed to be the underpinning consideration.

I was invited to join the working group for VicRoads Roadside Memorials Policy Review, and was involved with this group (via email, due to distances from Melbourne) as the consultation and review process continued. Their new policy was released in August, 2015, and can be viewed via their website (VicRoads, 2015). The main considerations addressed “the placement of the memorial with respect to road safety and maintenance, as well as the concerns of members of the community, particularly those affected by the crash.”
I was then contacted by the Strategy and Communications Directorate of Main Roads, Western Australia, in February, 2016, seeking feedback on my research and guidance on the review of their roadside memorial policy. The opportunity to be involved in these policy decisions covering roadside memorialisation has been an unexpected—and welcome—outcome from this research.

As other councils and states will possibly come under similar pressure to formulate fair and effective roadside memorial policies, contemporary Australian research will prove invaluable. Because roadside memorials are a growing phenomenon it is inevitable that the debate and controversy surrounding their establishment will become more heated. This is evidenced by the number of emails, telephone calls and text messages I received following the Australia-wide radio interviews I did at the beginning of this research period (see above), and the strong opinions held by people about such private memorials being in the public domain. My involvement, therefore, with Moreton Bay Regional Council in Queensland, VicRoads and Main Roads WA represents holistic, critical social work, enacting change at the meso and macro levels as well as the micro or individual levels.

The unexpected outcomes and opportunities continued, with a number of journalists seeking feedback and assistance with information for media articles. A reporter from the Port Macquarie News contacted me following a number of fatal road crashes in their region, which had sparked contentious newspaper coverage; a freelance journalist from Good Weekend magazine contacted me explaining that the public interest in the debate surrounding roadside memorial was growing and he was therefore keen to write an article on the findings from my research once it was completed; a fellow researcher and
photographer, interested in my work and keen to discuss the connections with his work, contacted me as he was writing a novel in which the protagonist photographs roadside memorials; and finally a journalist from the Central Western Daily (Orange) newspaper made contact for input into an article on roadside memorials, sparked by the death of motorcyclist and the placement of a large memorial complete with her helmet on top of the cross, which had caused heated debate within the town. Academics, journalists, artists, and the general community are interested in this phenomenon of roadside memorials, and the expression of private sorrow in the public domain. This Australian research provides contemporary and relevant insight into this growing phenomenon.

A New Zealand newspaper—the Manawatu Standard—included an article on my research on August 14th, 2013 (King, 2013), which was interesting as my awareness of, and curiosity about, roadside memorials was initially piqued while on a road trip in New Zealand.

Another unexpected outcome—or observation or unanswered question—was the number of local sites I noticed that showed signs of recent activity and maintenance. It was unclear whether this refreshing and visiting of sites occurred because it was the anniversary or other significant time. It was likewise unclear whether this was due to the media coverage about my current research, or was purely coincidental. Perhaps, indeed, the research gaze that I adopted meant that I started to notice and be aware that refreshing of sites was occurring, when in fact this had been happening before my gaze was upon roadside memorials. I visited a few of these sites to try and determine why they may have been refreshed, and in all but one it appeared that there was no link to significant dates. It was a shame that the “owners” of these memorials had not
contacted me; as a curious researcher I would have loved to have left a note at these sites, explaining my interest and leaving contact details (as anecdotally another researcher did); alas, as an ethical researcher I simply drove away, forever wondering.

In this way, a number of unexpected outcomes and opportunities arose during the research period. Although these were not directly related to the research aims or lines of inquiry they nevertheless show that a high level of interest in roadside memorials exists, and the time is indeed ripe for research into this growing phenomenon. This chapter has also considered some implications for both policy and practice, along with some suggestions from participants for others who may be going through similar experiences. The next chapter, the final chapter of this thesis, provides a summary of the findings and some concluding remarks, along with a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the research. Avenues for future research are also suggested.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Daily, people pass numerous locations of where lives have abruptly ended. Some places may bear the scars of an accident, but most appear unblemished, not exhibiting the truth, the sudden loss, the grief, the mourning. Occasionally, a memorial is erected at a fatal accident site. To the casual observer, the micro sacred sites may evoke a vast assortment of emotions: sadness for the loss of life, respect for the preciousness of life, concern for one’s own mortality or a loathing for such an ostentatious display of raw emotions. For the survivors, this may be an attempt to establish a connection with the deceased, an outlet for overwhelming emotion, or an effort to comprehend the solemnity of the situation. These personal markers scream for attention, demanding recognition of not just the life that was lost, but for all of the potential of the life that was extinguished in a single moment (Weisser, 2004, 5.4).

This chapter, divided into seven sections, concludes the study. First, I revisit the context of the study and the methodology employed. Second, I revisit the research aims and lines of inquiry, as introduced in Chapter One. Third, I summarise the overall findings and themes that emerged through this study. Fourth, I link the research findings to the theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter Two. Fifth, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this study. Sixth, I suggest avenues for future research into this phenomenon of roadside memorials. And seventh, I offer final conclusions and draw the thesis to a close.

Revisiting the context of the study and the methodology employed

The study was positioned within the newer understandings of bereavement theory: the role of continuing bonds, the importance of memorialisation and the preservation of memories—keeping the deceased “alive”—as opposed to the older yet still dominant discourse of grief with its task or stage-based models and emphasis on closure, letting go and moving on.
The study was likewise contextualised within the existing literature surrounding roadside memorials. This growing phenomenon of newer ways of memorialisation has piqued the interest of many disciplines—historians, folklorists, cultural geographers, sociologists, authors, poets, photographers—with a noticeable dearth of input from the social work profession and an exploration of the role these memorials play in therapeutic processes and grief journeys. Hence, this study sought to address this identified gap in the knowledge base.

The study was underpinned by hermeneutics, phenomenology and critical social work theory. The very nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to uncover the hidden meanings of the phenomenon under investigation; to seek to understand it from the perspective of the participants; to hear firsthand accounts and to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals (Crotty, 1998; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Smythe et al., 2008). Hearing from the people most affected by roadside memorials has given the voiceless a voice, and demonstrates the power of the hermeneutic approach. Such an approach likewise resonates with the social work profession and its Code of Ethics (AASW Code of Ethics, 2010). By employing a radical, critical social work theoretical perspective, the study was able to reach beyond individual and micro levels, endeavouring to enact change at societal, governmental and policymaking levels—the meso and macro levels.

To ensure the research was rigorous and credible, a triangulation of methods was utilised—a comprehensive literature review was undertaken, semi-structured interviews with fourteen participants were conducted and fifty roadside memorial sites were photographed and analysed. The findings from these three approaches were
analysed, leading to a number of themes being identified and subsequent implications for both policy and practice were suggested.

**Revisiting the research aims and lines of inquiry**

There were four aims of this research. The main aim was to examine the meanings and role of roadside memorials in bereavement; asking *if* they help in this process, and if so, *how* and *why*? The research looked at the lived experiences of some who have chosen to erect roadside memorials, and aimed to uncover the significance of this growing phenomenon of memorials by the roadside.

A second aim was to contribute to the public debate and controversy concerning roadside memorials, to increase community understanding and raise awareness about the placement of roadside memorials and the role they have in bereavement.

A third aim was to inform and contribute to the professional knowledge base of grief and loss in relation to roadside memorials, to assist a range of health service professionals, including social workers, to have a deeper understanding of the significance of these roadside memorials for bereaved people. As identified by Ife (1999) and Pease and Fook (1999a, 1999b) the social work profession is committed to working with individuals, communities and societies, at the micro, meso and macro levels. Social work practice occurs in the nexus between the personal and the political; we work at both the “coalface” and in the background, attempting to exert influence on policy and societal attitudes. As a profession, social workers are well placed to instigate action and change . . . and this extends to the issue of roadside memorialisation.
Finally, a fourth aim was to inform the NSW RMS and other government policymakers, to provide suggestions to assist them in their future policies and directives surrounding roadside memorials.

Thus, the lines of inquiry were:

1. What is the meaning and significance of, and the role played by, roadside memorials? Do they, and if so, how do they assist those who are grieving?

2. How does the role of the roadside memorial compare to the cemetery or graveside? Do these two sites serve the same, or different, functions?

3. What can be learnt from the memorials themselves—their physical characteristics such as wording used and the icons or personal mementos left there?

4. What policy and practice implications can be gleaned from the research findings?

The findings from the fourteen interviews and the observation of fifty sites, relating to each of the lines of inquiry, are now addressed.

Summary of overall findings and themes

1. The meanings, significance and role of roadside memorials

Roadside memorials are imbued with a myriad of meanings for those who build and maintain them. They are important because they mark the precise location of the crash and/or death of the loved one—for many of those who build them it is a sacred site—for some, the only site. Through their personalised and individual character, roadside
memorials enable ongoing communication with the deceased for close family and friends, and can mobilise the wider community; they foster continuing bonds and they represent an attempt to ensure the memory of the victim lives on. A secondary role is that of providing a warning and road safety message for other motorists. The participants in this study declared that their roadside memorials were a significant and helpful part of their bereavement experience, providing solace and comfort, as well as being a focal point for their grief. The observation of fifty roadside memorials led to similar conclusions, with evidence at the majority of sites of personalised, individualised touches and mementos, communication to both the deceased and others conveyed through notes and messages, and a demonstration of the desire to mark the place of the fatal crash with an enduring memorial.

Proximity to home—the third theme—emerged as an important issue in the role of roadside memorials. Eleven of the fourteen participants lived less than thirty kilometres from their roadside memorial, with eight living less than ten kilometres away. Proximity to the family home was thus cited as a determining factor in the roadside memorial being built, visited and maintained. This was seen as a paradox for some of the participants, being both comforting and distressing. Many of the participants stated that because their memorial was close to home, it was more elaborate, and they were able to visit and maintain it more often than if the crash site had been further away. It was, however, difficult to determine if proximity to home was a factor in the establishment of roadside memorials under observation in this study.
2. The role of the roadside memorial compared to the cemetery

Seven participants in this study had both a roadside memorial and a place in the cemetery, while the remaining seven had only a roadside memorial, having ashes held or placed in other locations. For those who had both a roadside memorial and a cemetery place, three stated that it was the roadside memorial (or site) that was their preferred location to visit and to spend time with their loved one, and to gather at, with others, on anniversaries or special occasions. Three stated that the cemetery represented death; that it was a cold, impersonal place, allowing little room for personalised mementos and individual touches. These participants also felt a closer spiritual connection to their loved one at the site of the crash. Conversely, one participant found the cemetery to be a more orderly, comforting place compared to the crash site, which was deemed to be a horrible, tragic place. Due to the proximity of the cemetery to the family home, one participant visited the cemetery more frequently. Two participants indicated that they visited both sites, and did not favour one over the other; they were both places of comfort and contemplation.

The differing roles of both the roadside memorial and the cemetery were also discussed by some participants. One felt that the roadside memorial was important for the young friends in the period before the funeral, when there was nowhere else to gather and mourn. Others saw the site of the crash as being the last place the loved one was alive, hence laden with a greater spiritual significance than the cemetery where the remains were laid to rest.
Another theme—the community role of roadside memorials—was likewise mentioned by participants, who felt that the roadside memorial enabled community interaction and provided a gathering place for mourners. Others spoke of the ability for large groups of friends to gather at the crash site, and the freedom to be able to leave a wide variety of personalised mementos, which they were unable to do at the cemetery. Yet another spoke of friends preferring to gather at the cemetery, due to the public and dangerous location of the crash site. In this way, the themes that emerged in relation to the roles and functions of the roadside memorial, compared to the cemetery, demonstrates diversity, with a wide variety of responses to this line of inquiry.

3. What can be learnt from the memorials themselves?

A number of clear messages emanate from these not so silent sentinels, as discussed in Chapter Seven. The visitation, photography, careful observation and analysis of fifty sites revealed many were clearly celebrating life, and designed to capture the identity and personality of the victim. Forty-three of the fifty sites included personalised touches and individualised mementos, ranging from names, dates, messages, flowers and favourite colours, as well as ordinary, everyday objects that were now laden with special meanings for the family and friends. The importance of personalising the site—theme two—was thus clearly demonstrated at many of the sites observed. Evidence of the desire to foster ongoing relationships and continuing bonds with the deceased was apparent, through the use of notes, messages of love and heartfelt inscriptions. The intention for the memory of the deceased to live on in the community and to never be forgotten was also noted. Some sites had inscriptions denoting a belief that the loved
ones would be seen again, they also contained many messages conveying communication to the deceased and declarations of love.

Similarly, the analysis of the fifty roadside memorials revealed that most were built as near to the physical site of the fatal crash as possible (taking the official records and GPS coordinates into account), indicating that marking the exact location of the crash or death was seen as important, as theme one described.

Anecdotally, a number of the sites did cause drivers to slow down and be more cautious, illustrating theme four. Despite the variety and differences in each and every site visited, a number of commonalities existed—all indicating the significant role and meaning roadside memorials have for those who build and maintain them.

4. What are the policy and practice implications?

A number of policy and practice implications are suggested in light of the existing literature, the interviews and the observations of sites, drawing upon the themes that emerged. The importance of personalising the site—theme two—is highlighted in this line of inquiry. It is clear that personalised roadside memorials have an important and significant role to play in the bereavement experience for many. Suggestions for policymakers thus centre upon enabling sites to be unique, rather than standardised, statistical markers.

Traditional mourning practices are being added to or exchanged for newer ways of expressing grief, and roadside memorialisation is one example of this. An understanding by policymakers that roadside memorials have an important role to play in whole communities, not just individuals or families, is vital. They can be a focal point for
community gatherings, they can link generations of friends and families, they bring communities together and demonstrate caring communities, they can help to provide mutual support and decrease isolation. They can help to counter disenfranchised grief and the stigma attached to deaths caused by actions such as drink driving or speeding.

Eleven of the participants reported viewing memorials as encouraging safer driving and being more powerful and effective than official or government sponsored road safety campaigns. It was difficult to determine the warning function of memorials through the observation of sites except that again, anecdotally, people commented on certain memorials within the local government area that did cause them to consider their own driving behaviour and slow down as needed. The warning function of roadside memorials—theme four—is thus worthy of note by policymakers, and incorporating such images in road safety campaigns is suggested.

Five main implications for policy have thus been identified in this research: use individualised memorials rather than generic markers; develop guidelines addressing the scope and size of memorials; introduce a register with contact details; use roadside memorials in road safety campaigns and lastly, include those with first-hand knowledge in policy formulations and discussions.

From the themes that emerged in this research, several practice implications have been identified, recognising the positive impact grief can have at the micro, meso and macro levels. Understanding the role of roadside memorials in bereavement and the theory behind continuing bonds is imperative. Meaning-making, and doing something positive with grief, is to be encouraged. Likewise, an awareness of the diversity in grief experiences and needs of individual mourners is important—there is no one-size-fits-all
approach to grief and loss or roadside memorial construction. Further, challenging the
dominant discourse of grief, with its stage or phase based models, is vital. The newer
grief theories, supporting individual approaches, are to be incorporated into work in the
bereavement field. A careful critique of the DSM-5 is warranted, to ensure that the
normal grief experienced by those affected by road deaths is not medicalised and
pathologised. A recognition of the role roadside memorials may have in alleviating
unnecessary pain and judgement following deaths caused by stigmatised actions such
as drink driving or speeding is also important. Being able to commemorate and honour
the deceased, regardless of the cause of their death, is essential. Practitioners could
courage people who build roadside memorials to participate in policymaking, and
social action on other road safety bodies, as well as to become involved in mutual self-
help groups, reaching out to others also bereaved through road fatalities, as suggested
by several of the participants. Finally, professionals need to be mindful that, in reality, it
is only a small number of people who need or seek intervention following the death of
a loved one (Bonanno, 2004; 2005; 2008). Nevertheless, professionals need to be
cognisant, well-trained and equipped to provide effective and expert service provision
for those who do seek help while grieving.

Despite a number of commonalities and shared experiences, the stories uncovered in
this research showed that each person’s bereavement journey has unique aspects and
is “individually negotiated” (Bell et al., 2015, p. 385). The participants’ needs,
experiences and ways of coping with their loss differed and their responses to the
roadside memorial and its role in their bereavement also reflected much variation.
The findings indicate that roadside memorials hold great significance and mark a sacred site for bereaved families and friends, which is consistent with the literature (e.g. Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Everett, 2000; Larson-Miller, 2005; Weisser, 2004). Some of the findings differed from that previously found by others, such as Hartig and Dunn (1998). For example, a strong gender link—celebrating male youth machismo and aggression—was not supported by this study, with males and females memorialised being equally represented. Similarly, only fourteen of the fifty sites examined displayed car parts (3) or alcohol bottles/cans (11), in contrast to Hartig and Dunn’s study where these items were frequently found. One of the key findings generated in my study was that roadside memorials have a very important role to play in bereavement for families, friends and indeed whole communities.

**Links to theoretical frameworks**

The findings from the interviews with participants in this research support the newer theories of grief discussed in Chapter Three—losing a loved one never ends, relationships continue past death, and there are no neat and tidy stages to pass through to achieve closure. Terms such as closure or moving on are discouraged, and those who grieve are encouraged to preserve the memory of their loved one and integrate this loss into their lives. All of the participants referred to a continuing relationship with their loved one in some form or another, and indeed the strong desire to ensure that others did not forget their loved one either. Timeframes and time-limits of grief and mourning are likewise eschewed. For many of the participants, their loss occurred many years ago; despite this their pain and grief remains raw and vivid. They certainly had not experienced “closure” and had not “moved on”. Expecting those who are bereaved to
“get over it” now that a certain amount of time has passed, or chiding them with talk of “he wouldn’t want you to sit around crying all day” simply adds guilt to the bereft mourner. It is imperative that as professionals we adopt these newer understandings of grief and loss in order to help others navigate the uncharted waters of bereavement.

The observation of the fifty roadside memorials likewise supports the newer models of grief and shuns notions of timeframes, closure or moving on. Some sites were still being maintained or visited after many years had elapsed, and others expressed a desire to continue the bonds and have ongoing relationships beyond death. Additionally, these sites demonstrate that individual expression of grief is important and that the loved one is preserved in memory both through the establishment of a roadside memorial as well as the personal mementos that are placed around it. Grieving the dead in the twenty-first century encompasses many forms of individual expression (Cann, 2014), and it is imperative as professionals that we support people in finding their own ways to grieve, in their own time; roadside memorials are just one way of doing so.

The use of a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, encompassing in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowed the voices of the participants to be heard and their lived experiences to be uncovered. We are not separate from the world or from those we are researching. It is both impossible and undesirable to distance ourselves from the phenomenon under investigation, or from those who are able to tell us their lived experiences. By a conscious bridling of my own experiences and preconceived ideas I was more able to hear the social reality and see the phenomenon of roadside memorials from the participants’ perspectives (Crotty, 1998; Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Paterson & Higgs, 2005; Smythe et al., 2008). As Heidegger explained, “being-in-the-world” of the
people who construct roadside memorials is a crucial element for social researchers employing a hermeneutic and phenomenological approach to explore this phenomenon.

Heidegger’s metaphor of the hermeneutic circle was also discussed earlier: as researchers we gain understanding about a phenomenon by breaking it down into its parts and considering these in relation to its whole (Crotty, 1998, p. 92; Heidegger, 1978). By breaking the phenomenon of roadside memorialisation down into its parts—articulating the themes across all the interviews and linking this with the lived experience of the individual people—I have thus engaged in the process of the hermeneutic circle, considering each part in light of the whole phenomenon (Gadamer, 1975).

Similarly, through dialogue, shared understandings of the phenomenon under investigation were produced, meeting Gadamer’s understanding of “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1975; Paterson & Higgs, 2005). Different interpretations of the same phenomenon have been brought together in this current research, with the participants’ stories shedding light on the complexities experienced.

Additionally, utilising a critical social work perspective was fruitful, allowing the participants to be active agents in the research process and empowering them to voice their experiences and be heard by policymakers. The critical social work approach enables influence at micro, meso and macro levels.
Strengths and limitations of the study

The research methodology employed—a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective coupled with critical social work theory—resulted in rich and unique insights being uncovered, with authentic, powerful and poignant accounts from the participants. Thus, valuable experiential knowledge was provided from those who have firsthand experience of roadside memorials. As Bell (2009) noted, being privileged to hear the firsthand accounts and personal experiences of the participants added to the poignancy and robustness of this study. This represents one of the strengths of hermeneutic phenomenological research methods, as used in this study.

The rigour of this study adds to its strength. To achieve results that were credible, and a research project that was rigorous, I followed Creswell’s (2007) recommendations, using a number of his identified strategies. These included a triangulation of data collection methods, reflexivity, thick description, peer review with colleagues, keeping an audit trail and member-checking. In addition, I addressed criteria suggested by Paterson and Higgs (2005) to achieve “plausibility”. This included being transparent with the methodology used and providing a “detailed discussion of the findings including many original participant quotes” (p. 352).

Empowerment and providing a voice for the voiceless is one of the core values underpinning the social work profession (AASW Code of Ethics, 2010) and is demonstrated in this research, representing another strength of the study. It has thus enabled these participants who are directly linked to roadside memorials, and who have the valuable lived experience of this phenomenon, to have such a voice.
In keeping with the chosen methodological framework, the use of a semi-structured interview was both “highly appropriate” (Bell, 2009, p. 191) and valuable. Participants were able to tell their story, from their perspective and knowledge base, with minimal input from myself. This allowed their stories to flow and the richness and depth of meanings to surface. By putting aside my pre-conceived thoughts and pre-knowledge, I have been able to adopt openness to the participants’ stories—a core concept in the hermeneutic phenomenological perspective which underpins this study.

Even though the participants self-selected, other strengths of the study were the broad range of ages (twenty to in the seventies); the mix of males and females (three males, eleven females); the diverse range of relationships to the deceased (mothers, fathers, partners, friends, sisters, daughters), as well as the mix of urban/city and rural/country participants. Participants were not from the one locality, or solely from city areas, nor were they all parents of the deceased; rather the study included a range of relationships. By including such a range of experiences, diversity, uniqueness and depth were achieved. Real and rich accounts of the phenomenon of roadside memorials ensued. Despite the initial apparent homogeneity of the group, a range of stories was discovered, containing some commonalities, some differences and some exceptions.

Finally, despite the vast body of literature on roadside memorials, there were few studies employing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach and no research from an Australian social work perspective. Hence this study sought to address these gaps, signifying another strength. This research has uncovered new areas—for example capturing valuable insights into participants’ reactions to others’ roadside memorials and a consideration of the changes to how grief is expressed in modern Australian
society and how this influences memorialisation, and roadside memorial practices in particular. This study thus adds to the body of literature and makes a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge base.

All research has limitations and this research project is no exception. As discussed in Chapter Eight, the participants were from similar, English-speaking backgrounds and I therefore had limited access to other cultural, racial or religious groups. A more diverse group of participants would have provided a richer, deeper insight into this phenomenon and would have made significant contributions to the existing literature. Added to this, eleven out of the fourteen participants were female, with Breen (2006) pointing out that this is often the case with research into bereavement. These limitations are duly noted and acknowledged.

Further, I was aware that those who self-selected were “biased” (Reid, 1988, p. 456) in their thoughts about roadside memorials, and others who had experienced loved ones’ deaths through road crashes may have chosen not to build a memorial. Also, there are many, many individuals bereaved through roadside deaths, but it may well only be those who were confident or articulate enough who came forward and volunteered to be interviewed, or those who wanted their voices heard. Others—maybe so enveloped in their grief and pain—will therefore remain unheard, voiceless. Reaching these people may prove difficult if not impossible. Furthermore, those recently bereaved may have felt unable to participate at this point in time, due to the raw intensity and freshness of their grief. This group may have considerable input to share down the track. Additionally, as part of the ethical considerations—duty of care and protecting
participants from harm—I chose to interview those who were a certain temporal
distance from their loss.

The use of a semi-structured interview tool was preferable for hermeneutic research,
yet some unavoidable structure was nevertheless needed to ensure the lines of inquiry
were addressed and the interview remained “on track”. This can potentially be viewed
as a limitation to the study, however I attempted to minimise these negative effects by
encouraging the participants to talk as freely as possible. In addition, nine of the
interviews were conducted by telephone, not face to face. This method of interviewing
has a number of disadvantages, including being harder to gain rapport, not being able
to read facial expressions or other nonverbal cues, the inability to see photos or other
mementos and a lack of personal connection (Breen, 2006). Given the response from
participants all over Australia these limitations were difficult to avoid and are therefore
duly acknowledged.

I also recognise that a power imbalance existed between myself as “the researcher” and
the participants as “the researched”, despite my attempts for us to be “co-constructors”
of the interview process (Lowes & Prowse, 2001; Wendt & Boylan, 2008). This power
differential can have the potential to affect the interview process. Again, this is an
unavoidable result of any research. Linked to this are the effects of my own being on the
research process. As a female, Caucasian, Australian, with no personal experience of
building a roadside memorial my gender, my ethnicity, my religion, my culture, my
worldview and my experiences are all brought to the “research table”. These can all be
a potential filter and affect my research lens; the paradigm with which I view the world
and the phenomena within it. Because of these inherent and unavoidable biases the use of bridling, as discussed by Dahlberg et al. (2008) is paramount.

Another limitation of this research is my conscious decision to not ask a question specifically relating to spiritual beliefs and the bearings these may have had on participants choosing to establish a roadside memorial. Unlike Clark and Franzmann (2006, p. 595), who saw the failure of Collins and Rhine (2003) to “ask questions about religious affiliation” as an “unfortunate omission”, I deliberately chose not to pursue this line of inquiry, for a number of reasons. Social work and bereavement, not theology, are my areas of expertise. I was also aware of the need to conduct respectful, sensitive research, as well as ensuring a conscious bridling of my own faith and beliefs. Despite this “omission”, several of the participants did volunteer information about their beliefs and thoughts of “the afterlife”; from varying viewpoints including a Christian doctrine.

A final limitation of this research is that the observation, photography and analysis of sites was restricted to just one LGA—the Shoalhaven. This geographical setting is by no means intended to be representative of other LGAs, and the rural/coastal setting may differ significantly from an outback, urban or city setting.

**Avenues for future research**

A myriad of further opportunities exist to explore more of the terrain around the phenomenon of roadside memorials. Research aimed at exploring the differences between several members of one family, or a group of friends, and their thoughts on the roadside memorial would be beneficial. The differences and tensions between family members, generations, or family compared to friends’ needs, were mentioned by
several participants, as well as anecdotally by members of the public who contacted me following the radio interviews. One mother, for example, requested that no bright things, no flowers or “happy” mementos be left at her daughter’s crash site, as this was certainly not a happy place for her. This allegedly caused conflict between her and her daughter’s friends who wanted to mark the spot with vivid, personal mementos. An exploration of these conflicts and possible resolutions would provide more insight into the role, meanings and messages of roadside memorials.

Further research focusing on the importance of proximity of the crash site to the home of the family and the likelihood of a memorial being built, visited and maintained is warranted. A number of participants commented that if the site was a long way from home, or even overseas, they probably would not either establish or maintain a roadside memorial. Interviewing those who have lost a loved one far away, and determining if they do or do not have such a memorial would be helpful. This could then be extended to explore if this has or has not had an effect on their grief journey, and what other means they have used to find comfort and solace in the absence of—or distance from—a roadside memorial. Additionally, given that a large number of the complaints about roadside memorials centre upon those that have become neglected and fallen into disrepair, creating eyesores and potential hazards with loose items (King, 2013), ongoing research into this issue of proximity to home is indicated.

The current study only addressed bereaved people who had chosen to place a memorial. Many others may have consciously or unconsciously decided not to erect visible, public memorials for their loved ones. Hearing the experiences from families and friends who consciously decide not to erect a roadside memorial would be a worthwhile and valuable
contribution to the existing knowledge. Klaassens et al. also noted that “further research is required to say more about the bereaved that decided not to build one” (2009, p. 199) and to my knowledge this remains un-researched. Interviews aimed at finding out the reasons for this would be fruitful.

Following on from this, the question of why some roadside memorials are removed after certain timeframes needs more research. Has the memorial served its initial purpose and is now no longer needed? Some research suggests that roadside memorials do in fact have a natural time-limited life span of, for example seven years (Klaassens et al., 2009). My research challenges this, as several participants’ memorials had been in place for over ten years. Nevertheless, the reasons why some memorials have a limited life-span is worthy of further study. Were there tensions between family members or friends, leading to its removal? Was it a result of vandalism or disgruntled nearby homeowners? These questions indicate further research into this issue is warranted.

The consideration of other religious or cultural groups is another worthwhile direction for future research. As mentioned earlier, this research drew participants from quite homogenous backgrounds, with no input from, for example, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders or other cultural groups; or religions such as Islam, Hindu, Buddhism and so on. Exploring such diversity and the effects on bereavement following fatal car crashes would extend the knowledge base and be a fruitful area for more research.

Ongoing research into the reactions of those bereaved by road fatalities to others’ roadside memorials is likewise another avenue for further research, considering how fellow mourners may, in time, be able to offer support to those in a similar situation. Participants in this study indicated how they felt empathy and connectedness to
“unknown” others who had also placed roadside memorials, and perhaps some may be interested in joining associations such as Victoria’s Road Trauma Support Services and other self-help or bereavement organisations. Such involvement may also assist with their own grief journey, resulting in meaning-making or post-traumatic growth. Indeed, being confronted with such grief and tragedy may cause sufferers to re-evaluate their fundamental values and life’s direction (Moodley & Costa, 2006, p. 39). As indicated by the participants’ comments, research exploring the notion of logotherapy could be beneficial for others so bereaved. In particular, the issues of post-traumatic growth and meaning-making, mentioned above, would prove worthy of further research.

While it was beyond the scope of this research to include interviews with professionals such as police, SES volunteers, ambulance officers, counsellors, RMS personnel, councillors and other policymakers, seeking the perspective of such professionals would be a fruitful direction for further research in this area. The unsolicited feedback from professionals involved in traumatic road deaths, citing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and ongoing trauma associated with seeing such memorials, evidences the need for further research.

Linked to this, research exploring the general public’s views—the “pros” and “cons” of roadside memorials—would yield some interesting and helpful data for future policies and practices pertaining to roadside memorials. As mentioned previously, I was contacted by many people following the radio interviews and media press releases, all eager to tell me their views on roadside memorials. Including younger people’s views—the under eighteens for example—would also be a fruitful avenue for further research.
A comparative analysis of different geographical areas, similar to previous research by Clark and Cheshire (2004), Nešporová and Stahl (2014) or Smith (2003), for example, would be another worthwhile direction for more research, extending the knowledge base. Exploring the differences between regional and urban areas of Australia, as well as overseas, is thus a worthwhile consideration for further research.

As Breen (2006) pointed out in her study into grief experiences in WA, research considering the loss of an only child, survivors of the crash that killed their loved one, intentional, single vehicle crashes and disenfranchised relationships such as gay relationships, extramarital affairs and former partners are all areas worthy of further research.

Finally, a longitudinal study, following up with the original participants over time—say 5, 10, 15 and 20 years later—would undoubtedly offer rich and meaningful insights into the role of roadside memorials in the ongoing journey of grief.

**Conclusion**

This research has explored the phenomenon of roadside memorials, where people display their private sorrow in a public place. By reviewing the literature, analysing sites and hearing directly from those who build and maintain such tributes, the meaning and significance of roadside memorials—and the role they have in bereavement—have been revealed. What has also been found, however, is the strength, resilience and capacity for growth in the bereaved participants. The dominant discourse of grief intimates that bereaved individuals are passive, unwell and weak, in need of “healing”. The findings of this research contest this view, showing instead the positive role of active grief, of
growth through sadness and pain. Constructing and maintaining roadside memorials can be the beginning of a transformative journey, connecting individuals and strengthening whole communities. Policy and practice can be informed and transformed by the participants’ experiences. Policymakers will seek input from those who have first-hand knowledge of this phenomenon. Practitioners will critique and review grief and loss theories. Private sorrow has the potential to make positive influences in the public domain.
Epilogue—Poem

Roadside Service

another tree with the bark ripped off
a mound of flowers, a wooden cross
a soccer ball, a teddy bear
the burnt remains of a safety flare
a set of skid marks, torn up grass
an oil stain, some shattered glass
friends all gather at the sight
holding candles, burning bright
try to figure what went wrong
break into his favorite song
remember stories through the years
some bring laughter, most bring tears
reminisce about a friend that’s gone
who wasn’t on this earth that long
someone’s brother, someone’s son
why did he have to die so young?
we’ll never drive by here again
not without remembering

Charlie Parant, February 8, 2011
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Appendix 1: Information Statement

INFORMATION STATEMENT


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Community Services and Health
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This research aims to explore the meanings behind roadside memorials, and the role they play in the grieving process. The research will include interviews with family and friends who have chosen to place a memorial to their loved one. Photographs of some local roadside memorials within the Shoalhaven Local Government area will also be taken and compared.

Through discussing the experience of loss and how building a roadside memorial may have helped I hope to better understand what roadside memorials mean to those who are grieving.

Recommendations to health and welfare professionals, as well as government policy makers, will be made following the research findings. It is hoped that local councils who may currently object to roadside memorials will be more aware of their role and become more lenient in their policies surrounding the placement of such memorials.

Interviews are expected to take between one and two hours to complete. These interviews will be held at a time and location suitable to you. With your permission, the interviews will be audio-taped. In order to ensure confidentiality and privacy, no person will be identified on tape, and names will be changed where any reference is made to participants in the final thesis. Tapes will remain my property and will be transcribed then destroyed at the conclusion of the research period.
All data, tapes and written work will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet or by password protection on the computer. Only myself and my supervisors will have access to this material. If you wish, I will send you a draft of the transcript from your interview to ensure that I have understood what you said.

Due to the sensitive nature of the subject matter, it is possible that you may experience a degree of distress during or after the interview. Should this distress become a concern you are urged to make an appointment for supportive counselling. Contact details for this are provided below. Please note that the agencies listed offer free services. If you choose to use a private service this would be at your own expense.

A report of the findings will be published and submitted to Charles Sturt University as part of the requirements for my Doctor of Philosophy degree. Further publications may include journal articles or seminar presentations. Again, all names will be changed to protect identity.

If you agree to participate, you may withdraw from the research project at any time, without penalty. However, your input will be greatly appreciated and could make a valuable contribution to the field of grief and loss – and an important difference to other people who may face a similar loss.

NOTE: Charles Sturt University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the Committee through the Executive Officer:

The Executive Officer
Human Research Ethics Committee
Office of Academic Governance
Charles Sturt University
Panorama Avenue
Bathurst NSW 2795
Tel: (02) 6338 4628
Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Thank you for taking the time to read this Information Statement. If you are willing to participate in this study, please contact me and we can then make suitable arrangements for an interview time and place. You will be given a Consent Form to sign at the time of the interview.

Thank you for your time and assistance. Your contribution to this research will be much appreciated and highly valued.

Susan Welsh 0405030406 swelsh@csu.edu.au
Appendix 2: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM


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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Principal Supervisor</th>
<th>Associate Supervisor</th>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Welsh, PhD student</td>
<td>Associate Professor Wendy Bowles</td>
<td>Dr Lynelle Osburn</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:swelsh@csu.edu.au">swelsh@csu.edu.au</a></td>
<td>Wagga Wagga NSW 2678 (02) 6933 2695 Mobile 0427 487 684</td>
<td>NSW Riverina Institute, Deniliquin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:wbowles@csu.edu.au">wbowles@csu.edu.au</a></td>
<td>(03) 588 22095</td>
</tr>
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</table>

- I, ...........................................................................................................(print name and date of birth), of ..............................................................................................................(print address), agree to voluntarily participate in an interview with Susan Welsh for her Doctor of Philosophy degree research project on the role and meanings of roadside memorials.
- I have read and understood the information sheet given to me.
- The purpose of the research has been explained to me, including the (potential) risks/discomforts associated with the research. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and received satisfactory answers.
- I have received information on sources of supportive counselling should I require this. I understand that I am responsible for organising this follow-up if needed. If I choose to access a private service I understand this will be at my own expense.
- I understand that any information or personal details gathered in the course of this research about me are confidential and that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used or published without my written consent.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my participation in the research at any time, and that if I do I will not be subjected to any penalty or discriminatory treatment.
- I permit the researcher to audio tape the interview, with the understanding that tapes will be transcribed for data analysis and will then be erased at the conclusion of the research period.
- I understand that all records of the research will be kept in a locked filing cabinet or by password protection on a computer for at least 20 years, and that only the researcher and her supervisors have access to the records in this time. Once this time has passed, the records will be shredded and disposed of.
- Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this study. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:
  
  **Executive Officer**
  Human Research Ethics Committee
  Office of Academic Governance
  Charles Sturt University
  Panorama Avenue
  Bathurst NSW 2795
  Phone: (02) 6338 4628   Email: ethics@csu.edu.au

Signed........................................................................................................ Date..............................................
Appendix 3: List of Counsellors

**Free Counselling Services**

- **Ulladulla Community Health Centre**
  1300 792 755 or (02) 44 555 366

- **Nowra Community Health Centre**
  1300 792 755 or (02) 4424 6300

- **Lifeline**
  13 1114

- **NALAG (National Association of Loss and Grief)**
  (02) 9489 6644
Confidentiality Agreement

Charles Sturt University

*Insert Name of other party*

---

THIS AGREEMENT IS A SAMPLE ONLY. PLEASE CONTACT THE UNIVERSITY SOLICITOR FOR ADVICE IF YOU WISH TO USE THIS AGREEMENT.
## Schedule 1 – Confidentiality Agreement Details

This Agreement is made up of this Schedule and the Agreed Terms.

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<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Parties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Organisation:</strong> Charles Sturt University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Registered Address:</strong> The Grange, Panorama Avenue, Bathurst NSW 2795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Telephone:</strong> 61 2 6338 4200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Facsimile:</strong> 61 2 6338 4833</td>
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<th>Item 3</th>
<th>Approved Purpose</th>
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<td>Insert details here</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Executed as an Agreement.

The signatories hereby personally warrant that they have express and sufficient legal authority to execute this Agreement (which includes the attached Agreed Terms) on behalf of the party on whose behalf they have signed.

**Signature for CSU**

SIGNED for CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY in the presence of

) ____________________________________________

) Signature

) ____________________________________________
Agreed Terms - Confidentiality Agreement Details

1. Definitions and Interpretation

1.1 Definitions

In this Agreement, unless the context otherwise requires:

Approved Purposes means the purposes set out in the Schedule.

Authorised Officer means:
(a) in relation to a corporation, a person for the time being holding or acting in the office of the director, chief executive officer or secretary of that body corporate, or a person the title of whose office at the body corporate includes the word “Manager” or the word “Director” or the like; and
(b) in relation to CSU, any person authorised by CSU from time to time act on behalf of CSU.

Confidential Information means:
(a) all Information submitted or disclosed to the Recipient by the Discloser; and
(b) all Information learned or accessed by the Recipient,
at any time in connection with the Approved Purposes (including during negotiations, discussions and meetings) and includes without limitation:
(a) Information which at the time of disclosure by the Discloser is identified as being confidential;
(b) Information which, of implied necessity, is confidential;
(c) Information which the Recipient knows, or ought reasonably be expected to know, is confidential;
(d) any agreement, arrangement or understanding relating to the Approved Purposes;
(e) Information developed by the Recipient independently of the disclosure, communication or access from the Discloser; and
(f) Information disclosed or communicated or accessed by the Recipient from a third party under no obligation of confidence to the Discloser in respect of that Information, but does not included Non-Confidential Information.

CSU means Charles Sturt University

Discloser means a party (being either CSU or the Other Party) which discloses Confidential Information to the other party.

Information means information, inventions and ideas, which may be oral, written, recorded or stored by electronic, magnetic, electromagnetic, or in other form, process, media or otherwise in a machine readable form or translated from the original form, re-compiled, made into a compilation, partially copied, modified, updated or otherwise altered.

Non-Confidential Information means Information which:
(a) at the time of disclosure by the Discloser to the Recipient or at any time thereafter is identified in writing by the Discloser as such;
(b) is in the public domain otherwise than as a result of a breach of the terms of this Agreement or any other obligations of confidentiality owed by the Recipient;
prior to disclosure by the Discloser was lawfully known to the Recipient and in respect of which the Recipient to whom the Information was disclosed is not bound by any other obligations of confidentiality; or

is found by final and binding court judgment to either not constitute Confidential Information or not otherwise be subject to any obligations under this Agreement.

**Personal Information** has the meaning set out in the Privacy Act.

**Privacy Act** means the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW)*.

**Recipient** means a party (being either CSU or the Other Party) which acquires Confidential Information of the other party.

**Recipient Personnel** means officers, employees and advisers of the Recipient.

1.2 Interpretation

In this Agreement, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) if a party comprises two or more persons, the obligations are joint and several;

(b) “person” includes a firm, body corporate, unincorporated association, authority or body politic;

(c) singular includes the plural and vice versa and words importing one gender include all genders; and

(d) “writing” includes any mode of representing or reproducing words in tangible and permanently visible form.

2. Confidential Information

2.1 Obligation of confidence

The Recipient may only use the Confidential Information for the Approved Purposes and undertakes not to:

(a) use or permit any person to use the Confidential Information for any other purpose;

(b) disclose or in any way communicate to any other person any of the Confidential Information, except as authorised by the Discloser;

(c) permit unauthorised persons to have access to places where the Confidential Information is displayed, reproduced or stored; or

(d) make or assist any person to make any unauthorised use of the Confidential Information.
2.2 Compliance with obligations

The Recipient must:

(a) take reasonable steps to enforce the confidentiality obligations imposed by clause 2.1, including diligently prosecuting, at its own cost, any breach or threatened breach of those obligations by a person to whom the Recipient has disclosed the Confidential Information (including Recipient Personnel); and

(b) co-operate and provide to the Discloser all reasonable assistance in any action which it may take to protect the confidentiality of the Confidential Information.

3. Recipient Personnel

The Recipient may disclose the Confidential Information to only those Recipient Personnel who have a specific need to have access to the Confidential Information for the Approved Purposes and who have been made aware of the terms upon which the Confidential Information has been disclosed to the Recipient.

4. Recipient Obligations

The Recipient must:

(a) not copy the Confidential Information or any part of it other than as strictly necessary for the Approved Purposes and must mark any such copy ‘Confidential [Discloser]’;

(b) not use or attempt to use the Confidential Information for its own direct or indirect advantage or gain in any manner which may cause or to be calculated to cause injury or loss to the Discloser;

(c) safeguard the Confidential Information in the same way as the Recipient safeguards its own confidential information;

(d) implement security practices against any unauthorised copying, use, disclosure (whether that disclosure is oral, in writing or in any other form), access and damage or destruction;

(e) notify the Discloser immediately if it becomes aware of a suspected or actual breach of this Agreement and immediately take all steps to prevent or stop the suspected or actual breach; and

(f) comply with any other reasonable direction issued regarding a suspected or actual breach.

5. Return Of Confidential Information (If Applicable)

If requested by the Discloser or either party notifies the other in writing that it does not wish to proceed with the Approved Purposes, the Recipient must immediately return to the Discloser, or destroy as the Discloser directs, all original documents containing any Confidential Information and any copies of those documents and any documents (including any copies) created by the Recipient or Recipient Personnel.
6. Disclaimer

6.1 Recipient’s Acknowledgement

The Recipient acknowledges that neither the Discloser nor any employee or other representative of the Discloser has made or makes any representation or warranty, express or implied, as to the accuracy or completeness of its Confidential Information.

6.2 Recipient’s Release

To the extent permitted by law, the Recipient releases the Discloser from all liability for any loss or damage (whether foreseeable or not, including consequential loss) suffered by any person acting on any Confidential Information, whether the loss or damage arises in connection with any negligence, default, lack of care, misrepresentation or any other cause.

7. Breach And Indemnity

7.1 Recipient to Notify Discloser

The Recipient must immediately notify the Discloser of all information which comes to its attention regarding any actual or potential disclosure or use of Confidential Information other than in accordance with this Agreement.

7.2 Indemnity

The Recipient indemnifies the Discloser against any cost, liability, damage or loss incurred or suffered by the Discloser arising directly or indirectly from or in connection with any breach by of this Agreement by the Recipient or any act, error or omission of the Recipient’s Personnel which, if done or omitted to be done by the Recipient, would constitute a breach of this Agreement.

7.3 Injunctive Relief

The Recipient acknowledges that damages may not be an adequate remedy for the Discloser for any breach of this Agreement by the Recipient and that the Discloser is entitled to seek specific performance or injunctive relief as a remedy for any such breach or threatened breach, in addition to any other remedies available at law or in equity under this Agreement or independently of this Agreement.

8. Term

This Agreement becomes effective on the earlier to occur of the date upon which Confidential Information is first provided to, learned or accessed by the Recipient; and the date the Recipient executes this Agreement (whether the Discloser has executed or not) and continues in force until the later to occur of an agreement in writing by both parties and the date that all of the Confidential Information is generally available in the public domain.

9. Agreement to be documented in formal and separate agreements

(a) The parties expressly agree that any agreement for cooperation in relation to the Approved Purpose will be documented in a separate and formal agreement executed by the parties in accordance with the policies and procedures of the respective parties.

(b) The parties expressly agree that this Agreement shall not give rise to an obligation to enter into a formal and separate agreement at any time.
10. Miscellaneous

10.1 General

This Agreement:

(e) does not transfer any interest in any intellectual property; and

(f) does not oblige either party to enter into any further agreements about the subject matter of this Agreement.

10.2 Amendment

Any amendment to this Agreement must be in writing and signed by both parties.

10.3 Waiver

A right or remedy created by this Agreement cannot be waived except in writing signed by the party entitled to that right. Delay by a party in exercising a right or remedy does not constitute a waiver of that right or remedy, nor does a waiver (either wholly or in part) by a party of a right operate as a subsequent waiver of the same right or of any other right of that party.

10.4 Governing Law

This Agreement is governed in accordance with the laws of the State of New South Wales, Australia and the parties submit to the jurisdiction of the courts of that state and any courts of appeal from then.

10.5 Privacy

The Other Party shall:

(g) in the course of fulfilling its obligations under this Agreement comply with the Privacy Act and any other applicable laws in any other relevant jurisdiction relating to the handling of Personal Information; and

(h) except as required by law or in order to fulfill obligations under this Agreement, not disclose without the written permission of CSU any Personal Information obtained in connection with this Agreement;

(i) take all reasonable steps to prevent the misuse or loss of and unauthorised use, modification, access and disclosure of Personal Information by it;

(j) ensure that only employees or agents who are authorised to fulfill the obligations of the Agreement and who need to have access to any particular Personal Information have access to the particular Personal Information; and

(k) in the event of an investigation of a complaint occurring as a result of a breach or alleged breach of this Agreement, cooperate with any investigation by the Privacy Commissioner or any complaints handling body established under the Privacy Act.

11. Notices

Any notice, demand, consent, approval or other communication (Communication) in connection with this Agreement must be sent to the address or fax number set out in the Schedule.
Appendix 5: Confidentiality Form for Transcribers

CONFIDENTIALITY FORM FOR TRANSCRIBERS

I have read through the Information Statement, given to research participants, which explains this research project.

I am aware of the confidentiality and privacy clauses surrounding this research and the ethical approval granted for it by Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee. I understand that I am also bound by these guidelines.

I have read and signed the accompanying CSU Confidentiality Agreement form.

I undertake not to discuss what I am transcribing with any persons, nor to divulge any information about the interviewees and interviews which I am transcribing.

I will ensure that all transcripts, computer records and related documents will be kept in a safe and secure location. I will erase all records upon completion of the transcription period.

I am aware that I will be listening to people describing emotional and distressing experiences. As such, I understand that I may need to seek counselling or debriefing during or after the transcription role has ended. I have been given contact details for this counselling to follow up if this is needed.

I am also aware that I can stop or withdraw from the transcription role at any stage without penalty or consequence.

Signed

Date
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

THIS DEED is made the 16th day of February 2013

BETWEEN: TRADE ALLIES PTY LTD (ACN 127 717 748) of 41 Latham Street, Chermside, in the State of Queensland (“Trade Allies”).

AND: “Contractor’s Name”

RECITALS:

A. Trade Allies conducts a Transcription Business (“the Business”).

B. The parties intend “Contractor’s Name” will provide certain transcription services for Trade Allies (“the Services”).

C. Trade Allies is the owner of the confidential information more particularly hereinafter defined relating to the Business, whether arising prior to or in the course of or subsequent to the Services.

D. Trade Allies and “Contractor’s Name” are desirous of setting forth their agreement regarding the disclosure of the confidential information.
NOW IT IS HEREBY AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

1. DEFINITIONS AND INTERPRETATION

1.1 Except to the extent such information is public knowledge or becomes public knowledge other than by breach of this agreement, “confidential information” shall mean for the purposes of this Agreement the following information relating the Business:

1.1.1 information or material proprietary to Trade Allies;
1.1.2 information designated as confidential by Trade Allies;
1.1.3 information acquired by “Contractor’s Name” solely by virtue of the Services;
1.1.4 trade secrets;
1.1.5 information imparted in confidence to “Contractor’s Name” by Trade Allies;
1.1.6 information listed in the Schedule hereto;
1.1.7 any other information classifiable in equity as confidential information.

1.2 Without limiting the foregoing, “confidential information” shall include but not be limited to marketing and product release information, unreleased designs, design development, design technology, design manufacturing techniques, sales information, any computer hardware, computer software, device, product, invention, development, process, drawing, design, pattern, make up pattern, specification, knowhow, technical data, enhancement or information whether of a technical engineering marketing or financial nature, trade secret, process, formulae, accounts and data base.

1.3 A reference to one gender shall include other genders and the singular shall include the plural and vice versa.
1.4 A reference to a person shall include a body corporate and vice versa.

1.5 Where any part to this Deed comprises more than one person the terms covenants and conditions hereof shall apply to each such person severally and to all of them jointly.

1.6 Headings shall be for the convenience of the parties only and shall not affect the interpretation of this Deed.

2. **NON DISCLOSURE**

2.1 “Contractor’s Name” shall not disclose or publish and shall use her best endeavours and take all necessary and desirable measures to prevent the disclosure or publication of the confidential information to any third party.

2.2 “Contractor’s Name” shall not use the confidential information for any purpose other than is strictly necessary for the Services.

2.3 “Contractor’s Name” shall not disclose the confidential information to any of her delegates employees servants or agents except those delegates employees servants or agents who are strictly required to have the information for the purpose of the Services.

3. **“Contractor’s Name” TO ADVISE**

3.1 “Contractor’s Name” shall forthwith notify Trade Allies of any misuse or misappropriation of the confidential information of which it may be or may become aware.
4. **RETURN OF DOCUMENTS ETC.**

4.1 Upon written request by Trade Allies, “Contractor’s Name” shall forthwith deliver to Trade Allies all documents materials and items of property forming part of or associated with the confidential information whether the same shall have been provided by Trade Allies or have been originated developed acquired or copied by “Contractor’s Name” in connection with the disclosure by Trade Allies of the confidential information.

5. **RIGHTS**

5.1 Nothing in this Deed shall be construed as granting to “Contractor’s Name” any right entitlement or interest in the confidential information or in any matter or property associated therewith.

5.2 “Contractor’s Name” hereby acknowledges that Trade Allies is and shall remain the sole and exclusive owner of the confidential information. Furthermore, all rights of any description in any know-how, information, invention or work of any description derived or arising from the confidential information and/or the provision of the services, whether arising prior to or in the course of or subsequent to the Services are hereby assigned to and shall vest in Trade Allies.

5.3 “Contractor’s Name” warrants that she is or shall be entitled to assign all rights pursuant to the provisions in clause 5.2

5.4 “Contractor’s Name” shall execute all the documents and do all acts and things required by Trade Allies for the purpose of giving effect to clause 5.2 including, but not limited to, the procuring of the execution of any necessary documentation by her delegates, employees, agents or sub-contractors and joining in proceedings brought by Trade Allies to protect such rights, in which
case Trade Allies' solicitors shall have the sole conduct of such action pursuant
to the instructions of Trade Allies.

6. **NON WAIVER**

6.1.1 No refusal or failure to enforce any provision of this Deed by Trade Allies shall constitute a waiver of any term hereof.

7. **DURATION OF AGREEMENT**

7.1 This Deed and the duties and obligations of “Contractor’s Name” shall continue in full force and effect during and provision of the Services until and thereafter for so long as the confidential information shall remain confidential information as hereinbefore defined **PROVIDED THAT** no part of the confidential information shall be deemed to have ceased to be confidential information merely by reason that such information or any part thereof may be embraced by general disclosure of information in the public domain.

8. **APPLICABLE LAW**

8.1 This Deed shall be governed by and interpreted pursuant to the Law of the State of Queensland and the parties shall submit to the jurisdiction of the Courts of competent jurisdiction in that State for and in respect of any action proceeding or dispute in relation to or arising from this Deed.

9. **PARTIES BOUND**

9.1 This Deed shall bind the parties their delegates heirs executors administrators successors and assigns.
IN WITNESS hereof the parties hereto have duly executed this Deed on the day and year first hereinbefore appearing.

The common seal of TRADE ALLIES PTY LTD was affixed in the presence of authorised persons:

Director Ian Mackenzie...

Full Name Trade Allies Pty Ltd.............

Usual Address 41 Latham St, Chermside...

SIGNED SEALED AND DELIVERED by the (sign your name here)
said “Contractor’s Name” in the presence of:

Witness ............................................. (witness signs here)

Full Name .............................................

Usual Address .............................................
DESCRIPTION OF CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

All information relating to any marketing and product release information, unreleased designs, design development, design technology, design manufacturing techniques, sales information, computer hardware, computer software, device, product, invention, development, process, drawing, design, pattern, mark-up pattern, specification, knowhow, technical data, enhancement, information whether or a technical, engineering, marketing or financial nature, trade secrets, processes, formulae, accounts, data base and all other information of any nature whatsoever arising from the transcription services provided by Trade Allies for its clients and all other information held in any form.
Appendix 7: AASW Code of Ethics

AASW Code of Ethics - Research

The AASW's *Code of Ethics 2010 (the Code)* is the core document which informs and guides the ethical practice of social workers. The *Code* expresses the values and responsibilities which are integral to and characterise the social work profession. It is intended to assist all social workers, collectively and individually, to act in ethically accountable ways in the pursuit of the profession's aims.

1. Publication and distribution of research findings

   a) Social workers will accurately and fully disseminate research findings.

   b) Social workers will inform research participants or their representatives, where possible, of research results that are relevant to them.

   c) Social workers will bring research results that indicate or demonstrate social inequalities or injustices to the attention of the relevant bodies.

   g) Social workers will ensure that publication and dissemination is conducted responsibly, taking into account the risks and possible consequences to individuals and communities.
Appendix 8: Interview Schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

• Introductions
• Outline purpose of research – see below
• Confidentiality
• Read through consent form, obtain signature
• Demographic details – age, family situation, relationship to the deceased, age of the deceased, time elapsed since loss, driver/passenger

(Here today to talk about the roadside memorial you have built……I will ask you about the memorial itself, what it is like, where it is, who helped build it and so on. Then I will ask about what its role has been, if it has helped, how it has helped, what it means to you, if you still go there, what you do when you go there, and finally how this may be different for you to the gravesite at the cemetery. I will then ask for your recommendations for other bereaved people, for policymakers and so on).

Lead - in questions

• Why did you agree to participate in this research/interview? Explore their motivation to participate.

• What were your thoughts about roadside memorials prior to your loss? Had you seen any? What did you think about them?

• Did you know other who had built them?

• Questions about the physical aspects of the memorial

• Why did you decide to build a roadside memorial?

• How much time passed before you actually built the memorial?

• Tell me about the memorial itself. Where is it, who was it for, who was involved in building it. Tell me about building it, what was that like? Did anyone stop, and notice what you were doing?

• What materials and mementos did you choose, and why? What physical form does it take, what does it look like, what is included in it? The physical aspects of it. (Get them to re-live that- hermeneutic, about lived experience).

• How did you decide what it would be like? Can you tell me about that?
• Did any spiritual or religious beliefs/values influence your decision to build a memorial, or shape the form it took – eg cross, religious icons, wording?

Questions about the meaning of the memorial

• What did the memorial mean for you then? What was the meaning for you at the time you built it?

• What does it mean now? Has this changed over time?

• Has it helped? If so, how?

• What role does it play? What does it mean/symbolise for you?

• Was it a milestone/rite of passage, like the funeral, the burial, the wake, then putting up the headstone?

• Did you ever try and avoid that part of the road? Before or after the memorial was there?

• How often do you visit?

• What do you do when you go there?

• What do you feel?

• Tell me about your last visit to the memorial. What was that like?

• What about the cemetery? Compare these two sites. Tell me about this. More of a pull towards one or the other?(What need does the RM fill which is perhaps not being met by sanctioned memorial sites and arrangements? Do the two sites serve the same, or different, functions?)

• What has happened as a result of putting up this roadside memorial?
• Did you have any opposition from other family or friends? Have people talked to you about it? Was it controversial? Were there any reactions to what you did? What were these reactions?

• When you see other roadside memorials, what do you feel? What do they mean for you now?

• Do friends or other family visit the memorial, and tell you about this?

Questions about recommendations to others

• Did you have any contact from RMS or council? Was this helpful or not helpful? Any suggestions for RMS or council?

• What would you say to someone contemplating building a roadside memorial? What advice would you give to others in the same situation who were going to put up a memorial?

• What is the key thing you have learned as a result of erecting a roadside memorial?

• What effect (if any) has this interview had on your thoughts about the roadside memorial you placed?

• Other comments?

• Conclude – summarise, clarify, re-state aims of research and thank for participation.

• Ensure follow up phone numbers given to participant. Ask if I may follow up later if I need to clarify any part of the interview. Do they wish to see a transcript of their interview to ensure I have recorded their thoughts accurately? Member-checking.
Appendix 9: CSU Media Release

Roadside memorial research needs participants

15 Apr 2013

A Charles Sturt University (CSU) social work researcher who is exploring the meaning and role that roadside memorials play in the grieving process seeks interviews with people associated with these memorials.

Ms Susan Welsh, a PhD candidate in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at CSU in Wagga Wagga, says the placing of roadside memorials has a long history, yet it has become a growing phenomenon in recent times, and has sparked heated debate and controversy.

"New laws have been established in various local government areas, ranging from total bans, to time limits being imposed, to allowing generic structures only. This has caused many bereaved people considerable anxiety, adding to their grief and anger," Ms Welsh said.

"It is important to understand why these memorials are important, how they help, and whether this phenomenon signals a move away from church or state run cemeteries to the roadsides as a place of significance.

"This research will lead to possible recommendations and implications for contemporary social work practice, government policymakers, other health and welfare professionals, and government departments such as the NSW Roads and Maritime Services."

Ms Welsh lives on the NSW south coast and in order to establish the role roadside memorials play in the bereavement process and how they assist the bereaved family and friends, she aims to conduct confidential semi-structured open-ended face-to-face interviews of between one to two hours duration with 10 to 20 participants who have placed roadside memorials. She will be researching memorials placed within the Shoalhaven Local Government Area – Berry to Durras, to Kangaroo Valley. If more potential participants from outside this area come forward, interviews can be conducted by phone.

She will also explore whether the actual site of the memorials has central spiritual significance. Analysis of some memorials will also be undertaken, including examination of their physical characteristics including their location, the icons and wording used, and the length of time they have been in place.

Ms Welsh stresses that although these research interviews are not intended as therapeutic or counselling sessions, some may find that sharing their grief and story may be a cathartic or healing experience.

"I hope that some participants at least will be comforted by the knowledge that they may be helping others who are facing similar grief, and that through this research they might contribute to possible policies regarding the placement of roadside memorials. All participants will be provided with counselling contact details if they need to seek further help," she said.

This research has CSU ethics approval to ensure privacy and confidentiality. No identifying data will be released and participants will not be linked to their own roadside memorial, unless they wish to be. Participants will also be bound by confidentiality agreements.

Contact Ms Welsh by email swelsh@csu.edu.au to find out more about participating in this research.
Spotlight shines on shrines

WHEN a council tried to ban roadside memorials to people killed in car crashes, the community outcry was huge and forced the council to quickly back down. However, the response prompted Ulladulla social worker and grief counsellor Susan Welsh to question why these roadside memorials were so important, and whether they had replaced traditional cemeteries as places of remembrance.

"I’m trying to find out the role roadside memorials play in the grieving process," she said.

Ms Welsh is studying the issue for her PhD in social work at Charles Sturt University, and is planning to interview people who have put up some of the many roadside memorials scattered along the Shoalhaven road.

"I really want to focus on our local Shoalhaven area," Ms Welsh said.

She pointed out that roadside memorials had a long history, yet it had become a growing phenomenon in recent times, and had sparked heated debate and controversy.

"New laws have been established in various local government areas, ranging from rural towns, to time limits being imposed, to allowing generic structures only," Ms Welsh said.

"This has caused many bereaved people considerable anxiety adding to their grief and anger," Ms Welsh said.

"It is important to understand why these memorials are important, how they help, and whether this phenomenon serves to move away from church or state run cemeteries to the roadides as a place of significance."

"This research will lead to possible recommendations and implications for contemporary social work practice, government policy-makers, other health and welfare professionals, and government departments such as the NSW Roads and Maritime Services."

Ms Welsh will also explore whether the actual site of the memorials has central spiritual significance.

Analysis of some memorials will be undertaken, including examining their physical characteristics including their location, the icons and wording used, and the length of time they have been in place.

Ms Welsh stressed that while the research interviews were not intended as therapeutic or counseling sessions, some might find sharing their grief and story to be cathartic or healing experience.

"I hope that some participants will at least be comforted by the knowledge that they may be helping others who are facing similar grief, and that through this research they might contribute to possible policies regarding the placement of roadside memorials," she said.

"All participants will be provided with counselling and contact details if they need to seek further help.

Anyone interested in taking part in confidential interviews for the project can contact Ms Welsh by email: s.welsh@csu.edu.au or through the university on 6933 2240 to find out more.

Ms Welsh said the project would look only at the people who put in roadside memorials, but she hopes to tackle the wider issue of their impact on others, particularly those involved in the accidents in different ways, in a different report.

Studying complicated and emotional issues is nothing new for Ms Welsh, who researched men who had led babies as part of her honours degree.
From a passion for grief and loss

KERRIELYN CLARK

A TRIBUTE to a loved one, a stark reminder to drive safely, distraction, eyesore or trauma trigger.

Charles Sturt University PhD candidate Sue Welsh has learnt roadside memorials mean different things to different people. For the past three years, the social work researcher has been exploring the meaning and role the memorials play in grief and loss.

On Friday, she will present a paper at England’s Oxford University on her research.

Mrs Welsh said the study of roadside memorials grew from “a passion for grief and loss” gained through her work in palliative care and oncology.

Observing the public outcry when a council tried to ban the tributes, Mrs Welsh decided to research this “public display of private grief”.

The South Coast resident said she hoped her work would help people better understand what these memorials meant to those who put them up as well as to the wider community.

Mrs Welsh’s research has involved travelling to photograph memorials and observe their physical characteristics.

She also put a call out to speak to people who had erected the tributes for in-depth interviews. Initially, Mrs Welsh confined that to her local area of the Shoalhaven but had since cast the net nationally.

Mrs Welsh said she had already gleaned a lot of information about roadside memorials.

“People have spoken to have said that it is a really important place – it’s where their friend or loved one’s spirit left their body.”

Mrs Welsh said she had also heard from those who believed the memorials were eyesores, were distracting to drivers and also to some “vocal” members of the emergency services.

“They are very against the memorials. They say they re-ignite the trauma that is seared on to their brains and that driving past them adds to their post-traumatic stress.”

Mrs Welsh said each local government area had different rules regarding memorials.

She said the process in Tasmania was to erect standard black posts to signify a death and red to signify injury.

“But seven of the ten black posts also had memorials and there were no red posts,” she said.

“Families do not want their family members to be seen as a statistic,” she said.

“They want the memorial to reflect the person who died...” Kiama Council does not have a current policy. To contact Mrs Welsh, email swelsch@csu.edu.au.
'Sacred' roadside memorials

18 April, 2013 5:44PM AWST

By Barry Nicholls and Rebecca Brewin

You see them wherever you drive in regional Western Australia. Roadside memorials have great meaning for some but are they a distraction for the everyday driver?

Forty four people have lost their lives this year on Western Australian roads with twenty one dying on regional roads.

Roadside memorials in the form of crosses, pictures and flowers are prevalent at crash sites.

Social work researcher Susan Welsh says they play an important role for those grieving deceased friends and relatives.

"I'm discovering they are very aware that this was the last place their loved one was alive," she said.

"This is where the spirit left their loved one's body... the body might rest in a cemetery but the person was never there. There is a sacredness about a the site"

There are those however who argue that road memorials are distracting.

"They can be a distraction for drivers if they're neglected and become unkempt and untidy they can become eyesores."

Memorials can also provide a traumatic reminder for ambulance personnel driving past a crash site.

To hear more of Barry Nicholls' interview with Susan Welsh click play on the audio player.
Hi, my name is Sue, and I am doing a PhD, exploring the growing phenomenon of roadside memorials. I am looking to interview people who have placed a roadside memorial in memory of their family member or friend who has lost their life on our roads in the Shoalhaven.

I am hoping to explore the meaning and significance this memorial has and the role it has played in the journey of grief. I am also interested to see how the memorial by the roadside compares with the graveside.

If you would like to be a part of this valuable research, please contact me and we can discuss this in more detail. Your confidentiality and privacy are assured. This research has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Human Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you,
Susan Welsh 0405030406 swelsh@csu.edu.au
Appendix 12: Interview Cover Sheet

INTERVIEW COVER SHEET

Name:

Pseudo name:

Age:

Gender:

Relationship to deceased:

Time elapsed:

Deceased’s details:
  - name:
  - gender:
  - age:

Date of interview:

Length of interview:

How recruited:

Face to face or telephone

Features of Roadside Memorial:

Summary of interview/salient quotes:
### Appendix 13: Participants’ Details Spreadsheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>R'ship to deceased</th>
<th>Sex of deceased</th>
<th>Year of death</th>
<th>Years elapsed</th>
<th>Built by whom</th>
<th>Proximity to home</th>
<th>Cause of death</th>
<th>Time of death</th>
<th>RM type</th>
<th>Ashes or cemetery</th>
<th>Visit both sites?</th>
<th>How recruited</th>
<th>F2F or phone</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>partner</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>30 kms</td>
<td>crash - Trevor driver</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>neither (body taken OS)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>28/05/2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>7 kms</td>
<td>kangaroo</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>ashes at home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>University contact</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>20/06/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>70’s</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>130 kms</td>
<td>on motorbike</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>memorial garden at home</td>
<td>never the cross</td>
<td>radio</td>
<td>2/07/2013</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rhonda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60’s</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>son (brother)</td>
<td>3 kms</td>
<td>truck into car</td>
<td>6.15 am</td>
<td>blue cross</td>
<td>ashes at home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>19/07/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>self and wife</td>
<td>165 kms</td>
<td>head on</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>local newspaper</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>16/07/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Allan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>friends/boyfriend</td>
<td>2 kms</td>
<td>crash and fire</td>
<td>afternoon</td>
<td>pink cross</td>
<td>ashes at home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>via friend</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>17/07/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Dianne</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>wife</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>self</td>
<td>9 kms</td>
<td>on motorbike</td>
<td>3pm</td>
<td>rock &amp; tree</td>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>flyer</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>17/07/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Kelly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>self &amp; family</td>
<td>2 kms</td>
<td>fatigue</td>
<td>5.34 am</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>ashes at home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>radio</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>23/07/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Molly</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>sister</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>16 kms</td>
<td>asleep</td>
<td>late at night</td>
<td>no-RM</td>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>flyer</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>24/08/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>friends</td>
<td>3 kms</td>
<td>passenger/speed &amp; drink</td>
<td>4.00 am</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>no - NOT the cross</td>
<td>local newspaper</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>27/08/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Emma</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>5 months</td>
<td>friends/NOT family</td>
<td>475 kms</td>
<td>kangaroo</td>
<td>flowers (cross to come)</td>
<td>ashes in cemetery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>local newspaper</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>31/10/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Meg</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50’s</td>
<td>friend</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>partner/friends</td>
<td>5 kms</td>
<td>pedestrian</td>
<td>night</td>
<td>cross</td>
<td>cemetery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>radio</td>
<td>F1</td>
<td>4/11/2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>daughter</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>family</td>
<td>20 kms</td>
<td>head on</td>
<td>no RM - single rose</td>
<td>ashes in cemetery</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>word of mouth</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>5/11/2013</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>sister</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>boyfriend</td>
<td>2 kms</td>
<td>crash and fire</td>
<td>afternoon</td>
<td>pink cross</td>
<td>ashes at home</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>via father/#6 participant</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td>7/09/2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 14: Genogram Template

Genogram Symbols

- Male
- Female
- Pregnancy
- Death
- Broken relationship
## Appendix 15: NVivo Initial Codes

### NVIVO Initial Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Faith/religion/spirituality</th>
<th>Other rituals</th>
<th>Rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age of deceased</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Others roadside memorials</td>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of participant</td>
<td>Funeral</td>
<td>Outliving own child</td>
<td>RMS/Council involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashes</td>
<td>Gender differences</td>
<td>Personalising the site</td>
<td>Sex of deceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black posts</td>
<td>Generational differences</td>
<td>Physical characteristics</td>
<td>Sex of participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built by whom?</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>Place being important</td>
<td>Special days – birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause of crash</td>
<td>Message</td>
<td>Police/coroner involvement</td>
<td>Survivor guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemetery</td>
<td>Messages to others/warnings</td>
<td>Positives out of the tragedy</td>
<td>Symbolism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort/solace</td>
<td>Motivation to participate</td>
<td>Proximity to home</td>
<td>Time elapsed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Nearby homeowners</td>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>Timeframes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect on other family members</td>
<td>Negative case analysis/exceptions</td>
<td>Relationship to deceased</td>
<td>Vandalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expression of love</td>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>Relocation of site</td>
<td>Young people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

404
Appendix 16: Roadside Memorial Observations Template

ROADSIDE MEMORIAL OBSERVATIONS TEMPLATE

Today’s date:
Location:

GPS Co-ordinates:
Name:
Born:
Died:
Age at death:
Gender:
Epitaph/Message:

Artefacts/icons/main feature:

Flowers:

Structure itself:

Signs of recent activity/visits:

General appearance:

Erected by whom?:

How died?:
Other:
### Appendix 17: Roadside Memorial Spreadsheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Died</th>
<th>Year died</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Eulogy</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>Flowers</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Recent activity</th>
<th>How died?</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Brendan</td>
<td>28.12.00</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>undecipherable</td>
<td>Red Bull can, old jacket at base of tree</td>
<td>Party board cross</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>1 killed</td>
<td>1 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>David Jordan</td>
<td>28.12.00</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>R.I.P. Your memory we treasure. Loving you always, forgetting you never.</td>
<td>3 bunches flowers</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>4 killed</td>
<td>5 injured (as below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>East Lynne</td>
<td>Andrea Patrica Rogers</td>
<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>Head on, dry, daylight</td>
<td>2 killed</td>
<td>2 injured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
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<td>25.3.04</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lewis (Rogers)</td>
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26 Kangaroo Valley Max 26.4.48 11.12.1 1 0 62 M With us always Max. Love always Di, Tash, Belinda, Tom & Dan xo
27 Nowra Tim 12.9.10 201 0 6 M Tim
28 Falls Creek Grant Baylon 1986 9.11.03 3 17 M Peace Out Brother
29 Falls Creek Matthew Steffans 6.6.11 2011 1 M We Love You
30 Tomerong Cheills 1.2.01 200 1 16 M Cheills
31 Wandandian Kristian Carruthers 1.1.01 200 1 34 F Kristian
32 Wandandian Lotty 3.11.09 200 4 35 M Lotty
33 Twelve Mile Warren George 12.9.03 27.2.04 200 4 35 M R.I.P. Jelly
34 Twelve Mile Troy Presland 6.11.09 27.2.04 200 4 35 M R.I.P. Chuffa
35 Bolang Bert and Anne 9.7.04 200 4 31 M, F Bert Anne
36 Bolang 17.4.06 200 6
37 Tomerong Natasha 1.10.10 201 0 1 Natasha
38 Tomerong George 21.1.13 203 3 30 M George
39 Woodburn State Forest Richard Colin Brown 17.9.82 3.4.03 2001 3 21 M We miss you so much, now you are with the angels and we will be together soon. Love always, Mum x
40 Wandandian (Jessica Loch) 21.3.11 6.7.2001 201 1 19 F
41 Falls Creek Rik 0 0 0 0 M R.I.P.
42 Ulladulla 3.11.14 201 4 31 M
43 Ulladulla (Clive Milne) 2.2.15 201 5 70 M
44 Gerringa My Best Friend. BFF. BGF. 201 5 M
45 Cockatoo Creek Carla | Robinson F Carla
46 Jenkins Bay Road Scott Kelly 23.11.1 201 0 18 M In memory of firefighter Scott Kelly.
47 Jenkins Bay Road (Alexa Rice) 23.11.1 201 0 23 F LEX
48 Jenkins Bay Road Scott Kelly 23.11.1 201 0 18 M
49 Jenkins Bay Road Scott Kelly 23.11.1 201 0 18 M Scott’s Place
50 Sanctuary Point Nick 14.2.12 201 2 19 M R.I.P. Nick. You are always in our hearts.

Love heart shaped flowers, photo of Tiny-bug
Yes Flowers No ? ?
Yes Yellow cross Yes On bend, dry, daylight
Crosses of timber No White cross No Head on, dry, daylight
Rear ended, pushed into river, dry, dark 2 killed, 2 injured

Tomerong

Rowan

Love always, Mum x
We Love You

Solar light, purple butterfly
Yes White cross Yes ?
Yes Purple cross Yes ?

With us always Max. Love always Di, Tash, Belinda, Tom & Dan xo

Flowers, purple ribbon, tied to tree
Yes Flowers No ?

Turtle, poems, 2 plaques, notes
Yes Yellow cross Yes On bend, dry, daylight

Loveheart shaped flowers, photo of Tiny-bug
Yes Flowers No ?

Cross made of flowers
Yes Cross No Head on, dry, daylight

Falls Creek

Grant Baylon

Twelve Mile

Woodburn

State Forest

Troy Presland

Six flags, dreamcatcher, flowers, No White cross No Off road, into object, wet, daylight
Yes White cross Yes ?

Teddy bear, flowers, wreath
Yes Purple cross Yes ?

2 cricket balls, 10 bunches flowers in vases
Yes Natural timber cross Yes Head on, wet, daylight

Star of David necklace, St Christopher’s medal
Yes Natural timber cross Yes ? ?

Blue and yellow bands on ends of cross, beer bottles
No White metal cross No Head on, overtaking, dry, daylight
2 killed, 2 injured

Red and green bands on ends of cross, beer bottles
No White metal cross No Head on, dry, daylight
2 killed, 3 injured (as above)

Red and pink bouquet, fresh paint
Yes White cross Yes ?

Six flags, dreamcatcher, flowers
Yes Australian flags No Off road, dry, dark
9 killed

Butterfly, windchime, beer bottle, plants
Yes 2 white crosses No ?

4 bunches flowers, solar lights, piece of car
Yes White cross Yes ?

Two crosses, tena notes written on tree. R.I.P.
Yes White cross, metal cross No Off road, into tree, wet, dark
3 killed, 1 injured

Flowers, ribbons, anchor heart
Yes Natural timber cross Yes Off road, into tree, wet, dark
1 killed

Australian Flag
No White cross Yes Off road, overtaking, into pole, dry, dark
1 killed

Fresh native flowers, tied to power pole, shells
Yes White cross Yes Heart attack, crashed into tree
1 killed

Flowers, photo, solar lights, poem, rocks
Yes Flowers Yes ?

Yes Flowers Yes ?

Cross, sunflower
Yes Cross No Head on
1 killed, 1 injured

Cross, fire helmet, stuffed toy, solar lights, stones
Yes White cross No Head on, dry, daylight
2 killed, 3 injured (as above)

Photo of Jesus, solar lights, bike chain, flag, stones
Yes White, omaha cross No Head on, dry, daylight
2 killed, 3 injured (as above)

beer bottle, scurf tied around cross, chrys
Yes Cross No Head on, dry, daylight
2 killed, 3 injured (as above)

Treffors helmet, photos, angel statue, stone globe
Yes Items attached to Connor fence post No Head on, dry, daylight
2 killed, 3 injured (as above)

Photo, butterflies, hearts, solar lights, angels, fingerprints on tree
Yes White cross Yes Crashed into tree
1 killed

Jim: day on, dry, daylight
Appendix 18: Dianne’s story

The necessity to address serious issues surrounding how death notifications are given, and how hospitals and morgues deal with the families of victims of road fatalities is highlighted in the following account from a very distressed Dianne:

And I still struggle with—the police didn’t handle any of the whole day very well. I mean, as I said, it was a big accident. And the young girl, who was the detective in charge of overseeing it, I don’t know, she had probably never dealt with anything to that magnitude. And I think normal protocol just wasn’t even—they didn’t even dispatch somebody to come find me and tell me. They didn’t—so, I had no awareness. I knew that—his friend had called me and I knew there’d been an accident, but he told me he had a broken leg, and I was just envisioning my husband there with a broken leg, going, swearing something like, “Bloody hell! We can’t go to the coast for the weekend,” which was where we were all heading. So, I then went from hospital to hospital, kind of searching and waiting and didn’t have an indication of the magnitude of it. And even after he’d passed away, the police still at that point didn’t even ever say, “Where’s his wife; or where’s the next of kin?” “Can somebody call and tell her to wait where she is, so we can get somebody to go to her?” I was never formally told. So—

I forever struggle with the fact that I wasn’t there to hold his hand and that I wasn’t there when he died, and that I didn’t get that chance, even after he’d died, his body was there for about six hours and no one ever told me. And so, I didn’t even at that point get somebody say to me, “Do you want—,” “I think what’s really important is that families and people close to them, they need to have time to absorb what’s happened, and I never got that. And if he had of died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital, then he would have been admitted to the hospital, because I had a friend who that happened to . . . He was able to go and sit with [his deceased wife] by himself, then go away and get his kids, come back; then go away and get her family, come back; then go away and get his family, come back. Everybody was given time. And then, when he was ready, he was able to go, “I’m ready now. She can go.” I was not given anything. They never even told me that he’d been on the side of the road all this time, which I understand they needed to work out the accident and I understand that when somebody’s deceased, they leave them there. . . But no one talked to me . . .

And then I went home and in my head I guess, I guess I thought he’d possibly gone to hospital. I don’t even know at that point—but, it wasn’t until a few hours later that the detective called my home and she didn’t even talk to me; and even that, she hadn’t received my permission to talk to anybody else instead of me. She had no idea of the relationship with the person that she was choosing to talk to, and asking to speak to. And so, I didn’t get that time out there and I had to actually get quite angry and almost fight to get them to not—because the morgue people, the undertakers, whatever they’re called the people that transfer the body, they were going straight to the accident site to take him straight to xxxx morgue. And they didn’t tell me that until, like I said, hours later. It was dark. It was bordering—well, it would have been six or seven. It was dark, because the accident happened at about three, and it was hours later. And they didn’t tell this to me. So, they’ve asked to speak—so, she’s rung me and . . . [my husband’s] name was Phillip, and his mate’s name was Stuart, and she said, “Oh, hi Dianne, it’s Detective Such And Such” she said, “I’m in charge.” And she said, “I’m really sorry for your loss.” And then she said, “Can I speak to Phillip please?” . . . So, then I kind of went, “So, I’m guessing that you mean Stuart?” And she
went, “Oh, my God. I’m sorry.” And I felt—she’s young, I felt sorry. And so then, I passed Stuart the phone and then I’m standing there and she’s proceeding to tell him that they’re moving [my husband’s] body. She has no right as far as I’m concerned to tell him anything, it’s my husband. And she didn’t say to me, “We’re still here, would you—,” none of it.

Because I had gone in to accident and emergency going, “What’s happening? Are helicopters landing? I need to know where my husband is. What’s going on?” So, she’d obviously, then spoken with them out there. And then, she had come back outside to find me because we had decided that sitting in accident and emergency with three children and my friend, with sick people everywhere wasn’t helping. So, we’d gone outside, and she came out to find me and said, “I’m really sorry. They’ve released his name and I’m sorry to tell you that your husband has deceased.” So, that’s the first point that I knew.

. . . so my issue with the police was big, and I think—I sat at the accident site a lot after, with that sense of, almost guilt really, of feeling I’d let him down. I wasn’t there; I hadn’t held his hand. Like, and almost saying to him, “You held my hand through three births, and I wasn’t there to hold your hand when you needed me.” And that whole—and I went there every month at the time that he died, and almost pretending I was sitting with him and there for those times. So, I don’t know if my connection with the accident site would have been as—it may have been bigger if I’d been there when—and had him there, and been with him and had that time, or whether I would have had that time to process it, see it, grieve it, be with him, sit with him, even if he had already gone. Like, he’s there by himself under a blanket. I was there going, “What right do you have not to let me sit with him and have his head on my lap and wait until you’re finished doing whatever you were doing?” But I should have had that time there to cry. And even if it wasn’t right for my kids to have seen that, I had friends that were there.

And I’m like, “No, I’m going to hospital to see my husband.” And he’s like, “What?” and I’m like, “You tell them that they’re taking him to a hospital.” And he’s like, “No.” And I’m like, “Give me the phone because I will,” and then he was like, “You need to tell them to take him to a hospital. She needs to be able to go to a hospital to see him.” So, I had to fight and then, you know again. I don’t know if you can make any changes, but I doubt it. But, paperwork; it’s all about paperwork and they’re not considering feelings and emotions because they didn’t want to take him into the hospital because he couldn’t be admitted to the hospital because he’s already deceased. So, paperwork means that he can’t be admitted. So, they put him in a room out the back and the undertaker people just waited. And I came to xxxx Hospital to a room out the back, to spend as little as I think ten minutes. And I was told by a lovely nurse there, when she’d—was feeling, obviously uncomfortable about the fact that this body hasn’t been admitted and can’t really be here in this room out the back where it’s not really a room where I should be having other people, and suddenly there’s people in this room out the back with this body. And she’s obviously thinking I’m not—

. . . This is probably not protocol. I’m probably not meant to be doing—this is probably not right. And so, she’s there going, “Okay, enough time,” and then said something to me, “This is not goodbye.” And I was very close to going, “Well if you don’t f**king call this goodbye, then I don’t know what it is, because hello? That’s my husband and I’m here saying goodbye.” So, bordering, I’m getting a bit, “Leave me alone! And let me have time with my husband to say goodbye!”—because . . . “ But I wasn’t given the room, the patience, the time, the privacy, the peace, any of it. . . I had some time by myself. But I mean, ten minutes? 10 or 15 minutes . . . So, again, like I say, to this day, I still struggle with all of that, because we didn’t get that time.

And I did talk to the coroner about it. I had meetings with the coroner because I was really upset with the police and the handling of it. So, I did, but, I don’t know. But again, there are already guidelines in place. They should have dispatched a police officer to find me.
And the next of kin was supposed to be—you see that, you hear the knocks on the door, and you hear about—they knew I wasn’t at home, but they yet knew that somebody there had contact with me. So, they needed to go, “Where is she? Make contact. Tell her to stay where she is.” And then, they need to ring a police person and say, “His wife is in xxxx. She’s here. Go find her. Make sure she’s not driving.” They didn’t know if I was with anybody. “Make sure, she’s not by herself. Tell her what has happened. Ask her what she would like to do. Does she want to come here? We need to tell her that this is what’s happening with her husband’s body.” None of it. I, like, you just—so I dunno if—again, that day, they just didn’t do what they should have done. But I think the whole paperwork from the hospital perspective, I think that’s something. I think if people die on the side of the road, I think people need to be given a place. And it needs to not be in the morgue. I wasn’t gonna take my three-year old to a morgue. I mean, I was just horrified at the whole thought of it. I was just like going, “I’m not going to a morgue.” And I was just literally saying, “I’m not going to the morgue. They’re taking him to a hospital.” But, even then, I was already too late to go to the accident because they were moving him right then. And I was like, “Why didn’t somebody tell me? I could have been here for the last two hours. Why am I being told now that he’s moving?” “Ah-ah.” Like already, it’s out of my control, like I’m going, “How has this happened? And I haven’t known.”

I think the process—people need to be given time somewhere. If someone dies in a hospital, they’re given time . . . Yeah, family can come, people can come. I mean for me, even that 10 to 15 minutes, I gripped to that . . .

But, at the accident site it would of made more sense because you can see the whole—the whole site and the whole damage. But for me, he shouldn’t have been by himself on the side of the road. Like, I think, “Yes, he’s died but it’s so early. It’s still so raw. So, he’s still there.” To me, that’s still human. It’s not just a body that you just leave on the side of the road. And because he was so tall, the blanket that they covered him with wasn’t even big enough to cover him. I mean, you’re talking about August in the middle of xxxx, it’s cold. I would of wanted to cover him. I would have wanted to hold his head. And I would of wanted to keep him warm, for that time or whatever it was.

And the aerial photograph that was taken by the reporters and the news that then went on the front page of the xxxx Times the next day, full page, aerial photograph, with my husband barely covered by a blanket that’s not big enough. Like, even that, do they not have to have permission to publish that photo? Obviously, they don’t and obviously because his face is covered, then they’re able to do whatever they like with it . . . But I’m there then, given a:-f-f-f-far out. That’s the first visual that I get of the accident. Nobody has taken me to that spot; nobody has given me that time to sit. Like, yeah.

In this heart-wrenching account, Dianne refers to a number of issues, and protocols which were not followed, which are a cause of serious concern for the professional bodies involved. In the first instance, no-one was dispatched to try and find Dianne, his wife, or any next of kin. She was not contacted by the Police until many hours after the crash, and after her husband had in fact already died. She feels that she was never formally told of his death, and never given the chance to be with him by the side of the
road and hold his hand, keep him warm, comfort him as he lay dying. She then continues to describe the lack of time she had at the hospital to be with him, and the fact that she had to fight to stop him being taken straight to the morgue. The detective who rang her home, before she knew of her husband’s death, not only asked to speak with her dying husband (got the name wrong) but did not ask to speak to Dianne, the wife and next of kin. They spoke instead to a friend, without Dianne’s permission. The way in which the death notification was delivered—over six hours after the crash—is another source of distress for Dianne. The handling of the whole situation—by police, hospital staff, morgue workers and others involved—have caused Dianne a lot of undue distress and suffering. She clearly points out a number of issues to be addressed to improve the handling of families and loved ones affected by road trauma and road fatalities.

Breen (2006), conducting research into road fatalities in WA, made some sound suggestions which may have alleviated some of the issues identified by Dianne. These included the need for “dedicated liaison officers” within the police force who “could be present at crash scenes and during the death notification and body identification processes, so that the investigating police can continue with their investigative tasks” (p. 229). Breen continued, pointing out that “most professionals in the position of delivering death notifications report that they have received no training in it, despite inadequate death notification practices being implicated in the later ‘complicated’ bereavement and/or PTSD” (pp. 229–230). Breen also pointed out that police are not primarily employed to look after the emotional and social needs of bereaved family members; their main role being investigating the crash scene, re-directing traffic and so on. She commented that,
While Hetherington et al. (1997) suggested that police officers should be trained to enable them to address the psychosocial needs of family members adequately following fatal crashes, a separate liaison officer is preferable because police (and emergency service personnel) can be greatly and adversely affected by attending and investigating fatal crashes . . . Further, some of the issues that some of the bereaved informants had regarding the police investigation, such as a lack of communication and poor access to information concerning the crash investigation . . . may be mitigated by the employment of liaison officers (p. 230).

As Breen so clearly noted, perhaps the introduction of well-trained liaison officers within the police force is one possible solution to the issues highlighted by Dianne. This interview and research has thus identified concrete ways in which professionals involved in road trauma and service delivery can assist grieving families at such a painful time. This contribution represents a novel and substantial contribution to existing theory and practice.