CEMETERY VISITATION:
The place of the cemetery in the grief process

A thesis submitted to
CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by
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April 2001

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Several people and organisations have generously contributed to this research project through practical support, guidance and encouragement. I wish to particularly thank:

Supervisors, Neil Lipscombe and Jim Birkhead, of Charles Sturt University,
Ian Roddick, General Manager of Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park,
The Trustees of Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park,
The Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association, including past presidents
David Blake and Peter MacLean, and executive officer Robyn Smith.
Priscilla Nelson and staff of Nelson Bros. Bereavement Resource Centre,
Grief counsellor, Damien Peile, and,
Members of the Rotary Club of Pascoe Vale.

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my personal confidante and wife, Jan Bachelor, for unflagging physical, psychological, and social support over the years of this research, while simultaneously completing her own postgraduate studies.

Those bereaved individuals (identified only by pseudonyms) who allowed me to delve into their personal grief and explore their intimate experiences, beliefs and practices, provided what is undoubtedly the most valuable component of this study.

To all of the above, and those un-named who contributed in other ways to this important research project, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation and sincere thanks for your assistance.

Philip Bachelor
Melbourne
October 2000
ABSTRACT

Although over thirty-three million visits are made to Australian cemeteries each year, empirical knowledge of this most common behavioural activity has remained a significant omission from bereavement literature. The entire cemeteries industry has, until recently, operated with little understanding of its clientele and their particular needs.

This sociological investigation opens a new dimension to bereavement study, through introducing unique field research. Complementary quantitative and qualitative studies are combined to furnish vital generalisations on cemetery visitation, and to evaluate the personal significance of visitation to mourners within different social and cultural contexts.

The study examines the place of the cemetery, within concepts of a grief process. As well as identifying principle reasons for visiting, significant reasons why some bereaved people do not visit are similarly investigated, as are common visitation activities, emotions, and personal values of cemeteries and memorials.

For many people, the cemetery is a vital focal point for remembrance of the deceased, and a place that facilitates expression rather than repression of grief. Visiting the cemetery is found to be a crucial aspect of 'grief-work' for many mourners, and typically offers most value during the emotionally intense, early stages of bereavement.

Principal cemetery visitation reasons, activities and emotions are found to relate to a common desire to maintain a sense of connection with the decedent, and many cemetery visitors maintain a strong perception of visiting the decedent as a person.

To literally millions of bereaved Australians, the cemetery allows potentially stressful obligations to be expressed and resolved. It also offers some escape from anguish of separation from the deceased, and a degree of control over separation and loss. The cemetery thereby offers solace and a sense of personal well-being.

The main societal value of the cemetery is found to be personal commemoration of significant decedents. The study reveals cemetery visitation to be a high participatory, value-laden, expressive activity, and one of the most significant, observable behavioural activities of recently bereaved people.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis presents a detailed, systematic study of the ways in which bereaved people give meaning to cemetery visitation and related commemorative activities. It comprises the synthesis of unique and highly challenging social research, and represents a substantial contribution to our understanding of the common phenomenon of bereavement.

The problem on which the research is focused is the major values of cemetery visitation to bereaved Australians, and the primary question to be answered by the study is:

What is the place of the cemetery in the grief process?

Bereavement is recognised within psychology as the single most significant life event that most people ever experience. This sociological investigative study now identifies cemetery visitation as an important meaningful behavioural activity of millions of bereaved Australians, and one driven by a combination of complex social, cultural and psychological factors.

A ‘cemetery’ literally offers only burial, though possibly entombment, as means of disposition of the remains of a deceased person. A ‘crematorium’ literally offers only cremation as an alternative. A ‘memorial park’ typically includes lawn cemetery and memorial gardens (for interment of cremated remains), though may include monumental graves and/or a crematorium. However, throughout this treatise, the term ‘cemetery’ generally includes crematorium and memorial park, and ‘cemetery visitation’ includes visits to all of the above facilities.

Background to the Study

This study owes its origin to an initial review of the leisure potential of cemetery land. During the 1980s, land-use and recreation planners, including Just (1989), alluded to perceived leisure potential of cemeteries. The notion that ‘inefficient use of land as cemeteries has become unacceptable’ (Just 1989:29) implied that, to relevant communities, interment and
long-term commemoration were considered less significant values of cemetery land-use than was public leisure. However, no evidence of community consultation was demonstrated and this researcher suspected that the purported ‘unacceptability’ existed purely in the minds of its proponents. Such contentions appeared to be merely the product of naïve generalisations, as many regular visitors of diverse cultures seemed to regard cemeteries as highly sacred sites, for the sole purpose of personal commemoration.

Suspecting that unjustified recreation-centric contentions did not represent the views of cemetery stakeholders, the researcher sought to identify what leisure pursuits could be acceptable to bona fide cemetery users and how acceptability may vary by specific social and cultural demographics within a very large cemetery. This initial study (Bachelor 1991), at Melbourne’s Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park, was undertaken as the research project component of an undergraduate degree, majoring in outdoor recreation.

It soon became evident that no specific social data existed on cemetery clients at all, despite there being around 2,300 cemeteries in Australia (according to the Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association) and these receiving around thirty-three million annual visits (current estimate). The entire industry was basing its service provision on what individual managers thought best for their clients. Prevailing industry opinion suggested it would be insensitive, and therefore inappropriate, to subject cemetery visitors to personal scrutiny.

This presented an interesting research challenge. While seeking to collect data on visitors’ attitudes to a range of potential leisure activities within the cemetery, it seemed opportune to obtain additional data on visiting patterns and trends, as well as attitudes to current service provision. This form of social inquiry offered an opportunity to discover who visits whom, when, why and how often. The researcher sought to discover the cemetery’s clients, along with their visiting behaviours and needs, and to find out how cemetery visitation may be influenced by specific social factors (including age and sex of the visitor and relationship of the deceased), and cultural factors (including nationality and religion of the family).

The researcher’s initial concern that the majority of prospects would decline participation proved to be unjustified. Within the original sample of two hundred and thirty visitors, only five percent of those approached declined to participate. Most visitors were very happy to talk and contributed freely to the survey.
The study found that attitudes towards leisure behaviour within the cemetery were strongly influenced by cultural factors. The majority of respondents considered that only a few passive leisure activities could be acceptable, and that more active pursuits were generally considered unacceptable.

Following publication of early study results (Bachelor 1992), the then Australian Cemeteries and Crematoria Association (ACCA) requested a presentation at its national conference in Melbourne. The paper presented (Bachelor 1993) concentrated more on visitor demographics and visitation patterns. This first image of cemetery clients aroused considerable interest within the industry for its potential value in guiding managerial decision-making, including more effective and efficient allocation of cemetery resources. Many requests came for copies of the paper, methodological details and even copies of the original questionnaire.

This was both encouraging and disturbing. While pleased that others saw value in this work, the researcher was concerned that employees of some cemeteries were simply acting under instructions to ‘do what Fawkner had done’ without knowing where and how to start, or even why they should be doing it. Some attempts were made, but a big difference was soon discovered between believing in the value of such work and having the appropriate resources and preparation to successfully complete it. A sound common approach appeared necessary to ensure that the information obtained maintained the integrity of each cemetery, its management, and most importantly the cemetery clients.

The Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association requested a further presentation at its combined convention with the International Cremation Federation, to be held in Adelaide in 1996. The five hundred delegates comprised the largest international gathering of cemeteries and crematoria personnel to date.

To update previous data, a further study was conducted at Fawkner early in 1996 with a survey sample of three hundred visitors. The data collected also expanded on previous work with the resultant paper (Bachelor 1996) attracting even greater interest, and several more cemeteries indicating desires to obtain similar information on their respective clientele.
In response to industry demand, this researcher subsequently coordinated a series of site-specific studies with the additional aim of combining the data to form a larger, more general image of cemetery visitors and visitation across Australia.

The national cemetery visitor study provided very revealing quantitative data on Australian cemetery clients, from which many generalisations could be drawn. Family religion and relationship to the deceased were revealed as major determinants of cemetery visitation, and the statistical significance of various social and cultural demographics, including religion and relationship was identified. However, this data revealed virtually nothing of the personal experiences of individual people. This type of data could only be identified and investigated through a complementary qualitative study.

**Nature of the Study**

This thesis introduces the major findings of qualitative sociological research into cemetery visitation and the place of the cemetery within the ‘grief process’. The research explores relationships between grief and cemetery visitation, and identifies the importance of visitation to mourners of different social and cultural backgrounds. As well as considering principle reasons for visiting cemeteries, significant reasons why some bereaved people do not visit are similarly identified and explored. Visitation activities, emotions and personal values of cemeteries and memorials are investigated.

In-depth personal interviews with recently bereaved people of various religions and relationships to the deceased were conducted during the latter part of 1997 and early 1998. Drawing from several different sources, informants were purposively sampled to approximate a cross-section of general cemetery visitors, as identified from the quantitative data.

In-depth interviews included discussion of issues such as impacts of bereavement, cemetery visitation activities, emotional experiences, personal values of cemeteries, memorials and visitation. Data also revealed similarities and contrasts across various social and cultural contexts.
The study focussed on human social dimensions of cemetery visitation, identifying personal meanings given to cemeteries and memorial visitation by bereaved people within Australian society.

Limitations of the Study

Post-funeral personal values of the cemetery are the specific focus of the research. As such, psychological, sociological and biological aspects of death and dying fall outside the scope of this study. So does the diversity of complex social and cultural structures in the conduct of funerals and evolving funeral practices. As Parkes (1996:153) observes, ‘anthropological studies of funeral and mourning customs are too numerous to review in detail’.

The findings are based on twenty-four case studies produced from interviews involving twenty-seven bereaved informants (ie. twenty-one individuals and three couples), including four non-visitor. Respective deaths had all occurred within five years of interviews, with the shortest duration of bereavement being two months.

Informants included adherents of the Roman Catholic (of Italian and Irish origin), Greek Orthodox, and Anglican churches: a few other Protestant denominations (Uniting, Baptist, and Salvation Army), some non-Christian faiths (Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and eclecticism), and people of no religion.

Relationships of decedents to informants were limited to spouses, children (including adult offspring and a grandchild), parents, siblings (including an in-law), and grandparents.

A majority of the respective deaths, cemetery visitation, and interviews took place in Melbourne. However, six deaths occurred in rural Victoria, three interstate (Queensland, New South Wales, and South Australia), and one overseas.

Values of the Study

Psychology has so far contributed more than any other discipline to our understanding of grief and most previous bereavement studies have been conducted in clinical settings. This study
opens a new dimension to the phenomenon of bereavement through unique field research in what is indeed a very fertile field. Literally millions of bereaved Australians may be found at our major memorial parks. Cemetery visitation is found to be a high participatory, value-laden, expressive activity and one of the most significant, observable behavioural activities of recently bereaved people.

This study sheds our first light on what is evidently a most important, yet previously unknown, aspect of humanity. The results offer the cemeteries industry its first opportunity to understand its various clients and their personal needs, and to establish a sound basis for future planning of improved facilities and services. Professional awareness and appropriate industry response may help ease the grief of literally hundreds of thousands of bereaved people, each year, throughout Australia alone. The study findings may also be internationally transferable, and may stimulate similar research elsewhere.

This study is entirely original and extends current psychological and sociological knowledge of bereavement by examining what is a major, though unexplored, activity within popular notions of the grief process.

This concludes the thesis introduction. The following chapter reviews existing literature forming the knowledge foundation on which the current research is based, and from which it expands.
Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of related literature, upon which conceptual foundations of the current study have been based.

The topic of bereavement is well documented, but even cursory mention of cemetery visitation is very rare within existing bereavement literature. One such allusion is by Jackson (1974), who, within his descriptive definition of grief, includes the suggestion that grief is:

a mother walking daily to a nearby cemetery to stand quietly alone for a few moments before she goes on about the tasks of the day; she knows that part of her is in the cemetery, just as part of her is in her daily work.

Jackson (1974:2)

Another of these rarities is Raphael's (1984:209) brief mention of 'daily or weekly visits' among behaviours of the 'preoccupied chronic mourner'.

Due to the dearth of pre-existing literature on the personal values of cemetery visitation, the researcher has necessarily read 'around' the topic, to establish a broad, existing knowledge base from which to approach the study.

Towards understanding the place of the cemetery in the grief process, it is essential to firstly clarify contemporary conceptualisation of such 'grief process'. This literature review examines current multidisciplinary perspectives on bereavement, and ideas of a grief process within concepts of cultural and social diversity. The research setting is then reviewed from an historical perspective, considering important factors in the evolution of the modern cemetery.

Two recent British studies, which include some issues of cemetery visitation, are reviewed. From this limited existing knowledge base, the current study then expands to consider personal values of cemetery visitation within the grief process.
Bereavement and Grief

Literature relating to the study of bereavement and cemetery visitation may be categorised as empirical research (contained in academic journals, conference proceedings and reference books), popular writing (i.e. general books, magazines and newspapers), and industry materials (i.e. news-magazines, specialist books and brochures).

Key empirical researchers and major resources are briefly introduced, then valuable contributions from other sources considered. This is followed by a summary of contemporary bereavement theories, concepts of the grief process, pathological grief, and a summary discussion of the literature’s contribution to our contemporary understanding of bereavement and grief.

Empirical Research

This section presents a review of empirical research into bereavement and grief, as it relates to the current study. With the dearth of existing research into cemetery visitation, empirical research most relevant to the current study of cemetery visitation within the grief process includes that furthering scientific and professional knowledge of bereavement and grief. Bereavement and grief have been the subjects of considerable psychological research and some sociological, physiological, and multi-disciplinary studies.

Psychological Studies

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’ (1969) classic, *On death and Dying*, is based on the personal experiences of around two hundred dying hospital patients in the USA. A psychological process is proposed through which dying patients typically pass. Physician, Kübler-Ross, considers that her work is ‘an attempt to summarise what we have learned from our dying patients in terms of coping mechanisms at the time of a terminal illness’ (p.33). Perhaps best known for popularising pre-existing notions of a ‘grief process’, Kübler-Ross (1969) is directed towards those caring for the dying and concerned with anticipatory grief, rather than the bereaved. Nevertheless, this work serves as a significant reference point for some subsequent research.
United States psychology professor, William Worden’s (1991) *Grief counselling and grief therapy*, is written specifically for mental health professionals. The author examines normal grief reactions and uncomplicated mourning, abnormal grief reactions and complicated mourning, grief therapy, and needs of the counsellor. Rather than comprising stages or phases, as proposed by others (including Bowlby 1961; Sanders 1989; and Parkes 1996), Worden proposes a series of tasks, which he suggests (p.35) is ‘as valid a mourning process, but much more useful to the clinician than phases’. According to Worden, phases imply a certain passivity on behalf of the mourner. He identifies the tasks of mourning as:

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,
To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

Australian professor of psychiatry, Beverley Raphael’s (1984) *The anatomy of bereavement: A handbook for the caring professions*, is an internationally renowned, comprehensive guide that well integrates excerpts from numerous case studies of bereaved individuals. Raphael reviews human bonds and separation through death, current bereavement theories and the psychological mourning process. Her grief process includes initial shock, numbness and disbelief, followed by acceptance of the finality of the loss. The bereaved then commences undoing relationship bonds and progressively relinquishes memories until a state of resolution is attained. Outcomes of bereavement may be satisfactory, or pathological in various forms. Raphael (1984) identifies different typical bereavement experiences occurring with the loss of different relationships. She specifically identifies issues concerning the bereaved child, the bereaved adolescent, death of a spouse and death of a child. Grief experiences other than bereavement, including aging, dying and disasters, and various coping mechanisms are also recognised.

Catherine Sanders’ (1989) *Grief: The mourning after* is addressed to personal and professional care-givers working with bereaved people, health professionals and behavioural scientists. The author is a United States clinical psychologist, seeking to provide care-givers a basis for appropriate interventions in various situations. Sanders also recognises phases of the course of bereavement. Individuality of grief is recognised with variables including personality, social and situational circumstances. Sanders (1989) contends that three types of
loss cause inordinate grief: the death of a child, death of a spouse, and the death of a parent; a separate chapter is devoted to each.

United States clinical psychologist, Therese Rando’s (1993) Treatment of complicated mourning is a comprehensive work specifically written for clinicians and care-givers. The author seeks to assist those who work with individuals whose grief and mourning does not respond to ‘mere therapeutic facilitation’. Rando presents her perspective on loss, grief and mourning, and considers the contributions of several bereavement theorists. Complicated outcomes of loss are reviewed, and assessment and treatment recommendations made. Therapeutic implications associated with specific clinical problems are also detailed. Rando proposes a process of mourning, comprising three phases and six specific steps within such phases.

British psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes’ (1996) Bereavement: Studies of grief in adult life, has become a classic text in the training of medical staff, clergy, social workers and funeral directors, since its 1972 first edition. Between the earliest and latest editions, Parkes has significantly modified his ‘grief process’ model. Parkes advocates disease theory, arguing (p.26) that grief is a common mental illness and that non-acceptance of this stems from incorrect and limited, but popular, ideas of what constitutes mental illness. Determinants of the outcome of bereavement are categorised by Parkes (1996) into antecedent, concurrent and subsequent. Antecedent determinants include relationship with the deceased, childhood and later experiences, prior life crises and mode of death. Concurrent determinants include gender, age, personality, socioeconomic status, nationality and religion. Subsequent determinants include social support or isolation, secondary stresses, and emergent opportunities.

Sociological Studies

Australian social scientist, Abe Ata’s (1994) Bereavement & health in Australia: Gender, psychological, religious and cross-cultural issues, presents the findings of a study of two hundred and sixty-nine households in Melbourne and northern Victoria. Ata utilised a structured questionnaire to obtain data on relationships between religious or ethnic affiliation and health outcomes of bereavement. Ethnic groups in the study included: Australian-born Christians, Indian-born Hindu-Sikhs, Italian-born Catholics, Arab-born Muslims, Vietnamese-born Buddhists, other Christian migrants, other minor religions, and non-religious affiliates. The study sought to expose sociological and psychological data reflecting different beliefs,
practices and attitudes towards death and bereavement. Not surprisingly, Ata found marked differences in the expressions of rituals of mourning and funerals among the main religious traditions, and significant variation among reported physical and emotional expressions of grief. The resolution of grief of first-generation immigrants was also found to be interconnected with their adaptive and acculturative process as much as to the degree of affiliation with their ethnic community. Almost one quarter of the ethnic groups surveyed reported various examples of conflict between Australian funeral practices and laws and the group’s cultural traditions. Ata also found that belief in an afterlife and attempts to communicate with the deceased were both reported to be more common among females than males, and among those of lower education.

British sociology lecturer, Tony Walter’s (1994) The revival of death, represents a refreshingly different perspective on death that challenges much accepted wisdom. Walter particularly focuses on the hospice movement and bereavement counselling, relating current death, funeral and bereavement practices to social theories of modernity and post-modernity. According to Walter, we have experienced a ‘dying of death’ through rationalisation, medicalisation, secularisation, and individualism, and in response are now seeing a massive ‘revival of death’ with two strands. ‘The late-modern strand replaces control through medical understanding with control through psychological understanding’ (p.39). Grief is now ‘controlled’ by experts. But Walter argues that the late-modern package is being rejected because it is arrogant and because research is showing that people do not die or grieve in neat stages. ‘The post-modern strand, by contrast, places private feelings firmly onto the public agenda – in medical training, hospital routines and the media. Public discourse is thus fragmented and the authority of experts challenged’ (p.41). Walter collectively calls the two strands ‘neo-modern’ and summarises his view of revival as shown in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bodily context</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Modern</th>
<th>Neo-modern</th>
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<tr>
<td>Death quick &amp; frequent</td>
<td>Death hidden</td>
<td>Death prolonged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social context</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Public vs private</td>
<td>Private becomes public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Self</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2.1**  Walter’s social revival of death

(Source: Walter 1994:46)
Walter (1994) is critical of stage theories of grief, considering that dying and grieving are too complex and contradictory to be encapsulated in neat stages. It is suggested (p.84) that 'the function of stage theories, therefore, is mainly to reassure students who have yet to encounter these experiences.' He rejects Kübler-Ross' stages and suggests that 'in conflating hard data, personal involvement and a message that will save the world, Kübler-Ross has written not so much a scientific monograph offering testable hypotheses as a persuasive religious/political tract' (Walter 1994:71). Walter considers that 'it is very difficult for practitioners not to be influenced by psycho-social theories that provide reassuring generalisations about how people die and grieve' (p.186). He challenges the assumptions of 'several leading social scientists' that 'death is inherently terrifying, and that we therefore need the comfort of religion and tradition' (p.187).

If you are a neo-Freudian like Kübler-Ross and believe that deep down everyone is petrified of dying, and you meet someone who apparently is not, then you assume they must be denying their fear. But maybe your assumption is wrong and they really are not afraid. (Walter 1994:188).

In observing the social significance of bereavement, Walter (1994) considers that:

Even if grief is an inner psychological process, it is manifested in behaviour which others have to live with. Grief therefore is also inevitably an interpersonal negotiation. (Walter 1994:160)

The popular focus on ‘letting go’ in each case is challenged, suggesting that counsellors and psychologists who go on about the need to ‘let go’ are simply compounding delayed grief.

It may be that for many bereaved people in the West (not just those who have lost a child) their need is not to let go, for they know perfectly well that the deceased is dead. Their need is to be assured that they can keep the deceased in some compartment of their mind and heart. For them, a model in which grief results in keeping the deceased in some form ... may be more helpful than standard Western models in which grief is resolved by an eventual letting go of the deceased and therapy is geared towards that end. (Walter 1994:83)

Walter considers that in some cases, ‘counselling and self-help groups’ may even ‘collude with the private modern way of death, keeping grief conveniently out of the everyday way so that life can go on as though death did not exist’ (p.35). He suggests that ‘a mass education campaign to teach everyone how to listen and support bereaved individuals would be more constructive than training skilled counsellors’. He acknowledges, however, that ‘we may not be able to reconstruct community, but we can construct self-help groups and pairs of lonely
individuals' (loc. cit.). Walter suggests that differences in grieving may be attributed to different social models. 'Americans tend to construct themselves in a more modern/post-modern way, while Europeans do so in a more traditional way (p.53). 'It is not uncommon when a child dies for the (neo-modern) parents to grieve differently from the (modern) grandparents'. Parents may have an 'expressive style' and the grandparents a 'stoical style', and 'their mutual incomprehension adds to the burden of grief of each other.'

Walter (1994) represents a most important contribution to the bereavement literature, presenting a sociological perspective to the essentially sociological phenomenon of bereavement (ie. the severing of a significant relationship).

Tony Walter's challenge to traditional psychological concepts of grief has, not surprisingly, attracted some response. Margaret Stroebe (1997) published her critique of Walter's new model of grief in the British thanatological journal, *Mortality*, and Walter responded in the same journal. According to Stroebe, Walter proposes that grieving serves the purpose of integrating the deceased into ongoing lives, rather than, as psychological models propose, working towards eventual detachment from the deceased. Stroebe (1997) considers Walter's work a 'novel perspective', but suggests that:

> neither the process of grieving or the purpose of grief identified by Walter can replace traditional formulations, but that a supplementary perspective is indeed provided, which incorporates and emphasises elements neglected in the past, in particular, by focusing on the social construction of the meaning of loss and on a non-medical outcome (relocation of the deceased).

Stroebe (1997:255)

In response to what she regards as Walter's challenge to 'the dominant model of grief' in contemporary bereavement literature, Stroebe asks, 'What alternative has a British sociologist of male gender to offer in the late 1990s?' (p.255). Stroebe suggests that she offers the perspective 'of a female psychologist (also British)'; to which Walter (1997:264) responds, 'whether my approach is typically male ... I am unsure: my mailbag so far has as many females as males identifying with what I wrote'. Stroebe purports that her 'objective is to work toward finding a place for his ideas rather than to refute them, that is, to further scientific understanding of the process and purpose of grieving' (p.256). She acknowledges that psychologists have 'identified dominant themes in the major theories' and have been 'selective in our derivation of arguments and neglected the minor themes', but thinks that she and Walter agree there is no contradiction in upholding concepts of letting go and also
maintaining relationships. 'These can co-exist quite easily throughout the grieving process' (p.257).

In reply to Stroebe, Walter (1997:263) notes that 'bereaved people may search and cling before finally letting go' and that 'of course, we lose not only friends and family but also cherished theories'. He suggests that 'Stroebe’s style seems more to cling to the old theories before moving on to embrace the new', while his own is 'more to let go of much of the old before coming to identify what in them may be embraced and held on to' (loc cit.). According to Walter, 'there is a widespread view that the goal of grief is to “let go” and that grief is essentially an emotional affair'. He insists that his work radically challenges this view, not just supplements it. Walter adds that: 'obviously I knew I’d upset a lot of counsellors by referring to their calling as “second best” – though some concur in that they would prefer a society in which everyday social support rendered counselling unnecessary' (p.265).

Thomas Attig’s (1996) *How we grieve: relearning the world*, integrates numerous bereavement case study summaries. The author is a United States former professor of philosophy who considers grieving to be an active process by which ‘we work our way through crises in self-identity and disruptions in our usual behaviour patterns and develop alternatives’. According to Attig, in seeking comfort and understanding, many bereaved people turn to books on grieving but are ultimately disappointed.

Too often mourners find authors whose ideas simply fail to resonate with their experiences. They don’t recognise themselves, what has befallen them, or their struggles in what is being said.
(Attig 1996:10)

In response, Attig offers his idea of ‘grieving as a process of relearning the world’. For this purpose, he divides the world into our physical surroundings, our social world (relationships with other survivors), our personal selves, and our relationship with the deceased. Attig believes that grieving is not a process of passively living through stages, nor a clinical problem to be managed or solved by others. 'Loss challenges us to relearn'. ‘Grieving is an active, coping process of relearning how to be and act in a world where loss transforms the fabric of our lives’ (p.44). According to Attig, ideas of stages, or phases, of grief and medical analogies both ‘wrongly suggest that we come to an end in our grieving as we either complete the stages or at least recover’:

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these ideas do not give us means to respect individuality. They emphasise how alike we are and how predictable as we grieve. In reality, however, we grieve neither so uniformly nor so predictably. Most such ideas take root in empirical studies of large populations of grieving persons. They are at best statistical generalisations describing what is probable across a particular population'. But statements of probability say nothing specific about particular individuals.
(Attig 1996: 45).

Attig strongly rejects ideas of grieving as passive, and suggests it is vital that we embrace ideas of it as active. He recognises bereavement as a helpless, wrenching deprivation and calls this imposition 'choiceless', but maintains that grieving is not.

Grieving, as coping, requires that we respond actively, invest energy, and address tasks. Among other things, coping requires that we come to terms with our grief emotion.
(Attig 1996:33).

Attig also questions the appropriateness of disease theory and its use of medical analogies. He suggests that terms such as 'symptoms' of grief, 'healing' and 'recovery' erroneously suggest there is 'something wrong with, or abnormal about, us when we grieve', which 'doesn't ring true with many of us as we experience our grieving as the quite normal thing to do when someone dies' (p.45). Attig's concept of 'relearning the world' includes relearning our physical surroundings, our social world (ie. relationships with survivors), relearning ourselves, and our relationship with the deceased.

In Handbook of bereavement: Theory, research, and intervention, edited by Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson (1993), Shuchter and Zisook report finding within 'the course of normal grief' that with many people, bereavement results in varying degrees of social inhibition and withdrawal. The death of a spouse invariably alters the dynamics of most relationships. The most complex changes occur within the family where the grieving must also contend with the grief of other members while maintaining a functioning household. Bereaved people also commonly undergo changes in friendships and perception of their own identity (Shuchter and Zisook 1993:38).

Physiological Studies

Physiological research is briefly reviewed because of the 'biopsychosocial' nature of grief, with its inherent close relationship between biological, psychological and sociological responses to bereavement.
Ata (1994:61) considers that psychological and somatic responses are interconnected, since a change in one can precipitate a change in the other. He reports that findings continue to show 'higher incidences of psychosomatic, social and cognitive problems at the time of grief', and believes that being predisposed to profound stressful experiences, such as grief, blurs the distinction between what is psychological and what is somatic.

From his review of at least twelve studies of the effects of bereavement on health, Parkes (1996:23) concludes that bereavement can affect physical health, but that 'most of the complaints which take people to their doctors are reflections of anxiety and tension rather than of organic disease'. In such cases, Parkes suggests 'the most important role for the doctor may be to reassure people that they are not sick rather than to label them as sick'. Parkes does, however, agree with Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984), whom he cites (p.23) that 'the most extensive evidence of a link between disease in a specific organ system and bereavement exists for the cardiovascular system'. To this, Parkes adds (loc. cit.) that 'certain potentially fatal conditions, ... seem in some cases to be precipitated or aggravated by major losses'.

Shucpter and Zisook (1993:36) found the impact of bereavement on health status to be profound, and extending 'beyond psychological to psychiatric and physical health'. Changes in functioning were found to include depression and anxiety, and increased consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and medications. Rando (1993:191) also reports 'psychoactive substance use' among what she describes as 'common mental disorders' emanating from complicated mourning, and Parkes (1996:190) observes that 'widespread use is made of drugs to alleviate the stress of bereavement'. In fact, Parkes considers 'were their popularity any indication of their value, drugs would be counted the principle treatment for grief'. But, he adds, 'few systematic attempts have been made to assess their effects'.

Ata (1994:73) found just over 3% of bereaved respondents to his study indicated that they sought psychological or psychiatric help, just under 2% were hospitalised because of the severity of grief, but almost 24% sought medical and pharmaceutical help leading to use of medication. Ata also found that coping methods varied greatly by ethnicity. Among his eight identified religious/cultural groups, Ata (1994:74) found the lowest tendency to use pharmaceutical services among the Australian-born, while Italian-born Catholics and Vietnamese-born Buddhists showed the lowest tendency to use psychological or psychiatric services.
Specific physiological studies of bereavement appear relatively few, as manifestations of the stress of grief are common to somatic manifestations of other stressors (Parkes 1996:36-37; Weiten 1998:522). Parkes (1996) finds that:

The evidence suggests that bereavement is a stressful situation and that the generalisations that stem from earlier research into stress are likely to hold good in the case of bereavement. There is nothing about the symptoms that is specific to bereavement. They are the reasons given by many widows for consulting their doctor after bereavement, and they are all symptoms with which doctors are very familiar. (Parkes 1996: 36-37)

Nevertheless, relevant physiological studies include those of Gallagher-Thompson et al. (1993), on the impact of spousal bereavement on older widows and widowers; Helsing et al. (1991), assessing factors associated with mortality after bereavement; and Irwin & Pike’s (1993) study of bereavement, depressive symptoms and immune function.

In the University of Southern California spousal bereavement study, Gallagher-Thompson et al. (1993:230) found considerably poorer health among surviving spouses following bereavement. The risk of a new or worsened illness among these survivors was estimated to be 1.4 times that of the non-bereaved.

From a review of relevant literature, Middleton (1998:4) found ‘the conceptualisation of grief within depression and anxiety models’ to be ‘a focus of some of the more recent literature’, and that ‘studies have indicated high rates of depression and anxiety in the bereaved’. But he contends, ‘no clear relationships have been shown between somatic symptomatology and bereavement phenomenology, though increased vulnerability to a wide range of health problems has been suggested’.

**Multi-disciplinary Studies**

Marian Osterweis, Fredric Solomon and Morris Green’s (1984) *Bereavement: Reactions, consequences, and care* is presented by the Committee for the Study of Health Consequences of the Stress of Bereavement, of the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences, under charter by the Congress of the United States. Committee members and contributing authors include leading psychiatrists, psychologists, physicians, sociologists and social workers. Physical, psychological and social reactions and consequences of bereavement are
reviewed and found to be inextricably linked, even though highly individual in manifestation. Conclusions from the evidence of available research about the health consequences of bereavement lead to recommendations for improvements to the practice of health care professionals and greater public education. Further research is recommended on the processes and outcomes of bereavement and on intervention strategies.

Margaret Stroebe, Wolfgang Stroebe, and Robert Hansson’s (1993) *Handbook of bereavement: Theory, research, and intervention*, comprises a comprehensive review of scientific knowledge of loss through death. Contributors include over fifty international scholars from various disciplines, including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, medicine, nursing and gerontology. Current theories of bereavement, grief and mourning are examined, as are physiological changes following bereavement. Psychological, social and health impacts, and reactions to different types of losses are also reviewed; so are distinctions between normal and pathological grief, and therapeutic methods of coping. Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson (1993) present a ‘structured framework for researchers and practitioners’, which provides a valuable guide toward understanding the world of bereaved people.

**Bereavement Theories**

To help understand what happens to us when a ‘significant other’ dies, several explanatory models of bereavement are postulated by bereavement researchers and theorists, including psychiatrists (Bowlby 1977; Raphael 1984; Middleton et al. 1993; Parkes 1996), and psychologists (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Worden 1991; Rando 1993). Popular approaches include classical psychodynamic theory, interpersonal theories, attachment theory, crisis theory, cognitive and behavioural theories, and disease theory.

*Psychodynamic* theory is based on works of pioneering psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), including his oft-quoted classic, *Mourning and melancholia* (1917). This approach ‘considers there is a need to relinquish a tie, but that letting go involves considerable pain’ (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984:57). The process includes initial denial that the death has occurred, followed by a preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased and loss of interest in the outside world. Bringing forth and reviewing memories helps withdraw ties to complete grieving, so that emotional energy is regained to invest in other relationships (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984; Middleton et al. 1993; Rando 1993).
Attachment theory draws on Freudian theory and animal ethology with interpersonal dynamics in the context of the individual’s role transition within the social group. Theorists consider separation anxiety with the severing of strong attachment bonds (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984; Worden 1991; Middleton et al. 1993; Rando 1993). A principle theoretician, John Bowlby (1977) cited by Raphael (1984:68), sees ‘falling in love as the emotion of forming bonds, loving as the emotion of maintaining them, and grief as the emotion of losing them’. Or, as Bekoff (2000:33) puts it: ‘The flip-side of love is grief at the loss of a loved one’.

Interpersonal theory also owes much to Freudian theory, but theorists are also concerned with interpersonal dynamics and the effects of relationship issues on one’s self-concept and view of others (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Middleton et al. 1993).

Crisis theory contends that the death of someone important disturbs the survivor’s homeostasis and is therefore a stressful event. ‘A crisis refers to a major life stress, of limited duration, which endangers mental health’, according to Parkes (1996:38). ‘Crisis disrupt customary modes of behaviour of the people concerned, alter both their circumstances and their plans, and impose a need for psychological work which takes time and effort.’ In their crisis, the bereaved is in danger of becoming less organised and suffering physiological effects (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984). Alternatively, it is suggested by Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:63), that the bereaved may concentrate energies on reorganisation and coping to the extent that pre-existing, latent problems may be resolved, thus providing positive change.

Cognitive and behavioural theories provide models for understanding a variety of depressive and anxiety disorders. A person’s effect and behaviour are supposedly based on their view of the world. Clinical depression occurs in people maintaining negative views, which may be instigated or reinforced by bereavement (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984).

Disease theory recognises grief as a pathogenic syndrome, involving somatic distress. The process of wounding and subsequent healing experienced by the bereaved is seen as being similar to that experienced with physical injury. This ‘medical model’ proposes that it is useful to think of abnormal behaviour as disease (Weiten 1998:557). Bereavement is also seen
to bring on, or complicate, existing physical or psychological conditions (Raphael 1984; Parkes 1996). But Attig (1996:44-46) questions the appropriateness of disease theory and its use of medical analogies, suggesting that terms such as ‘symptoms’ of grief, ‘healing’ and ‘recovery’ erroneously infer there is ‘something wrong with, or abnormal about, us when we grieve’. Attig considers this ‘doesn’t ring true with many of us as we experience our grieving as the quite normal thing to do when someone dies’ (p.45). However, Parkes (1996:26) further argues that grief is a common mental illness and that non-acceptance of this stems from incorrect and limited, but popular, ideas of what constitutes mental illness.

Psychodynamic theory, interpersonal theories, attachment theory, crisis theory, cognitive and behavioural theories, and disease theory, all represent significant contributions to collective contemporary understanding of bereavement, as various theorists of specific perspectives have developed and modified current models of the typical ‘grief process’.

The Grief Process

The phenomena of bereavement and grief are common across human cultures (Raphael 1984; Ata 1994; Parkes 1996). Anthropological studies of individual grief and mourning in a number of cultures (Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson 1976; cited by Raphael 1984:64 and Parkes 1996:59), consistently found that grief is expressed following a death, women cry and keen, anger and aggression are common, and fears of the dead body and spirit exist.

Professor Erich Lindemann is credited (Westberg 1992; Rando 1993; Attig 1996) with first proposing stages of grief in his 1944 article, Symptomatology and management of acute grief. Lindemann also differentiated ‘normal’ grief reactions from ‘abnormal’ or ‘morbid’ grief. Attig (1996:42) notes that Lindemann (1944) originally identified three stages of grief, Bowlby (1961) proposed three alternative phases, Engel (1964) put forward his six stage idea, Kübler-Ross (1969) proposed a different five-stage process, and Parkes (1974) modified Bowlby’s phases to become four. Various proposals have come from several other writers, including Westberg (1992), who presents all of ten stages in his ‘constructive approach to the problem of loss’.

It is generally agreed that grief is a process comprising three or more distinct phases. However, various contemporary opinions remain on the number and definitions of such
stages. The following comparative outline of various proposed stages, or phases, of grief reveals shifts in opinion and commonalities among various notions.

Lindemann (1944):
   1. Shock and disbelief,
   2. Acute mourning,
   3. Resolution.

Bowlby (1961):
   1. Urge to recover the lost object,
   2. Disorganisation and despair,
   3. Reorganisation.

Engel (1964):
   1. Shock and disbelief,
   2. Development of awareness,
   3. Restitution,
   4. Resolution of the loss,
   5. Idealisation,
   6. Outcome.

Kübler-Ross (1969):
   1. Denial and isolation,
   2. Anger,
   3. Bargaining,
   4. Depression,
   5. Acceptance.

Parkes (1974):
   1. Numbness,
   2. Yearning and searching,
   3. Disorganisation and despair,
   4. Reorganisation.
Sanders (1989):
1. Shock – the impact of grief,
2. Awareness of loss,
3. Conservation - withdrawal,
4. Healing – the turning point,
5. Renewal.

Shuchter and Zisook, (1993):
1. Initial shock, disbelief and denial,
2. Acute mourning, somatic and emotional discomfort, and social withdrawal,
3. Culminating period of restitution.

Rando (1993):
Avoidance Phase
1. Recognise the loss,
Confrontation Phase
2. React to the separation,
3. Recollect and re-experience the deceased and the relationship,
4. Relinquish old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world,
Accommodation Phase
5. Readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old,
6. Reinvest.

Parkes (1996):
1. The trauma response,
2. The grief response,
3. The psychosocial transition.

Despite this range of ideas, the more recent process proposed by one of the world’s most respected authorities on bereavement (Parkes 1996) is virtually the same as that first proposed over fifty years earlier (Lindemann 1944).

Attig (1996) recognises and graphically describes a common pattern to the generally accepted grief process.
‘We are told that when we grieve, we are first hit hard by our bereavement. We are then immersed in the full impact of intense and often nearly overwhelmingly painful experiences. Eventually, however, we achieve some kind of new equilibrium in living as if we had been washed up on shore as if having nearly drowned’.

(Attig 1996:42)

Attig thus illustrates common agreement of initial impact and eventual accommodation of loss, to be found within virtually all concepts of normal grief. However, between this genesis and diminution of intense grief remains a highly variable transition process.

Several writers (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984; Sanders 1989; Westberg 1992; Rando 1993; Shuchter and Zisook 1993; Parkes 1996) caution their readers, particularly therapists, against taking grief staging too literally and attempting to fix a subject at a particular place on any proposed continuum, despite intervening variables. As Attig (1996:43) says, ‘we do not fall into lockstep as we grieve, or lose our individuality’.

According to psychiatrists Shuchter and Zisook (1993:23), ‘grief is not a linear process with concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid phases that vary from person to person’. This concept is further given a lateral perspective by psychologist Catherine Sanders (1989), who suggests that her five stages may each be broken down into three levels, represented by the emotional, biological and social components of functioning. The breadth of personal impact of grief is thus well summarised by Sanders, as illustrated in Table 2.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASES</th>
<th>LEVELS</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Emotional</td>
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<td>1. Shock</td>
<td>Impact</td>
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<td>2. Awareness of loss</td>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Conservation</td>
<td>Despair</td>
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<td>4. Healing</td>
<td>Gaining control</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Renewal</td>
<td>New level of functioning</td>
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Table 2.2  Sanders' phases and levels of grief

(Source: Sanders 1989:40)
It is generally agreed that stages of grief should only be regarded as general, flexible guidelines. According to Raphael (1984:34), individuals may ‘pass forwards and backwards between the phases, or become partially or completely locked in one or another’. And according to Parkes (1996:124) there are considerable differences from one person to another as regards both the duration and the form of each phase. But Walter (1994:84) considers that ‘dying and grieving are too complex and contradictory to be encapsulated in neat stages’ and suggests that ‘the function of stage theories, therefore, is mainly to reassure students who have yet to encounter these experiences.’

Each person grieves differently in different circumstances. Westberg (1992:18) considers no one has ever grieved exactly the same ‘because no two people face even the same kind of loss in the same way’. Worden (1991:29) identifies determinants of grief as ‘who the person was, the nature of the attachment, mode of death, historical antecedents, personality variables and sociable variables’. Parkes (1996:119-120) categorises determinants of the outcome of bereavement into antecedent, concurrent and subsequent. Antecedent determinants include relationship with the deceased, childhood and later experiences, prior life crises and mode of death. Concurrent determinants include gender, age, personality, socioeconomic status, nationality and religion. Subsequent determinants include social support or isolation, secondary stresses and emergent opportunities. To this, Ata (1994:61) adds that ‘what a person is already predisposed to tends to be accentuated under stress’.

Raphael (1984) identifies factors affecting the outcome of bereavement to include the:

- pre-existing relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, the type of death, the response of the family and social network, concurrent stress or crises, previous losses, and sociodemographic factors such as age, sex, religion, culture, occupation and economic position.
- Raphael (1984:62)

Weiss (1993:271) contends that ‘grief results from the loss of primary relationships’, which he also calls relationships of ‘attachment’, but not from others, which he further categorises as relationships of ‘community’. We may have a relationship of attachment with a close family member, and a relationship of community with a friend or associate. ‘Differences in the severity and persistence of grief are usually experienced between the two relationships’ (Weiss 1993:271).
Social grief

Bereavement can be a source of distress for an individual, family, small social network, or an entire community depending on the range and number of others to whom the decedent was regarded as significant. Bereavement may even occur on a vast international scale following the death of a popular public figure, as evidenced on the death of Dianna, Princess of Wales, in 1997. Walter (1994:52) observes that ‘when a lot of people are affected, we may find emotions released in public, and rich funeral rituals that seem distinctly un-modern’.

Smith (1997) considers that:

Although variations exist in death care customs among ethnic, religious and socioeconomic groups and subgroups that coexist within communities, a universal goal of customary practices appears to create a set of structured social activities (ie. ceremonies, rites and rituals) which are intended to comfort the bereaved and to allow members of the community to sympathise with those who have experienced a loss.
Smith (1997:76)

In their history of Victorian police assaults and murders, Brown, Presland & Stavely (1994) suggest:

Whenever a police member dies, in whatever circumstances, there is a deep sense of loss amongst his or her fellow members. This sense of loss can be far greater than that encountered by the general workforce by virtue of the fact that the police have a highly developed sense of brotherhood. They are each dependent on the other for their personal safety.
(Brown, Presland & Stavely 1994:7)

At the funeral of a young constable fatally injured in the 1986 bombing of Melbourne’s Russell Street police complex, the Police Surgeon is quoted by Brown, Presland & Stavely (1994:130) as addressing ‘members of three families’ sharing their ‘sorrow, grief and sense of loss’. These three families are ‘the united family of the police force’, within the ‘greater family of the community’ and the officer’s ‘immediate family’.

From Burgoine’s (1988) comparative study of London and Bahamas widows, and Lovell, Hemmings and Hill’s (1993) comparison of Scottish and Swazi women, Parkes (1996:154) finds ‘support for the view that societies which encourage the expression of grief are likely to have fewer problems following bereavement’.
That death brings about such significant social and cultural responses, leaves no doubt that bereavement is, according to Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:199), a ‘sociocultural as well as a psychobiological phenomenon’. Nor is grief apparently only a human phenomenon.

Some animals display the characteristic behaviour we associate with grief. Often there is a period of mourning. Bekoff (2000:34)

Several writers (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Worden 1991; Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson 1993; Parkes 1996; Bekoff 2000), note Darwin’s *The expression of the emotions in man and animals* (1872; edn. 3, 1998), and subsequent reports of similar grief behaviour between humans and other animals, including terrestrial and marine mammals, and also birds.

**Psychological, Social and Somatic Impacts**

Health is currently held to be a ‘biopsychosocial phenomenon’, with illness caused by a complex interaction of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors (Weiten 1998:517). Bereavement is here considered within this complex model of health.

The phenomenology of grief, as described by the US Institute of Medicine in Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:47) and by contributors in Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson (1993), includes identifiable changes in emotions and thought processes, behavioural changes, interpersonal and social changes, and also physical complaints.

Worden (1991:20) identifies manifestations of normal grief under the categories of feelings, physical sensations, cognitions and behaviours. Grief feelings include sadness, anger, guilt and self-reproach, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, emancipation, relief and numbness (Raphael 1984; Worden 1991; Sanders 1989; Rando 1993; Attig 1996). Physical sensations of grief include hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest, tightness in the throat, over-sensitivity to noise, sense of depersonalisation, breathlessness, muscular weakness, lack of energy and dry mouth (Worden 1991; Sanders 1989; Rando 1993; Attig 1996). Grief cognitions include disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sense of presence and hallucinations (Raphael 1984; Worden 1991; Sanders 1989; Rando 1993). Normal grief behaviours include sleep disturbances, appetite disturbances, absent-minded behaviour, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, and avoiding reminders of the deceased. Other behaviours include searching and calling out, sighing, crying, visiting places or carrying
objects that remind the survivor of the deceased, and treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased (Worden 1991; Sanders 1989; Rando 1993).

**Readjustment and Accommodation of Grief**

It may be said of bereavement that ‘you don’t get over it, you just get used to it’ (Weiss 1993:277). However, ‘the hallmark of the restitution stage’, according to Shuchter and Zisook (1993:24), is ‘the ability of the bereaved to recognise that they have grieved and can now return to work, re-experience pleasure, and seek the companionship and love of others’.

The concept of ‘grief work’, introduced by Freud (1917), involves the mourner working their way through a series of essential tasks (Worden 1991:10). Parkes (1996:71) considers that in this respect, grieving is a creative activity; ‘a gradual piecing together of the pieces of a jigsaw that, eventually, will enable us to find an image and a place in our lives for the people we have loved and lost’. Through this active process, according to Attig (1996:47), ‘we work our way through crises in self-identity and disruptions in our usual behaviour patterns and develop alternatives’. Attig further considers that some may even need to be motivated to resist the attractions of remaining in grief and to begin to address the tasks of grieving.

O’Connor (1986) contends that grieving follows a predictable pattern and that ‘healing is attained if one allows themself to experience each step’. Although O’Connor acknowledges that the time taken to complete grief varies with the individual and degree of intimacy with the deceased, she does propose the following typical time frames for major stages:

- Breaking old habits (death to eight weeks),
- Beginning to reconstruct your life (eight weeks to one year),
- Seeking new love objects or friends (twelve to twenty-four months),
- Readjustment completed (after the second year).

Raphael (1984), also argues against the rigidity of any time frames, but does consider (p.46) that ‘after about six weeks to two months following the death, psychological mourning starts to subside in many bereaved people’. Raphael also reports that the time taken for the longer-term adaptations will vary enormously. In some instances the respective culture will set clear guidelines of perhaps a year or two, or five, or ten, or never (Raphael 1984:57).
Some theorists, including Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984), and Weiss (1993), caution against the use of terms such as ‘recovery’, but do recognise recovery in terms of a return of ordinary functioning. Reasonable expectations of ordinary functioning, postulated by Weiss (1993:277-278), include the following:

Ability to give energy to everyday life,
Psychological comfort, as demonstrated by freedom from pain and distress,
Ability to experience gratification - to feel pleasure when desirable, hoped for, or enriching events occur,
Hopefulness regarding the future; being able to plan and care about plans, and,
Ability to function with reasonable adequacy in social roles (e.g. spouse, parent and member of the community).

Accommodation of bereavement within one’s life involves processes which are identified by Weiss (1993:280) as cognitive acceptance, emotional acceptance and identity change. Cognitive acceptance occurs, as the mourner appears to develop a satisfactory account of the causes of the loss event. The absence of a satisfactory account seems to leave the bereaved anxiously perplexed, searching for contributions to the death, perhaps made by themselves or others. Emotional acceptance seems to require a neutralisation of specific memories and associations which might otherwise paralyse normal functioning. As each emotion-laden memory and association is confronted, a reduction of associated pain occurs until tolerance for the memory is developed. Identity change occurs as the mourner develops a new image of themself, seeing their connection to the deceased as part of their past. New commitments to new relationships help facilitate a perceived change of identity (Weiss 1993:280).

Shuchter and Zisook (1993) have found several features of grief, particularly those related to attachment behaviours, to continue several years after the loss. Thus, they conclude (p.23), ‘it seems that some aspects of grief work may never end for a significant proportion of otherwise normal bereaved individuals’. However, McCrae and Costa (1993:207) conclude that ‘it may also be comforting to know human beings are highly adaptable creatures, and that in the long run the great majority of us will be able to cope even with the most distressing and disruptive of events’.

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Pathological Grief

Bereavement researchers and writers (Jackson 1974; Raphael 1984; Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson 1993; Rando 1993; Parkes 1996) generally recognise a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ grief. But, as Weiss (1993:271) suggests ‘in the absence of any universally accepted criteria for ordinary levels of effective functioning’, researchers find it very difficult to define just what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ in grief and recovery. Walter (1994:79) reminds us that ‘norms (in the prescriptive sense) are derived not from religion or tradition, but from what is normal (in the statistical sense)’. He suggests ‘it is therefore the doctor, the psychologist and the statistician who can tell us how we ought to die and ought to grieve’.

According to Parkes (1996), atypical grief may include chronic grief, delayed grief, anxiety and panic attacks, self-blame, hypochondria and hysteria. Parkes (1996:86) also suggests that anger and guilt are ‘particularly likely to follow the dissolution of an ambivalent relationship and, because of their destructive nature, to lead to pathological forms of grief’.

Grief may be seen as pathological when the processes of resolving the loss do not occur, or where the grief is distorted and a delayed pattern predominates (Middleton et al. 1993:60; Rando 1993:154). Raphael (1984:61-62) identifies some pathological outcomes of bereavement to include general symptomatology, psychosomatic disorder, depression, other psychiatric or psychosocial disorder, altered relationship patterns, vulnerability to loss, and mortality.

Rando (1993:155) contends that ‘as grief is a natural, expectable reaction, the absence of it when warranted by the factors circumscribing the loss, is abnormal and indicative of pathology’. The US Institute of Medicine (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984:54) notes this contention but is unsure of its validity. Rando also considers that in the event of some compromise, distortion or failure of the process of mourning, the potential outcomes include mental disorders, physical disorders and death (Rando 1993:185).

Several morbid or pathological patterns of grief are identified in the literature. Prolonged severe grief (or chronic grief) is considered by Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:64) and by Weiss (1993:60) to be the most common type. Other forms of pathological grief include absent, delayed, inhibited, distorted, conflicted, and unanticipated grief (Raphael 1984:205;
Rando 1993:154). Grief may be absent when ‘the intensity of effects is too great, or the coping ability too weak, and a rejecting defence mechanism may result’ (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984:55). Delayed grief implies the emergence of grief-like symptoms, months or even years after apparently absent grief (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984:284; Middleton et al. 1993:60).

Several researchers, including (Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; Raphael 1984; O’Connor 1986), report that some people get stuck in one stage or another and never move on to the final stage of acceptance and to rebuilding their lives. People likely to become stuck in pathological grief reactions, according to Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:54), are ‘those whose prebereavement response patterns were to avoid confrontation and to escape from difficult situations’.

Attig (1996:38) considers that some of us ‘may stay in grief to avoid the unknown’. For some, ‘remaining in grief brings secondary rewards’ such as gratifying attention, and efforts to comfort and support.

Some may remain in grief for fear that if they stop longing for those they have lost, they will stop loving them. ... Paradoxically, in their grief, some mourners refuse to accept the loss as real in the face of that very reality.
(Attig 1996:39-40)

It is suggested by Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:65) that pathological grief occurs where major positive reinforcement is lost from one’s life, as is often the case in the death of a spouse. With the loss of the strongest relationship of attachment and dependence, life can appear meaningless, and all actions may be concluded as futile. Positive actions, which would help alleviate stress, may therefore be avoided, thus compounding the situation.

Parkes (1996:121) records that among one hundred and seventy-one people referred to him in recent years for the treatment of psychiatric problems following bereavement, 45% had lost a spouse (35% a husband, 10% a wife), 22% had lost a parent, 14% a child, and 11% other people; the remaining 9% had experienced multiple bereavements.

Parkes (1996:171) also compared widows who sought to repress or avoid grief by showing little or no emotional response during the first week of bereavement with other initial responses. Those who engaged in little formal mourning, and avoided visiting the grave or
crematorium, ultimately suffered more psychological and physical problems than those who 'broke down' in the first week. Physical symptoms of those who held back included headaches, palpitations, insomnia and alopecia. These widows also became more psychologically disturbed around the anniversary of death (Parkes loc. cit.).

Other Literature Relating to Bereavement and Grief

Popular Books

Carey & Sorenson’s (1997) *Penguin book of death* includes a diverse collection of eighteen essays in response to death. Contributing authors include journalists, novelists and historians. Some chapters are intentionally irreverent and provocative, some unintentionally banal, and others somewhat philosophical. Not written for either the bereaved or carers, this work presents a range of interesting contemporary observations, but is not a significant contribution to empirical understanding of death.

Many self-help guides are written to further understanding of personal or familial responses to bereavement. Such guides generally fall into one of two major groups. The first group includes those written by professional bereavement counsellors and educators (such as O’Connor 1986; McKissock & McKissock 1995; McBride 1996). These guides generally seek to provide a common framework within which the reader may recognise otherwise unfamiliar emotional and behavioural responses to bereavement. The main objective of such books appears to be to reassure the reader that their responses are part of a normal process and that, with some readjustment, they will ultimately transcend deep grief. The second major group of self-help guides relates autobiographical accounts of individuals bereaved through various circumstances. These works are generally the products of their authors’ self-therapeutic documentation of emotional and practical experiences. Readers may share non-technical, personal accounts of how others have faced and usually overcome real experiences, which may hold some similarities to their own. Self-help guides of this type were not specifically reviewed as they are considered to offer less empirical value to the current study than are the first group.

Other popular writing considers specific social or cultural responses to bereavement (such as Brown, Presland & Stavely 1994; Henwood & Choy 1997; McFarlane 1997; Teather 1997).
The first of these relates to a specific social/vocational group within Australian society, and the later three relate to a particular Asian culture with increasing participation in Australia.

Brown, Presland & Stavely's (1994) *In the performance of duty* documents Victorian police assaults and murders between 1837 and 1988. Details of twenty-six cases of police murder are presented and the role of Victoria Police Legacy is considered. This book, written by police officers, represents an expression of grief within a large structured society, serves as a tribute to fallen comrades, and also demonstrates group desire for similar remembrance and family support in the event of personal tragedy. Some insights are provided into police culture and group response to death within a specific structured society.

*Feng shui*, the ancient Chinese theory of design and placement is applied by many Chinese people to burial and memorialisation. The aim of *feng shui*, literally meaning the flow of wind and water, is to keep harmony and balance between the energy flows of humans, earth and heaven, to enhance well-being (McParlane 1997:167; Henwood & Choy 1997:8). The orientation of a grave is a crucial *feng shui* consideration (Teather 1997:200) as is the day and time of interment. But simply siting a grave well is not enough in itself. The Chinese tradition of ancestor worship requires regular visits to the grave, including offerings to the deceased (to ensure their comfort in the spirit world) and seeking their continued blessings and good fortune for survivors (Teather 1997:200). To the Chinese, important *feng shui* considerations within a cemetery are likely to include the day and time of the funeral, location and orientation of the grave, funeral ritual, memorial style, and visitation practices.


In *The Jewish way in death and mourning*, Lamm (1969) blends traditional Jewish law with contemporary practice, in a guide used and recommended by Australian Jews, including the Melbourne *Chevra Kadisha* (or 'Holy Brotherhood' burial society). Although principally written for laymen, the lay reader is advised to omit the appendix concerning preparation of remains. In this work, Lamm presents:

clear guidelines that the Jewish tradition has laid down to lead mourners through the complex maze of uncertainties and ambivalences that attend the tragic moment. The ache of the heart will not suddenly disappear. There will be no miraculous consolation. But Judaism does teach
the aching heart how to express its pain in love and respect, and how to achieve the eventual consolation which will restore us to humanity and keep us from vindictiveness and self-pity. (Lamm 1969:3)

Lamm (1969) does give some consideration to cemetery visitation, in brief sections entitled ‘Cemetery etiquette’ (pp.74-75) and ‘Grave visitation and prayers’ (pp.192-194). Within Judaism, the holiness of the cemetery is considered to be equivalent to the holiness of the sanctuary (p.74). Cemetery etiquette requires one to dress properly for the occasion and not to impress others. Neither may one step over a grave or sit on a monument. Eating, drinking, and any other frivolous or pleasurable activities ‘desecrates the cemetery’ and ‘violates codes of honour’. Even religious observances (of great joy to Jews) may not be indulged in within close proximity of the grave, so as not to ‘slight the deceased’ who may not now participate in such pleasures (Lamm 1969:75). Prescriptions are given on proper times for visiting, and appropriate prayers and devotions.

Much care must be taken to direct one’s personal prayers at the graveside to God. To pray to the deceased, or to speak directly to him in the form of prayer, borders on blasphemy. It is sheer necromancy, outlawed by the Bible (Deut. 18, 11) ... Better no visitation to the cemetery at all than one which induces ‘inquiring of the dead’. (Lamm 1969:194)

Christian guides to coping with grief include Westberg’s (1992) Good grief: A constructive approach to the problem of loss, published by the Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne, and Walker’s (1985) Dealing with grief, distributed by the Orthodox Church in Australia. Westberg (1992:7) holds the premise that ‘faith plays a major role in grief of any kind’, to which Walker (1985:14) adds that ‘a Christian response to grief is far more than an individual matter; it involves the whole Church’. The Orthodox approach includes memorial services for the departed, performed at the close of the Sunday worship nearest to the fortieth day after death, and each year for five years, on the anniversary of death.

**Industry Literature**

Industry journals hosting relevant articles included ACCA News, American Cemetery, Pharos International, Australian Parks and Recreation and its successor, Parks and Leisure Australia. Of these, American Cemetery magazine was particularly fertile, yielding several useful articles, including those by Douglas Keister (1997; 1998a; 1998b; 1999) on cemetery and mausoleum history, cemetery social roles and industry marketing.
Useful booklets and brochures included those published by the Australian Funeral Directors Association and the community education department of a large family-owned firm of funeral directors. Several North American publications are also available within Australia through some funeral directors.

Australian Funeral Directors Association publications include:

- The universal experience,
- What do I do when someone dies?,
- What do we tell the children: A simple guide for adults to help children understand death,
- It’s alright to cry: A survival guide for the bereaved, and,
- We need to say goodbye: Why a funeral is important.

Tobin Brothers publications include:

- The process of grief,
- Surviving suicide, and,
- Understanding funerals.

Ontario Funeral Service Association publications include:

- Helping children understand death, and,
- Helping each other after suicide.

United States National Funeral Directors Association publications include:

- Living when your spouse has died, and,
- A caring response to an AIDS-related death.

These brochures, published and provided as community guides, are important in that they are indicative of contemporary popular notions of bereavement and grief responses.
Discussion of Literature on Bereavement and Grief

Grief is recognised as a universal experience, involving a non-specific set of psychological, behavioural and physical reactions in response to the death of a significant other.

Bereavement and grief have been the subjects of considerable research, particularly from a psychological perspective. Some sociological and physiological studies have also made substantial contributions to contemporary knowledge. Anthropological studies focusing more on customary funeral practices fall outside the scope of the current research.

The literature identifies grief as a ‘biopsychosocial’ phenomenon, involving psychological, social and somatic changes for the bereaved individual. The experience of bereavement may also be shared at different social levels.

Various bereavement theories, different types of grief, stages of mourning, physical and social changes and grief abnormalities, indicate that grief is not a simple, universal process, with a progression of fixed stages, each with its typical symptoms. Rather, grief has a multi-dimensional nature and a complex range of cognitive and behavioural responses. Nevertheless, popular notions of grief involve a process of at least three phases, and concepts of normal and abnormal grief. While a common pattern is generally considered to exist, grief experiences are reported to be as individual as are the specific people experiencing the phenomenon, on the particular occasion, and under all of the given circumstances.

Successful readjustment to, and accommodation of, grief involves working through specific tasks of the grief process. Grief may be considered pathological when normal processes of resolving the loss do not occur as anticipated.

While an impressive array of empirical research reports and other literature tells us much about bereavement and grief, particularly of common psychological experiences, this literature reveals virtually nothing about a most common and important behavioural activity of vast numbers of bereaved people: that of cemetery visitation. The bereavement literature therefore fails to reveal values of the cemetery within the grief process.
The Research Setting

Overview of Cemetery Literature

Within the funeral and cemetery industries, it appears conventional to mark a centenary with the publication of an historical account of the past hundred years. Historical reviews include those of the Australian funeral industry (such as Nicol 1989 & 1992; Chambers 1990 & 1994; Liveris 1991; Griffin & Tobin 1997) and those of cemeteries (including Etlin 1984; Michelson 1989; Nicol 1994 & 1997; Zelinka 1991; Sagazio 1992; Forest Lawn Memorial-Parks 1994; Cypress Lawn Memorial Park Staff 1996; Liveris 1999).

Chambers (1990) documents one hundred years of Victorian funeral industry associations, from the Victorian Master Undertakers Association in 1890, to the Australian Funeral Directors Association Victorian Division in 1990. Liveris (1991) records the growth of, and major influences on, the undertaker business in Perth, from 1860 to 1939. Both of these works note significant changes in funeral practices over their respective eras.

Chambers (1994) presents the story of a particular firm: Le Pine Funeral Services, which has grown from a small family business in 1891, to what is now Victoria’s largest funeral firm and a part of the world’s largest funeral and cemetery provider: the USA-based, Service Corporation International. Changes in funeral practices and some notable funerals of the era are also documented.

Nicol (1989) presents an account of the ultimate fate of the destitute in colonial South Australia, and further work by the same author (Nicol 1992) specifically reviews funeral rituals in colonial South Australia. Griffin & Tobin’s (1997) view of the Australian response to death represents another important social history of bereavement and burial, which helps place modern cemeteries into an appropriate historical context.

Important general cemetery histories include Etlin’s (1984) account of the transformation of the cemetery in eighteenth century Paris, Sagazio’s (1992) portrayal of Victorian cemetery
heritage, and Nicol's (1994) review of South Australian government, society and the disposal of human remains in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.


John Llewellyn's (1998) *A cemetery should be forever*, is appropriately subtitled: *The challenge to managers and directors*. The author, CEO of California's Forest Lawn Memorial Parks and Mortuaries, argues that appropriate cemetery governance and management will plan for adequate endowment care funds, to ensure that the cemetery may be maintained long after its income from a finite sales life has ceased. Llewellyn also considers the modern development of cemeteries, their contemporary community roles, and other operational issues. While recognising that the main use of cemeteries is subsequent to funerals, the author appears somewhat more concerned about their long-term cultural values than with shorter-term grief-related values.

**The Historical Context**

The purpose of this section is to construct from the literature a social historical image of the research setting. This setting is the contemporary Australian cemetery or memorial park: a cultural site representing the modern product of significant historical development.

Cemeteries have evolved over many years in response to changing health, religious, political, technological, social, cultural, and economic concerns. Many changes have ushered in significant improvements for cemetery clientele (i.e. those purchasing services, including graves and/or memorials, and non-paying visitors), but some changes have been imposed to meet external desires, without adequate regard for the needs of the bereaved.

The modern cemetery concept has emerged over the past two hundred or so years, contemporaneously to the European development of Australia. According to South Australian
State Historian and Cemetery Trustee, Dr. Robert Nicol (pers. com. September 1999), ‘in some ways, the Australian colonies were at the leading edge of cemetery development’.

In their review of Australian society’s response to death, Griffin & Tobin (1997) observe that:

The Australian scene is in many ways quite distinctive. There are certainly similarities to practices in other countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, but the differences are important.
(Griffin & Tobin 1997:2)

**Indigenous practices**

The world’s earliest known cremation was that of a young Australian Aboriginal woman at Lake Mungo, approximately 26,000 years ago (Flood 1989:44; White & O’Connell 1982:37). But cremation was not a unique generic practice among the first Australians. Indigenous funeral practices varied both spatially and temporally. Significant changes, including vertical and prone entombment and a variety of other techniques, are evident from burials spanning 7,000 years at one excavated cemetery at Roonka, South Australia (White & O’Connell 1982:103).

According to Nicol (1992:12), several early settlers recorded details of native burial procedures and there is some record of attempts to enforce Christian burial procedures on them. Chambers (1990:ix) and Lehman (1997:229) note that disposal methods of some groups included depositing their dead in bark resting places, hollow tree trunks, simple and elaborate earthen burials, and cremation.

**European Influences**

Western attitudes to death and the place of the cemetery have changed considerably over recent centuries (Etlin 1987), particularly since the late eighteenth century. Modern public cemeteries took their place alongside what had been almost exclusively the lot of churchyards or private properties and rapid population growth, industrialisation and urbanisation, saw many cemeteries absorbed by early urban sprawl (Etlin 1987:24; Spicer 1991:4).

Reuse of graves was common practice. Trenches were sometimes dug for communal graves and as cemeteries filled, new burials took place on top of earlier ones. Sewerage systems had
not been developed in most urban areas, and facilities such as abattoirs and domestic waste disposal were yet to be separated from the urban environment (Etlin 1987:12; Nicol 1994:116). As ready dumping grounds for these other common urban wastes, some cemeteries were, according to reports cited by Nicol (1994), rather unpleasant and unsanitary places.

Etlin (1987:12) notes, that a new concern for public hygiene emerged during the eighteenth century, presenting grave fear of the role of cemeteries and church burial in cultivating and spreading common diseases. Major biochemical discoveries of the 1770s, including the discovery of oxygen and microbiology, increased awareness of principles of respiration and parasitic pathology. Growing community concerns further focused attention on the apparent problems of urban health (Etlin 1987:24).

Nicol (1994:100) reports that ‘evil miasmas hovering over burial grounds’ were believed to be responsible for ‘everything from tarnishing silverware and spoiling food to causing fatal illnesses such as typhus, cholera and diphtheria’. Publicised medical opinions of the day evidently cultivated such concerns. Spicer (1991:4) notes that ground water pollution from burial grounds and sewers was found to be a cause of London’s first major cholera epidemic in 1831, and Nicol (1994:98) records the English General Board of Health including graveyards in its official 1850 report as ‘one of the causes of cholera’.

Around this time, traditional communal graves were offending what Etlin (1987:24) describes as a ‘newfound sense of public decency’. Out of these changing values and ideologies emerged the Elysium, or ‘field of rest’ cemetery concept. Elysian fields were, according to Howard (1987:5), ‘meadows circled by trees and crossed by streams – a demiparadise’, where Linden-Ward (1986:4) suggests the Greeks supposed ‘the souls of the virtuous retired after death and roamed through bowers forever green’.

New cemeteries were to have important ‘cultural as well as spiritual roles’ according to Etlin (1987:39) as ‘virtuous citizens of all walks of life were to be honoured by monuments and inscriptions to inspire the living to at least equal the accomplishments of those before them’. They were to ‘animate every citizen to a love of virtue and glory, and to excite in youthful minds an ardent desire of imitating those celebrated worthies’ (Linden-Ward 1986:4). Etlin (1987:43) reports that new cemeteries were to become ‘schools of virtue’, and were to
'balance Christian and humanistic ideals'. These outdoor schools of history and philosophy would 'preach lessons to which none may refuse to listen, and which all that live must hear' (Howard 1987:5).

New cemeteries were established on elevated sites exposed to prevailing winds, enclosed within walls and planted so as not to hinder air circulation. They were distanced from residential areas, 'though not so far as to make access difficult or expensive' (Nicol 1994:128).

**Colonial cemeteries**

Australia's first European cemeteries were initially small and conveniently situated close to early settlements. But as settlements grew, it soon became necessary to establish new cemeteries further away from sprawling urban areas. Griffin and Tobin (1997) report that:

> In some districts, such as Albury, New South Wales, the first white settlers took over an existing Aboriginal burial ground for a time. In others, each family made its own decisions and its own arrangements.
> Griffin and Tobin (1997:53)

Liveris (1999:18-19) reports of colonial Western Australia, that 'only with difficulty were settlers dissuaded from burying family members on their own property', as was 'contrary to the wishes of the government'.

Griffin and Tobin (1997) further report that, initially the Church of England held a monopoly on all things religious, including cemeteries.

> the first cemeteries, although ostensibly public and general and provided for from the public purse, were thoroughly Anglican. They were consecrated by Anglicans, ordered by Anglicans and the services conducted within them were direct from the Book of Common Prayer.
> Griffin and Tobin (1997:62)

The first major change to take place in nineteenth century cemeteries was, according to Griffin and Tobin (1997:65), 'the move away from the undivided public cemetery to several denominational areas in one cemetery', from 1820. The next major development, was Governor Gipps' 'transfer of responsibility for the administration of cemeteries from the churches to appointed trustees', from 1846.
Gipps’s proposal ... introduced not only the notion of trustees but also the principle of numerical size being the determining factor for space, but with the assumption that the four major denominations of the time would remain dominant in size.
Griffin and Tobin (1997:67)

The four major denominations of the time were the Church of England, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and Roman Catholic churches.

It quickly became accepted that major cemeteries would be administered by trustees and that the trustees were not acting on behalf of the churches but of the municipal or state governments. When municipal government was introduced in Australia, councils were often vested with responsibility for cemeteries as part of their general concern for public health.
Griffin and Tobin (1997:67)

The transition of control of Australian cemeteries from church to state health authorities is summarised by Griffin and Tobin (1997).

Each of the original colonies handled the management of their cemeteries and resolved the relationship of church and state with respect to burial places in distinctive ways. By the beginning of the twentieth century, each state had provision for church ownership and management, municipal ownership and management, state ownership and management through state-appointed trustees, and, in some instances, private ownership and management. The regulations governing the burial of the dead, originally the responsibility of the ecclesiastical authorities, became the province of health authorities in the various states and have remained there.
(Griffin and Tobin 1997:53)

Garden Cemeteries

With continual reuse, the ground level in Paris’ Cimetière des Innocents, built up until a wall eventually gave way, in 1780, spilling remains into adjacent property (Etlin 1987; Keister 1999:27). In response, old Parisian cemeteries were subsequently cleared and the bones were reinterred on display in subterranean catacombs. A new, wooded garden Cimetière du Père-Lachaise, was established in 1804, which is credited (Etlin 1987:39; Howard 1987:5; Keister 1997:20) with starting the ‘rural’ cemetery movement, subsequently popularised throughout the USA. According to Etlin (1987:12) Père-Lachaise, ‘perhaps the most famous cemetery in the western world’, is a ‘turning point in one thousand years of western civilisation’.

Cemetery reformations, similar to that in Paris, commenced in Britain at Liverpool’s Low Hill General Cemetery in 1825; and in the USA at Boston’s Mount Auburn, in 1831 (Linden-Ward 1986; Etlin 1987; Howard 1987; Keister 1997 & 1999).
The informal English estates serving as models included vast expanses of rolling grass with handsome trees, which had replaced countless formal gardens during the eighteenth century (Howard 1987:5). Instead of monuments and sculptures 'overshadowing horticulture', at Mount Auburn, 'the emphasis was and is clearly on the supremacy of the landscape'. This 'rural' cemetery concept quickly caught on as 'a radical departure from the crowded, neglected seventeenth century crypts and grave yards' within urban areas (Howard 1987:5). The establishment of Mount Auburn was quickly followed by the founding of other United States rural cemeteries, including Brooklyn's Green-Wood, in 1838 (Keister 1999:28).

Public Parks

Garden cemeteries were the forerunners of large-scale public open spaces near urban areas in the United States, according to Keister (1999:26). Churchyards initially served as public gathering places and were used as markets, forums and malls. Keister reports that Andrew Downing, a promoter of public open space, visited Green-Wood in 1848 and remarked:

Judging from the crowds of people in carriages, and on foot, which I find constantly thronging Green-Wood and Mount Auburn, I think it is plain enough how much our citizens, of all classes, would enjoy public parks on a similar scale. Indeed, the only drawback to these beautiful and highly kept cemeteries, to my taste, is the gala-day air of recreation they present. People seem to go there to enjoy themselves, and not to indulge in any serious recollections or regrets. Can you doubt that if our large towns had suburban pleasure grounds, like Green-Wood (excepting the monuments) ... they would become the constant resort of the citizens, or that, being so, they would tend to soften and allay some of the feverish unrest of business which seems to have possession of most Americans, body and soul? (Keister 1999:28)

According to Keister (1999), Downing kept 'hammering away' at New York City officials to 'develop a park patterned after the rural cemeteries' and finally had his way in 1853, when:

a 700 acre site (that eventually grew to 843 acres) was authorised to establish a park in the centre of New York City. Central Park was the first landscaped park in America. (Keister 1999:28)

Railway Access

Shifts away from cities brought corresponding changes in burial customs, in particular transport of coffins and mourners to cemeteries. In the late nineteenth century, railways were
considered appropriate means of access for both funerals and subsequent visitation to cemeteries, which could, according to Nicol (1994:147), therefore be ‘sited away from cities’. However, this involved another significant change from tradition: the means of slowly conveying the deceased for burial, as was ‘considered only decent’.

Railway funerals were first introduced in England in 1854 with the opening of a large, state-run cemetery in Woking (Nicol 1994:148). The first Australian cemetery connected to a main railway was Sydney’s Rookwood in 1867. A specifically modified funeral car served Perth’s Karrakatta Cemetery from its commencement in 1899 (Liveris 1999:41), and then in Melbourne, major cemeteries were established on railways at Springvale in 1901 and Fawkner in 1905 (Nicol 1994:148).

**Compartmentalisation**

Back in 1862, discriminatory compartmentalisation of cemeteries by religious denominations was being contested in Australia (Nicol 1997:52) and debate on this issue continued for many years. By the early 1890s, non-sectarian memorial parks, such as Cypress Lawn at Colma in California (Keister 1997:21), were being developed as a more open, ‘democratic alternative’ to church cemeteries and ‘denominationally-segmented’ public cemeteries. However, most of Australia’s twentieth century cemeteries were still laid out in religious divisions and continue to operate in this manner.

**Cremation**

A significant change to take place in Australian funeral practice was the legalisation of cremation, which did not come about quickly or easily. The cremation movement was initiated in Europe, in the late nineteenth century (Mitford 1965:140; Liveris 1999:118). While cremationist organisations vigorously promoted this technique, it was generally considered ‘un-Christian’ or ‘heathen’ by many of Australia’s Anglo-Celtic Christian community (Zelinka 1991:48; Sagazio 1992:15; Nicol 1994:169; Ata 1994:48). An 1886 edict of the Catholic Church officially condemned cremation (Zelinka 1991:48; Sagazio 1992:15; Nicol 1994:169) and it was not until the 1960s that the Catholic Church withdrew its opposition to cremation (Ata 1994:48).
Australia's first cremation bill was enacted in South Australia in 1891, but it was to be eight years before the new Act was put to effect. Meanwhile, an 'illegal' cremation conducted on the beach at Sandringham in Victoria, in 1895 (Zelinka 1991:48; Chambers 1994:19; Nicol 1994:186), was to receive considerable press attention. Nicol (1994) well illustrates the polarisation of public opinion at the time with highly contrasting news reports of the event. The _Adelaide Observer_ reported a 'decent and orderly' ceremony, while the _Melbourne Age_ described in embellished detail, 'a most ghastly spectacle' (Nicol 1994:188).

The completion and commissioning of Australia's first crematorium took place at West Terrace Cemetery in Adelaide, in 1903 (Nicol 1994:321). The same year, a cremation bill was finally passed in Victoria. But it was not until 1905 that Victoria's first 'legal' cremation took place at the Springvale Necropolis, where a rather crude hole was dug in the ground for the occasion (Sagazio 1992:16; Nicol 1994:323; Liveris 1999:120).


**Memorial Parks**

European and American garden cemeteries provided inspiration for, and influenced design and development of, Australian memorial parks including Perth's Karrakatta, Melbourne's Necropolis and Fawkner, and Adelaide's Centennial Park (Nicol 1994:266).

In Los Angeles, Forest Lawn Memorial Park was established as the first full lawn cemetery in 1917 (Forest Lawn Memorial Parks 1994:13; Keister 1997:20; Llewellyn 1998:28). Mitford (1965:127) credits Forest Lawn's creator, Hubert Eaton, as 'probably having more influence on trends in the modern cemetery industry than any other human being'. According to Llewellyn (1998:28), 'when Hubert Eaton conceived his “memorial-park plan” in 1917, he transformed the way cemeteries were operated and viewed by society. Mitford (loc. cit.) considers that with Dr Eaton's creed, 'the Memorial Park idea was born' and that subsequently, 'the lengthened shadow of Eaton's genius' has crept 'over much of the
cemetery land in the territorial United States’ and ‘today it spans oceans, extending to Hawaii and even to Australia’.

Enfield Memorial Park was established north of Adelaide in 1947 as this country’s ‘first full lawn cemetery’, and according to Nicol (1997:52), the original development plans were unashamedly strongly influenced by Forest Lawn’s philosophy and design.

**War Cemeteries**

During the Great War, Australian casualties were buried overseas where they had died. However, ‘the proposal for a perpetual memorial cemetery for war dead was first raised’ at this time (Liveris 1999:89). During the Second World War, special memorial cemeteries were established apart from civilian burials, for war dead and eligible veterans (Liveris 1999:137). War Graves cemeteries were established within major cemeteries in each state capital.

**Mausolea**

Long-established Australian funeral practices have also been subject to significant cultural variation (Zelinka 1991:87). The 1980s also saw in-ground concrete vaults and their more elaborate monumental structures change the face of many cemeteries. Vaults became very popular among the wave of post-war, southern European immigrants who had aged and were dying out by the 1980s. Vaults were also a popular choice among people of Chinese backgrounds; but aboveground crypt burial was what many of these people really wanted.

Aboveground entombment in individual family mausolea was provided in NSW at Rookwood Catholic Cemetery prior to the twentieth century, and at Botany Cemetery in the 1950s. Anglo-Australian use of mausolea was very limited. Zelinka (1991:87) notes that at Botany, all the families taking up this option were of non-Anglo-Saxon origin.

Australia’s first community mausoleum opened at Fawkner, in Melbourne, as late as 1994, following a long-awaited change of state legislation. Public mausolea have subsequently become available at several other cemeteries: each providing hundreds of crypts within one building. These large, multilevel mausoleum structures are further changing the current face of major cemeteries across Australia.
Commercialisation

Funerals were once voluntary services provided by grieving families and their communities. However, funerals often involve very big business today, with hundreds of private funeral parlours and public cemeteries acquired each year by a few large international corporations, turning over thousands of millions of US dollars each year (American Cemetery 1997:6; The Australian, 2 April 1998:22; Hopkins 1998a:21 & 1998b:34; Shoebridge 1998:56). Llewellyn (1998:199) reports that in 1996, the not-for-profit cemetery operation and the for-profit mortuary (funeral parlour) of Rose Hills Memorial Park in California (billing itself the world’s largest memorial park) sold for approximately $US 285 million.

The largest US, so-called ‘death care’ company: Services Corporation International (SCI), and market follower, Stewart Enterprises, both bought into Australia in 1993. By 1998, SCI had spent $250 million on acquisitions and development of more than one hundred and forty Australian sites (Hopkins 1998a:21; Shoebridge 1998:56). By 1999, Stewart Group and SCI Australia shared some 52% of the Australian funeral business (Boreham 1999:34). As Walter (1994:17) observes, the funeral industry is now dominated by ‘privatisation, commercialisation and professionalisation’.

Conclusion to the Historical Context

Linden-Ward (1986:2) considers that ‘over the last century and a half, Americans have created for themselves cemeteries that reflect their own notions of death, nature, individualism, family, community and commemoration worthy of a distinctive national historic consciousness’. A review of the Australian scene reveals that Australians have been similarly creative in this respect.

Etlin (1987) sums up the process of changing cemetery environments in this way:

Despite all of the transformations in form and use, the cemetery always furnished a landscape, either architectural or horticultural, as well as metaphysical, which reflected the underlying bonds and tensions of social and individual life.

Etlin (1987:368)

Other Literature relating to the Research Setting
Other references, relating to the research setting, address urban park visitation in Melbourne (Hamilton-Smith & Mercer 1991), heritage management in Australia and New Zealand (Hall & McArthur 1996), and a classic controversial critique of the American funeral industry (Mitford 1965).

General-interest magazines, which proved useful sources of incidental articles, included Business Review Weekly, New Scientist, Heritage Australia, and Choice.

Newspapers did not provide a rich source of articles relating to the study of cemetery visitation, but The Australian and The Age were of some value in this respect.

Discussion of Literature on the Research Setting

Toward identifying major influences on cemetery visitation, the literature outlines the modern metamorphosis of the cemetery environment. Cemeteries and the funeral industry have necessarily evolved throughout history in endeavouring to keep up with the needs of constantly changing societies.

The literature reveals a great deal about various social historical factors which have shaped the contemporary Australian cemetery, and some of its broader community values. This provides invaluable insights into the setting itself. However, the literature reveals virtually nothing about the setting’s main use: identified within the current research as commemorative visitation. The historical literature therefore fails to reveal values of the cemetery within the grief process.

Cemetery Visitation

Empirical Research

Only two empirical studies with any cemetery field research component could be identified. The first of these studies is portrayed in Francis Clegg’s (1991) paper on The psychological importance of memorials. Initially, Clegg, a British clinical neuropsychologist, sought to
identify whether the choice of burial or cremation for the deceased had any influence on the bereaved person’s subsequent ability to cope with the loss. Her literature review similarly turned up nothing more than ‘a few passing conjectures from clinicians’ (p.4). Clegg’s study sample of four-hundred and sixty-seven, comprised elderly people in day centres, Cruse (organisation for bereaved people) members, Christian Woman magazine readers, random people encountered in the course of her work, and some sixty visitors to an English cemetery and crematorium. Data was gathered through interviews and a questionnaire. Clegg reports (p.6) that ‘many of the most interesting interviews took place with the people ... who were visiting the cemetery or its adjacent Garden of Remembrance’. Ultimately Clegg concluded from her study, conducted over two years, that ‘there were no significant differences between burial and cremation’ in the psychological value of memorials. Clegg does not purport to present any definitive answers or firm conclusions, but does seek to present some ‘interesting and thought-provoking material, which may point us in the direction of “the truth”, and more importantly, provide a basis for future research.’

In their paper, ‘Sustaining cemeteries: The user perspective’, British social anthropologists Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou (2000) present an ethnographic account of cemetery visitation behaviour and attitudes toward reuse of graves. Although it is acknowledged that ‘many more [British] disposals are of cremated remains’ (p.36), ‘this research focussed on burial’. Some 1500 graveside interviews were conducted with visitors at six cemeteries around outer northern London, during the late 1990s. As with the current study, this significant work bridges the gap in bereavement research between social-anthropological studies in traditional societies and psychological studies conducted in modern societies (Francis et. al. 2000:34).

Cemetery visitation is found to be mainly a function of choice, largely determined by the degree of emotional significance of the deceased.

Outside religiously prescribed occasions, people of all denominations make choices about visiting the cemetery and which graves to visit. ... Often, graves may be attended in order of priority, the emotionally most significant being visited first. ... decisions to visit and to prioritise a particular grave are likely to be guided by the emotional qualities of the relationships between the deceased and the survivors.
(Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2000:37)

Visitation activities are considered and it is found that ‘the data suggest a relatively similar range of activities across the different religious and cultural groups at the graveside.’ Graveside activities identified by Francis et. al. (2000:43) include: ‘examining/washing,
cleaning the memorial; tidying the space around the grave; saying prayers and partaking of rituals'. 'By maintaining the grave, survivors demonstrate an on-going emotional involvement with the deceased. For many, tending the grave also appears to serve as a proxy act of physical contact with the deceased.' Talking to the deceased was also found to be common, including sharing family news, expressing feelings and concerns, and possibly asking for guidance, help, advice and/or intercession.

For all communities studied, deceased kin are considered members of the existing family. The ideal fulfilment of reciprocal obligations between parent and child and wife and husband continues throughout life and beyond the grave. (Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2000:37)

An attempt was made to identify reasons for non-visitaton and it is concluded that the data suggest 'age, health and absence of living relatives are probable factors in non-visiting'. According to Francis et. al. (2000:40), the ideal burial place is conceived as having four facets. These are identified as being where the deceased is buried with near kin, among his/her community, close enough for ritual/customary practices to be carried out, and in a place which meets aesthetic standards and levels of propriety judged appropriate.

Cemeteries are found to sustain important, largely-unacknowledged functions in personal, family and community life. Values include providing for a 'developing culture where public, open expressions of grief may be both accepted and supportively managed'.

Social and family expectations, community norms, personal pledges, religious beliefs and a cemetery culture all help to reinforce visiting behaviour. Such visits seem to offer psychological benefits to the mourner and the establishment of an on-going bond with the deceased, which can assist adjustment to, and acceptance of, bereavement, and which allows possible further negotiation and settlement of unresolved interpersonal issues. (Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2000:44)

It is also suggested that this study reveals significant implications for the future management of cemeteries.

While resource issues and societal attitudes are critical, the research findings clearly indicate that future cemetery practice, particularly the reuse of graves, will need to be formulated with sensitivity and with a careful understanding of the significance of graves for sustaining individuals, families and cultural groups. (Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou 2000:46)
Discussion of Literature on Cemetery Visitation

Although neither of the published studies incorporating a cemetery visitation component specifically identifies the place of the cemetery within the grief process, both do contribute in some ways towards our understanding of this complex issue. In this respect, Francis, Kellaher & Neophytou's (2000) ethnographic account of cemetery visitation behaviour is particularly helpful. This study, conducted contemporaneously on the opposite side of the world, produced several findings of close similarity to those of the current study.

Clegg's (1991) finding of no significant differences in the psychological value of memorials between those who chose burial and those who opt for cremation, and Francis et. al.'s (2000) finding of a relatively similar range of activities across different religious and cultural groups at the graveside, indicate that psychological values and common visitation activities associated with cemetery visitation may be universal human experiences.

Nevertheless, the extent and significance of cemetery visitation behaviour still remain poorly recognised and inadequately understood throughout existing literature. The current research seeks to substantially add to existing behavioural scientific knowledge of bereavement, through expanding understanding of a most common bereavement behavioural activity: that of cemetery visitation.

This concludes the review of existing literature which forms the knowledge foundation on which the current research is based, and from which it expands. The following chapter presents a detailed review of the methodologies employed in the current research.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGIES

Introduction

To furnish both satisfactory generalisations on cemetery visitation and to evaluate the significance of visitation to specific bereaved individuals, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in this study. While many researchers may adopt solely one or the other of these approaches, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive of each other. Neuman (1997) recognises the supplementary or complementary nature of both methodologies:

many social researchers try to combine quantitative and qualitative research. The logic of qualitative research does not forbid the use of numbers, statistics, and precise quantitative measurement; such quantitative data can be a source of information, which supplements or complements qualitative data.

Neuman (1997:336)

In recognising limitations with any behavioural research, British psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes also commends the complementary values of quantitative and qualitative bereavement research, towards minimising such limitations.

We shall never be able to fully understand any piece of human behaviour, nor can we expect to identify major factors that are important to outcomes in every case of bereavement. But we can, I believe, learn something of the factors that play a part in most cases and a major part in some.

Relevant data can be obtained from detailed studies of a few people or from statistical studies of larger samples. Ideally, the two types of study should complement each other, for it is only by studying large numbers of people that we can generalise, and only by intensively studying a few that we can evaluate the significance of the mathematics of many.

(Parkes 1996:118)

Initial endeavours to embark on a more generalised exploration of the social phenomenon of cemetery visitation best suited the adoption of a quantitative methodology. However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985:110) say, ‘the trouble with generalisations is that they don’t apply to particulars’. As the research became more focussed, qualitative investigation was considered more appropriate toward developing the project’s descriptive component and interpreting meanings of cemetery visitation from the perspectives of the social actors.

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The study's quantitative investigation employed a highly structured survey questionnaire interview method to answer specific questions, while the qualitative investigation involved a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews to reveal personal experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) identify the values of each approach:

the structured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer knows what he or she does not know and can therefore frame appropriate questions to find it out, while the unstructured interview is the mode of choice when the interviewer does not know what he or she doesn’t know and must therefore rely on the respondent to tell him or her.
Lincoln and Guba (1985:269)

Quantitative Methodology

Research Partners

A general invitation to all cemeteries to participate in an Australasian cemetery visitor study was initially issued in 1996, at the joint international conference of the then Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association, and the International Cremation Federation, in Adelaide. This was subsequently reiterated through articles and advertisements in the national journal of the Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association. Every cemetery in Australia and New Zealand was invited to participate and thereby identify the numbers and visitation patterns of their clients, key social and cultural demographics and the expressed interests of clients. Additional specific invitations were directed to some thirty businesses, including the largest and busiest cemeteries within Australia's major population centres.

The study sought to identify cemetery visitors by specific social and cultural demographics, including age, sex, relationship to the decedent, family religion and nationality; and to reveal the significance of such factors on cemetery visitation activity. Hamilton-Smith & Mercer (1991) consider that:

'The thrust of urban park visitor research must be to identify the various kinds of park visitor, and to develop an understanding of their perceptions, values and behaviour, and from this, an appreciation of the most appropriate managerial responses to each such category of visitor'.
(Hamilton-Smith & Mercer 1991: 64)
The following industry leaders responded positively to the opportunity to identify vital data relating to their visiting clientele:

Carr Villa Memorial Park, Launceston City Council (Tas.),
Centennial Park, Centennial Park Cemetery Trust (SA),
Cheltenham Cemetery, Enfield Memorial Park Trust (SA),
Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park, Botany Cemetery & Eastern Suburbs Crematorium Trusts (NSW),
Enfield Memorial Park, Enfield Memorial Park Trust (SA),
Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park, Trustees of Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park (Vic.),
Fremantle Cemetery, Fremantle Cemeteries Board (WA),
Gungahlin Cemetery, Canberra Public Cemeteries Trust (ACT),
Karrakatta Cemetery, Metropolitan Cemeteries Board (WA),
Keilor Cemetery, Keilor Cemetery Trust (Vic.),
Memorial Park, Trustees of Memorial Park (Vic.),
Mt. Gravatt Cemetery, Brisbane City Council (Qld.), and,
The Necropolis, Trustees of the Necropolis Springvale (Vic.).

No New Zealand cemeteries seized the opportunity to participate. Responsive cemeteries occupy a total nine hundred and ten hectares (2,250 acres) of urban land and collectively facilitate around six hundred and ninety three funerals each week. During 1997, they provided twenty-eight percent of Australian burials and cremations, turned over fifty-nine million dollars, employed five-hundred and ninety staff, and hosted well over eight-million visits.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>STATE DEATHS 1997</th>
<th>PARTICIPATING CEM. SERVICES</th>
<th>% STATE SERVICES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>45,641</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>33,261</td>
<td>15,770</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>21,945</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>11,658</td>
<td>7,730</td>
<td>66.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>10,807</td>
<td>7,900</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tas</td>
<td>3,809</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territories</td>
<td>2,229</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td><strong>129,350</strong></td>
<td><strong>36,230</strong></td>
<td><strong>28.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Proportions of state services represented by responsive cemeteries
Table 3.1 indicates, for 1997, the number of deaths in each state, the number of total primary services (i.e. burials and cremations) performed by participating cemeteries in each state, and what proportion of respective state services these represent.

The mean number of annual visits per primary service across all participating cemeteries was two-hundred and forty-eight. This figure, multiplied by 134,200 expected deaths in Australia during the year 2000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997a), indicates that over thirty-three million visits are likely to be made to Australian cemeteries during the year 2000. Appendix 2 presents a profile of deaths in Australia, by age, sex, and cause.

Data Collection

A standard questionnaire (Appendix 3) was devised to obtain directly comparable responses from visitors at each cemetery. Data sought from the survey questions included:

- Specific bereavement (and grave/memorial) to which other data relates,
- Usual frequency of visits and incidence of personal anniversary visits,
- Perceived nationality and religion of the family of the decedent,
- Primary service choice (i.e. burial or cremation),
- Interval since death,
- Significant service issues which satisfy and dissatisfy visitors, and,
- Relative age and sex of visitors.

The researcher visited each participating cemetery to establish the data collection process. Prior to arrival, at least one suitable staff member or consultant was appointed to the project by the respective cemetery management. A copy of the researcher’s similar report on findings at Fawkner Memorial Park (Bachelor 1996) was provided to interviewers and coordinators as part of their background briefing.

Each cemetery visit included a detailed site inspection to identify main traffic flows and strategic sites for random data collection, including personal interviews and vehicle counts. As well as physically planning the operation, the researcher briefed interviewers on standard survey techniques, including their presentation and introduction, dealing with various
responses, ensuring that questions are clearly understood, ensuring the survey form is correctly completed, and appropriate close of interviews.

At some cemeteries, vehicles and/or pedestrians could be stopped at random as they entered the site. At others, this was not practical and visitors had to be approached at graves and memorials by an interviewer wandering the grounds. At yet other cemeteries, a combination of these techniques was employed with emphasis on randomising general samples. At all cemeteries, visitor samples were drawn each day of the week. In all, twelve male and fourteen female interviewers assisted with data collection from thirteen cemeteries.

Annual reports, brochures and management discussions at each participating cemetery yielded vital business details, including financial and management structures and primary service provision.

At each site, the researcher supervised pilot batches of interviews and immediately reviewed the results with interviewers to ensure their capability and confidence, and standardisation of results, before leaving interviewers to continue the bulk of data collection. Suitable traffic survey methods were also determined to identify the numbers of people and/or vehicles and heads per vehicle entering the premises on each day of the week. In most cases, traffic counters were borrowed from local councils. Head counts were also undertaken to identify the mean number of vehicle occupants entering each cemetery.

Other data acquired included the numbers of burial and cremation services conducted each day of the week and the average numbers of mourners attending cemetery services. The researcher monitored the total data collection process through regular telephone contact with cemetery managers and interviewers.

Commemorative visitors (i.e. those visiting graves or memorials) were specifically targeted and funeral participants intentionally avoided. The privacy of any visitors who did not wish to be interviewed was fully respected; however, only very small proportions (between 2% and 5% at various cemeteries) declined. A typical interview took around ten minutes, including discussion. Many lonely mourners were only too happy to talk and talk, so that discussions were often necessarily curtailed by interviewers after twenty or thirty minutes.
Previous surveys at Fawkner Memorial Park had indicated that a minimum sample of two hundred visitors was required to facilitate extrapolation of reliable data on key visitor groups. Most participating cemeteries agreed to conduct this number of interviews, but some saw advantage in the higher degree of accuracy afforded by a sample of three hundred.

Data Processing and Analysis

Interview responses (ie. completed questionnaire sheets) were forwarded to Fawkner Memorial Park where data were entered onto a spreadsheet program for processing. The data were analysed and interpreted, and appropriate tables and graphs produced for each data field.

Even before data processing and reporting was completed, managers of several cemeteries reported evident positive responses from their staff involved in interviews. Such responses included improved interaction with visitors and enlightened enthusiasm towards meeting the newly identified needs of various clients.

Site specific reports (Bachelor 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; 1997d; 1997e; 1997f; 1997g; 1997h; 1997i; 1998a; 1998b; 1998c) were presented to participating cemeteries. These reports provided invaluable information on the specific cemetery’s clients and identified significant management implications.

On completion of individual reports, the total data gathered at all participating cemeteries were amassed for further analysis. This ‘national sample’ comprised the questionnaire responses of three thousand cemetery visitors throughout Australia. Each interview resulted in a data record of thirteen specific points, and the total statistical data set analysed included some thirty-nine thousand individual data points.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of quantitative inquiry is usually measured in terms of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity.
Internal Validity

Internal validity means that there are no errors internal to the design of the research project (Neuman 1997:145). The design of the qualitative data collection and analysis component of the current study benefited from previous similar work conducted by the same researcher, and which had previously passed both academic and industry scrutiny. The data collection and analysis processes of the current study are highly transparent and the researcher took utmost care throughout to ensure the accuracy of results.

External Validity

External validity is the ability to generalise findings from a specific setting and small group to a broad range of settings and people (Neuman 1997:145). In the current study, the significant sample size (ie. 3,000 cemetery visitors), representativeness of participating cemeteries (ie. providing 28% of all Australian burial and cremation services), and general consistency of data across participating cemeteries, suggest that results should be generalisable to a broad range of cemeteries, at least throughout Australia.

Reliability

Reliability refers to an indicator’s dependability and consistency (Neuman 1997:138). In the current study, data collection instruments were used at thirteen individual cemeteries, sited in six states and one territory, with highly consistent and apparently dependable results.

Objectivity

Objectivity seeks to minimise personal prejudice and bias of the social researcher, and to present social reality as it is, rather than as it is wished to be by the investigator (Sarantakos 1987:8). Although it is generally considered that true value neutrality is perhaps unattainable, a high degree of neutrality was sought throughout the current study, including research planning, collection, analysis and dissemination of data.
Data Dissemination

Conference presentations and papers (Bachelor 1998d; 1999e; 1999a; 1999b; 1999c), based on findings of the amassed quantitative data, have presented a grander, more representative profile of Australian cemetery visitors to the Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association, Parks and Leisure Australia, Australian Funeral Directors Association, Cemeteries & Crematoria Association of Victoria, and the National Association for Loss and Grief.

Naturalistic Observation

Naturalistic observation involves the observation of behaviour without direct intervention (Weiten 1998). Although the researcher’s tacit knowledge of the research field draws on general observations of cemetery visitors over more than a decade, specific naturalistic observation was utilised in one relatively small, but important, component of the study of cemetery visitation. Naturalistic observation was considered a more reliable method of identifying duration of visits to specific cemetery compartments than was self-reporting.

Key Quantitative Findings

The purpose of this section is to briefly highlight key quantitative findings pertaining to visitation patterns, including trajectory, frequency, duration and incidence of anniversary visits; and how visitation patterns generally vary by relationship of the decedent, family nationality and religion, primary service choice, sex and age of the visitor. The initial quantitative data provided a vital basis on which the subsequent qualitative study was constructed. This included building the researcher’s tacit knowledge towards formulation of a satisfactory data collection process and identification of appropriate questions.
Trajectory

![Graph showing the trajectory of cemetery visits over years]

**Figure 3.1  Cemetery visitation trajectory**

A cemetery visitation trajectory was constructed from the data collected during 3,000 random interviews of visitors to major cemeteries throughout Australia. Figure 3.1 illustrates the proportions of cemetery visitors attending each year since their respective bereavement. The data reveal that 21% of all visitors sampled were visiting graves or memorials within one year of the respective death. Only 5.2% of all visits occurred five years after a death, just 2.5% ten years after, 1% fifteen years after the death, and only 0.7% twenty years after. The median interval between death and a cemetery visit was found to be 3.7 years.

Frequency

![Bar graph showing frequencies of visits]

**Figure 3.2  Frequencies of all visits**

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Visitation frequencies were also extrapolated from data relating to 3,000 random visitors to major cemeteries throughout Australia. The majority of visits were found to follow regular patterns, with the most popular frequency being weekly, as shown in Figure 3.2. Just over 41% of visitors indicated that they visit at least once each week.

![Bar chart showing weekly traffic patterns](image)

**Figure 3.3**  *Mean vehicles over a normal week*

Visitor activity generally follows clearly defined regular patterns with no significant variation throughout the year. Figure 3.3 shows the mean proportions of weekly cemetery traffic occurring each day throughout a typical week, including the funeral traffic component. The data reveal that funeral corteges comprise some 23% of the total weekly traffic volume, with the majority (77%) representing memorial visitation. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are evidently the most popular days for commemorative visitation.

**Relationship**

![Pie chart showing visitor relationships](image)

**Figure 3.4**  *Proportions of visitors by relationship of decedent*
Just over 95% of visitors sampled were visiting specifically to tend the grave or memorial of a relative. Figure 3.4 indicates the proportions of visitors by relationship of the decedent to the visitor.

The most significant group of cemetery clients by relationship of the decedent is those visiting a parent’s memorial, followed by those visiting that of a late spouse. Of course, more visitors have a deceased parent than most other relationships, with the obvious exception of grandparent, so the general devotion to visiting the memorial of a grandparent appears much less than toward that of a parent. Considering that fewer people have a deceased spouse or child, the incidence of visits to these relations is also indicative of very strong devotion.

The category ‘Other’ identifies the proportion of people visiting cemeteries other than to visit the grave or memorial of a relative or friend. These visits were less than 0.1% recreational, and just over 0.1% history and heritage related. While much may be heard of promulgated heritage and leisure values of cemeteries, the incidence of actual use for such purposes by the community appears relatively minuscule by comparison with commemorative visitation.

![Graph showing years since death by relationship of decedent.](image)

**Figure 3.5**  *Years since death by relationship of decedent*

The survey data reveal no significant variation by relationship of the decedent, within the visitation trajectory. However, significant variation in the frequency of visits is evident by relationship of the decedent, as shown in Figure 3.6. To enable direct comparison between the specific frequencies for each relationship, proportions expressed in Figures 3.5 and 3.6 are of the respective relationship, rather than of total visitors.
Figure 3.6  Frequency of visits by relationship of the decedent

The data indicate higher proportions of visits to the memorials of spouses and children among the greater frequencies, while visits to grandparents, other relations and friends occur more among the lesser frequencies. Of all people visiting a son or daughter’s memorial, 62.7% reported that they do so at least once each week. Of those visiting a spouse’s memorial, 54.8% reported that they visit at least once each week, while among those visiting a parent’s memorial, 34.8% reported the same frequency.

Religion

Figure 3.7  Major religions of visitors contrasted with the Australian population
Figure 3.7 shows the proportions of cemetery visitors of major religions contrasted with the stated religions of the Australian population (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997b). The major religious attributes of cemetery visitors were found to be, in descending order, Catholic, no-affiliation, Anglican and Orthodox.

Although many may be only nominally affiliated with the religion indicated, the association between funerals and religious services is still strong. The proportionately low incidence of visitors of no religion is also indicative of a strong association between cemetery visitation and religious observance.

The data reveal no significant variation by religion, within the visitation trajectory, in Figure 3.8. However, significant variation in the frequency of visits is clearly apparent by religion, as shown in Figure 3.9. To enable direct comparison between the specific frequencies for each religion, proportions expressed in Figures 3.8 and 3.9 are of the respective religion, rather than of total visitors.

![Graph showing frequency of visits by religion](image)

**Figure 3.8 Years since death by selected religions**

Religion appears to be a significant determinant of more regular visits, with 66.1% of Orthodox respondents reporting that they visit at least once each week, while 49.2% of Catholic, 25.9% of Anglican, and 27.1% of non religiously affiliated visitors reported similar frequencies.
Figure 3.9  *Frequencies of visits by selected religions*

The data reveal close similarities between the frequencies of visits by Anglicans, other Protestant Christians, and non-affiliated visitors. A higher degree of religiosity is evident among non-Australian families, who comprised 51.4% of all visitors in the sample. Where funeral services involved no religion, 77.2% of visitors identified the respective family as Australian.

Nationality

![Pie chart showing nationality]

Figure 3.10  *Nationality by which members of the family most identify themselves*

As national identification can be a complex personal concept, personal perception of the nationality by which members of the decedent's family most identify themselves was chosen to indicate cultural identity, rather than any imposed classification such as country of birth.
Consequently in many instances, ‘Australian’ may be an adopted nationality and does not necessarily indicate the country of birth of either the decedent or the visitor.

Just less than half (48.6%) of all cemetery visitors identified their family as Australian. Figure 3.10 shows that following Australian, the major nationalities of cemetery visitors include Italian, Greek, British, Maltese, Polish and Croatian. The category ‘Other’ includes virtually all other nationalities represented throughout Australia, but with each comprising no more than 1% of all cemetery visitors.

![Graph showing years since death by selected nationalities](image)

**Figure 3.11  Years since death by selected nationalities**

No significant variation by nationality, within the visitation trajectory, is evident from Figure 3.11. However, significant variation in the frequency of visits is clearly apparent by nationality, as shown in Figure 3.12. To enable direct comparison between the specific frequencies for each nationality, proportions expressed in Figures 3.11 and 3.12 are of the respective nationality, rather than of total visitors.

Nationality appears to be a significant determinant of visitation frequency, with 70.5% of Greek respondents reporting that they visit at least once each week; 58.3% of Italian, 30.6% of British, and 26.9% of Australian visitors reported similar frequencies.
Figure 3.12  Frequency of visits by selected nationalities

The correlation between nationality and religion is very strong. Figure 3.13 reveals that of Italian visitors, 97.6% identified their relevant family religion as Catholic, as did 96% of Croatian, 95.7% of Maltese and 92.2% of Polish visitors. Of Greek visitors, 98.2% identified their family religion as Orthodox. Australian and British visitors were predominantly of various Christian faiths with the Anglican Church best represented.

Figure 3.13  Faiths of visitors of major nationalities
Primary Services

![Chart showing proportions of burials and cremation services and their subsequent visits](chart)

**Figure 3.14** Proportions of burials and cremation services and their subsequent visits

Although interment of remains may be the primary reason for the existence of a cemetery, it is only the initial service provided to clients. Primary services include burial and cremation.

Those who opt for cremation appear much less likely to visit frequently than those who choose burial. Cremations currently account for 54% of all Australian cemetery services (Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association 1998) and 54% of services provided by participating cemeteries; yet within the national sample, only 20% of cemetery visits were to a cremation memorial, as shown in Figure 3.14.

Cremation often results in no commemoration at the particular cemetery. The tendency for funeral directors to collect cremated remains on behalf of the family (usually for the opportunity to further sell an ornamental urn) has grown in recent years. The Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association (1998) reports that 51% of cremated remains are currently collected, 7% are scattered by request, and just 42% are interred within cemeteries, either in existing graves or specific cremation memorials.

The data behind Figure 3.15 reveal no significant variation by type of service, within the visitation trajectory. However, significant variation in the frequency of visits is clearly apparent by type of service, as shown in Figure 3.16.
Figure 3.15  *Visitors by years since death for each primary service*

To enable direct comparison between the specific trends and frequencies for each type of service, burials and cremations are expressed in Figures 3.15 and 3.16 as proportions of the respective service type, rather than of total services.

Figure 3.16  *Frequency of visits by primary service*

The data indicate that where the decedent was buried, over 45% of subsequent visits are made at least weekly. Where the decedent was cremated, less than 24% of subsequent visits are made at least weekly. Those who cremate are much more likely to visit less frequently than once a month but more than once a year (ie. 2-11/year). This frequency includes common and personal anniversaries, such as Mothers Day, Fathers Day, birthday and anniversary of death.
Sex

![Bar chart showing the percentage of male and female in the Australian population and cemetery visitors.]

**Figure 3.17** *Sex of the Australian population and cemetery visitors*

The Australian population was identified in the 1996 census as 50.5% female and 49.5% male (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997b), while Australian cemetery visitors were found in the current study to be 64.3% female and 35.7% male (Figure 3.17). Visits by females were also found to be of significantly greater duration than were those of males, as discussed in the following section: ‘Duration’.

The data reveal no significant variation between the sexes from the general pattern of decline in visitation over years since death, as shown in Figure 3.18, and no significant variation in the frequency of visits, as shown in Figure 3.19.

![Line graph showing the percentage of male and female visits over years since death.]

**Figure 3.18** *Years since death by sex of the visitor*
To enable direct comparison between the specific frequencies for each sex, proportions expressed in Figures 3.18 and 3.19 are of the respective sex, rather than of total visitors.

![Chart showing frequency of visits by sex of the visitor](image)

**Figure 3.19**  *Frequency of visits by sex of the visitor*

A person’s sex is evidently a significant determinant of whether or not they will visit the cemetery. However, the data suggest no significant difference by sex in either frequency or visitation trajectory among those who do visit a cemetery.

Age

![Chart showing ages of cemetery visitors compared with the Australian population](image)

**Figure 3.20**  *Ages of cemetery visitors compared with the Australian population*

Figure 3.20 shows the proportions of visitors within age decade intervals, and how these compare with those of the general Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics
1997b). The low incidence of visitors under forty years of age is significantly at variance from the general population.

The age of cemetery visitors reflects their stage in the life cycle and the incidence of death among popularly visited relationships. While the 1996 median age of the Australian population was thirty-four years (Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997b), the median age of cemetery visitors was found to be fifty-six years, or around twenty-two years older than the average Australian person.

The data reveal no significant variation by age within the visitation trajectory, nor in the frequency of visits. While age appears to be a major determinant of cemetery visitation, it does not appear to be a significant factor in influencing specific patterns within visitation.

Duration

![Duration of visits to specific cemetery compartments](image)

**Figure 3.21 Mean duration of visits to specified cemetery compartments**

Durations of cemetery visits were extrapolated from observations made of visits to each of several specific cemetery compartments at Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park. Thirty random visits (involving one or more visitors) were observed throughout a week during winter, and for comparison, another thirty were observed during summer. As no specific seasonal variation was discernible, the data were then combined and subsequent information extrapolated.
The quantities of persons of each sex comprising each group was recorded, as was the interval between gravesite arrival and departure with each visit. Figure 3.21 summarises the mean duration of visits by females, males and all visitors to each of the specified cemetery compartments. The compartments surveyed included a mausoleum, Catholic monumental section, Orthodox monumental section, general lawn graves, memorial garden, and a children’s lawn.

**Mausoleum**

Mausoleum entombment occurs indoors, in above-ground crypts with engraved granite shutters. Virtually all families choosing mausoleum entombment are of Italian origin and Catholic faith, and the vast majority of encrypted decedents were born in Italy.

The sample sixty visits to a mausoleum involved one hundred and twenty-one visitors, giving a mean of 2.0 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 3 to 57 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 18.9 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 11.7. Seventy-three of the sample mausoleum visitors were female and twenty were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 3 to 43 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 6 to 57 minutes. The mean duration of female visits within the sample was 21.5 minutes with a standard deviation of 13.3. The mean duration of male visits within the sample was 15.4 minutes with a standard deviation of 8.0. There were twenty-one male single visitors and thirteen female single visitors in the sample.

**Catholic Monumental**

The Catholic monumental area involves burial in below-ground concrete vaults with full monumental cover. The majority of all families burying in the Catholic monumental area are also of Italian origin.

The sample sixty visits to a Catholic monumental area involved one hundred and twenty-nine visitors, giving a mean of 2.1 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 10 to 90 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 29.6 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 12.5. Eighty-seven of the sample mausoleum visitors were female and forty-two were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 10 to 90 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 15 to 90 minutes. The mean
duration of female visits within the sample was 32.6 minutes with a standard deviation of 13.2. The mean duration of male visits within the sample was 25.0 minutes with a standard deviation of 9.0. There were nine male single visitors and four female single visitors in the sample.

*Orthodox Monumental*

The Orthodox monumental area involves burial in earthen graves with full monumental cover. Most Orthodox visitors are of Greek families, though several other eastern European nationalities are less well represented.

The sample sixty visits to an Orthodox monumental area involved one hundred and thirteen visitors, giving a mean of 1.9 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 3 to 67 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 31.3 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 19.0. Seventy-five of the sample Orthodox visitors were female and twenty were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 3 to 67 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 5 to 67 minutes. The mean duration of female visits within the sample was 35.3 minutes with a standard deviation of 19.7. The mean duration of male visits within the sample was 22.8 minutes with a standard deviation of 14.2. There were twelve male single visitors and seven female single visitors in the sample.

*General Lawn*

The general lawn area involves burial in earthen graves with lawn cover and flush bronze plaques. General lawn areas are utilised by diverse families, but are particularly popular among those of Anglo background.

The sample sixty visits to a general lawn area involved one hundred and four visitors, giving a mean of 1.8 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 3 to 45 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 14.6 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 7.3. Sixty-six of the sample general lawn visitors were female and thirty-eight were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 3 to 45 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 4 to 25 minutes. The mean duration of female visits within the sample was 15.3 minutes with a standard deviation of 6.4. The mean duration of male
visits within the sample was 13.7 minutes with a standard deviation of 8.1. There were twenty male single visitors and seven female single visitors in the sample.

Memorial Gardens

The memorial gardens involve cremated remains interred in rose, garden and wall niches, with small bronze plaques. Memorial gardens are utilised by families of diverse backgrounds, but are more popular among Anglo-Protestant and non-religious families.

The sample sixty visits to a memorial garden area involved ninety-nine visitors, giving a mean of 1.6 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 1 to 30 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 7.5 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 4.0. Sixty-nine of the sample memorial garden visitors were female and thirty were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 3 to 12 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 1 to 30 minutes. The mean duration of female visits within the sample was 8.0 minutes with a standard deviation of 4.4. The mean duration of male visits within the sample was 6.4 minutes with a standard deviation of 2.7. There were thirteen male single visitors and twenty female single visitors in the sample.

Children’s Lawn

The children’s lawn area involves burial in earthen graves with lawn cover and a choice of raised bronze plaques or small monuments. Burial in this area is restricted to those under thirteen years of age.

The sample sixty visits to the general lawn area involved one hundred and eight visitors, giving a mean of 1.8 persons per visit. Within the sample, the duration of visits ranged from 5 to 180 minutes. The mean duration of all visits was 44.7 minutes and the standard deviation of the sample was 36.9. Eighty-three of the sample children’s lawn visitors were female and twenty-five were male. Visits by (or including) males ranged from 10 to 60 minutes, while visits by (or including) females ranged from 5 to 180 minutes. The mean duration of female visits within the sample was 50.2 minutes with a standard deviation of 40.2. The mean duration of male visits within the sample was 26.3 minutes with a standard deviation of 16.4. There were two male single visitors and twenty-six female single visitors in the sample.
The mean duration of female visits was found to be greater than that of male visits in each of six identified cemetery compartments catering for various sociocultural groups. To all compartments combined, mean visits by females were found to be 49.5% longer than mean visits by males (i.e. 27.2 and 18.2 minutes respectively). The greatest variation occurred among visits to children’s graves, where mean visits by females were found to be 90.8% longer than mean visits by males (i.e. 50.2 and 26.3 minutes respectively). Females were also found much less likely than males to visit adult graves on their own, but much more likely than males to make solo visits to children’s graves and to memorial gardens (involving cremated remains).

Anniversaries

![Pie chart showing anniversaries](image)

**Figure 3.22  Personal anniversary visits**

Of all cemetery visits, virtually 20% were found to coincide with a personal anniversary, as shown in Figure 3.22. This illustrates the apparent significance of anniversaries, particularly of death and birthday, in precipitating visits.

Summary of Key Quantitative Findings

This section presents a brief summary of key findings of the quantitative study, and considers the value of such data toward identifying the place of the cemetery in the grief process.

Prior to the current researcher’s preliminary investigations, no specific social data existed on the people now shown to be paying over thirty-three million annual visits to Australia’s two
thousand three hundred cemeteries. An initial exploratory investigation was warranted. The current quantitative data now reveal cemetery visitation to be a significantly high participatory behavioural activity of recently bereaved people, and show larger cemeteries to be among the most visited places in this country.

The vast majority of cemetery traffic is found to relate to regular commemorative visitation, rather than to funerals, and most cemetery visits are found to occur within a few years of the respective death.

From the quantitative data, different frequencies of general cemetery visitation are most evident by relationship to the decedent, family ethnicity, and service type (a choice largely determined by ethnicity). People found most likely to visit a cemetery at least once each week include: those attending the grave of their own child, spouse, or parent; people of Greek-Orthodox and Italian-Catholic families; and those visiting a grave rather than a cremation memorial. Conversely, people found most likely to make very-infrequent visits to a cemetery include: those attending the grave of a grandparent or friend; those of Christian-Protestant and non-religious families; those of British and Australian families; and those visiting a cremation memorial rather than a grave. Personal anniversaries, including death and birthday of the decedent, were found to precipitate significant proportions of cemetery visits.

Relationship data indicate that a greater total volume of visits is made to graves and memorials of parents, while graves and memorials of spouses and children receive a greater degree of more frequent visits. Other bereavement researchers (Raphael 1984; Sanders 1989; Parkes 1996) contend that three types of loss cause inordinate grief: the death of a child, death of a spouse, and the death of a parent. Spouse, parent and child are the same relationships to which the current quantitative study reveals that the majority of cemetery visitation relates, and to which the greatest proportions of more frequent visits are made. It is here suggested that frequency of cemetery visitation relates to the degree of emotional dependence on the decedent, and therefore cemetery visitation is implicated as an important aspect of 'grief-work' for many significantly bereaved people.

The concept of ethnicity refers to a specific cultural group, within which one associates, and includes variables of family nationality and religion. The current research reveals ethnicity to be a significant determinant of primary service choice, memorial type, and frequency of
studies of large populations of grieving persons, and they are at best, statistical generalisations describing what is probable across a particular population. But as Attig adds, 'statements of probability say nothing specific about particular individuals'.

Personal values of the place of the cemetery in the grief process could only be adequately identified and investigated through a complementary qualitative study. The quantitative data provided an ideal basis for selection of suitable qualitative informants, and also offered invaluable insights into appropriate questions required to gather vital qualitative data.

Qualitative Methodology

While a conventional quantitative approach best suited initial exploratory investigation of generalities of cemetery visitation, adequate sociological description of the place of the cemetery in the grief process required a qualitative, or naturalistic, study to reveal the specifics of particular individuals. To this end, an interpretive social science, grounded theory, ethnographic case study approach was considered most appropriate. As Keesing (1981:5) puts it, ethnography is 'the process of recording and interpreting other people's way of life'.

Theoretical Perspective

This section presents an overview of the theoretical perspective adopted to provide a guiding framework for the qualitative study. The naturalistic, or qualitative, perspective of inquiry is explored and found to be most appropriate towards identifying the place of the cemetery in the grief process.

Different social theories are developed to help us understand the social world from different perspectives. However, it must be recognised that all social theories work with generalisation and analytic abstraction (Craib 1992:26) and are value laden in their development and application (Gray 1997:5). Theories are not right or wrong, but chronologically adequate and subject to change. Nevertheless, social theory is invaluable in understanding social action. As Craib (1992:10) says, 'if we can use our theory to find out about the world, then our range of effective action increases; we become more free'.
The Social Science Context

In its continuous quest for greater understanding, modern science has necessarily embraced many methods. Expansion and refinement of scientific methodologies has long since left behind any single notion of a scientific method. As Grinnell (1987: 125) states, ‘Doing science includes many methods; what makes them scientific is their acceptance by the scientific collective’.

Neither is there any single, universally adopted approach to social research. Three major approaches: positivism, critical social science (including structuralism), and interpretive social science (including qualitative sociology), each have their own strengths and weaknesses, proponents and detractors (Neuman 1997:62).

Social research may be undertaken to explore, describe or explain social phenomena. Neuman (1997:19) observes that some studies may have more than one purpose, such as to explore and to describe. Identifying the place of the cemetery in the grief process has involved both initial exploratory research and the more-developed dimension of descriptive research. As suggested by Neuman (1997:20), ‘descriptive and exploratory research have many similarities’ and these may ‘blur together in practice’.

The science of sociology offers systematic and objective investigation of the social world, using rigorous methodological standards, techniques and practices. The interpretive paradigm offers an appropriate sociological approach to the interpretive study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, within the naturalistic, or qualitative, perspective of inquiry.

The Interpretive Paradigm

Interpretive social science, of which German sociologist Max Weber was a founder, initially drew on journalistic and anthropological models. The journalistic approach involved getting behind fronts to expose what was seen to be really happening, while the anthropological approach involved attachment to a group and reporting their particular perspective. According to Neuman (1997:68), ‘Weber argued that social science needed to study meaningful social action, or social action with a purpose’. The interpretive approach is summarised by Neuman (1997) as:
the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds.
(Neuman 1997:68)

The interpretive paradigm suggests that everyone does not share the same meaning system or hold the same values: each person's perception becomes their own reality. Social, physical and intellectual realities can change for individuals over time and in response to specific events.

The Naturalistic Perspective

Sociological perspectives are different ways of attempting to understand the social world. Different perspectives and their techniques are employed to study various social phenomena for specific purposes. No one set of tools is adequate, or indeed appropriate, for all social research.

Naturalistic research is so called because ‘behaviour is allowed to unfold naturally (without interference) in its natural environment – that is, the setting in which it would normally occur’ (Weiten 1998:49). Naturalistic inquiry employs qualitative methodology in attempting to understand individual values of a specific social phenomenon from the perspective of the social actors. It is as such, the methodology best suited to identifying values of the cemetery in the grief process from the perspective of bereaved cemetery visitors and non-visitors.

The naturalistic paradigm has, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), five axioms:

Realities are multiple, constructed and holistic.
Knowers and known are interactive, inseparable,
Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses (idiographic statements) are possible,
All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects, and,
Inquiry is value-bound.
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:37)

Fourteen characteristics of operational naturalistic inquiry are identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985:39), who suggest that ‘these characteristics can be justified’ by ‘their logical dependence on the axioms that undergird the paradigm’ and by ‘their coherence and
interdependence’. These characteristics also ‘display a synergism such that, once one is selected, the others more or less follow’. The identified characteristics of operational naturalistic inquiry are:

- Natural setting,
- Human instrument,
- Utilisation of tacit knowledge,
- Qualitative methods,
- Purposive sampling
- Inductive data analysis,
- Grounded theory,
- Emergent design,
- Negotiated outcomes,
- Case study reporting mode,
- Idiographic interpretation,
- Tentative application,
- Focus determined boundaries, and,
- Special criteria for trustworthiness.

(Lincoln and Guba 1985:39–43)

The following sections explore Lincoln and Guba’s characteristics of naturalistic inquiry, in relation to the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process.

**Natural Setting**

Naturalistic researchers operate within a natural setting or context (a field), rather than any artificial setting. Since naturalism holds that subject phenomena cannot be adequately understood in isolation from their natural context, naturalists engage in field research. Emmerson (1983) describes field research as:

> the study of people acting in the natural courses of their daily lives. The fieldworker ventures into the worlds of others in order to learn firsthand about how they live, how they talk and behave, and what captivates and distresses them. ... It is also seen as a method of study whose practitioners try to understand the meanings that activities observed have for those engaging in them.

(Emmerson 1983:1)

Keesing (1981:5) similarly defines fieldwork as ‘intimate participation in a community and observation of modes of behaviour and the organisation of social life’. However, use of the term ‘field’ may be misleading. In this context, as in the current study, a field site may be more of a social concept than a physical territory. According to Neuman (1997), it is ‘more of an orientation towards research’.
Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that ‘natural inquiry demands a natural setting’ and suggest that:

inquiry must be carried out in a ‘natural’ setting because phenomena of study, whatever they may be – physical, chemical, biological, social, psychological – take their meaning as much from their contexts as they do from themselves.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:189)

Neuman (1997) also considers that the context in which qualitative research is undertaken is critical.

Attention to social context means that a qualitative researcher notes what came before or what surrounds the focus of the study. It also implies that the same events or behaviours can have different meanings in different cultures or historical eras.

(Neuman 1997:331)

William Corsaro (1980), cited by Lincoln and Guba (1985:251), ‘has strongly recommended use of what he terms “prior ethnography”: becoming a participant observer in a situation for a lengthy period of time before the study is actually undertaken’.

Such prior ethnography not only helps to diminish the obtrusiveness of the investigator but also provides a baseline of cultural accommodation and informational orientation that will be invaluable in increasing both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the formal work.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:251)

Neuman (1997:349) agrees that a qualitative researcher ‘needs to be well informed but open to discovering new ideas, suggesting that ‘finding the right questions to ask about the field takes time’. The current researcher’s decade-plus operational and service management experience within one of Australia’s largest, busiest and most multicultural cemeteries provided invaluable ‘prior ethnography’ towards planning and successfully implementing the current research into the place of the cemetery in the grief process. The physical setting in which the current research is based may be the cemetery. However, the ‘field’ in the broader context of naturalistic social science includes bereaved people acting in the natural courses of their daily lives.

**Human Instrument**

Naturalistic researchers use themselves and/or other humans as the primary data gathering instruments, as have classical anthropologists for many years. It is recognised that ‘all
instruments are value-based and interact with local values, but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account (to some extent) those resulting biases’ Lincoln and Guba (1985:40).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:193), ‘in naturalistically based studies everything is indeterminate’ and the naturalist has no choice of instrumentation, ‘because only the human instrument has the characteristics necessary to cope with an indeterminate situation’. Necessary characteristics are identified as: responsiveness, adaptability, holistic emphasis, knowledge base expansion, processual immediacy, opportunities for clarification and summarisation, and opportunity to explore atypical or idiosyncratic responses.

Neuman (1997:354) considers that using the researcher as instrument has two implications. ‘First, it puts pressure on the researcher to be alert and sensitive to what happens in the field and to be disciplined about recording data. Second, it has personal consequences.’ Neuman recognises that fieldwork involves social relationships and personal feelings, and researcher’s own subjective insights and feelings, or ‘experiential data’, are part of the field data.

The current researcher served as primary data-gathering instrument for the qualitative study of the place of the cemetery within the grief process. As may have been expected, qualitative data collection and analysis were much more emotionally taxing on the researcher than was the preceding quantitative study. Others have recognised similar costs of fieldwork:

The price of doing fieldwork is very high, not in dollars ... but in physical and mental effort. (Bogdan and Taylor 1975)

The researcher’s direct involvement in the field often has an emotional impact. Field research can be fun and exciting, but it can also disrupt one’s personal life, physical security, or mental well-being. (Neuman 1997: 348)

Manifestations of compounding emotional stress became noticeable after several in-depth interviews of bereaved persons and constant review of interview recordings during the course of constructing case studies. Ultimately, the researcher sought counsel of a professional grief therapist, and benefited from personal debriefing, as regularly undertaken by professional grief therapists.
The researcher’s initial apprehension and subsequent sense of satisfaction were similar to the experiences of psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes. Of his study of London widows, Parkes confesses that at the outset he had some misgivings about the entire project:

It was not my wish to intrude upon private grief and I was quite prepared to abandon the study if it seemed that my questions were going to cause unnecessary pain. In fact, discussion of the events leading up to the husband’s death and of the widow’s reaction to them did cause pain, and it was quite usual for the widow to break down and cry at some time during our first interview; but, with only one exception, they did not regard this as a harmful experience. On the contrary, the majority seemed grateful for the opportunity to talk freely about the disturbing problems and feelings that preoccupied them.
(Parkes 1996: 28)

As with the current researcher, Parkes personally experienced no sense of intrusion after the first few minutes of initial contact and found that his interviews seemed therapeutic to his subjects, who needed two to three hours to ‘talk through’ the highly charged experiences on their minds. In both studies, questions were kept to a minimum and simply ensured that comparable information about critical events was obtained in each case.

Utilisation of Tacit Knowledge

Keesing (1981) recognises tacit knowledge as ‘unconscious’ knowledge:

As we learn more about learning, it seems increasingly likely that much of what the ethnographer learns never goes into the notebooks: it is in the realm, that for lack of a better term, we call the “unconscious” — a knowledge of scenes and people and sounds and smells that cannot be captured in the written word.
(Keesing 1981:5)

Naturalistic researchers acknowledge the inescapable existence, and legitimate the use, of tacit knowledge in addition to propositional, or expressible, knowledge. Lincoln and Guba consider this is because:

Often the nuances of the multiple realities can be appreciated only in this way; because much of the interaction between investigator and respondent or object occurs at this level; and because tacit knowledge mirrors more fairly and accurately the value patterns of the investigator.
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:40)

The authors suggest that not only is the influence of tacit knowledge unavoidable, but such knowledge is actually essential towards the development of qualitative theory.
Tacit knowledge must not only be admitted but is in fact an indispensable part of the research process; it will be influential whether its influence is recognised or not. ... Tacit knowledge becomes the base on which the human instrument builds many of the insights and hypotheses that will eventually develop (and that will be cast in propositional form).
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:198)

Prior familiarity with the cemetery social and physical environment, previous formal and informal education, and general life experience has all contributed to the current researcher’s tacit knowledge. Valuable knowledge may also be gained tacitly with immersion into the field of study through the literature on bereavement and grief. Invaluable insights, afforded by such knowledge, guided the researcher’s preparation for in-depth interviews and in formulating appropriate research questions. Such insights also influenced the development of sound research methods, enabling some degree of empathy to be displayed to diverse bereaved informants.

**Qualitative Methods**

Naturalistic researchers use qualitative methods over quantitative, although, as Lincoln and Guba point out, not exclusively. Qualitative methods are more sensitive and adaptable to emergent multiple realities, and also to the specific posture of the researcher.

Whatever may be the state of affairs regarding paradigm fit in the so-called hard and life sciences, the naturalistic paradigm provides a better degree of fit with substantive paradigms in the areas of social/behavioural research.
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:198)

Neuman (1997:14) recognises that ‘sometimes qualitative researchers examine quantitative data, and vice versa’, that ‘the two styles are complementary’ (p.327), and that ‘many researchers combine elements from qualitative and quantitative methods in specific research projects’ (p.328).

The initial exploratory quantitative investigation of cemetery visitation was of a complementary nature to the major descriptive study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process; the latter following the lines of ethnographic qualitative inquiry.

In-depth interviews were the primary source of qualitative data collection. During initial discussions with potential informants, the researcher introduced himself as a ‘cemetery
manager and doctoral researcher’, and outlined the objectives of the study. The interview procedure was then outlined and tentative agreement to participate sought. Only two persons approached (both having recently lost a parent), at this point declined to be further interviewed. Where agreement was given, an appointment was made for the main interview to be conducted wherever the informant felt most comfortable. Most interviews were conducted at informant’s homes in Victoria, though several were held at the researcher’s business premises, two in an interstate hotel room, and one at the researcher’s home.

Informants read (or had interpreted to them) the contents of a research ‘Information Sheet’ and ‘Consent Form’ (Appendices 5a & 5b), before formally consenting to the interview. All informants agreed to their interview being tape-recorded.

Most interviews involved only a single informant and the researcher. However, three married couples were interviewed as couples, and three other informants had the support of a close friend or family member present. In another two cases, the daughters of migrant widows assisted with interpreting to and from the informant’s first language. In these latter cases, interview questions were broken down into more simple concepts, generally soliciting rather brief, simple responses. Short responses were often directed back to the researcher in broken English and detailed responses were frequently directed through the respective interpreter. Evidently, many of the more detailed responses were then broken down into brief English expressions. The data gained in this way certainly added a further dimension to existing data and was valuable in this respect, but the resultant ‘thick description’ is comparatively ‘thin’ in these particular case studies.

Interviews were semi-structured, utilising a few primary questions to guide what was otherwise an ad hoc discussion, loosely following specific themes. Appendix 6 presents the semi-structured, qualitative interview guide utilised.

Main interviews ranged in time, from less than one hour to over three hours. Most home visits concluded with the researcher being shown around the house to see how the informant ‘now lives’ and to be shown photographs and other memorabilia of the decedent. Wherever possible, the researcher subsequently visited the specific cemetery and grave or memorial of the decedent. This provided additional insights into individual scenes of commemoration and visitation.
Purposive Sampling

According to Neuman (1997:206), purposive sampling is ‘an acceptable kind of sampling for special situations’, which ‘uses the judgement of an expert in selecting cases or it selects cases with a specific purpose in mind’. Neuman (1997) further suggests that purposive sampling is appropriate in three situations: to select unique cases that are especially informative, to select members of a difficult to reach, specialised population, and to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation. All three situations for purposive sampling presented themselves in the qualitative study of the place of the cemetery within the grief process.

Purposive sampling offers the naturalist advantages over generalisation-oriented random sampling which, Lincoln and Guba suggest, is likely to suppress more deviant cases, as well as the likelihood that a full array of multiple realities will be uncovered. Particular characteristics of purposive sampling are identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as: emergent sampling design, serial selection of sample units, continuous adjustment or ‘focussing’ of the sample, and selection to the point of redundancy.

Naturalistic sampling ... is based on informational, not statistical, considerations. Its purpose is to maximise information, not facilitate generalisation. ... the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level.
Lincoln and Guba (1985: 202)

Within the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, it was initially intended to conduct less than twenty in-depth interviews of cemetery visitors, however, qualitative data gathering did not reach a point of apparent redundancy of data until some twenty-four interviews had been completed.

As quantitative data indicated relationship of the decedent and religion of the family to be the most significant determinants of cemetery visitation, purposive sampling was employed to ensure that a good cross-section of these variables, in particular, is to be found among the case studies.

Informants were contacted through various sources, including appeals to a service club and an industry convention. Access to other informants was gained through specific ‘gatekeepers’, including a professional bereavement counsellor, and clerics of Orthodox, Salvation Army,
and Buddhist faiths. A few informants were directly approached, whilst visiting cemetery compartments serving specifically targeted sociocultural groups.

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Notes:
(1) Includes Anglican
(2) Denotes relationship of the decedent to the informant.
(3) Includes de facto.
(4) Includes adult offspring and grandchild.
(5) Includes in-law.
(6) Twenty-four case studies involved a total twenty-five decedents.
(7) Quantitative data indicate the median age of cemetery visitors to be fifty-six years.

Table 3.2  Quantities of qualitative informants relating to specific attributes of visitors

Though the cases were intended to represent the specific experiences of a few individuals only, informants were purposively selected to include common attributes of typical cemetery visitors, as identified from the qualitative data. Table 3.2 shows how specific quantitative variables of cemetery visitors and the attributes of twenty-seven qualitative informants are numerically represented within the resultant case studies (Appendix 8). The twenty-four interviews involved twenty-one individuals and three couples.
Inductive Data Analysis

The researcher’s goal, is ‘to organise a large quantity of specific details into a coherent picture, model, or set of interlocked concepts’ (Neuman 1997:420), while data analysis itself may be defined as ‘a search for patterns in data – recurrent behaviours, objects, or a body of knowledge’ (Neuman 1997:426). Inductive data analysis begins with detailed observations of the world and moves toward more abstract generalisations and ideas.

Inductive analysis ... begins not with theories or hypotheses but with the data themselves, from which theoretical categories and relational propositions may be arrived at by inductive reasoning processes.
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:333)

As Lincoln and Guba (1985:203) say, it is the inverse of the usual mode of deductive data analysis used in conventional investigations. A naturalistic investigator ‘typically does not work with either a priori theory or variables’ (both characteristics of conventional studies); ‘these are expected to emerge from the inquiry’.

Data accumulated in the field thus must be analysed inductively (that is, from specific, raw units of information to subsuming categories of information) in order to define local working hypotheses or questions that can be followed up.
Lincoln and Guba (1985:203)

Within the current study, data analysis commenced implicitly during collection, as recurring concepts and recognisable patterns emerged. Case study data coding was undertaken to facilitate simultaneous analytical categorisation and reduction of data into recognisable concepts. Data codes are ‘tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’ (Miles and Huberman 1994:56).

Inductive data analysis, in the current study, involved a recursive process of review and coding. Case studies were systematically analysed by sentences, emerging concepts noted, and emergent concepts then structured by logical relationships. Successive reviews involved divergent and convergent re-coding within a developing structure. Appendix 10 lists the adopted analysis themes and coding applied to each concept within the categorisation structure.
Case studies were further reviewed and codes relating to specific concepts inserted at the commencement of respective paragraphs. Appendix 11 presents a sample case study report page showing insertion of coding at beginning of paragraphs. The study’s emerging focus and inductive analysis suggested that only specific concepts would contribute significantly to empirical knowledge of the place of the cemetery in the grief process.

Coding of case studies facilitated ready retrieval of all sections of text alluding to each identified concept. Documents were systematically searched by codes, and paragraphs or sentences containing references to specific concepts were cut and pasted under pseudonyms of respective informants. Appendix 12 illustrates this method of analysis for a sample category or theme.

Frequency of occurrence of each concept within the data (ie. numbers of informants commenting on each concept and numbers of comments by each informant) was taken as a crude indication of possible significance of such concepts. Informant’s attitudes to such concepts were reviewed and typical, or highly illustrative, quotations used to portray sentiments expressed.

The inductive approach adopted in the current qualitative study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process involved systematic analysis of case studies, identification and refinement of concepts, and development of empirical generalisations. Through this methodology, the resultant theory was grounded in the data, or was built from the ground up.

**Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is theory that emerges from data rather than preceding data. It is, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990:24), ‘a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived theory about a phenomenon’.

As Lincoln and Guba put it, grounded theory ‘is discovered empirically rather than expounded a priori’. They consider that the naturalist:

prefers to have the guiding substantive theory emerge from (be grounded in) the data because no a priori theory could possibly encompass the multiple realities that are likely to be encountered’

Lincoln and Guba (1985:41)
Neuman (1997) describes the purpose of grounded theory as being:

...to build a theory that is faithful to the evidence. It is a method for discovering new theory. In it the researcher compares unlike phenomena with a view towards learning similarities. He or she sees micro-level events as the foundation for a more macro-level explanation.
(Neuman 1997: 334)

As suggested by Lincoln and Guba, no a priori theory could possibly have encompassed the multiple realities that were encountered in the current study of the place of the cemetery within the grief process. The currently proposed theory of cemetery visitation is therefore grounded in the personal experiences of informants, as presented in the case studies.

**Emergent Design**

Within the naturalistic paradigm, researchers ‘allow the research design to emerge (flow, cascade, unfold) rather than to construct it preordinately (a priori) because it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about the many multiple realities to devise the design adequately’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:41). As Neuman (1997:370) says: ‘the field researcher first gets a general picture, then focuses on a few specific problems or issues’.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out that ‘the steps of purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, development of grounded theory, and specification of steps in an emergent design interact and are reiterated multiple times in the course of any particular investigation’.

Indeed there is no end to emergent design; it seems likely that any naturalistic investigation could be continued indefinitely, since it will continually dredge up new questions and insights worth pursuing.
(Lincoln and Guba 1985:211)

No a priori theory construction was attempted in planning the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process. Rather, towards answering the primary research question, the research has undergone a flowing, but reiterative, design process. Ultimately, the study has reached a satisfactory conclusion within necessary constraints of time and the specific research focus.
Negotiated Outcomes

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:41), the naturalist ‘prefers to negotiate meanings and interpretations with the human sources from which the data have chiefly been drawn because it is their constructions of reality that the inquirer seeks to reconstruct’. Neuman (1997) refers to this technique as ‘member validation’. Negotiated outcomes are essential toward meeting the trustworthiness criterion of ‘credibility in the eyes of the information sources’, which, Lincoln and Guba (1985:213) consider, parallels ‘the conventional criterion of internal validity’.

Outcomes of the current research into cemetery visitation were negotiated with informants or their representatives. Draft case study reports were presented to respective informants to validate accurate portrayal of their expressed words and feelings. Informants were requested to suggest any corrections, additions or deletions to the draft document. A standard letter requesting this review is presented as Appendix 9. Most informants expressed full satisfaction with the first draft case study, but two suggested minor alterations. In these cases, amended reports were ultimately validated, as were all others.

Verbatim review comments on the draft case studies from informants include the following.

‘No, there’s nothing I would change; I mean that’s what I said; it’s just my words.’
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

‘It’s very accurate. I thought it was very good. My daughter also read it and she also thought it was very good.’
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4.5 years)

‘It was alright. Yeah, I hope it is helpful.’
(59 year old, Sri Lankan Buddhist daughter, bereaved 3 months)

‘It was really funny, reading what I said. My husband also had a laugh, because he read it too. I said, “Do I really sound like that?” and he said, “That’s exactly you; that’s just how you sound”.’
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)
'This is very good. Could we have a copy of it – but with our real names – for the family?'
(Daughter of, and interpreter for, 70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

'It was alright. It was quite correct. You can put our real names on it if you want.'
(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Case Study Reporting Mode

The naturalist ‘is likely to prefer the case study reporting mode (over the scientific or technical report) because it is more adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered at any given site’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:41).

Case studies serve three purposes: thick description, axiomatic representation, and vicarious reader experience (Lincoln and Guba 1985:215). Thick description is a ‘portrayal’ of a situation, and enables transferability judgements to be made. Case reporting is also ‘the form most responsive to the axioms of the naturalistic paradigm’ and provides the reader with ‘a vicarious experience of the inquiry setting’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:214).

Attig (1996:7) considers that ‘stories of loss through death are the heart of the matter in reflection on loss and coping’. According to Neuman (1997:30), ‘case studies help researchers connect the micro level, or the actions of individual people, to the macro level, or large-scale social structures and processes’. From case studies, qualitative researchers are able to measure, in-depth, many features from a relatively few cases. The case study method has been employed in the current research as a means of identifying common and contrasting experiences of diverse mourners.

The current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process uses case studies as the primary data source. Tape recordings of interviews were transcribed (for a sample crude transcription, see Appendix 7) then edited, deleting what was considered unnecessary or irrelevant discussion, including the researcher’s own questions and any superfluous repetitions. Names and any other identifying factors were substituted, and some broken
speech reconstructed where this enhanced the flow of expression. This process resulted in the production of twenty-four condensed draft case studies (Appendix 8).

Although newspaper-style headings have been applied to the case studies, the headings are not intended to sensationalise the personal stories of informants. Headings are provided in this style to assist the reader to appreciate the variety of faiths, relationships and experiences represented, and thereby readily identify specific cases of particular interest.

**Idiographic Interpretation**

The naturalist ‘is inclined to interpret data (including the drawing of conclusions) idiomatically (in terms of the particulars of the case) rather than nomothetically (in terms of lawlike generalisations) because different interpretations are likely to be meaningful for different realities’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:42).

Generalisations – nomothetic statements – are always underdetermined (there is always more than one way to account for any set of data) and, when applied to the individual case, are at best problematic.

(Lincoln and Guba 1985:216)

To the naturalistic researcher, idiographic interpretation means that data is meaningful only in its own time and full context.

Total immersion in a context is required to legitimate the claim that even partial understanding has been achieved. And that understanding can apply only to that context from which it was derived.

(Lincoln and Guba 1985:216)

Findings of the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process are interpreted as an idiographic portrayal, rather than as any universally applicable generalisations.

**Tentative Application**

The naturalist ‘is likely to be tentative (hesitant) about making broad application of the findings because realities are multiple and different’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:42).

an investigator can make no statements about transferability for his or her findings based solely on data from the studied context alone. At best the investigator can supply only that information about the studied site that may make possible a judgement of transferability to
some other site; the final judgement on that matter is, however, vested in the person seeking to make the transfer, who must be in possession of similar data for the receiving context. (Lincoln and Guba 1985:217)

Findings of the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process are presented for tentative application only, rather than any attempt made to hold such findings as definitive and of universal application.

Focus Determined Boundaries

The naturalist is likely to set boundaries to the inquiry on the basis of the emergent focus, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985:42), because that permits the multiple realities to define the focus (rather than inquirer preconceptions).

what guides naturalistic inquiry is the focus of the study, in exactly the same way that the focus guides the conventional study. (Lincoln and Guba 1985:217-218)

The focus of the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process is the personal experiences of individual mourners, and the ways in which such people give meaning to cemetery visitation and related commemorative activities.

Boundaries of the research include the number and type of informants, and duration of bereavement. Selected informants included twenty-seven bereaved adult Australian residents of specific ethnicities and relationships to the decedent, bereaved between two months and five years.

Rather than being predetermined, these boundaries were determined by emergent focus and design of the study, towards maximising values of necessarily limited data.

Special Criteria for Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a crucial element of any scientific research. The researcher must be able to convincingly demonstrate to his or her audience that confidence in the results is well founded. The naturalist 'is likely to find the conventional trustworthiness criteria (internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity) inconsistent with the axioms and procedures of naturalistic inquiry', according to Lincoln and Guba (1985:42), who propose:
that these conventional formulations be replaced with four new terms that have a better fit with naturalistic epistemology: ... “credibility” (in place of internal validity), “transferability” (in place of external validity), “dependability” (in place of reliability), and “confirmability” (in place of objectivity).

(Lincoln and Guba 1985:219)

Nevertheless, according to Neuman (1997), reliability in field research is based on the concepts of internal consistency and external consistency. Neuman (1997:369) defines validity as ‘the confidence placed in a researcher’s analysis and data as accurately representing the social world in the field’.

The current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process is here reviewed in accord with Lincoln and Guba’s trustworthiness criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility relates to acceptance as truth by those being studied. It is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the naturalist’s alternative trustworthiness criterion to internal validity.

According to Neuman (1997), for interpretative social science:

a theory is true if it makes sense to those being studied and if it allows others to understand deeply or enter the reality of those being studied. The theory or description is accurate if the researcher conveys a deep understanding of the way others reason, feel, and see things.

(Neuman 1997:71-72)

In the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, member validated case studies are constructed in such manner that readers may enter the reality of bereaved cemetery visitors and derive a deep understanding of the ways that such visitors reason, feel and view things. As Craib (1992:93) suggests ‘we understand people when we understand what they think they know about the world, their meanings, and self-conceptions’.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:301) consider that techniques or activities making it more likely that credible findings and interpretations will be produced include prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and member checks.
The first, *prolonged engagement*, is the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the ‘culture’, testing for information introduced by distortions either of self or of the respondents, and building trust. (Lincoln and Guba 1985:301)

It is suggested that prolonged engagement involves spending ‘time enough to become oriented to the situation’, ‘soaking in the culture’, and is ‘sufficiently long to detect and take account of distortions that might otherwise creep into the data’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985). But mere prolonged engagement may be inadequate without persistent observation.

The technique of *persistent observation* adds the dimension of *salience* to what might otherwise appear to be little more than mindless immersion. (Lincoln and Guba 1985:304)

The researcher’s prolonged engagement and persistent observation over more than a decade of working within Australia’s largest and most-visited cemetery, while researching and simultaneously striving to meet the service needs of culturally-diverse bereaved visitors, suggests adequate acculturation for such an ethnomethodological study.

The technique of triangulation takes its name from the geometric survey technique of identifying a specific data point from two or more different angles (Neuman 1997; Lincoln and Guba 1985). However, in social research:

*triangulation* means using different types of measures, or data collection techniques, in order to examine the same variable. It is a special use of multiple indicators. ... The basic idea is that measurement improves when diverse indicators are used. As the diversity of indicators gets greater, our confidence in measurement grows, because getting identical measurements from highly diverse methods implies greater validity than if a single or similar methods had been used. (Neuman 1997:151)

Multiple indicators used in the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process include the quantitative questionnaire, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and relevant literature, including comparative findings of related studies. Key findings through the different indicators are generally consistent and supportive of each other, suggesting considerable objectivity and credibility.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:314) consider the *member check* to be the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Member checking is the process of testing data and its interpretations
with members of the groups studied. ‘Member checking is a process carried out with respect to constructions’ and is ‘directed at a judgement of overall credibility’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:315-316). In the current study, member checking included the validation of respective case study reports by informants. Unanimous approval of the case study reports suggests that the base data and researcher’s interpretations are credible to members.

Transferability

Transferability is the ability of the findings to be representative within other similar contexts. It is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the naturalist’s alternative trustworthiness criterion to external validity.

However, Lincoln and Guba (1985:316) find that the establishment of transferability by the naturalist is, in a strict sense, impossible. Idiographic interpretation and tentative application mean that ‘the naturalist can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context within which they were found to hold’.

Whether they hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue, the resolution of which depends upon the degree of similarity between sending and receiving (or earlier and later) contexts. Lincoln and Guba (1985:316)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) conclude that the naturalist’s task, rather than being to provide ‘an index of transferability’, is to provide ‘the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers’. Accordingly, of the current interpretive study, no claim concerning direct transferability of the findings to other contexts can be assured.

Nevertheless, within a similar context, several concepts emanating from the current study data may be at least partially transferable, and satisfactorily appropriated. Consequently, it is suggested that the current study findings are likely to be quite important in the broader context, towards general understanding of concepts of the place of the cemetery in the grief process.
**Dependability**

Dependability is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the naturalist’s alternative trustworthiness criterion to reliability. The authors argue that ‘since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability) a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter’ (Lincoln and Guba 1985:316).

According to Weiten (1998):

> A case study is an in-depth investigation of an individual subject. ... Case studies are particularly well suited for investigating certain phenomena ... They can also provide compelling real-life illustrations that bolster a hypothesis or theory. However, the clinical samples typically seen in case study research may not be very representative of the general population.  
> Weiten (1998:50)

The current case studies present only the specific experiences of a few individuals and do not purport to represent a highly representative cross-section of the Australian population, nor of all cemetery visitors. Nevertheless, the cases purposively selected are not too dissimilar to what might constitute a small sample of typical cemetery visitors.

If Lincoln and Guba’s argument that a demonstration of credibility is sufficient to establish dependability is accepted, then the above case for credibility of the current study should also hold for its dependability.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the naturalist’s alternative trustworthiness criterion to objectivity. While recognising that pure objectivity is impossible to attain in any study, and that the researcher’s tacit knowledge and personal biases will in some ways influence the outcomes of any scientific research, the current researcher has endeavoured to remain as objective as possible.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:318) propose that confirmability may best be established by an inquiry audit. Such inquiry audit trail would follow raw data, data reduction and analysis, data reconstruction and synthesis, process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information.

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Appendices to this thesis include documentary evidence of specific techniques employed throughout processes of data collection (Appendices 4, 5 & 6), reduction (Appendix 7), reconstruction (Appendix 8), validation (Appendix 9) and analysis (Appendices 10, 11 & 12). Process notes, materials relating to intentions and dispositions, and instrument development information are also appended (Appendix 13).

It is suggested that the confirmability of the current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process is consistent with Lincoln and Guba’s criteria for credibility.

Ethical Considerations

Important ethical considerations of the current interpretive study of the place of the cemetery within the grief process include:

- Full disclosure of the project objectives and values of the study to prospects,
- Consent to use and publish sensitive, personal and family details of informants,
- Empathy in soliciting sensitive data within an emotional, lengthy interview process,
- Recording interviews,
- Confidentiality of data and anonymity of informants.

All interviews followed a previous meeting or telephone discussion with prospective informants, during which the objectives and values of the study, and nature of the proposed interview were outlined. Prior to interviews, all informants read, or had read (or interpreted) to them by a personal representative, the content of a research Information Sheet (Appendix 5a). Only then, and following any further explanatory discussion on the research, did all informants grant formal consent to their voluntary participation in the study (Appendix 5b).

Full disclosure of the project objectives and values of the study to prospects was realised partly through initial introductory discussion, but more specifically through the Information Sheet, and preamble discussion to in-depth interviews.
Consent to use and publish sensitive, personal and family details of informants was implicit in initial discussions, but also formally granted in each case through signing the Consent Form.

Empathy in soliciting sensitive data within an emotional, lengthy interview process is evidenced by the validation of case studies by all informants, and the specific comments from some informants. Although interviews were not proposed as a form of bereavement therapy, in the cases of two male informants who had specifically requested they be included and interviewed in relation to their respective bereavements, the men’s partners subsequently reported therapeutic benefits from the exercise.

‘The interview reads well and is as [my friend] spoke, so we both agreed that it reflects accurately how he responded to your questions. I must tell you that after the actual interview, [he] was surprised at how much he had been able to feel again and welcomed the opportunity. It was very therapeutic for him. I feel you were extremely sensitive with all the issues raised.’

(Companion of 51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

‘It was really helpful to read what you wrote. I got the feeling you really understood how we felt. It was really interesting to read what we went through; and I think it’s helped me, somehow, to get over it more.’

(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

British psychiatrist, Colin Murray Parkes (1996) similarly found that:

The very act of persuading the bereaved person to explain their situation to an ignorant outsider can be very therapeutic for, while the other person is explaining themselves to us, they are also explaining themselves to themselves and getting the situation into perspective.

(Parkes 1996:184)

All informants in the current study verbally agreed and formally consented to the tape recording of interviews. The presence of a micro cassette recorder, usually sitting on a table between the researcher and informant, seemed to be immediately ignored by virtually all informants, and without exception, did not impede natural flow of discussion.

Confidentiality of data and anonymity of informants was guaranteed as a condition of participation. However, several informants suggested that anonymity and confidentiality were
not important issues. Some informants would have preferred their real names and identifying data to have been included in published case study reports.

No evidence emerged during or subsequent to the interview process to suggest that individual participants were harmed by the case study approach. The research involved no coercion, deception, or invasion of privacy. All informants were fully informed and each acknowledged that data collection might evoke emotions of loss and grief. Many interviews did involve considerable emotional release, and some informants took occasional pauses of respite; though none chose to abort the interview, even when specifically offered that option.

This concludes the review of the methodologies employed in the current research. The following chapter presents an interpretive analysis of the case study data.
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Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis Concepts

This chapter presents an interpretive ethnographic analysis of the data drawn from the case studies. Sixty-eight concepts were identified from the case study data and these were individually coded and categorised as specific themes for analysis, as illustrated in Appendix 10. Major categories, into which these concepts were structured, are identified as psychosocial history, bereavement, funeral, adjustment, cemetery, visitation, reflection, and other.

Due to the quantity of the total data gathered, and the necessarily specific research focus on the place of the cemetery in the grief process, only those coded concepts yielding data of specific value toward answering the primary research question are here analysed. The following twenty-three such identified concepts are categorised as subsets of the above major analysis categories of ‘Cemetery’ and ‘Visitation’.

| Cemetery: Memorial: Significance, |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Values: Cultural, Heritage, Peace/Solace, Personal, Remembrance, Respect, Sacredness, Social, |

| Visitation: Activities: Conversation, Flowers, Maintenance, Prayer, Other, |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Emotions: Fear, Guilt, Happiness, Pain, Sadness, |

Frequency,
Reasons,
Values,
Waning.

Further refinement and convergence of data culminated in the following vital concepts, which are analysed in this chapter:

Visitation Reasons,
Non-Visitation Reasons,
Visitation Values,
Visitation Activities,
Visitation Emotions,
Visitation Frequency,
Memorial Values, and,
Cemetery Values.

Appendix 12 illustrates the analytical process undertaken with the first of these concepts or categories of analysis. In the following analysis of vital concepts, typical or highly illustrative quotations from the case studies are used to portray sentiments expressed and informant's own meanings and interpretations. Throughout this chapter, case study informants are identified by their age, nationality, relationship to the deceased, religion, and period of bereavement.

**Visitation Reasons**

This section comprises an interpretive, ethnographic account of self-reported reasons why bereaved people actually visit cemeteries. Cemetery visitation is here defined as physically entering a cemetery and locating, inspecting, or performing commemorative activities in relation to a specific grave or memorial.

The data reveal three principal reasons and several apparently less-significant reasons for visitation, as well as several reasons for not visiting cemeteries. Principle reasons for visiting a respective cemetery are identified as:
Fulfilling a sense of obligation,
Maintaining a sense of relationship, and,
Seeking solace.

Not all informants discussed their reasons for or against visiting a respective cemetery. Of twenty-seven qualitative informants (four of whom were non-visitors), twenty-two did refer to reasons for visiting and/or reasons for not visiting. Informant’s own interpretations of their expressed reasons for visiting the cemetery are presented in the following sections.

Fulfilling a Sense of Obligation

Fourteen of the twenty-three visiting informants referred, either directly or indirectly, to a sense of obligation felt towards visiting the grave or memorial. Such perceived obligation may be to either the decedent, the family or to the visitor themself. It may also relate to the expectations of others. Other reasons relating to a sense of obligation include religious duty, perceived duty of respect, and an innate compulsion to visit.

The following comments illustrate typical sentiments expressed towards fulfilling a perceived sense of obligation or duty, in the first case to the decedent, in the second case to the family, and in the third case to one’s self.

‘I’ll keep going; I promised my father I’d keep going for him.’
(47 year old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)

‘At first after she died, every time I drove past, I used to feel that I had to go, otherwise I was somehow letting the side down.’
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

‘I think it is perhaps a sense of duty that I feel to go there now. I feel it’s a duty to me, because – it’s a silly thought – if you don’t go, you feel that you’re forgetting the person.’
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

Fulfilling a perceived expectation of others was mentioned by two informants, both being non-religious husbands.
‘In the beginning, people expect you to go there. If I were really truthful, I’d probably have to say that most of the times I went were because people expected me to. To be honest, I felt a bit guilty if I hadn’t been when people thought I should have. Now I go when I want to go: when I feel like it and not when other people think I should be going.’

(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

Five informants spoke of a perceived religious duty to visit, including two Italian Catholic widows, who both considered that their faith certainly influences the frequency of their visits.

‘The Catholic thing to do is go once a week. It is a religious obligation and a duty to [my husband] and to God’.

(70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

‘Of course, that’s what you feel. That’s why you go into the cemetery, because if not that feeling, well what for do you go?’

(66 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 5 years)

However, a somewhat less-committed and less-traditional Italian Catholic son said:

‘I don’t visit out of any religious obligation, purely out of a feeling that I should see Dad.’

(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Although neither Roman Catholicism nor Islam specifically encourages or discourages cemetery visitation, to some bereaved adherents of both faiths, a perceived religious obligation to visit evidently does exist.

‘A special day for Muslims on Fridays. ... It is very important to be there, especially on Fridays. I come every Friday, and sometimes on Sundays or Saturdays.’

(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Judaism requires appropriate cemetery visitation to be observed. According to Lamm (1969:192), visitors should ‘avoid the extremes of constant visitation on the one hand, but of complete disregard on the other’. Graves are to be visited at proper times, including ‘days of calamity or decisive moments in life’, but not on holy days. Accordingly, a Jewish informant advised that:
'After a funeral, the immediate family is not permitted to go to the cemetery for thirty days or four weeks, so as a family we all went four weeks later. After the thirty days, we have a special service. ... Jewish law actually states that it is more important to go to the cemetery on important days like birthdays, memorial days, prior to high holidays and the anniversary of the death. It is not required to go daily, weekly or on a fortnightly basis and have a routine. Some people would actually condemn frequent visitation to the cemetery.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

No Protestant Christian informants considered that their cemetery visitation is in any way influenced by their faith.

Three informants commented on a perceived duty of respect as a reason for visiting the cemetery.

'I sort of felt that somehow it would be disrespectful, selfish, in bad taste, not to go in there. ... There's not a sense of visiting her, but there is a sense of duty done and respecting a memory: of ensuring that anybody else who goes there will see that the memory is respected and not neglected.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Two informants identified respect as a reason for paying secondary visits to other relatives, whilst in the cemetery primarily to visit a specific closer relative.

'I sometimes do the rounds of the family, but that's more out of respect than anything else, if I've got time, ... I would've gone to visit my grandparents just purely through respect, but with my father, it's a bit more. There is more emotion attached to the visit, because it's my father.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Compulsive visitation was identified in five informants: three being mothers, one a grandmother, and the other a lone husband. Compulsive visitation appears more common shortly after the loss of a child or spouse, but can persist in cases of chronic grief.

'I have to come and see him; I have to look after him. ... I have to do something. I can't do anything for him at home, so I have to come and just talk to him. People might think I'm being silly; but quite frankly, I don't care what people think. That's my child there and this is the last thing I can do for him.'
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

I felt that for [my wife], it was becoming a compulsion: "I've got to go; I'm relied upon". ... I didn't want to get to the stage of going to the cemetery like that: "I've got
to go, because I’ll be relied on to be there”. I thought that would have been extremely unhealthy, not only for her, but also for me too.’
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

’I go every day and it just helps me to sleep.’
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Maintaining a Sense of Relationship

Twelve of the twenty-three visiting informants discussed issues indicative of endeavours to maintain a sense of ongoing personal relationship with the decedent. Talking to the decedent, maintaining the monument, and placing gifts were found to be common graveside activities of visitors apparently seeking to maintain such sense of relationship.

’I’m just his Mum. It’s my motherly instinct to look after him and to make sure everything’s well maintained and pretty, just as if he was at home, where I could look after him. That mother/child bond will always be there. I mean, I gave birth to him and I’ve got to do what I can for him – and for myself.’
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

’I come to the cemetery everyday purely because – well, [my wife] and me have been together for close to forty-eight years, so I just want to be with her for a few minutes – no other reasons.’
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

’It’s like the only place that I could identify in a physical sense with the last existence of him as a person. That made me understand why people do go to the cemetery, I could never understand why people go all the time; and I still couldn’t go all the time. But the people who do go every week, go because they’re looking at that place and saying, “That’s where that person is; that’s where that person lies”, and therefore to visit and see and communicate or contact that person, they must be in that place.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Endeavours to maintain a sense of relationship with the decedent (perhaps combined with a sense of duty) become most evident on special anniversaries, including anniversaries of birth and death, Mothers Day, Fathers Day, various religious festivals such as Christmas, Easter, and some non-Christian events. Inclusion of the decedent in these events is evidently very important to many bereaved people. Seven informants specifically mentioned the importance of visiting the decedent on special anniversaries.
'I'll go up on birthdays – including my own – because he can't come to my birthday, so I have to go up and see him. I tend to go at Christmas, birthdays and Easter and those types of things.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

'I don't feel that I have to go; it's just, I go on special occasions. It seems to have settled down to anniversaries, birthdays and before I'm going away, you know. It's just that I can't buy him presents: because we always exchanged gifts on these occasions.'
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)

However, not all informants hold any concept of an afterlife, nor seek any sense of on-going relationship with the decedent. One pragmatic husband commented that:

'If people live after death, they only do so in the minds of the people they leave behind.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Seeking Solace

Twelve of the twenty-three visiting informants commented on visiting the respective cemetery specifically to seek solace or relief from emotions of grief and guilt.

Nine informants specifically mentioned cemetery visitation as having some therapeutic benefit towards grief resolution, or at least giving some solace. Regular cemetery visitation, at least within the first year or so, is evidently very important to many people working their way through personal grief.

'For the initial twelve months, I needed to go there and leave flowers and talk to her. I think that helped me in my own personal grieving process.'
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

'In the morning, I stay there for two hours, then I go home and if I'm feeling his death, I come back again. It makes me feel much better.'
(47 year old, Turkish Muslim mother, bereaved 14 months)

'You feel that you need to go because your hurt is still there, but as you start to get your life back together, or back to normality, the pain eases off.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)
A single specific anniversary visit may not provide similar cathartic value to that evidently derived by many visitors from regular visitation.

'[My sister’s] eldest daughter decided ... to get married on the anniversary of [her father’s] death. The day before my niece’s wedding, my husband took my sister out to the cemetery, to sort of help her get through her depression. We thought it might have helped her, but it didn’t.’
(43 year old, Australian sister-in-law of eclectic faith, bereaved 3 years)

Some people, particularly those in less emotionally-close relationships, may not require the solace sought by others from frequent cemetery visitation.

'I don’t think going there is significant in the grieving process, in the sense that some people do.’
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Feelings of guilt are well recognised as a common grief reaction among many bereaved people. Seven informants mentioned feelings of guilt in relation to not attending as often as they (or others) think they should, and at ending visits. One husband well described his feelings and resolution of such feelings.

'I found that I would be saying to myself, “Oh, God: I haven’t been to the cemetery, I’d better go over”. I would go as a matter of deliberate intent, because I’d say, “I haven’t been”. So I’d go and get in the car and I’d drive over there and tidy up around the grave, which served a few purposes. First of all it stopped me feeling guilty, because if I haven’t been there for a while I might feel a bit guilty about it, so I went. ... I then found that I wasn’t feeling guilty about not visiting the grave ... as other interests in life began to intervene.’
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Other Reasons

Nine of the twenty-three visiting informants identified reasons for going to the cemetery other than the principal reasons of fulfilling a sense of obligation, maintaining a sense of relationship and drawing solace. Other reasons include taking or accompanying a principal visitor, being in the vicinity with time to spare, inspecting the monument, and habit.

Four informants commented on visiting to take (or accompany) family or friends.
‘I’ve been to my grandfather’s grave about four times since his burial, but only one of those occasions was by myself. The others were to show relatives who had come to town.’

(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

‘Because I mainly visit at [my wife’s] prompts, I just respond to her need to go. It’s not important for me personally; it’s more that I go to support [her]. It’s not something that I have to do and I have no perception of guilt about it; none at all.’

(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

Four informants commented on visiting when finding themselves in the vicinity of the cemetery with time to spare.

‘If I go to town to get pizza by myself, I’ll eat it near the cemetery. That’s when I sort of think of her ... if I’ve got nothing else to do. I’ve only ever driven in there a few times just to go and see her.’

(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

‘I’ve been ... a few times recently, probably because we’ve been in the area making arrangements to move.’

(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

Two informants commented on visiting specifically to inspect a newly erected monument.

‘When I did go by myself, ... I was just driving past and I thought it was a good time to go in and have a look at the headstone, which I hadn’t seen. It was good to see that he’s been memorialised in a nice way.’

(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Cemetery visitation can evidently become habitual (without necessarily becoming compulsive) for some people. Three informants commented on visiting out of habit.

‘At times – and I have felt this on quite a few weekends – we go there just because it’s something that we do; it’s just become a custom to us.’

(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

At least one informant considered that habitual visitation may devalue the meaning and importance of cemetery visitation.
'I don't want to ever get used to it to the point where you go every Sunday and wipe it down and clean it: and that's what you do next Sunday as well. I don't want it to become a routine that I just get used to.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

**Non-Visitation Reasons**

Four informants were not cemetery visitors and ten others commented on either their own reasons for occasional non-visitation or the non-visitation of others. Identified reasons for some bereaved people not visiting include:

- Non-interment of remains,
- Inability to access the cemetery,
- Grief repression,
- Religious restrictions, and,
- No perceived need to visit.

Informant’s own understandings of their expressed reasons for not visiting a cemetery are presented in turn in the following sections.

**Non-Interment of Remains**

Many families that choose cremation have no specific reason to visit a cemetery. According to the Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association (1998), the interment rate of cremated remains within cemeteries is currently only 42%. In the current study, two of seven informants, in cases where the decedent was cremated, reported no interment of remains. In one case, the ashes were stored in a cupboard for a combination of reasons, while in the other, they were scattered in accord with cultural tradition.

In at least some cases where remains are not interred, fulfilling expressed wishes of the decedent is considered more important than facilitating grief resolution of survivors. Four informants spoke of meeting the wishes of decedents.
'Both my mother and father were cremated and there are no ashes, no plots: nothing. That's what they wanted; that's what they got.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

Other reasons expressed for not interring remains at a cemetery included bitter family dispute, holding-on, indecision, and traditional scattering.

Inability to Access the Cemetery

Two informants reported that they were infrequent travellers and the remains of their respective decedents were interred in interstate cemeteries. Other informants also identified proximity of the cemetery as a significant factor in the frequency of visits.

Grief Repression

By deliberately avoiding the cemetery, and therefore avoiding confrontation by its sometimes-perceived harsh reality, some bereaved people seek to bury distressing thoughts and feelings in their subconsciousness.

'I feel that if I went to that cemetery, I'd feel that it just happened yesterday. I would feel that I'd lost him all over again and I'd start from the beginning now. It makes it definite, you know. But perhaps I'm playing a game where I think he's away somewhere and perhaps he'll come back. I don't want to look at that ground and know he's there: it's too final, it's absolutely too final. I keep away from there.'
(75 year old, Australian Catholic wife, bereaved 14 months)

Other bereaved people also consider it preferable to repress unpleasant memories, and avoid potentially recurrent grief reactions to visiting, by staying away from the cemetery.

'Why put yourself though another sadness when you don't need to? I know that if I went there, all these memories from the accident would all come back; so it's best, I think. ... I'd hate to go back to where I was when I had the breakdown: not that I'm going to go right back to the beginning, because you don't, but I don't want to go anywhere near that spot.'
(43 year old, Australian sister-in-law of eclectic faith, bereaved 3 years)

'Our younger daughter doesn't like to go at all. She'll go if we want her to come with us, but she doesn't really like it and won't go on her own.'
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)
Religious Restrictions

Cemetery visitation may be restricted by specific religious observances of some faiths, for example Judaism, where:

'After a funeral, the immediate family is not permitted to go to the cemetery for thirty days, or four weeks.
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

No Perceived Need to Visit

Some bereaved people (particularly where the relationship may be less emotionally-close) simply do not experience any perception of need to visit the cemetery.

'Personally, I don't need to go.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Visitation Values

While 'reasons' for visiting focus on why bereaved people visit cemeteries, 'values' of visiting consider what is personally gained from the visit experience. The major values gained from cemetery visitation evidently relate to meeting the previously identified needs of fulfilling a sense of obligation, maintaining a sense of relationship, and seeking solace.

Twelve of the twenty-three visiting informants specifically reported their cemetery visitation experiences to be cathartic, and even euphoric.

'In the first year or two, you feel that it benefits yourself to go to the cemetery.'
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

'I look forward to it actually; I look forward to going to the cemetery.'
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)
'I come down to the cemetery because it makes me feel really good ... Usually, I come here crying and leave feeling better.'  
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Five informants identified value in talking to other bereaved visitors. Four parents considered two-way sharing to be mutually beneficial, while one son considered it beneficial only to the other party.

'I organise other mothers to be there, so we can be together and have a chat. ... If I'm on my own, I spend the time specifically with [my son], but if I'm with other mums, we just get together in the sun and we sit there and just talk and talk to our kids.'  
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

'I've met ... a family that has lost a son, just across from Dad. They're there often and I think it helps them—not me—but it probably helps them for me to talk to them.'  
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Two infrequent visitors (attending mainly to accompany others) considered that they derive no personal value from visiting, while some who do benefit from attendance feel that frequent visitation is unnecessary.

'I just don't believe that's where she is. I don't see it as a rite of passage or anything like that, for me to be there. It doesn't help me get anywhere and it doesn't remind me of [my daughter]; I have enough ways to do that.'  
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

'I think [my daughter] would feel like we do: that we wouldn't want the family coming up all the time. I'd rather they got on with their own lives. You can remember without going to the cemetery, of course.'  
(64 year old, Australian Uniting father, bereaved 3 years)

Actual and potential negative values of visitation were also identified. Two infrequent visitors felt that more frequent visitation could be detrimental, while two non-visitors considered that any visitation may have an emotionally negative impact.

'I don't think that I'm ever going to be a frequent visitor; it is far too traumatic. ... When I'm there, I identify with him and his last moments of pain. It's not a future thing; it's definitely a past thing and a definite loss for me.'  
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)
Visitation Activities

Cemetery visitation activities include the physical and mental actions performed by visitors within a cemetery, in association with a specific grave or memorial. The data reveal three principal gravesite activities, two secondary activities and several apparently less-popular activities among cemetery visitors.

The identified principal grave- or memorial-site activities are:

Placing flowers,
Maintaining the grave or memorial, and,
Talking to the decedent.

Crying and prayer appear to be somewhat less-common secondary activities and several other activities are identified among still smaller numbers of informants. Of twenty-seven informants, four were non-visitors. All visiting informants discussed their activities at the grave or memorial site. Informant’s own interpretations of the meanings of their cemetery visitation activities are presented in the following sections.

Placing Flowers

Twenty-one of twenty-three visiting informants advised that they do bring and place flowers when visiting the grave or memorial, but not all bring flowers on each occasion. Some visitors choose to place flowers only occasionally, and some visiting several times a week do not need to replace flowers on each visit.

Either maintaining fresh flowers on the grave at all times, or placing new flowers on every visit, was reported by thirteen informants, twelve of whom were female.

‘When we come together, we stop first at the florist ... All the flowers get taken out of the vase and the good ones separated from the bad. The two of us do our flowers together and that probably takes about an hour; I’m pretty fussy. I’ve become a little bit of a flower arranger since all this happened and a bit fussy about how it looks.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)
‘Mum always believed in fresh flowers, so we bring her fresh flowers. Dad buys them on Friday, because he goes to the market then.’
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

The sole male informant, either maintaining fresh flowers on the grave at all times or placing new flowers on every visit, was a retired husband who visits his wife’s grave every day.

‘I don’t take flowers every day, but as soon as they start to wilt, I just replace them. I usually buy them; I get some from home too, but not very often.’
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Five other informants advised that they bring and place fresh flowers on the grave or memorial, but not on each visit. These informants were all male.

‘I took flowers out of our own garden for a while, but not the last few times.’
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

Although most cemeteries do not permit artificial flowers, some infrequent visitors prefer them. Two informants discussed use of artificial flowers: one positively, the other negatively.

‘Because we can’t be there regularly, we tend to change silk flowers once every few months. We get plenty of nice silk flowers; we won’t take live ones, because we just don’t want dead looking flowers.’
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

‘I always buy flowers. ... One time – I got so annoyed – my mother actually took bloody plastic flowers there. I chucked them away and told her I didn’t see them, they must have blown away or something. ... After about twelve months, they’d been really weather beaten and they looked awful; I didn’t want to look at them. I thought, “No, Grandma deserves better than that”.’
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

Seven female informants commented on tending other graves or memorials while at the cemetery, often of people unknown to them. No males reported giving any attention to graves or memorials of people unknown to them.

‘My daughter ... likes to visit the children’s section too on the way down and if there’s no flowers on one, she’ll take some from what we’ve got and she’ll put it there: yes. “Poor thing; they’ve got no flowers”.’
(47 year old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)

One informant appreciated a friend tending her husband's grave for her, when she had been unable to perform her routine task.

'I... put some fresh flowers every week. ... Even when I was really ill, I had someone place fresh flowers on his grave'.
(70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

While to many visitors, placing flowers may be a sign of respect, or symbolic gift to the decedent, the reason for placing flowers is not understood by all.

'I take flowers every time I visit ... but it's only a ritual; it's got no significance that I can think of.'
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)

Only two of the twenty-three visiting informants advised that they do not bring and place flowers on any occasion when visiting the grave or memorial; both were male and saw no value in flowers.

'I certainly wouldn't put flowers there. I don't think that's significant or necessary. '
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Maintaining the Grave or Memorial

Sixteen of twenty-three visiting informants advised that they engage in some form of routine maintenance activity to the plaque or monument, or lawn or garden, relating to the grave. Most informants conceded that their maintenance work was not technically necessary, but that they derived some personal benefit from being able to do something for the decedent.

Ten visitors spoke of cleaning the plaque or monument.

'I just trim the grass around the concrete base of the bronze plaque. My next door neighbour told me that the way to keep the bronze plaque up is with a bit of baby oil rubbed into a rag. I've also got an old toothbrush, which I use to get into the lettering and what-have-you, just to make it look neat, clean and tidy.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)
'Once a week, I wipe down the monument. I get a small bucket to carry the water, but I usually have a damp cloth.'
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Six visitors indicated that they maintain the lawn or garden covering or adjoining the grave, even though they recognise that it may not be technically necessary. Performing some maintenance activity on the grave or monument provides a sense of satisfaction through either fulfilling a duty to care or demonstrating continuing love for the decedent.

'All I can do is trim her grass and do her flowers, so I'm more than happy to make sure that I do that, because here is my outlet for mothering. ... This is the place where I can do things for her. So it's very important to me that I am able to do those things for her, you know: very important. ... We know the gardeners do the borders and everything, but it gives us great satisfaction in trimming back all the little bits of grass, you know.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Three informants advised that they always carry a kit of tools in their car, specifically for maintaining the plaque, monument or surrounds.

'I keep everything in my car boot, like scissors for the flowers and to cut the grass. I fertilise the lawn, clean the headstone and put pretty windmills on there.'
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

Nevertheless, not all visitors feel a compulsion to perform some maintenance activity within the cemetery.

'The place is immaculate, so I didn't need to do anything.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Talking to the Decedent

Twelve of twenty-three visiting informants specifically advised that they do talk to the decedent at the grave or memorial site. 'Conversations' include just saying 'Hello' and
assuring the decedent that they are missed, updating the decedent on recent and current events, and requesting divine intercession.

Five informants specifically spoke of updating the decedent on recent and current events.

'I talk to her about the past and what's going on in my life: a bit of an update on what's happening and what all the others are doing, because I know they don't visit. I remember telling her when my younger cousin had her second child: a little girl. I remember telling her that she looks like this, she's nothing like that and it's a shame that you weren't here. You know, just a bit of a gossip session really: one way.'
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

Four informants specifically reported that they always renew their acquaintance by saying 'Hello' and assuring the deceased that they are missed and not forgotten.

'I just look at Dad's photo and say a few words: that I miss him and I'm still thinking of him and for him to look after us. ... Even if I don't drop in to the cemetery, every time I go past or drive anywhere near it, I just can't help but say, “Good day, Dad. How are you going? I hope you're well”.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Two Catholic male informants frequently ask the decedent to intercede on behalf of family members.

'I talk to [my wife] about how things are going and when someone is sick from the family, I just ask her to pray for them.'
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Four informants advised that their graveside talks were of a general or non-specific nature.

'I talk to [my husband], ... but not about anything in particular, because I can talk to him anytime.'
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)

Despite its apparent popularity as a specific grave- or memorial-site activity, not all visitors do engage in talk to the decedent.

'I don't think either of us does.'
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)
Crying

Crying is relatively common in association with cemetery visitation, and is identified more within early stages of grief. Ten informants referred to crying in relation to visiting the respective grave or memorial site.

'Usually, I come here crying and leave feeling better.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

'I should have stopped driving there, because I was starting to get dangerous. I wouldn't stop crying. The crying went on for two and a half years; I was a mess.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

Some informants recognise crying to be less common among modern Anglo-based cultures and more prevalent among other European cultures, including Greek and Italian.

'The Italian way of crying and all this – and they carry on a little bit – is a way of letting it all out; it helps to cleanse. The Anglo-Saxon way of just being polite keeps the grief still going on.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

At least one Anglo-Australian informant considered that the crying of others within the cemetery could be intrusive and offensive.

'If I'm visiting the cemetery and someone else is bawling their eyes out and screaming, I think it's offensive, because they're intruding on my grieving. To me, that's not true bereavement: it's just an act. I really hate that. It seems to me, that women who cry the loudest think they're the ones who grieve the most. But neither do I think that they should have to hide their grieving. I mean, if you want to cry: cry!'
(34 year old, Australian Anglican de facto wife, bereaved 3 years)

While several males spoke of a 'lump in the throat' or a 'tear in the eye', only one admitted to regular crying at the gravesite. One husband specifically mentioned that he and his sons intentionally withhold their emotions.

'Initially some memories were quite painful, but ... I didn't show it; to do so would be a sign of weakness. ... The three of us are not the type to show our emotions, particularly in that way. We would by nature try to conceal our emotions.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)
However, whilst withholding emotions may be more common among males, it is not unique to that sex.

'I never actually sat there and had a bit of a cry. I've always been sitting there talking to her. Is that a bad thing? It's just who I am; I don't cry.'
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

Prayer

Although evidently not as popular as the identified principle activities of placing flowers, maintaining the grave or memorial, and talking to the decedent, prayer does still appear to be a common activity among some cemetery visitors. Out of twenty-three visiting informants, sixteen professed holding a religious faith and seven of these people advised that they do pray at the grave or memorial site.

'In visiting them, I also pray for them, so that sort of helps us to communicate in a spiritual way. ... I pray pretty much the same at the gravesite as I do away from the cemetery.'
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

'In visiting him and praying for him, we feel like he's next to us. While we're visiting, we feel close to God too, because we're praying for him there, you know.'
(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Eight informants (including three of no religion) specifically advised that they do not pray at the grave or memorial site.

'I don't say any prayers or anything like that.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Other Activities

Several other gravesite activities were found to appear less often within the data than did the above principal and secondary activities. Other activities identified from the data are, in descending order of frequency of occurrence: performing religious rites, kissing the memorial,
feasting or drinking with the decedent, placing gifts or ornaments, standing silently, talking with other mourners, and imagining the decedent.

One informant and her husband reported that she maintains a detailed personal log of subsequent burials in the respective cemetery compartment.

Four informants of different faiths referred to various religious rites, including blessing the grave, consecrating the monument, symbolic feasting, playing recorded scripture readings, and burning incense.

'Blessing the grave is usually done on a Saturday. The priest will come to the cemetery where we'd be waiting for him at the grave. He prays for her soul and we have a bowl of boiled wheat with raisins, sugar and almonds mixed in and that symbolises the body of the deceased. The priest blesses the wheat and then once it's all over, we just have a bit of the wheat and a biscuit or whatever anybody else brings along. We spend a bit of time there with the deceased and then they usually all come over to the house and have a coffee.'
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

The monument is being organised at the moment and next month we will have it consecrated by a rabbi and we'll all probably go to the cemetery.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Three diverse informants advised that on each visit they kiss the memorial.

'My first reaction is to kiss the stone.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Three informants saw considerable benefit in communicating with other mourners at the cemetery. A self-help mothers' group was discovered through the current research to have developed naturally at a children's area within at least one cemetery.

'A lot of our conversations are what you'd call 'bitch sessions', if you overheard us. They're just about all the stupid things that people say to us, and how our families make us feel, and stupid things our best friends say. It's really good to have that outlet, because otherwise it could fester. So the lack of understanding is one of the big things we talk about.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Two male informants advised that they have humorously poured out drink over the grave.
'It's a funny thing I know, but I was there probably only a couple of days after the funeral and there were these two bottles of wine that she just wouldn't let me open. I don't know why; they were nothing special - just two bottles of plonk - but she just wouldn't let me open them, for no reason at all. So I went down and opened those bottles of wine and poured them all over her grave. I had a mouthful of each and threw the bottles in the rubbish bin. Why I did that, I don't know, but I couldn't drink them after that. One bottle wasn't bad actually; it was a waste.'
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

**Visitation Emotions**

Emotion is an elusive concept to define, but involves potentially-intense internal feelings. According to psychologist Wayne Weiten (1998:406), emotion is considered a construction of cognitive, physiological, and behavioural components. The cognitive component involves a subjective conscious experience; the physiological component involves bodily arousal; and the behavioural component involves characteristic overt expressions.

Cemetery visitation emotions are here defined as significant internal feelings (bodily arousal) and specific responses (overt expressions) experienced by visitors in association with tending a specific grave or memorial (the subjective conscious experience).

Emotional theorists, including Robert Plutchik (1993), identify at least eight primary emotions, and propose that additional emotions are produced by blends of primary emotions and variations in intensity. According to Plutchik's model, emotions such as grief, sadness and pensiveness involve one primary emotion experienced at different levels of intensity.

In the current study, qualitative data reveal ten specific emotions reported by twenty-seven informants, including four non-visiters. For the purpose of this study, two major groups have been constructed by clustering two related emotions of ‘Sorrow’ and two related emotions of ‘Solace’. This thesis therefore recognises two major groups and six other specific emotions self-reported by cemetery visitors. These emotions are discussed in descending order of their frequency of occurrence within the data.
It is well recognised that each person’s grief is a unique, individual experience. The current study data indicate that the emotional experiences of two parents concurrently mourning loss of the same child may vary significantly.

‘It’s difficult, in the sense that everyone grieves differently. Just because I was her Mum and he was her Dad, doesn’t mean that we’re grieving in the same way. I found that I went through real anger. ... At the same time, he was still just crying and sad. He couldn’t understand why I was so angry. So you go through these different phases differently.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

All visiting informants indicated that they experienced various emotions at different times, and most informants reported experiencing emotions of both sorrow and solace. Emotions of both major groups were often experienced within a specific visitation pattern, and were occasionally experienced in association with the same visit, such as displacing sorrow with solace. Emotions identified among qualitative informants included:

- Sorrow (including grief and sadness),
- Solace (including relief and peace),
- Guilt,
- Respect,
- Loss,
- Loneliness,
- Fear, and,
- Anger.

It appears that most of the emotions expressed are not necessarily exclusive of each other. Data suggest that seemingly contradictory emotions may be simultaneously experienced in relation to separate, but concurrent issues of bereavement and visitation. Informant’s own understandings of their expressed emotions are presented in the following sections.

Sorrow

One of the major groups of emotions identified in the data is that of sorrow. Sorrow is here defined as emotional distress in response to loss. As a group of emotions, sorrow includes (for
the purpose of this study) grief (including anguish and despair) and sadness (including pensiveness). Twenty-one informants referred to emotions of sorrow in relation to visiting the respective grave or memorial.

Sadness is a state of unhappiness, which is considered to be less intense and severe than grief. Grief may be considered at the more intense end of the sorrow spectrum and is characterised by a greater degree of emotional pain and anxiety.

Sadness was the most common cemetery visitation emotion within the sorrow group, and the most frequently expressed of all emotions. Nineteen informants referred to feelings of sadness.

‘The cemetery is ... a place of sadness: quite a bit of grieving, of course.’
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

‘I feel just sadness and loss.’
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)

‘I feel very sad, of course. ... When I go, I remember when we were together, but now I really feel sad when I go to the cemetery. Now I go to see my brother in the grave and that is very, very sad too.’
(66 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 5 years)

Some informants felt a greater sense of sadness for others than for their own situation.

‘I guess the cemetery is a sad place, not because [my wife’s] buried there, but because of some of the other people you see come there. Like, there’s a little old lady who just sits there; she’s done this nice little garden and she just sits there for hours on end; she brings a cup of tea and dinner; that’s sad – not that it’s a particularly sad place.’
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

‘There is a sense of sadness when you see a plaque with somebody that’s young. ... I feel sad when I see a little person that’s died.’
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)

Grief is another frequently expressed cemetery visitation emotion within the sorrow group. Six informants discussed feelings of anguish in association with cemetery visits. Those still experiencing anguish at the time of interview were both within months of the death; the other four referred to earlier experiences.
'It is a really, really hard thing: a heart wrenching experience to go.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

The data suggest that, within normal bereavement experiences, early grief usually subsides to the less intense emotion of sadness.

'I used to stress something shocking; it really knocked me around. And when I stopped just dropping into the place, I improved quicker. I could have quite easily said, 'That's it; I'm not going any more'. That's how it was stressing me, but I was determined not to let it stress me to the point that I wouldn't go.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

When interviewed, one informant had been under psychiatric care for three years, two had experienced months of professional bereavement counselling, and another was receiving church pastoral care: all were female. A further four informants had previously used professional counselling, which two found beneficial; and two had used antidepressant drugs, which one reported to be beneficial: again, all were female. It appeared to the researcher that six other female informants were exhibiting classic symptoms of chronic grief at the times of interviews, which ranged from eight months to five years after their respective bereavements.

'I had a mental breakdown ... I think it was [my brother-in-law's] death that actually popped it. ... I just went and fell off the top as soon as I heard about the accident. ... My breakdown has been very, very difficult for my immediate family. My husband ... thought I should just snap out of it. Most people think, 'Well, OK; so you're depressed. Now get better'. But it's like a disease; mental illness is a disease and you can't snap out of it.'
(43 year old, Australian sister-in-law of eclectic faith, bereaved 3 years)

'I had to go to the doctor and was put on medication for depression for about six months.'
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

Even though emotions of sorrow were the most discussed group, this set of emotions was not common to all informants. Three male informants reported that they experienced no emotions of sorrow when visiting the cemetery.

'For me, it's a location where we buried our daughter and ... that's important, but in terms of it bringing things back to me, or heightening emotional responses: it doesn't.'
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)
One male visitor (a retired soldier) revealed a perceived need to conceal any personally felt emotions of sorrow.

‘Initially some memories were quite painful, but because of the inherent discipline that my previous occupation engenders, I didn’t show it; to do so would be a sign of weakness.’
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Another informant considered that his emotional feelings at the cemetery were largely the product of his own thoughts at the time.

‘Sometimes I feel a little bit of sadness at the cemetery and other times, I have a laugh and chuckle; it depends on what I think about at the time. If you think about a good time, you sort of laugh and chuckle, but if you’re thinking about sad things, then you will be sad.’
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

Solace

The second major group of emotions identified from the data is that of solace. Solace is here defined as a state of comfort or relief from distress, attained by soothing and consoling. As a group of emotions, solace includes (for the purpose of this study) relief and peace. Seeking solace was also identified as one of the principal reasons for cemetery visitation. Eighteen informants referred to emotions of solace in relation to visiting the grave or memorial.

Relief was the more frequently expressed emotion of solace, with thirteen informants referring to feelings of relief or comfort.

‘Once I get there, I feel happy: quite happy. ... Just bringing the fresh flowers and things gives me a good feeling’.
(70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

‘I come here because it brings me comfort.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)
‘On the way to the cemetery, I feel happy that I’m going to see him. I just can’t wait to come and say hello to him, but when I’m leaving I do feel sad.’
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

Some comfort may also be drawn from the specific feature or cemetery compartment visited, or from the concept of others being present.

‘If she can’t be with me, then I am just so relieved that she’s in that area with all the other children. I can speak on behalf of probably fifteen different sets of parents that I’ve met down there; it brings us all so much comfort to know they’re all together: it really does.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

‘At first, I used to worry about him being up at the cemetery by himself ... but then I started to think, “You’re somewhere else now with other people”. And he isn’t by himself: definitely. My uncle is with him and so is my Mum. That’s how I comfort myself. I don’t think about whether it’s true or not.’
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

But not all informants experienced any particular sense of comfort from visiting the cemetery.

‘There are no happy memories in the cemetery.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Peace was another popularly expressed emotion of solace, with twelve informants referring to a sense of peace pertaining to the cemetery environment.

‘Within the cemetery, I definitely feel a sense of peace; just peaceful. It’s a peaceful sort of quiet place. It’s a very beautiful landscape actually, a very nice place to look at.’
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

‘I’m at ease when I’m at the cemetery; it’s a peaceful place.’
(47 year old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)

Any perception of peace at the cemetery may relate to the relationship of the decedent and mode of death. The father of a young woman killed in a car accident said:

‘The cemetery is nice, but I don’t feel any sense of peace with her; with my father and mother I do, but not with my daughter.’
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)
Others indicated that as intensity of grief subsided, a sense of peace progressively emerged.

'The scenery has become progressively more and more peaceful ... Initially, I found that instead of giving solace, going there tended to make me remember the immediacy of the funeral ... it brought it all back.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

'Not always so, but lately I feel peaceful ... I'm quite happy to be there now.'
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

As with relief, a sense of peace may also be drawn from the specific feature or cemetery compartment visited.

'I don't find the cemetery to be sad or depressing in any way. ... It's a focal point that just brings it all together and it's peaceful. There is a sense of peace there, certainly at the mausoleum. That's peaceful; it really is.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

'It's a very different area in that it certainly brings the parents a lot of peace and a lot of comfort and I know cemeteries are probably meant to do that anyway, but I find it a lot more in that [children's] area.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

But not all informants experienced the emotion of peace when visiting the grave or memorial of a significant decedent.

'It is not in any way peaceful. The cemetery can be peaceful because it's quiet, but it's not peaceful in that particular place.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Guilt

Six informants referred to the emotion of guilt in relation to visiting the grave or memorial. Most guilt related to frequency of visitation.

'I felt really relieved the last time I went, because I felt so guilty that I hadn't been for a while.'
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)
Individual informants also experienced guilt at not feeling distressed and at leaving the site.

'I think it's peaceful. I feel possibly a trifle guilty because I'm relaxed there.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

'Now, ... I just cry walking back to the car, and I think it's because I feel guilty about leaving him there.'
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

One informant questioned the logic of his own perception of guilt.

'If I haven't been there for a while I might feel a bit guilty about it, so I went. Now, who the hell I would feel guilty to is another matter, because who the hell would know? The dead don't; and the kids hardly ever go there. It's like a reflex. I think that is interesting. Well, why the bloody hell should I feel guilty?'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Some informants experienced no feelings of guilt at not visiting the cemetery.

'It's not important for me personally... It's not something that I have to do and I have no perception of guilt about it: none at all.'
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

To another informant, appropriately founded guilt might exacerbate grief in some people.

'I didn't feel guilty after he'd died. I really believe that people grieve a long time, or grieve excessively, because of guilt. That's what I believe. But I did everything I could for him that I thought was appropriate.'
(34 year old, Australian Anglican de facto wife, bereaved 3 years)

Loss

Of twenty-seven informants, twenty-six experienced significant degrees of loss in relation to death of the decedent, and all but one other informant had some previous experience of loss through the death of a close family member. Twenty-four informants considered that their previous loss experience did not adequately prepare and assist them in coping with their more recent significant bereavement.
However, only six informants referred specifically to the emotion of loss in relation to visiting the grave or memorial.

'I feel just sadness and loss'.
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)

Variables evidently influencing the emotion of loss within the cemetery include personality of the bereaved, relationship of the decedent and circumstances of the death.

'I don’t think that everybody understands ... the individual situation every time. Just because you can lose a grandparent and go to a funeral and be back at work tomorrow, doesn’t mean that I’m going to survive the loss of my cat. You know, it depends on the person and on the importance of the relationship. Every situation is so totally different: you function differently.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

'The loss of a loved one is horrible no matter who it is, but I know that the loss of a child is worse than losing my brother. I understand the cemetery has to treat everyone as being in the same position. The last thing you can do is say, ’Well they lost their child and you only lost your husband’. I mean you can’t do that to people.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Respect

Six informants referred specifically to the emotion of respect in relation to visiting the grave or memorial. Respect may be felt towards one or more decedents, all of the deceased within a cemetery, to other mourners, or towards the concept of the cemetery itself.

All informants who commented on respect considered that the cemetery itself is symbolic of humanity’s respect for its dead.

'The cemetery is emblematic of the respect with which we held the people who are there. It marks us as a civilised society, in that we show respect by honouring that memory. ... I would suspect that respect for the dead and those things which are emblematic of that respect – which obviously includes cemeteries – is common to all, and I think it distinguishes the human animal from others.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)
'I guess it's a respect: a respect for the place as a final resting-place.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Some informants felt that a significant degree of respect was due to the cemetery itself.

'A cemetery should be treated with the same respect that the people who are there should be treated with, if they were still alive.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Five informants saw their visitation as a demonstration of respect for the deceased.

'I feel that he feels I'm there: that I'm showing respect.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

But not all informants considered cemetery visitation to be essential towards demonstrating their feelings of respect for the deceased.

'I don't find that it is a lack of respect not to go there.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

One informant recognised a problem with differing concepts of appropriate respect.

'I know different people view respect differently and that's a problem in the cemetery. Some people think it shows a lack of respect to leave so many things around. I suppose to everyone it's different: it's in the eye of the beholder.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Fear

Five of the twenty-three visiting informants referred to the emotion of fear in relation to visiting the grave or memorial, but only two of these people had actually felt any fear within the cemetery. One informant related her fear of graves as a child visitor and the other indicated an occasional feeling of vulnerability.

'Mum used to take us to visit [my grandparents’ grave] about once a month. I still remember going to that cemetery. I used to be scared to tread on the graves; I used to jump over them all the time.'
(34 year old, Australian Anglican de facto wife, bereaved 3 years)
‘I guess, sometimes I feel scared and I look over my shoulder, but most times, I feel happy; just that he knows I’m there.’
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

Three informants specifically advised that they feel no fear when visiting the cemetery.

‘The cemetery is a peaceful place; I don’t ever feel frightened.’
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)

Loneliness

Four visiting informants referred to the emotion of loneliness, or missing the decedent, in relation to visiting the grave or memorial.

‘At the cemetery ... I remember it’s a love and I am alone.’
(66 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 5 years)

‘I talk to him, you know, about everything. I tell him I miss him.’
(47 year old, Turkish Muslim mother, bereaved 14 months)

Anger

Only two informants referred to the emotion of anger in relation to visiting the grave or memorial. One visitor’s anger was felt toward the decedent and the other’s was toward non-visiting family members.

‘I think it has become easier to visit these days ... But I get angry at him too: more than anything because he’s actually died. He had so much to live for.’
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

‘I used to have terrible arguments with the others, because they never went. Even if I rang them up and said I was going and I’d offer to pick them up, they wouldn’t want to come for the drive. “Too busy!” I get so angry with them. ... I get so annoyed with the rest of the family, because the bastards never go.’
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)
Emotional Change

Thirteen visiting informants referred to a process of gradual change in emotions in relation to visiting the grave or memorial. Emotions of sorrow (including grief and sadness), guilt, loss, loneliness and anger were all found to progressively subside in most visitors.

'My emotions have got better. At first, visiting was more difficult: it was very, very emotional. That has got a bit better now; I definitely feel better.'
(70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

'I don’t get as upset now. I suppose you’d say I find it easier to visit these days.'
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)

One informant well described what he saw as a logical process of emotional change.

'What has happened progressively is that a sense of logic began to take over from the emotions. And logic says that underneath the ground is a coffin, in which is what’s left of the body, and that’s all. Therefore, ... there’s not the emotionalism that there was initially.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

The same informant was surprised at the rate of his own emotional change.

'I recall a tremendous sense of loss at first, when she died. Although I was surprised and even felt somewhat guilty about the rapidity at which I seemed to get over it.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Another informant noted that acceptance and emotional change might be expected to differ, depending on the relationship to the decedent.

'IT's amazing how it has changed. I think you accept it and make it part of your life; it's happened and you move on. I think it's also got a lot to do with personality and the make up of a person, because my mother still gets very emotional when she goes, but she's the wife; it's a different grief experience.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Professional bereavement counselling incorporating gravesite visits was considered beneficial to one informant towards mitigating emotional intensity.
I've been a lot better since I've been seeing a counsellor; he's helped me a real lot, you know. ... I was worse than what I am now before I went and saw him, you know; he helped me a lot. ... We'd have a walk around the cemetery and he'd come to my parents' grave, you know.'
(47 year old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)

Subsidence in emotions of distress following a significant death does not necessarily occur with all cemetery visitors. Resignation to a death may take several weeks, months or years, or might never be fully accommodated by some bereaved people. Several informants indicated that in having difficulty accepting a death, they themselves, friends or family members, tend to avoid cemetery visitation.

One of my daughters – the eldest one – doesn't go to the grave very often, because even though four years have passed now, she still doesn't accept the death of her mother, but the other one she goes every Sunday.'
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

We don’t need to go all the time, you know, and our younger daughter doesn’t like to go at all. She’ll go if we want her to come with us, but she doesn’t really like it and won’t go on her own.'
(64 year old, Australian Uniting mother, bereaved 3 years)

[A friend’s] son got killed in a car accident; he was only twenty-one. I don’t think the father has even been to the cemetery since the funeral; that was ten years ago. He won’t talk about it, like it just didn’t happen – except that his son is not there.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

Only one regular cemetery visitor advised that she experienced some difficulty in accepting the death.

I do have bad days; I can go there and just cry. I suppose I’ll just never accept that he’s gone.’
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

As previously recognised by Attig (1996), the current data reveal that some bereaved persons may deliberately choose to retain emotions of grief.

It is a really, really hard thing: a heart wrenching experience to go. I don’t want it ever to change from that. I don’t want to ever be able to walk up to his gravesite and not cry, and not feel, and not hurt.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)
'I'm not trying to rebuild my life in any way. ... I don't see any future. There's no future without him: no future at all. I can't build a new life without him: I can't. ... Every night when I go to bed I pray, "Please don't let me wake up in the morning", and the next morning I say, "Oh God, I'm still here; now I have to live through another day". I am very interested in assisted suicide; I think I'd like that, but I guess I'm probably a coward at heart.'

(75 year old, Australian Catholic wife, bereaved 14 months)

Shuchter and Zisook (1993) found that several features of grief, particularly those related to attachment behaviours, continue several years after the loss. Thus, they conclude, 'it seems that some aspects of grief work may never end for a significant proportion of otherwise normal bereaved individuals'. In the current study, one bereaved father well recognised that while his grief emotions may have subsided, they have not ceased.

'We don't feel perhaps quite as emotional as we did, but it's different. At the beginning, we were going through a real grieving process, which tends to reduce somewhat I suppose; but to a lesser degree I still have that grieving experience.'

(64 year old, Australian Uniting father, bereaved 3 years)

**Visitation Frequency**

Frequencies of cemetery visits and a general progressive wane in visitation are clearly documented from the quantitative data. Differences in frequencies of visitation are most evident by service type, family religion, and relationship of the decedent.

The qualitative, interpretive ethnographic approach best identifies when and how changes in frequencies of visits occur and the effects of specific turning points in the lives of visitors.

The twenty-seven qualitative informants had all been bereaved within five years. Four informants were not cemetery visitors. The non-visiting informants were all females, comprising an Anglican, a Catholic, a Buddhist and a person of eclectic faith.

**Frequency Modulation**
Fourteen of the twenty-three visiting informants recognised that a specific modulation of the frequency of their cemetery visits had occurred, while the other nine reported no such modulation yet occurring.

Four informants reported abatement in the frequency of their visits occurring within weeks of the death and funeral. Three of these informants were bereaved spouses, who were free to visit as frequently as they felt any need or desire.

'I'd have been going there at least twice a week – sometimes three times a week – for the first six to eight weeks and then it rapidly tailed off.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Another four informants reported abatement in the frequency of their visits occurring within months of the death and funeral.

'Straight after the funeral, I probably visited close to once a week, or at least every two weeks. Then after a month or two, it dropped off to once a month. Now, I just go on the anniversary, birthday and spur of the moment visits.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

'For the first six months after he passed away, I would go every Sunday and after that, you know, not so much; I don't need to go so much.'
(66 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 5 years)

Three informants reported abatement in the frequency of their visits occurring a year or more after the death and funeral.

'For the first twelve months after he died, I came to the cemetery everyday. Now, it's every second day, or sometimes every third day.'
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

'For the first eighteen months, I used to go once a month, but it's gone to about once every three months now. ... It changes; it's just something that happens progressively.'
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

Two other informants reported abatement in the frequency of their visits, but did not specify how long after the death and funeral this had occurred. One of these informants explained her personal feelings toward her own modulation of visitation frequency.
'I used to go to the cemetery ... everyday or every second day. ... I now visit perhaps every six weeks or so ... not for the lack of love for him, it's just that you've got to get on with your life. The personal need to be there is not as great.'
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

One informant's visitation reflected an aberration within the general trend, in that, instead of more frequent visitation subsequently abating with greater acceptance of the loss, in this case visitation frequency increased in response to mitigated emotional distress.

'I would have gone more in the last six months than in the previous four and a half years – between six and eight times. ... I used to stress something shocking; it really knocked me around. And when I stopped just dropping into the place, I improved quicker.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

Nine visiting informants reported no modulation of frequency of their visits since bereavement. Sustained visitation may relate to fulfilling a sense of obligation, or to an acquired habit.

'I visit Mum and Dad's grave every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and on the weekend, every week. I used to go three times with Dad, to visit Mum and I just kept the tradition going; that's continued through.'
(47 year old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)

'Every day I go, ever since she passed away, except ... when I went to Malta, otherwise every day I go.'
(66 year old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)

One informant found it difficult to imagine that her current twice weekly visitation is likely to modulate.

'So many people say, "As time goes on, you won't feel the need to go there as often". And I know older parts of the cemetery get visited less, but at this stage, I find that hard to imagine. I can't really see what time is going to do, in this sense, to me. I can't see how that will change.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Nine informants found that a progressive distancing from their loss seemed to occur with the passing of time.
'I think the change is just part of the grieving process. You feel that you need to go because your hurt is still there, but as you start to get your life back together or back to normality, the pain eases off. I think it's just a natural thing.'

(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

'Time is a healer.'

(62 year old, Australian non-religious grandfather, bereaved 5 years)

Turning Points

Some visiting informants recognised a specific change in the frequency of their cemetery visits corresponding to a decisive turning point in their grief or other personal circumstances. Such turning points may be intellectual or emotional.

'I'd have been going there at least twice a week -- sometimes three times a week -- for the first six to eight weeks and then it rapidly tailed off. I'd go back and I'd start thinking, "I'm not doing myself or anybody any good here", but I still missed her. ... The space has become greater as realism, logic and objectivity all begin to play a much larger part.'

(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

'I feel I have less of a need to visit now than I did earlier, but I'll still go. It won't be as often as it was in the first two-and-a-half to three years, but I will always go.'

(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

One informant found that professional guidance helped establish an emotionally positive turning point.

'I found one of the best things that helped me, was ... the funeral director's Christmas seminar, a year after he died. It was the best thing I'd done. Those experts put me on track, because I really thought that I was going mental, but I wasn't of course. Then I started to think, the next time someone asks me, "How are you going?" I'm going to say, "Fantastic!" And that was my turning point; it honestly was.'

(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

Return to work represented a decisive turning point in visitation to another informant, by replacing her ability to visit daily.
'Straight after Mum's funeral I went on a daily basis, because I had about two and a half weeks off from work, but since I've been back it's just on weekends.'
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

Yet another informant reported that she had no understanding of why the frequency of her visits to her husband’s memorial had subsided from weekly to very occasional.

**Memorial Values**

A cemetery memorial is here defined as any plaque, monument and/or other associated object within a cemetery, dedicated to commemoration of the life of a decedent.

Among twenty-seven bereaved informants, all twenty-three visitors and two of the four non-visiting informants commented on the personal values of cemetery memorials to themselves, family members and/or friends. The data reveal five major values of cemetery memorials to visitors, being:

- A focal point of remembrance,
- Cultural and personal expression,
- Symbolising the decedent,
- Identifying the location of remains, and,
- Recording family history.

The concept of permanence of a memorial was found to be significant and personal cenotaphs were found to be important in the lives of some informants. Informant’s own understandings of personal values of memorials are presented in the following sections.

**Focal Point of Remembrance**

All twenty-three visiting informants referred either directly or indirectly to the memorial’s value as a focal point for remembrance of the decedent, and all engaged in some form of commemorative activity at the location of the memorial.
'One of the most important things about the cemetery is that there's somewhere for the memorial, to remember him by. ... I think it's critical that we do remember where our deceased go and that they do have memorials and plaques to remember them by.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Two informants referred to feelings of distress on discovery that people significant to them lay in unmarked graves, and in at least one case, feelings were strong enough to spur remedial action.

'We found that one of our blokes was buried in a country cemetery in an unmarked grave. ... We got a bronze plaque and a retired Anglican army padre (a chaplain who was also a Vietnam Veteran) who'd actually buried him and we had a memorial service there. Then we went into the local RSL and had our few beers and what-have-you: it's a respect for the man.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Two other Christian male informants (one Catholic, the other Protestant) expressed opposition to the scattering of cremated remains, due to this practice averting a potential remembrance point of focus.

'[Our] next door neighbour ... was cremated and his ashes were scattered over Botany Bay. We couldn't believe that. We knew it was his wish, but [his wife] wasn't happy with it afterwards. She felt that there was nowhere she could relate to him after his death, to even take a flower. She was really sorry she did that. So that's why I think the cemetery is very important.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Cultural and Personal Expression

Eight informants referred to the memorial's value in facilitating cultural or personal expression. Choice of basic type of memorial, its location and individual style may reflect the family's religious or other cultural traditions, or preference of the decedent.

Distinct styles of monuments usually differentiate several specific cultural groups within most general cemeteries. An Italian-Catholic informant and her late husband had (as is relatively common practice among Italian-Catholics) pre-purchased their grave (a concrete vault), and erected a large granite monument some ten years prior to his death. The monument included inscriptions, with just the dates of death and recent photographs to be added on interment of
each of the couple. Another Italian-Catholic 'can't speak highly enough of the mausoleum' in which his father's body is entombed.

'Dad ... saw the mausoleum and came home and to Mum said, "We've got to buy one of these; they're fantastic. You should see it". He was quite adamant that that's the way he wanted to go, and you know, three weeks later: Bang!' (40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

One informant revealed a family dilemma with the complexity of expressing both cultural and personal identity through a fitting memorial.

'You know, when an elderly grandparent dies you have to pick a straight monument, maybe black or a grey marble. But in Jewish religion, you know that there's a Star of David and there are certain things that go on it; it goes to a form, I guess. It's the same with Greeks or Italians. But when you're talking about somebody like [my brother], who was a unique individual, you couldn't just give him a black piece of marble with the Star of David and normal writing; you have to go a little bit different, because that's the kind of person that he was.' (37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Despite their general popularity in contemporary Western society, physical memorials are not important within all cultures, for example, Buddhism.

'You can have a memorial if you want. There's no hard and fast rule; it's just an option, you know. But we don't focus on material things, you see. We might just plant a tree. For example, where my Dad was cremated, we just planted a flowering tree where the funeral pyre was lit. Now that tree blooms.' (59 year old, Sri Lankan Buddhist daughter, bereaved 3 months)

Several informants considered it particularly important to fulfil the specific wishes of the deceased and at least two considered fulfilling decedent's wishes to be more important than upholding traditional practices.

'Locating the ashes in a particular place is not all that important any more. I used to think it would be, but not for [my partner]. If it were for my mother, then it would be a different story. But because [my partner] didn't worry about it, it doesn't worry me as much. I feel it's important to do what the person wanted done with their remains.' (34 year old, Australian Anglican de facto wife, bereaved 3 years)
Symbolising the Decedent

Five visiting informants referred either directly or indirectly to the memorial’s value as a symbol of the decedent. To some visitors, it is most important that the memorial reflects aspects of the decedent’s personality.

‘[My brother] was artistic, creative and young; and these were things that we wanted to reflect in the monument.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

The memorial may also serve as a physical representation of the decedent, to which affection may be expressed.

‘I give his headstone a kiss ... I never, ever go away without giving [my grandson’s] headstone a kiss.’
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

Identifying the Location of Remains

Four visiting informants referred, either directly or indirectly, to the memorial’s value in identifying the physical location of the remains of the decedent.

‘There’s just a bronze plaque; the cremated remains are in the lawn and the bronze plaque is on the concrete plinth. ... I mean, that’s where the remains are, right in front of you. I have actually put my hand on the grass while I’m talking to her knowing that the remains are directly underneath there.’
(35 year old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)

‘I think putting a permanent marker there is important. Well, that’s where her body is and it was important to her. ... So it’s important I think; it’s very important. When I die, I think I’d like somebody to say, “Look; he’s buried there”.’
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

Recording Family History

Three visiting informants referred either directly or indirectly to the memorial’s value in recording their family’s history.
'His name is always going to be written down and not forgotten; somewhere for the grandchildren ... to go and visit.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Permanence

Three female visiting informants (of diverse beliefs) commented on the permanent status of memorials. Each considered a temporary marker to be essential, prior to installation of a permanent memorial.

'The grave was not finished until the stone monument replaced the temporary wooden cross, some months later. As soon as that was done, we went together and I said, 'He's at rest now; nobody else can hurt him'.'
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

At least one mother had developed affection for the temporary marker itself, and then had mixed feelings about its replacement.

'We're now looking at putting a monument there, but I love her cross. A lot of people I know feel that it would be nice if we could just leave the crosses there, because there's something about babies and just having a simple cross that just seems right. But at the same time, I'm very happy with what we've chosen for a monument. So yeah, it is important to me to have a final monument to her; the cross does feel a little bit temporary.'
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

No Importance

Not all informants saw any particular value to be derived from a cemetery memorial. Four informants were not cemetery visitors at all, though one had no option to visit as the decedent had been cremated and the remains scattered overseas.

The Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association (1998) reports that some 7% of cremated remains are scattered by crematoria authorities. Scattering may be either at the family’s specific request, or often by default owing to family apathy towards cremated remains and memorialisation. It appears that some bereaved families would agree with Smith (1997:78-79), who considers that 'cremated remains are sanitised matter which, unlike bodily
remains, do not require final disposition or memorialisation in a cemetery or elsewhere.' One informant in the current study put it this way:

'Before I'd gone through the death of [my partner], I always thought that placing cremated remains was very important. I didn't understand why some people wanted to scatter ashes. Now I understand how people can forget about them and even leave them at the crematorium. It is just a lot easier not to think about it.'
(34 year old, Australian Anglican de facto wife, bereaved 3 years)

Personal Cenotaphs

As well as regularly visiting respective graves and maintaining large granite monuments, at least two informants also maintained home cenotaphs or shrines to their decedents.

An Italian Catholic widow’s bedroom dresser (which must be negotiated on entering or leaving the room) serves as a shrine to her late husband, complete with photographs, remembrance card and vigil lamp. Rather than seeking to resolve her loss, she chooses to daily focus her thoughts on her late husband and retain his presence within their bedroom.

The prominent dining-room sideboard of a daughter of no specific faith (but whose mother was Catholic) serves as a cenotaph to her parents. One side features a large photograph of her mother surrounded by several personal items, including spectacles, other photographs and memorabilia. The other side features a large photograph and similar personal items relating to her father, including a container with one half of his cremated remains (the other half being interred in the family grave, where lies the body of the informant’s mother). Through this shrine, thoughts of the informant (and, no doubt, her family) are daily focussed on her parents.

*Cemetery Values*

The current study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process sought to identify the expressed values of cemeteries to recently bereaved visitors, rather than any broader community values. For the purposes of this thesis, a cemetery value is therefore defined as any personal significance or importance of the cemetery itself, to the visitor. Twenty-three out of twenty-seven informants commented on perceived values of cemeteries.
The data reveal five specific values of cemeteries to visiting informants and these are discussed in their descending order of frequency of occurrence within the data: sacredness, cultural values, social support, heritage, and remembrance. Informant’s own understandings of personal values of cemeteries are presented in the following sections.

Sacredness

Thirteen visiting informants discussed perceptions of sacredness relating to the cemetery, with seven maintaining that, for them, the cemetery does hold at least some degree of sacredness. Many religions, churches, denominations and sects tend to revere cemeteries as sacred, and specifically dedicated cemeteries, or respective compartments within public cemeteries, are often consecrated.

Three Catholic informants specifically mentioned that they considered the cemetery to be similarly sacred to the church.

'It is a sacred, holy place, like the church is.'
(70 year old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)

At least two other informants (Orthodox and Muslim) also considered the cemetery to be sacred, but not to the same degree as a church or mosque.

'I believe the cemetery is a sacred place, but I'm not sure how to explain it. I think on a personal basis, that it's not as holy as the church. It has that holiness in it, but it's not as holy as the church, you know.'
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

Another two informants specifically mentioned that the cemetery should be venerated, but for non-religious reasons.

'I see the cemetery as being sacred to the memory of the people who are there, rather than sacred in the Catholic sense.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

Six informants (of various religious perspectives) specifically mentioned that, to them, the cemetery is not a sacred place.
‘To me, the cemetery is not sacred (as in holy, like the synagogue), but I respect it.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

‘To me, the cemetery doesn’t have any sacredness ... or much other significance.’
(37 year old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)

Cultural Values

Six informants specifically referred to some identified cultural values of the cemetery. Four commented on various opportunities that the cemetery provides for continuation of cultural traditions.

‘I think it is traditional when you visit a gravesite – in Jewish religion – to put a pebble on the grave as a mark of respect and to mark the fact that you’ve been.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

‘The mausoleum is ... how they do it overseas. So for the people here who immigrated, it’s just back to what they were used to; it’s their traditional way of burying people.’
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Evidently, cultural traditions relating to the cemetery, and community values of such, may vary geographically.

‘I understand that certain Orthodox cultures have feast days, on weekends and they take their food and eat it with the person that has passed away. ... I think, it depends on which part of Greece you come from.’
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

Cultural traditions are also subject to modernisation and changing values.

‘Some Buddhists are buried and some are cremated. ... In our area, the customs are different from other areas. ... Younger people tend to be buried and older people tend to be cremated in accordance with customary traditions, but not everywhere.’
(59 year old, Sri Lankan Buddhist daughter, bereaved 3 months)

Concepts of multiculturalism and non-discrimination were embraced by the cemeteries industry during the 1980s, with the effect that cemetery compartmentalisation by religion is
no longer practiced in recent general cemetery developments. However, while non-denominational (or multi-denominational) compartments may appeal to the socially-concerned but uninvolved observer, this recent practice evidently offends the traditions of many religious groups and cemetery stakeholders, who clearly favour such discrimination. Jewish groups, in particular, have had recent success in lobbying governments for their own exclusive cemeteries.

Two informants specifically referred to the importance of exclusive cemeteries, or dedicated compartments within general cemeteries.

'I would like to go in the Orthodox area, because of my religion ... of course the Orthodoxy does play an enormous role. I'd feel comfortable in the fact that I'm amongst others of the same religion. It's the place to be. ... Of course, once we go it doesn't really matter where our body is, it's our soul that plays the important role, but you still want to be amongst those who have had the same beliefs as yourself.'
(27 year old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)

'Judaism was really important to him ... So I think if he had a choice, he would be very happy that he was buried as a Jew.'
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)

Social Support

Six informants referred to some degree of social support either given or received within the cemetery. All six considered social contacts within the cemetery to be beneficial towards grief mitigation.

Four informants recognised mutual benefit from two-way sharing with other visitors.

'In talking to other mums that have lost kids, we've developed a great bond, because we're all going through the same thing. In some ways, it's more helpful than talking to a counsellor who's gone through textbooks, but hasn't gone through our emotions and how hard it is. So yes, a lot of us mums have become quite close.'
(33 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)

Some informants found their own tragedies easier to bear after speaking with other visitors who had evidently suffered even greater losses.
'You know, once we stop and talk to people, we find there are two boys and one was sick and one had an accident; they’re both buried in the same grave: brothers. ... the same day ... One is twenty-five and one is twenty-two. So when we see that, I say, “Gee; we lost one and they’ve lost two”.'

'The poor boy we talked to yesterday ... his sisters died. ... his father is an ambulance man and ... they rang his father and said, “There's an accident”, and he was with his ambulance and he ... said, “Oh, gee; my two daughters and they both are twins”. So when we learn these, you know, we are getting a little bit of relief. We're saying we are worse, but some people are more worse, you know.'
(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Two informants felt that social contacts within the cemetery were of benefit to just one party, with one informant considering his discussions benefited only the other.

'I've met ... a family that has lost a son, just across from Dad. They're there often and I think it helps them – not me – but it probably helps them for me to talk to them.'
(40 year old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)

Four informants specifically mentioned that they had formed close friendships with other mourners they had met at the cemetery. One couple first met the parents of their son's best friend within the cemetery. Both families had lost their sons through separate motorcycle accidents, eight months apart.

'Yeah, we met first at the cemetery and then we met at a restaurant. We are best family friends now; we visit each other and just talk, you know. We try to give us a bit of comfort, you know.'
(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Two young mothers spoke of the value of relationships formed with empathetic peers befriended at the cemetery.

'Some people ... just fumble for words and yap on, trying to make you feel better. But usually what happens is I just say, “Yeah, yeah; no worries”. Then I'll hang up and ring one of the other mums from the cemetery and say, “You wouldn’t believe what this idiot just said to me”. So we have big bitch sessions about all the silly things people say to us.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)
One informant reported that his wife, who spends at least two hours every day at their son’s grave, actively seeks to establish relationships with new mourners ‘joining’ the cemetery, and that she logs their personal details.

‘As soon as she sees someone digging the grave she goes and talks to them and asks them. We just go in and meet each other and talk and she writes it in the book.’
(52 year old, Turkish Muslim father, bereaved 14 months)

Three informants mentioned avoiding cemetery social contacts. Avoidance may occur even among family members during early grief, so as not to ‘encroach on each other’s grief’.

‘In the early days, we’d ... always bump into one of the family. ... We’d more-or-less like pass in the dark. It’s not that we weren’t talking to each other: we were, but we’d just say, “Hello”, and they’d go their way and we’d go our way.’
(60 year old, Australian non-religious grandmother, bereaved 5 years)

Some visitors may endeavour to avoid other less-considerate or distressing mourners.

‘There’s one woman there that I don’t like to speak to as much. ... She just focuses on her daughter’s illness. When she sees me she wants to discuss what ward [my daughter] was in and what doctors she had and that sort of stuff. ... and I find that she brings me down. I’ve actually turned around the car and gone to see someone else or gone to the canteen when I’ve seen her car.’
(27 year old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)

Heritage

Ten informants referred to perceptions of heritage relating to the cemetery, with five affirming that, to them, the cemetery does have some heritage value. Perceptions of heritage include cultural heritage, local and family histories.

One informant considered that the heritage value of a specific religious cemetery is dependent upon its cultural exclusivity.

‘There are lots of people we know who are buried there; it definitely has heritage value. If there wasn’t a Jewish cemetery, as such, and you were able to be buried anywhere, then I don’t think it would have any heritage value.’
(37 year old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)
Another informant considered that the cemetery’s heritage value related to its documented local history.

'I suppose it would have some heritage value. It tells you a lot about the town, because you can usually see in a mining town that the people died a lot younger – mainly accidents – than in an agricultural town. You can learn a lot about a place by its cemetery, and they are interesting places.'
(51 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)

To yet another informant, the cemetery’s heritage value relates to progressive occupation by family members.

'We’re creating a family heritage at the cemetery. We’ve actually reserved a fairly large family plot, because of the size of the family and everyone’s got wishes where they want to be buried. ... It definitely creates a heritage. It’s got that name there for future generations to go back and look at. ... I also find it very interesting in historical value.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

One informant expressed concern at the possible loss of heritage through grave renewal.

'I am appalled that in a country as large as Australia, we think we can recycle gravesites. I can understand it in countries where land is at a premium, such as Japan and in parts of Europe, but we don’t have that problem. The problem may come of having to put a cemetery somewhere where it may be difficult for people to get to, if you run out of space in suburbia: which we will do. Land is finite, but I think the loss of heritage is terrible.'
(62 year old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)

An equal number of informants specifically commented that they saw no heritage value in the cemetery, as did those specifically noting it to be significant in this respect. Three visitors inferred that the cemetery’s lack of heritage value related to their personal disconnection from ancestral burial.

'This cemetery doesn’t have any history to me. All my family is buried in England.'
(67 year old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)
Remembrance

Seven visiting informants specifically referred to the cemetery's remembrance value, and five of these people (four of whom were male) considered the cemetery to have significant value of this nature.

One informant particularly appreciated the opportunity that the cemetery presented for memorialisation.

'One of the most important things about the cemetery is that there's somewhere for the memorial, to remember him by. He's got his place in the ground, or his place in the world, so to speak. His name is always going to be written down and not forgotten, somewhere for the grandchildren and relatives and people who didn't go to the funeral to go and visit. ... I think it's critical that we do remember where our deceased go and that they do have memorials and plaques to remember them by.'
(25 year old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)

Another informant particularly appreciated the focus provided by the cemetery as a place to go and remember the deceased on specific occasions.

'You never, ever forget those that have gone, but I guess the cemetery gives you an opportunity to go and remember them on the special occasions, such as birthdays and the like.'
(64 year old, Australian Uniting father, bereaved 3 years)

However, two visiting female informants specifically commented that the cemetery was not necessarily essential in providing remembrance value.

'I don't think that you have to go to the cemetery to remember the person. ... I mean, you remember what you remember yourself; you don't have to go and visit a cemetery.'
(45 year old, Australian non-religious female secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)

This concludes the interpretive analysis of the case study data. The following chapter presents a discussion of the meanings of the qualitative findings.
Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the previous data analysis categories of: visitation reasons, non-visitation reasons, visitation values, visitation activities, visitation emotions, visitation frequency, cemetery values, and memorial values, are discussed within the further reduced categories of:

Cemetery Visitation, and,
Cemetery and Memorial Values.

Research findings are discussed in terms of sociocultural commonalities and discrepancies, and consistency with related literature and the quantitative data. The relationship of the current study to the literature is further reviewed.

Cemetery Visitation

This section presents a discussion of the qualitative findings on cemetery: visitation reasons and values, non-visitation reasons, visitation activities, visitation emotions, visitation frequency, visitation differences between the sexes, and visitation as grief-work.

Visitation Reasons and Values

The current research sought to identify why bereaved people do visit cemeteries, and the personal values of cemetery visitation to bereaved individuals.

Several reasons why bereaved people do visit graves and memorials at cemeteries are identified, including three reasons which appear more frequently within the data. The three principal reasons are: to fulfil a perceived sense of obligation, to maintain a sense of relationship, and to seek solace. The data suggest that these principal reasons for visiting
cemetaries, though not common to all, may be somewhat universal, as none was found to be unique to informants of any specific social or cultural identity. Rather, the principal reasons were found to apply broadly across a diverse group of general cemetery visitors in Australia.

The first principal reason for visiting is to fulfil a perceived sense of obligation or duty. Such sense of obligation or duty may be experienced towards the decedent, the family, or to the visitor themself. It may also relate to the expectations of others, as some people evidently feel obliged to visit out of a sense of religious duty, personal respect, or innate compulsion. The sense of duty or obligation experienced in relation to visiting a grave or memorial may evidently be strong enough to compel a mourner to travel considerable distances on specific days to conduct what are often very brief and simple rituals. What may be a self-imposed burden of obligation can evidently become a source of considerable stress, and this may be best resolved by visiting the cemetery and performing required rituals.

A second principal reason for visiting a cemetery is to maintain a sense of ongoing personal relationship with the decedent. Activities such as talking to the decedent, including them in special anniversary days, and leaving gifts at the grave, are evidently very important to many cemetery visitors towards maintaining a sense of ongoing personal relationship.

In noting that relationships are built up through everyday conversation, Walter (1997:264) suggests that ‘it seems likely that if relationships continue after death, this too is likely to entail everyday conversation, either with the dead or about the dead’. Such relationships evidently do continue and appear of great importance to many bereaved cemetery visitors.

Within his study of bereavement and health in Australia, Ata (1994:76) found that where emotional ties are deeply rooted in the relationship, ‘they are not easily severed simply because of physical separation’. Although not in a cemetery visitation context, Ata (1994) also found that attempting to talk to the bereaved was quite common. He concluded that:

To many of the bereaved, opting to be comforted by the illusions of the presence of the deceased is a lesser trauma than facing the pain of an unbearable reality of death. It provides an escape from the anguish of finality; the hope of permanence overrides the despair of extinction.

(Ata1994: 78)
The cemetery evidently provides an important physical location for such escape from anguish. To many bereaved people, it is essential to be at the gravesite to relate to the decedent as a person, because, as one informant reported:

‘they’re looking at that place and saying, “That’s where that person is; that’s where that person lies”, and therefore to visit and see and communicate or contact that person, they must be in that place.’

A third principal reason for visiting is specifically to seek solace from personal grief, including relief from feelings of guilt. Some guilt may relate to not meeting a perceived sense of obligation or duty to visit, or to neglect of the relationship. Nevertheless, at least within early bereavement, regular cemetery visitation is evidently of significant therapeutic benefit to many people seeking to work their way through intense grief. Visiting a grave can provide a perception of being with the decedent, and a sense of a decedent’s presence can provide appreciable solace from the common early-bereavement anxiety of separation.

Other apparently less-common reasons for visiting the cemetery were found to include: taking or accompanying a principal visitor, being in the vicinity of the cemetery with time to spare, inspecting grave or cemetery development, and habitual visitation.

Personal values of visitation are closely related to reasons for visiting. The majority of informants, who do visit a cemetery, reported that they find the experience to be personally beneficial, in that, from visiting they derive a sense of wellbeing.

Non-Visitation Reasons

Toward understanding the place of the cemetery within a typified grief process, it is essential to recognise that not all bereaved people do visit a cemetery. Accordingly, non-visitaton and reasons for such were also considered in the current research. Identified reasons why some bereaved people do not visit cemeteries include: the remains not being interred in a cemetery, the mourner’s inability to travel to the cemetery, grief repression, religious restrictions, and simply no perceived need to visit.

While the cemetery clearly facilitates vital grief-work opportunities for many people, others evidently manage their grief without any opportunity, or perceived need, to visit a cemetery.
Visiting the location of the remains of a decedent appears to be less important to mourners who hold little or no perception of association between the body and spirit of the deceased. To these mourners, little sense of obligation to visit exists, nor desire to communicate with the decedent, and solace is therefore unattainable from carrying out such activities. Those who may be genuinely unable to travel to the cemetery, or whose visitation may be restricted by religious observance, would also be free of any sense of such obligation.

In his study of London widows, Parkes (1996:141-142) found that those who initially repressed grief, showed little or no emotional response or formal mourning, and avoided visiting the grave or crematorium, were found to ultimately suffer more psychological and physical problems than those who ‘broke down’ in the first week. Parkes also found that those who ‘held back’ became more ‘psychologically disturbed’ around the anniversary of death.

Osterweis, Solomon & Green (1984:54) conclude that people likely to become stuck in pathological grief reactions are ‘those whose prebereavement response patterns were to avoid confrontation and to escape from difficult situations’. An implication of this is that people with a natural tendency to avoid cemetery visitation, specifically to evade confronting the reality of death, or sadness or recurrent grief, may be likely to suffer pathological outcomes. In the current study, two informants had deliberately avoided visiting the cemetery, expressly to evade such confrontation. Both were subsequently diagnosed as suffering pathological grief, and at the times of interviews, one was still under psychiatric care and the other was receiving psychological counselling.

The data suggest that self-justification for not visiting the cemetery may be an important factor in averting feelings of guilt at not meeting what is otherwise a commonly perceived sense of obligation. Deliberate avoidance of cemetery visitation, in the absence of self-justification, may be indicative of unresolved pathological grief, including self-recognised inability to cope.

Visitation Activities

The current research sought to identify what bereaved people commonly do when they visit a cemetery in Australia.
Principal gravesite activities are identified as placing flowers, maintaining the grave or memorial, and talking to the decedent. Crying and praying appear less frequently in the data, while several other activities were identified as being undertaken by still fewer informants.

Placing flowers at the grave or memorial was found to be the most popular gravesite activity among informants of diverse faiths and relationships to the decedent. Almost 92% of visiting qualitative informants advised that they do place flowers at the cemetery.

Maintaining the grave or memorial is another popular activity among cemetery visitors of various faiths and relationships to the decedent. As placement of flowers may symbolise a gift, so may maintenance of the grave symbolise continuing care for a decedent. Almost 70% of visiting qualitative informants advised that they do perform maintenance activities at the cemetery.

Talking to a decedent at the grave or memorial site is yet another popular activity of cemetery visitors across various faiths and relationships, though such communication requires some personal concept of an afterlife. Over 52% of visiting qualitative informants advised that they do talk to the decedent at the cemetery. Common gravesite ‘conversations’ include renewal of acquaintance by saying ‘Hello’, assuring the decedent that that they are missed and not forgotten, and updating the decedent on recent and current events. Catholic visitors may also ask the decedent to intercede on behalf of family members.

Moderately common cemetery visitation activities include crying and praying. Crying is more evident during early stages of grief, among females, and particularly those of Italian and Greek origin. Prayer appears a relatively common practice among some religious visitors.

Other cemetery visitor activities include performing various religious rites, kissing the memorial, feasting or drinking with the decedent, placing mementos and other gifts on the grave, standing silently at the memorial site, talking with other mourners, and conjuring up images of the decedent.

The data indicate that cemetery visitation activities serve at least one of two purposes. These purposes are, to enable mourners to undertake perceived duties and fulfil their obligations, and to maintain an ongoing relationship with the decedent. Undertaking perceived duties and
fulfilling obligations were found to be helpful towards mitigating the common bereavement emotion of guilt. Maintaining an ongoing relationship with the decedent was found to be helpful towards mitigating other bereavement emotions, including grief, sadness, loss and loneliness.

Visitation Emotions

The current research sought to identify common emotional experiences of bereaved people when visiting a cemetery.

Two major groups of emotions and six other specific emotions are identified among visiting informants of diverse social and cultural backgrounds. The major groups of cemetery visitation emotions are identified as sorrow and solace.

As a group of emotions, sorrow includes grief and sadness, with the latter being the most frequently expressed specific emotion. The second major group of emotions is that of solace, including relief and peace. Other emotions, in descending order of frequency of occurrence within the data, include guilt, respect, loss, loneliness, fear and anger.

With the notable exception of emotions of solace (including relief and peace), all other emotions experienced by visiting informants have been previously recognised within the literature (Worden 1982; Raphael 1984; Sanders 1989; Rando 1993; Attig 1996) as common emotions of grief. However, the emotional benefits of cemetery visitation, reported by over 78% of visiting informants in the qualitative sample, have until now remained unrecognised.

Emotions of sorrow (grief and sadness) and of guilt, loss, loneliness and anger were found to progressively subside in most regular visitors. Subsidence in intensity of these emotions generally occurred rapidly from the funeral, or following a specific turning point. Subsidence in intensity of emotions was found to correspond to abatement of cemetery visitation.

The data indicate that retention of emotions of grief and sadness, guilt, loss, loneliness, and anger may be more common among those who avoid cemetery visitation, particularly in early bereavement. Deliberate avoidance of the cemetery may be indicative of a failure to embrace
the concept of personal grief-work, and may further deny such mourners the emotional benefits of cemetery visitation evidently available to more regular visitors.

Visitation Frequency

The current research sought to identify how cemetery visitation typically modulates over time, and the impact of specific turning points on visitation abatement.

Self-reported abatement of frequency of cemetery visits was found to be consistent with the current study's quantitative findings of a visitation trajectory (Bachelor 1998d; 1998e). Most qualitative informants (visiting within five years of bereavement) recognised that the frequency of their visits had already abated. Abatement of cemetery visitation frequency was most evident within weeks or months of the death and funeral, but in some cases, occurred a year or more later. Most informants found that abatement of cemetery visitation correlated to subsidence in intensity of grief emotions.

Customary pre-bereavement practices of seeing a significant other and giving gifts on personal and public anniversaries, and religious festivals (including birthdays, Mothers Day, Fathers Day, Christmas and Easter) are commonly substituted after death with visiting the grave or memorial and placing flowers, greeting cards and other symbolic gifts. Such substitute symbolic giving manifests on-going love in an endeavour to maintain the relationship, and mitigates the emotions of loss, particularly at times of specific personal remembrance. For many people, the cemetery evidently provides an essential place of focus, and for some, the only place where vital communication with the decedent may occur on such important occasions.

Cemetery visitation is evidently a crucial aspect of grief-work for many people, and allows the full emotions of grief to be mitigated through keeping a part of the decedent alive within the life of the mourner. The data suggest that, within the lives of such people, cemetery visitation is of most value in the early stages of bereavement, then usually diminishes progressively.
Visitation Differences between the Sexes

The current research sought to identify how cemetery visitation behaviour may vary by sex of the bereaved person. Sex of the mourner is found to be a significant determinant of cemetery visitation behaviour across informants of diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

Quantitative data confirm consistent observations that many more females visit cemeteries than do males, and that females tend to spend more time at the grave or memorial site on each visit. Qualitative data indicate that female informants are more likely than males to: bring and place flowers on a grave or memorial, socially interact with other visitors, visit their children's graves, tend graves other than of their own family, and express emotions including crying at the gravesite. Female informants were also found more likely than males to seek counselling and to use antidepressant drugs towards suppressing emotions of grief, while male informants were generally found to be more inclined towards stoicism and pragmatism.

The literature indicates that females are more likely than males to: suffer post-bereavement psychological illness (Raphael 1984; Sanders 1989; Worden 1991; Parkes 1996), use chemical antidepressants (Parkes 1996), be religious (Ata 1994; Francis 1997; Australian Bureau of Statistics 1997f), and be tender-minded (Parkes 1996; Francis 1997). Bereaved males are reported to be more likely than females to: display long-term signs of social withdrawal and disengagement (Sanders 1989), remarry sooner following the death of a spouse (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson 1993), and die of a heart attack after the loss of a spouse (Parkes 1996). According to Parkes (1996), different gender-related grief reactions may be observed prior to adulthood:

Boys, more than girls, commonly express their grief in aggressive ways, while girls, on the other hand, may become compulsive care-givers.
Parkes (1996:128)

Visitation as Grief-Work

The term 'grief-work', first proposed by Freud (1917), remains an important concept in current bereavement literature (Worden 1982; Attig 1996; Parkes 1996).
'To accept the reality of the loss' is the first of Worden's (1982) tasks of mourning. Several informants in the current study identified the funeral as being of significant value in this respect. However, cemetery visitors evidently constitute mourners mostly working through Worden's subsequent tasks: to work through the pain of grief, to adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing, and to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life.

Working through the pain of grief, adjustment and moving on with life, at least in some cases, correlates to self-reported, initially-frequent then diminishing cemetery visitation.

Parkes (1996) notes that grief-work includes an:

attempt to make sense of the loss, to fit it into one's set of assumptions about the world (one's 'assumptive world') or to modify those assumptions if need be.

(Parkes 1996:78)

Parkes further suggests that attempts to make sense of what has happened 'would seem to be one way of restoring what is lost, by fitting its absence into some superordinate pattern'. But, he considers, if these attempts do not succeed 'then the preoccupation will increase and may indeed become obsessive' (Parkes 1996:78).

The current data indicate that failure to make sense of the loss of a significant other, particularly a child, is a significant factor in much frequent cemetery visitation. One's assumptive world may be modified to incorporate concepts of the decedent in a fitting afterlife and to facilitate meaningful communication with the decedent. Such fitting afterlife may include a pre-existing notion of heaven, or some other spiritual world (for example: one's child, accompanied by others, in a metaphysical playground). Concepts of an afterlife are evidently adopted or modified (as suggested by Parkes 1996) to suit the needs of the mourner. As one distressed grandmother in the current study said, "That's how I comfort myself. I don't think about whether it's true or not".
Cemetery and Memorial Values

This section presents a discussion of the qualitative findings on personal values of cemeteries and memorials to the bereaved.

Cemetery Values

The current research sought to identify common personal values of cemeteries to bereaved people. Several specific values are identified from the qualitative data, including sacredness, cultural significance, social support, heritage and remembrance.

That, to many Australians, the cemetery is as sacred as the church should not be surprising, as the ancestry of modern Australian cemeteries lies in consecrated churchyards and church-controlled burial grounds. To some informants, the cemetery has a degree of sacredness, but less than that of the church. Yet others considered that the cemetery has a sense of ‘sacredness’ in that it should be venerated, but for non-religious reasons. All qualitative informants considered the cemetery to be a very special place.

Many visitors value various opportunities that the cemetery provides for continuation of cultural traditions. To this end, cultural segregation of traditional funereal and commemorative activities is particularly important to many people of diverse backgrounds. Yet this choice has become less available in modern cemeteries developed within concepts of non-denominationalism, or multiculturalism.

Evidently, for some bereaved people, cemeteries are venues of important social support and assistance towards grief mitigation, through mutual sharing of personal bereavement experiences with other visitors. Close and highly valuable friendships were found to have developed among truly empathetic mourners within specific cultural and social groups clustered within dedicated cemetery compartments.

Notions of cemetery heritage value appear to be held more by those with a greater concept of Australian family heritage and those without a direct emotional interest in the particular cemetery. However, heritage values to bereaved cemetery clients do include cultural heritage, local and family histories. According to Hall & McArthur (1996), 'heritage is significant to
different communities, groups and individuals depending on their values and attitudes and the nature of the heritage resource'. The very notion of heritage is known to be value-laden, as values are central to our understanding of heritage and, as Hall & McArthur (1996) acknowledge, all heritage is based on human values. It is therefore hardly surprising that perceived heritage values of cemeteries are recognised more by those 'outside' the cemetery than by those with a direct emotional investment.

The personal values of cemeteries to bereaved people are evidently different to the values popularly envisaged by the general community, historians, and even cemetery managers. Cemeteries are often considered to be simply places for the disposition of human remains. But as Llewellyn (1998:36) identifies, 'cemeteries fulfil a practical role, but that is not why they are valued'. Although the practical act of disposition of human dead is acknowledged as being important, it is according to Llewellyn (p.61), 'probably secondary to cemeteries' role in the continuum of life'.

However, other researchers and authors have continually overlooked the place of the cemetery in the grief process. The current quantitative research reveals that around 77% of cemetery traffic relates to commemorative visitation, around 95% of post-funeral traffic is to visit the grave or memorial of a close relative, and most of the remaining 5% is to visit friends graves for commemorative purposes. Only some 0.2% of people sampled were visiting the cemetery for its heritage and/or recreation values. Current data clearly indicate that the main societal value of the cemetery is personal commemoration of significant decedents.

Walter (1994:176) observes that 'historical preservation societies and friends groups are not noted for supporting the cemetery as a place where local bereaved families can bury their dead, or where death can be publicly symbolised, nor for campaigning to reform the burial laws to make continued local use easier'. Walter (1994) continues, suggesting that 'historical tourism' ties up land that might otherwise be leased by bereaved people, who may now have to travel well out of their local area to bury their dead. This poses a challenging dichotomy to Just's (1989) suggestion that cemeteries tie up land that might otherwise be used for local leisure.
Memorial Values

The current research also sought to identify common personal values of cemetery memorials to socially and culturally diverse bereaved persons in Australia.

Cemetery memorials were found to proclaim the significance of the life of the decedent and hold several short- and long-term values to cemetery visitors. These values include providing a focal point for remembrance, facilitating cultural or personal expression, fulfilling the decedent's wishes, symbolising the decedent, identifying the location of the remains, and recording family histories.

Perhaps the most significant value of a cemetery memorial is in providing a specific focal point for remembrance of the decedent. Where a memorial is held as symbolic of a decedent, maintenance of such memorial (a principal activity of cemetery visitors) may symbolise continuing personal care for the decedent. Clegg (1991) also found a memorial to be an important aid toward personal expression of loss:

When a memorial marks the site of a deposition, then for months and sometimes for a few years, it provides a real focus for grief. It is the place where the mourner can re-experience and express the pain of the loss at a time when he or she chooses to visit it. … A static memorial in a suitable environment gives mourners the chance of going to a chosen site as and when they wish, and thus enables them to exercise some control over their expression of the loss. (Clegg 1991:3)

Memorials also facilitate cultural and personal expression through choice of basic type, location and individual style. Such choice may reflect family cultural traditions or personality of the decedent. Conglomerates of distinctly styled monuments clearly distinguish cemetery compartments utilised by specific cultural groups.

Despite their general popularity, physical memorials are not considered to be significant among all cultural groups, suggesting that specific social obligation is an important determinant of the significance of a memorial. Generally, among people who opt for cremation, less emphasis is placed on the interment site and memorialisation than occurs among those who choose burial.

Leaving a grave unmarked, or scattering cremated remains, provide convenience to some bereaved people, particularly in the short-term, but these actions are also found to hinder grief
resolution and to evoke emotions of distress among those for whom identification of a point of focus and/or historical recording are particularly important. United States psychologist, Dana Cable (1999), considers that:

The reality is that most survivors need a place to focus their grief – a place for memorialisation. ... If a family talks of scattering the ashes, it is wise to raise questions as to where they would go in three years if they wanted to feel close to the deceased and deal with any remaining grief issues. (Cable 1999:24)

Clegg (1991), suggests that faithfully implementing the expressed wishes of the deceased, in this respect, may not necessarily be in the best interests of the bereaved:

Occasionally, individuals ... say they don’t want money spent on a funeral ... the intention is to save the family needless expense. However, from another point of view, it totally denies the importance of the ritual and the psychological dimension to death and grief, and if actually put into action, can deprive the family of the various processes which facilitate mourning and adjustment. Sometimes, I feel these decisions are made because there is no real knowledge of what loss is like, and although families derive comfort from carrying out the stipulated wishes, later, they may come to regret the lack of a grave, gravestone or memorial plaque. (Clegg 1991:2)

Current research findings on memorial values to cemetery visitors in Australia are highly consistent with Clegg’s (1991) findings on the values of memorials to British cemetery visitors.

**Relationship of the Study to the Literature**

The literature documents a wealth of contemporary knowledge of bereavement and grief, particularly from clinical psychological studies, but also from some sociological, physiological and multi-disciplinary studies. Concepts of a typical grief process and common variations to this process are well acknowledged. However, the significance of the cemetery in the grief process has, until now, remained a significant omission from the bereavement literature.

The research setting itself is not so well documented, other than from an historic perspective. Psychological and sociological studies of cemetery visitation are virtually non-existent, though two previous British studies: one psychological and the other anthropological, did
involve some component of cemetery visitation research. Neither study focussed on the place of the cemetery in the grief process, though both do contribute in their own ways toward knowledge of this important psychosociological phenomenon. Francis, Kellahe & Neophytou (2000), in particular, present valuable key findings of British cemetery visitation behaviour research, which were generally complementary to findings of the current study.

As with the current research, Francis et al. (2000) found that cemetery visitors in London were almost invariably happy to participate in their study. ‘Naturally, a high degree of sensitivity was required, but at the same time, the refusal rate was very low’ (Francis et al. 2000:36). However, some findings were inconsistent with the current research. Francis et al. (2000:44) considered that ‘rates of summer visiting are likely to be double those of winter’. This is substantially different to the Australian context, where the quantitative data reveal no significant seasonal variation in visitation rate. A further inconsistency between the studies appears in the extent of long-term visitation. Francis et al. (2000:44) found that ‘some graves are visited continually over four or more generations’. The current study found that throughout Australia, visitation is very low and infrequent after the first generation. It appears extremely rare for graves in Australia to be visited beyond two generations from the deceased. It is here suggested that apparently shorter-term interest in visiting graves in Australia may relate to less entrenched perceptions of family heritage than exists in Britain, and also to somewhat less likelihood of Australian progeny to be living in close proximity to a ‘family cemetery’.

The current interpretive ethnographic study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process opens a whole new dimension to bereavement research in Australia. This study draws bereavement research out of the commonly contrived clinical setting (with a major focus on atypical grief) and extends it into what is perhaps the most natural setting of the bereaved (with a major focus on typical bereavement behaviour).

The current study documents the first social research into the place of the cemetery in the grief process, combined quantitative and qualitative study of cemetery visitation, and sociological investigation of cemetery visitation in Australia.

This concludes the discussion of the meanings of the qualitative data findings and relationship of the study to the literature. The following final chapter presents the conclusion of the study.
Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the thesis is drawn to a close. The study is summarised and the researcher’s contributions to the study and some aspects of the methodologies are reconsidered. The conclusions are presented as a theory of the place of the cemetery in the grief process. Finally, some suggestions toward further research are proposed.

Summary of the Study

This thesis presents a detailed description of the study of cemetery visitation. Its objective is to answer the primary research question:

What is the place of the cemetery in the grief process?

The researcher brought to the study almost twenty years professional experience in cemetery operations and service management, including over a decade’s service and observations of the commemorative activities of thousands of mourners at Australia’s largest cemetery. Broader experience has included reviews of cemetery operations throughout Australia and overseas, and active participation in relevant industry associations.

Every endeavour has been made by the researcher to become acquainted with and immersed in the field of study. Such endeavours have included soliciting the opinions of over three thousand people on the services offered at major cemeteries around Australia, reviewing the bereavement and cemetery literature, and conducting in-depth interviews of over two-dozen diverse bereaved people. By these means, the researcher has become intimately familiar with the personal experiences and raw emotions typifying those significantly touched by bereavement.
In this study, a conventional quantitative investigation was initially employed to explore
generalities of cemetery visitation, including its numerical significance and key
demographics. However, personal values of the place of the cemetery in the grief process
could only be adequately identified and investigated through a complementary qualitative, or
naturalistic, study to reveal the specifics of particular individuals. To this end, an interpretive
social science, grounded theory, ethnographic case study approach was ultimately employed.
The preliminary quantitative data provided essential insight into both selection of suitable
case study informants, and appropriate questions towards gathering crucial qualitative data.

Qualitative informants were purposively sampled to select members of specialised
populations, representing unique informative cases for in-depth investigation. As quantitative
data indicated relationship of the decedent and religion of the family to be the most significant
determinants of cemetery visitation, a good cross-section of these variables, in particular, is to
be found among the case studies.

During the four-year study period, the researcher endeavoured to discover both the general
and personal experiential nature of cemetery visitation, and specifically, the place of the
cemetery in the grief process to a diverse group of mourners. The thesis also describes and
demonstrates the researcher's familiarity with, and understanding of, the physical and social
environment within which the subject behaviour occurs.

After presenting the study's major quantitative findings, illustrating the general nature of
cemetery visitation, an interpretive analysis of key qualitative data is then presented and
discussed towards answering the primary research question.

In this concluding chapter, the data analysis from the methodologies employed is brought
together to ground a theory of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, and thus to
answer the primary research question. The conclusions of the study of cemetery visitation are
presented as a theory of practical bereavement, or grief-work. The theory has been derived
from an extensive examination of the environment of the cemetery visitor and through
personal perceptions of a diverse group of mourners.

The researcher gave rigorous attention to the technicalities of gathering the extensive data
throughout the study period. All data were carefully cross-checked and the researcher ensured
thorough personal familiarity with the data. The ideas contributing to the theory arose directly from the data throughout the study. The theory is therefore grounded in, or developed from, the study of the place of the cemetery in the grief process. The researcher believes that the grounded theory accurately and honestly explains the research phenomenon.

Theory Construction

The theory has been derived from, and used to explain, the personal perception of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, as explained by a selected group of recently bereaved persons and should be considered further against the perceived reality of other mourners. Subsequent modification of the theory, or production of differing theories of cemetery visitation, should not be unexpected. This study, involving an extensive though relatively small sample of the total recently bereaved population, has produced its own explanations of the place of the cemetery in the grief process. Different theoretical outcomes are likely when subjective worlds and data are examined. However, therein lies a key value of studies employing an interpretive approach: the real world in which people live and function is not reduced to statistics, but reflected in the way in which life is lived and interpreted (Lipscombe 1997).

Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) naturalistic inquiry characteristics of idiographic interpretation and tentative application imply that ‘the naturalist can only set out working hypotheses together with a description of the time and context within which they were found to hold’. Accordingly, rather than proposed as a definitive universal statement, the current theory is tendered as a working hypothesis, offering a currently adequate explanation of the place of the cemetery in the grief process to a specific group of diverse Australians at the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, many general findings of the current research are likely to be transferable within a broader context of general cemetery environments, at least within Australia, and possibly throughout Western societies. The researcher is confident that the theory would be duplicated if another researcher applied the same research methods and practices to a similar group of recently bereaved persons.
The Grief Process

Prior to constructing a theory of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, this section concisely reviews what the literature refers to as the grief process, drawing in particular from the contributions of Worden (1982), Parkes (1996) and Attig (1996).

Grief is a universal human reaction to the loss of a significant other. Normal grief comprises three or more distinct phases, including:

- An initial trauma response (involving shock and disbelief),
- An intervening grief response (involving cognitive awareness and acute mourning),
- An ultimate psychosocial transition (involving resolution, accommodation and reconstruction).

Satisfactory psychosocial transition is the ultimate desirable outcome of working through this process of grief. Grief-work is the sum of a mourner’s endeavours toward achieving a satisfactory bereavement outcome.

The Place of the Cemetery in the Grief Process

This section presents the theory of the place of the cemetery in the grief process, derived from the research data. The theory comprises a distillation of the data analysis and discussion.

Social and individual values of the cemetery are highly subjective. General community values attributed to the cemetery through legislation and management regulations do not, and cannot, reflect those of all stakeholders. Even among recently bereaved cemetery visitors, personal values of the cemetery vary by:

- Emotional significance of the decedent,
- Ethnicity of the family,
- Sex of the visitor,
- Method of disposition of remains,
- Afterlife concept of the visitor, and,
- Progression or accomplishment of grief-work by the visitor.
The primary service provided by the cemetery, and the rite through which the bereaved symbolically and physically enters, is the funeral. This social acknowledgment of the humanity and mortality of the decedent is an important catalyst of grieving. The funeral helps the bereaved accept the reality of the death of a significant other and facilitates a transition from the initial trauma response to the loss.

The cemetery takes on its significant place in the grief process at this transition to the intervening grief response (involving cognitive awareness and acute mourning) and such significance persists to the ultimate psychosocial transition (involving resolution, accommodation and reconstruction). Through these phases, the bereaved typically works through the pain of grief, adjusts to an environment in which the decedent is missing, emotionally relocates the decedent, and moves on with life.

Many bereaved people uphold the cemetery as a place of great emotional and spiritual significance, and one to be respected for its sacredness, cultural significance, social support, heritage, and commemorative values. Visiting the cemetery is a most important behavioural activity of many people holding these values. However, not all bereaved people are able to, or chose to, visit the cemetery. Personal concepts of grief-work may therefore be adopted which accommodate non-visititation.

Nevertheless, to literally millions of bereaved Australians, the cemetery:

- Allows potentially stressful obligations to be expressed and resolved,
- Offers some escape from anguish of separation from the decedent,
- Allows a degree of control over separation and loss, and,
- Offers solace and a sense of personal wellbeing.

For most people, the cemetery is a vital focal point for remembrance of the decedent and facilitates expression rather than repression of grief. Principal cemetery visitation reasons, activities and emotions are all related to a sense of connection with the decedent, and most cemetery visitors maintain a strong perception of visiting the decedent as a person.
Cemetery visitation is a crucial aspect of grief-work for many people, and offers most value in the early stages of bereavement. Initially frequent cemetery visitation allows the bereaved to work through and mitigate intense emotions, including grief and sadness, guilt, loss, loneliness, and anger. A perception of the decedent’s presence can provide appreciable solace from the intense anxiety of separation most commonly experienced in early bereavement. Visiting the decedent’s grave or memorial also allows emotions of grief to be mitigated through keeping a part of the decedent alive within the life of the mourner and facilitating a progressive emotional relocation. Deliberate avoidance of the cemetery denies mourners the potential therapeutic benefits of cemetery visitation.

The main societal value of the cemetery is personal commemoration of a significant decedent. This has a greater place in the grief process of females than of males, and is more significant within some specific ethnicities.

Cemetery visitation is a high participatory, value-laden, expressive activity, and one of the most significant, observable behavioural activities of recently bereaved people. It is an important meaningful behavioural activity of millions of bereaved Australians, and one driven by a combination of complex social, cultural and psychological factors. To many people, the cemetery provides a basis for control over the loss of a significant other.

Further Research

Issues emerging from the current research, which perhaps warrant further study, include:

Cooperative self-help groups within cemeteries,
Socioeconomic status as a determinant of cemetery visitation,
Personality as a determinant of cemetery visitation,
Universality of key findings of the current study, and,
Comparative long-term cemetery visitation trajectories.

Several self-help groups and activities were identified from the qualitative data. A group of young mothers was found to generally coordinate their visits to a children’s area within a large cemetery, cooperatively maintain each other’s graves, and support each other through reciprocative counselling. Other mutual support activities were reported among informants
within specific cemetery compartments catering to Italian-Catholic, Greek-Orthodox, and Muslim families. Naturally occurring self-help groups within the cemetery evidently comprise bereaved people who may have experienced a similar type of loss, or are of similar ethnicity, including first language and religious beliefs. Although somewhat beyond the focus of the current study, further investigative research into the prevalence, social dynamics and support values of such groups may be expected to reveal additional significant coping behaviours within bereavement.

Socioeconomic status is a subjective concept, generally relating to education level, professional status, financial income, and accumulated wealth. No measures of financial income or accumulated wealth were included in the current research, but education level and professional status may be regarded as partial indicators of socioeconomic status. Within the current qualitative research sample, frequent visitation was reported only among lower-educated informants, while occasional visits and non-visititation were reported significantly more among higher-educated informants, suggesting a strong negative correlation between level of education and frequency of cemetery visitation. Frequent visitation was also reported only among long-term unemployed and sub-professional informants, while occasional visits and non-visititation were reported significantly more among professional informants, suggesting a strong negative correlation between professionalism and frequency of cemetery visitation. Further investigation would be required to determine precisely what factors are operating here, however, available time and employment status are implicated. Less positive outlook and social reinforcement, and chronic melancholia may relate more to the unemployed and sub-professional informants than to the professional group.

Personality may also be a significant determinant of cemetery visitation, but no attempt has yet been made to identify personality traits of cemetery visitors. It is suggested that the psychological personality trait of tender-mindedness, which has been associated with religiosity and femininity (Eysenck & Eysenck 1985; Francis, 1997), may also be a significant factor in much cemetery visitation. However, further research would be required to identify any such association.

Comparative research into the place of the cemetery within the grief process, undertaken in other countries, would enable the universality of key findings of the current research to be tested. Also, a comparison of the long-term cemetery visitation trajectories of other countries,
including Britain where it appears that significant transgenerational visitation occurs, would enable the suggested reasons for apparently shorter-term interest in visiting graves in Australia to be tested.

Epilogue

The ultimate word on this study is ascribed to biblical King Solomon of Israel, who observed around three thousand years ago that:

Of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. (Ecclesiastes 12:12 KJV).
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APPENDICES
Appendix 1

DEATH IN AUSTRALIA

Based on 134,200 annual deaths in Australia, at a mean age of 77 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997a) and each having a typical 25 close relatives (including surviving spouse, siblings, nephews and nieces, children and grand-children), it is estimated that around 3,355,000 Australians (ie. more than 1 out of 6) will suffer the loss of a close family member in the year 2000. Many more will experience the death of a less close relative, friend or associate.

Age at Death

Figure A2.1 shows that more males than females die at all ages under 80 years. The average male attains around 75 years of age. More females than males die over 80 years, with the average female attaining around 81 years of age.

![Bar chart showing deaths by age and sex]

**Figure A2.1** Deaths in Australia during 1995 by Age and Sex  
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1997a))

During the 20 to 39 year old period, the male to female death ratio is 2.7:1. Factors involved include higher risk activities of young males, including motor accidents (2.2:1) and the significantly higher incidence of male suicide (3.8:1).

Causes of Death

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996b) 'the male death rate is higher than that of females for most causes of death'. However, 'for some leading causes, the number of female deaths exceeds the number of male deaths. These are cerebrovascular disease (stroke), senile dementia, and hereditary and degenerative diseases of the central nervous system, all usually associated with older age groups in which females predominate' (see Figure A2.2).
Figure A2.2  *Deaths in Australia during 1995 by Cause and Sex*  
(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996b))

Accidents are the leading cause of death for those under 45 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996b). ‘Malignant neoplasms (cancers) are the second leading cause among this group except for those aged 15 to 24, where it is suicide. For those aged 45 years and over, neoplasms and heart disease are the leading causes.’

‘All other causes’ include diseases of other organs, infectious and parasitic diseases, perinatal deaths, poisonings, violence, and ill-defined conditions (Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996b)).

*Place of Death*

Various authors (including Sudnow 1967; Osterweis, Solomon & Green 1984; O’Connor 1986; Chambers 1990 & 1994; Zelinka 1991; Ata 1994; Nicol 1997; Liveris 1999) remark on the institutionalisation of death, through an historical shift from the most common place of death being the traditional home bed, to death more typically occurring in a hospital or similar institution. Some (Walter 1994; Ata 1994; Deveson 1997; Griffin & Tobin 1997) have postulated figures ranging from ‘over half’ to ‘ninety percent’ of contemporary deaths occurring in hospitals and other institutions, though none of these reports are validated.

The Victorian *Application for Cremation* form requires the place of death to be specified. A review of all applications for cremation for the last annual quarters of 1989 and 1999, conducted at Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park is summarised in the Table A2.1.

A significant trend away from traditional home deaths (23% down to 16%) is apparent over this ten-year period. This correlates to an increase in hospital deaths (53% up to 58%) and all institutionalised deaths (totalling 73% up to 79%) for the same period.

There appears no reason why people who are buried would die in different places to those who are cremated, nor why these proportions would be at all unique to Fawkner. It therefore
may be construed that almost 60% of Victorians currently die in a hospital, and almost 80% in some institution.

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<td>156</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Place</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospice/Nursing Home</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Own Residence</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Place</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A2.1  *Shift in place of death over ten years*
Appendix 2

QUANTITATIVE STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

--------- Memorial Park ---------

1. What was the relationship to you of the closest deceased person, whose memorial you are visiting today?

- Grandparent/Anccestor
- Parent (incl. In-Law)
- Spouse
- Brother/Sister (incl. In-Law)
- Daughter/Son (incl. In-Law)
- Cousin/Uncle/Aunt/Nephew/Niece
- Friend
- Other

2. Bearing in mind that many people intend to visit more often than they are really able to, how frequently would you actually visit this memorial?

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<th>First visit</th>
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<th>1/YEAR</th>
<th>2-11/yr</th>
<th>1/Month</th>
<th>2-4/Month</th>
<th>1/Week</th>
<th>2-6/Week</th>
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3. Does this particular visit coincide with any personal anniversary or special day?

- No
- Birthday
- Death/Funeral
- Wedding
- Other

4. What nationality do members of your (relative's) family mostly identify themselves with?

- American
- Greek
- Italian
- British
- Other

5. Was your (relative's) funeral conducted in accordance with a particular family religion? If yes, which?

- No religion
- Unknown
- Catholic
- Anglican
- Orthodox
- Other Christian
- Other
- Non-Christian

6. Was your (relative) cremated or buried?

- Cremated
- Buried

7. In what year did the death of your (relative) occur?

8. Is there anything, in general, which you particularly dislike about the cemetery?

9. Is there anything, in general, which you particularly like about the cemetery?

10. Which of the following brackets includes your age?

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<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
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<th>80+</th>
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11. Sex of respondent?

- Male
- Female

Interviewer______________________________  Date of interview: __/__/__
Appendix 3

INTRODUCTION REQUEST

Rev. Spyridon Vandoros
Rector, St. Nektarios Greek Orthodox Parish
PO Box 194
Fawkner 3060

September 1998

Dear Rev. Vandoros,

You may recall we met just before Easter, when I spoke to you about the research I am undertaking on cemetery visitation. I appreciated the opportunity to talk to you and your interest in assisting.

You may also recall that you spoke to the Bishop's office for me, requesting some information on Orthodox funeral and remembrance practices, but unfortunately I didn't hear anything further.

I am undertaking a doctoral research project on cemetery visitation among mourners of different social and cultural backgrounds.

I have already collected and analysed statistical data from 3,000 brief interviews of cemetery clients around Australia and now wish to conduct a smaller number of in-depth personal interviews with people of specific cultural groups. As you know, Greek Orthodox mourners are highly significant cemetery visitors.

The project has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee. I have enclosed a copy of an information sheet prepared for potential participants.

I am hoping you may be able to refer me to a few Greek Orthodox parishioners who have experienced a significant bereavement, more than 3 months but less than 5 years ago, and who may be interested in participating in this research.

As any language other than English is 'all Greek to me', participants would need to be fairly well spoken in English. It would also help if the bereavements were of different relationships (eg. parent, spouse, child, other).

I hope this is not too much to ask and that you can help me. Please let me know if you are able to assist. I look forward to catching up with you again soon.

Sincerely,

Philip Bachelor
Appendix 4a

INFORMATION SHEET

CEMETERY VISITATION: The place of the cemetery in the grief process

This study is part of a social research project conducted by Philip Bachelor, PhD candidate with Charles Sturt University and technical services manager at Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park. Other project data has been collected Australia-wide with support of the Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association and major cemeteries in each state.

The purpose of this part of the study is to explore relationships between grief and cemetery visitation, and to identify the importance of cemetery visitation to mourners of different social and cultural backgrounds.

The results will give the cemeteries industry a far greater understanding of its various clients and their personal needs. This will provide a sound basis for future planning of improved cemetery facilities and services throughout Australia. It is expected that this will help literally hundreds of thousands of people each year during the most difficult period of their lives.

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and involves one or more in-depth personal interviews, which will take the form of a discussion and may take more than an hour at a time.

These discussions will focus on your recent bereavement and cemetery visitation and therefore may evoke emotions of loss. The researcher has appropriate experience and is sensitive to this. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable with a particular question, you are free to not answer it. You may also withdraw your consent and discontinue your involvement in the project at any time.

If you consent to the interview being tape-recorded, this will allow discussion to flow without interruption and enable your information to be recorded with greater accuracy than is possible from hurriedly written notes.

The researcher, Philip Bachelor may be contacted at Fawkner Crematorium & Memorial Park, 1187 Sydney Road Fawkner, Victoria. His telephone number is (03) 9359 3777.

NOTE: This project has been approved by Charles Sturt University's Ethics in Human Research Committee. 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
Ethics in Human Research Committee
The Grange
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst NSW 2795

Tel: (063) 384 187
Fax: (063) 384 833

Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix 4b

CONSENT FORM

CEMETERY VISITATION:
The place of the cemetery in the grief process

I, .............................................. have read (or have had read to me) the information on the back of this page and understood it. Any questions I may have had have been satisfactorily answered. The purpose of the research has been explained to me, including the potential discomforts associated with the research.

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 permission.

I agree to participate in this activity on the understanding that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.

I do/do not (delete one) permit the researcher to tape record my interview as part of this project.

This study has been approved by Charles Sturt University’s Ethics in Human Research Committee. I understand that if I have any complaints or concerns about this research I can contact:

Mr Barry Yau
Executive Officer
Ethics in Human Research Committee
The Grange
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst NSW 2795

Phone: (063) 384 187
Fax: (063) 384 833

Signed: .............................................. Date: ....../...../.....
## Qualitative Interview Guide

**Cemetery Visitation:**
The place of the cemetery in the grief process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRIMARY QUESTIONS</th>
<th>LOOK FOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Please tell me about yourself?</td>
<td>Age, Sex</td>
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<td>Nationality, Religion</td>
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<td>Family status</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How would you describe (deceased)?</td>
<td>Age at death, Sex</td>
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<td>Duration and type of relationship</td>
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<td>Employment</td>
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<td>3. Please tell me about your personal experiences with death and grief?</td>
<td>Any previous loss experience</td>
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<td>Period of loss</td>
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<td>Cause of death, Preparation for loss</td>
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<td>4. What other changes have happened in your life in response to or following the death?</td>
<td>Emotional changes</td>
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<td>Relative position in grief process</td>
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<td>Impact on family structure and relationships</td>
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<td>Economic impact through loss</td>
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<td>Changes in religiosity</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Tell me about (deceased’s) funeral</td>
<td>Burial / cremation</td>
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<td>Personal value of funeral ritual</td>
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<td>Opportunity for personal goodbye</td>
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<td>6. Where do you believe (deceased) is now?</td>
<td>Personal concept of afterlife</td>
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<td>Relationship between body and spirit</td>
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<td>Intercession for and/or communications with deceased</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. What to you is the importance of the cemetery?</td>
<td>Personal concept of cemetery values</td>
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<td>Sacredness, Heritage</td>
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<td>Frequency of visits and feelings toward frequency</td>
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<td>Influence of religion on frequency of visits</td>
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<td>8. What do you do when you visit the cemetery?</td>
<td>Commemoration activities (place flowers, pray, talk to deceased, maintain memorial)</td>
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<td>Mode of travel</td>
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<td>Duration of visits</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Do you feel any special sensations within the cemetery?</td>
<td>Close to God, Close to deceased</td>
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<td>Peace, Safety, Sadness, Fear, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Do you believe the need to visit changes as a person progresses through their grief?</td>
<td>Personal concept of progressive change in frequency of visits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal concept of progressive change in emotions surrounding visits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Has any part of this interview appeared insensitive or lacking understanding of your feelings?</td>
<td>Tips on how to modify and improve subsequent interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Appendix 6

CASE STUDY – CRUDE TRANSCRIPT

Interview with #### (John) ####

8.00 p.m., Tuesday, 4 August 1998

Philip  John, firstly I'd like you to tell me a little bit about yourself. I'm after a few basic things such as your age, nationality, religion and so on.

John  Aged 62, religion nominally Catholic but lapsed and verging on atheistic. What else was it you wanted?

Philip  You're Australian born?

John  Yes.

Philip  Your family status, your family situation?

John  I'm a widower and I have two adult sons in their middle thirties.

Philip  You're living here ...?

John  I live here alone. They've gone their own way.

Philip  Your education? You've had a military career and you're currently involved in tertiary studies.

John  Yes. Left school with the New South Wales Intermediate Certificate, which is Form 3 in today's terms. In the army, to the army First Class Certificate education. Did a certificate through R.M.I.T. in the early 1960's and subsequently qualified in financial planning and passed all the various accreditations in the industry, but it's only now that one's getting towards a tertiary education in one's sixties.

Philip. Ok, thanks. Tell me about your wife. Mary is the person that you've lost fairly recently. Can you tell me about Mary? Can you describe her for me?

John  Yes, Mary was born in Australian of a purely Irish family, which had been here from the convict days. They were on the land at Nagambie. They were in fact squatters who drove sheep down 180 years or more ago, so she strongly identified both with her Irish ancestry and her Roman Catholicism. She was a happy go lucky, vivacious person but very serious about her responsibilities as a mother and she raised the children and I went out to work. It was from the time that she got advanced in the first pregnancy she never went to work for wages again. We had the old fashioned idea that the husband was the breadwinner and the wife was the home maker.

Philip  And how old was Mary when she died?

John  Let's see, she was born in '41, died in '94. Just 53.

Philip  Would you mind telling me a little bit about your relationship with Mary?

John  Sorry, in what way?
Philip  A bit about your family life, I'm interested in the role that Mary played in your life and the life of your boys.

John  Well being a professional soldier, she was very much in raising the children and took virtual total responsibility for the family unit as such. Being a soldier means prolonged periods of times away from the family and the wives of professional soldiers they do all the things which in other ordinary nuclear families, the husband does or they both do together. Wives of soldiers are much more experienced in just about everything. If there's a nail that needs to be driven, they get the hammer and they drive the nail. So, she was the lynchpin of the family. We had a very happy relationship, the only point of strain was me getting out of the army, I did go back in again, I did it because I thought it would make her happier but on the basis that it made me dreadfully unhappy. But it was one where she was the family, if you like and I funded it.

Philip  And your sons are how old?

John  35 and 33.

Philip  I'm interested in your experiences, your previous experiences with death and grief. Prior to losing Mary, had you had any significant bereavements?

John  No, not personally, interestingly enough the only person that had died in my family were obviously my grandparents and my father's brother and sister and my mother's brother or two brothers. But no one closer than that had died until in fact my wife died, she was the first person very very close to me that died.

Philip  And that was how long ago now?

John  4½, 4 years and 8 months today.

Philip  And Mary's cause of death?

John  There's a death certificate there if that's of any interest to you.

Philip  Well, could you just tell me about it?

John  Yeah, she got breast cancer, they did what's called a lumpectomy as opposed to a mastectomy, where they go and remove the lump but leave as much of the breast as they can. And then they gave her a massive radiation treatment, they thought they had it but it came back in both the liver and the bone. In the liver it was inoperable. And but from the time that she got the breast cancer to the time she died was 8 years and she fought it every inch of the way, but she succumbed to leukaemia in 3½ weeks. So she actually died of a combination of breast cancer and acute leukaemia.

Philip  Over those eight years, do you feel that you had an opportunity to prepare for her ultimate death?

John  Yes. Although that I was surprised at the rapidity of death with the leukaemia, having her last as long as she did with the breast, liver and bone cancer, it was quite dramatic at how quickly she went downhill and died with leukaemia.

Philip  Out of this you lost your wife, you've lost your life partner, the mother of your children. Can you tell me the significance of that loss to you as an individual?
John  First of all there's a though that as I was some years older than her that one had originally obviously looked forward to travelling around together with her and enjoying old age together. I mean that was the way one thought since women outlive men and to bury a younger wife came as a, still came as a surprise but I think that because I had the opportunity to prepare for it, it wasn't as jarring as it would have been, like a friend of mine last year who's fifty year old wife had a cerebral aneurism and virtually dropped dead. He had no chance to prepare.

Philip  I'm interested also in what other changes have happened in your life in response to, or following the death and I'm interested in things like emotional changes. Do you feel or have you felt or experienced any emotional changes, or changes in your emotional state before and after the death?

John  There was a tremendous sense of loss when she first died. I was surprised and in fact even felt somewhat guilty about the rapidity at which I seemed to get over it. But I think again that that goes back to the fact that one had eight years to prepare for it. At first you find yourself saying to yourself I must mention that to Mary and of course there's no Mary there to mention it to. A large empty house also tends to, if I could use the analogy, you can the echoing of your own footsteps around the place because there's nobody there in the house and that initially exacerbates the sense of loss. But even that was diminished by the fact that she spent so much of the time in hospital. Particularly in that last year and a half, she was in hospital almost constantly. So again, one had a period of time to adjust before the actual death itself, so I suspect, I'm not a psychologist but I suspect that lead to a more rapid adjustment and acceptance than it would otherwise. But I'm by nature a pragmatist and I also have her in private moments, if you like engage in what's called self talk. That is to get yourself to do things you may not say out loud but mentally you might say get off your backside and do this or whatever. I simply told myself that, since I come from a family of notorious longevity, then in all probability I had a long time yet to go, it's about time I got off my backside and got on with the rest of my life and did so. There was occasions in the early stages when I felt a bit guilty about this attitude but again, I think pragmatism steps in you begin to think to yourself, well, you know, you're not helping anybody by grieving excessively. You don't help them and you certainly don't help yourself and you're certainly not much fun or pleasure to be around for your family or for your acquaintances.

Philip  Psychologists do find, as I'm sure you wouldn't be surprised to know, that where the death is anticipated, and particularly for a couple who have had time to work things through and plan things together, that the impact is often a lot less. Though of course, when the death does come, it's still a devastating loss. But they also find, in general, that immediately following the death there is a very, very deep devastating period of a sense of loss, a very deep grief. Then there are various other stages that people identify with, and ultimately, most people, go through to what they tend to refer to as resolution of the grief, where one tends to reclaim their life, albeit a different life. After various adjustments, people tend to be fully functioning again, but in a different way. How many steps there are depends on which model you look at and it's never a smooth flowing process anyway, because everyone is individual. But within that, starting from a period of deep grief and then working through all sorts of emotions and changes in one - physically, mentally, socially and then coming through the final stage of resolution, are you able to picture yourself on that process?

John  Oh yes, I've put the death behind me completely. By that I mean that I'm totally accepting of the fact that she's dead. She's gone, I'm not, therefore I have to get on with my life. If the question were "are you sad she's gone, of course I am, but I'm not going to allow that to affect the rest of my life. It makes no sense and she wouldn't want it anyway. So resolution was the final step was it that you described? Well I'm certainly at that stage and in fact I have a lady friend whose company I enjoy. Because there's quite an age difference, a quarter of a century's age difference, it's not going to lead to marriage or that sort of thing, but if I were a younger man it probably would, but I'm not. Again you have to confront in life,
you must confront reality and deal with things on the basis of reality, but I've certainly resolved it. There are times when I develop some nostalgia, something will trigger that off, but I regard that as perfectly normal and healthy, but no, the effect that it had has passed. You said resolution, yes, I've resolved it.

**Philip** I'm interested in whether Mary's death had any particular impact on the family structure, yourself and the boys, did it?

**John** Actually it brought the boys and I closer together, in that as I said earlier, it was my wife who raised them. There's a humorous story about the chap who's home from work one day and the telephone rings and the voice on the other end of the phone said "Hello, is the head of the family there", and the bloke said "No she's out but you can talk to me, I'm Chairman of the fundraising committee". That probably describes the family unit but what it also meant was that my sons and I weren't terribly close then, it's surprising how close we are now.

**Philip** Would you attribute that to circumstances relating to your wife's death or do you feel that that's something that's just happened in the relationship between you and your sons anyway, or would it be hard to tell the difference?

**John** I think that because she was the closest person to them they had, that her going out of the picture, I think they first came to see me out of a sense of obligation, sense of duty. We were never ever enemies or what have you, we just, because of the nature of the life that we'd led weren't close. Then we discovered each other and got friendly.

**Philip** Do you feel that might be a case of clinging to the surviving parent?

**John** No, no, neither one of them are that type. The youngest bloke is like me in temperament and personality, he's by nature aggressive, I didn't teach him how to control that aggression as much. I'm talking about not only physical aggression, I mean his approach to life is Whitlam-esque, crash through or crash. Whereas the older bloke is in many respects like his mother, but in fact that is a veneer and he has an even higher level of aggression but it's just that it is not as obvious. So we're just not the type, the three of us are not the type. My wife's father was also of that nature, so they've gotten the genes if you like from both sides of the family. So, no, no, the three of us are not the type to show our emotions, particularly in that way. We would by nature try to conceal our emotions, so no, it would not be a matter of the survivors clinging together. When Mary died, my son was engaged and he and the lass he was engaged to spent 2½ years working their way around Australia and the other 2½ years working their way around the world together. I then in fact caught up with them in London. They came and stayed here while they were getting their own house together up the country and I think we all basically felt relieved when he left. I think that's the type that we are. And there's also something of a loner about me as well which I've identified in myself. I think some of that comes from the fact that I was a person without an education and who the army promoted through the ranks and eventually commissioned. I can remember standing in an officers mess thinking that there was forty people in this mess and I'm probably the only person without a university degree in the room other than the stewards. And so that does, does tend to make you a bit of a loner and I think the boys are that way as well. So again, this removes the clinging bit.

**Philip** At this point I'm looking at what other changes - what other impacts - the loss of Mary has caused, other than your own direct emotional impact.

**John** You talking about basically physical things?

**Philip** Yes, we just mentioned impact on the family structure. I'm also interested in economic impact. This is something which is evidently more devastating where a husband
who is the breadwinner has died, but I'm interested in whether it had a significant economic impact in your situation where you were the Chairman of the Finance Committee but you had someone looking after the home front. Were you now in a situation where your economic situation changed through the need to engage someone to look ...?

John  For a start, if you've been in the armed forces since you were 16 years of age and you're now in your sixties, the propensity towards neatness and tidiness and cleanliness tends to be almost overwhelming by instinct. As a 16 year old the sergeant when I was a recruit minor used to do room inspections with white gloves. ??? this is what I work for a living. Most of my peer group in this industry walk in their rooms and it looks like something I won't describe because this is going to be transcribed by a lady. Let's just say that they are not clean, not tidy. Secondly when my wife was at home during an 8 year illness I was the one that did all the cleaning anyway, including cleaning her. I simply set a routine and stuck to it, so and my wife like most people who grow up on the land are not by nature tidy, they are certainly clean but they are not tidy. So I keep the place clean and when you've finished here I'll show you around. I go into people's homes and the nature performed in my work and almost without exception my own home is tidier than any home I go into which is run by a woman. Now of course we at a stage where we don't have babies around the place and whatever but, so no that's not the case, but even my wife once said that it was a pain in the backs side being married to a neat clean and tidy man. I think so that might answer that part of it.

Financially, my financial situation improved dramatically. Even though I had full HBA the cost of supporting my wife for 8 years was quite horrendous, but since leaving the army I've earned very well in this business. Mainly because you get out in proportion to what you put in and surprisingly I found that I was good at it. I might add this came as a surprise to me and so my earnings, all my earnings then went into savings and on lifestyle. Which means I now lead an interesting lifestyle, I go away to the wineries, I go away on interstate holidays which I can afford to do. My financial situation has improved with my half of my father's house and this house I have, literally in terms of assets and investments, crosses the million-dollar mark. I find that almost impossible to believe. I am quite astounded that that can happen, because it doesn't seem that long ago where one used to wonder where the next shilling was coming from. It's unfortunate of course that happens to you at your age. The old cliche about youth being wasted on the young is certainly not a false one. I'd certainly like to be that young man in that photograph and be worth what I'm now worth. So financially my situation improved dramatically and it used to bother my wife the amount of money that it cost to support her. It never bothered me at all. So the fact that I am now financially so much extraordinarily better off is just a side effect and being of an age where I'm not going to remarry and owning my own home outright, not having a debt to a soul in the world and being a saver as well as a spender. I don't save to save I save to spend but I do the saving first and the spending after not the other way around. And my kids are adults, I've got no dependents, nothing, every dollar that comes in the door goes to me except of course for Peter Costello putting his hand out for his considerable whack. Which is why I don't work as hard and which is why I've been able to find the time now to start in my sixties to become a geriatric undergraduate. I've got time, I've got money and so I'm in a different situation I suspect than most people. Is this going along the lines of -.

Philip  Yes, yes this is all still fairly preliminary stuff that we're going through here, which is helping to build a picture of the individual person. You mentioned earlier that the situation of your faith is now quite different to what it was when you were younger. So I know that you've taken a bit of a journey there, a personal journey. But I'm interested in whether Mary's death has had an influence there and whether you've noticed any particular shift in your religious perspective or your personal philosophies.

John  No, I don't think so. I think one would be more likely to feel that way if it had been suddenly dramatic, but it wasn't. Again you've got this adjustment period prior to the dying
rather than having to do it from scratch. The second thing is, well that’s what they presented you with. I went back to the regiment in 1995 I’ve seen a awful lot of death. A lot of people close to me but I’m not unused to death. I think probably my Catholicism started to die when I was still a teenager but was certainly accelerated by violent military service. It’s very hard to see the hand of God in the midst of the lifetime experiences you’re undergoing. I never voiced that to my wife, but she was certainly aware of it and I think it’s more a journey of intellect. I just find it impossible to conceive an old man with a beard sitting in a cloud looking down on earth. I mean you know, now I realise that for the theologically educated that’s not the concept they’re after, but whatever, I’m afraid I am an evolutionist. So no, it’s been a journey away from faith and I don’t think Mary’s death played a part in that at all. I’d already arrived to that destination well before that. However, it could make you think again that if there’s a God and she was so religious then the old adage of only the good die young tends to have some element of truth in it. But that’s an ??? of reasoning not emotion.

Philip  Can you tell me about the funeral? Mary was buried?

John  Yes.

Philip  And she was buried at ##### Memorial Park?

John  Yes.

Philip  In the lawn section?

John  In the lawn section yes. Just with a bronze plaque.

Philip  And the funeral itself is a very important ritual, but I'm wondering what value it had to you personally. Can you tell me about your own personal feelings toward the funeral and what it meant to you?

John  I had a chance to if you like observe myself, if one can be objective in a subjective situation. Mainly because #####, the funeral director, was a personal friend of both Mary and myself and we went back an awful long way so he quite obviously pulled out every stop to attend just about everything. I was more concerned about my two children to see how they held up. The ??? was absolutely no reason for me to have that concern. There was a more dramatic obvious on Mary’s elderly mother, it’s a dreadful thing for an elderly parent to lose a child and because her family are such devout Catholics. There was a Requiem Mass and everything else. I think I drew more solace from the number of people who came to the funeral, it was quite an enormous turnout. Now a lot of those came because of the military association with myself, you know. But there was huge amount of people who Mary had somehow touched in her lifetime who came along. Even back to people she went to school with came to her funeral. But I do agree that the ritual does help you deal with the situation. I've got no doubt that it's an important part of it.

Philip  So the Requiem Mass was important to you?

John  Only in the sense that it was familiar, if that makes sense.

Philip  Yes.

John  Not from any spiritual sense, but the fact that it was familiar.

Philip  Was that comforting?

John  Yes I think it was but again and I don’t want to harp on the military side of things but because the military reduced things to routine, finally an acceptable routine is the right thing
to do and you do “the right thing”. No I wasn’t touched spiritually but the metallics of the service, yes, yes it did.

**Philip** Had you planned the service with Mary?

**John** No. Mary organised her father’s funeral even though it was the early stage of the cancer, so I had the opportunity to see exactly what she wanted and I did liaise with her mother and her sister as well, because I knew that the religious aspect was important to them. Again this is again fulfilling a duty in terms of the ceremony itself. My grieving was internal and I tended to privatise it.

**Philip** When she did actually go, was her death then anticipated? Or, whilst she’d been ill for a long term, were you aware that she was about to die?

**John** I got a phone call that day saying “get in and get the family together and get here very quickly. As it happened it took quite some hours after that and I was with her, as was the eldest son. The youngest son couldn’t handle being there. All of a sudden she started slipping away and I had to run and get a priest, because I knew that’s what she wanted and I probably drew some something, I’ll call it spiritual for want of a better thing, but I think that’s more again that having gotten the priest to give her the last sacraments of the Catholic Church in her bed of the #### Hospital.

**Philip** That was the right thing to do?

**John** Yes and that I’d done the right thing. That I had kept the faith, if you like, with her. I wasn’t keeping the faith with the Church but I’d kept it with her.

**Philip** Do you feel that you had a good opportunity to say a personal goodbye to her?

**John** Well, on the basis of Mary you’re going to be dead in a few hours, you know, or a few minutes, no because the mind had gone that day. I mean we were talking to her earlier in the day and then, you know.

**Philip** I’m talking about the period leading up to that as well, or even after the death. Do you feel that you’d had an adequate opportunity to say a personal goodbye?

**John** No, no I don’t. Particularly from one who’s not unfamiliar with death I never broached the subject and she was such a fighter she keep fighting and I hoped that she would get better. So she wasn’t acknowledging the inevitability of her death and because she was a fighter I wouldn’t want to discuss it with her anyway because it might sound like you might think that but I don’t. And that would be a contradiction. I would be contradicting what she hoped. So therefore it would have been the wrong thing to do.

**Philip** It was important to maintain that hope?

**John** Yeah, well it was even more important not to just maintain it, but certainly not to be the person who destroyed it.

**Philip** Ok, I’m interested in where you believe Mary is now. Do you have any - I know you said before you’re bordering on atheism - but do you have a personal concept of any form of afterlife or any idea as to where Mary may be now?

**John** No, I think Mary is dead and as harsh as it sounds I think that a human being is no different after death than any other living animal. I think dead is dead. If people live after death they only do so in the minds of the people they leave behind. I don’t believe that
there's some place somewhere where they all go and I have no concept of the pearly gates or anything of that nature, or afraid at all.

Philip  Ok, I'm now moving into the area of cemetery visitation and I'm interested in what to you, John, is the importance of a cemetery? Now Mary is at a local cemetery, but what does that cemetery mean to you?

John  It's emblematic and the respect in which we held the people who are there and it marks us as a civilised society in that we show that respect by honouring that memory but it's the memory you're honouring by the method of disposal of the remains and by maintaining a place where you can go and you can mentally if you like think back, reminisce, engage in nostalgia and think what if she hadn't died and all that. And as I drive through the cemetery and see other people there it is I believe significant to society. I think that they play an enormous role and ??? at what you were showing me earlier I think that may go a long way in explaining why people go to cemeteries where people are buried but they don't go to see people who have been cremated anywhere near the same degree. I just wonder if there's a cause and affect relationship there but I believe, I mean if in my lifetime they are going to dig up my wife's remains and put someone else in because they wanted to recycle the whole of the ground. Then I would be looking around for a weapon metaphorically speaking and going out hunting, I would be very, very annoyed.

Philip  So do you see the cemetery as being a sacred place?

John  Sacred to the memory of the people who are there rather than sacred in the sense that as a person who started off life as a practising Catholic. I would never knowingly engage in a sacrilegious act. Now that's not a matter of trying to be euphemistic and two bob each way. Or do I believe a bolt of lightning would come down from the clouds and strike me dead or anything of that nature. I believe it's a respect for people, it's a respect for culture, it's a respect for tradition and it's respect for customs which hold a society together. Even though there are so many disparate parts of that society who had different customs but I would suspect, respect for the dead and those things which emblematic of that respect which obviously includes cemeteries.

Philip  It's common to all.

John  Yes, it's common and I think it distinguishes if you like the human animal from others. I mean really what is the difference between us and any other animal but the capacity to reason and if we are a reasoning people and we understand things such cemeteries do bring solace to an awful lot of people and become a focus in their lives and it should be treated with the respect that the people who are there should be treated if they were still alive. Sorry I'm rambling a bit.

Philip  No, no. That's excellent. I find it fascinating, what you're saying.

John  If I may give you an aside. We found that one of our blokes, one of our SAS blokes was buried in the ##### cemetery in an unmarked grave. We immediately combined with two commando associations because he'd been a regular army instructor in two commando as well as being in one of ours and also ex Vietnam and we got a bronze plaque, went up got a he was an Anglican. We got a retired Anglican army Padre who lives in #####, a Chaplain who was also a Vietnam Veteran, who'd actually buried him and had a memorial service there. Then we went into the ##### RSL and had our few beers and what have you. It's a respect for the man and if I'm driving past #### I'll pop around there and just cast an eye on it and let the blokes know next time we get together. We have a bit of a sticky at Snowy's grave and I look after it. ??? I'm pleased to see how long they look after it there. I think that little lawn section in the ##### cemetery is well tended and well that's good.
Philip  Ok, what about the heritage value of cemeteries? Does that mean much to you?

John  Yes, I ?? and I think having travelled through Europe and particularly through Ireland because my ancestry is Irish I found it fascinating to go to churches in England and Ireland where they can have the names of the priests going back a thousand years recorded on a board. I mean the board wasn’t there a thousand years ago. And you could go out into the churchyard and there was their grave. Very often difficult to read because they’d weathered over, the stone wasn’t of the quality like it is today. I think that people such as same people are part of our history it’s the people who made history. So if we are going to show any recognition of our history we should surely show recognition to the people who created that history and maintained that history and that I suspect means that you maintain the cemeteries, which also allows people carrying out research for example to go and do so in those cemeteries.

Philip  They’re a great source of information - all sorts of information.

John  Oh yes, incredible. So no, I’m appalled that a country as large as Australia that we think can recycle in gravesites. I mean I can understand it in countries where land is at a premium and I mean Japan is a classic and in parts of Europe, we don’t have that problem. The problem that may come is that you may have to put a cemetery somewhere where it may be somewhat more difficult for people to get to if you run out of space in a suburban, which we will do. I mean land is finite but I think the loss of heritage and that even if all the people who ?? individual along did themselves. I mean the loss of heritage is terrible. I mean I find I go out to the cemetery with #### who goes regularly to look after her father’s grave and it’s not a grave in the sense where you ?? it one of those marble Italian ones, so I find myself in the midst of a dichotomy there. That the style and the money on those Italian graves there do not appeal to me one bit and I think the money would be better spent on, instead of spending it on hubby’s grave you’d be better spending it on your children, helping them put a deposit on a house or something. Now that’s the pragmatism coming out there and they do not appeal to me visually but the first person who wanted to change them would find me as a warring enemy because if we’re going to respect the fact that we are a multi cultural society, part of culture is the way in which we alter, not only alter our own ??, from our own little cultural entity our own mono cultures if you like but we must show respect for other people who are different tradition. That is important to them, so if that’s important to them and their important, each group is important to society, then their traditions and their icons for want of a better word need to be honoured as well. So no, anybody starts buggerising around with graves and I tend to get quite irritable.

Philip  And you sound almost as defensive of the graves of people that you don’t know as you are towards your wife’s grave.

John  I am. Oh philosophically I am. Probably, emotionally I wouldn’t be as much but philosophically, as an exercise in logic and as an act of what I believe to be decent civilised behaviour - and that may come strange from an outdoor person who earned his living shooting people and reducing things to their basic bottom line, as our accounting friends say. No, I would. If for example, they said they were going to destroy the Italian or the Orthodox or the Greek or whatever section of your cemetery over there and they wanted people to go and demonstrate against it and sign bloody petitions I’d be there in a flash. I’m also reminded that bit about during the Second World War, or after the Second World War where a Lutheran Minister said. When before the war, when they came for the Jews I wasn’t a Jew so I didn’t worry and when they came for the Catholics I wasn’t a Catholic so I didn’t worry and when they came for Gypsies I wasn’t a Gypsy so I didn’t worry, by the time they got round to Lutheran bastards it was too late. The place where we draw the line in the sand as human beings is for other human beings because that’s the only group we actually belong to. Right and to my mind it’s a desecration, and I don’t believe we should engage in those sort of things. People who, these louts who get into cemeteries and break graves and what have
you I know what I’d do to them. I’d start off by handing them a shovel and pointing to a plot of earth. Sorry you touched a raw nerve.

Philip No, that’s fine - that’s great. I’m interested in how frequently you would visit Mary’s grave?

John Actually I ????

Philip Sorry, could I just say, that you mentioned that you also visit with ###. I’m interested specifically in how frequently you would initiate a visit to Mary’s grave.

John Oh, I’d find myself there about once every four weeks or so now and that’s because I simply clean up the bronze plaque. You know I’ve got in the boot of my car a little tiny pair of grass shears and a little hand broom and bottle of baby oil and a rag in a plastic bag. I just keep it clean and tidy. Now again, it might be a moot point to ask whether or not that’s part of respect for Mary and part of it is the habit and the instinct almost of looking after, keeping things neat, clean and tidy. It’s seems somehow a mark of disrespect not to. So I’d say I’d be there about 12 times a year but I used to go there every week. Every time I drove past there I used to feel I had to go otherwise I was somehow letting the side down when she first died. So I found that graph that you showed me quite interesting, because it virtually reflects my situation.

Philip Tell me what you do when you visit. What sort of things do you do? Do you place flowers?

John I put flowers there on Mother’s Day and her birthday.

Philip You mentioned cleaning and maintenance of the plaque. Obviously you were trimming overhanging grass and you said you would leave the place neat and tidy.

John Yeah and I’ll also probably be an annoyance. I maybe shouldn’t be telling you this, but to the annoyance of the funeral people I also, if I notice it’s getting bare patches in the lawn cemetery I also bring a little grass seed along and a bit of soil and I’ll sprinkle it on the bare patch and sprinkle a little bit of soil over it, which probably annoys the hell out of the people.

Philip I’m sure it doesn’t

John I haven’t any weeds there yet but if I did find them you know a flat weed or what have you I would most certainly root it out. Again it’s a combination I think of a mark of respect to Mary but also I think it’s also part of the old soldier’s habits. You would need someone skilled I think in psychology to be able to determine what it is but I would say it would be half and half of that. Let’s put it this way, if one let the whole thing go and imagine the cemetery authorities also let it go, I would find that quite disgraceful on my part not to go to the effort to maintain it properly.

Philip And how long would you stay there per visit?

John Not long, not long.

Philip Ten minutes? What would you say?

John Five - no more. Under the heading of ‘for as long as it takes to just to tidy up around’ but I’m not given to prayer or anything like that.

Philip So a very brief visit may be how long?
John  Yes it is. Oh, five minutes.

Philip  Would five minutes be an average?

John  Yeah I reckon, I've never timed it, so the time it takes, by the time I just trim around, trim the grass around the concrete, the bronze plaque, by the time I trim around, sweep after the little ??? broom, pour the baby oil on it. My next door neighbour told me that by the way to keep the bronze plaque up is a bit of baby oil rubbed into the rag. I've got an old toothbrush which I get in the lettering and what have you just to make it look neat, clean and tidy. You could spend money ??? obviously when it's wet it gets mud and that sort of stuff gets on it.

Philip  But that's good actually, because it's treated with a - I'm not sure what it is, I think it's an acrylic. A lot of people come in and use Brasso and of course that strips off the finish, so the plaque then corrodes more.

John  No, I put the baby oil on there. But no, 5 minutes I'd say.

Philip  How do you feel when you are there at Mary's grave, do you feel any particular sensations? I assume you wouldn't feel close to God, as some people do, but do you feel close to her? Have you any other particular feelings, such as peacefulness, a sense of safety, a fear of the cemetery, sadness - any particular emotion or sensation like that?

John  It is peaceful. I think that that lawn section where she is, is visually relaxing. I find tombstones and what have you quite harsh and in fact some of them try to outdo you because I'll have a bigger one than you have and all of this sort of stuff. Obscene for me, however, I would defend everybody's right to have it. Totally. But for me that's not the way and since I'd probably go down unless you know I'd manage to wipe myself off in the most peculiar way, I'm going to finish up in the same hole in the ground myself anyway. Yeah, peacefulness I think, yeah, possibly a trifle guilty because I'm relaxed there. I find it quite a relaxing place except when there's a funeral being carried because I feel for the people who's grief I understand, but when there's no funeral going on there I find it quite a peaceful place. I don't feel any communion with Mary at all but I'll often think about her but that's a matter of reminiscing it's a matter of casting the mind back but I have no sense of being in contact with her or God or what have you. But I believe that you should honour and respect the memory and but if somebody asked me to be logical I would say, well probably it accomplishes nothing.

Philip  Alright, I'm interested in how you believe the need to visit the cemetery, or the grave, changes as a person progresses through their grief. Now we spoke about that graph before and you said you could relate to that very much, so evidently there is a change and you feel a change. Can you tell me about how the frequency of your visitation has changed since immediately after the funeral?

John  I think the memory fades and the sense of identification with the individual fades. Now I don't mean that it vanishes at all but it certainly does, the sharpness if you like of the immediacy of death is fast. And also if you're not religious, it tends to become a combination of a sense of obligation, a sense of duty and a habit and the need to maintain the plaque and the grave site at a standard which satisfies me. Now this sounds rather selfish I know but it's as if I'm deriving a sense of satisfaction by fulfilling a duty to maintain an emblem, we're back to emblems again, of what was once my wife. Also I think that if my sons should visit there and I think that they're probably not as likely to do it anywhere near as often as I do. I'd never ask and they never volunteer but #### has remarked on occasions he popped in and I was pleased that he was able to say that he found that the plaque was nice and clean and shiny, so he hadn't been there long after I'd been there you know, only a matter of days. So maybe
there’s a sense of indicating to your children, who are no longer children, who are well and truly adults, that you’re remembering their mother and treating her memory with respect.

Philip  Ok. But over time you’ve felt less of a need to visit as frequently?

John  Well, yes.

Philip  You said that you’re visiting about once a month on average. How often would it have been within days, or weeks?

John  I wouldn’t drive past #### Road without going there. I’d go down that way very often. I sort of felt that somehow it would be disrespectful, selfish, in bad taste not to go in there.

Philip  So within the first few weeks, or in fact the first few months, how frequently do you think?

John  I’d have been going there at least twice a week, sometimes three times a week for the first 6 to 8 weeks and then it rapidly ended, tailed off, I’d go back and I’d start thinking, look I’m not doing anybody any good here, myself or what have you because I still missed her and I found that initially going there instead of giving you solace tended to make you remember the immediacy of the funeral, the pain in the mother’s eyes, this sort of thing. It brought it all back and because there was nothing to do around the grave site, when they put the turf down it was in good nick and I cleaned up the bronze plaque. That was part of it, I hope I’m not rationalising here. Also you began to get on with your own life and as you got on with your own life the tendency to revisit your old one which is what you’re doing I think when you go to the cemetery. It’s part of it, part of what you’re doing is revisiting your own past.

Philip  I’m fascinated that you are rationalising, because a lot of people are not able to rationalise this, they don’t understand how or why the change comes.

John  So I found that I wasn’t and I found that I wasn’t feeling guilty about not doing so and then as other interests in life began to intervene I found myself more and more involved as a Trustee of #### RSL, on the committee of the SAS Regimental Association, all these things started to ???. Then I started going out with #### and then she introduced me to wine, then I read up on it to blazers and enjoyed it. Which I enjoyed before I knew anything about it but that’s another story. This began to occupy time. I elected not to work harder because I couldn’t see the sense in working hard for first of all Paul Keating and then oh well Paul Keating, whoever was Treasurer, at the changeover and then Peter Costello who didn’t strike me as being sensible a way ago. I found that I be then saying to myself “Oh God, I haven’t been to the cemetery, I’d better go over” I would go as a matter of deliberate intent because I’d say “I haven’t been”. So I’d go and get in the car, I mean, luckily it’s that close and I’d drive over there and I’d tidy up around the grave and come over. And that served a few purposes. First of all it stopped me feeling guilty because if I thought God I haven’t been there for a while, maybe I might feel a bit guilty about it so I went. Now who the hell I would feel guilty to is another matter because who the hell would know. The dead don’t. Right and the kids hardly ever go there.

Philip  It’s interesting isn’t it?

John  Yeah

Philip  You still have that feeling.

John  Yeah it’s there. It’s like a reflex if you like. And also you go over there and either the grave looks good or sometimes you get a bit of grass that has died off in a patch. You think alright well I’d better get over there and fix it up and so there’s some soil in the plastic bag in
the cupboard in there, you know the potting mix? When the seed so I put it up in a thing and take it a day later, I might be there again. You know I don't count that as a thing I count those two trips in two days as one visit you know. I might see something that needs doing you go and do it. It's like if I go over there and found out I was out of baby oil, I'd come back the next day with a new bottle but I treat that as one. I think it's only happened a couple of times so from your statistical point of view it's insignificant. Again it is interesting that you think well why the bloody hell should I feel guilty. So you find that you're not doing it, I've only been over there about, I can't remember, just a few times with #### when she's been going over to her father's grave and on that basis I thought, oh well, you know while I'm here, naturally I'll go to Mary's. Now again that's an interesting thing to do, you observe that she is far more attentive to her father's grave than I am to my wife's. I believe that makes you feel guilty too. Also of course you wouldn't want to appear in the eyes of a friend, say maybe there's a bit of a hypocrisy creeps in here at the same. You know you wouldn't want them to regard you as being a terrible person who doesn't go. So yeah, it's, I don't have a need to go there but yet if I've forgotten for any period of time I feel guilty about it and I assure that guilt by going. So it's interesting, I don't know if that's along the lines of - does that answer your question?

Philip Yes it does. It does very well, I'm nearly at the end of my questions. I wish to identify your personal concept of progressive change in emotions surrounding the visits and you've touched on that a little bit. You mentioned early on that with initial visits you found that being there didn't necessarily help. In fact, what it did was evoke very clear memories of the funeral service itself and your mother in law's grief, etc.

John And her moment of dying in the #### Hospital.

Philip Why?

John And that actual moment.

Philip So clearly, over a period of time there's also been a change in your emotions surrounding the visits as well.

John Yes.

Philip Can you tell me a little bit more about that, about how you would have felt emotionally when you visited shortly after her death or after her funeral, as to how you might feel now?

John Well we were there shortly after, of course. It was still all very muddy and very offensive to the eye. You know they hadn't done all the work they do when they get to the end of the row and put down the turf and all that sort of stuff - compact it or whatever they do, you know, I'm not quite sure but whatever. I mean they must compact it otherwise it wouldn't be like that.

Philip They consolidate the surface.

John Right, ok. that's a euphemism, I like that too. But as it became, it wasn't long after I did that and I found that it wasn't as jarring. Your first go there and there's a pile of soil and your wife's under that pile of soil. It is a little jarring even for a person of my background. And you look at the other part that's already been done and you think that oh well, it's something to look forward too. It's nice and green and what have you. Your emotion when you are there initially was as I said, I didn't feel I was in contact with her or with God or whatever but it did evoke memories initially some were quite painful because of the inherence of discipline that my previous occupation engenders, you don't show it, to do so is a sign of weakness. But there's an occasional time when there's a bit of a catch of the throat, metaphorically speaking when ???? What has happened progressively since is that your sense of logic begins to take
over from your emotions and your logic says that underneath the ground, there is a coffin in which there's what's left of the body and that's all. That's all and therefore although the scenery has become progressively more and more peaceful there where she is. Where she is now that's interesting, why did I say that? Where she's buried is what I would normally say but I just said where she is. Yeah maybe a psychologist would make something of that. Where she isn't, what's left of the body is there and that's the reality. Because of that and because I am I think by nature a pragmatist and a realist, then there's not the emotionalism that there was initially. Any sense of it. There's not a sense of visiting her but there is a sense of duty done and respecting a memory, of ensuring what anybody else who goes there will see that the memory is respected. That her memory is not neglected and that, it gives you a sense of peace that you are doing that but you don't have to do it as often to feel the same feeling? of peace. That's what's happening. The time, it's like wearing a drug addict, you know the time between hits becomes greater. The space has become greater. Realism, logic, objectivity all begin to play a much larger part. Somebody once said that when emotion comes in the door, logic flies out the window. I think the reverse may also be true. When logic comes in the door, emotion flies out the window. So yeah, it's. And it's also an indication of your own mortality. I mean I'm looking at the place where I'll be buried. Now and I say buried because she's was that way. Maybe I'll get cremated and make them bury the ashes there, I don't know, I don't care. I am totally fatalistic, not about dying, I'd like to put that off for as long as I possibly can, but if having occurred -

Philip Would you like your remains united?

John I found it insignificant. But I know that for my kids sake, yeah. I think for the convenience that, God this is going to be a terrible thing to say, besides which it's neat. I mean that sounds ridiculous but it's neat. My brother has Mum's ashes in his attic. When Dad dies right, well we'll have Dad cremated and they liked where they lived, I'll sprinkle their ashes there together. Which is interesting as they fought like cat and dog. Anybody sees a clump of active ashes, hello they're at it again. But you know dead is dead. So what they do afterwards from my point of view is not relevant, I don't want a large funeral. I intend to sit down and write a note to my sons, my executor who's my brother and ##### or whoever his heirs and successors are, stipulating that I would simply like the funeral with two or three members of the family present and a quiet. I haven't decided cremation or burial or what have you right, and then a week after a notice in the paper under the regimental badge saying that I was privately interred or cremated or whatever da dum, da dum. And that's it. I've been to enough funerals myself where you're buried, ??? the bloke and then gone to the pub and gotten pissed afterwards. I mean you know. For myself it's not what I need to know but I certainly recognise the large number of people find that they do have a great need to know what's going to happen to their remains and what have you. For them it's significant therefore do it. It's significant for my perspective for them but it's not for myself. I'm back to my original point for me and that is when I'm dead I'm dead and I'm not going to know what the hell what is going on, so why should I care when I'm alive.

Philip Well, we're virtually at the end, I've only got one more question to ask. Before we finish I'd like to ask you if you think that any of my questions could have been offensive in any way, or have show any lack of sensitivity or understanding of your feelings? I'm interested in your honest feedback, because this can help me with other interviews, to avoid upsetting anybody else.

John No, you've not been offensive or insensitive at all. I think you've shown great sensitivity and understanding.

Philip There's nothing you would change?

John No, nothing. It's been very interesting for me and I just hope you can make something of it all.
Philip  I'm sure I can. Thank you very much.

End
Appendix 7
CASE STUDY REPORTS

ANGLICAN AIDS SURVIVOR RETAINS PARTNERS ASHES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Bereaved</th>
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<td>Relationship:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>De facto Husband</td>
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Psychosocial history

Marie is a thirty-four-year-old technical officer who grew up in Tasmania with a younger sister. Her parents separated when Marie was quite young. Ten years ago, she was working in the ACT and was a top amateur sportswoman. Then she met Jon, who was six years older than her, a professional in the same sport and a successful gambler. The following year, she moved to Victoria to live with him.

Marie recalls, ‘Jon was a very confident, very knowledgeable person, even though he didn’t have very much education. He didn’t work at all, but that didn’t worry me, because he ended up with money through his high-profit gambling and other activities. We never lacked for money. We used to fight a lot, but then we used to always make up really quick. We used to fight and make up all the time. We had a good life together. We weren’t in each other’s pockets. We were just there for each other when we needed each other and our relationship ran very well. Anyway, we fought like brother and sister a bit, but still loved each other as much, or probably more, after each tiff. We lived with each other for six years and in the last fifteen or sixteen months of his life, we bought a house together. That sort of helped things a bit.’

Bereavement

‘It is almost three years now since Jon died of AIDS. We think he contracted it in his previous relationship, before he met me. People were always questioning, “Oh, did he take drugs?” or “He wasn’t gay, was he?” They just don’t understand that heterosexuals are at risk as well. That used to get up my nose a lot, with some people.’

While nursing Jon through months of serious illness, Marie was able to plan with him and accept the eventuality of his impending death. ‘It certainly helped me to prepare for his death. He told me what he had seven months before he passed away. He knew about fifteen months before he died, but kept it to himself for quite some time.’

They had planned to start a family and Marie had been trying to conceive ‘for two or three years’. Initially after Jon was advised of his illness, he avoided sexual activity. Going out at night to bring home money provided a convenient excuse and allowed him to better support Marie financially. When they did resume sexual activity, he insisted on using a condom ‘to
prevent pregnancy', suggesting 'it would not be wise, in light of family history' and that 'as there was something wrong' with him, they should 'wait until the doctors know what it is'.

When he eventually did tell her that he was dying with AIDS, Marie's initial reaction was shock. 'I was unable to speak for about an hour. I just sat there rocking backwards and forwards. But when I got over that, I started talking very positively. I suggested we travel the world and enjoy the time we had left together. Then he said, "And I've been worrying about telling you all this time", and we laughed.'

'We both just assumed that I had it as well and I felt we were sharing the ultimate experience together. But four days later, I found out I didn't have it at all and it felt like we'd lost something, if you know what I mean. I was sort of disappointed that we weren't sharing it together, if that makes any sense. But you can't be disappointed that you haven't got AIDS! During those few days I had mapped out the rest of my life, but this was now uncertain and I was facing life without Jon. It upset all our plans.'

Marie considers that knowing of his terminal illness for seven months greatly helped her prepare for Jon's death. 'I didn't expect him to die so soon, though. But then it was his time and he was lucky that he went then, because a lot of people with his illness suffer for a lot longer than he did. He virtually suffered only from when he told me, because he went right downhill after that. Well, it seemed like that to me. I think he was trying so much to keep it a secret, that he pretended nothing was wrong and that helped, because it's a mind control thing as well with that sickness.'

'Before that, we knew he was sick and were trying to work out what it was - that is, previous to him knowing - but then after he found out he kept telling me that the doctors didn't know. Because I had been to the doctors with him before he found out, I just thought that the doctors were still telling him the same thing. I don't know if it's a bit of conscious blindness or not. I don't know if I thought that I really didn't want to know about it anyway. But then I did want to know, because during the month before he told me I was on his back a bit about it. I assumed he had cancer.'

'We talked a lot of times about what would happen after his death. He used to talk about his wake a lot and he said that he wanted a big party with lots of grog and lots of dope there. He wanted everyone to enjoy themselves. Then he said, "Oh, hang on. I'm not going to be there and it's going to be a real good party". Then he suggested we have it before he dies.'

'Another time, he broke my heart when I was giving him a bath. I had to help him in and out of the bath. He was lying in the bath and was just in tears; he was crying and crying. When I asked what the matter was, he said, "I'm scared that when I die, I'm going to miss you too much. I know I'm not going to be with you. It doesn't matter if I don't know, but I'm scared I'll miss you." That really broke my heart. Ooh: I can still see him there crying in the bath.'

**Other losses**

Marie's previous loss experiences included the deaths of her maternal grandparents and an eighteen-year-old close friend who had died in a car accident. 'My grandfather was pretty close to the family. He had Huntington's Chorea, which is hereditary. That was pretty awful looking, that sort of disease.'

Marie doesn't believe that her previous experiences helped her at all in preparation for Jon's death. 'It was a very different thing altogether: very different. I didn't have to care for my
grandfather. Anyway, he was in a home and I got over my grandfather's death a lot easier than I did Jon's. Sure it was very sad, but it was just something that happened. That's just the course in life; when you get old, you die. He wasn't that old; he was only sixty-five I suppose, but back in those days when I was a lot younger, I thought that people died at sixty-five. So memories of his death didn't help me whatsoever.'

Funeral

'We talked about whether he would be buried or cremated, just before he signed his will. He didn't really worry too much, but he asked me what I thought and I said I'd rather get cremated myself and he said, "Oh yeah, I'll just get cremated." He really didn't care. He's not into cemetery visitation that much, because he never visited his parents at all; he never visited anyone in the cemetery. He just wanted to leave the funeral arrangements up to me and said so in his will. He wasn't really fussed, but he did put in the will that he wanted to be cremated.'

Marie planned the funeral and was very satisfied with the way it went. 'I specifically asked for a funeral director I knew and he came after they took Jon away. He'd died in his sleep in the morning and they waited very late that night to get him and that was good. We had him there the whole day, which was good.'

Adjustment

Marie considers that she had a good opportunity to get things right and to say goodbye in a personal sense to Jon. 'I didn't feel guilty after he'd died. I really believe that people grieve a long time, or grieve excessively, because of guilt. That's what I believe. But I did everything I could for him that I thought was appropriate. There were times when I told him that his demands were far too much, but I think that with time off from work, I had plenty of time to spend with him. We talked about things alright – just us – and the life he had.'

Marie took extended compassionate leave from her work to care for Jon full-time in the last few months of his life. After his death, she stayed interstate with her mother for a month before returning home. 'I just wanted to leave work and go away for a while, to just cruise around and live everywhere. I didn't want to just hang around home.'

Marie felt that she was pushed back into work too soon by her boss, who insisted that she 'set a date'. So she set a date and despite her apprehension, returned to work six weeks after the funeral, but for the next three months, she hated work and didn't want to stay. 'I wanted to sell the house, to drink and do all sorts of dreadful things. But then, I took two weeks holiday and came back bright as a button. I just needed a taste of it and then to go away for a couple of week's holiday, then I was back and I was fine.'

'I never admitted to too many people, that in the morning when I was trying to wake Jon up, half of me was saying, "Wake up", and the other half was saying, "Don't wake up". A sense of relief went right through me, including my mind and body, when I knew it was over. I had lost a lot of weight without having to go on any diet, so it was a sense of relief at first: just a sense. I'm not saying that I was relieved, but there was a sense of relief there.'

'I was very well in control for a week and then after that, I lost a bit of control. That's when I did go into shock, I think. For the next three months, I was a bit out of control. Then they put me on those tablets and I started to regain control.'
I think I’m beginning to part with him now. For six months, I felt that I had to tell any man I met that my fiancee had died. Then my Mum told me that I didn’t have to tell everyone about my past partner. I thought I had to, because he had AIDS. I certainly didn’t experience any social withdrawal after his death; I was actually the opposite. I just wanted to talk to everybody. It really depended on who I met, whether I told them that Jon had died of AIDS or not, but I definitely told them that he had died recently.’

Marie’s economic situation changed considerably. ‘He had acquired a bit of money and we took out a mortgage to buy a house, but a month after moving into the house he found out he had AIDS. After that, he wasn’t well enough to do all the things that he had been doing and earning the money, but we had a bit of backing there and so it was a lot easier to get through the few months that I had off from work. We actually survived on the pension, plus our savings.’ Marie is now finding it a lot tougher paying off the mortgage repayments on her own.

Jon and his sister jointly inherited the house his sister lived in. He willed part of his share to Marie, who then needed to raise cash to pay many bills, including medical and funeral costs and to maintain her now sole mortgage repayments. Jon’s sister had no interest in purchasing Marie’s share of the house and refused to sell or pay any rent to Marie, so a bitter legal battle ensued.

Marie is now very confident that she has regained control of her emotions and is now functioning in a very different way. She considers that ‘throughout life, things change and you have to adapt to all the changes’.

Eight months after Jon’s death, Marie became pregnant. Though she was not to maintain a lasting relationship with the father, pregnancy was the fulfilment of a great personal desire. ‘I now had something new to live for; it gave my life a new focus. I stopped drinking and everything else I shouldn’t have been doing. But then, I think I needed to do those things as well, to get them out of my system.’

Marie noticed personal physical changes, as a result of Jon’s death. ‘I lost so much weight just before he died and didn’t put any weight on until I was pregnant. The weight loss was due to stress and worry. I was eating the same as him and was giving him eight small meals a day. Jon was eating more, but the weight wasn’t going on him, or me. Other physical changes include the acute stress, which comes in patches, and the chronic stress, which is always there.’

She sees herself in a different way these days. ‘I feel I’m tougher than I ever have been and I lose my patience more with people. I’m definitely against suicide and that sort of thing. I don’t have as much sympathy for people as I used to. I’m less tolerant with people who might be complaining about something of a more minor nature, like a headache’. She believes this is because she has witnessed far greater pain. ‘They don’t know what a headache’s all about. Jon had shingles on his head and excruciating nerve pain going through his eyes all the time. Shingles is very painful, especially around the eyes and the head. I have toughened up a lot. I now say what I think more and people have to accept me. If they don’t like it, it doesn’t worry me.’

‘Some people, like nurses and even some friends said, “Oh, you were so lucky not to get it too”. But I feel I am very strong and healthy. If my body can reject or beat HIV – and with what I’ve been through – I feel I can now cope with anything.’
Marie again emphasised that she was against suicide. ‘I have no sympathy for people who kill themselves, unless they themselves are dying in some horrible way. Suicide pacts are senseless; it is stupid for both people to die. Thinking you can’t live without your partner is a load of crap and just shows cowardice. Life is so precious. There are too many people out there fighting with all they’ve got to stay alive.’

As well as undergoing emotional and biological changes, Marie now has a new social identity. Instead of being one of a couple, she is now a single mother. She is now very satisfied with her life but suggests, ‘that doesn’t mean that there’s no room for changes’. She considers that Jon’s death is progressively ‘having less influence’ on her self-perception.

Although having a brief experience with personal counselling, Marie didn’t find it valuable enough to continue. ‘I was talking to a counsellor during Jon’s sickness and went there once after he died, but I couldn’t be bothered going back again. It’s not that I didn’t get anything out of it, it’s just that I couldn’t be bothered going there.’

Her spiritual life has wakened since Jon’s death, but she does not attribute this to his death. ‘We try to go to church every Sunday, but that’s due to my daughter, since she’s been christened. I really don’t believe in having kids christened and then not doing anything about it afterwards. What’s the use of getting them christened? Christening isn’t just one act, it’s for the whole of their life. I want to give her an opportunity to learn about God, so she can make a choice later in life.’

‘I did attend an Anglican Church when I was younger, but not while I was with Jon. He had no interest in that at all. I can’t say that I didn’t have any faith in God, I just put my faith in myself more. I mean I didn’t think about it. Jon did pray to God daily, that I wouldn’t have HIV and when he told people about him having it, he would always say, ‘Thank God Marie didn’t get it’. He talked about God just before he died. He’d been thinking about God and then the night before he died, he went a bit strange in the head and was telling me to go out and pray to the Lord on the lawn outside. He’d gone a bit crazy, you know.’

‘I did have a funny dream on the first anniversary of him telling me that he had AIDS. It was about him in heaven and it meant a lot to me, having that dream. It was like heaven, but there was nothing about God in there. It did give me the faith that he is waiting somewhere for me in years to come. His spirit is waiting for me; I don’t necessarily know where, but I still remember the dream. He said we couldn’t be together now, but we will soon and don’t be in too much of a hurry to join him. That was when I was drinking a lot.’

Almost three years after Jon’s death, Marie is still with her employer of nine years, but has experienced several significant ‘turning points’ in her life. Turning points include progressing in her sport to become the national women’s champion and subsequently representing Australia overseas. She also returned to part-time studies, to expand her professional knowledge and work role. In the meanwhile she has moved closer to work, but retained the house she shared with Jon and recently bought a second home as an investment. Marie is also the very proud, single mother of a precocious two-year-old daughter.

**Cemetery**

‘Before I’d gone through the death of Jon, I always thought that placing cremated remains was very important. I didn’t understand why some people wanted to scatter ashes. Now I understand how people can forget about them and even leave them at the crematorium. It is
just a lot easier not to think about it. You really don’t know what to do sometimes and what you get doesn’t always justify the cost."

Prior to Jon’s death, he and Marie did not discuss what would be done with his ashes. ‘It just didn’t enter my head. I didn’t think about it until afterwards. I just had the crematorium post his ashes up to Mum, but since then, I’ve had a lot of thoughts. They’re still in my mother’s top cupboard in the hallway and she’s asked me a couple of times, what I’m going to do with them. I’ve thought about having a rose bush or something at the cemetery, but I can’t justify the cost at the moment, because I’ve got others things to think about. But I wouldn’t mind having a big pot with a bonsai tree and his ashes buried in the big pot, then I could move him around. I like that idea.’

Marie has felt no compulsion to place the ashes anywhere permanently. ‘I did think about putting them with his mother and father at their cemetery, but I haven’t even bothered to ring up to see if there’s any room. Keeping the ashes doesn’t seem to worry Mum very much at all. When she comes across them every now and again, she asks me if I’ve decided what to do with them.’

‘If I were dying and someone else was going to clean things up and throw things out, I think I’d have his ashes scattered, but nowhere in particular. I have no idea, because I’m not a real outdoors person. Locating the ashes in a particular place is not at all important any more. I used to think it would be, but not for Jon. If it were for my mother, then it would be a different story. But because Jon didn’t worry about it, it doesn’t worry me as much. I feel it’s important to do what the person wanted done with their remains.’

Marie recalls that Jon’s grandmother’s children all died before she did and that she had kept her two sons’ ashes on a bench in the lounge room. ‘One was in a wooden vase thing, the other one is still in the plastic box.’

**Visitation**

‘A cemetery didn’t have any particular significance with Jon, but with different people you’re related to, things can vary. I think it is a bit of a selfish thing for me as well; if I put Jon in a cemetery, then his sister could share him.’ Marie acknowledged that she is consciously withholding Jon’s remains from his sister, ‘because I hate her; I really hate her. She was still giving me hell fifteen months later. But with Mum, I’d want to share her with everybody else, so I’d put her in a cemetery. To me, putting cremated remains in a cemetery is when you want to share.’

Marie’s memories of visiting her grandparents’ grave were as family experiences. ‘My grandparents were buried in a very small cemetery in Tasmania. Mum used to take us to visit them about once a month. I still remember going to that cemetery. I used to be scared to tread on the graves; I used to jump over them all the time. There were the Catholic, Methodist and Anglican sections, because back in those days you didn’t mix the faiths.’

Marie feels that people should be considerate of others within the cemetery. ‘If I’m visiting the cemetery and someone else is bawling their eyes out and screaming, I think it’s offensive, because they’re intruding on my grieving. To me, that’s not true bereavement: it’s just an act. I really hate that. It seems to me, that women who cry the loudest think they’re the ones who grieve the most. But neither do I think that they should have to hide their grieving. I mean, if you want to cry: cry!’

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FORMER SOLDIER HONOURS WIFE’S MEMORY

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Psychosocial history

Born in Sydney sixty-two years ago, John describes himself initially as ‘nominally Catholic, but lapsed, and verging on atheistic’. He now lives alone as his two sons, aged thirty-five and thirty-three have ‘gone their own way’.

Having retired from a military career, John is currently undertaking tertiary studies in business. He left school with the Intermediate Certificate, completed the Army’s First Class Certificate of Education and a technical certificate in the early 1960s. More recently, he qualified in financial planning and attained industry accreditation.

His wife Mary was born in northern Victoria to an Irish family that had been there since the convict days. According to John, ‘they were on the land and were squatters who drove sheep a hundred and eighty years or more ago. She strongly identified with her Irish ancestry, her Roman Catholicism and her rural background. She was a happy-go-lucky vivacious person, but very serious about her responsibilities as a mother. She raised the children and I went out to work. From the advancement of her first pregnancy she didn’t work for wages again’. John and Mary had what he described as ‘the old fashioned idea that the husband was the breadwinner and the wife was the home-maker’.

Bereavement

Mary died four and a half years ago, at the age of fifty-three. They had been married for thirty-four years. John recalls: ‘She was very much into raising the children and virtually took total responsibility for the family unit as such. Being a soldier means prolonged periods of times away from the family and the wives of professional soldiers do all the things, which in other ordinary nuclear families, the husband does or they both do together. Wives of soldiers are much more experienced in just about everything. If there’s a nail that needs to be driven, they get the hammer and they drive the nail. So she was the lynchpin of the family.’

‘We had a very happy relationship. The only point of strain was me getting out of the army. I did go back in again, because I thought it would make her happier, but it made me dreadfully unhappy. She was the family, if you like, and I funded it.’

‘She was the first person very close to me that died. She got breast cancer. They did what’s called a lumpectomy as opposed to a mastectomy, where they remove the lump but leave as much of the breast as they can, then they gave her massive radiation treatment. They thought they had it, but it came back in both the liver and the bone. In the liver it was inoperable. From the time she got the breast cancer to the time she died was eight years and she fought it

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every inch of the way, but succumbed to leukaemia in three and a half weeks. So she actually
died of a combination of breast cancer and acute leukaemia.  

John was caught by surprise at the rapidity of death with the leukaemia. 'Having her last as
long as she did with the breast, liver and bone cancer, it was quite dramatic how quickly she
went downhill and died with leukaemia.'

'I got a phone call the day she died, saying, "Get in and get the family together and get here
very quickly". As it happened, it took quite some hours after that. I was with her, as was our
eldest son, when all of a sudden she started slipping away. I had to run and get a priest,
because I knew that's what she wanted. It was important that I'd done the right thing: that I
had kept the faith with her. I was not keeping the faith with the church, but I'd kept it with
her.'

Other losses

Although briefly mentioning that he 'was paid to kill people', John did not at this point
clarify on the 'awful lot of death' he had seen in various 'violent military service' in
several countries over many years. Nevertheless, he had not previously experienced a close
personal bereavement. 'The only people that had died in my family were my grandparents,
three uncles and an aunt. No one closer than that had died until my wife died. She was the
first person very close to me that died.'

Funeral

John feels that the ritual of a funeral helps one to deal with bereavement. 'I've got no doubt
that it's an important part of it. I had a chance to observe myself - if one can be objective in a
subjective situation - mainly because the funeral director was a personal friend of both Mary
and myself; we went back a long way. I was more concerned about my two children, to see
how they held up, but there was no reason for me to have that concern. A more dramatic
impact was obvious on Mary's elderly mother. It's a dreadful thing for a parent to lose a
child.'

'Because her family are such devout Catholics, there was a requiem mass and everything else.
The requiem mass was important in the sense that it was familiar, though not from any
spiritual sense, but it was familiar and I think that was comforting. Because I'm used to the
military way of reducing things to routine, I consider an acceptable routine is the right final
thing to do: and you do the right thing. I wasn't touched spiritually, but I was touched.'

'I think I drew more solace from the number of people who came to the funeral; it was quite
an enormous turnout. Many came because of the military association with myself, but a huge
amount were people whom Mary had somehow touched in her lifetime, even back to people
she went to school with.'

John didn't plan the service with Mary. 'She organised her father's funeral during the early
stage of her own cancer. So I had the opportunity to see exactly what she wanted and I did
liaise with her mother and her sister as well. I knew that the religious aspect was important to
them. This is again fulfilling a duty in terms of the ceremony itself. My grieving was internal
and I tended to privatise it.'

John has no personal concept of an afterlife. 'I think Mary is dead, and as harsh as it sounds, I
think that a human being is no different after death than any other living animal. I think dead
is dead. If people live after death, they only do so in the minds of the people they leave behind. I don’t believe that there’s some place somewhere where they all go; and I have no concept of the pearly gates, or anything of that nature: nor any fear.’

Adjustment

‘I recall a tremendous sense of loss at first, when she died. Although I was surprised and even felt somewhat guilty about the rapidity at which I seemed to get over it. But I had eight years to prepare for it.’

‘Her mind had gone that day. We were talking to her earlier in the day and then— you know. I don’t feel I had a good opportunity to say goodbye, particularly from one who’s not unfamiliar with death. I never broached the subject and she was such a fighter. She kept fighting and I hoped that she would get better. She wasn’t acknowledging the inevitability of her death and I wouldn’t want to discuss it with her, because it might sound like I would be contradicting her hope. It would have been the wrong thing to do. It was not only important to maintain that hope, but it was even more important not to be the person who destroyed it.’

‘As I was some years older than she was, I had originally looked forward to travelling around with her and enjoying old age together. I mean, that was the way one thought, since women outlive men. To bury a younger wife came as a surprise. But as I had the opportunity to prepare for it, I think it wasn’t as jarring as it would have been to a friend of mine, whose fifty-year-old wife had a cerebral aneurism and virtually dropped dead last year. He had no chance to prepare.’

‘At first I found myself saying, “I must mention that to Mary”, and of course there’s no Mary there to mention it to. The house was large and empty. I could hear the echoing of my own footsteps around the place, because there’s nobody there in the house and that initially exacerbates the sense of loss. But that was diminished by the fact that she spent so much of the time in hospital, particularly in that last year and a half, she was in hospital almost constantly. So again, I had a period of time to adjust before the actual death itself. I’m not a psychologist, but I suspect that lead to a more rapid adjustment and acceptance than it would have otherwise.’

‘I am by nature a pragmatist and in private moments, engage in what’s called ‘self-talk’. That is, to get yourself to do things you might say mentally to yourself, “Get off your backside and do this”, or whatever. I simply told myself, “Since I come from a family of notorious longevity, then in all probability I have a long time yet to go. It’s about time I got off my backside and got on with the rest of my life”. And I did so. There were occasions in the early stages when I felt a bit guilty about this attitude, but again I think pragmatism steps in. You begin to think to yourself, “Well, you’re not helping anybody by grieving excessively. You don’t help them, you certainly don’t help yourself and you’re certainly not much fun or pleasure to be around for your family or for your acquaintances”.’

John considers that he has now put his loss completely behind him. ‘By that, I mean that I’m totally accepting of the fact that she’s dead. She’s gone: I’m not. Therefore I have to get on with my life. I’m sad that she’s gone of course, but I’m not going to allow that to affect the rest of my life; it makes no sense and she wouldn’t want it anyway. In fact, I now have a lady friend whose company I enjoy, but because there’s quite an age difference (a quarter of a century’s difference) it’s not going to lead to marriage or that sort of thing. If I were a younger man it probably would, but I’m not. Again, you have to confront reality in life and deal with things on the basis of reality, but I’ve certainly resolved my grief. There are times
when I develop some nostalgia: something will trigger that off; but I regard that as perfectly normal and healthy, but the effect that it had has passed. They say that grief is usually resolved; well, I’ve resolved it.’

‘Mary’s death brought the boys and I closer together in that, as I said earlier, it was she who raised them. My sons and I weren’t terribly close then; it’s surprising how close we are now. I think, because she was the closest person to them, that her going out of the picture changed things. I think they first came to see me out of a sense of obligation or duty. We were never enemies, but because of the nature of the life that we’d led, weren’t close. Then we discovered each other and got friendly. It was not just a matter of the survivors clinging together. The three of us are not the type to show our emotions, particularly in that way. We would by nature try to conceal our emotions. There’s also something of a loner about me and I think the boys are that way as well, so this removes the clinging bit.

John found that his financial situation improved significantly, following Mary’s death. ‘Even though I had full medical insurance cover, the cost of supporting my wife for eight years was quite horrendous. But since leaving the army, I’ve earned very well in this business. Financially, my situation has improved dramatically. It used to bother my wife, the amount of money it cost to support her: it never bothered me at all. So the fact that I am now financially so much extraordinarily better off is just a side effect. I’ve now got no dependents, so I don’t work as hard; which is why I’ve been able to find the time to become a geriatric undergraduate. I’ve got time; I’ve got money. I’m in a different situation, I suspect, than most people.’

John does not think that his religious perspective or personal philosophies have shifted at all in response to Mary’s death. ‘I think one would be more likely to feel that way if it had been suddenly dramatic, but it wasn’t. Again, I had this adjustment period prior to the dying rather than having to do it from scratch. I’ve seen an awful lot of death; I’m not unused to death.’

‘My Catholicism probably started to die when I was still a teenager, but this was certainly accelerated by violent military service. It’s very hard to see the hand of God in the midst of such lifetime experiences. I never voiced that to my wife, but she was certainly aware of it. I think it’s more a journey of intellect. I just find it impossible to conceive of an old man with a beard sitting in a cloud looking down on earth. Of course, I realise that’s not the concept of the theologically educated, but I’m afraid I am an evolutionist. For me, it’s been a journey away from faith, and I don’t think Mary’s death played a part in that at all. I’d already arrived at that destination well before. However, it could make you think again that if there’s a God – and she was so religious – then the old adage that only the good die young tends to have some element of truth in it.’

_Cemetery_

Mary was buried in a lawn grave with a flush bronze plaque. According to John, ‘The cemetery is emblematic of the respect with which we held the people who are there. It marks us as a civilised society, in that we show respect by honouring that memory. But it’s the memory you’re honouring by the method of disposal of the remains and by maintaining a place where you can go and can mentally think back, reminisce, engage in nostalgia and think, “What if she hadn’t died?” – and all that.’

‘As I drive through the cemetery and see other people there, I believe it is significant to society. I think cemeteries play an enormous role. If in my lifetime, they are going to dig up my wife’s remains and put someone else in because they wanted to recycle the ground, then I
would be looking around for a weapon (metaphorically speaking) and going out hunting. I would be very, very annoyed.'

'I see the cemetery as being sacred to the memory of the people who are there, rather than sacred in the Catholic sense. I would never knowingly engage in a sacrilegious act — now that's not a matter of trying to be euphemistic, or having two bob each way — nor do I believe a bolt of lightning would come down from the clouds and strike me dead or anything of that nature. I believe it's a respect for people: it's a respect for culture, it's a respect for tradition, and it's a respect for customs which hold a society together. Even though there are so many disparate parts of that society who have different customs, I would suspect that respect for the dead and those things which are emblematic of that respect (which obviously includes cemeteries) is common to all. And I think it distinguishes the human animal from others; I mean, really, what is the difference between us and any other animal, but the capacity to reason? And if we are a reasoning people and we understand things, cemeteries do bring solace to an awful lot of people and become a focus in their lives. A cemetery should be treated with the same respect that the people who are there should be treated with, if they were still alive.'

John considers the cemetery to be a peaceful place. 'I think the lawn section where she is, is visually relaxing. I find tombstones quite harsh. In fact, some of them try to outdo you — "I'll have a bigger one than you have" — and that sort of stuff. This is obscene to me. However, I would defend everybody's right to have it: totally. But for me that's not the way. I'll probably finish up in the same hole in the ground myself anyway. I think it's peaceful. I feel possibly a trifle guilty because I'm relaxed there. I find it quite a relaxing place, except when there's a funeral being carried out, because I feel for the people whose grief I understand, but when there's no funeral going on there I find it quite a peaceful place.'

'Somebody once said that when emotion comes in the door, logic flies out the window. I think the reverse may also be true. When logic comes in the door, emotion flies out the window. It's also an indication of one's own mortality; I mean, I'm looking at the place where I'll be buried — and I say buried because she was; maybe I'll get cremated and they'll bury the ashes there — I don't know.'

'I don't consider reuniting the remains to be very significant, but I know that for my kid's sake it probably is. I think it is convenient and it's neat. My brother has Mum's ashes in his attic. When Dad dies, we'll have him cremated and I'll sprinkle their ashes together where they lived; they liked that place. But what they do afterwards with me, from my point of view is not relevant.'

'I don't want a large funeral. I intend to sit down and write a note to my sons, my executor (who is my brother) and our funeral director friend — or whoever his heirs and successors are — stipulating that I would simply like a quiet funeral with two or three members of the family present. I haven't decided on cremation or burial. A week later, there should be a notice in the paper under the regimental badge saying that I was privately interred or cremated, or whatever — and that's it.'

'I've been to enough funerals myself where we've buried the bloke and then gone to the pub and gotten pissed afterwards. For myself, it's not what I need to know, but I certainly recognise a large number of people have a great need to know what's going to happen to their remains. For them it's significant, but it's not for myself. I'm back to my original point and that is when I'm dead, I'm dead. I'm not going to know what the hell what is going on, so why should I care when I'm alive.'
John spoke of the importance of commemoration among military comrades. 'We found that one of our blokes was buried in a country cemetery in an unmarked grave. We immediately combined with the commando association, because he'd been a regular army instructor in the commando unit as well as being in one of ours; he was also ex-Vietnam and an Anglican. We got a bronze plaque and a retired Anglican army padre — a chaplain who was also a Vietnam Veteran — who'd actually buried him and we had a memorial service there. Then we went into the local RSL and had our few beers and what have you; it's a respect for the man. Now if I'm driving past, I'll pop around there and just cast an eye on his grave and let the blokes know the next time we get together. We have a bit of a 'sticky' at Snowy's grave and I look after it. I think that little lawn section in the cemetery is well tended and that's good.'

'Having travelled through Europe — and particularly Ireland, because my ancestry is Irish — I found it fascinating to go to churches in England and Ireland where they have the names of the priests going back a thousand years recorded on a board. And you could go out into the churchyard and there was their grave: very often difficult to read, because they'd weathered over. The stone wasn't of the quality it is today. I think that people such as these are part of our history. It's people who made history, so if we are going to show any recognition of our history, then we should surely show recognition to the people who created and maintained that history. That I suspect, means that you maintain the cemeteries, which also allows people carrying out research, for example, to go and do so in those cemeteries.'

'I am appalled that in a country as large as Australia, we think we can recycle gravesites. I can understand it in countries where land is at a premium, such as Japan and in parts of Europe, but we don't have that problem. The problem may come of having to put a cemetery somewhere where it may be difficult for people to get to, if you run out of space in suburbia: which we will do. Land is finite, but I think the loss of heritage is terrible.'

'I go out to the cemetery with my friend, who goes regularly to look after her father's grave. It's one of those marble Italian ones and I find myself in the midst of a dichotomy there. The style and money spent on those Italian graves do not appeal to me one bit. I think the money would be better spent on the children, in helping them put a deposit on a house or something. Now that's the pragmatism coming out again. They do not appeal to me personally, but the first person that wanted to change them would find me as a warring enemy, because if we're going to respect the fact that we are a multicultural society, part of culture is the way in which we differ. We must show respect for other people who have different traditions. If that is important to them, they are important and each group is important to society, then their traditions and their icons need to be honoured as well. So if anybody starts buggerising around with graves, I tend to get quite irritable.'

John agreed that he sounded almost as defensive of the graves of people he didn't know, as he was toward his wife's grave. 'Emotionally, I probably wouldn't be quite as defensive, but philosophically I am, as an exercise in logic and as an act of what I believe to be decent civilised behaviour. And I know that may sound strange from a person who earned his living shooting people and reducing things to basics.'

'If for example, they were going to destroy the Italian, the Greek, or whatever section of the cemetery and they wanted people to go and demonstrate against it and sign bloody petitions, I'd be there in a flash. I'm reminded of a Lutheran Minister during the Second World War, who said, “When they came for the Jews, I wasn't a Jew, so I didn't worry. When they came for the Catholics, I wasn't a Catholic, so I didn't worry; and when they came for the Gypsies, I wasn't a Gypsy, so I didn't worry. But by the time they came for the Lutheran’s, there was
no one else to defend us". Where we draw the line in the sand, as human beings, is for other human beings, because that’s the only group we actually belong to.’

‘These louts that get into cemeteries and break graves and what-have-you: I know what I’d do to them. I’d start off by handing them a shovel and pointing to a plot of earth. You’ve touched a raw nerve here.’

**Visitation**

Four and a half years after her funeral, John now visits Mary’s grave about once a month, but initially, he wouldn’t drive past the area without going there. ‘I’d go down that way very often. I sort of felt that somehow it would be disrespectful, selfish, in bad taste, not to go in there. I’d have been going there at least twice a week – sometimes three times a week – for the first six to eight weeks and then it rapidly tailed off. I’d go back and I’d start thinking, “I’m not doing myself or anybody any good here”, but I still missed her. Initially, I found that instead of giving solace, going there tended to make me remember the immediacy of the funeral, including the pain in her mother’s eyes, and that sort of thing; it brought it all back. And initially there was nothing to do around the gravesite; that was part of it. I hope I’m not rationalising here, but as one begins to get on with their life, the tendency to revisit their old one – which is what I think they’re doing when one goes to the cemetery – diminishes. Part of what one is doing is revisiting their past.’

‘I then found that I wasn’t feeling guilty about not visiting the grave and as other interests in life began to intervene, I found myself more and more involved as a trustee of a local RSL and on the committee of my regimental association. Then I started going out with my lady friend and she introduced me to wine; I read up on it to blazes and enjoyed it. I enjoyed it before I knew anything about it, but that’s another story. These things began to occupy time. I elected not to work harder, because I couldn’t see any sense in working hard for the Federal Treasurer.’

‘Initial visits did evoke memories, but I didn’t feel that I was in contact with her, or with God or whatever. Initially some memories were quite painful, but because of the inherent discipline that my previous occupation engenders, I didn’t show it; to do so would be a sign of weakness. But there was an occasional time when there was a bit of a catch of the throat, metaphorically speaking.’

‘I found then that I would be saying to myself, “Oh, God: I haven’t been to the cemetery, I’d better go over”. I would go as a matter of deliberate intent, because I’d say, “I haven’t been”. So I’d go and get in the car and I’d drive over there and tidy up around the grave, which served a few purposes. First of all it stopped me feeling guilty, because if I haven’t been there for a while I might feel a bit guilty about it, so I went. Now, who the hell I would feel guilty to is another matter, because who the hell would know? The dead don’t: and the kids hardly ever go there. It’s like a reflex. I think that is interesting. Well, why the bloody hell should I feel guilty?’

‘I’ve only been over there a few times with my friend, when she’s been going to her father’s grave. On that basis I thought, “Oh well, while I’m here I’ll go to Mary’s. Now that’s an interesting thing to do. I observe that she is far more attentive to her father’s grave than I am to my wife’s. I believe that makes me feel guilty too. Also of course, I wouldn’t want a friend to regard me as being a terrible person who doesn’t go, so maybe there’s a bit of hypocrisy creeping in here at the same time. So yeah, I don’t have a need to go there, but yet, if I’ve
forgotten for any period of time, I feel guilty and I assuage that guilt by going. It's interesting, isn't it?'

John would now initiate a visit to Mary's grave about once every four weeks or so. 'That's because I simply clean up the bronze plaque. In the boot of my car I've got a tiny pair of grass shears, a little hand broom, a bottle of baby oil and a rag in a plastic bag. I just keep it clean and tidy. Now it might be a moot point to ask whether or not that's part of respect for Mary and part of it is the habit and the instinct almost of looking after, keeping things neat, clean and tidy. It seems disrespectful not to. I'd say I'd be there about twelve times a year, but I used to go there every week. At first after she died, every time I drove past, I used to feel that I had to go, otherwise I was somehow letting the side down.'

'I don't feel any communion with Mary at all. I'll often think about her, but that's a matter of reminiscing; it's a matter of casting the mind back; but I have no sense of being in contact with her, or God or what-have-you. I believe that you should honour and respect the memory, but if somebody asked me to be logical, I would say, "Well it probably accomplishes nothing.'

John places flowers on Mary's grave on Mother's Day and her birthday. 'Maybe I shouldn't be telling you this -- I'm probably an annoyance -- but I also bring a little grass seed along and a bit of soil. If I notice bare patches in the cemetery lawn, I'll sprinkle seed on the bare patch and a little bit of soil over it. This probably annoys the hell out of the cemetery people. There aren't any weeds there yet, but if I did find a flat-weed or what-have-you, I would most certainly root it out. I think it's a combination of a mark of respect to Mary, but also part of the old soldier's habits. I think you would need someone skilled in psychology to be able to determine exactly what it is, but I would say it would be half-and-half. Let's put it this way, if one let the whole thing go -- and imagine the cemetery authorities also let it go -- I would find that quite disgraceful on my part, not to go to the effort to maintain it properly.'

John spends around five minutes at the grave. 'As long as it takes just to tidy up around. I'm not given to prayer or anything like that. I just trim the grass around the concrete base of the bronze plaque. My next door neighbour told me that the way to keep the bronze plaque up is with a bit of baby oil rubbed into a rag. I've also got an old toothbrush, which I use to get into the lettering and what-have-you, just to make it look neat, clean and tidy.'

John recognised that his initially frequent visits to the cemetery had mitigated as the intensity of grief subsided. 'I think the memory fades and the sense of identification with the individual fades. Now, I don't mean that it vanishes at all, but the sharpness of the immediacy of death fades. If you're not religious, it tends to become a combination of a sense of obligation, a sense of duty and a habit, and the need to maintain the plaque and the grave site at a standard which satisfies me. Now, this sounds rather selfish I know, but it's as if I'm deriving a sense of satisfaction by fulfilling a duty to maintain an emblem of what was once my wife.'

'I think my sons are probably not likely to visit anywhere near as often as I do. I'd never ask and they never volunteer, but I was pleased that the older one was able to say he had found the plaque nice and clean and shiny. So he had been there not long after I'd been, only a matter of days. So maybe there's a sense of indicating to my children -- who are well and truly adults -- that I'm remembering their mother and treating her memory with respect.'

'What has happened progressively is that a sense of logic began to take over from the emotions; and logic says that underneath the ground is a coffin, in which is what's left of the body, and that's all. Therefore, although the scenery has become progressively more and more
peaceful where she is buried, and because I am by nature a pragmatist and a realist, then there's not the emotionalism that there was initially. There's not a sense of visiting her, but there is a sense of duty done and respecting a memory: of ensuring that anybody else who goes there will see that the memory is respected and not neglected. It gives a sense of peace that I am doing that, but I don't have to do it as often to feel the same peace; that's what's happening. It's like weaning a drug addict; the time between hits becomes greater. The space has become greater as realism, logic and objectivity all begin to play a much larger part.
NON-RELIGIOUS GRANDPARENTS CHOOSE QUIET CEMETERY

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**Psychosocial history**

Brenda is sixty years old and was ‘brought up a Presbyterian’, but has had no church affiliation since her ‘younger days’. Both she and her sixty-two year old husband, Kevin, were born in Melbourne of Australian parents. They have three married daughters: aged forty, thirty-eight and twenty-six. Brenda didn’t have paid work while the children were at home, as Kevin kept her ‘quite comfortable’. However, she started a job three years ago at a local RSL ‘just to fill in time, and thoroughly enjoyed mixing with people’.

Kevin was ‘christened Church of England’ and attended church until he was ‘around twelve or fourteen’, but says he could be termed ‘non-religious and non-conforming’. Religion doesn’t matter to Kevin, who considers ‘it’s just not a problem.’ He ran his own plumbing business for thirty-eight years, until two-and-a-half years ago and now works part-time, as a courier.

**Bereavement**

Five years ago, Brenda and Kevin were devastated by the accidental death of their four-year-old grandson. Robert was their eldest daughter’s second son; he had a seven-year-old brother and two cousins.

Brenda recalls: ‘He was a dear little boy: very cheeky. We’ve got very, very good memories of him: excellent memories. If you could have seen him, you would laugh too. “You old bitch”, he’d say and run straight out that door with me after him. “Don’t you smacka me”, and he’d take off with me after him many, many times. I have never smacked my other three grandchildren, but Robert: on average, four times a day. I loved him dearly, but I think he loved his grandfather a little bit more than me. Kevin would go up and have a shower and the next minute Robert would be in the shower with him, “Me, Pa; Me with you Pa.” We had a lot to do with him, as we do with our other grandchildren, but we particularly had a lot to do with this little fellow. He had a couple of little setbacks; he couldn’t hear properly and he used to talk a bit funny.’

Kevin and Brenda were holidaying at a resort, about three-and-a-half hour’s drive from home. There were eight children between four families staying together. Brenda recalls, ‘The day he was killed, Kevin and I were minding him and that’s what made it hard for us, because we had to ring his mother and tell her to come to the hospital, because he was gone. Only a quarter-of-an-hour before the dear little fellow had the accident, I whopped him three times’. ‘He just went over and went ‘Bop!’ to this poor little girl. He was a cheeky little devil; he really was, but he was also just adorable.’
Brenda spoke of Robert’s accident: ‘All he wanted was one of those horse-drawn carriage rides. So Kevin put him on and stood by the kerb. He thought, “I won’t put him up top there; it’s not safe. I’ll put him inside”. So Kevin did put him inside and I went off shopping. Halfway around, Robert decided he’d leave the seat and lean on the door. Now he was a very little boy, but as he leant on the door it opened – fortunately there were witnesses – and as it opened, he went out with it and then he came back. If he had let go when he was out, the cart wouldn’t have run over him, but when he came back in, he dropped.’

According to Kevin: ‘The cart bloke was an ex-ambulance officer. He jumped down immediately, realised the little bloke was gone and gave him mouth to mouth and brought him back. He resuscitated him on the spot.’ Brenda felt sure that ‘he was brought back to life a couple of times’.

‘When I came out of the shop’, Brenda said, ‘and looked on the ground, there he was lying there. I said to my daughter, “That’s Robert! Go and get your father”. So she went and got Dad, but it was too late. As the ambulance didn’t stop, people said, “He’s alive”; and I really thought he was alive: honest to God, I thought he was alive. I really believed that when the ambulance didn’t stop, he’d be all right. Later, I asked my daughter, “Why didn’t they ask for his organs?” She said, “Mum, there were no organs left”.

‘When he was lying on the ground, they wouldn’t let me near him, but when we did see him in the hospital, it was just as if he was asleep: weak as a kitten. It was just awful, but we went back to the caravan and did what we had to do. The police even offered to drive us all home to Melbourne.’

Kevin said, ‘They wanted to keep Brenda in the local hospital for shock. They didn’t want me to take her. I had to virtually stand over them and say, “Well I’m sorry, but she’s not stopping here. Jesus! I’ve got one crowd following the bloody ambulance [forty kilometres west] and the other crowd’s gone [fifty kilometres north] back up the river, to get the kids. I just can’t leave her here”‘.

Kevin felt he ‘sort of had to bully the family into doing what had to be done. One of us had to be on the ball. We lost him on the Sunday and we didn’t get him to town until the Wednesday. The autopsy was done up there. The length of time all this was taking was really dragging on people. Luckily we got him and could bury him on the Friday, but it looked like going over the weekend and into the next week and that was starting to impact heavily on people.’

**Other losses**

Kevin had experienced the death of his mother, seventeen years earlier, but believes that did not help in any way in coping with this incident. ‘We hadn’t had a close relationship and I wasn’t in any bereavement really, of any description, when my mother died. I didn’t grieve, because our relationship had long since finished in that regard. She was still my mother; I buried her and did everything I should have done, but she said she didn’t want me. She’d say, “I’m going to leave it to the church”. I said, “Well that’s fine. Leave it to the church, but let them bury you too”. Then I think the pennies might have dropped. She was a bitch; she was a funny lady.’

‘She’d been ill for a long time. We got a surprise, or I suppose it was a shock, when she did die. Although she hadn’t been well for a long time, she just fell dead in the street. That came out of the blue, but it wasn’t totally unexpected. I mean you would’ve expected it at any time,
because she wasn’t a well person. I think my father dying when I was eighteen was a bigger shock. That was definitely a shock, though I didn’t agree with my father a lot, but it was nothing like the grandkid, you know. Phew!

‘It’s taken all this time to get a bit easier’, Brenda said. ‘And then I had two more close deaths: my Mum and uncle; but they weren’t at all so hard. I nursed Mum for months and it wasn’t even hard. Mum died about two years ago. Her boyfriend of fifty-two years – who I called my uncle – died six weeks earlier; he had cancer. But it wasn’t hard, because Robert had made us better people. I’ll always say that, and I’m sure Kevin would too; but Robert’s death has made me, in particular, a much better person. When my Mum and uncle went, I was so much stronger. I even said words for my uncle at the funeral; that’s what a stronger person it has made me.’ Kevin interjected, ‘It makes a person different; I wouldn’t say better, I’d say different.’ Brenda reiterated, ‘I think it made us better people.’

Brenda continued: ‘We definitely grieved for Robert. With Mum it was a relief; with my uncle it was certainly a relief. To watch somebody die is terrible, but with Robert there was no reason why. They told me in the hospital – other than not being well, as she’d had a heart complaint – that Mum died of a broken heart. I said, “Oh, come on. She’s eighty-two years old”. But she did die of a broken heart: she really did. The only last sensible thing she said was, “He promised he wouldn’t leave me”. That proved to me that she fretted away; she just died.’ Kevin agreed, ‘She did and she didn’t realise she’d lost him probably, in the first three weeks. She was in dementia; we couldn’t even take her to the funeral. We put her in hospital when Uncle was in the hospice, because we couldn’t handle him at his place and Brenda’s mother at her place.’

Kevin had known Brenda’s mother and uncle for forty years, and had expected the two of them to go around the same time. ‘I said for a long time, “It’s going to be a race”. It didn’t really impact on either of us heavily. There was a sense of loss, but we had our grieving period and the grieving period was evident, but it was so much shorter, because we were grieving even while they were here, than when they left. I felt that they were two people who required grieving for; I really felt sad for them.’

When Brenda’s mother was cremated, the funeral director strongly advised her to, “Get it over and done with”, by placing the ashes the next day or so. However, she let it go for nearly a month and now says, “Oh, it was terrible; their advice was so sound”. Putting Mum’s ashes into the grave affected me months later, more so than her death and funeral did. That, I would never do again; I would do it immediately.’

‘Brenda’s uncle was a Catholic and we buried him’, advised Kevin. ‘I said, “He was brought up a Catholic and he’s going to go down as a Catholic too”.’

Funeral

In the church, Brenda did not even notice other people present. ‘I asked Kevin, “Why didn’t the people come? He was only a little boy, Kevin. Why didn’t people come?” Yet honestly, they were falling out of the rafters; but far as I was concerned there wasn’t a soul there.’

Kevin disagreed with his other grandchildren being prevented from attending their brother and cousin’s funeral. ‘They were wrong in not letting the children go to the funeral service and nothing would change my mind about that. It might only be a very small way of helping, but it’s still got to be there. It doesn’t matter how old or young they are. We had Robert’s brother with us when we had an open casket at the funeral home the night before. He didn’t
want to go in; he was only seven. I took him aside and said, “Now look. You’d better go and see him. This will be your last possible chance of ever seeing him, because tomorrow he’s closed down and he is put away and that’s it”. I let him go for a couple of minutes, then I went in and came back out again and then he said, “I want to go in”. Brenda recalled, “We did say to the minister, “Now we don’t want this too religious; you know we’re not religious people”. And he said, “OK, that’s fine, but don’t you make it too sad and hard for me, because I’ve got to stand up there”.‘ Kevin commented that the minister had a reasonably long association with the family. ‘He taught our children and had already conducted two weddings. He was certainly feeling for the family. He came out and sat up in the bedroom for a couple of hours and spoke to us: he was fine.”

Brenda noted that the minister ‘did a little bit of religion: very little, but what he did was perfect. We chose little bits of music that Robert loved. We all clapped our hands together and that helped us more.’ Kevin agreed, ‘That helped the whole family. There was a tape recording of his favourite little piece of music that he used to jump around with. All the family there had to jump around and clap our hands and we’d all fall down. Nobody else in the church got the benefit of it, because they didn’t realise what it was all about. They just sat there, probably dumbfounded.

Brenda found comfort in the period leading up to the funeral. ‘But the funeral day was a blur. I fainted outside the church and then sat in the car, out of the way.’ Kevin did not consider the funeral to be a valuable personal experience. It did not help him in his grief at that stage and was ‘just a hell of a day, finishing off a hell of a week.’ They agreed that the open coffin at the funeral parlour afforded them a most valuable opportunity to say their personal goodbyes.

Adjustment

According to Kevin, ‘Robert’s parents were straining at the bit a little and all this put extra strain on their relationship.’ He considered, ‘It would make or break them. So far, they’ve returned now to where they were; they tolerate each other, but it still wouldn’t surprise me to see them bust up. There was a night that certain things were said, and – well, I copped the blame. It was as if I wasn’t blaming myself enough at the time: which I was; I still do. It was thoughtless, but he more-or-less straight-out blamed me, but we got over that and it was never brought up again.’

Kevin insisted, ‘I would never have got in the same street if I had known there was a problem with the horse and bloody cart. I’ve always been safety conscious. We’ve never had work accidents; kid accidents; any accidents, and we’ve been boating for thirty years of our lives. We can’t get heaps of cotton wool and wrap our kids in it and say, “No, you can’t do that; it looks dangerous”. You cannot do it. If something happens – well that’s the price we pay for being human.’

Brenda and Kevin consider they have both changed emotionally since Robert’s death. Brenda feels she has ‘always been a bit of a softie. I suppose, I’m not as cranky now; I accept things better. Once, I would absolutely flare up and particularly call Kevin everything. We just laugh now. “You silly old thing”, he’ll say to me and we’ll get on with it now. We’ve learnt about what’s most important in life. Now we just say, “Come on”, and we’ll have a laugh and go and do what we’ve got to do. Over the last twelve months, I suppose we’ve laughed a little bit more, but not up until then.’
Kevin did not quite agree. ‘I’d say we don’t laugh as much as we used to at all; I don’t anyway, though I try. Outwardly, people wouldn’t know. People get a surprise when they hear about it, or somebody else might tell them and they might like to ask, but they’re more embarrassed to ask than I am to tell them. But I don’t go around saying, “Hey, do you want to listen to this?” Therefore we tend to disguise our emotions. I’m more emotional now than ever; I cry easily now. I would cry more now than I would laugh. I laugh a little bit, but I probably laugh at different things now. Things that used to seem funny don’t seem quite as funny. I couldn’t be specific, but that’s how I feel. I became a totally different person and I still am.’

‘I get upset when we hear of kids. I can look at adults and can hear about bad things that have happened to them and I don’t emote in any way at all, but not so with little kids. When I heard that those two little kids got killed on the railway line there, a few years ago – Boy! Did that break me up? I had to stop the car; I was bawling my eyes out. But strangely, the people I thought about were the grandparents. I felt terribly upset for the kids, but you can’t be upset for dead people, because they’re dead; they’re beyond being upset for. Let’s face it, grieving is for the living; funerals are for the living. But the grandparents – I thought, really I should make an effort and go and see them. But then I couldn’t; now I could. Today I could go, but three years ago I couldn’t. I would have been in a worse state than they would, probably. So I couldn’t physically go and do it. They’re the differences I’ve noticed.’

‘Friends of ours lost their son in his early twenties and I found out one night through a phone call. I said to Brenda, “I’m going over to see them” – this was long before we lost Robert – and then I thought to myself, “No; No, I won’t. I might feel as though I’m barging in”. But after losing Robert, the first thing I’d do now is go straight down to their place, whoever it is. It doesn’t matter whether I’d seen them in twelve years, twelve years, or whatever; I would go and see them, because, I learned that people coming to see us when we lost Robert helped us tremendously. When Brenda said that there was nobody at the four-year-old’s funeral, there were four hundred people, and she asked, “Where is everybody?”

Brenda agreed with Kevin, that, ‘When you’re really grieving, people are very important. I love the people that came. I don’t know how many hundreds we had through, but I only cooked one meal. People just kept bringing food; it was unbelievable. Our daughter and son-in-law came and stayed with us; they just couldn’t go home.’

Brenda considered, ‘Another thing that made life easier, for Robert’s mother and me were the flowers. I had them everywhere and that was a great comfort. Everyday my little granddaughter and I would go around and water them and we’d talk about the person that gave me this one and that; it was lovely. We buried him on the Friday and on the Sunday, his mother brought a lady in who picked flowers from every bunch and pressed them. So we all got pressed flowers: framed.’

‘Little things that people do are so important. One of his mother’s friends gave me a little gift. It was simply a bit of wood wrapped up as a present with a bow on it and it said, “This is a gift from me to you. You can’t give me anything in return; I’m not here. But if you’re feeling down, you think about me. Pick it up and look at me and love me through this gift”. And it was good. It didn’t have the gift of life: just written words. That’s all it was, a piece of wood. But unfortunately, we were robbed two years ago and it was taken. I didn’t care about the diamonds, but they took this too.’

Brenda considers that she is getting on with her life now. ‘I do normal things; I’m well on the way to being on top of it. It is behind me now, but it will never, ever be gone. Everyday I
have a little think of him some way or another. It might be just some little thought of Robert
that flashes through my mind. I'm OK now, but three years ago, I'd be hopeless; I'd have to
sit down and I'd cry. Many a time I rang Kevin up and said he'd have to come home.'

'I found one of the best things that helped me, was when our daughter and son-in-law asked
us to go to the funeral director's Christmas seminar, a year after he died. It was the best thing
I'd done. Those experts put me on track, because I really thought that I was going mental, but
I wasn't of course. Then I started to think: the next time someone asks me, "How are you
going Brenda?" I'm going to say, "Fantastic!" And that was my turning point; it honestly
was.'

Kevin considers his grieving was quite different. 'When I did grieve, it was heavier because I
couldn't grieve early. After it all happened, the policeman was sitting there talking to me and
I was crying my eyes out with him. The old cop was no better, because he had grandkids and
as he said, "He had to do the job". He said to me, "I thought I had the original ice-man, the
day it all happened. You were so in control of everything". But so far as I was concerned, I
couldn't do anything else; there was no one else who could stand with me or was stable. One
of us had to stand up and that's all it amounted to. They were all falling over - understandably
though: completely understandably - they were literally lying on the floor. Even the other
son-in-law was useless. Of course, I continued in that vein right through until after the
funeral, so I had a week of being held in abeyance or limbo, and then it came onto me during
the next week.'

'I think we went back to work on the Monday. We said, "Well, come on; we've got to get
going again". It started to impact on me in the second week and it impacted pretty hard. I'd
say the third week was when I really went into heavy grief. So much so, that a friend of ours
who was in the SAS said, "You don't look good and you're not talking good"; and I wasn't
good either. Anyway he asked, "Have you spoken to anybody?" and I said, "No". So he gave
me the name and address of a bloke somewhere and said there's an appointment there for you.
It was a shrink they use for their own SAS people in similar circumstances, but the
appointment got mixed up and he wasn't there. Anyway he rang me that night and spoke to
me a little bit and he apologised profusely for the mess up. He phoned again a few days later
and said, "It sounds as though you're fine"; and I felt I was. Just the fact that I'd made the
effort to see someone had helped.'

'Some people say, "It couldn't possibly be as bad as losing one of your own". But I would
defy anybody to tell me the difference between losing one of your own, or a grandchild. It's
been five years now. The grieving was reasonably heavy for three years, but slowly and surely
you come out of it. I'd say I've been in good control now for well over twelve months.'

'I look at things totally different now. Once I'd stand and argue with someone. Now I just say,
"Well you must be right", or something like that and walk away and leave it. I just couldn't be
bothered. But I suppose age might have something to do with that too.'

Brenda appreciates the grandchildren bringing Robert's name up and talking about him. 'I'm
very pleased with that. They have never forgotten him, and we laugh about the funny little
things he did and we're fine.' Kevin mentioned that their youngest daughter is now pregnant.
'A few weeks back, the kids turned around and said to Brenda, "That'll make it even. There'll
be four of us again". So another one's coming back to take the place of the one that's gone;
that pleases us too.'
Both Brenda and Kevin are adamant that their religiosity is in no way different now, following Robert’s death. Brenda considers that she is ‘not really religious’, but when it came to the ‘nitty-gritty’ of her grandson’s funeral, she ‘particularly wanted him buried from a church’. She feels therefore, that she ‘must have gone back a bit. I would never say that I don’t really believe in God, but I had my doubts there for a while; now it doesn’t worry me. When people used to say, “They only take the best”, or whatever, that really got up my nose.’

Cemetery

Kevin recalled when: ‘The kids were all here one night and I said, “Well let’s all think about the future, as this proves you never know. I think everyone wanted him to go into a nice quiet little area, not into a big commercialised cemetery. So I said, “Let’s go out of town and have a look”. And as soon as we walked through the gates, I said, “This is it”. We worked out that we needed four plots to accommodate our family and maybe one or two of the grandkids. So now it’s there and all of this was brought about purely and simply. I wouldn’t have done it if Brenda’s mother and uncle had died first; I wouldn’t have even thought of it. But with the little bloke dying, I just looked at life a little bit differently.’

The thing I thought of was, none of us had made provision down the track for when we’re going to die. And it all came together; it had to be done that day. So I asked, “Well how many plots do we need?” Then I went out and I purchased four plots. At that time, Brenda’s mother and uncle would have been in their early- and mid-seventies. They were very relieved, because they knew the cemetery they were going to.’

‘I say I’m not religious’, said Brenda, ‘but some little things really get to me and many Catholic people said to me at the time, “There is a hereafter, Brenda”, and I said to Kevin, “There’s got to be a hereafter”. And that’s one thing that kept me going, because I knew he was at the hereafter, and that’s how I felt. When I go up to the cemetery, I know that he’s not by himself any more. My Mum and uncle are buried there now and then there are two graves and then Robert’s. The two middle ones are ours. I believe that he’s not by himself and that makes me happy. I think this earth is so complicated that there’s got to be a peaceful hereafter; that’s how I look at it. At first, I used to worry about him being up at the cemetery by himself, particularly when it rained; I hated it when it rained. But then I started to think; “You’re somewhere else now with other people”. And he isn’t by himself – definitely – my uncle is with him and so is my Mum. That’s how I comfort myself. I don’t think about whether it’s true or not. Kevin always says to me, “If it helps you, think that way”.’ However, Kevin has a more pragmatic view: ‘I believe he is six feet under the ground and that’s it.’ Both Brenda and Kevin fully respect the other’s perspective.

Visitation

At the gravesite, Brenda always sits for at least two or three minutes to just think about Robert. ‘Then I get some water, clean out the vases and put the flowers in, then I give his headstone a kiss and I come home. If I’m really upset, I’ll just stand there; but it’s been a long time now since I’ve been really upset. I just say, “Hello”, to Mum and my uncle and put some flowers there; that never upsets me. But I never, ever go away without giving Robert’s headstone a kiss. The time I spend there all depends – on a good day, I’ll stay five or ten minutes – depending on how long it takes to do the flowers. On a bad day, I’m there and out. But as I said, it’s been a while since it’s been a bad day; because I now go when I want to go, not when I think I should.’
Brenda always talks to Robert when she visits, but she never prays. 'We place flowers every time. On special occasions we put windmills; so if flowers are not there he has always got his windmills. His brother also put a balloon there in our football club colours. If we go to the show, his brother will always get a blow-up toy and we tie it onto the grave and it stays there till I pick it up and take it home. At Easter time, we take him Easter eggs; at Christmas time, we put angels on it. He's always got an angel on his grave. It is a very cute little cemetery and it's very easy to visit. You see lots of people visiting; obviously looking at the old graves. I always feel as if I'm going home.'

As he usually visits with Brenda, Kevin will just carry the water. 'I pull the dead stuff out and tidy up: just the normal type of thing. I don't speak to anybody. I put an odd flower here and there, but Brenda usually does the flowers; there's nothing else to do.'

According to Brenda, 'The grave was not finished until the stone monument was constructed about eighteen months ago, to replace the temporary wooden cross. As soon as that was done, we went together and I said, "He's at rest now; nobody else can hurt him". When I go to the cemetery, I'm inclined to say, "Hello", to Mum and my uncle, but something pulls me to Robert every time and that's where I stand; that's what I get out of going there now. Before, I got nothing; it upset me, but now I get rest.' Brenda now visits 'perhaps every six weeks or so'.

Kevin had no problem with the headstone not being there. 'I knew who was there and I knew what the wooden cross was for; I didn't feel that it was unfinished, as it was, but I place no importance on the cemetery. Both my mother and father were cremated and there are no ashes, no plots: nothing. That's what they wanted; that's what they got. But with Robert, I found it hard to walk in and out of the cemetery early on. I can walk in and out of there now with no worries.'

Kevin considers: 'I would have gone more in the last six months than in the previous four and a half years: between six and eight times. I'll go up on birthdays - including my own - because he can't come to my birthday, so I have to go up and see him. I tend to go at Christmas, birthdays and Easter and those types of things. I want to go on days that I want to go. I don't feel obliged to go; I just feel as though I want to go. But I have been known to be driving that way and just pull off the road and go to the cemetery for no reason.'

Brenda commented that their second daughter nearly stopped going, even at Christmas. 'Because she just thinks up a migraine'. Kevin added that their eldest (Robert's mother), can't go at all. 'Because as soon as she goes there, all the bad memories come rushing back to her and she's upset for days; so she handles it by staying away.'

On the odd occasion that Kevin visits the cemetery by himself, he doesn't take flowers. 'I'm not like that. When I'm going: away I go, there and then: that's it. I only stay a couple of minutes. I was doing that early in the piece, but haven't done it for a long time now.'

Brenda suggested to Kevin, 'You'd be stressed out by the time you got home', to which he replied, 'Yes, I used to stress something shocking; it really knocked me around. And when I stopped just dropping into the place, I improved quicker. I could have quite easily said, "That's it; I'm not going any more". That's how it was stressing me, but I was determined not to let it stress me to the point that I wouldn't go. I was going to beat it; it wasn't going to beat me - and I did beat it: totally, but that was the mad time. I suppose, had I given in then and said, "That's it, I'm not coming again", I'd have gone back now and probably been OK, because time has elapsed. Time is a healer.' Brenda recalled being told at a bereavement
seminar that, "Even time doesn’t help some people", but she was adamant: ‘It certainly helped us. Time has definitely helped us.’

Brenda remembered, ‘In the early days, we’d go on special occasions and always bump into one of the family. We wouldn’t all go together and we’d more-or-less like pass in the dark. It’s not that we weren’t talking to each other: we were, but we’d just say, “Hello”, and they’d go their way and we’d go our way. That was the early days, but then it became easier.’ Kevin commented that family members soon learnt the visitation patterns of each other and intentionally avoided visiting during what was likely to be someone else’s personal time. ‘We didn’t work it out together, but we all tended to know. We didn’t want to encroach on each other’s grief. On Christmas Day, we go up there early in the morning and his parents go up later.’ Brenda added: ‘We know who’s been by the flowers.’ And Kevin observed that ‘Robert’s other grandparents go up regularly, about every fortnight; they’re a lot older than we are. His other aunty goes up a fair bit too.’

Brenda has found that her own personal need to visit has changed over time. ‘In the beginning I went because I had to. I felt as if I had to, because it was the right thing to do, but now I go because I want to and it’s much nicer. Early on I visited very, very frequently, and now less frequently: not for the lack of love for him, it’s just that you’ve got to get on with your life. The personal need to be there is not as great. I feel I’m very important to my family and my grandchildren that are alive and I’ve got to keep going for them.’

Both Brenda and Kevin have noticed a progressive change in their emotions when visiting. Earlier on, Brenda found Kevin’s presence to be a necessary comfort. ‘He’d just stand there, and that’s all I needed. He knew that’s all I needed.’ Kevin said ‘I’d stand probably three metres back from the grave and let her potter and have her cry and do what she wanted to do; I’d get the water and that kind of thing. Well, now I don’t have to stand back. I only stood back because she needed it more than I did.’ Brenda agreed.

Kevin added, ‘although I was pretty heavy and grim on it, Brenda needed it. She needed the cemetery at the time: badly. But I needed to not be there. I’d dried up by the time I got there. I should have stopped driving there, because I was starting to get dangerous. I wouldn’t stop crying. The crying went on for two-and-a-half years; I was a mess. But once I came away again, I’d come good pretty quick. I drove slower home than I went there. But I did get better, I must admit.’

Eventually, Kevin became concerned at what appeared to be compulsive visiting behaviour on Brenda’s part. ‘It got to the stage where I thought I had to make her look at the amount of times she was going. She jumped up and down at me when I did say it. I forget the exact words I used at the time, but it was pretty cute phraseology, to imply to her that maybe she was going too often; and she was; she admitted later on that she was.’ Brenda agreed, but added, ‘I took no notice at the time; I did what I wanted’.

Kevin continued, ‘I said to her, “You know he’s not going to fly up out of the grave and say, hello Nanna; here I am”. Another person we know used to go every day and that’s what her husband said to her. Their son got killed in a car accident; he was only twenty-one. I don’t think the father has even been to the cemetery since the funeral; that was ten years ago. He won’t talk about it, like it just didn’t happen, except that his son is not there. I feel that going to the cemetery does you good, because you know that’s where they are. That’s why you’re going to the bloody place; if they weren’t there you wouldn’t go. I felt that for Brenda, it was becoming a compulsion: “I’ve got to go; I’m relied upon”. Brenda is a little bit that way, you know, though she may not admit it, but I didn’t want to get to the stage of going to the
cemetery like that: "I’ve got to go, because I’ll be relieved on to be there". I thought that would
have been extremely unhealthy, not only for her, but also for me too; but anyway, she broke
out of it herself and worked her way through it.'

Brenda responded, 'I’ve got to admit that I used to go to the cemetery – not too much, but I
used to go everyday or every second day – and I used get so uptight; there was no sense to it.
So then I said to Kevin one day, "That’s it; I’m going when I feel like it". I’m sure he was
pleased when I told him that. So now I do go when I feel like it and when I go I don’t even get
upset, because I want to be there.' Kevin added: 'This was when I said to her, "Have a think;
just have a think about what you’re doing".' Brenda continued: 'And that’s when I started to
get myself into control. I worked out that this little fella was not going to come out and say,
"Don’t worry Mama", so I broke out of it'.

Brenda now feels a sense of peace within the cemetery. 'Not always so, but lately I feel
peaceful; but I definitely don’t think of God. I’m quite happy to be there now, because to me
he is in his final resting-place. I think about just him and me; I really don’t think about
anybody else. I don’t think about his mother or his father’s sadness; I just think of him and
me. Going to the cemetery now is my time. I like my time; that’s important to me.'

Kevin doesn’t experience any significant feelings or sensations when he visits now. 'I’ve
come away sadder than I’ve gone there in the past, but now I can walk away and not look
back. Once I used to drive around the corner so we’d go past again, but we don’t need to do
that now.'

Both Brenda and Kevin find it much easier to talk about their ordeal now, without feeling any
need to hide their personal emotions. Brenda commented that, 'This is the first time I’ve
really broken down in months and months. I can relax in front of some people. It wasn’t hard
for me to talk to you about it, and I didn’t care about crying in front of you; that makes it easy
for me, so I don’t hide it. But we don’t cry as much as we used to.'

Kevin feels similarly: 'That’s right. It only flashes back to us now, but we keep going,
because we know we’ll clear ourselves again, and I don’t care when I cry now. If something
happens, I’ll cry. You know what they say – “Grown men don’t cry”. Well that’s crap! And I
must admit, it took this to bring that out of me.'
ITALIAN CATHOLIC WIDOW VISITS EVERY SUNDAY

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Psychosocial history

Rosa is a Catholic widow who was born in south-east Italy seventy years ago. She was raised on a farm and received no formal education. At the age of twenty-nine, she came to Australia and married Joe two years later. Before her second child was born, Rosa did various production work, including making jumpers, dolls and bicycle components. She also worked in a private hospital, but has not worked for wages since having her children.

Joe was born in Sicily seventy-two years ago and died almost three years ago. He came to Australia at the age of thirty-four and after twenty-eight years as a telecommunications worker, had ten years of retirement. Rosa and Joe were married for thirty-six years.

Other losses

Joe and Rosa’s two daughters are both married with children of their own. Their elder daughter, Maria (along with her husband and own daughter) continued to live with Joe and Rosa for some years. The young family had not long moved out when Maria suffered a debilitating stroke at the age of thirty-four.

Bereavement

Joe had been unwell with kidney failure and dementia for some months before suffering a fatal stroke, only a year after Maria’s incident. According to Rosa, ‘He had a few things wrong with him and although I sort of knew it was coming, it hit very hard’. She had still been endeavouring to cope with her daughter’s incident and this, no doubt, also had its toll on Joe. Rather than anticipating Joe’s death and endeavouring to prepare herself for his loss, Rosa acknowledges that she ‘went into denial’.

She knew that he had been having strokes, as ‘lots of strokes were picked up by a head scan’ and her daughter had tried to explain that ‘he didn’t have long to live’. Nevertheless, Rosa found that: ‘when it did finally happen, it was still very, very hard’ and she ‘was greatly shocked’.

Joe died in hospital, with Rosa and her family present. “I also spent some time at the hospital with him, even though he was unconscious. We had as long as we wanted to be with him once he passed away, but after that the next time I saw him again was at the funeral, because he had an open coffin.’
Funeral

Rosa considers that through the funeral process she ‘definitely had a good opportunity to say a personal goodbye’. She was very pleased with the funeral service, considering it ‘very, very nice’. She believes that the ritual of a requiem mass and the whole funeral service helped her to cope with her grief. ‘As Catholics, we had a rosary the day before the funeral – that is the blessing of the soul of the dead. The priest who does the rosary usually does the funeral as well at the same church. We have a rosary first; the next day we have the funeral. It’s like saying goodbye. The funeral itself is very, very emotional. The funeral is actually good, but on the day, I just felt very sick: really, really sick.’

Adjustment

According to Rosa and her daughter, she is a different person now. She is ‘more withdrawn and doesn’t see the good side, but always sees the negative side of things’. It appears to her family that ‘she doesn’t really enjoy life now. It’s really hard for her. She’ll have good days when everything’s fine. But then, little things constantly remind her of him and it comes to her. She sort of keeps to herself now.’ Rosa often feels ‘very lonely, very upset and depressed’, but finds that on ‘some days’ she is ‘all right’. She is ‘still getting there’, but hasn’t yet reached the stage where she ‘could sit back and remember the good times and start enjoying life’.

It took Rosa ‘over a year’ to get herself ‘back together’ and now she is ‘gradually doing more and more, like working the garden, which was always Joe’s garden’. While he was alive, she wouldn’t go near the vegetable garden. This was Joe’s main interest and source of much pride. It was always neatly and efficiently planted, meticulously maintained and highly productive.

At first, she ‘wouldn’t go out there because it was his area and he had just recently passed away’. But now, Rosa feels driven to work in the garden, partly because she wishes to maintain what was most important in his life and to carry on his work, and also ‘to feel close to him’. She also acknowledges that it gives her ‘something to do instead of sitting down dwelling on things. You know the more you do, the quicker the day goes and the less you think.’ Rosa recognises that as she is ‘getting older, it is getting too hard to do’ and she regrets that before long, she will ‘have to stop doing Joe’s garden’.

Rosa’s second daughter (along with her husband and two sons) now shares the house with her. They moved in to keep Rosa company ‘about two weeks after Joe died’ and she considers they have been a ‘great support’ to her.

She believes ‘Joe is now safely with God’ and waiting to be reunited with her. Her faith has not changed since Joe’s death, however, she does feel ‘a little bit more dependent on God, now that Joe has gone’. Rosa’s bedroom dresser (which must be negotiated on entering or leaving the room) now serves as a shrine to Joe, complete with photographs, remembrance card and vigil lamp. Rather than resolving her loss, she chooses to focus her thoughts on him each day.

Cemetery

Following his requiem mass, Joe was buried in a pre-purchased, double-depth concrete vault. Joe and Rosa had purchased the grave and erected a large, Italian-style, granite monument of their choice, some years earlier. The monument already included inscriptions, with just the
date of death and a photograph to be added, following the interment of each of the couple. According to Rosa, 'the cemetery is a place where the people die and go and relax. It is a sacred, holy place, like the church is.'

**Visitation**

Rosa visits Joe's grave 'once a week: every Sunday morning', and feels that 'once a week is enough'. She considers that her faith influences the frequency of her visits, as 'the Catholic thing to do is go once a week'. She sees her regular visits as 'a religious obligation and a duty to Joe and to God'. The frequency of visits and her personal need to visit have not changed since the first week after his funeral; however, Rosa feels that her 'emotions have got better'. She found that 'at first, visiting was more difficult: it was very, very emotional. That has got a bit better now; I definitely feel better.'

A friend (whose husband's grave is in the same area) drives Rosa to the cemetery. When she visits, Rosa will 'pray, wash the monument and put some fresh flowers every week'. Depending on the weather, she spends about fifteen to thirty minutes at Joe's grave. 'Even when I was really ill, I had someone place fresh flowers on his grave, because I couldn't go there; I was too ill'.

Some Sunday mornings, Rosa feels very upset and doesn't want to go. 'But once I get there, I feel happy – quite happy. Being there, I feel close to God and Joe. Just bringing the fresh flowers and things gives me a good feeling'.
ITALIAN CATHOLIC SON FINDS MAUSOLEUM COMFORTING

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Psychosocial history

Tony is a forty-year-old Roman Catholic father of three. He was born in Melbourne of Italian parents and has one sister who is nine years younger. His wife is also of Italian parentage and they identify their own family as Italian. After completing his secondary schooling, Tony did a business course majoring in real estate, which led to him being licensed as an estate agent. He has been operating as a licensed real estate agent for twenty years now.

'Dad left Italy in 1952. They did it pretty hard during the war and all that: typical migrants seeking a better life. He left the family at seventeen – obviously wasn't married – and came to Australia looking for a new start. He had various jobs: usually manual. He was a non-skilled labourer, I suppose. He worked as an assistant chef for a number of years and enjoyed that, but the hours were atrocious, so he eventually left.'

'Dad worked for an antenna company, where they make communications equipment. He was a storeman and loved it, and that's where he stayed until he died. So he did it pretty hard. He was just: work, work, work. When I was a kid, he was working seven days a week: two shifts. Of course, that changed in later years, but he was a typical migrant: came here with nothing and carved out a future for his family and certainly put us on the right track.'

Bereavement

'Dad was always a little bit overweight. He had a bit of a cholesterol problem and was always trying to keep that under control. He died of a massive heart attack, just on three years ago. He was sixty-one years old. It was very quick: very sudden, just like turning off the light switch: flat on his back. His doctor said, ‘It was probably going to happen one day. There’s just no way of knowing when’. There were no previous warnings or anything like that. It just happened; it was very instant.'

'Dad and I were always close, but not as close as we would have liked to be. We never argued, even as a child. We never went through a teenage crisis, or anything like that. I was probably as close as one could be to a father who – when I was a child – was always working. We never really had family holidays and things like that, but when we were together as a family it was fine. We didn’t go away on camps or go fishing, because they just weren’t the sort of things we did. The European way of life is different to the Australian way. It’s not that there wasn’t love there, it’s just that we didn’t show that closeness. But now, for example, before my boys go to bed, I go in and hug them and tell them I love them: every night: without fail. That never happened, but that’s OK; it didn’t happen to anyone. It’s just the way it was, but I don’t feel that he didn’t love me. He was a great father.'
'A funny thing happened just before Dad died. I would have gone weeks without seeing him because of work and everything else. But two nights before he died, we went out shopping and I don't know why, but for some reason instead of coming home I said, “Let’s pop in and see Mum and Dad”; and so we did. That was the Friday night, and at the same time, my sister also decided to drop in, just by coincidence; I don’t know why she decided to drop in. So we spent that Friday night as a family. It wasn’t planned. I remember distinctly that we had a family video – the home movie that we took – and we all sat around watching that. It was just amazing. I don’t know why, but we all sat around in the room watching that video. And I remember distinctly that I had just bought a huge warm coat and it was pretty cold and Dad said to me, “Oh that’s good that you’ve got that woollen coat. You need it, especially in your job. You need that woollen coat and it’s good that you’re wearing it”. And they were his last words to me as he said, “Goodbye”. So it really was an amazing night. It was a night that we all got together as a family: had a few laughs, a few jokes, and everything was great. It is a really fond memory to have, because that was the last time that I saw my father alive. That was just a terrific way of remembering him.'

‘Dad died in the holiday house, on the peninsula. He loved going down there, fishing and all that. So in a way it was fitting that he died there, because to him that was peace.’

Other losses

Prior to his father’s death, Tony had some experience of close bereavement. ‘When I was sixteen or seventeen, my auntie lost her child through cot death; he was eighteen months old. That was the first death in the family and it was quite emotional, because we were all very attached to the baby in the family; it was a real shock. We used to visit the cemetery quite a lot soon after that, but then it dropped off a little bit. Then my grandmother (my father’s mother) died. She came out after many, many years and lived the rest of her life here in Australia. You know, she’d got to an age where no one could look after her in Italy, so she came out and stayed with us – for probably ten years – and died a natural death at about seventy-eight. And then after that, my grandfather died. But certainly the death of my father was the most emotional; it was nothing like the other experiences.’

Funeral

‘I didn’t actually see Dad when he died, but I saw him at the funeral parlour. It was terrific to see him then, dressed up and ready for his next adventure. We put his fishing rod in with him and it was good to see him. To view the body was good.’

‘The funeral service included a full requiem mass, which had to be done because – you know – it’s just got to be done. But having said that, it still showed or brought home the fact that Dad had a lot of friends. The Italian way is that people come and visit you at the home, prior to the actual funeral and give their condolences personally. The number of people that filtered in through those three days was unbelievable; that is just the Italian way, I suppose. It’s just amazing to see how many people are actually prepared to do that. But then, they also come to the funeral: the numbers and just the support, it’s just incredible. People you wouldn’t expect just turn up and it makes you feel that you do mean something to other people, and that’s good. You know, a lot of those people came for Dad, but some even came just because they knew me: to show respect to me and I thought that was just fantastic.’

‘I think the funeral is very helpful. It helps you come to terms with it, because it’s like final. It sort of ends the whole process from the time of death to the burial and then you can sort of get back to your normal way of life. Obviously weeks, months, or a year goes by while you get
back to normal, but at least it's a starting point. After Dad's funeral, we all went back to Mum's place: just the very close family, my family, aunts and uncles. We had a family dinner and it was terrific, just to sort of finish it that way. We finished it as a family and then we've got on with our lives; it was a good experience.'

'We had our children at the funeral, so they saw the coffin being put into the mausoleum and can now relate to their Nonno being there. It's not that he's in the ground; it's a different concept. They can still remember that Nonno was put in there. It wasn't as terrifying as seeing a coffin dropping into the ground and then the dirt being thrown on top. That just seems cold; it just has a different feeling about it. The mausoleum seems cleaner and nicer.'

Adjustment

Tony feels that he is emotionally different following his father's death. 'I can honestly say there's probably not a day that goes past that I don't have a glancing thought of my father. Now when he was alive, I don't think I ever really thought that much: not at all. I mean he was my father and it was great, but I probably took him for granted. He was Dad and he was there and that's it. But now, what it did to me was it really just focussed, or brought it home that I was now really the leader of the family. Being an Italian family, there's always a little bit more responsibility on the male, you know. I've got a sister; I haven't got any brothers, so I'm it.'

'For an Italian son who has just lost his Dad, there's a significant load of responsibilities. It doesn't mean that I'm going to take over the world and all that, but what it meant - and I'd never thought of it before - was taking over that role. That thought only came to me once my father died; I realised that I was alone, in the sense that I am now the family - as far as the rest of the family is concerned. There's only my mother, my sister, myself, and now my family, and that's it. And if there's a family decision to be made, or some consultation to do, it is now basically up to me. It is going to involve me a lot more than it did before - not that my father was overpowering, he was very easy to get along with and certainly didn't impose his beliefs or feelings on anyone else. He never did that on me either, as his son. It's interesting, that sort of concept I suppose, not so much the physical actions of being head of the family, just the concept of being responsible. It's very strange, because I never thought of it before. It really did hit me; it really did. I often think about it. It's just strange how it sort of just happened.'

Tony now feels that his grief is behind him. 'There was initial grief, of course, and probably for a good six months after that, but I think I resolved it pretty quickly, just because of my own make up. I'm a very practical person: that's me. I'm pretty clear cut and I don't express emotion; I'm a bit reserved in that way. So I think I've resolved it in a short space of time, but the hurt never goes away; it's still there.'

'I suppose it made me focus on life a bit differently. You learn to appreciate what you've got in your family more than you did before, and also you learn to appreciate others. I had a very close friend who lost his father about ten years ago and I couldn't understand what he was going through. I couldn't work out why he was so affected by it, but I was younger then and hadn't gone through the experience myself. Now I totally relate to what he went through. I also appreciate the fact that he was younger at the time and what he must have been going through was just unbelievable. Ten years later, I had to go and get him aside and apologise to him for not caring as much and not having understood. His father died of prostate cancer and I didn't even go and visit his father in the hospital. To this day, I really feel a bit guilty about that, but I now think logically that I wasn't mature. But now I'd be totally different. So it has changed me. I think going through the experience definitely changes you.'

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‘The one most affected is Mum. She feels cheated because they worked very hard and I suppose they always believed that some day they’d sit back and enjoy it all. But that wasn’t to be, so she feels cheated and alone and that’s where the difficulty is at the moment. My sister is pretty much like me, but a bit easier going. She certainly shows her emotional side more, so she probably showed her grief for a longer period than I did. But she’s got her own family; she’s got two kids. She’s pretty much adjusted. It’s certainly Mum that’s still — you know. When she was here the other night for my son’s birthday — which happened in the same week of Dad’s death — she just couldn’t help herself by saying, “If Dad had been here it would’ve been all different”. She’s still hurting a lot. I think she’s adjusting to a new way of life, but she can’t help feeling that she’s been cheated. If there’s been any change in the family, it’s brought us closer together. I think I probably see Mum more now; I certainly ring her more, because I’m conscious of her being alone.’

‘My faith hasn’t changed since Dad died. I don’t think it’s got any weaker and I don’t think it’s got any stronger; it’s the same. As a younger person I used to go church every Sunday. I grew up going to Sunday school and doing all that, then I broke away. Some of the things the church gets up to, I don’t really agree with. I still consider myself to be Roman Catholic, but I want to do it my own way. I don’t think I need to go to church to be lectured and sermonised to have a faith. I think that faith comes from within and as long as I live a good life in the sense of the way we were taught, I think that’s basically all I need to do.’

Tony says that these days, he only goes to church at ‘Christmas, Easter, christenings and that’s about it. I don’t relate to the church. I think the church — to some extent — has lost the plot; I don’t think they’ve changed with the times. We’ve got a parish priest here, who is only in the job because there’s no one else to replace him. I don’t think that’s right, but that’s just the way it is; so I think they’ve lost the plot there. I think religion, or the faith, comes from within. But having said that, my daughter goes to church and Sunday school every Sunday morning, because we still want to bring them up in the faith and they need the teaching and we can’t give it to them. We’ll give them the support, but we can’t give the teaching.’

‘I do believe there is a spirit. Now, quite where — what you’d call heaven or what — I don’t know; that I haven’t really come to grips with. The faith teaches us that the Lord will come down and save everyone, and all this. I believe there has to be something more to our existence than just our physical life here on earth. It just seems a waste if you die and that’s it. The concept of that just doesn’t seem right. I know we don’t have the proof to say that there is this existence after death, but I just can’t help feeling that there must be something spiritual. I don’t know what form it takes, but perhaps the spirit lives on and somehow looks down or protects or guides those who want to be guided and have that sort of mental telepathy. I don’t know what you’d call it. I don’t know if that exists, but I just feel it: something inside me tells me that it does. I can’t explain it as being heaven and hell, as in the Bible. I just feel that there is something that the spirit belongs to, or goes to.’

‘I don’t think that’s the traditional Catholic view; it’s not exactly as they say. I believe maybe part, or some of it in a different concept, but it’s probably essentially the same. Obviously, a lot of what was written in the Bible was written to the uneducated masses and it had to be put in a way that everyone understood, so they created analogies. Maybe now, because we are a bit more educated, we see it in a different light, but essentially it means the same thing.’
Cemetery

'Dad wouldn't even go to the cemetery to see his own mother; but one day (three weeks before he died) he did. Why he stopped at the cemetery that day, no one knows. He saw the mausoleum and came home and to Mum said, 'We've got to buy one of these; they're fantastic. You should see it'. He was quite adamant that that's the way he wanted to go and you know, three weeks later: Bang! It's unbelievable. But it is; the mausoleum is just so much better. It's terrible seeing a coffin dropping into the ground; it's just cold and final. The mausoleum is so much more acceptable. Yes, you've had a loss, but you don't feel like you've had such a loss, in a way, because there's a concept or feeling that the person is still there.'

'With cremation you're just gone; there doesn't seem to be any emotion in it. The Italian way of crying and all this -- and they carry on a little bit -- is a way of letting it all out; it helps to cleanse. The Anglo-Saxon way of just being polite keeps the grief still going on. I don't think I could be cremated; I didn't want to go in the ground either. I wasn't sure, but now that I've seen the mausoleum: that's definitely it.'

'I think our friends would probably feel the same as us. I don't think they'd want to be cremated. I mean, we've never discussed it; it's just a sense. It's too final. We had a next door neighbour here for many years and her husband died in Sydney. Well, he was cremated and his ashes were scattered over Botany Bay. We couldn't believe that. We knew it was his wish, but she wasn't happy with it afterwards. She felt that there was nowhere she could relate to him after his death, to even take a flower. She was really sorry she did that. So that's why I think the cemetery is very important.'

'We've got other relatives in the concrete vaults. They're terrible because they fill with water. There's no way of stopping it; there is water in the ground and concrete is porous, so you're probably better off to go in the ground anyway; at least it drains away. That's terrible for a lot of Italian people; they have nightmares. That's why the mausoleum is just so much better. That's how they do it overseas. So for the people here who immigrated, it's just back to what they were used to; it's their traditional way of burying people. It's a more expensive option -- but not really, if you take into account the amount that's spent on an actual grave and the monument - no, it's not an expensive option. A typical monument on a vault might cost twelve or fifteen thousand dollars and that's on top of the cost of the vault. I think Dad's crypt was twenty-three thousand and about five or six thousand for the funeral, so it was close to thirty thousand dollars for the whole funeral. It's a lot if you think about it in money terms, but I suppose we would like to have the same done for us. We've both got life insurance; we should be covered.'

'Even if I don't drop in to the cemetery, every time I go past or drive anywhere near it, I just can't help but say, "Good day, Dad. How are you going? I hope you're well". The cemetery is a focal point, so it is very important. It is a very special place. I think it's something that should always be preserved. Really, it should be maintained forever and a day: definitely, because it is a history. In a way, it's a living history, because it shows history. Certainly in my lifetime it will have special meaning to me. I don't know about my children, because it's their grandfather and he died when they were very young. They might not have the same feeling as I do, but we're going to follow and then they possibly will. So I think it is a very important place.'

'I don't find the cemetery to be sad or depressing in any way. Just being there brings me closer to my father. It's a focal point that just brings it all together and it's peaceful. There is a
sense of peace there, certainly at the mausoleum. That’s peaceful; it really is. It’s not as
dramatic as seeing the grave. It’s just wonderful. I can’t speak highly enough of it; it really is
fantastic.’

Visitation

‘Straight after the funeral, I probably visited close to once a week, or at least every two
weeks. Then after a month or two, it dropped off to once a month. Now, I just go on the
anniversary, birthday and spur of the moment visits, but probably still every one or two
months.’

Tony doesn’t believe that his faith influences his visitation. ‘I don’t visit out of any religious
obligation, purely out of a feeling that I should see Dad. I normally take one flower, because
there’s limited space. Sometimes I don’t take any, but generally I try to take one flower at
least, if I can fit it in. I don’t spend a lot of time there; probably no more than five minutes. I
just want to be there and then go; that’s all I need to do. My first reaction is to kiss the stone. I
just look at Dad’s photo and say a few words: that I miss him and I’m still thinking of him
and for him to look after us. I don’t say any prayers or anything like that. I feel that’s enough.
And then depending on my time, I sometimes do the rounds of the family, but that’s more out
of respect than anything else, if I’ve got time; there’s my uncle, my grandfather, my
grandmother, and my little nephew.’

‘I’ve never done a long visit; I don’t see the value in a long visit. Five minutes would be
average, unless I meet someone and start talking, but that’s not really to do with the visit. I’ve
met, for example, a family that has lost a son, just across from Dad. They’re there often and I
think it helps them – not me – but it probably helps them for me to talk to them.’

‘I drive to the cemetery, sometimes by myself, sometimes with the kids. The kids like
coming, because they like their Nono; but my wife doesn’t like going to the cemetery. On
Fathers Day, we all go; on his birthday, I would go: it just depends. Fathers Day would be the
main day and not so much his birthday and anniversary day, but sometimes we just might go
for no reason.’

‘On Dad’s anniversary, I went to the cemetery. I actually rang up to find out what time the
gates opened, because I wanted to get there before I went to work. I got there about eight
o’clock, but the mausoleum wasn’t open yet. From the front of the building there, you can see
Dad’s plaque and that was enough for me at the time. I mean, there’s no room to put any more
flowers. To me, it was just important to go. The fact that I couldn’t walk the extra couple of
feet didn’t really worry me. The important thing is that I saw Dad’s photo and said a couple of
words. I always tend to say, “Just look after us if you can, if that’s the way it works. Look
after the family and make sure that everything goes well”. It was important to go. When I left
the cemetery, I rang Mum just to make sure she was alright, because I knew she’d be sort of
feeling it a bit.’

These days, Tony’s visitation ‘has dropped off a little bit’, but he considers he would
probably still visit every two months, or so. ‘It might be six weeks; it might be eight weeks.
Sometimes, if I feel I haven’t visited Dad for a while, I just get that urge to go. I can’t explain
it and sometimes, when I’m feeling a little low, it helps. I feel that he feels I’m there: that I’m
showing respect. I feel that I’ve got that support: that shoulder, that he gives me strength. I
can’t explain that, but I feel invigorated a little bit in the sense that I’m on the right track. I
wouldn’t have felt this with anyone else, like my grandparents. I would’ve gone to visit my
grandparents just purely through respect, but with my father, it’s a bit more. There is more emotion attached to the visit, because it’s my father.’

‘I think the change is just part of the grieving process. You feel that you need to go because your hurt is still there, but as you start to get your life back together or back to normality, the pain eases off. I think it’s just a natural thing. When I first used to visit, I used to get very tense inside and maybe draw a tear. Now I go there and feel good about it. I feel a support that comes from going. It’s amazing how it has changed. I think you accept it and make it part of your life; it’s happened and you move on. I think it’s also got a lot to do with personality and the make up of a person, because my mother still gets very emotional when she goes; but she’s the wife: it’s a different grief experience. I’ve got a young family to be concerned about, whereas she’s got nothing now. She’s got no real responsibility to us; we are all self-sufficient. That’s all she’s got, whereas we’ve got other things.’
CATHOLIC GRANDSON DOESN'T NEED TO VISIT OFTEN

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Psychosocial history

Twenty-five years ago, Frank was born in rural Victoria to an Australian Catholic family of Dutch origin. He has four brothers and five sisters. ‘We are a very close, very big family. We spend a lot of time together and regularly have over a hundred people at family barbecues.’ Frank’s fiancee now lives with him in his home town. He is a partner with his father in a local agricultural machinery business and is the sales manager.’

Bereavement

Frank’s eighty-five year old maternal grandfather died of heart failure just over a year ago. ‘My grandfather lived in town with us and I saw him about twice a week. They were always coming over for dinner and we were always going there. He was a motor mechanic and he helped me through buying cars and those sorts of experiences. Grandfather was pretty special to us. He was also a pretty independent sort of bloke. My grandmother is still alive.’

‘In Holland, he was a motor mechanic. He was an ambulance driver during the Second World War. He also fought against the Germans and was imprisoned for a while. After the war, they migrated to Australia and lived in various locations and eventually started a motor mechanic business. He retired around the age of sixty-five and tripped around Australia from then on.’

‘He had had a triple bypass. I think he’d had about sixteen attacks all together over a period of thirty years. After each incident he was relatively healthy and active, but in the last two weeks, we knew there was not much chance of him going on much longer. He was in hospital for the last three days and had been in and out over the last couple of weeks. I was away and didn’t see him for about a week and a half before his death. I arrived back in town on the train only a couple of hours after his death, so it was a bit disappointing at the time, but we’d certainly spent a lot of time together beforehand.’

‘We’d been anticipating it for some time. He’d had a heart attack six months before his death and I actually thought that he was going to die then. So I suppose it gave me a bit of time to think about it and spend more time with him. That did help: definitely. It wasn’t as much a shock to the system as it would be getting that phone call to say that someone’s died unexpectedly.’

Other losses

His grandfather’s death from a heart attack was the first close bereavement Frank had experienced.
Funeral

'There was a requiem mass in the Catholic church. That didn’t mean a great deal to me, personally. It meant a lot more to my family: my parents, and especially my grandmother. They are very well practising Catholics. But it was great to have all the family together in the church. It’s also a very peaceful place to sit and contemplate what’s gone on and to hear about his life from people outside the family. The church side was good, but not most important to me.'

'He was buried in the lawn cemetery. We had a viewing the night before, and that was quite interesting and a good opportunity to say goodbye. I spent some time there by myself. It’s a pretty hard thing to do when you haven’t experienced anything like that before. I think it’s quite a difficult decision sometimes: to go to a viewing, but I found it worthwhile.'

Adjustment

'The weekend following the funeral, we all went and cleaned up his house, mowed his lawns, washed his car and things like that. That was good for everyone, because that’s something we’d been doing for some time. It was probably the best way to say goodbye.'

Frank considers he has not changed significantly in any way, in response to his grandfather’s death. 'I’ve still got two surviving grandparents (my grandmother on my mother’s side and also my grandfather on Dad’s side). Since his death, I’ve spent a lot more time with the two surviving grandparents learning about their history and just spending some time with them before the inevitable. We talk about their backgrounds; they’re pretty interesting. My grandmother will be moving in with my parents soon. She’s eighty-three and living on her own at the moment; it’s a bit hard by herself. She also has to live on one pension instead of two, so we tend to help her out a little bit more now.'

'I’m not a churchgoing Catholic, so it hasn’t had a major religious impact on me either. My faith hasn’t changed. His death was inevitable. It wasn’t something that happened suddenly and you lose faith. It was more just a passing of life: the end of a cycle, I think.'

'The church was good in its own way, but I don’t see him at the cemetery or anything like that. I see him more or less around town, still at eighty years old. That’s more the way I see him rather than what’s left now. I obviously believe in the Christian faith – in that he’s gone to heaven – but it doesn’t mean a great deal to me at this point in my life, so I see him more in past events. I’m not really sure where I see him, apart from in heaven under a couple of clouds. I haven’t got enough faith in that. I just know that he’s gone and lived a great life and still means a lot to us. I don’t have any thoughts of what’s happened now. I don’t think that I expect to be reunited with him in the future, but I’m not a hundred percent sure. Well no one knows for sure. I don’t have that sort of faith.'

Cemetery

'One of the most important things about the cemetery is that there’s somewhere for the memorial, to remember him by. He’s got his place in the ground, or his place in the world, so to speak. His name is always going to be written down and not forgotten, somewhere for the grandchildren and relatives and people who didn’t go to the funeral to go and visit. It’s more important to my grandmother than to anyone else, but I don’t think she sees it that way. She’s only been out there a couple of times since he died, so that makes it less important to me, I
suppose. But I think it’s critical that we do remember where our deceased go and that they do have memorials and plaques to remember them by.’

‘We’re creating a family heritage at the cemetery. We’ve actually reserved a fairly large family plot, because of the size of the family, and everyone’s got wishes where they want to be buried. He’s also surrounded by a lot of his old mates from town, which is a good thing. It definitely creates a heritage. It’s got that name there for future generations to go back and look at. I see the cemetery more as a place of remembrance, rather than a sacred place. I also find it very interesting in historical value, more than it being sacred.’

‘Within the cemetery, I definitely feel a sense of peace: just peaceful. It’s a peaceful sort of quiet place. It’s a very beautiful landscape actually: a very nice place to look at. In a certain way there is a feeling of being close to my grandfather, because I know that he was buried there, but he’s certainly not there in spirit. I don’t feel at all emotional at the cemetery, apart from the actual burial when the coffin went down; that was obviously an emotional event.’

**Visitation**

‘I’ve been to my grandfather’s grave about four times since his burial, but only one of those occasions was by myself. The others were to show relatives who had come to town. Personally, I don’t need to go. When I did go by myself, it was about three months after his death. I was just driving past and I thought it was a good time to go in and have a look at the headstone, which I hadn’t seen. It was good to see that he’s been memorialised in a nice way. I think I’ll probably drop in every now and then when I’m going past, but I wouldn’t make a special trip out there unless I had something on my mind related to him, which I think is quite unlikely. I’ve actually been to other funerals at the cemetery since he was buried, but I don’t count those as visits. I did see his headstone though, just in passing.’

‘On the occasion that I was driving past the cemetery and just decided to call in, I just wandered in and had a look around and just thought about his past. The place is immaculate, so I didn’t need to do anything. I certainly wouldn’t put flowers there. I don’t think that’s significant or necessary. I wouldn’t have stayed more than five minutes at the most.’

‘I think I probably will visit the cemetery every now and then when I’m driving past and have some spare time or something. Certainly going out there the first time was good to see that everything had progressed the way it’s meant to do, like the monument. But I don’t think going there is significant in the grieving process, in the sense that some people do. I’d be more than happy to call in if my grandmother wanted to go there and I’d spend some time there with her, but I wouldn’t instigate that sort of thing.’
NON-RELIGIOUS GRAND-DAUGHTER VISITS TO MAINTAIN RELATIONSHIP

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<tr>
<td>Frequency of visits: Occasional</td>
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Psychosocial history

Natasha was born in Adelaide, thirty-five years ago. She has one brother, two years older, and one sister: six years younger than herself. She is married with 'no kids, but one dog' and identifies her religion as 'non-existent'. 'I don’t have a religious faith. I did go to Sunday school when I was about five, but my memories of that are vague. I don’t even remember what type of church it was. My parents sent us; they didn’t take us. We never went to church as a family unit. My husband doesn’t have a religion either, but his mother is very strong Catholic. I think she still goes to church, but his father doesn’t; he never went with her.'

Natasha says, 'I never liked school: hated it in fact. I finished year eleven, but didn’t go any further than that, because of other circumstances. Six months after I left school, I was asked to apply for a job in local government and, in theory, I have that job today. The authority I now work for grew out of reorganisation over the years.'

'I’m the middle child. Of the grandchildren, my brother was the apple of my grandmother’s eye. He was the first grandchild and, as it turned out, the only grandson. So I always thought that I was second best, even within our little family unit. When I was five, my mother desperately wanted another child and she couldn’t have one, so my father relented and they adopted my sister. Well, because she was adopted, they gave her everything they thought she needed. That created a huge chasm, with my brother being the golden-haired boy. There wasn’t any room left for me and, looking back, I think that’s why my father and I had such a very close relationship. He knew that my brother was a bit of a mummy’s boy and a bit of a sook.'

'But I haven’t seen or spoken to my Dad in twelve years now. We had a bit of a spat. I’m just like him: stubborn and very obnoxious. Yeah, I’m just like him. The first time I recall my father leaving us, I was eight. Between then and when I left home at nineteen, they just took it in turns: regular. He went and came back; then she went and came back, and they’d patch it up. It was a very stressful time. It’s sort of different with my mother, because I know I have never had a close relationship with her, because I always felt that I was the insignificant one. I think that’s why I had a closer relationship with my father. My father and I fell out when I was twenty-four, and I’m now thirty-five; it’s been a long time. I met my husband that same year and he’s never met my father.'

'My Mum has been remarried for almost three years now. She got married and moved on. I don’t see an awful lot of her, which is a shame. I used to see a lot of her before Grandma died, but I don’t now. It’s quite ironic, because she lives closer to me now than she ever has, other than when I was still at home.'
Bereavement

Natasha’s maternal grandmother died almost four years ago, at the age of seventy-nine. ‘She lived a long way away (about forty-five minute’s drive) in a public housing trust house. They were the first people to live in that house. When she died, she had been there for forty-odd years.’

‘When she was a younger woman, she worked in town at a large emporium and played basketball with the ladies team. You know, neck to knee uniforms: really weird. There are some lovely old black and white photos; they’re really good. I enjoy looking through them. Anyway, she met and married my grandfather, Jack; although he wasn’t the first person she was engaged to. She was actually engaged to another bloke, also called Jack, and then – the gallant gentleman that he was – he actually broke off their engagement, because he knew he was dying from TB. Until he did die, they remained firm friends and kept in contact. He died the same year that my mother was born, but he did get to see my Mum as a baby. Anyway, she got married and had two children: my mother and her younger brother, and from those two kids, there were five grandchildren.’

‘From the time I was a child, up until the age of about fifteen, we would see her often. Every Sunday we went down to Grandma’s house for Sunday roast dinner. In her later life, we grew up, left home and established our own houses and partners. In the last six years, I probably saw her once a month. She was quite ill for the last six years of her life and my mother actually went to live with her to take care of her. She had very severe arthritis from the age of fifty-three: very crippled hands, elbows, knees, hips and her back. It was a real shame, because she got so frustrated. Her mind was as sharp as anything, but her body just wouldn’t do what she wanted it to. I think that in the end she just couldn’t stand it any more and gave up.’

‘Grandma was definitely the lynchpin in keeping the family together. She was the head of the house and she ruled with an iron fist. What she said, we did and we were happy to do that. Initially, between her death and the funeral, we were at each other. It was almost as if we were vying for that top position: who was the closest to her, who had the best memories, and who had the best photographs.’

‘When my Grandmother died, I was actually there in the room, as was my mother, my brother and my husband. We knew she was very ill and that it was her last time in hospital. She had actually developed pneumonia and my mother and her brother had decided that – well, this is it! They just wanted her to pass away quietly. They didn’t want her revived and hanging on for days, in pain, so they decided that if she was going to die, it was just to be.’

‘I really don’t cry a lot. I don’t cry at movies, or puppy dogs, or little kids, or things like that. But actually seeing that – it’s really hard to try and describe the emotion I felt, unless you have actually experienced that yourself – knowing that she was going to die.’

‘My brother was in the air force at the time; he still is. But he was based in Canberra then and when she’d slipped into a coma they let my mother know. “It could be any time now. It could be as quickly as today; it could be tomorrow: two days at best”. So she was very anxious to get my brother there: he being the only grandson and the eldest of all the grandchildren. He had a very special relationship with my grandmother. Anyway, he got special compassionate leave and it was ironic that she hung on for four days and they had told us, “We know it’s awkward, but just keep talking to her; she can hear you”. Apparently your hearing is one of the last senses that goes when you’re about to die. And you know, I found myself just sitting
there talking to her: telling her that my brother was coming. And when he actually got there, he was only in the room with her half an hour and she died. No one will ever convince me that she did not hang on just to hear his voice. It was absolutely incredible.'

'We all sort of lost it then, but I was more OK. I was really sad that she had actually passed away, but I was more upset for my mother, because for the past six years she was caring daily for her mother. My parents had long been divorced, so I felt a little sorry for my own mother, thinking her mother's just died and she's on her own. OK, she's still got her children, but we're now adults and have moved on. I felt really sad. I almost felt that it was my responsibility to try and fill that void for her.'

'Grandma had been in hospital with several complications. She'd actually had pancreatitis and she developed pneumonia after that. Everything just failed on her - the liver and then the kidneys - everything just started shutting down and turning off. At that stage, because she was so ill and had been ill off and on for several years - and her arthritis - I think she just thought, "Well, I'm here now; I'm not going home any more". When she was very ill and slipped into the coma, we virtually had a twenty-four hour vigil until she died. Mum and I sat with her for hours on end.'

'When my Grandmother died, my husband and I were standing at the foot of the bed. It was a fairly small room and we could see her breathe. We actually saw that final moment. I remember my mother looking at me and saying, "Well that's it. That's it?" She was looking at me for an answer: "Is it or not?", but we knew anyway. I remember just stepping back and looking around the room. I was waiting for something to happen. I didn't know what, but I thought as soon as I saw it I'd know what I was waiting for.'

'You see, two years prior to that, my grandmother was very ill in intensive care and my husband and I went to see her. She didn't recognise my hubby at all and she absolutely insisted that I was my mother. Well she was facing the window and suddenly sat bolt upright. I said, "Oh, my God! What's the matter?" And her eyes were really wide and she said, "I'm not ready yet, Jack; I'm not coming". Of course, Jack is my grandfather's name and he would've been dead sixteen years at that time. I knew who Jack is. I got the nurse, who said, "It's probably just all the medication she's on. Maybe she saw a reflection on the window or the television". Well, the television wasn't on and even after she had recovered from the operation, she relayed that story to me again: that he had come for her and she was just not going; she wasn't ready. I thought, "Well I'm not going to tell you that he wasn't there. If you saw him, then you saw him". I don't know whether she saw him inside the window or outside the window, but she was adamant that she saw him and I'm not going to say that she didn't.'

'So, getting back to when she did die, I think I was waiting for Jack. We always called my grandfather Jack, and she always talked about Jack. So I think I was actually waiting for him myself. I don't know whether I expected to see light come into the room, or something - I really don't know - or whether she would get up and float off, you know, how they do it in the movies; I don't know, but I was a bit wary.'

'It's amazing you know, during May before she died (she died in October) I was on holidays and I spent two days with her, because I wanted to get out all the photos and start writing down who people were and where they fitted in. I got it all down on paper and a short time later she passed away. I asked her to tell my mother that when she died, I could have all those family photos. My mum didn't want them and it turned out that I got all those photos.'
Other losses

'The only other person I can remember dying was my grandfather (her husband); he died when I was nine. Looking back, I really wished that we had been allowed to attend the funeral, but we weren’t. The last time I saw him was two weeks before he actually passed away and that was in a hospital bed. I have vivid memories of seeing him that last time. The thing that stands out the most is that he had yellow eyes. He was dying from cancer and we were taken in two weeks prior to his death and that’s the last time I saw him. We were just told, ‘He’s gone now’: and that was it. I didn’t know that there was a whole funeral process and grieving that went with that. We were just left with the neighbours and my parents went off and that was that. That was my only other experience, until my grandmother died twenty-two years later.'

Funeral

‘After she died, Mum asked us if we wanted to have a viewing and the consensus was “Yes”, so we all went to the funeral parlour together and I must say I found that rather strange. I didn’t quite know what to expect, but I’m glad I did it. I was really pleased with the way she looked. She looked really well actually, considering that she was rather ill and a tired old lady when she died. I think they did a really good job, and we picked out the clothes and what-have-you.

‘My youngest cousin told me afterwards that she was absolutely petrified. She didn’t want to go in that room by herself and I asked her why she didn’t say something; I would’ve gone in with her. “No, no”, she said, “everybody else went in by themselves, so I thought I just had to be brave enough to go in there by myself”. I said, “Oh look, that’s really silly, I’d have gone in with you, if that’s what you thought you needed”.

‘My mother and her brother made the funeral arrangements and told us five grandchildren that we had to be pallbearers. I didn’t want to do it. I was not prepared for that, but thought I really couldn’t say no. Because they needed six, they asked my husband as well. I’d never done that before; I had no idea of what to do and where to walk. What if we dropped it? All these things were racing through my mind. I even got a little bit of a giggle fit, walking in as a pallbearer.

‘Mum and my uncle had organised a celebrant who came to my grandmother’s house a couple of days earlier. He met with us all to get the eulogy ready and asked each of us to contribute something to it and that’s when we almost had an all-in brawl. Oh, he was a really lovely man, he really was; I liked him. He went round the room and came to my brother and that’s the only time I’ve ever seen my brother really crying; absolutely sobbing. I thought, “OK, maybe he is human after all”. And he kept going around the room and got to my sister. He was just asking us to give a little bit of a story on our individual, personal relationships with my grandmother. But my sister is a bit of a drama queen; she grew up in the theatre. Well she went on – not about my grandmother, but about her – and that’s not why we were there. It was, “I –this”, and, “I –that”, and “I’m adopted, and Grandma still took me in and that didn’t matter to her”, and, “I did this”. I think that if my brother had been any closer to her, he would have punched her in the face. Of course, this guy had never met her before and that’s all she needed: a complete stranger to put on a show for. I was really annoyed. I actually did punch her in the back half way through her bit, because I just couldn’t stand it myself.’

When it got to me, I was extremely nervous; I don’t know why. I just said, “I’m the one in the family who never goes anywhere without a camera”. I’ve got hundreds of photos. I think that stems back from my parents never having any photos of me on my own. There were always
hundreds of photos of my brother by himself and of my sister by herself, but there’s none of me by myself; I’m always with either him or her, or both of them. I hated that and I think that’s probably why I’ve gone the other way. From about fifteen years of age, everywhere I went – family picnics or even out to dinner – I’d always take the camera and take photos. Grandma really enjoyed getting out her old black and white photos to show the family tree. She only had one sister, who died when my grandmother was seventeen, but even her parents and her parents’ brothers and sisters and our aunties and my grandfather, all had these black and white photos, and I’ve actually got them myself, today.’

‘Anyway, we had the funeral and I did cry at the funeral, but nothing like I did at the hospital. I don’t know whether I was embarrassed because everybody was there, or whether I just thought I’d already had that sort of initial release and didn’t need anything else. It was pretty weird. From then to now, on the outside, people think I’m really hard and mean, but underneath I’ve got feelings the same as the next person; although I must admit, I really try not to show them. I think for me, that stems back to my childhood from when my father would see me and say, “Don’t cry. You don’t need to cry aloud; you’re not hurt. Your leg’s not broken. Get up and walk”. I was brought up to not show my emotions. My parents were not people to cuddle their children or tell them they love them regularly. I guess from then, people perceived me as being hard and almost non-caring. But my husband will tell you differently; he sees the real me, without my coat of armour on.’

Personalising the funeral service meant a lot to Natasha and she believes this greatly helped in her grief. ‘So many little things only meant something to the family. Some were quite funny and throughout the service, people started to laugh and I thought, “Well that’s really good”. The funeral was very important. She was cremated and that was her wish, because my grandfather had previously been cremated. They had a double plot at the memorial park.’

Adjustment

‘I believe that my grandmother is now at the memorial park, where we left her, in the ground – and that’s it. I don’t know about any afterlife: seeing is believing. I guess I’ll make up my mind when I’m dead.’

Natasha considers that her bereavement has brought about virtually no change to her emotions, familial relations, or personal beliefs. Neither has she recognised any particular impact on any other aspect of her life. ‘I miss her greatly, but I’ve copped it on the chin’.

Cemetery

‘For me, the memorial park doesn’t have any heritage value, but it is a special place. I know that’s where they are and they’re safe there. I would like to see it retained. I’ve got the licence and it’s got another twenty-one years on it. I’ll get that renewed again at the end of that time and maybe thereafter for another twenty-five, if I’m still here.’

‘My mother asked me to go with her to the memorial park to organise the plaque and we almost had a brawl in their reception area, because I wanted to say one thing and she wanted to say something else. I relented because I didn’t want to get anybody upset, but I tried to tell her. We took my grandfather’s plaque off and had a big double one placed instead with both of their names and their dates, and then us. I said to Mum, “No; I don’t need my name on it. It’s not about me; it’s about them. Let’s just say something about them that would tell people more about who they were, not who we are; that is really insignificant”. We were just arguing in the reception area. Both of my cousins (my mother’s brother’s girls, the youngest two
grand-daughters) had just had babies. They both had a son in June and of course Grandma passed away in October. Well, that made her a great-grandmother, didn’t it? My uncle insisted that those boys’ names went on the plaque, before they ever knew her. They don’t care. I was really angry. He insisted that their names be put on it and they are. I didn’t feel that I needed to have my name on it; it wasn’t about me. OK, I was one of her grandchildren, but so what? She had five; she could’ve had fifty, who cares? I just thought it needed to be a bit more about her and her life. I haven’t told my mother this, but I might actually change it. Wouldn’t my Grandma die?’

Visitation

‘When I’m at the cemetery, I feel close to my Grandmother, because that’s where she is. For the initial twelve months, I needed to go there and leave flowers and talk to her. I think that helped me in my own personal grieving process. But I used to have terrible arguments with the others, because they never went. Even if I rang them up and said I was going and I’d offer to pick them up, they wouldn’t want to come for the drive: “Too busy!” I get so angry with them.’

‘I last visited her memorial on Mothers Day. I must say, this year I’ve been a bit slack. I keep saying, “I must get there”. It takes me over an hour to get there, but that’s no excuse; I’m a firm believer that you should visit regularly. I get so annoyed with the rest of the family, because the bastards never go. I don’t know why they made such a fuss about having a memorial if they’re never going to look at the bloody thing. I’ve been really slack this year; I’ve probably been three times. I went on Mothers Day, her birthday and in March, when I was on holidays. But for the first two and a half years, I went once a month; it was a routine. I felt I had to; I needed to do that. I just felt that it was the right thing to do. That’s what people do when they lose family; they go and visit them. You don’t just stop thinking about them. That’s one of the reasons I couldn’t understand why everybody’s name had to be on the bloody plaque and no one goes to visit. I felt really angry. Even my mother probably only goes twice a year: Mothers Day and her birthday.’

‘When I do go, I sit there and talk; I sit down on the grave. I always buy flowers. There’s just a bronze plaque; the cremated remains are in the lawn and the bronze plaque is on the concrete plinth. One time – I got so annoyed – my mother actually took bloody plastic flowers there. I chucked them away and told her I didn’t see them, they must have blown away or something. She knows that I go regularly and I knew that she put them there. After about twelve months, they’d been really weather beaten and they looked awful; I didn’t want to look at them. I thought, “No, Grandma deserves better than that”, so I tossed them out and the next time I heard from her she said, “Oh, have you been up to the cemetery?” I said, “Yes”. “Did you see my flowers?” “No, they weren’t there; they must have blown away”.’

‘I normally visit by myself. My husband’s probably been with me a dozen of those times during that four years. He hasn’t been this year. I usually stay about half an hour. I get there and chuck out the old flowers and put the new ones in and get the water and just wipe over the plaque and just sit there and chat. Although I must say, the last time I went I was in and out, because it was raining and I was getting wet. On a good day, I would sit cross-legged on the grass and – you know. I mean, that’s where the remains are, right in front of you. I have actually put my hand on the grass while I’m talking to her knowing that the remains are directly underneath there. I talk to her about the past and what’s going on in my life: a bit of an update on what’s happening and what all the others are doing, because I know they don’t visit. I remember telling her when my younger cousin had her second child: a little girl. I
remember telling her that she looks like this, she's nothing like that, and it's a shame that you weren't here. You know, just a bit of a gossip session really: one way.'

'I felt really relieved the last time I went, because I felt so guilty that I hadn't been for a while. That was a Saturday and I had so many things to do that day, just running around. I got my haircut and I had to go and do the grocery shopping; I had to ring and catch up with a friend and I had to drop in on my cousins and pick something up. I also had to fit in a trip to the memorial park, which is on the other side of town from me. And I do really remember that day feeling, "I've got to get there. This is not one of the things that I can just put off. I can put off one of the others, but this isn't one of them". And when I did get there, I recall feeling relieved. I felt better within myself for doing that. And as it turned out, I managed to fit in all the other things anyway, but I was almost a little bit panicky, you know. "I really have to get there today. It's her birthday; I can't not go". But I think I was just putting the pressure on myself a little bit.'

'I feel I have less of a need to visit now than I did earlier, but I'll still go. It won't be as often as it was in the first two-and-a-half to three years, but I will always go. I just couldn't feel comfortable within myself, not doing that. I think she'd be hurt. I don't go as often as I would like, because of other things in my life; something has to give way. Because it's on the other side of town, it takes me over an hour to get there. If it only took me ten minutes, I'd go every week or so.'

Natasha hasn't noticed any change in her emotions surrounding visits. 'I'm not someone who goes there and cries. I will always go there and I will always talk to her. My visits have never been a very emotional experience. I think that's my own personal failing. As I said, I'm not a crier at the movies, or kids, or puppy dogs: no. I knew that I'd done my crying at the hospital and at the funeral. It's over now; I've done that, now move on. I never actually sat there and had a bit of a cry. I've always been sitting there talking to her. Is that a bad thing? It's just who I am! I don't cry.'
UNITING PARENTS CHOOSE FAMILY MEMORIAL

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Psychosocial history

Max was born in Melbourne almost sixty-four years ago. ‘I was in the motor trade for forty-four years and retired as a service manager. I worked for the same company all my life. I had had other positions through the company at varying times, but I guess the most recent would be that of service manager. I retired nearly four years ago now.’

Margaret was also born in Melbourne sixty-four years ago. She was formerly a secretary in real estate and then did part-time work in a pharmacy. ‘It’s been about ten years now, since I’ve gone out to work. The family’s grown up and gone now. We had two daughters, two years apart; they both became schoolteachers. We’ve now got one daughter living nearby and we’ve got two grandchildren. We belonged to the Methodist Church, but it’s the Uniting Church now.’

Bereavement

Their thirty-eight year old daughter, Marjory, was killed three years ago when her car left the road, not far from her country home.

‘She’d only ever wanted to be a schoolteacher from when she was a little girl’, said Margaret. ‘When she went to kindergarten and primary school, she’d come home and do work on the blackboard and in books and be a teacher. That’s all she ever wanted to do and she was an excellent schoolteacher: held in high regard. Marjory married at twenty, but wasn’t able to have any children; she lost several. She liked sports and she loved all animals. She always did very much more than was required of her.’

Max added, ‘As well as enjoying the sports, she was a very keen horsewoman; she loved her horses. She used to enter into the hunts and all the various riding competitions, and so forth. She felt that was great and it was great for her too. She lived out of town, on a nice property of about three-and-a-half acres. She had plenty of room to move with the animals, and so forth. As Margaret said, she was very highly regarded in her teaching life; she’d studied and had two degrees. You know, she thoroughly enjoyed the teaching aspect. She loved the kids and the kids loved her.’

‘Just the day before was my birthday and the family were together. We had dinner together at our younger daughter’s. Little did we know that twenty-four hours later Marjory would be gone. But I’ve always been thankful that we’d had that opportunity to all be together, so soon before the accident.’
Other losses

Prior to Marjory’s death, Margaret and Max had both lost parents and grandparents. Max’s father had passed away around twenty-eight years ago and his mother, about six years ago. Margaret’s father died twenty years ago, but she lost her mother only last year.

Max considered that the loss of their parents had probably not helped them at all to deal with the loss of their daughter. ‘I think in the case of our parents, both our fathers were ill and we knew that they were going to go, so we were somewhat prepared for that. Our mothers both lived to ripe old ages. My Mum was eighty-nine and I think Margaret’s Mum was ninety-two. So I guess we were very sorry at the time they did go, but having lived to that age you can’t be too sad, because they’d had great innings; whereas, with our daughter, that was totally unexpected and came as a real bolt from the blue. So I think our parents going didn’t prepare us in any shape or form for Marjory going.’

Margaret said, ‘With our fathers, it was a happy release for them. All we wanted for them was peace; they’d both had bowel cancer and were very ill. And our mothers had got to the stage where they’d had enough. They didn’t want to live any more; they said they’d had their lives. And in the case of my mother, well she would’ve willingly given her life and would rather it had been her taken than her grand daughter, of course.’

Funeral

With some input from John and their younger daughter, Margaret planned the funeral service herself. ‘Well you have to have something as a farewell and a memorial to the person, and to let the people who want to come and pay respects to Marjory herself, and also to other members of the family. I think the funeral and the way things went was really helpful at the time, because it’s something to work to. I sat down and wrote out the service and typed it out. It’s important that you put into it what you want to go into it and don’t leave it to other people to do, because I think you’d be sorry later. We couldn’t have had anybody better than the man we had to conduct the service. We met with our minister and sat down with him; I gave him all that I’d written out, which he was grateful for, and he made other suggestions as well.’

Max felt that, ‘The service was a great tribute to Marjory; that so many people attended, from old to quite young. A number of children that she’d taught came along and I thought that was a wonderful tribute. There was perhaps about three hundred and fifty people there in all and everything went very well.’

Adjustment

Max found that his period of deepest grief lasted twelve months or more. ‘During that time, I’d still expect the telephone to ring and those sorts of things. Different things trigger off emotional times. It’s just time, like the old adage: time’s a healer.’ Margaret added, ‘And you have to keep busy, always; and we do.’

Margaret and Max believe that Marjory is now in heaven. ‘It’s just what I’ve always thought’, said Margaret, ‘that that’s where anybody deserving would go. Otherwise, if you just think everything’s finalised and gone, then what’s the meaning of your life? And you like to think, hopefully they’ve met up with everybody else in the family.’ Max agreed, ‘I mean, that’s our faith and I guess that if there is a heaven, then Marjory would certainly be there and, as Margaret said, she would meet up with other members of the family that have gone before. We expect to meet up with her in the future, hopefully.’
Margaret and Max both consider that Marjory’s death has changed them personally, but not had any particular impact on their faith or family relationships. ‘At the time’, Margaret recalls, ‘we seemed a lot different. We were a lot more impatient with each other and we certainly didn’t laugh much. Then I remember someone saying to me after quite some time, that it was the first time they’d seen me smile. We find we’re smiling more now.’

Max agreed with Margaret. ‘She didn’t become introverted, but she certainly had changed in her personality a bit. I don’t say for the worse, but just differently. And she was reluctant to go and meet people. In my case, being a member of a service club at the time tended to help me get out and get amongst the fellows. I guess it tended to – not bring me out – but certainly keep me involved with others. So certainly, you do have a personality change; there’s no question about that. I tended to become a little more sceptical, maybe; I don’t know.’

Cemetery

Following cremation, Marjory’s remains were interred at the base of a ‘family rose’ at the local cemetery. The arrangement provides for three other future placements, if required. Margaret and Max expect that they will eventually occupy two of the remaining places. Margaret supposes, ‘It’s just the way we’ve always known. That’s where most people – or their remains – go. I know a lot of people don’t; they have their ashes scattered, or they’re kept at home, but all the other members of our family have been buried or cremated at this cemetery, so we’ve got that plot now, for four of us. We talked with our other daughter about that and she agreed also that it would be for the four of us. It is nice to be able to go, particularly living where we do; it’s not too far. We planted some little fressia bulbs in the plot as well, because they’re nice and we all like those. They look nice and they smell nice as well, but we wouldn’t put anything in that would disturb the look of the place.’

Margaret continued, ‘About the cemetery, grounds staff are the people we mainly come in contact with and I think they’re very good. They go about their jobs unobtrusively and yet they are approachable and I think that’s very important; and they keep the grounds in excellent condition, which is very nice for people like us to see that it’s cared for and clean. It would be terrible to go to somewhere and feel that they didn’t care about the place. I don’t know a lot about cemeteries – I’ve been to a few others – but this one has always been very well maintained and that’s the cemetery people should be very proud of.’ Max concurred. ‘I endorse what Margaret said about the staff: they’re very good, and how the grounds are kept. I think it’s great. Even in the older parts where our parents are, it’s still maintained pretty well. The paths – even though they’re not concrete; they’re gravel – are maintained and you can walk along there without mud. I think it’s good, having seen other cemeteries where it hasn’t been as good.’

‘The cemetery isn’t sacred’, according to Max, ‘but it does have some heritage value. You never, ever forget those that have gone, but I guess the cemetery gives you an opportunity to go and remember them on the special occasions, such as birthdays and the like.’

Visitation

Max advised, ‘We go up fairly often and just remember. I guess we remember, more than anything else.’ Margaret added, ‘And we make sure everything looks nice and tidy; we take any weeds away. We always visit together. These days, we visit once a month.’ Max continued, ‘In the very early stages, we would have visited more frequently, when family and friends might have wanted to go. So we may have gone a little more frequently in the first few
months, I guess.' Margaret added, 'We don't need to go all the time, you know; and our younger daughter doesn't like to go at all. She'll go if we want her to come with us, but she doesn't really like it and won't go on her own.' Max concurred: 'Yes, she's not keen on going at all'.

Margaret continued, 'The children have been up with us and they'll come again. Oh, we just go sometimes.' Max added, 'Well we do, but we would certainly be there on Marjory's birthday. We both went on Fathers Day as a special sort of day - along with a million others.' Margaret and Max are certain that their faith has no influence over the frequency of their visits and consider their visitation pattern 'is about right.'

'When we visit', said Margaret, 'we always take a bag with us with scissors, a gardening knife and a container of water. If there's any dead flowers left in those little vases that the cemetery provides, we throw them in the bin or in the bag and bring them home; and when we take flowers, we put water in the vases and place the flowers around. We weed the bed and around it. We have a look at the others: some of the other memorials nearby. Sometimes if we've got water, we top up some of those people's flowers too.'

'We generally just remember', said Max. 'We don't pray: not openly I guess, though I have said the odd personal prayer while we were there. I don't know whether Margaret does, but we privately remember.' Margaret confirmed, 'Yes, I do pray; but not only at the cemetery, and I have also found myself talking to Marjory when I'm there, but not all the time. I think Marjory would feel like we do: that we wouldn't want the family coming up all the time. I'd rather they got on with their own lives. You can remember without going to the cemetery, of course, and that's what our other daughter thinks. But I wouldn't like to think that they wouldn't come and keep the place neat and look after it, for us and the rest of the family.'

'We drive to the cemetery together and spend about half an hour at Marjory's spot', Margaret said. 'Sometimes we visit the other members as well after that, but not always. Sometimes we go to everybody and sometimes we don't.' Max added, 'We never sit down; we just stand silently, I guess. There is a seat not far away, but we just stand silently, having done our little chores and maybe attended to a couple of others nearby, as Margaret said; then we drive off.'

Margaret feels 'just sadness and loss' when she visits Marjory's memorial. She doesn't feel at all close to God, or any closeness to Marjory. 'The cemetery is nice, but I don't feel any sense of peace with her; with my father and mother I do, but not with my daughter. I've always thought that it was the worst thing that could happen to anybody: to lose a child in the family, no matter what age.' Max feels similarly about visiting the cemetery. 'I don't feel any closer to God than Margaret does. On odd occasions, I think I feel close to Marjory, but not all the time; generally, it's a sense of sadness. As Margaret said, nobody would want to lose a child. So I guess we - or at least I - just feel very sad.'

Neither of the couple believes that their need to visit has changed during their progress through grief, but they consider that their emotional responses have changed somewhat. Margaret said, 'I don't get as upset now. I suppose you'd say I find it easier to visit these days.' Max concurred, 'I'd pretty much agree with Margaret's comments there. We don't feel perhaps quite as emotional as we did, but it's different. At the beginning, we were going through a real grieving process, which tends to reduce somewhat I suppose; but to a lesser degree I still have that grieving experience.'
ITALIAN HUSBAND MOURNED BY CATHOLIC WIDOW

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Psychosocial history

Elsa was one of five girls and three boys born to ‘a typical large European family’ in Libya, sixty-six years ago. She is a devout Roman Catholic. At the age of twenty-six, she came to Australia, landing in Perth first and then sailing across to Melbourne. Four years later, she married Giovani, who was born in Italy. They subsequently raised two sons and a daughter. Elsa and her adult children speak Italian and English, and identify their family as Italian.

She had no paid employment while raising her family. ‘Before I married I worked, but after I married my husband did not want to look after the children’. Elsa considers that was a ‘very European’ thing to do. ‘No, you do not work’. Neither did she work before immigrating. ‘No, no, no! In my country, it’s not good that the girl goes to work. It’s very hard: not like here.’

Giovani came to Australia as a young teenager, shortly after World War II to join his father who had immigrated about ten years earlier. ‘He left his family very, very young in Italy. There were two girls and one boy that he left over there. After he left, the war broke out and they were separated; he could not go back. He was one of the first Italians across here from his region back in Italy. He came to Australia and started bringing them all across from that village or area that they were all in. One sister stayed in Italy.’

‘Giovani started as a farmer when he came to Australia. Then I think he had a few odd jobs – cleaning jobs – and then he worked at the brewery for twenty-three years. He did a lot of shiftwork. He never missed the nightshift for twenty-three years, you know; and he would never be sick. He was working everyday, every night, every afternoon; and after it all, this happened.’

Bereavement

Five years ago, following three years of retirement, Giovani succumbed to lung cancer at the age of sixty-three. His illness had been diagnosed only three months earlier.

‘He had couple of problems, including diabetes, but when it came, it came pretty sudden. When he went in hospital last (three weeks before he passed away) the doctor she was telling me, “You better go home; you together with your children”. She did not tell me straightaway, “Your husband is going to die”; but I’m not stupid, you know. He was very sick, but I came home. One day she said, “You know, he’s very sick”. It was Friday and he passed away in the night. The family was all there. In his last few hours he closed his eyes and did not open the eyes, you know.’
Other losses

Prior to Giovani’s death, Elsa’s most recent bereavement had been the death of her mother, thirteen years earlier. Her mother was buried in another suburban cemetery and she has a deceased brother who was buried in the same cemetery as Giovani.

Funeral

After a full requiem mass, Giovani was buried in a lawn grave at the local cemetery. The funeral meant a lot to Elsa, personally. ‘Oh, yeah. All the time I remember the funeral. He had a good funeral; good people came. The church was full; yeah, it was full. There were his mates from work and my relatives and my friends. He had a good funeral.’

‘After the funeral, family and friends called at home. Elsa felt that the funeral helped her in working through her grief. ‘It was an important part of all that. Of course, I’m very sorry for him to go. I said goodbye, but in my heart it’s very broken, you know. The doctor she gave me some sedatives to calm me, but I was fine; I don’t need them.

Adjustment

Elsa considers that Giovani’s illness did give her some opportunity to prepare herself for the loss of her husband. ‘Of course there was some preparation during the sickness’.

She considers that she is ‘a different person now’, as a result of her bereavement experience. ‘Sometimes I cry more now, but not always. Anyway, I remember I had a good life with him. I’m alright one day and – you know. I still get angry, but not for a long time: just for a minute, enough for everything to pass, you know. I remember how he used to just yell for about five minutes, you know; but you just forget these things.’

These days, Elsa lives with her daughter and one son; her older son is married. The family has not experienced any particular change in relationships at all following Giovani’s death. ‘We get on with each other; we stick together.’

Nor has Elsa’s faith changed in any apparent way since Giovani’s illness and death. ‘It’s pretty much the same: pretty strong and remained constant.’ She believes Giovani is now in Heaven. ‘I pray every night for him and when I go to church. But what can you do? Nothing; he’s not coming back.’

Cemetery

The cemetery is very important to Elsa. ‘It is sacred. It’s nice, but when you go it’s very sad, you know.’

Elsa feels a sense of God’s presence at all times in the cemetery and sometimes also a sense of Giovani’s presence. ‘At the cemetery I feel close to God: close to my husband, of course. I feel very sad, of course. I remember it’s a love and I am alone. I don’t play cards; I don’t play anything, you know. When I go, I remember when we were together, but now I really feel sad when I go to the cemetery. Now I go to see my brother in the grave and that is very, very sad too. Sometimes I think I go crazy. Sometimes I forget about everything, but what can you do? Nothing.’
Visitation

These days, Elsa would like to visit the cemetery each week, but she actually gets there 'about three times a month: just when it comes up. 'My daughter usually takes me, or my son does sometimes. Always I go with my son or daughter: not by myself, no. At the other cemetery: yes, because I have my mother in another cemetery. Sometimes I go there by myself, because it's easy, you know; the tram stops there, but not at this one.'

Elsa makes a particular point of visiting on several special occasions, including Giovani's birthday, Fathers Day, their wedding anniversary and All Souls Day. 'Fathers Day is big at the cemetery: Big! I go up early in the morning, because it's very hard to go inside with your car.'

She considers that her faith strongly influences how frequently she visits. 'Of course, that's what you feel. That's why you go into the cemetery, because if not that feeling, well what for do you go?'

When she does visit, Elsa always places flowers. 'Sometimes I talk to him; sometimes I pray. I definitely maintain around the plaque, you know. When I'm there, I stay about a quarter- or half-an-hour, yeah: definitely half-an-hour. It depends on the day; it's different. We clean the plaque; we take our time. If it's a nice day, we take a little bit longer. Then we visit my brother in the Italian area on the other side; that's another fifteen, maybe twenty minutes.'

Elsa would like to visit her husband's grave more often than she is able to get to the cemetery. 'Sometimes I have the feeling to go, but my son is at work; everybody is at work. I wait for Sunday to come, or Saturday, to go over there, because who'll take me? I don't drive, you know. If I had a chance, I would go everyday, but no.'

Elsa recognised a change in her visitation pattern about six months after Giovani's death. 'For the first six months after he passed away I would go every Sunday, and after that - you know - not so much. I don't need to go so much.' She also feels that visiting her husband's grave has become less of an emotional strain. 'Oh, just a little bit, yeah; it's now a little bit easier. You know, the feeling you get; it does get easier with time.'
ATHEISTIC LOVER NOW AGNOSTIC

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Psychosocial history

Marisa is forty-five years old and has never been married. She lives with her parents and one of two sisters, who is twelve years younger. 'My Dad is retired as a blind, invalid pensioner. My Mum worked when we were younger, but not since my youngest sister started school, so she hasn’t worked for nearly thirty years. My sister and I have always lived at home. Twenty-two years ago, I started at the business where I still work as one of the administration officers. I was told to learn the payroll and have been in payroll ever since.'

Prior to Greg’s death, Marisa regarded herself as an atheist, but is now perhaps agnostic. 'I don’t really have any religion, but I think I believe that there is something out there: more now than I’ve ever believed, I think. Before, I was clear that there was no God. Now, I believe that when someone dies you don’t just disappear: someone does look after you. So I’m really not sure what I believe, but I believe there is something up there.'

Marisa’s family was unaware of the depth of her relationship with Greg. 'They thought he was just a friend, but he was my partner – boyfriend – my lover – whatever.'

Bereavement

Greg was forty-four years of age when he died of a massive heart attack, almost three years ago. He was a manager at a provincial sports venue. We had been going out, off and on, for nineteen years. He was basically a nice person. He was my very first boyfriend. We went out for a good year and had a normal relationship, then we broke up for a while. Whenever he got sick, he rang me up and we continued our relationship right where it left off, up until the time he died. The week before he died, I went for a week’s holiday and stayed at his place. I noticed a difference in him from what I had seen the month before. His appearance had changed dramatically, going from a very clean and impeccable dresser, to a slob.'

'Greg had a very mixed up family. He was adopted; his sister was adopted too, but he didn’t know that until he was in his late twenties. So he was very mixed up: very confused. He had a son who he had distanced himself from, but I think that that was just basically the way he’d been brought up too; he treated him virtually the same. They were very mixed up. His son lived with his ex-wife and her new female partner. The son was twenty-one when Greg died.'

'Greg was on his second marriage and all was not well with that marriage. She was away, staying at their friend’s penthouse, interstate. Greg suspected that she was having an affair with his friend over there. And she has recently moved and they’ve bought a house together over there; so –.'
Greg suffered a fatal heart attack in his car, while it was in his garage. 'The week before, he'd been feeling sick and had blackouts and so he went to the doctor's. He found out he had sleep apnoea, high cholesterol and diabetes, and was having tests for that; but actually dying of a massive heart attack was very unexpected. Some of his friends hadn’t seen him for a while, but the week before his death, his appearance and everything seemed to have changed. I mean, he was getting things in order: writing a letter to his son, and different things. Sometimes people say that they think people know when they're going. He was just sorting himself out.'

'They thought he might've committed suicide, because his car engine was running when he died. Well, his car had run out of petrol the next morning when they found him, but the Coroner ruled that out and said it was a massive heart attack.

'Apparently he had a meeting with a lady from the local television station at midday. I'd spoken to him the night before (about eleven-fifteen) when he was doing some work on the computer. Apparently he woke up - or he mightn't have gone to bed - and they figure he had pains in the chest and tried to get into the car to go to the hospital, about two-fifteen in the morning, but he had a massive heart attack in the car. So from two-fifteen until after midday, when someone came to find out where he was, he'd been in the car.'

'I found out a day or so after Greg had died, and was able to see him that night, at the funeral parlour. It was my sister's birthday and I felt I couldn't stay at home, singing happy birthday and pretending to be happy. I had to get away and be by myself, so I went out. Coincidentally, a staff counsellor started at my work the very next day. Well, on his first day he really copped the whole lot; he really did. He listened and he came back week after week to see how I was.'

Other losses

Greg's death was Marisa's first close bereavement. 'No one else close to me has died. I mean, I've lost uncles and auntsies since then, but his death was the most significant thing that I've had to deal with in my whole life.'

Funeral

'Greg was a very popular person and had lots, and lots, of death notices in the paper. I felt, because I'd known him for so long, that I should put one in too. Part of me was saying, "Do it"; and part of me was saying, "No; don't do it". The counsellor suggested that I do it, because of my relationship with Greg. I only put in a very small notice and there was no signature; so no one but me knew who it was from. I always called him 'Sunshine', so I just put his name, his date and just 'my Sunshine is gone'; and that was it. And the next morning the newspaper rang up and said the family thanked me for the notice and would like to thank me personally. I thought, "No; this is not a good idea". Then they said, "Well, we won't get the family, we'll get a friend of the family to talk to you"; and I thought, "Ooh, OK".'

'So I spoke to the gentleman that they asked me to speak to, and he asked if I was going to the funeral; so I arranged to meet him at the funeral. When I got there with a friend, I recognised him. He was looking around; I suspect looking for me. He'd given me a description of what he looked like. I went inside for the service, came out and then went over to introduce myself. Then Greg's wife came over and introduced herself. We went to the crematorium and in the line up to greet Greg's wife, we exchanged hugs and kisses like long lost friends and we arranged to have lunch at a later date. And we did have lunch and have kept in contact with each other since; so it's a very strange situation.'
'Greg was cremated at the memorial park and it was – it sounds very strange, but it was – the best funeral that I’ve ever been to. They had singing; they had funny stories; they had lots of people. The seating at the funeral director’s chapel was reserved seating only, because there was just so many people there. He had people from overseas and interstate, and there were columns and columns of advertisement notices in the paper, from people all over the place. Yes, it was a really big funeral and really good. To me, it wasn’t a sad day. It wasn’t, ‘We’re all sad because Greg’s gone’; it was like a celebration. It was a celebration of his life and what he’d meant to a lot of people. It was different.

‘At the funeral director’s service, everyone was laughing; no one was really crying. Then we went to the crematorium. And at this place, they don’t lower their coffins; they turn around in the wall, so it’s like he’s not actually going anywhere; it’s just disappearing for a while, and still there were no tears there. I mean, there were hardly any tears from anyone and that sounds kind of sick really, doesn’t it?’

‘I was very lucky, because I was allowed to go to the funeral parlour before anyone had actually found out he had died. He lived way out in the western district, but he’d been taken to the Melbourne Coroner’s office; then they took him to the funeral directors. The day I found out, I rang up the funeral directors and I was allowed to go over there to see him. People had told me that to see someone when they have died helps you accept death a lot better; so I saw him and it was just like he was asleep. And I think that really helped me, because I didn’t really feel that he had died – that he’d been in a lot of pain or anything – because he looked really peaceful; he just looked like he was asleep. I was very happy with the opportunity to see him at the funeral home. I feel that gave me a good opportunity to say goodbye to him; but I was crying leading up to the funeral. I think, at the funeral you realise that they’re not coming back; I mean, they’re going to be cremated and you’re not ever going to see that person again.’

**Adjustment**

Marisa feels that her personality has changed slightly since Greg’s death. ‘After Greg died, I was very, very angry – very angry at him – very angry at friends. I was really quite a nasty person for at least twelve months. I had to go to the doctor and was put on medication for depression for about six months. I have mellowed now, and I feel that I’m a bit more compassionate to a lot of people than I was originally, before Greg died. I cried an awful lot for that first twelve or eighteen months, as good friends know. I cried many tears, but you get back on track. I mean, you never forget them, but life just tends to go in a different direction.’

‘After he died, I kind of went mad on shopping; mad on spending money. I mean, I spent an awful lot of money in that first six months, but it was just wasted things. That was part of my relief, I think; I just went shopping.’

Following Greg’s death, Marisa observed in herself a new personal quest for spiritual understanding. ‘I didn’t think straightaway that there was anything there: that he went to heaven or he went to hell, or wherever. I went to a few spiritualists and mediums after he died. I just felt that there was something out there: that he is there. I don’t think that when you die, you just disappear totally; no. I just got some faith; I don’t really know what sort of faith, but it’s there.’

Marisa has not adopted any specific afterlife concept. ‘I am not so sure that there is no spirit world any more, but I don’t believe Greg is now in heaven. I reckon he’s in hell somewhere; I
do. Greg was a really nice person, but he lied an awful lot to different people. I reckon he’s somewhere off having a really good time. He’s probably in hell, but having a wonderful time. I believe there is something, but I’m not sure whether it is God or the devil, or whether he is on a plane waiting to go into another life, or whatever. I do believe he is somewhere, but I’m not quite sure where. I expect I’ll see him again some day; but I’ve always wondered, if he died as a forty-four-year-old person and I lived, say for another forty-six years, then I’ll be ninety.’

‘I did go to a medium about five months after Greg died. I’d been to the cemetery that morning and put flowers on his memorial; I went with a friend from work. And the medium said to me that Greg thanked me for the red flowers that I’d put there this morning. And I mean, she didn’t know that I’d been to the cemetery; so I figure it had to come from somewhere. I just thought it had to be Greg thanking me for going to the cemetery and that helped me a lot.’

‘Greg’s parents were quite elderly. About ten months after Greg died, his father died; his mother died exactly a year after Greg. A man rang me up at work and told me, “Greg’s father has died”, and he told me that he’d known about me for years and years. Then we arranged to go out and have dinner. He still rings me up once a month, just to talk about Greg and to see how I’m getting on; so he’s also remained friends.’

‘I told the counsellor at work about my family situation: about my situation with Greg, his being married at the time, and my relationship with the girl that I work with. He made it a lot easier to see why I was upset, and he just checked if I was all right. He’s been really good through the whole process. At Greg’s anniversary he came in to see if I was all right: how I felt the year after. He checks in occasionally, just to see that I’m going along all right. Nothing is a secret; everything just came out in the open. There doesn’t have to be a secret with him any more. And I kept Greg and my relationship a secret for all those years.’

‘It’s still a secret with my immediate family, but lots of others know the details these days. I don’t want to tell my family about it. Both my sisters and my parents don’t know. I figure there are some things that you just leave; they don’t need to know. As far as they’re concerned, I just lost a friend. But he was a bit more than just a friend, and I miss him more than words can tell.’

**Cemetery**

‘Greg was cremated and has a memorial tree at the cemetery. I believe it is a special place; they are really guarding the people that have been trusted to them. I mean they look after them — maintain the grounds, and it’s locked up at five o’clock — it’s like they’re the custodians. I think it’s very safe once the gates are locked. I think he’s in a very safe spot there and no one can really get in and touch him.’

‘At the cemetery, I feel safe; I feel it’s sad, and I feel safe. Sometimes I’ve even gone in the evening, during summer particularly. They leave the gates open until seven p.m., so I go after work sometimes; there’s nobody else around. It’s a bit eerie because they’ve got a musical garden there too, and the music wafts around the ground; there’s not another living soul around.’
Visitation

‘For the first eighteen months, I used to go once a month, but it’s gone to about once every three months now. I often wonder why I go to the cemetery. I think I like going to see him, but I get really sad walking away, because he’s there. I mean, he’s never going to leave there, and this cemetery is a very tranquil spot; it’s very pleasant where he is, but as I said, I get very sad. I think I stopped going because of that reason. I like to visit, but I get very sad when I walk away; but I go there often enough.’

‘For the first year-and-a-half, I would go monthly; but it changes; it’s just something that happens progressively. At first, soon after he died, I cried when I went there and I cried when I went away. Now I visit his plaque, put the flowers there and I just cry walking back to the car; and I think it’s because I feel guilty about leaving him there. I think it has become easier to visit these days; it’s not as painful now as it was. But I get angry at him too: more than anything because he’s actually died. He had so much to live for. The pain of going to visit is alright, but it’s still that going away and leaving him there –.’

‘When I go, I feel that I’m doing so for my own benefit rather than for his benefit, but I’m also not quite sure what that personal benefit is. I feel good going there, but I feel very sad walking away. I don’t look forward to going. I think it is perhaps a sense of duty that I feel to go there now. I feel it’s a duty to me, because – it’s a silly thought – if you don’t go, you feel that you’re forgetting the person. By not visiting them, it’s like you’ve forgotten them and you’re not going to see them any more.’

‘I always drive to the cemetery by myself; but on his first anniversary, two friends came with me. I usually try to make it around the anniversary of his death. I know his ashes are there, but he’s not; but it just kind of helped me when he first died. I also visit on his birthday, but not Christmas, because Greg wasn’t really big on Christmas. I don’t think that you have to go to the cemetery to remember the person. I mean, I used to think when he first died and I used to go every month, that it’s like going to visit him. But then I thought, “Well that’s silly, because he’s not there”. I mean, you remember what you remember yourself; you don’t have to go and visit a cemetery.’

‘I don’t really know what I get out of visiting there myself. I go and place some flowers, talk to him, and just walk away. They have the plaques on a concrete base, raised out of the ground; so I just push the tan bark around a bit more, but that’s basically it. I’m happy with the way they maintain it.’

Marisa considers that, ‘In the first year or two, you feel that it benefits yourself to go to the cemetery; but as time goes by, you realise that you don’t have to go to the cemetery as often, because the person is inside you. I mean, the memories are there; you don’t have to go to the cemetery to visit the person. But even so, I still like to occasionally; but it’s not as urgent as it was before.’
Psychosocial history

June was born into a Catholic family in Melbourne seventy-five years ago. ‘My dad was an Irishman and we were very strict Catholics. My parents drank too much and were cruel to us kids.’ At the age of fourteen, June fell in love with Edward and they married three years later. ‘He’d just turned twenty-three a week before the wedding.’ June insists that from when she was fourteen-years-old, until Edward’s death fourteen months ago, at the age of seventy-nine, ‘Not a day went by that we didn’t see each other’. She now lives alone.

‘I have a daughter who’s fifty-six and a son who’s forty-six; and I have another: a fostered daughter. She’s forty now and I’ve had her since she was two years old, so she’s really our daughter now, isn’t she? She lives up the top of the hill. My other daughter lives across town and my son lives in north Queensland. I’ve just come back from a couple of months up there and he keeps ringing me; he wants me to go up there and leave here. He really worries; he doesn’t like the lonely part of me any more than I do: I miss him.’

June had paid employment ‘only for a short while’ before her first child was born. ‘I worked in a factory: a stinking shoe factory. It was much against my brain, but that’s all there was for kids in my day. Then I stayed at home and was always there when they came home. I was there when they went and I was there when they came home.’

According to June, Edward was as dependent on her as she was on him. ‘We shared everything. Raising the children was our role. Everything was ours: everything. We did everything together: the housework and everything. We even washed half the car each – would you believe? We were never apart: no, never! He worked at the government aircraft factory. That’s why he didn’t go to war; they wouldn’t release him. He was a supervisor at the aircraft factory for forty-two years there. They tried to send him interstate, but he wouldn’t go. He said, “If I can’t take my wife, I don’t go”. They made quite a fuss about it there for a while at the aircraft factory, but he just refused to go, and said, “I’ll leave the job first”. There was nothing going to separate us.’

Edward had retired from work fifteen years before his death. ‘I got him out of work. He had a year’s sick pay and he wasn’t the type to tell lies to the doctor; so I did it for him. I went up and told the doctor that he was very tired and couldn’t sleep; but he was sleeping very soundly. I was very nervous and the doctor said, “Oh, we’ll retire him”’. Then, as I was going out the door, the doctor told me I hadn’t fooled him at all. He said, “I just think you want him at home, don’t you?” and I said, “We all do”. Then I ran straight across the road to the public telephone and phoned Edward. I said, “You’ve retired!” and he said, “Oh, wonderful”. I thought he’d never have to go to work again and we could be together every single minute of
the day. It was a great day when I went out to that telephone and said: “Guess what? You’re coming home!”

‘I was a pillar of the church until I started to do a bit of thinking and looked around. The Vietnam War actually started me off. The Vietnam War was on and I found my church – my beloved church – was supporting it and supporting them going over there and burning women and children. I thought, “Something’s wrong here, somewhere”. I started to do a bit of thinking and gave the church away. I suppose I would’ve been about forty at that stage. So I didn’t have any religion for many, many years; but I’ve wandered back, partially, to my Catholic faith.’

**Bereavement**

‘Edward had a heart bypass operation two years before he died. It seems to be all they get out of a bypass: about two years. He had chest pains and went to the hospital and the cardiologist said he’d do a balloon that would fix him and he should be all right, and he did that. Then I rang Edward up and said, “How do you feel?” and he said, “I feel good”. I said, “I’ll come over and see you”, and he said, “Don’t come; it’s too late”. I said, “Yes, I will; I’m coming over, because I love you”. And they were the last words I ever spoke to him, because when I got there, he had died.’

‘When we got to the hospital, the nurse came and said, “He’s very, very sick”. I said, “What’s happened to him?” She said, “He’s got chest pains and he’s up in the theatre. He’s very, very sick”. We sat there for about three-quarters of an hour. They had him on the heart-lung machine and they tried to get a surgeon to see if they could do a bypass, but apparently they couldn’t. Then our cardiologist came around the corner and just said, “We’ve lost him” – just like that – “We’ve lost him”.

‘The cardiologist was distraught, absolutely distraught, because he didn’t know why and I still don’t know what happened. They were to have an autopsy, but apparently the Coroner decided against an autopsy: I suppose he being an old bloke of seventy-nine, and with a heart history. So we still don’t know what happened – I don’t know. He was to come home in two days, but he was dead when I got over there.’

When advised what had just happened, June chose not to view Edward’s body. ‘The girls did that, but me? No way! I wouldn’t go anywhere near him: no way. I never wanted to see him for the rest of my life as a corpse. I wanted to see him how I saw him in his bed: smiling and happy the night before. That’s who I remember; not a corpse.’

‘It worries me that I don’t know if he knew he was dying. I went over to see the cardiologist, but I didn’t ask him. I wanted to know if he knew, because if he knew he was going to leave me – then how terrible for him!’

‘Edward was one in a million – believe you me – one in a million. He’d help people. He took food to people. He had his own meals on wheels and if anybody was sick, he’d cook a meal. He got a few widows around here and he’d look after them, and take them meals and he looked after an old man one time – shaved him and so on.’

‘Edward never suffered. That’s the only way I can bear it now; that’s the only way I can stand it. I think to have him come home an invalid would have been a bigger hell than what I went through. If only you knew the man. He’d have crawled on his hands and knees rather than be an invalid. He never sat down. But two days before he died, I walked in and he just stood up
and put his arms around me and said, “I’m feeling sad. You know, we really haven’t got all that much time left together, have we?” I nearly fainted! It was uncharacteristic of him: completely, absolutely uncharacteristic. Oh, it made me feel cold. Of course, I don’t believe in premonitions; I think all that’s a lot of nonsense.’

‘I’d never seen the man down in my life. He was on an even keel: never depressed or anything. He had a wonderful attitude: wonderful, very strong-minded and strong-willed: very. That’s why it surprised me when he said it. A couple of things like that happened a few days before, but I never think of them. Just before he went to hospital, we were laying in bed and I felt him just touch my leg and I woke up. He said to me, “Sorry I woke you up”. He said, “I was just laying here and feeling so full of love for you: just so full of love. I felt that if I touched you, you’d feel just how much I love you, in your sleep”. He said, “I’m sorry I woke you up”. I was seventy-three and he was seventy-nine.’

Other losses

Prior to losing Edward, June had lost her parents quite a few years ago. ‘But we also had a tragedy with the daughter – or the foster-daughter. She had a wonderful partner – just a beautiful partner – who was like a wonderful son to us; but he got killed on a motorbike about nine years ago. That was pretty terrible. He was a lovely fellow.’

‘Mother died fifteen years ago now, at the age of ninety-one; my father died thirty years ago. They both died of boredom. When my mother was ninety-one, the doctor said she could make a hundred: easily. She said, “I’m not into that”, and so she stopped eating and drinking; and that’s a fact: it’s a fact. Mum eventually become dehydrated when she stopped eating and drinking and they wouldn’t do anything about it. I asked the doctor and he said, “No; it’s her choice”. When she became badly dehydrated they put her on a drip, so I assume that her kidneys would have failed and she died.’

‘I don’t know what happened to my father. He was in hospital with prostate trouble. The doctor said he could live many years with it. But seeing he was eighty-five, he just sort of laid down and said, “I’ve got cancer”; just shut his eyes, went into a coma and eventually died; so I don’t know. When people ask me what they died of, I say boredom. One of these days I’ll get their death certificates and see what it’s got on them.’

Funeral

‘Edward was buried. I said to the kids, “If you cremate your father, I’ll never forgive you”. He was buried; I couldn’t handle that cremation bit. My mother said to me when she was dying – or sometime before – “If you cremate me, I’ll come back and haunt you”. I didn’t want to burn him up: no way!’

June did not attend the funeral. ‘I wasn’t well. I wasn’t going to sit there in front of a box and know that he was in it. My daughter planned the funeral – my two daughters – I had nothing whatsoever to do with it. They’re planning a gravestone now and I want nothing to do with that. I don’t even want to know what’s on the headstone. I don’t want to know anything about it: nothing. I signed the cheques, and that’s all.’

On the day of the funeral, June just sat in her brown chair. ‘A friend stayed with me. They all went away and I just pretended it wasn’t happening – you know – just pretended it wasn’t on. Then they all came back to the house after the funeral and they were around for days. My son and his wife came down from Queensland and he stayed. Oh, the family was great for a week
or so; they were here all the time. They slept overnight; they stayed with me. Oh yes, they were very supportive: very, very supportive.'

'They didn't talk to me about the funeral. I didn't want to know anything about it, but they made a tape of it and I could listen to the tape. It was not a religious service; it was a celebrant, you know. I'll listen to the tape. There are different ones (our friends) who stood up and spoke; it's beautiful, you know, and I could listen to that. I got some comfort out of listening to that for some reason or other. I can even read the book. They had a book and all the people that were present wrote their name in it, and they got some really beautiful cards. It was beautiful; everybody was beautiful. I could just listen to the tape of the service, without even crying. But it doesn't at all make me wish that I had gone to the funeral: no way: never! No; I couldn't: it'd be the last memory - you know - a box with his body in it: no way!'

**Adjustment**

June does not believe that under the circumstances she had any opportunity to prepare herself for Edward's death. 'No; not at all: not at all. I couldn't believe it: just couldn't believe it. No; I had all the faith in the world. The cardiologist and I knew that these fellows could do so much with these sorts of things and we'd been going to the cardiologist for so many years that he was our friend as well as our cardiologist. I had too much faith in him, I think. I thought he could do anything. I thought when Edward went over there and had this treatment, that he'd be alright for a few more years. The cruel part about it is that he had a stress test about a month before, and that showed him to be remarkably well. The cardiologist said, "Ah, you're remarkable: absolutely remarkable". So we were elated: absolutely elated, the two of us. We thought we'd have a few more years; and he was dead within a month. It proves you should never trust a stress test.'

June is still significantly emotionally distressed and appears reluctant to allow her grief to subside. 'I think of him all the time—everyday: non-stop—but not when I'm with other people. As soon as I get out of bed, I cry. I cry in the middle of the night; I cry when I'm going to bed. I just can't stop it. I say to myself, "I won't"; and every time I open that door and walk in, I say, "No"; but I walk in, sit in that chair and sometimes cry for half an hour before I can even do anything. It will wear off eventually I suppose, but I don't know; I've never been through it before, so I don't know. I just have to wait and see what happens. I was on medication: I'm coming off it gradually now, because I don't want to depend on medication. I've got to do it on my own, someway or other—sink or swim.'

June is not finding her bereavement easier to cope with, but says she has started to find life a little bit more interesting. 'I never turned the television on for a year, and I cancelled all the papers. I was a great reader; I used to read five or six books a week, but I never read a book or turned the television on for a year: never. I read nothing; I watched nothing. But now, I put it on for the news and current affairs report, and then I go to bed. I've read a couple of books. I started to show a little bit more of an interest in the world that way, but I'm off reading again. I can't be bothered reading.'

'We got the newspaper everyday and that was a whole lot of our life. We used to sit over the paper every morning at breakfast and do the crossword puzzles. That was a whole lot of our day, was breakfast with the newspaper. They kept delivering it and I must have just hurled it over to the next door neighbour's. I never, ever touched it: never opened it.'

'We've always been a fairly close family, you know. We've never had any problems in the family, though I'm a bit disappointed in the younger daughter up the hill. When Edward was
alive, she used to come here three nights and sometimes four nights a week. He was a great cook; he cooked everything we ate. She'd come down for meals with her little girl: a beautiful little girl, I love dearly. Since he's gone, I see her now and again, but not much. I miss the little girl; I miss her terribly. I adore that little girl and she adores me. She comes out and we will sit and cuddle together; she pats me and kisses me and says, "I love you Nanny". You know, I miss that like hell.'

'I had all that up in Queensland too, with the three girls up there: just beautiful, absolutely beautiful, those girls. I went up there for two months. My son, his wife and the girls were just so beautiful. Now, the son's on the phone every night and wants me to come back. He gets very emotional and he said to me, "Oh, if you won't come back it means that you don't love your grandchildren", but that's blackmail: that's stupid. He gets very busy; he's a barrister and he can't just walk out at any time. He can only come between briefs, if he's got time off. He said he's coming down shortly and wants me to go back with him; but the heat: it's so hot. I don't like to leave the house; I hate it. I can't see any way out of it though.'

June considers there has been no particular change in family relationships since Edward's death. 'But sometimes I feel a bit let down by them, like when I was very bad. I was like a zombie when I went out, you know. People would say, "Come out!", and I'd go with them and try to shop. I'd push a trolley and pick groceries up and that. It was incredible; I just couldn't do it, you know. I just had no concentration: no interest. Now when I look back, I think the kids could have rallied a bit more and helped me out a bit more in that way; but they were pretty good. I just came back from my daughter's; I had a weekend up there with her and I think that sometimes they could've helped me a bit more, you know; but that's the way it goes.'

'Since he died, I'm down the gurgler a bit. He had good superannuation, but the wife just gets seventy percent, but I'm quite all right; I'm quite comfortable. My son said, "You shouldn't worry about money, Mum". He's very successful and he's got a successful surgeon wife, and he said, "I could keep you out of my petty cash".'

June was 'absolutely dependent' upon Edward to drive her anywhere. 'I had a chauffeur. We only had the one car, so I couldn't have learnt to drive while he was working and when he knocked off work; he was just a chauffeur. It didn't matter where I went: to the dentist, the doctor, the hairdresser, everywhere; he was there. These days, I get a half-fare taxi, but there's not many places I want to go to now.'

June is certain that her religious beliefs have not changed at all as a result of Edward's death. 'I met a particular priest who came to see me and I was surprised that all the things I found wrong with the church, so did he. I was quite delighted, you know. He came a couple of times. I really enjoyed talking to him. I thought back over the years - the stupid, ridiculous things that they taught us, and brainwashed us into believing - it's criminal - and he agreed with me. He's a beautiful man; he said, "Typical Catholics". Really, I couldn't believe it. So I did go back to church; they have a healing mass every month and I go to that. I find that a little bit helpful. I felt the priest really understands. When I went up to the altar and received communion, he leant forward and kissed me on the cheek. I thought, "Oh, I'm just with somebody who understands". I thought he was beautiful; he is beautiful. He should come more often, but he's the only priest in charge of the whole parish. If it had been any other priest that came here and started all this preaching, I wouldn't have given him a minute. They're no good to me; I can't handle a lecture.'
'But the church has changed so greatly in those years that I’ve been away – well, ours has. The change has been tremendous; they’ve done away with all that garbage and it was a hell of a lot of garbage. He said, “It’s a lot of –”, well I won’t say what he said it is, all that garbage and rubbish. “We’re trying our best to change it all”. Yeah, they told us we’d go to hell for eating a meat pie on a Friday and then they changed it and I spent months wondering what happened to the poor things that went to hell previously for eating meat pies on a Friday. Now we could eat them. I must have been very simple and stupid, I think. There must have been something wrong with us to believe them.'

'Underneath it all, even through those years, I’ve always been a bit of a believer, you know. But my own religion was between God and me; the church had nothing to do with it; it’s a private thing. If there is a God – and I’m not one hundred percent convinced there is – then it’s just between him and me. I do like this healing mass though; it’s good for troubled people like myself.'

'I wouldn’t have a clue where Edward is now: wouldn’t have a clue. Sometimes I’ve got him up in heaven with God; at other times, I’ve got him out there with the lid screwed down and that’s it; I don’t know. Who knows anyhow? Who does know for sure? I know no more than anybody does. If I could feel sure there is a heaven and God, and that he’s up there and I’m going to meet him one day, it’d be wonderful; but I don’t know.'

'I’m not trying to rebuild my life in any way. A couple of days recently, I went to bed and just stayed there all day: for two days, just didn’t get out. I don’t see any future. There’s no future without him: no future at all. I can’t build a new life without him: I can’t. He was there for nearly sixty years, when you think I was fourteen and I was seventy-three when he died. From fourteen to seventy-three, I was there all the time. Even at fourteen, I saw him practically everyday and I didn’t have much of a life at home. He provided more of the things I never had.'

'The children haven’t provided any real support or assistance since he died. No, nothing interests me: nothing. I don’t think anybody can really support me, in any way. I just miss him; I miss him like hell and I just won’t do anything without him. It’d be very easy to take to suicide, even now. I go out sometimes; I go in a taxi to the shopping centre and just wander around. I have to wear my dark glasses, because I walk around just crying all the time. I go out on occasions and I visit people. Sure, I visit people; I’ve always done that, even after a few weeks, you know. I went in a zombie-like state and walked a little bit; it was dreadful. I couldn’t do anything for myself: breakfast or any meals out in the kitchen. I shake bad, you know; I couldn’t hold anything. I just dissolved into tears for about an hour and a half and I was thinking, “Why aren’t you here to help me clear up?” I still don’t touch the house; I’ve got a housekeeper, a lady who comes in once a fortnight and does it. I couldn’t be bothered doing it. I’d like to keep it clean, but I just haven’t got the interest.'

'My daughter is a social worker and she asked me about a counsellor coming and I said, “No”. I said, “I don’t see how anybody saying words can help. I know what I should do and I’m fully aware I’ve got to be brave and go forward and go out and make friends. I know it all, but nobody’s going to tell me how to do it: nobody tells me. I know exactly what I should do. I couldn’t see the point in somebody coming and saying what I already knew, but I said, “Well let him come just the once”, and he came. He’s a beautiful person; he’s a beautiful man. I looked forward to him coming; I really did, but as soon as he walked out the door, I’d dissolve into tears and all his work – you know. I think he gave up in the end; I think the counsellor gave up on me. I think he thinks I’m one of his failures. I suppose I saw him about half a dozen times, at least. He called a few times while I was out and left a note on the door. I
was sorry I missed him a couple of times. I did find it helpful, a bit, because I got a chance to talk to him about Edward. I wanted to impress on him what a wonderful fellow he was: what a fantastic man he was, you know; I don’t know why.1

‘I’ve got a friend who used to drive me up the wall; I’ve got to drop her. She’s very good and very kind but – oh. She’s got a photo of my husband on her kitchen table. “Why haven’t you got a photo of him?” she asked me. She said I couldn’t have loved him. I said, “No, I couldn’t stand the man”. She’s ridiculous, you know; she carries on like this and is overpowering people. I was up there one day and she had this photo on the table; she put it right in front of me. Then I had to visit the doctor and my blood pressure was right up when I got there. When I went back to see him a week later, it was down normal again. The doctor told me, years and years ago, to keep away from her. She’s very kind, but as he said, “She’s a morbid person; she’s not suitable for you”. I’d hate to ever tell her that, but he said that she’d understand. She’s a very morbid woman: very morbid, but other than that she’s got a heart of gold. But I had to stop going to see her: just gradually weaned off her, you know. She would put this photo right in front of me; I don’t know her reasons, but it’s weird, isn’t it? I think it’s rather wicked also, because she knows I won’t have a photo around. I can’t understand why she does it. A couple of times I’ve had a peep at it; a couple of times I’ve thought of our young days and I go right through to the present: a little peep and I put them away again. I’m gradually working myself up to it, I think.’

‘When I’m ready I’ll have one, but not until then. I know exactly what I should do to brighten up; you do this and do that; now she’s telling me how to do it. There’s no way of telling a person how to do it, is there? That’s what I think of counselling. I don’t know how many people really get help with counselling. I suppose young people are different; we’re all different. It must help a lot of people perhaps, to get over it and start a new life. I think a lot depends on the relationship too. When you’ve had that sort of ace relationship – two old dears. We used to sit in the back room there at night with his arm around me. He was mad on music; after me, his greatest love was music. We used to sit in the back room there with our music, holed up together like a pair of teenagers. I won’t go into that room now. I’ve never put his music on; ooh, no way I’d put the music on. I won’t even go in the room; I stop in this room. We never used to come in this room: never. I couldn’t stand it. I’d start crying and carrying on; I just breakdown. I can’t see any point in doing a thing that’s going to make me breakdown. One day, perhaps – I don’t know.’

Although apologising for her tears, June does not find it too painful relating her experiences. ‘Bringing back these memories has not really been difficult, because actually when no one’s here, I’m thinking about it anyhow. It doesn’t make that much difference; I think about it most of the time and my mind goes over and over, and over.’

‘I’m sorry I’ve been crying. I’m running out of tissues; I can’t afford the tissues, I’ll have to give it away sooner or later. I usually have a small towel: my special ‘crying-towel’, as I call it. I have a good old cry and say, “Come on, have a coffee”, and I go and get a cup of coffee and sit down and I’m all right for a while. I haven’t got any interest in the television. That’s just the trouble; there’s nothing on that thing through the day. My friend that I used to go and visit (who has the photo) – she lost her husband shortly after I lost mine – she says to me, “Put your television on; there are some wonderful things on in the day”, but it’s unadulterated crap and she sits and watches it all. It’s unbelievable that people can watch it; oh, it’s all trash. It’s the age of trash, you know: trash on television, trash on radio. Plenty of things are trash these days, like McDonald’s.’

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'I recently read an excellent article about what to do with mum, when dad goes, or dad, when mum goes. One woman said they weren't getting her into a nursing home or to rent a retirement village with old wrinkly bodies like hers swimming in swimming pools and some old dodderers dropping dead in the grounds. She wasn't going where there were only two people that had their marbles: all the others were loonies. She said it was like One flew over the cuckoo's nest. I also read somewhere that old age is not for cowards.'

'I'm interested in euthanasia. I've been tempted a couple of times to do something about it, but I don't think I ever will. I think I'll just think about it. I used to think I wouldn't do it once, on account of the family, but I'm beginning to think lately that the family might be relieved eventually. They might cry and mourn for a while then think, "Oh well, thank God we haven't got to worry about Mum anymore". You feel like a strain, you know. You can see the family saying, "Oh well, perhaps we can have Mum next Sunday. Oh, there's something on, perhaps the following Sunday". You can see it. I'll tell you something: when you lose your mates, you're on your own; you've lost everything; you're on your own. That's life; isn't it?'

'That's where we went wrong: the only time he let me down. I always told him I had to go first. I told you he was stubborn. I should've gone first. I was in hospital once and I rang him up and said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Nothing: just sitting here". I said, "Why?" He said, "I've got no interest in doing anything when you're not here; I've got no interest at all", and he was such a busy person; he was always doing something.'

'Every night when I go to bed I pray, "Please don't let me wake up in the morning", and the next morning I say, "Oh God, I'm still here; now I have to live through another day". I am very interested in assisted suicide; I think I'd like that, but I guess I'm probably a coward at heart.'

'I think he probably would have felt the same way if I'd gone first, but I think he would've coped better; I think he would've. He'd have been very sad: very sad. I remember when I went to a picture show one afternoon with his sister. I came home and he said, "Gosh, I missed you while you were gone". He said, "You know, the house is just not the same. It's awful without you: it's terrible". So one of us had to be left behind and I was the unfortunate one. On Saturday nights, I think to myself, "If I was only with him", and then I console myself by thinking that if he had lived another couple of years, he may have developed cancer or something. That would have been worse, wouldn't it? That'd have been worse, watching him rotting away.'

'When I go shopping, I see all the others walking arm in arm and I see the young couples together and that makes me feel terrible. Then I think to myself, "Well, you had your day; you had all that". You know, when we were out in public, he wouldn't walk holding my hand: no way. He wouldn't ever hold my hand or show affection in front of anyone: oh, no. Even before we were married, we'd be walking home from the films with his arm around me, if he'd hear someone come he'd pull his arm away. He was a very self-effacing person, you know, very tranquil and no show at all in front of people: no kissing. He never kissed me in front of anyone in his life. Where nobody would see us he was very, very affectionate: very. I embarrassed him once in front of his sister; I said, "You watch this". I went over and threw my arms around his neck and I said, "You're just absolutely marvellous and I just love you so much". You know, he just didn't do anything, but he said, "Oh that's nice", but after she went he shut the door and he came back and said, "Come on, now; where were you up to"?"
‘My daughter said to me, “Mum, you must realise that you and Dad had a most unique relationship: absolutely unique”, and I said, “Well, all these things just make it harder, don’t they?” Can’t I be forgiven for taking so long?’

Cemetery

June played no part in Edward’s burial. ‘The cemetery really means nothing to me. You’ve got to be buried somewhere – apart from cremation – you have to be buried somewhere and I didn’t care. It just had to happen, didn’t it? What happens to the body is not a particular concern, but I wouldn’t have had him cremated; I wouldn’t have done that.

I’ve never visited my parents’ graves; I’ve never been back to the cemeteries to see my parents. I went to their funerals. I could handle that, because I had him supporting me every inch of the way; that was different. You grieve for parents, but after their funerals I never went back to the graves. My parents weren’t buried together; they’re in different cemeteries. There wasn’t enough room where Dad was buried; he was buried in a family grave and there wasn’t enough room for Mum. We thought it advisable, because they had continual warfare between the two of them. Everybody said, “The best thing to do is to separate them”. We felt sure they’d find a way to keep it up, if they were together.”

Visitation

June has never been to the cemetery where Edward was buried fourteen months ago. ‘I feel that if I went to that cemetery, I’d feel that it just happened yesterday. I would feel that I’d lost him all over again and I’d start from the beginning now. It makes it definite, you know. But perhaps, I’m playing a game where I think he’s away somewhere and perhaps he’ll come back. I don’t want to look at that ground and know he’s there: it’s too final, it’s absolutely too final. I keep away from there.’
**DAUGHTER VISITS FREQUENTLY TO HONOUR PROMISE**

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**Psychosocial history**

Marion was born in Melbourne forty-seven years ago, the youngest of six children, including just one boy. She has not had paid employment since she was seventeen. Marion said, 'I was a bookbinder, but I had to leave my job to look after my Mum, because she got sick.'

'Mum raised six children and most of her grandchildren. Dad was retired; he was a storeman. He worked at a flourmill for twenty-two years then he went to a furniture place and was a storeman there until he retired nineteen years ago. None of us ever got on well with Dad, because he was strict. When he used to drink (when we were all younger) he used to belt Mum and belt us kids, but he mellowed out when he got older.'

'I like the Catholic faith. My Mum was Catholic: my Dad was a Salvo. We didn’t go to church, us kids; Dad didn’t allow that, so we weren’t christened or anything either. I’ve never been a real churchgoer. I told my Dad I wanted to become a Catholic and he went off his head. You should’ve heard him: “Roman Catholics, you know I hate them”. I said, “Mum was a Catholic and my sisters all married Catholics; I’m the only one that didn’t”. He said, “I bloody-well hate them”. When she got married to him, Dad wouldn’t let Mum go to church either.”

Marion has been married to Gerry for nine years now. She has four children and four grandchildren. Her first child was to Gerry, twenty-four years ago. 'Then we split up. Then I married another guy and had three children to him. Then we split up and I got back with Gerry and then we got married. So our relationship’s been twenty-six years, but we’ve been married for nine years. Gerry is a machine operator; he doesn’t have any other children, only mine.'

**Bereavement**

Marion lost her father five months ago and her mother died nine months before that. 'Mum was seventy-seven; she died five days after her birthday. Dad was also seventy-seven when he died.'

'Mum had dementia and my father helped prepare me, telling me – you know. She died of a stroke, in the end. She often got worse and then she’d come good. We always thought she’d get better, you know. The Friday night she died, she didn’t get better: she just died. It took a lot of weight off my shoulders, because I was over there nearly every day, you know. It was a relief that she wasn’t suffering any more.'
'Eight years Mum had dementia. Over that period of time it was difficult to communicate and all. I stayed close, you know. I used to have them here; I used to shower her and – you know. When nurses never came, I’d feed her; I’d do everything. None of my other sisters would do it because, “We’re not touching her”, as if she had germs or something.’

‘After Mum died, I got closer with Dad: yeah, my Dad and I. I was growing close to Dad while Mum was still alive. We were spending everyday together, you know. It’s a bit hard to sit there and ignore him. No, I’d make his lunch: make his tea, bring his washing home, wash it; I’d do it all from home.’

‘Dad died earlier this year from pneumonia and prostate cancer. He’d been ill with the prostate cancer for seven months; the pneumonia just set in. He was in a nursing home and we weren’t expecting his death at all. It was quite a shock, yeah; it was worse than Mother’s. I had him home here on Tuesday for lunch and he was happy. I took him back to the nursing home and he said, “See yah later”; I took him inside and I came home. I used to go and see him everyday. Then Thursday, he told me he didn’t feel too good, so I told the nurse and she got the doctor and he said, “Oh, he’s all right; his prostate’s playing up a bit on him, you know”; I said, “Yeah, alright”. But Friday, about ten to two in the morning, they rang me up and said, “You’d better come down here; your father ain’t too good”. He died twelve-thirty that afternoon.’

‘With my mother, I hardly cried, at least not as often as what I did with my father, you know. Because, I knew Mum was sick for a long time and then they said my Dad needed twenty-four-hour care, because I couldn’t look after him. I used to go and see him all the time. But it was worse with Dad, you know; I never cried like I did with my Dad. The worst loss was my Dad, yeah, because he lived here until he went to the nursing home.’

Having lost her mother nine months earlier did not in any way help prepare Marion to cope with the death of her father. Rather, the loss of her father while still mourning the death of her mother compounded Marion’s bereavement.

**Other losses**

‘My grandfather died when I was eleven; he had cancer. I still remember; it was on a Monday, one o’clock in the afternoon, when I saw the undertakers come and take him. I didn’t really understand it at the time. But it was different with my mother’s death, because she was very sick for eight years.’

Between the deaths of her parents, Marion also experienced two other significant bereavements. ‘My children’s other grandmother had emphysema and she choked and died, and my brother-in-law, he died earlier this year. He had lung cancer; he was fifty-three. I was close to my brother-in-law. I used to mind his kids for him and my sister, but she’s gone funny, you know. She won the lottery and doesn’t want to talk to us or nothing, and then he died. I didn’t go to his funeral or nothing, because I wasn’t talking to my sister and thought I’d better stay away; you know, not cause any problem.’

Tension and animosity have apparently always characterised relations within Marion’s family of origin. Her father referred to his daughters as his ‘ugly molls’ and his son as ‘the skinny bastard’. Even sharing the loss of their parents did not help draw the family together and Marion does not enjoy good relations with any of her siblings. ‘The others all live in town, but I don’t see them. I don’t get on with any of my family; they were all greedy, you know. They try to outdo each other. If one got a new house, the other one had to buy a new house,
you know. I couldn’t be bothered with that kind of people, you know what I mean? Where you buy a new car, they try and buy one better, to outdo you. That’s not my style, you know what I mean? My father never saw none of them after my mother died: not once.’

Funeral

‘Mum’s funeral was a requiem mass at the Holy Rosary Church and then she went to the cemetery. I made the funeral arrangements and Dad went. Dad and I had it pre-arranged. He thought that him and Mum were getting buried together at the lawn cemetery. When he started to make the arrangements, I said, “No, Dad”. He goes, “What? Beg your pardon?” I said, “No; Mum’s wishes are that she goes from the house to the Holy Rosary to the cemetery”. He said, “Right then”, so we did that. Mum’s buried: Dad’s cremated. Half his ashes are there; half his ashes are here. We made both of the arrangements the same day: prepaid.’

Marion believes that the funeral, including the requiem mass, did help her in her grief. ‘I said a eulogy for her and said one for my father. I think we did the right thing; we sent her off the right way. With Mum, the coffin was open the night before, you know, and I went to see her with my husband and the kids. I couldn’t see her by myself, because my sisters kept pushing in all the time.’

‘With Dad, it was straight to the crematorium; we met there. We had a service at the crematorium chapel: a very short service. It was different to Mum’s; it wasn’t as long, it’s very quick. Mum had rosary the night before and then she had the church service. Yeah, Mum’s was better; but that’s not what he wanted, so they each had what they wanted. His ashes have been divided and half of the ashes are with my Mum, in the grave with Mum. The other half are here at home. None of my sisters were interested in the ashes.’

‘My mother-in-law went from home, you know. She went from her backyard where she’d sit all the time and have coffee with me. They had her service out in the backyard and then from there to the cemetery. That was nice: yes, simple but nice. They didn’t have another service at the cemetery: just had a service at the house. The whole three of them had that: the mother-in-law, the father-in-law, and their daughter – fifteen years ago – she had the same. I don’t know about my brother-in-law; I didn’t go to that. I think he just went from the funeral parlour to the crematorium.’

Adjustment

Marion has not experienced any change in religious beliefs since the death of either parent. ‘I believe there’s a God. When my Dad was sick, at the hospital that day I kept telling him to, “Let go: let go and go with Mum; Mum’s waiting for you”, and then in the afternoon he said to me, “Your mother’s here; she’s got angel wings on”. I said, “Yeah; I can see her”. He said, “And God’s waiting to take her”. I said I could see them. It blasted the hell out of me, you know. I couldn’t see them, but he could see them, you know what I mean? He must have been going, you know. I said, “Yeah, yeah; I can see it”. “No; no, you can’t, no”. He was telling me to help him find the sky and I didn’t know what he was talking about. “I can’t find the sky; help me find the sky”. “What do you want the sky for?” I never knew he was dying; I thought he’d get over that pneumonia.’

Marion is not certain where her mother is now, but hopes she is with her own parents and brother. ‘Where she wanted to be, I hope: up above. I hope she’s happy; I just hope where she is, she is happy, you know. I don’t know about an afterlife. Does anyone know? I guess it’s
the same with Dad. I think my sisters would rather him be in hell. They didn’t even want him in the cemetery with Mum; they tried to get a court order to get him removed. I get short fused and I bite; just let them try! I don’t take nothing from them; know what I mean?”

The prominent sideboard in Marion’s dining room now serves as a shrine to her parents. The left side features a large photograph of her mother surrounded by several personal items, including her mother’s spectacles, other photographs and memorabilia. The right side features a large photograph and similar personal items relating to her father, including the container with the other half of his cremated remains. Earlier in her bereavement, Marion would take her father’s ashes to bed with her for comfort. Through her shrine, Marion and her family’s thoughts are regularly focussed on her parents.

Marion says she has developed an interest in embalming since her parents died. She believes that all bodies are embalmed prior to any funeral. ‘I just felt like doing an embalming course. I know where the college is, but I have to work two weeks at an undertaker’s place first, so I rang up the undertaker who did my mother and father and they said they’d be willing to give me two weeks there. Some people think that’s a bit morbid, you know, but I’d like to help the grieving families and explain to them what I went through. Oh, I hope it could be helpful to other people one day: it might and it might not, I don’t know. I’m not ready for that yet; I’m not going to do the course until next year, after that, I should be ready.’

Cemetery

Marion’s parents are interred in a family grave in an older Catholic-monumental section of a large public cemetery. ‘The grave’s been there for over sixty years. My grandfather got put in there and then Mum’s Mum when she died, and then Mum last year. So we had it all done up: the marble headstone and all polished, and a picture and all put on there.’

Marion believes that as time passes, it is becoming easier to visit her parents’ grave. ‘It’s just time, you know. I’ve been a lot better since I’ve been seeing a counsellor; he’s helped me a real lot, you know. Yeah, I laugh and joke; I’m not morbid all the time. I was worse than what I am now before I went and saw him, you know; he helped me a lot. I just talk about the family: talk about my sisters, you know, what they were like and how my mother and father were; we’d have a walk around the cemetery and he’d come to my parents’ grave, you know. It was good to sit down and talk.’

‘It’s really important to me to go to my mother and my father’s grave and talk to them, you know: sit there, clean the grave, put fresh flowers there and talk. I spend a couple of hours there and then go home. There are a few other people – a brother who’s dead – that I visit.’

‘I’m at ease when I’m at the cemetery; it’s a peaceful place. I feel close to my mother and father and I feel sad because they’re not with me any more. I hate to leave there.’

Visitation

‘I visit Mum and Dad’s grave every Monday, Wednesday, Friday and on the weekend, every week. I used to go three times with Dad, to visit Mum and I just kept the tradition going; that’s continued through. We used to go three times a week to make sure there was fresh flowers.’

‘I just brush the stones back, you know. I keep them all together and take the vases out and clean them with a rag, put them back and do the headstone. When Dad and I used to go and
visit there, I'd put the flowers there and clean the grave. Then he'd say, “Oh, you can go off there to the mausoleum, to have a look while I talk to your mother”. So I just left him there, you know, for about fifteen or twenty minutes and came back and got him.”

Marion maintains that she spends ‘a couple of hours there, every time’ she visits the cemetery. ‘If some of the flowers are dead, I replace them; I always take more flowers when I go. I don’t pray; I just sit and talk to them. I talk to them as a couple, just about life and how the others are carrying on, you know, about his will and everything. I said, “You’re not going to get your last wish, because they’re fighting over the will, you know”. He left everything to me; now they’re fighting about it. I said, “You’re not going to get your last wish”. Most of the time I’m there, I’m just talking to them.’

According to Marion, ‘They just wanted to visit Mum without Dad being there. Well, they don’t go any more. I can tell if they’ve been. I’ll go three times a week and I’ll go on the weekend. I know what flowers I put there.’

‘On a Sunday, my daughter comes: she’s seventeen. We leave the car at the kiosk and we walk down to the grave. You might think we’re a bit morbid, but she likes to visit the children’s section too, on the way down and if there’s no flowers on one, she’ll take some from what we’ve got and she’ll put it there: yes. “Poor thing; they’ve got no flowers”. The other visits: I’m on my own.’

‘I’ll keep going; I promised my father I’d keep going for him. It is a bit easier to visit the cemetery now than what it was: not a whole lot easier, but it has got a little bit easier along the way.’
JEWISH FUNERAL FOLLOWS BROTHER’S SUICIDE

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Psychosocial history

Naomi was born in Melbourne thirty-seven years ago, the eldest of four children. She has never married, has no children and lives alone. After stockbroking for twelve years, she has managed her own consultancy business for about five years. Of her career, Naomi says, ‘I went from one stress situation to another.’

Naomi is Jewish, ‘but not orthodox’. She is not a member of a synagogue and only goes about twice a year. ‘I would consider that we’re traditional; that is, it’s in our heart. We observe to the best of our ability the high holidays, which just involves going to synagogue, family meals and things like that. I certainly go to synagogue on two of the holiest days: the Day of Atonement and New Year. My mother would do the same; my father is less observant. I think there are a number of reasons why he doesn’t really go to synagogue, but we share the spirit of it: it’s the family, it’s the getting together. It’s a time of remembering those who are no longer with us, that makes us all get together and try to be some kind of observing Jews at very important times in the Jewish calendar.’

Bereavement

One of Naomi’s two brothers took his own life eight months ago. ‘Simon was thirty years old; he was also single and had no dependents. He had been working most recently on a part-time basis, helping my parents in their family business. He was a young, energetic, passionate man: creative, artistic, beautiful and generous. He was just a beautiful human being.’

‘He was very secretive: no, not secretive, but I don’t think he was able – for whatever his own reasons – to talk to us openly and honestly about what was truly going on in his mind. He had self-diagnosed himself as schizophrenic. He probably had a fear of discussing openly with us and with people in the medical profession what was going on, for fear of being put into an institution or of sedation. You know how certain sectors of the community deal with mental disorder or mental illness, in a lot of cases. And he really didn’t believe he was unwell. But I would never have believed that five years later, that that’s what would have come out of this situation.’

Simon died in the car, of carbon monoxide inhalation. ‘He got the information from the Internet. We found a multitude of pages from the Internet on ways and means of dying.’

‘If it was going to happen, I think we would’ve all been more prepared – or at least better understood – if it had happened two or three years ago, because of his mental state. He was more ill then; his bipolar mood swings were far more obvious, because of more erratic behaviour. I guess, on reflection you think, “Shit: why now, when things appeared to be
worse two or three years ago? Why now, when they seem to be calming down or reaching some kind of balance?" He seemed to be coping with life better now – in what he showed us externally – than he was two or three years ago."

'There were no indications that he may have been contemplating taking his life. We were concerned, but he had a conversation with Mum and he reassured her that he never would. But he wasn't happy, because he said the medication suppressed his creative field. He couldn't create his music; he couldn't create art. He had little interest in the sort of things that were his life before he became ill and that in itself caused him the unhappiness that he kept to himself a lot. We always feared that depression, but we didn't think it was going to happen, because he assured Mum it wouldn't.'

'I really think that we are fortunate. Apart from having been fortunate to have known, loved and had him in our physical life, I think that we are really fortunate that he was beautiful in his death: in his passing. The note that he left behind for all of us was beautiful; it just expressed his love for the family. He said, "I'm sorry that my life has come to this; this is not the way I want my life to be. I don't want to cause you pain; I want you to be able to get on with your lives". So he left us as beautifully as he could in his situation, to leave us as little pain as humanly possible. He went in the kindest, most gentle way, as opposed to something like jumping off the bridge. Dad found him and Mum and I were two seconds behind. It was like, "I chose to do this for myself. I chose to go quietly, as peacefully as I could. I've chosen to do this and I don't want you to have to worry about where I am, or what I've done". The police report gets closed; it's not like he was never found or he had a revolting end. Do you know what I mean? All of this follows through from the nature of the person that we knew and love and I think, in some ways, that's why we're allowed to be a little bit more peaceful.'

**Other losses**

Naomi's grandmother died twelve years ago and her grandfather followed nine years ago. She says that her grandmother's death definitely had an impact. 'I was absolutely devastated and traumatised by her death. I don't know whether it was just because it was the first real important death that I'd experienced. I think it's a combination of that and other circumstances. I had really devoted a lot of my time to visiting them and I was really just lost: absolutely lost without her, and totally devastated. She was also a beautiful woman.'

'My grandfather's death probably didn't devastate me as much. I guess I was surprised that he survived as long as he did without my grandmother, because they'd been married for so many years. I was probably more prepared for his death; I was less prepared for my grandmother's death. I mean, I knew that she was old and unwell and had probably given up the will to live for a long time, but I was definitely not prepared for her death at the time that she died. I didn't expect that phone call, to say come to the hospital. I think when we got the call we presumed it was my grandfather, because he had a weak heart and he was unwell; they were both in hospital at the time. When Mum and Dad called to say that it was actually my grandmother, I just went quite beresk. I was the last one to see her alive; I'd been to visit her and I told her that Mum would be in tomorrow: to eat and be a good girl and, "What can I bring you in tomorrow?" They hadn't lost any of their senses in anyway, so I think that it was a shock and I was very traumatised by that.'

My grandfather's death was more in the course of nature, I guess. He was old; he'd been sick. He'd had major surgery that we didn't think he'd survive, but he survived many years, including three years without her that none of us ever believed that he would. But he was sick in hospital and we really were anticipating his death.'
'I also had a very close girlfriend who died pretty suddenly of cancer four years ago, but she wasn’t as close to me as my grandparents were. It was unexpected, but my life had changed; we weren’t as close. She wasn’t actually living in Melbourne at the time and hadn’t been for a while. But I don’t think I was as traumatised by that; I’m not quite sure why.'

Naomi is adamant that the loss of her grandparents and girlfriend did not help prepare her for the loss of her brother. ‘No way: absolutely, no way! It was totally, totally different. I believe that nothing can ever prepare you for the loss, be they sick or healthy. It is just such a shock to the system: particularly I guess, the circumstances of Simon’s death (the fact that he took his own life) and I guess for all of us it was just a total shock. He had been unwell; he’d been properly diagnosed as being bipolar and had been suffering with a bit of depression, but that had been going on for about five years.’

Funeral

Simon was buried in a specific Jewish cemetery, without a prior service at the synagogue. ‘Normally, we’d have a service in the chapel, or the little sort of synagogue, at the cemetery and then the burial. We specifically requested that the service not be held in the chapel. There are separate orthodox and liberal Jewish cemeteries. Cremation is not actually the Jewish way, but some Jews do get cremated; they go in the liberal area. So do some that are buried who may marry a Jew, but they don’t convert; they may have lived a Jewish life, but they can’t be buried in the orthodox part.’

‘Normally, the service is held in the chapel with the coffin present and various prayers and possibly a eulogy are read and then the family and the other mourners follow the coffin in a procession out of the chapel to the gravesite. We specifically requested that if possible, we have a graveside funeral rather than the traditional one. That was permitted; I believe it is something that is entirely up to the rabbi conducting the service.’

‘It was totally emotional. We just did not want – if at all possible – to be in that situation. The chapel is very cold and very depressing in itself. In the chapel, the immediate family – the immediate mourners – would have to sit on small stools on display in front of everybody. And the coffin is in the chapel, just covered with a black cloth and the rabbi says various prayers and it’s all sort of there, in your face. The mourners sit as they would in a synagogue: ladies on one side and men on the other and then the coffin is wheeled to the grave. It’s quite a procedure: a noisy procession. It’s quite a traumatic thing and it can be worse the greater the distance that you have to walk from the chapel. And now that the cemetery’s filling up, the distance between grave and chapel seemed like a two-hour walk to me. So we decided as a family that if we couldn’t have a graveside funeral, we’d probably go to the liberal side or to another cemetery where we could’ve had music and done whatever we wanted to do. We would’ve possibly gone through the procedure of finding a rabbi who would’ve allowed it, once we’d found out that it is possible. A lot of people don’t know that it’s possible, so they don’t request it and a lot of people also won’t break with tradition. So that’s the way it was done.’

‘I certainly remember arriving there and walking from the entrance (which is near the chapel) with a number of people holding us up, to the gravesite where the funeral took place. As much as I really tried to listen to what the rabbi was saying, part of it was done in Hebrew. He is a very gentle, gentleman. I think he said some English words, but in my own mind, I just really wasn’t there. I vaguely remember it, but it was almost as though we were in a space of our own and it felt like there were hundreds of people around us. I know, because I was told that
there were a lot of people, but I really don’t remember the service or his words. I do remember standing there; I know that I was at my brother’s funeral, but –.

'We have a special Jewish burial service (the Chevra Kadisha) and the man came and it was all arranged from home. We didn’t even have to leave the house. The man that organises it is just such a wonderful caring person. At Jewish funerals, you don’t bring flowers and the coffin is a simple pine box. The idea is that you come in with nothing and you go away with nothing. Jewish people get buried as soon as possible; if a person dies in the morning, you’ll usually find the funeral is by that afternoon. Simon died in the evening and there was to be a coroner’s inquest. Quite often, in cases like this they ask for autopsies. Autopsies are against the Jewish belief. We got around that; there are very few cases that don’t get around it. The Chevra Kadisha usually handles avoiding the autopsy; that’s something that the family, under normal circumstances, doesn’t have to get involved with.'

'I remember one case where a family had to get involved to stop an autopsy, because there was nobody with her when she died. She was a young girl and both her parents were deceased and she was an only child. A neighbour who happened to be a friend – or somebody who lived in the street – was walking past her house in the morning. He saw her on her front doorstep and she was already dead. I know that there was quite a procedure and a process to avoid the autopsy. There was quite a delay in the funeral because there was nobody with her; there were no circumstances that anybody could find. They had to try and find a doctor who could substantiate the fact that she was a serious asthmatic to avoid going through an autopsy, otherwise there was nothing that could be done. And I think from memory that’s what happened. They actually found a doctor, but it was quite a problem because she didn’t go to see a regular doctor. But it hadn’t been long before that, that she’d had a major asthma attack and ended up in hospital on a respirator. So proof of that, plus some doctor that had seen her on the odd occasion, was enough. But under normal circumstances, it is something that the family does not have to get involved with; it is usually handled by Chevra Kadisha and doctors. It’s just totally against the law.'

'Being an organ donor was against the law for a long time. I don’t think it stands with the orthodox, but there is now a Jewish registry. They ask in the Jewish news media for people to become a donor. In Judaism, if a person is injured (let’s say they lose a limb) then that limb is actually buried in a grave in the cemetery and when they die, the rest of the body goes in the same gave.'

'Simon’s funeral was held in the early afternoon of the next day. We were lucky in that it was a beautiful sunny day, which made it just that little bit more bearable. The coffin is usually covered with a black cloth and there was a Star of David in the centre. The Star of David was embroidered in white and it was just so bright: so bright, it was amazing.'

'It was a new rabbi at the synagogue and he didn’t even know us; we met him just before the funeral. We spoke with him briefly and we asked him not to hold a eulogy, because he didn’t know Simon. It seemed very superficial for a rabbi to come along and make up a speech about him. I said that if everybody who would be there knew him, then it wouldn’t be necessary to tell them how good he was, because they already knew.'

'At his funeral, I wasn’t in denial that he had passed away, so I don’t think I needed it to concrete in my mind that this was a reality. I don’t believe there was anything really peaceful: maybe there was, a little bit. Maybe when somebody passes away, then a process has to begin. I think it’s something that you dread, so once it’s over you’re relieved when that part of the process is done; it’s something you don’t have to talk about or worry about any more. I think
the only thing the funeral did for me was let me say, "Well it's done; it's done now". It is a definite finalisation."

"Jewish funerals are pretty basic: very, very simple. There are no flowers: no decoration. You get there and the hole's been dug and the soil is there to the left – or to the right – with the shovels there. The coffin is lowered by the gravediggers and then, it is the deed of the family to put in the first shovels of soil. There is always a small envelope of Jerusalem soil and that gets scattered on the coffin first. The men do that; it is not really acceptable for women, but when we discussed it with the rabbi, I asked if it is actually against the law or whether it's just one of those things that isn't done. He said, "If you want to, you can". It was actually quite interesting, because I did. I got my sister and we just held the shovel together and picked it up. For us, it was important. My Dad had to do it and my other brother had to do it; there was no way that Mum could've done it. I just think it was important for us: that we do it too, as long as it wasn't against the law. And it was actually quite interesting, because I went to get the shovel and my uncle tried to shove me away and said, "What are you doing?" and I sort of said, "Excuse me; I'm allowed", but most women wouldn't want to do it. The woman has a different role in the Jewish religion. The woman is the house-maker and the provider and the keeper of the children and all of the nice traditional women's roles, and that is not one; but yes, we did that."

"We have a tradition where they bring little stools to the house. When you're in mourning, you're supposed to humble yourself before everybody that visits. You're not supposed to sit or stand higher than the people that come to show respect and therefore, you sit on these stools that look like kindergarten chairs. The immediate family sits on those stools during the shivah."

"I last saw Simon at some stage during the week before he died; it would've been within the week. I know that a lot of people see the funeral as a time to say goodbye, but for me it wasn't; it wasn't a goodbye. It's not the way I look at it, in any way."

**Adjustment**

"The day of the funeral, Mum and Dad didn't open their shop at all; they just put a notice in the door. They didn't even open the shop the day after. People were very sympathetic; many of them knew Simon. I didn't go back to my business for two weeks. At that stage, I had two other business partners; they were very understanding and my clients were too."

Naomi insists that her life has changed considerably and she is definitely a different person since Simon's death. "I was always an emotional person, but I definitely cry more now than I used to. I love laughter just as much as I did before, though sometimes I find that it's harder to laugh. I think I take life a little bit more seriously now than I did before and you look at people differently. For me, to go out and laugh just feels so good. I love those laughter moments: I treasure them. They go from head to toe, because they are just the absolute extreme from the real pain that I'm feeling and that pain is with me everyday, every minute; it just doesn't go away."

"I think the people who know me well, definitely notice that change in me and I think other people who are either too quick to judge, or only think they know me, probably look at me differently. In some ways, I know that I am more emotionally vulnerable and weaker than I was. I could in some ways be broken far easier, but in other ways, be it business and within myself, I think I'm a lot stronger than I was. I'm a little less tolerant and a little less patient than I used to be. Some people, who don't really know me very well or who are a bad judge
of character, could easily presume that I am hardened by it; whereas I’m not. I don’t believe I’m hardened at all; I’m just a little bit more determined. You know, I’ve got a little bit of his passion inside me and I just don’t want people to walk all over me or use and manipulate me.’

‘I’ve become less tolerant of trivial situations – because they’re just not important – but much more tolerant in serious situations – because they are important. He was a very understanding, people’s person and in his memory, I guess I find myself being more tolerant of people that I may not have been tolerant of before, out of respect for his memory. But it’s not a conscious thing.’

Naomi does not believe that Simon’s death has had any significant impact on family relationships. ‘I think we are all incredibly bound: all of us. It’s like there’s a common thread through our hearts. That went for all six and certainly goes for the five of us now; I don’t believe it’s changed. I think, in the very early stages, it certainly made us closer than we were, but I really don’t believe that you could make our family any closer than it always was. It’s just one of those unique things.’

‘As a unit, we would all be together at anytime and pull our weight to help one another. There would never be a situation in our family of seriously not talking. I speak to my sister everyday; I probably speak to my brother every couple of weeks, but that’s not for anything else other than his life and my life. My relationship with Mum and Dad is probably even stronger and closer than it was, but it was close before.’

‘In the very, very early days, we were inseparable: all of us. I guess the sad part through trauma – especially the death of somebody who is truly missed in life – is that the world goes on. But you can make a choice; you can either go down the drain – and that would just have been so easy and in some ways could still be so easy – or you can decide you’ve got to go on. So life returns to where it was before, if you make that choice. I guess that’s where the family unit is now; it’s back to where it was before.’

Naomi’s faith has not changed significantly in response to Simon’s death. ‘I don’t pray and I don’t question if there’s really a God, on a daily basis, but I certainly did when I was sitting in synagogue. I thought, “What the hell am I here for?” I guess it’s made me understand – in some ways – a lot less than I understood before, because now I’ve got so many questions that we’ll never have answers to. But it hasn’t really changed my faith; I mean, I’ll still go to synagogue, but I guess I probably believe less than I did before. I’ve lost a little bit of that, though not about that Jewish faith thing, the family bond and the things that we love doing at home. But I would say that I’ve lost a little bit of the need to go to synagogue, even on the high holidays at this point in time. If there was a call to go to synagogue tomorrow, I think I’d probably make a choice and say, “No”, because I’m not quite sure what place being in that synagogue has any more.’

‘I’m not quite sure where Simon is now; he could be in a number of places. There are times that I believe his spirit is definitely around. I believe that he’s somewhere around, without a doubt and that we are connected in some way. But I really don’t know how much of that is just my own belief – in that part of him now lives inside us all and certainly inside me – or whether there is a spirit or a soul or something flying out there. I’m not sure; I guess that’s something else that I’ve started questioning, you know, whether there is a spirit world or not, or a reincarnation. I just know that the person I knew and the person that is no longer with me, is not suffering in this physical world; that I know.’
The traditional Jewish view is actually very beautiful – in that the soul lives on – and I guess, without being a traditional – or looking at it from a religious point of view – I think that’s probably how I really do feel. But I’m not able to be definite about where the soul actually is. I mean, his soul lives on; he is gone from this physical world, but there is plenty of him and plenty about him that is still around. So I still feel him very much in the physical sense, because of a number of reasons: his room, his things, paintings on the wall, art, photos: all of those kind of things. He’s in my heart.

The Jewish faith has a thirty-day mourning period. Nobody actually tells you that you have to be any different, or tells the parents not to go to a wedding, or a function and have a great time: to be sinister. It’s actually saying that for twelve months you’re not going to feel like it. So maybe the religion actually caters to what a normal grieving process is for anyone. I mean, twelve months after the fact, maybe it will be easier for Mum and Dad in particular, to go to a wedding and go to a function and relax. But now, they couldn’t get up and be carefree.

I would imagine it is harder – it’s something totally different – for a parent to lose a child. I mean, it’s been very traumatic for me to lose my brother, but it is something completely different for a parent to lose a child. The religion respects the proximity of the relationship. I mean, child/parent: parent/child, is the closest bond you’re ever going to get in life and it will take a period of adjusting to get used to this new life: a new existence, without that person. I think it basically says, “It’s all OK; everything that you feel is normal”. It’s allowing you to go through this process – which is a normal process to go through – not having any expectations put on you; there is nobody that doesn’t understand. Even non-Jewish people certainly understand Mum and Dad; I mean they’re grateful for them attending something that is important to them and being there and sharing the occasion, but nobody questions their inability to get up and dance. To actually get up and dance takes a lot more than just functioning as you normally would.

I don’t think that everybody understands death and the process that goes with it. What they don’t acknowledge is the individual situation every time. Just because you can lose a grandparent and go to a funeral and be back at work tomorrow, doesn’t mean that I’m going to survive the loss of my cat. You know, it depends on the person and on the importance of the relationship. Every situation is so totally different: you function differently.

Cemetery

Simon is in the orthodox cemetery. There was a time when, if you took your own life, they wouldn’t bury you in the orthodox section, or if they did they would put you right at the back. But this was a different case, because he was ill and it happened through the illness; they didn’t treat it like a normal self-inflicted death. There used to be a lot more trauma connected with that sort of dying than there is today.

The Jewish way is to buy your own grave, but some people are not prepared. It was a conversation that we’d had in the family at odd times and nobody really wanted to discuss it. I know that up until my brother’s death, Mum and Dad certainly didn’t have anything; since, they got themselves a plot next to my brother.

I’ve now gone through three phases of what the cemetery actually means to me. Very early on – like within the first couple of weeks – I was dreading it. It was such an issue to go to the cemetery and I kept saying, “It’s just a place: it’s just a place. It’s not where he is. That’s not where he is; it’s just a physical thing”. It is traumatic; it is an absolute reminder, every time,
of the truth. It is not in any way peaceful. The cemetery can be peaceful because it's quiet, but it's not peaceful in that particular place.'

'There isn't a monument on his grave yet. The marker there is just a piece of wood with the name, which is very typical; that's really what happens until a monument is erected. It's just a mound of soil, or you can order a metal cover, which protects it from the rain and stuff like that. So yes, it does have a cover over it and there's just a wooden plaque with the name.'

'But then, I learned another thing that the cemetery means to me. On one visit, when I came home, I was quite emotional: almost traumatised, because I realised that it's the only place I know that I can identify as where he was: is, or is around. It's like the only place that I could identify in a physical sense with the last existence of him as a person. That made me understand why people do go to the cemetery. I could never understand why people go all the time; and I still couldn't go all the time. But the people who do go every week, go because they're looking at that place and saying, 'That's where that person is; that's where that person lies', and therefore to visit and see and communicate or contact that person, they must be in that place.'

To Naomi, there was 'never a question' of Simon not being buried in a specific Jewish cemetery. 'Simon did leave a note. I know for a fact that he didn't think he'd be able to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. I'm pretty sure it's because he took his life that he didn't think he'd be able to be buried as a Jew. And really, for a great part of his life and even through his illness at various times, Judaism was really important to him - not that he was any more orthodox than anybody else was. But there were times when he really did believe that he had a calling almost; he had a real essence about him. So I think if he had a choice, he would be very happy that he was buried as a Jew.'

Naomi does not feel especially close to Simon at the cemetery. 'I feel more distant probably, but you can always feel different things when you're at the cemetery. It's normally a chilly, freezing cold place; there is not a time that you ever go there in your T-shirt, because it's not warm there. But on the day of his funeral, it was just absolutely beautiful; the sun was shining and the birds were flying and the bugs were around. Every time we've gone to the cemetery to visit him, it's always been a beautiful sunny day. You can stand there and feel the sun directly on your face and you can say, 'The sun's shining on me: it's Simon'. It's a beautiful thing, but whether it's real or not, I don't know.'

Naomi does not feel any closer to God at the cemetery. 'It's not a holy place, but is a religious place, in terms of the standard of what goes on there. But I don't feel closer to God, because I question him at the moment. To me, the cemetery is not sacred (as in holy, like the synagogue) but I respect it. I would never do anything that would show any disrespect: as much as I'd love to go there, light up a cigarette and blast some music. At the synagogue, you can have a wedding; there are some happy memories attached to a synagogue. There are no happy memories in the cemetery. There are lots of people we know who are buried there; it definitely has heritage value. If there wasn't a Jewish cemetery as such and you were able to be buried anywhere, then I don't think it would have any heritage value.'

'I personally would never have just gone to the cemetery for the hell of going to the cemetery. I've always gone to the cemetery because it was - like I said before - the high holidays or anniversary or something like that. If it so worked out that Mum and Dad said that they were going to go to the cemetery and I could meet them, I would go and meet them at the cemetery. The monument is being organised at the moment and next month we will have it consecrated by a rabbi and we'll all probably go to the cemetery.'
Visitation

'Visiting her brother's grave is still a very difficult experience for Naomi. 'I don’t think the pain for that particular loss is ever going to be any easier; all that we really do is survive or learn how to cope. I probably survived in the first instance and now I’m coping. I think life changes and you have to work around it and you do, to the best to your ability. There’s always going to be a memory: a reminder and an acknowledgment of his pain that nobody ever understood. I guess that’s the hard thing and the difference with mental illness. While cancer itself is devastating, harsh and it's physically destructive, because you can see it and feel it, you can identify with somebody who has it. Their body changes and you’ve got something you can relate to, whereas with mental illness and somebody in Simon's situation, you can never quite grasp it. You can’t really say, “Well at least they're no longer in the pain that they were dealing with”. You know that that must have been the case, because of what they did, but you’ve got no physical proof.'

'Jewish law actually states that it is more important to go to the cemetery on important days like birthdays, memorial days, prior to high holidays and the anniversary of the death. It is not required to go daily, weekly or on a fortnightly basis and have a routine. Some people would actually condemn frequent visitation to the cemetery. After a funeral, the immediate family is not permitted to go to the cemetery for thirty days or four weeks, so as a family we all went four weeks later. After the thirty days, we have a special service.'

'I wouldn’t be surprised if the thirty days was to be gentle to the mourners, because the religion and things that you’re meant to follow seem to be pretty kind to the individual. So maybe it’s because every time you visit the grave it’s another sort of emotional upheaval that you go through. Maybe it’s something to do with trying to remove yourself from that for thirty days to be totally engrossed in yourself, because that’s really what it’s all about. I mean, that’s why they say the mourning periods are stipulated, because it is hard to get through life: it is. It’s a process that destroys part of you and you do change: you are vulnerable, you are weaker and I think the religion says that it is OK, that it is normal.'

'As time goes on, I don’t think that I’m ever going to be a frequent visitor; it is far too traumatic. I don’t know whether I still believe that it’s the only place I can find him; I just know it has to be there. I don’t know that I’d have it any other way, unless there was ever a Jewish lawn cemetery or something like that, which is very peaceful and pretty. I can’t identify with anything at the cemetery, although the monument has been incredibly important to us.'

Naomi says that she would have been to Simon’s grave ‘maybe only half a dozen times’. She is adamant that her religion does not influence the frequency of her visits. 'Whether I visit frequently or infrequently is entirely up to me. I don’t find that it is a lack of respect not to go there. I guess I feel him and think about him everyday; I think about him probably fifty times a day. I mean, there are times that I dance with him in my lounge room; yeah, he’s with me all the time. I don’t want to make it a routine in my life to go there, because he’s everywhere; he’s not just there. So I guess I don’t have to identify with it as being the only place that I can find him; I just couldn’t; I'd be destroyed, because it is a really, really hard thing: a heart wrenching experience to go. I don’t want it ever to change from that. I don’t want to ever be able to walk up to his gravesite and not cry and not feel and not hurt. I don’t want to ever get used to it to the point where you go every Sunday and wipe it down and clean it: and that’s what you do next Sunday as well. I don’t want it to become a routine that I just get used to.'
'I think it is traditional when you visit a gravesite (in Jewish religion) to put a pebble on the grave as a mark of respect and to mark the fact that you've been. I don't spend a lot of time there; I know when my grandmother passed away I thought that I would. I always talked about taking a deck chair and sitting down for a whole afternoon and sitting by her side, so to speak. But I guess I've grown up a little bit since then and matured and maybe become a bit more spiritual and I know that I can't do that now, because Simon's everywhere else, you know.'

'There are times when I wish I had a specific prayer that I could say; maybe that will come, or maybe that will happen. I just have really nice, pleasant thoughts about him and shed a tear and I guess I say, "I love you", but I say that everyday. So for me, I guess it's a respect: a respect for the place as a final resting-place, but I haven't yet gone through all the mental processes about what sort of role it really takes and what it really means. When I'm there, I identify with him and his last moments of pain. It's not a future thing; it's definitely a past thing and a definite loss for me. It becomes real; it's there and there's the proof.'

'When I visit, I don't think I'd spend any more than five minutes: tops. It's not that I can't stand being there, it's a matter of not being quite sure what to do when I stand there. You know, even if I was to say a traditional Jewish prayer, that would probably only take a minute: maximum and there's nothing else to do, I mean there's nowhere to sit. There have been a lot of new burials since his funeral, because it's a new area of the cemetery. So there's a lot of death visible around him, which I guess is a fact of life for a cemetery, but because they're all relatively new, there aren't many tombstones. It's not very pleasant to stand there and look at the graves behind and read familiar names; there's a Naomi there and the names of my parents and both brothers are on other graves. So it's really quite a hard thing to stand there, also knowing that the two spots next to him are for Mum and Dad. I picture myself very, very briefly (in a millionth of a second) visiting Simon and Mum and Dad together, then that's it: I've got to go. I don't think I have to stand there for that long; I don't think that he would expect it and I don't think there's anything to stay for.'

'When the tombstone's up, maybe one day I will go there and sit down and talk to him and sit on his grave, or lie down and bask in the sun or something and do something really wild and wacky, which is what I'd love to do. But being in the cemetery you've got to come down several pegs; you can't light up your cigarette and just chew on the grass, because you'd be condemned as a lunatic in about three seconds and if the rabbi catches you, you'd be kicked out anyway. But I guess if I had my choice, that's what I'd like to do.'

**Monumental masons**

'I think monumental masons need to be educated about servicing the mourner better: without a doubt. I mean, they've got a lot to learn about compassion and understanding and knowing people. I think it is crucial that they know and understand and learn how to service people properly.'

'Each situation I'm sure is different. You know, when an elderly grandparent dies you have to pick a straight monument, maybe black or a grey marble. But in Jewish religion, you know that there's a Star of David and there are certain things that go on it; it goes to a form, I guess. It's the same with Greeks or Italians. But when you're talking about somebody like Simon, who was a unique individual, you couldn't just give him a black piece of marble with the Star of David and normal writing; you have to go a little bit different, because that's the kind of person that he was. So you need somebody who is prepared to listen and understand. You don't want somebody who says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah; that'll be right mate", and then it's
nothing like what you’re looking for and you’ve got to go through the same thing all over again. It’s so traumatic; it’s one of those things that are a necessity; it has to be done because of our religion, but nobody wants to do it. Nobody wants to have to think about what needs to be written. Nobody wants to really have to go through the process of picking a colour or looking at fifty-five photos of other monuments, while they say, “Now, which of these do you want it to look like?” “I don’t want it to look like any of them. Listen to me”. I think that they could learn how to service a little bit better and be a little bit more compassionate and understanding.’

“We went to several stonemasons. The main reason we did was because we’ve got such a special need. What we’ve got is a situation where we needed to be able to communicate and have some understanding. Simon was artistic, creative and young and these were things that we wanted to reflect in the monument and it was also for us; I mean, we’ve got to go there, you know.”

“If they haven’t got the colour you want, they tell you, “That’s not the right colour for you”, so you wipe them off and then you go and speak to the next person. The next person actually shits you, because there’s just no dynamic personality between you and they’re telling you what you should have and you’re saying, “But that’s not what I want”, so we go and talk to somebody else.”

“And then we finally found somebody who seemed to understand; he took the time and actually came to us with a load of samples and drew a sketch and looking at it we though, “Yeah, that’s what we want. Yeah, you’ve got the marble. Yeah, you get what we’re talking about”. He was not a Jewish man, but he does a lot of work at the cemetery; it wasn’t anything new to him. He just seemed to understand, because he belonged to the association and was recommended. I even said him, “Thank you, it is so pleasant to talk to you; you’ve been very helpful and very compassionate and understanding”, and he said, “Well that’s what I do; I’ve done this for so many years”, but he let us down completely. He never got back to us; he was supposed to come back with a quote, but didn’t. Three weeks later, after ringing him three times and leaving three messages, I eventually got him on the phone. He said, “You were one of the people that I was going to contact”. I said, “Thank you very much; what time are you working till tonight?” He said, “Seven thirty; but by six o’clock you’ll have it, I’ll fax it to you”. He never faxed; never rang, we never heard from him again.’

“In the meantime, Mum and Dad had been pestered by this Jewish man who does it for various people and we couldn’t get him off our backs, because one of his kids went to school with my brother. He said he really wanted to help Mum and Dad and do it more as a good deed; he wasn’t in it for the money. But Mum said, “Sorry: we’re basically committed to this guy”. He said, “Please, please let me help you; once he sends the thing through, let me just give you another quote and see if I can help you. I really want to help you”. We were saying, “Jeez: this is just ridiculous. We’re talking about something that we don’t want to do and we’re having to deal with it like a normal business transaction”.

“Then as it turned out, because the other guy never got back to us and this other gentleman was really persistent, we ended up saying, “You’ve got the job”. He said, “Here’s a picture; it will be just what you want. Just give me the words and leave the rest up to me”. But that’s not what we wanted; it wasn’t the right colour or the size. We didn’t want the Star of David; we wanted a treble clef instead. He was like the others. They don’t want to understand special needs; they’re used to just selling people a traditional, typical monument. He said his computer had about two hundred fonts, but not the one that we wanted. So there’s been about fifty faxes sent back and forth trying to get it right this time.'
CATHOLIC MOTHER LOVES BEING AT CHILDREN’S CEMETERY

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Psychosocial history

Donna is a functional manager within a large government service organisation. She was the third child born to a Catholic couple in Melbourne, just on twenty-seven years ago. Her brother was ten and her sister, six years old when Donna was born. She had a Catholic schooling and married in the Church two and a half years ago. Her husband is of an Italian Catholic family.

‘I’ve had a very good life in a lot of ways, but I had an alcoholic father and my mother had a couple of nervous breakdowns when I was around seven or eight. I didn’t know what was happening at the time, but as I’ve gotten older it’s become clear what happened and we’ve spoken about it. It was a very hard life. I can remember being very young and praying, “If you make Dad stop drinking, I promise I’ll be good; I’ll do this for you. I’ll come back to church, I promise. I’ll go every Sunday for the rest of my life”. I didn’t fulfil my end of the bargain, but I’ve been lucky. Dad hasn’t had a drink in five years. He’s an amazing man now. I love him, you know. So we’ve been touched by some good things, but unfortunately, probably by just by as many bad things as well.’

‘My brother told my parents when I was seven (and he was seventeen) that he was homosexual. We’re talking about a time when you just did not do that kind of thing and he also turned to drugs at the time. It was a very, very difficult time for my parents. It never made me think any less of my brother; I just adored him. I didn’t know about the drug problem until I was a bit older. As I got older, my brother told me things that happened to him when he was seventeen. He was very confused about what to do about these feelings that he had and the first person he went to tell was a priest (a family friend of ours). At the time, this priest basically told him that he was excommunicated: he couldn’t do that, it’s wrong: to get out of here and ignore his feelings. And I think, from that moment, I had a hell of a lot of questions. I think that was it for me; I was finding the Catholic religion very hypocritical. You know, I just look at it and tear my hair out sometimes. Sometimes I wish I was Anglican.’

Donna’s brother died within the same month that she was married. ‘He had been an HIV patient for about twelve or thirteen years and had done really well. He got really sick about two years before he passed away; that was when he developed full-blown AIDS. He was an absolutely amazing person, my brother. We were so close, even though he was ten years older than I was. He just idolised me from the day I was born, so of course I loved him. We were extremely close through my entire life and especially when he was diagnosed with HIV; I would have been only twelve or thirteen at the time. Being homosexual, he opened me to a whole different world that I never knew existed. But he didn’t tell anyone in the family for two years so; poor thing, he went through it all on his own.’
’He was an amazing person. He ran a house for people with AIDS, whose families disowned them and problems like that – unfortunately that happens – and I met this amazing group of people through him. Unfortunately most of them have passed on now.’

’My husband and I are very lucky. We’ve always been a very close couple, but we had to deal with my brother’s death so quickly after our marriage. I wouldn’t have blamed him if he had said, “Stop this; I’m out of here, I want an annulment”. But he supported me through all of that and I treated him terribly – I really did – and he put up with it all. Then I fell pregnant six months after that and I thought, maybe that was God’s way of giving me a new start and bringing me some happiness: and she did. Natalie was a blessing; our little surprise.

**Bereavement**

’I stopped working prior to having Natalie. I went on maternity leave and didn’t think I would’ve gone back; I was really enjoying being at home. She was fine and healthy and great: a normal child. I had a bad pregnancy and not a pleasant birth, but she was beautiful: a very healthy child. Everything was going along wonderfully. Then she came down with a fever in November, when she was five months old and couldn’t shake the fever. After a week of fever and ongoing doctor visits, we ended up taking her to the Children’s Hospital. They admitted her with a suspected urinary tract infection, but that turned out not to be the case. Then she was diagnosed as having glandular fever, which they say occurs very often in young children.’

’She was in hospital for about four weeks and wasn’t getting any better. The doctors didn’t really have any answers, but nobody thought there was any major thing wrong with her. We just thought everything would be OK, eventually. But then, one day out of the blue, she started to bleed from her mouth and her bottom: and that was it. That was on a Saturday and unfortunately with the way the hospitals are run these days, she couldn’t have a bone marrow test until the Monday. So she bled over the weekend and then on the Monday had the bone marrow test done. They suspected it might have been leukemia, which is quite rare in children that young. She was almost seven months old.’

’When they sat down with us on the Monday night (three days before Christmas) it wasn’t leukemia and we were pretty relieved about that. We thought that was pretty good, but unfortunately they weren’t smiling; she had a very rare blood disorder. There’s only been half a dozen cases known in Australia and it’s a disease that they don’t really know a lot about. She died thirteen days later.’

’We thought that Natalie was our crack at happiness, but to lose her then certainly raised a lot of questions like, “Why the hell is this happening to me? This can’t happen now; she was meant to be here. She was my happiness; she was meant to help me get through the rest of my life”. Then she got taken away as well. Oh, it’s a very, very difficult time: a very difficult time.’

’Since Natalie passed away, I’ve met people that have lost their child suddenly through SIDS and I’ve seen other people that have lost children that were sick from the day they were born. We’re a little bit in between. We really only had thirteen days to get used to the idea that she probably wasn’t going to make it: and that was right over Christmas. It was pretty awful: a pretty horrible Christmas Day last year and pretty horrible New Year’s Day. She passed away on the third of January.’
Right up until the fever, she was perfectly healthy and a beautiful little baby. There’s a photo of her at the gravesite and you wouldn’t even believe that she could possibly get sick and that’s only two weeks before she did. So it’s very frustrating; very frustrating to have such a rare disease and no research done in Australia. Yeah, it’s pretty horrible.

When they tried to explain that she had this disease, we just sat there completely baffled by everything they said. We didn’t understand any of it and there was no time. Because she was already so sick, chemotherapy started right then; we didn’t have any time to think about it, or discuss what we wanted. There was no choice in anything. It was just like: this is what’s happening and it’s happening now, and that’s it."

She was lying in her cot sleeping and real sick. When they left the room, I looked at my husband and said, “We’re going to lose her”, and he said, “I know”. I think that was probably out of fear that we said that. Then over the next couple of days, I think we tried to talk ourselves out of it, when they started the chemotherapy. I remember sitting there on New Year’s Eve, looking at her and it came the New Year and I looked at him and said, “Yeah, happy New Year; this is great”.

They had her on a lot of medication, because I didn’t want her in any pain obviously, so she was sleeping a fair bit and she had all these tubes in her body. I can’t even describe how many, but I couldn’t hold her; she just had to lie there and that’s just awful to think I couldn’t even hold her. About midnight, we tried so hard to talk ourselves into the fact that she was going to get better. But then around nine or ten o’clock in the morning on New Year’s Day, she just took this really bad turn for the worse; and then she only lasted another two days.

The hospital staff kept telling us that everything would be OK, because they’d just treated a little girl with the disease and she was OK. I don’t think they really realised until the night she passed away that there was no chance at all, so we still lived in hope all that time. I don’t think we really had much time to prepare at all. We knew nothing about the disease and there was no reading material or anything they could give us. It was horrible. It was Christmas and New Year time, so there was no social work department (they were on holidays); there was no priest (they were also on holidays) and the doctors had no idea what she really had. Only one doctor in the whole hospital had even heard of the disease.

They put her on the resuscitator machine and that was horrible. They kicked us out because they wanted to look at her and when we came back in they had already tubed her without even asking us, but they felt that’s what they had to do. I don’t really carry much anger towards the hospital about the whole thing, because I just don’t think they knew what to do. Because she was tubed, she started to blow up; she looked awful. She was very jaundiced and very swollen, because her liver and spleen had swollen; her face started to swell and she just didn’t look like Natalie. I think that’s when we started to realise how bad things really were, because everything was just changing before our very eyes.

Around eleven o’clock in the morning, I asked the doctor, “Is she going to make it? I need to know”, and he said, “There’s still a chance”. I said, “If she’s not going to make it, let’s end it now; let’s just do what we have to do”, because it was awful. And then about six o’clock, I called the professor in again, from the intensive care section and I said, “Look, she’s changing more and more; is she going to make it or not?” and he said, “She’s not going to make it”. I said, “You told me six hours ago there was a chance”, and he said, “Well, I’m telling you now there’s not”. I asked what our options were and he said, “You can leave her on the resuscitator and she might last another day or two, or you can take her off it and she could last thirty seconds or thirty minutes, but not much longer than that”. So we obviously had a very big
decision to make. I asked, “What would happen if we left her on?” and he said, “Well besides you getting more time with her, she’s not going to get any better; she’ll just get sicker and sicker”. We decided we didn’t want that to happen to her, so we told them to take her off the resuscitator. We were very lucky; she died in our arms. You know, we got to hold her while she passed away and that’s something we’re very grateful for; at least we were given that opportunity.’

‘You know, if there was any sign of hope, then it would obviously then be a completely different story, but if there was absolutely no chance, then I didn’t want her to suffer any longer. We were very fortunate because we didn’t just hold her, we actually bathed her and dressed her; many people don’t have that opportunity. I’m not one for seeing people after they pass away. I was there when my brother passed away and we spent three or four hours with him after that, but I didn’t want to view him again. I think that if Natalie had looked more like herself, then maybe I might have said goodbye again, but I didn’t want to remember her like that. I surround myself in photos of her when she was well and try really hard not to think of her in hospital.’

‘We got nothing from the hospital, you know. The nurse that looked after her was beautiful and gave us her footprints, her handprints and a poem, but then we were sent on our way with: “I’m very sorry that this has happened; we’ll take care of her; see you later”.’

‘I’ve spoken to a lot of bereaved parents now. You’re faced with so many decisions to make so quickly, you know. Those next two days were just so bad; the next day would probably be the worst day of my life. My husband and I were literally screaming at each other, because we wanted completely different things and we had no one and nothing to help us make any decisions. We had no guidance: nothing.’

‘Hospitals like the Children’s – unfortunately they lose children all the time in there – should be equipped with some sort of pamphlet, you know: even just a pamphlet. Maybe a lot of people would say that’s the last thing you want when walking out after just losing your child: you don’t want something shoved in your face. But my Mum and Dad were there. You’ve usually got someone else there: it’s not just you and your husband. They could even approach them and say, “Look; they might not want to hear this right now, but here’s a little pamphlet for them. They’ve got a lot of decisions to make in the next couple of days. This tells you some different options they’ve got and some things that could help”. We had to know what we wanted by the next day when our funeral director came.’

**Other losses**

‘My first grandfather (my Mum’s dad) died when I was five; that was a very big loss as I was close to him at the time. Then my grandmother (his wife) passed away when I was fourteen. Probably five years ago now, my Dad’s parents tragically passed away within twenty-one days of each other, so that was horrible. They were both sick and everyone knew it would be quick, but I don’t think anyone realised it was going to be that quick. They were great people; all of them were really great people.’

‘The only way that my brother’s death helped when we lost Natalie was that we knew who to contact for funeral arrangements. I still remember, with my brother I was devastated; I just wanted to die. We were just newly married and I don’t know how my marriage got through that first couple of months. It really affected my life, you know. It affected my relationship with my new husband and it affected my work. I couldn’t go to work, you know; it was shocking. When he passed away, I honestly thought that was going to be the worst loss I’d
ever have to experience, but I’m sure my brother wouldn’t mind me saying that it’s just not in the same realm as losing a child. There is nothing to compare to losing your own child; there’s absolutely no comparison. I adored my brother and I miss him, but when I speak about him I can still smile and laugh.’

‘He had a life. He was thirty-four years old – way too young – but he had a life and he lived life to the fullest. He was a great person who created opportunities for himself. But you don’t expect to lose a child; it’s never a possibility. I knew that I was going to lose my brother at some stage. There’s no cure so obviously I was going to lose him, but when it happened that didn’t make it any easier; I was still devastated for months.’

Funeral

‘Natalie’s funeral was very important to me. We had a family friend that’s a priest, who understands all my views and opinions; he did our wedding and my brother’s funeral. I wanted some certain things done in the service. I wanted the priest to stand up there and yell at God for me – that was really important to me. I didn’t want anyone telling me that she was in a better place or that this has happened for a reason. It was very important that I got my point across to him and he was pretty good, because he did it for me; so I was pretty rapt.’

‘We asked the priest to do the eulogy, but overall, the rest of the funeral arrangements were pretty much left up to me. Now unfortunately, I’ve had a bit of experience of this; with my brother, I did all the booklets and the service and everything for him. So I chose all the music, readings and the poem; I arranged the entire service. I don’t think I was all there on that day. It was bizarre, sitting there and actually writing out my daughter’s service; it was pretty weird. But it was the most beautiful service; I couldn’t have been happier.’

‘My husband carried her coffin out and that’s always quite emotional: seeing a man with a little white coffin. There was a great turnout: nine-hundred-odd people. We asked for a private burial. I would’ve liked it even a little bit more private than it was, but my husband’s family are Italian and they take ‘immediate family’ to include cousins and second cousins and third cousins. We just had close friends and families at the burial and I’m really glad. I still wish it was smaller, but it was fine at the time.’

‘The funeral was very, very important: very important and I wanted it to be really, really sad. I wanted everyone to be howling, because they should be, because it’s my little baby. A lot of those people had never met her, so it was important that everyone walked away feeling like they’d known her; that’s why we had a fairly lengthy type of eulogy. Even though she was only seven months, we tried to make it like everyone could share part of her life; that was very important. And it was very important that I had lots of flowers. That was something else everyone is so different on; we wanted donations for the Children’s Hospital, but I wanted donations and flowers.’

Adjustment

‘The initial period after she died was just the worst time. It’s a very, very difficult time. During this time, while we were organising the funeral my husband said to me, “I’ve come up with the reason why this has happened”. I said, “OK, let me hear it”. Now I don’t know how I feel about this, but it comforts him. He feels that my brother had a bit of a hand in taking her, because he never had a child and wasn’t ever going to have a child, but he loved children. And he feels like he actually had a hand in taking Natalie and he’s, sort of, looking at us saying, “You know, I’m sorry; but this was my chance at having my child”. Well, you know, I
just think that if my brother’s done that, then I reckon he’s a bit of a selfish bastard and I’ll lay him out when I see him, but that made my husband feel better. I don’t know if he still feels the same; this was two days after it happened and I think he desperately needed to find a reason why. At the time, that was the best answer for him, whereas I think I could ask why until the day I die and I don’t think I’ll ever know. Religion is a funny thing.

‘It was very important that we christened Natalie, especially as my husband is Italian; he’s a lot more religious than I am. The reason she made it to six months without being baptised was probably me, more than anything else: oh, and the fact that she didn’t fit into her christening dress. But when she got very sick; you know, you do turn. I can remember saying, “We need a priest; we need one here now!” It was quite important to me that she didn’t pass away without being baptised. It’s not like I thought she wouldn’t have gone to heaven or she wouldn’t be looked after; I mean she’s a tiny little baby, of course she would, but it was sort of important.’

‘We actually jumped on a plane straight after her funeral and flew up to Queensland for three weeks. In retrospect I can’t believe I did that, but I desperately needed to. I was very run down at the time and we just wanted to run away and bury our heads. We lost her in January and I went back to work in February. It’s coming up to the anniversary of when she got sick, so I’m going to have a couple of months off. I just think I need a bit of a break.’

‘Mum and Dad are still going strong. I don’t know how, when they’ve lost a son and a grand daughter now and they’ve both lost both their parents as well. So it’s pretty hard. My sister’s married and has three beautiful, fantastic children who I love and adore. I’m really close to them, especially to her seven-year-old daughter: we have a really special relationship.’

‘Emotionally, people tell you there’s a pattern for grieving. They tell you, “You’re going to be really upset initially”, and, “Oh, you’ll probably get angry”, and, “You’ll probably go through this phase and that phase”, you know. Maybe they’re right. I don’t know, but I don’t really take notice of that; I just go with how I feel at the time. With my brother, I tried denial and found that it just didn’t work. I tried keeping it all in saying, “Sure, I’m fine”, but with Natalie, I knew I had to grieve properly and just let it all out.’

‘I think on every level, I’m a completely different person now since Natalie’s death. I am nowhere near the same person I used to be. Emotionally, it just completely changes you; all your priorities are different. I’ve always been a fairly emotional person anyway; that’s my nature. It’s affected me in the sense that I couldn’t look at other children – which is pretty awful – but I’m getting better. It’s ten months down the track and I’m just finding now that I can look at other children. It’s quite difficult, because I have several friends that had children at the same time as me, so their children are exactly the same age as what Natalie should be. I made sure that I saw them soon after Natalie passed away, because I thought the longer I leave it, the harder it will be. So I just tortured myself and saw them. It almost killed me and I didn’t hide it. I mean, these are very dear friends that I’ve known all my life, who have these children, so I didn’t feel I had to hide anything – which is very good. I don’t try and suppress my feelings. In a lot of ways, I’m probably stronger now, because it just makes you harder to be hurt. It makes you very cynical and a little bitter sometimes, but I try not to be too bitter, because I don’t want to end up bitter and old.’

‘A lot of people can’t tell others how they feel; I feel sad for them. I’ve been able to express my feelings, but I only have a couple of people that I’ll really confide in: that’s changed a lot. People let you down, including really close friends. My best friend in the whole world hasn’t spoken to me since it happened; she’s never called to see how I am, or anything. That’s very
disappointing. I don't wish my best friend any harm, but I never want to see her again. I've proven I can do without her. For all she knows, I could be in a mental institution, which you get so close to.'

'It's just awful what you have to put up with from other people. When I first went back to work, some people came up and said, "I heard about Natalie and I'm so sorry", and, "It's just terrible and I just wish you to know I'm thinking of you". To those people you say, "Thank you". That's all you expect; you just want to know that people were thinking of you and that they're thinking of her. But then, other people just ignore the fact and say, "Oh, hi; it's nice to see you're back at work, bye", and they walk off and you think, "You must know; can't you at least tell me you're sorry". Initially, that really hurts you and then you learn. So people do let you down. In some ways it weakens you emotionally, but in other ways it strengthens you as well. It's usually either black or white. I have never felt so black and so white at the same time; there's no grey. You don't ever feel in-between any more.'

'I've been really lucky. I work for the government and they're very understanding; my boss is great. So I'm very fortunate in that way, but I know of another mother who lost her job, because she physically and emotionally couldn't go back to work after it happened.'

'Having Natalie changed us a lot; it's not just her death that changed us. It wasn't a planned pregnancy; having her really changed us. And through losing her, you take it out on each other: definitely. I can't express my feelings to Mum, but I do with my husband, so we tend to take it out on each other at really strange times, just when we think things are going OK. It's easier to take it out on each other, because we're the only two people in the world who really know how each other feels.'

'But it's difficult, in the sense that everyone grieves differently. Just because I was her Mum and he was her Dad, doesn't mean that we're grieving in the same way. I found that I went through real anger. I hated everything and everyone: and God. How could this happen to me? At the same time, he was still just crying and sad. He couldn't understand why I was so angry. So you go through these different phases differently. I can certainly understand how couples break up; it would just be so easy.'

'It's very difficult when you've got different views, especially in a large family. I know another mother from the cemetery whose child died at only four days old and her husband's way of coping is to ignore the fact that the child was ever born. They've got two other children, but to him, the third one never existed. I don't know how their marriage will ever survive, because her heart's breaking. I mean, he did exist – maybe only for four days – but especially for the mother. Mothers carry them and give birth. You know, I think what's so tragic is that it affects so many people so differently.'

'At one stage, we got that close to breaking up. I just looked at him and said, "We're coping with this badly, together. Can you imagine what it would be like if, on top of this, we decided to split up as well?" I think in our case, it's made us stronger because we do communicate; we do try and share the grief. My husband can cry in front of me and knows that he's comfortable in doing that. I try to be strong for him, but more often he has to be strong for me.'

'The old religion is a bit of a strange thing. When you lose someone you love – probably especially a child – you do your best to look for answers. With my brother, there were a couple of obvious answers; with Natalie, there's nothing. There's nothing; no answer anyone can give me as to why I don't have my daughter here now. And I try so hard to tell myself she's in a better place, but part of me says, "Well hang on; to me, the best place is with her
Mum and Dad”. I don’t care what anyone says, I don’t care how good heaven is or how good God is, nothing can beat being with her parents, you know.

Natalie’s death has not strengthened Donna’s reliance on her faith in God. ‘Oh, I still hate him; I always have and always will, but I’m not like some people who say, “There can’t be a God. How could a God take away children?” Part of me feels that way, but I have to believe. I have to believe that God is with her, but as long as my brother’s with her and she’s with the other kids, I don’t really care too much. But you have to believe that there is a nice place for her: that she’s OK, she’s not sick, that she’s better and you have to believe that you’re going to see them again; that is really important.

‘I’ve called God some pretty bad names and most of the time I get pretty angry about him and continue to hate him, but I’m pretty sure he’d understand that. He must surely be looking down and saying, “I’ve taken this woman’s child from her; she’s got every right to be angry”. I think I’ve got every right to be angry with anyone I want to be angry at really. You go through suicidal tendencies when you lose a child. The pulling that you feel to be with them is so very strong. You think, “I shouldn’t be here; I should be with them”. I think at some stage, we’ve probably all considered that. I had to justify to myself why I am still here and she is there.’

‘So I have to believe there’s a God; I have to believe he’s looking after her and I have to believe that he will let me be with her again, no matter what I say about him in between time. It’s really important that I believe that way, but it’s very hard. For my husband, it’s not hard to believe, because he’s always believed, but I’ve been too angry to believe. It has changed my faith, but it doesn’t stop me from calling him names.’

‘Having her in the children’s part of the cemetery really helps. I don’t think it’s a burial; I think burials are just the hardest part of it all. I hate burials: hate them. I found it very difficult to walk away after she’d been put down. To me, that is so final. It was just like: she’s gone now, and that was awful, but at the hospital we probably had as much time as we could’ve had.’

‘I had a dream not long ago, where she actually spoke to me. It was very important to me to know that she’d met Mark, the son of one of the other mums. I can remember saying in the dream, “Do you know Mark; are you with Mark?” and she said, “Yes, yes”. I mean she didn’t speak – she’s only seven months old – but she spoke to me in the dream, which is great. At the time Mark’s mum was really struggling and I must have been thinking about that, because I said, “I’ve got to know if Mark is OK; I’ve got to tell his mum”, and she said, “Yeah, Mark is fine; we’re together and we’re both OK”. She didn’t say, we’re both really happy or we’re both great; she just said, “We’re fine; we’re OK”. That was good. I like that wording. She told me she was only OK. I want her to be OK, but I don’t want her to be too happy without me. I want her to miss me, but not crying because she misses me. But I think she’s in heaven. I don’t know where it is, or what it is, but there’s certainly a place and she’s certainly there. And she’d be making everyone else smiling and happy, like she made us.’

Donna continues to be amazed and hurt by insensitive comments made in ignorance by well-meaning people. ‘The night Natalie passed away, some family members actually said, “Don’t worry; you’ll have another baby”. But what has having another baby got to do with losing Natalie? It’s got nothing to do with it. Yeah, we probably will have another baby, but it will be another baby. It will be my second child, who will have an older sister who just happens to not be here, that’s all. I think there are different situations. If you have a miscarriage or a stillborn – especially if you haven’t had other children – I think it’s probably fairly important

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to have another child fairly quickly. In a sense this would be a replacement, because you
never fulfilled the role of becoming a mother in the physical sense. But not so when you’ve
had a child with you and got to know their own personality and everything about them: what
makes them laugh and what makes them cry and they know that you’re their mum.’

‘As time has gone on, people probably piss me off more in that sense. Some people say,
“Well it’s been ten months now; maybe you should think about having another child”, like,
“What are you still crying for?” Most people don’t know someone that’s lost a child, or if
they do, it’s often a stillborn or a miscarriage. Not many people know children that have
passed away at seven or eight months, or two or three years. They just fumble for words and
yap on, trying to make you feel better. But usually what happens is I just say, “Yeah, yeah; no
worries”. Then I’ll hang up and ring one of the other mums from the cemetery and say, “You
wouldn’t believe what this idiot just said to me”. So we have big bitch sessions about all the
silly things people say to us. We could write a book on all the stupid things people say.’

Cemetery

‘When the funeral director came around to see us we still did not know what we were going to
do. I didn’t know there were private cemeteries and public cemeteries. I don’t know if I’m
naive, but I only thought of where my brother and my grandparents are buried. This is where
we’ve always come, so I didn’t think of any other cemetery. But I had no idea the children’s
area existed. I wanted to buy a plot for us – thinking that was really the only option we had –
but my husband didn’t want a bar of it. He said, “No; I’m too young. We’re too young to buy
a plot”. I said, “We’re too young? Our daughter’s seven months old and just passed away.
How young is young?” So I was ready to do that, but he just wouldn’t and in retrospect I’m
glad, because we might never have found out about the children’s area.’

‘I thought of cremating her and keeping her with us. I didn’t really want to do that; I just
thought that it was the only option we had, but he would not have a bar of that either: no way!
Then – thank God – when we sat down with the funeral directors, they said there’s a couple of
special children’s sections. They offered to check out the one that they thought was best and
to get back to us and I’m telling you, you don’t know just how much it means to us now. It
was a blessing; it’s one of the few good things. If she can’t be with me, then I am just so
relieved that she’s in that area with all the other children. I can speak on behalf of probably
fifteen different sets of parents that I’ve met down there; it brings us all so much comfort to
know they’re all together: it really does.’

‘It is really important to me that the cemetery staff know that I come here for comfort. I don’t
believe she’s here – although she may be in body. I do feel a spiritual thing, but I don’t feel it
about my brother; I hardly visit my brother. I suppose that’s just one of the differences you
find. I can talk to her anytime I want, I can feel her anytime I want and I can smell her
anytime I want; I don’t have to be at the cemetery to do it. I feel really sad for the people who
feel that they have to come to the cemetery everyday, because this is where they are. I don’t
feel that way. I come here because it brings me comfort, because the area is just beautiful
and because I like to have fresh flowers there all the time as a sign of respect. That’s why I come,
because it is, in a sense, where she lives and I like her garden area to be the best; I want it
always to look great. That’s very, very important to me.’

‘I couldn’t think of any place I’d rather her be than at the cemetery; I absolutely love the area.
I have never seen any other children’s sections before – fortunately, I’ve never had to go to
any other children’s funerals – so I don’t know what other cemeteries offer, but where she is,
is the most wonderful, beautiful area. The area is very, very important to me. I think this is probably hard to get across to people who haven’t lost children.’

‘I was closer to my brother than anyone in the whole world, but I still know that there’s a difference between having my brother buried here and having my daughter buried here. I’ve got different requirements or different needs. I mean, I’ll spend ten minutes when I go to visit my brother and I visit him only on special occasions now. I go and see him on birthdays and at Christmas and he’s just over the road and I’m here all the time; I still don’t go across there. But if I’m anywhere this side of town and I’m in the middle of work, I’ll never drive past the gates without driving in: never, ever. I wouldn’t care how short I was for time; I could never drive past. It’s a very different area in that it certainly brings the parents a lot of peace and a lot of comfort and I know cemeteries are probably meant to do that anyway, but I find it a lot more in that area. There’s just something really nice about being there and I think the area itself is lovely. It really is great for the parents.’

‘The cemetery isn’t a very sacred place, in the sense that the church is sacred, but it is sacred in a sense. I think that anyone who goes around destroying property in a cemetery should be shot. I can’t believe there’s people out there who do the things that happen. It’s just unbelievable that someone can actually get killed in a cemetery. At the children’s section, there are lots of toys and other articles left on graves. We all know we’re running a risk in leaving anything there. I’ve never left anything of vital importance: something that couldn’t be replaced. I would never do that, because there are idiots out there and people who don’t have respect and could damage or take things. So to me, it’s quite sacred in that sense. It’s also sacred in that the area as a whole does affect me, especially Natalie’s plot; that is sacred. I’m very fussy about how it looks and how it’s looked after. It’s important to me that the gardeners in the area have respect. I just think that that you should respect and honour the dead. I think that it’s a very sacred area, but you don’t have to be religious to respect or understand people’s grief or situation. I think that all people should understand that this is sacred ground and that if you come in, you come to visit someone and pay your respects. But I know different people view respect differently and that’s a problem in the cemetery. Some people think it shows a lack of respect to leave so many things around. I suppose, to everyone it’s different: it’s in the eye of the beholder.’

‘This is our family cemetery and my husband and I will be here one day. I hate to hear on the news that many cemeteries are filling up and they have to look at changing things and moving things; I can’t stand that idea. Hopefully, I’ll be gone before anything like that ever happens. I hate the thought that anyone would ever touch Natalie. I’ll end up here for sure one day. I want to be where she is; that’s very important to me.’

‘Mum gets really worried about me being here on my own, but I don’t. I feel a great sense of peace when I’m here, especially when I’m on my own. I don’t care if there are gardeners around. I don’t feel close to God and I don’t feel especially close to Natalie. If anything, I probably feel much closer to her at home and we’ve moved from the house she lived in, but I have my little nightly routine, where I kiss her photo goodnight and that sort of stuff. Sometimes I’ll sleep with some of her clothing or something, if I’m feeling like I really need to feel her. That’s different to a lot of people. A lot of people at the cemetery feel like that’s where they have to be to see them, feel them or be with them. I don’t feel that way; I feel like she’s with me all the time. At the cemetery, it’s more a respect thing.’

‘I come down to the cemetery because it makes me feel really good and because I can arrange her flowers. Everybody always tells me how beautiful her area is. “Gee, you do your flowers nicely”. That makes me feel really good, because I can’t mother her any more; there’s no
mothering left. I can’t feed her, I can’t change her, I can’t hold her and I can’t stop her from crying; I can’t do any of that. All I can do is trim her grass and do her flowers, so I’m more than happy to make sure that I do that, because here is my outlet for mothering. It’s more than, I’ve got to be here because she’s here; it’s more like, this is the place where I can do things for her. So it’s very important to me that I am able to do those things for her, you know: very important.

‘On her grave, there’s a cross in the ground. It’s a beautiful pink cross with her name, her photo and an angel sitting on the top of it. I’ve also got a couple of windmills and little things: bees or something and she’s got a plastic Big Bird that I bought. Big Bird was her favourite thing and so that sort of sits there just in front of her vases on the ground. Other people have given her everything else. We’re now looking at putting a monument there, but I love her cross. A lot of people I know feel that it would be nice if we could just leave the crosses there, because there’s something about babies and just having a simple cross that just seems right, but at the same time, I’m very happy with what we’ve chosen for a monument. So yeah, it is important to me to have a final monument to her; the cross does feel a little bit temporary.

‘The loss of a loved one is horrible no matter who it is, but I know that the loss of a child is worse than losing my brother. I understand the cemetery has to treat everyone as being in the same position. The last thing you can do is say, “Well they lost their child and you only lost your husband”. I mean you can’t do that to people, but I think visitors to the children’s area have special needs, because we do visit there longer. We’re there a lot longer than other people who go and visit, just do the flowers, say a prayer and leave. When I got there today, one of the other mums was laying on her rug reading a book and making an afternoon of it. You know, it’s a very different visit than when you go and see your grandparents, your brother or anyone else; you’re there for a lot longer. So it’s very important to us that the area does look beautiful. And the parents are very funny about people walking on the actual graves. They understand they’ve got to be mowed, so obviously that’s not a problem, but walking on them is really offensive to a lot of people.

**Visitation**

Donna says there has been no change in the frequency of her visits to Natalie’s grave over the past ten months. ‘I visit with my husband every weekend, usually on a Sunday and I try and visit during the middle of the week, usually on a Wednesday. I like to come around again, on either a Monday or a Thursday, just to make sure the flowers are still looking fresh and that everything looks OK. I’ve visited three times this week. It varies, but is probably no more than three times a week and certainly no less than once a week. I’ve got a bit of a routine.’

Prayer is ‘not really’ part of Donna’s visiting routine, although she may pray ‘every now and then’. She does talk to Natalie. ‘I don’t have big conversations with her. I always say hello to her and give her photo and her angel a kiss, but I don’t really have full-on conversations. I tend to talk to her more at home and at night, rather than at the cemetery.’

‘When we come together, we stop first at the florist and when we get to the cemetery, we always get the rug out and put it on the ground. All the flowers get taken out of the vase and the good ones separated from the bad. The two of us do our flowers together and that probably takes about an hour; I’m pretty fussy. I’ve become a little bit of a flower arranger since all this has happened and a bit fussy about how it looks. We know the gardeners do the borders and everything, but it gives us great satisfaction in trimming back all the little bits of grass, you know. My husband will go to the canteen and get a cup of coffee and come back.’
'As I met some of the other mothers, I started to come a little bit more. I like coming on my own. I love coming with my husband; that's very important to me, but I probably like it just as much to come and spend time here on my own. When I come by myself, I do pretty much the same: get the rug out and usually have a snooze. I probably spend longer when I'm here by myself, but it depends. I spend an absolute minimum of an hour and sometimes, over two. Once, it was five hours, but that was a bit of a strange day, or different; I was very upset and couldn't go into work that day. Usually, I come here crying and leave feeling better. On this day, I woke up and was really upset, so I wanted to come down and just spend some time with her. I came on my own, about ten o'clock in the morning and threw the rug down. I bought some flowers on the way and did her flowers and went and got a cup of tea from the canteen and was sitting down and then another couple came and we were having a bit of a chat. He started to talk about his religious beliefs, so religion was a big topic that day. Then a few other mothers came and everyone just sort of sprinkled through, so I just stayed chatting to them all and it was really nice. I felt heaps better when they were here.'

'Religion can be a fairly big topic. It's not something I really like to talk about a lot, because I think everyone has different beliefs and you can't judge people on what they believe. Some people there don't believe in anything and I understand that, but don't tell me not to believe. Don't tell me there's nothing, because I can't believe that. A lot of our conversations are what you'd call 'bitch sessions', if you overheard us. They're just about all the stupid things that people say to us and how our families make us feel and stupid things our best friends say. It's really good to have that outlet, because otherwise it could fester. So the lack of understanding is one of the big things we talk about.'

'There's one woman there that I don't like to speak to as much. Her daughter was born sick and also passed away in the Children's Hospital at roughly the same time, but the year before and she just focuses on her daughter's illness. When she sees me she wants to discuss what ward Natalie was in and what doctors she had and that sort of stuff. I can talk about it now, but it always hurts. She's always talking about that and I find that she brings me down. I've actually turned around the car and gone to see someone else or gone to the canteen when I've seen her car.'

'I suppose emotionally, it has probably become a little bit easier to visit now. The first couple of times we pulled up, I just shook my head thinking, "I can't believe what I am doing here. This can't be my life". I still feel it even when I'm driving out; I'm still in disbelief, for sure. I'm still in shock; I still can't believe it, but I'm coming around emotionally I suppose. It's probably a little bit easier and it makes me feel better too and that's important.'

'I'm looking forward to summer and being able to come and spend some good times. The last month has been really hard; visits have had to be a lot shorter with all the wind and the rain and everything, but I'm probably going to spend more time there in summer than I have up to date. I'm having some time off work and I can definitely see me spending more time, lengthwise.'

'So many people say, "As time goes on, you won't feel the need to go there as often". And I know older parts of the cemetery get visited less, but at this stage, I find that hard to imagine. I can't really see what time is going to do, in this sense, to me. I can't see how that will change. It's very, very important to me that when I have another child, they understand the importance of this place. It's very, very important to me that they understand that they have an older sister. But I understand that maybe, if I have another child, they might have cricket and football and maybe my time might be a little bit more restricted.'
**TENDING BABY’S GRAVE HELPS YOUNG MOTHER**

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**Psychosocial history**

Veronica was born in Melbourne thirty-three years ago. She lives with her husband of eleven years, who 'was a painter and decorator for years, but is now a warehouse manager in a bakery'. Veronica says, 'his work is quite hectic and busy.' She is now a 'full-time mum' to their eight-year-old son.

'I was brought up in a Catholic family and I went to a state school; my husband was brought up in the Church of England. I used to go to church regularly, but once I got married the priorities changed; weekends are now with the family and my husband. But the thing is, it doesn’t worry him whether I go to church or not; he’s quite easy about it. I mean, both our children were baptised, so he’s pretty easygoing; he’s not really strict. He doesn’t say, “You can’t do this”, or, “You can’t do that”; I’m pretty lucky like that. He used to come to church when I’d go and I think his family approved when we christened our kids Catholics.'

**Bereavement**

Almost two years ago, Veronica’s second son, Timothy, died at the age of thirteen-and-a-half-months. 'He was diagnosed with this illness at eight weeks of age, so he had a struggle all his life. He had a lot of tests and he needed a liver transplant, then he passed away just before Christmas. The condition he had was quite rare, so it made it really hard to know how to treat it. He was a very happy little boy; it never showed that he was as sick as he was.'

'We didn’t know from the outset that he was so seriously ill. The doctor gave us a positive outlook, because he was just so different to other children with his condition; he was the opposite. So they never thought that he would get so ill that he would actually pass away. The doctors were surprised at just how quickly he deteriorated in the last few months of his life. That was pretty hard to take. The worst part was that I wasn’t there for him, because he was in the Intensive Care Unit and a mix up with the nursing staff sort of tore us apart a bit. It’s very hard to take when it’s your child.'

'It was only a week before he passed away that we knew he was in such a serious condition, because a week before, he was at my son’s birthday and he was as happy as anything. You wouldn’t think that in a week he could go downhill so quickly. He went into hospital for a routine biopsy and he was supposed to come home the day after, but he didn’t. He just deteriorated overnight and passed away within two days. Never once, did we think that he wouldn’t be here in two days time. I think that’s the hardest part to take.'

'Ve spent a few hours with him after he passed away in Intensive Care. We also had a couple of close family come and see him and say goodbye. I held him for a couple of hours. There were
things that I now wish I had done that I didn’t do then: things like bathing him, but at the
time, because of the shock of what’s happened, you don’t think about it.'

Other losses

‘My husband’s father died when Timothy was a week old, but luckily he just got to see him
and then he passed away two days later. It was a rush out of hospital and over to see him. We
didn’t think he would actually see him alive: we weren’t sure. So I think the whole pregnancy
was a bit up in the air; a bit of a nervous thing. It was pretty hard with Timothy. It was just
constant doctors’ visits and hospital visits. I didn’t have time for my husband and my other
child as well; it wasn’t easy. To lose a child and to lose a father-in-law, are two different
things; they’re both different cases really. Timothy was home with us, so he was part of our
family. Even though my husband’s Dad was part of our family, he wasn’t actually living with
us, so it was hard but I think it’s a different sort of thing. I mean, a child is part of you; he was
born to us and we brought him up.’

Funeral

‘Timothy’s funeral was very rushed, because he passed away on the twenty-first of December.
It was very close to Christmas and just the worst day of our lives. We were so rushed in
getting things organised; we didn’t know what we wanted. I mean, we didn’t really have a
chance to look around, so I said to the funeral director, “I want him where all the kids are, not
where adults are and I want him beautiful”. We had his funeral two days later; there wasn’t
time for people to come from interstate, because of public holidays. I wish I had more time
with him. I would have liked to stay until he was covered up, but I couldn’t. We were rushed
into the cars and people were all around. I think I was very angry in some ways. People turned
up for his funeral that couldn’t be bothered when he was alive; I’ll never accept that.’

Timothy was buried in the current children’s section of a large urban cemetery. Veronica
hopes that he is now in heaven with all the other kids. ‘I have to think that way, but I can’t say
any more than that. I had a little bit to do with planning the funeral, but not much. The main
things to me were that he had a white coffin and I just wanted him with the kids. My husband
did a bit more and Timothy’s godmother and a good friend of mine organised it. Their brother
was a funeral director at the time and that made it a lot easier, because she also knew Timothy
very well. We had a church service at the Catholic church where he was christened. We had a
photo of Timothy sitting on top of his coffin, so that everyone could see what a lovely boy he
was. The church was packed; it was full of people, not that I can remember much of the day; I
wasn’t always there, I guess. During the funeral itself, my husband was pulled at one end and
I was being dragged the other end, whereas we wanted to be together and we couldn’t be.’

We had two viewings: one on the Sunday (the day after he passed away) and then again on
the Monday. They were only for very close friends and family, because I didn’t want
everyone to see him. I just told them that I wanted to see him for the last time, before he was
buried. I would have liked to hold him again. I was told the pros and cons; I could if I wanted
to, but then things could happen if I did hold him. I would have liked to dress him too. There
are little things that I didn’t get a chance to do and they’re regrets that I guess I’ll always
have. I didn’t mention it at the time. I think when you’re in such a shock, you need to be told
the things that you can do, because you don’t really think about it at the time.’

‘I’m happy with the way the funeral service went; it was a very pretty service. I guess that did
help me a bit, in my grief, but I just never expected it to happen. The funeral was another part
that I suppose we had to get through; we didn’t have a choice. I mean, what could you do with
him otherwise? If there was another alternative, I’m sure I would’ve considered it, but I knew that’s what happens when someone dies: you have to bury them and I had to accept it. There was no choice about it.’

Adjustment

‘My other son has had a hard time, especially at school. Of course, all the other kids have got brothers and sisters and he no longer has; he’s only got himself. People just don’t realise — even though he’s only eight years old now — how much he understands, even with the funeral. Compared to other kids, he’s a lot older for his age, because of what he’s gone through. He’s grown up a lot, I guess. In losing his brother, his whole world fell apart.’

‘It helped pull us close together. We make a point of spending time together now, whereas before, we used to just get on with our hectic lifestyle. Now we do make a point of spending more time together and we appreciate that time, because now we know that you just never know what’s going to happen tomorrow.’

‘My parents are always there for us. They know how difficult it is to be with other kids Timothy’s age and they’re always only a phone call away. My parents only live across the road, so they’re very close; my husband’s family live further away. I think in some ways they’re distancing themselves a bit more.’

‘I’m a Catholic, but I don’t really practice it that much. I don’t go to church every Sunday. I’ve lost a lot of my faith since I lost my little boy. My husband’s the same as me; he’s just not practicing, he doesn’t go to church now. I think, like me, he’s lost a lot of his faith since we lost our little boy. I used to go to church a fair bit, when I was younger, but when Timothy died: I just feel things differently. I think, well if there is a God, then why do they take a child so young? They could’ve taken us; we’ve already lived some of our lives, whereas Timothy hasn’t; he’s just too young. I’ll never accept it. I want to know why they took him; I mean he’s only a child after all. Yeah, I’ve lost a lot of my faith. I’ve spoken to priests and they seem to understand, but they always wonder why too. They always find it very hard doing funerals for kids. I just can’t accept it.’

‘I still go to church occasionally; it just depends. Sometimes I have the urge; I really want to go. If I feel a bit down in the dumps, then I go; or if I just feel like going, I do. I go a lot less since I’ve been married. I guess, sometimes you’ve got better things to do than to go to church. I know that’s the wrong attitude to have, but your time is so precious these days; you just try and get so much done in a day, that it becomes impossible. But Timothy’s situation made me really question my belief. I’ll always wonder why. I just don’t think he should be taken from us so young.’

‘My husband tends to agree with me; he won’t accept it. He’ll never accept it, because he keeps saying, “If there is a God, they wouldn’t have taken him from us”. That’s just the way we see it. People always say things happen for a reason, but I’d like to know the reason. Are we being punished, or why? People write in sympathy cards, “Things happen for a reason”, or, “They only take the best”. Well, why do they take the best?’

‘I think those people need to actually go through it themselves to understand what it’s really like to lose your child. I mean unless you go through it, you can assume, but you never know the pain a parent goes through. But I really wouldn’t wish what I’m going through on anyone. It’s coming up to two years, but some days it just seems like yesterday. It was his birthday on Sunday, so I had a bad week, but just to get through everyday is such a struggle sometimes.
And people forgot his birthday and that tore me apart. I made my intentions clear from the start; as soon as he passed away, I said I wanted him included in everything. I don’t want his name forgotten or anything like that. I want his name put on cards, because as far as I’m concerned, he’s still part of our family and he won’t be forgotten.’

Veronica has noted significant changes in herself since Timothy’s death. ‘I see people differently now. You learn who your real friends are; you learn to trust fewer people. I guess I am emotionally a different person altogether. You make different friends. I laugh a lot less. Important occasions don’t mean much to me any more. Christmas and birthdays are just no big deal any more: Easter and Mother’s Day. It just doesn’t feel the same any more. People get on with their lives as if nothing has happened, whereas to me, it’s the opposite. It’s a different life altogether now. I just see things differently and I’ve learnt to appreciate life a lot more with what I’ve got.’

‘For the first twelve months, I was very emotional. Now I still do get emotional, but it depends on what sort of a day I’m having. I mean, I can have a couple of great days for no reason and I can have a couple of bad days where he’s constantly on my mind and I wish I could hold him. When I’m around other babies, it all comes flooding back, even though it’s nearly two years. If I hold a baby, I just wish it was him and everything will come back: his illness and his funeral; it just seems like yesterday. Then I’ll have a couple of bad days or a couple of bad weeks.’

‘When people say they understand I get angry, because they don’t understand. They’ve got no idea what it’s like to lose a child, no matter how much they read in books, or what they’ve been trained to do. As far as I’m concerned, unless it’s their own child, they’ll never understand.’

‘It would be hard, no matter what age the child is that you’ve lost. But I think people handle their emotions differently. Lots of people bottle it up and don’t speak; they don’t do a thing, whereas I guess I’m the opposite. I’m very open and I tell people how I feel. If I want to cry, I’ll cry and no one will tell me otherwise: that’s just me, I’m an emotional person. I guess people’s emotions are all different. It’s got a lot to do with their upbringing and where they’ve come from, especially men who get told not to cry. “You’re not an adult if you cry”. But you shouldn’t be afraid to talk about things.’

Empathetic relations have developed between parents regularly visiting the children’s section of the cemetery and Veronica has found this to be more helpful than professional counselling. ‘Oh, I’ve seen counsellors; I’ve spoken to counsellors and they seem to understand what you’re going through, but in talking to other mums that have lost kids, we’ve developed a great bond, because we’re all going through the same thing. In some ways, it’s more helpful than talking to a counsellor who’s gone through textbooks, but hasn’t gone through our emotions and how hard it is. So yes, a lot of us mums have become quite close. Other people just wouldn’t understand us; they’d think we’ve gone nuts.’

It’s coming up to two years now and I guess I can talk about it a lot more without crying. For the first twelve months, every time I spoke I’d burst into tears; whereas now, I can talk about him to anyone. I still burst out crying at times, but I guess I can talk about him a lot more without getting so upset. I still have to accept it, I guess.’

Cemetery
'The cemetery has no heritage value to me, because most of my relatives are overseas. To me, the cemetery is a place where you can pay your respects to family and friends. It's a special place where you can come and put fresh flowers and see family and loved ones.'

'We've made a lot of friends there and we all look after each other's children there. To us, it's a special place and we try and make it as pretty as possible. The children's area is very, very important to us mums. If our kids were just buried here and there in a general adult's area, it just wouldn't be the same; we wouldn't have that bond that we've developed. I guess we all hope that our kids are all playing together. I think we all try to see it that way.'

Veronica is very much aware of the impacts of some visitors on others. She is also aware of occasional conflict between memorabilia paraphernalia left on some graves and cemetery management issues such as maintenance, access and public safety. 'In the past, I've found some people at the cemetery to be quite rude. I don't think we're informed enough about what's happening, but I really like what they've done recently. I'm very happy with the way it is now. I guess everyone's got faults: no one's perfect. I know every person's job is hard and I accept that and if I can help in anyway, I'm more than happy to. I just feel that sometimes they should understand people's feelings a lot more, especially when it's a child that's concerned. I think they should be a bit more lenient, because with the parent losing a child, it's very hard. I think that if people want to have a few more flowers or other items on the grave, they should understand that, within reason. I've got a lot of friends that come and visit Timothy and they'd love to leave flowers, but they get heartbroken when they see the extra flower vases removed; it shouldn't happen.'

'Some people are very friendly and very helpful; half the gardeners are terrific. When they layed the grass I was very grateful and I showed them how grateful I was, because I really appreciated what they did. Overall, they're pretty good, but they do have their faults and I just think they need to understand people's feelings a bit better and be a bit more lenient. I think they need to talk to people more and not just do things and let the parents find out afterwards. I know the cemetery people have got a hard job ahead of themselves, especially in the kids' section; people do have a lot of items there. I guess I try and see both sides of it; I try not to have too much if I can help it, but then when family take things there, you can't say, "Don't".'

**Visitation**

'I visit the cemetery regularly. I have to come and see him; I have to look after him. I make sure his flowers are pretty and that his headstone's maintained. I have to do something. I can't do anything for him at home, so I have to come and just talk to him. People might think I'm being silly, but quite frankly, I don't care what people think. That's my child there and this is the last thing I can do for him.'

'For the first twelve months after he died, I came to the cemetery everyday. Now, it's every second day or sometimes every third day. I try to see him every day or every second day. I just have to come and see him, even if it's only for five minutes. I'll pop in and say hello to him. I water his grass and maintain it, and I try and make it as pretty as I can; I change his flowers and make sure nothing's broken or taken.'

Veronica is sure that the frequency of her visits to Timothy's grave is influenced by her relationship, but not at all by her religious beliefs. 'I'm just his Mum. It's my motherly instinct to look after him and to make sure everything's well maintained and pretty, just as if he was at home, where I could look after him. That mother/child bond will always be there. I mean, I gave birth to him and I've got to do what I can for him: and for myself.'
'The cemetery is only fifteen minutes drive from home. I park near his grave there. I check his flowers, check the water and I cut the grass. I keep everything in my car boot, like scissors for the flowers and to cut the grass. I fertilise the lawn, clean the headstone and put pretty windmills on there; I try and make it as pretty as I can. If the grass is really dry, we go and water other graves or just remove dead flowers and we just help the gardeners in anyway we can. I mean, we know their job is enormous — looking after the kids’ graves with all the windmills — and we appreciate that, so we try and help as much as we can. At times, we don’t like the things that they do — or get told to do by various people. It’s a kids’ section and we try as much as we can, I guess.'

'If it were a cold and wet rainy day I would stay there probably five or ten minutes, but if it’s a warm day I can spend hours there. Once I’m there, I just find it hard to go home. I can sit there in the sun and just be with him for hours. A lot of times, I organise other mothers to be there, so we can be together and have a chat. But we’re also there with our kids and that means the world to us; we’re sure they know that we’re there. If I’m on my own, I spend the time specifically with Timothy, but if I’m with other mums, we just get together in the sun and we sit there and just talk and talk to our kids. It’s mainly mums, because most dads work. We usually have a coffee there and a talk.'

'My husband makes a point of coming on the weekends. But he can’t come every weekend, because of the hours he’s at work, so he finds that very hard. When he does come (after he finishes work) he feels rushed; he can’t spend enough time there. You can spend hours and you don’t realise how quickly the time goes. My other son comes on weekends and on days off school; he loves to come. He talks to his brother and brings toys or makes pictures for him, which I put on his headstone. He always talks about his brother; he misses him a lot.'

'When my husband and my son are there, we do the same things. My husband knows what I always do; he quite understands and he respects my feelings. He does help me, but because I know what to do, it’s easier if I just do it. He does try to help, if he can. He gets the water. He normally fills the containers up and waters the grave for me. He’s pretty good, but he mainly leaves it to me to do. I just like to be there.'

'On the way to the cemetery, I feel happy that I’m going to see him. I just can’t wait to come and say hello to him, but when I’m leaving I do feel sad. I know I have to go home and get on with life and do what I have to do at home. I’d like to spend a lot more time if I could, but I guess we have to get things done. I wish he was a bit closer to me, but I’m pretty lucky that it’s only just a short drive from home.'

'At times, when I’m there I feel happy, but I have bad days when I’m really sad and I just wish I could take him home with me. I guess, sometimes I feel scared and I look over my shoulder, but most times, I feel happy: just that he knows I’m there. When I get there his windmills start turning; to me, that means that he knows I’m there. I just feel he knows that I’m there and he knows that I’m looking after his area. But I do have bad days; I can go there and just cry. I suppose I’ll just never accept that he’s gone.'

'I do find it a bit easier to visit these days. I’ll always come and see him a lot. I mean, that’s my son there and until they bury me, I’ll always come frequently. I’ll always make sure that it’s maintained and looked after and he’s got fresh flowers.'
ALCOHOLIC SON SHEDS NO TEARS FOR FATHER

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Psychosocial history

Peter grew up just north of the Murray River, where he was born fifty-four years ago. He has four brothers and two sisters. During Peter’s childhood, his father was a practising alcoholic. 'He gave us a pretty rough time, especially Mum, but also my brothers and sisters and myself. I grew up hating him.'

‘After I left home, I began drifting early. My Dad got into Alcoholics Anonymous and I was getting into trouble; I got down to the Big House, you know. At the age of seventeen, I was introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous, but it wasn’t for me. Dad stuck in AA and I continued on and all my life was drinking and drifting in and out of jobs – just any sort of job – and in and out of gaols. Then fifteen years ago, I went to gaol for an armed robbery I did on April Fool’s Day and that was my last drink. It was in gaol that I got into Alcoholics Anonymous and when I come out, my Dad and I became pretty good mates. We weren’t the ideal father and son; we were just good mates.’

‘Alcohol’s been in our family all along. Out of five brothers and two sisters, only one brother and one sister are not affected by alcohol. The others are alcohol and drug riddled. So it’s been a bit of a journey, you know. Today, I’m on a pension, because I had a tumour operation eleven years ago and I’ve got no hormones. The tumour could have sent me blind, so they operated on that. But I couldn’t hold a job, because I had no energy, so they had to put me on a pension. And after ten years I thought I was over it, but last year they discovered I had another one, so I just had another operation a few months ago and I’ve got to keep going back to the hospital for another ten years.’

‘I’m divorced. I’ve got two kids: a boy and a girl, but I never see the boy. He lives with his mum, as far as I know. The girl turns twenty-seven, next birthday. She was born disabled, with cerebral palsy. Friends who knew me from a kid reared her, because I walked out on the missus years ago. My son is about two years younger, I think. I walked out not long after he was born.’

‘I got married in a drunken stupor. I met her in a hotel; it was a bloody rough joint. They were my kind of people in there. We got married in the registry office. We lived together for about five years, I think, and then I found out she was pregnant. That’s why I did the right thing and I married her. Then, the day after we got married, we went back to the hotel and I didn’t see her for a week. I just went on a bloody binge and I didn’t know where I was. That was what I was like in my younger days.’

‘I see my daughter pretty often. We go out and we’ve got a pretty close relationship. She lives with people, but they’re getting on, you know. Well, I couldn’t give her what they’ve given
her, you know. She's been around the world and been everywhere. She's got a wonderful life, you know. I get a lot of strength from her. They amaze me, these people in the wheelchairs and everything, they always seem so bloody happy: it's unreal. I can bloody get around OK and the little things upset me, you know: just the bloody little things.'

'I saw the boy after I came out of gaol; he would have been about sixteen or seventeen then. He was in hospital with some infectious disease – herpes, or some bloody thing – and I went and saw him. I sent a photo of myself to these people who have got my daughter and they had handed one onto him. When I walked in, I introduced myself and I said, "Do you know who I am?" and he said, "Yeah, I got a photo not long back". He had this huge tape recorder thing and it was blaring in the hospital and I said, "Don't you reckon you ought to turn that down and think of the other patients and the nurses?" "Oh, f— them", he said and I couldn't turn around and say, "Well, hey listen. You'd better knock that off", because who am I? We had a bit of a yarn and I said, "Well, you'll be here tomorrow?" and he said, "Yeah", and I said, "Would you like me to come out again tomorrow?" Well he said, "Oh, you know". I said, "Well if I don't see you, you know how to get in contact with me if you ever want me". I went back the next day, but he'd gone home and he never, ever got in contact with me, so I just didn't push the issue. You know, he was still a minor at the time, but I don't believe in pushing myself into his life, you know: you don't do that.'

'I believe there is a God and I have got a God. I was brought up as a Catholic, but I don't go to church, because I don't believe in religion. Man made religion and whatever man makes, I reckon he stuffs it up anyway. But I have got a God of my understanding, which is Jesus, who made this great heaven and earth. That's my belief; I've got great faith in that, you know.'

'I used to travel all around Australia – before I met my girlfriend and before I got sick again – and I didn't know nothing about cars or anything like that. I had a beater up old HQ and all I knew about cars is that you put petrol in them and keep up the oil and water and pump up the tyres, you know. People used to say, "You're mad. What happens if you breakdown?" I said, "So what?" I said, "Somebody will come along and help me", which they did. I busted down in the bloody Nullarbor and I didn't know what was wrong with my car. It just so happened, that down the road a little, was a road construction gang and I got talking to the boss. He sent his mechanic back and the mechanic said to me, "Well, it's too crook. Your alternator's stuffed", and I said, "Well, what does that mean?" He said, "That means you can't go nowhere". I thought, "God!" He said, "It just so happens, a bloke working on the road construction gang has a HQ with a busted gearbox. For a few dollars, we could swap alternators over and you're on your way". You know, my higher power looks after me: he's pretty good.'

'Everybody's always been close to God, because God's never lost, you know. Some people say, "I've got to find Him". Well he's never been lost, anyway; it's always within you. You know, they say you hand over the reins like. In AA, we hand our will over to a God of our understanding, you know, and sometimes we take it back.'

'I have a strong faith in God, but the only time I'll go to church or anything is to a funeral or a wedding, because I believe you can pray anywhere you like and that's fair. I've never liked church, but I've always believed in God. I've never believed in church, because there are priests and God-knows-what making up all sorts of funny little things. I went to a convent at one stage – when I was a little nipper and Mum was having twins, in town – and those nuns there were – oh, they were sadists: they were sadists at the time. You know, they'd whack us so much; I reckon they took their frustration out on the kids. Oh, I don't want any of that.'
'Mum always had a sense of humour; she could see the funny side of anything. She was that way and maybe she got that way by living with Dad all them years when he was on the booze. It was her way of coping. And I inherited that bit of a sense of humour, you know, because I always try and laugh my way through bloody life. Life's too short, you know. Even when I got the eight years with a five-year minimum, the old man said, "You don't look worried". I said, "What's the good of worrying about it? Hell, I've got that; now I'll kick on and just do it". I appealed and had it reduced to six years, with a four-year minimum, but I copped it on the chin.'

'Well it saved my life, you know. If they hadn't got me when they did, well — I was mad. I was right around the twist, you know. I would've gone on and shot somebody. Coppers were my biggest enemy; anybody with authority was my enemy. But today, I've turned it all around; I haven't got a single enemy, you know, because it all reflects back on me.'

**Bereavement**

Ten months ago, Peter's father died at the age of seventy-nine. 'About six years ago, he had surgery to remove a cancer. They said they got it all, but they never get cancer. When you've got a cancer, you've always got it. It erupted again and it wasn't long before he was put in hospital. He only lived there for about two months.'

'I saw him a week before he died and then the day before he died; I didn't recognise him. You know, I felt like sniffing him out myself, there and then. It's a shocking way to go. All within a week, he just wasted to nothing. He was on bloody morphine and they couldn't even find any meat or anything to inject, so they had to spray it in his mouth. That's how skinny he was. I mean, he looked like a prisoner of war.'

'When I went in the second time, he couldn't talk; he was sedated. This was a day or two before he died. I took a photo of him. I've got a couple of photos of him: what he was like before and what he was like then. I just said, "Goodbye, Dad", and that was it. I was praying for him to go as quickly as possible, because it's shocking. You know, he was a great believer in that euthanasia and so am I. I was going to send that photo to every bloody politician in Australia and say, "Well, do you want one of your family to go out like this, in pain and Christ-knows-what". I'd put it to them. That's one thing I didn't want to see: him go out in all that bloody pain. It was just shocking, you know.'

'I felt sorry for him but I didn't shed a tear at all, because he still gave Mum a hard time, even though he'd been sober. He was all self. As I said to my sister once, "He never sobered up; all he did was put down the booze". He didn't live a life of sobriety: one of caring about other people. It was all just, "Me: Me: Me". Even in his will, he had said that he was a widower and he wasn't. After Mum died, he remarried within three months and picked up a drink and then it was all his new wife's fault. He caused havoc there. She had to sell the home and get out and he finished up living with another lady and now the will's all topsy-turvy; they don't know what's going on. Even though he's six foot under, he's still causing trouble.'

**Other losses**

'I was always close to Mum, but she died eight years ago. I miss her a lot, you know. I can always remember Mum, when her Mum died. She went out to the sleep-out, had a good cry for something like an hour and then she came back in and was OK. That was over and done with then and she just got on with life. Mum was like that and when she passed away — we buried her up by the river and I came back to Melbourne — I was much the same, you know. I
went home by myself and I had a good long think about Mum, shed a few tears and then I got on with life, because I remembered what she said, even though I greatly miss her.’

‘I miss my Mum. She had three strokes; the third one killed her. I was working at the time, at the last job I had. As soon as my brother told me she had another stroke, I took off up home with an ex-fiancee. When I was about twenty minutes out of town, I looked across as I was driving and I said, “She’s gone”, and when I got to the hospital, I found out my Mum had died. I asked what time and it was just about to the second that I had that feeling that she was gone. But after making a few inquiries, it was a blessing that she did go then, because if she had survived her third stroke, she would’ve only been a vegetable. Mum wouldn’t have wanted that.’

‘But after Mum died, Dad picked up another drink and that hurt me a lot. Even though he’d been sober all those years, he was still a mean man. I mean, everything had to revolve around him, you know. If it wasn’t going his way, then that was it! Even a week before he died of cancer, when I went in to see him and to say hello from a friend, the old man said to me, “Why don’t you and that so-and-so get out of AA and get yourselves a bloody life?” But that’s typical of alcoholics. He was as mean as mean. Right up to the last, he was still mean.’

Funeral

Peter’s father was buried at the local country cemetery. The funeral did not have any special meaning to Peter, personally. ‘I think it was just a relief that Dad moved on. I think that’s how it was with the whole family you know. One brother didn’t even turn up. As I said before, there wasn’t one tear. Most people who went there – in my mind – were just making sure that he was going down, you know. I went along because, you know, it was the thing to do. There was quite a good turnout at his funeral, but you know, there wasn’t a tear shed, because everybody knew him. He was just a mean man.’

‘It wasn’t important to say goodbye to him. I think I said my goodbye the last time I saw him in the hospital. You know, I really wish – I nearly put a bloody pillow over his head in the hospital. It was just shocking to see a person like that. You know, they’d put an animal down that was suffering that much.’

‘He had a pretty good turn up, but not as big as Mum’s. Quite a few AA members came along. I think it was just the thing to do up there, you know, it’s a small community and everybody knows everybody else. It might have been a day’s outing, or a day to get on the booze at the local pub where they held a reception and there’s always a fight or something afterwards. But I got out early, because I don’t drink.’

Adjustment

Peter is certain that his faith has not changed in any way since his father’s death. He is not sure where his father is now. ‘I wouldn’t be able to say. Mum would be in heaven, because she was an angel, but I wouldn’t have a clue about the old man; I don’t know. He might need me. He might be still drifting. I saw a movie once, about a ghost or something and the guy couldn’t leave because he knew he’d been wrongly done by, or something like that. So I don’t know. He could be drifting. I wouldn’t have a clue. The only thing I’d know for sure, is my Mum’s in heaven with my grandparents. That’s as far as I could say on that one.’

‘The funny thing was, we buried a big mate of mine the day before we buried my Dad and I felt a hell of a lot of loss, cracking me more than I did for Dad, you know. It was funny, that.
They buried him on top of Mum. One of my brothers said, “I’ll go down and dig him up if they put him there.”

‘The old man was just terrible, you know. I was having very bad dreams about him after he died; oh, bloody nightmares they were. I used to have nightmares as a kid; it was always this bloody wolf going to get me. When I got sober, I saw a lady who looked into the dreams and she told me that the wolf was my old man. Then after he died, I started to have the nightmares again about him. I wanted to kill him and this brother who hated him intensely was going to dig him up. My brother and me ended up fighting. It was just bloody madness.’

Peter considers it was a relief for everybody in the district, when his father died. ‘When Mum died, we were at the funeral and his own sister said to my sister, “We’re putting the wrong one down here; it should be him.”

Cemetery

‘Cemeteries are one of the safest things of all time, I don’t mind cemeteries. I like looking at a lot of older graves. I know Mum’s soul is not there, but that’s where they put her body. I just go in there to say hello: that’s all.’

‘I would’ve still been drinking when my grandparents died. I remember once, I called in to see Pop’s grave and I was drinking a bottle. Anyway, I tipped the stubby upside down on his grave. Everybody reckons it was a hell of a joke. You know, Pop would’ve liked that.’

‘The cemetery is a very, very sacred place. It riles me when I hear or read about vandalism in cemeteries and things like that. That’s bad; it is really bad. And when, after a certain amount of time, they can shift cemeteries – like Vic Market, I think was built on top of an old cemetery – that’s wrong. I wouldn’t like anybody going out and ploughing the cemetery up where most of my relations are. I remember years ago as a kid, when big floodwaters were coming up and we were filling sandbags, a dark bloke came along and he said, “You can’t dig there. My ancestors are buried there”. And we kept digging and sure enough, there were skulls and bones and God-knows-what. At the time, I didn’t think anything of it. I took home a couple of skulls and cleaned them out and had them sitting in my room. But I know today, that was the wrong thing to do: a shocking thing to do! We could’ve gone somewhere else and dug, but at the time, we saw nothing wrong with it. You wouldn’t like to do it today; Jesus, you’d cause World War Three! I’ll never forget it.’

Visitation

On the few occasions that he has visited his mother’s grave, Peter has been alone. He would ‘just sit down there and have a little bit of a yarn’ and tell her what’s going on in his life. ‘I’ve taken some flowers along. It needs a little bit of grass picked out of the grave; I do that. I’m not a great one for praying, but I talk to Mum. I just tell her how things are going. I think she knows how things are going on anyway. You know, I think they look down and see how we’re doing – along with my grandparents up there – but I let her know that I’m still going strong.’

Peter has not visited his parent’s grave since his father’s funeral. ‘I don’t get up there very often, but my sister visits regularly. She passes through there and says, “Good day, Nell”. We all called Mum, ‘Nell’. I’m not a great cemetery visitor. Every now and again, when I’m up near home, I’ll go and see Mum’s grave. My grandparents are buried in the same one and my godmother is there too. I just call in there and spend a few moments remembering them, you
know. I don’t have any desire to visit my Dad’s grave, but I’ll visit out of respect for Mum. They’re in the same grave, unless my brother’s got to it, but I haven’t heard he’s been out to dig him up. I’ll probably pop in and say hello to Mum and, “Hello, Dad. How are you doing, wherever you are?” And I’ll say, hello to the godmother and grandmother and grandfather. I really miss them.’

Peter is quite content with his infrequent visits to his mother’s grave and not having visited since his father’s funeral. ‘I believe I am where I’m meant to be, you know, and if I were meant to be up at Mum’s grave, well I’d be there. That’s the way I look at it. It’s not practical to visit very often, but I see Mum everyday. I’ve got a big picture of her in the lounge room and she’s forever in my thoughts. When I’m talking to my sister up the bush, you know we’re always having a joke about Nell: what Nell would do with this, or what Nell would do with that, so she’s never out of our thoughts. But if I’m there and it’s appropriate to pull in, then it’s meant for me to go in. You need to be where you’re at, I reckon.’

The frequency of Peter’s visits hasn’t changed since the death of his mother. ‘It’s been about the same level for some reason or other. I think she probably understands, but some people might not, like we’re all different aren’t we? Some people go there a hell of a lot, others don’t go at all and some people just go now and then. We’re all made up differently.’

‘I haven’t shed a tear when I’ve visited Mum’s grave. I’ve felt the sense of loss, you know, but I’ve also been happy that I’ve been there and just told her how I’ve been ki ck ing along. She wouldn’t want me to be grieving all the time. She’d want me to be getting on with life. You know, life’s meant to be enjoyed. Instead of going around moping, you have your moment of grief and then you get on with it. I still miss Mum; I still miss her, for sure. I wish she were still alive today, but I know she’s not and that’s it.’

‘I was very happy that she saw my seven years of sobriety. She said that she didn’t have to look up the law lists any more. She’d be happy if she saw my name there, because she’d know her little boy was in gaol and he was getting fed three times a day. That’s true; she felt I was safe when I was in gaol. I know she’d be happy today, that I’m still sober and just doing the right thing. I don’t get into trouble today; it’s as simple as that.’
ORTHODOX DAUGHTER FINDS STRENGTH IN TRADITIONAL FAITH

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Psychosocial history

Adriana was born in Melbourne twenty-seven years ago. She is unmarried, lives with her father and eighteen-year-old brother and has no other siblings. On leaving school ten years ago, Adriana commenced her current career in a bank.

‘Mum was born in Greece forty-eight years ago. When she was four, she came to Australia with her parents, two brothers and her sister. They first migrated to northern Queensland where my grandfather worked in the sugar-cane fields, but it got a bit too hot for them, so after a few years, they moved south to Melbourne. Mum went to school here, so she was virtually more Australian than Greek. She didn’t speak much Greek.’

‘She went back to Greece when she was eighteen or nineteen and met Dad there. He was born in Greece four years before Mum. They decided to come back to Australia and get married. That was a year or so later. Mum never had a professional job; she mainly worked in sales. When I was five, we all went to Greece for about three months, and four years after that, my brother was born.’

‘I used to go to a Greek Orthodox college. All students there are Greek Orthodox and they focus on our religion quite a bit as it’s run by the Archdiocese in Melbourne. So during our schooling, we always had a religious influence on us. Then once leaving school, it sort of died down, because I didn’t have that fed to me. I didn’t go out myself, to find out more about it or to be involved. I wasn’t attending church on a regular basis, at that time. Well, of course I went at Christmas and Easter and in between I’d say every two or three months, but not on a regular basis. However, that didn’t stop me from being religious. It didn’t stop me from praying and what-have-you; it’s just that I wasn’t directly involved with it.’

Bereavement

‘Six years ago, we discovered that Mum had cancer. They virtually gave her about three years of life, but with a lot of chemotherapy and very good support from our doctors, she managed to go on for six years.’

‘This year was very difficult. I think it was about this time last year that she was actually free from cancer. They had cured it and they had great hope for her, so we actually went away to Queensland (where her brother lives) and spent Christmas there. When she got back, she had gastro. That deteriorated her immune system and by April she had lost quite a bit of weight.’

‘She was in and out of hospital about twelve times in a matter of three months. So every few weeks she’d be in hospital, out again, at home for about a week, then back in. She was very
nauseous, so she couldn’t keep food down and that was the main reason she was in hospital. We didn’t know that the cancer had actually hit her lungs, but that’s the reason why she couldn’t eat."

‘Mum passed away four months ago. She was actually at home that day and she requested she go to the hospital. I remember her saying, “I have to go into hospital, because they have to do something to me. I can’t live like this any more”. So I don’t know whether she actually felt that this was her last day, or whether she still had hope. I really don’t know what she meant by that. I happened to take the day off from work, so Dad and I took her in to hospital at about twelve o’clock. Our oncologist spoke to Dad and myself while she was having X-rays taken. He said, “You know, it’s a only matter of days left”, and even at that stage, I didn’t want to believe it.

‘My brother was still at school and Dad asked me to go and pick him up, so we could all be together. After I’d picked him up, I went by my grandmother’s (my mother’s mother’s) place and I told her that Mum didn’t have long to go and of course, she wanted to come. At that time, Mum’s sister was with my grandmother. They had originally planned to spend that day over at our house, but as we had told them that we were going into hospital, they stayed at my grandmother’s house and were going to make their way to the hospital late in the afternoon. So we all went to the hospital together: my grandmother, aunt and my brother and me, but by the time I got back with the others, Mum had already passed away. So it was a matter of hours, more than days.

‘They allowed us to stay there with her as much as we wanted to. That was very healing in my view and as we left late that night, it was just Dad, my brother and myself with Mum. I think that even though they were around, that didn’t bother me. I still paid my final respects to Mum in a way that I wanted to do and I still spoke to her in a manner that I would’ve if others weren’t around me, so I don’t think that made a difference.’

Other losses

Adriana’s only prior bereavement experience was the death of her Grandfather, about fifteen years ago. ‘Mum’s dad passed away when I was about twelve. I only remember bits and pieces of it. The young kids (or the grandchildren) weren’t directly involved in what was really happening. We knew that we had lost our grandfather and that we were grieving, but because we were so young, we didn’t go through the whole thing that I am going through now. We were the young kids, you know, and we sort of just did our own thing and didn’t play much of a part in the whole grievance process.’

Despite her lack of involvement in the funeral and little sense of mourning for her grandfather, Adriana believes the familiarity of the experience did help her somewhat through her mother’s funeral. ‘My Grandfather’s was the first funeral I’d ever gone to. I’m sure that it helped me a lot and did prepare me in some way that I didn’t expect. I sort of looked back and remembered some of the stuff that we did for my grandfather: the traditional Greek customs that we’ve got, and that sort of prepared me for now. I knew what to expect and what to do, so it did help me a bit.’

Adjustment

Adriana considers that the eventual death of her mother did not have as great a personal impact on her as did coming to terms with the fact of a terminal illness. ‘As Mum was ill for such a long time, I don’t think her death actually changed my emotions or made me feel any
different. I think that happened when we originally found out that she had this disease. I think then, my whole outlook on life in general changed and my emotions changed as well. So I’m still the same person and I still have the same emotions I had before she passed away. Maybe, if she didn’t have an illness and it just came as a shock, then I’d probably feel different, but I think her illness changed me more than her death did.’

‘Mum’s illness brought us a lot closer. We respected each other a lot more. When we found out she was ill, I was only twenty-one and back then, a normal twenty-year-old only thinks about herself and having a good time. So I think once we found out about the illness, it really hit me first of all. And it definitely did bring us a lot closer. We did a lot of things together.’

‘Now that I look back, I think she tried to prepare us for her death. Anytime she spoke of it, I couldn’t actually confront it; I couldn’t sit there and listen. I’d just break out, so I had to leave. There were certain things that she would tell us she wanted, without us realising that she was actually talking about her death, for example, the photo that she wanted on her tombstone and the dress that she wanted to wear at her funeral. She was sort of telling us in a way, not to upset us, but to give us the idea that that’s what she wanted. So that was really good, but we only realised that after she had passed away and everything sort of started coming back to us. But we never actually sat down to discuss what she wanted from us and what she expected from us, because we never thought that it would get to that stage. We always had faith and hope that she would always be with us.’

‘But I always knew, at the back of my mind, that she would no longer be with us one day. It’s very rare that someone who has cancer actually makes it through. So it was always there. Being close to our religion and having that faith: you never stop believing that there might be someone that can help. So yes, there was always that hope that she would be with us forever.’

‘Mum’s illness brought us a lot closer to our religion, especially for herself. She always enjoyed going to church and finding out about our religion, but I think she had a need to know what to expect. She also had to prepare herself for her death and she prayed for God to help her, so it did bring us all a lot closer to our religion.’

‘Our religion helped us prepare for the time when she actually passed away, in that we knew she would be finally resting and we hoped that she would be in good hands, which we’re now sure that she would be. By understanding a lot more of our religion, we then knew why she left, so it helped to answer a lot of questions that we did have. I mean, throughout the time that she was ill, we always questioned, “Why did it happen to you?” But you know that if it’s God’s will, then it will happen and there’s no way out of it. And it was God’s will for Mum to have this illness and of course that might have been a way of getting us a lot closer to our religion. So that’s how we looked at it.’

Adriana considers that her relationship with God has not changed since her mother’s death. ‘I think it’s virtually stayed the same. Before that, when Mum was ill, we had that bond and we found religion and we often did pray. So it really hadn’t changed that much, except for the fact that I go to church regularly now and she’s there with them. I tend to know that I’m talking to Mum through God, so there’s actually more than just a reason to pray now, if I know that Mum’s there listening to me. I don’t pray any more now than I would have when she was ill, it’s just that my prayers have changed. Whereas, before it was a lot of pleading, you know: “Please help us”, now it’s more like a conversational type of prayer.’

‘I believe that Mum is now in heaven: the reason being that she had great faith. She loved her religion; she loved God, she loved Jesus. So I do believe that she has gone to a better place.
Also, I’ve had a close bond with our priest. He would often come to the hospital and talk to Mum and say a few prayers together and just before she passed away, he gave her final Holy Communion. Once she had her Holy Communion, it was only a matter of five or ten minutes later that she passed away and I believe that God waited for that moment before he took her. So I believe she left for a better place.’

‘Mum’s death has actually brought my father and brother and I together a lot. We’re spending a lot more time together now and we understand each other a lot more, because we’re not afraid to show our emotions and how we feel. So we’re able to sit down and discuss things now. Previously, just like any other normal family, it was very difficult to sit down all together and discuss things. So I think it has brought us that little bit closer, mainly because that’s how Mum always wanted it to be. So we’re probably doing what Mum wanted us to do.’

‘Once Mum fell ill, it was just like a blessing that everything came to me again. I started meeting people without really going out looking for them. It was just out of coincidence that I was meeting kids: young kids from different Greek Orthodox youth groups and to me, that was a sign: “You’ve got to come back to us”. So that sort of helped me during that time, but it wasn’t something that I actually ventured out to do; it sort of just came to me. So yeah, I find that a blessing, actually.’

Adriana does not consider that her mother’s death has had any real financial impact on the family. ‘Mum actually retired from work about two years ago. Dad’s still working and of course I work and help out wherever it’s needed.’

**Funeral**

Adriana was ‘very much involved’ in planning her mother’s funeral. ‘The funeral was something that had to be done, but it was also our final respect to her. It was the last time that we could actually show how much we loved her. To me, it was the last thing I could actually do for Mum, so of course you try and do everything to perfection. But it wasn’t only a grieving day; it was also a day of relief that she’s now at rest, she’s now sleeping and going through no more pain. So the day had, sort of, two meanings and there were two different types of emotion.’

‘Dad, my brother and me were all involved in planning the funeral: just the three of us. In a way, working through the funeral was therapeutic. I’d been to a few Orthodox funerals: not direct relatives or anyone close to us, just friends of the family. I was very happy with Mum’s funeral arrangements. I think I actually asked Mum through my prayers (after she had passed away) to help us in the way that she would want her funeral. So I just left it at that and everything we did was something that Mum would have liked. I think that helped us a lot too.’

‘The day before the funeral (the Sunday night), there were prayers for her up at the church, so she was there. The coffin was open at that time and at her funeral. She didn’t stay there at the church overnight: she was taken back to the funeral parlour.’

‘The service was at our local Orthodox Church. There were actually two priests at Mum’s funeral. The service included mainly hymns and they asked for the soul to be saved and for Mum to have repented during that time. In our religion, for forty days the actual soul is still with us; then after the forty days, it makes it’s way to heaven or wherever. So it’s a way of helping the soul find its home and a lot of love is also chanted through the hymns, so we’re
also showing how much we loved her. I speak some Greek and Dad speaks a lot of Greek, but most of the service is in ancient Greek, so unless you have a clear understanding of the ancient Greek language, it’s very hard to understand. I really wasn’t familiar with what was going on.’

‘After the church service, we went over to the new Orthodox section at the cemetery and then there was another service at the graveside. I really don’t remember much of that. I know that again there were certain hymns and prayers said, though I really couldn’t say what they actually were. I think, it’s basically that the soil put on top is not made heavy. So what they say is, “Let the soil be light for you and may you not have any more burden on you”. I think they say something to that effect and that’s about it really.’

**Cemetery**

The cemetery is an important place to Adriana. ‘Well, it’s Mum’s home. Actually, it’s not her home; it’s her body’s home. Her spirit or soul is not there; it’s just her body that is there. And as Mum was a beautiful lady, I would also like her surroundings to be the same, so I think it’s important that when we do attend the cemetery, it’s not seen as a dull place. It should be something that is beautiful, even though it is such a sad, sad place. It still can be beautiful for others to visit and for those whose bodies are in that area there.’

‘It doesn’t have any heritage value, although I do have a grandfather buried there. I believe the cemetery is a sacred place, but I’m not sure how to explain it. I think on a personal basis, that it’s not as holy as the church. It has that holiness in it, but it’s not as holy as the church, you know. It’s very hard to explain.’ Adriana does not feel particularly close to God or to her mother within the cemetery. ‘It’s very difficult to explain how I feel. The fact that it’s still hard to believe she has gone makes it difficult when we’re going and to believe that she is there. So at times – and I have felt this on quite a few weekends – we go there just because it’s something that we do; it’s just become a custom to us. I still haven’t truly grasped the fact that she has left us; so I don’t feel any closer to her there, than I do at home.’

‘The cemetery is a peaceful place: it’s very peaceful. It is a place of sadness: quite a bit of grieving, of course. Whether it’s a safe place, I don’t know. I find it very difficult to go there on my own, only because of certain events that have happened. I remember when Mum and I used to go to my grandfather’s grave, but now I find it difficult to go to a cemetery on my own. But I still find it to be a beautiful place.’

Adriana is not entirely happy with the Orthodox area of the cemetery. ‘I would be a bit happier, in a sense, if it was a little bit cleaner around us. I understand that certain Orthodox cultures have feast days, on weekends and they take their food and eat it with the person that has passed away and then of course, they don’t clean up behind them. That’s very disturbing to me, because it’s like they’re dirtying my Mum’s house. That is very disturbing. I don’t think it should be necessary – but it is in this case – that maybe they should have someone that might clean up the place after they leave, because it is terrible; it is very disappointing.’

‘I think, it depends on which part of Greece you come from. I know that the northerners (which are mainly the Macedonians) tend to have this kind of feast at the cemetery. The rest would just take a little plate of biscuits or maybe the boiled wheat on their Memorial Day: that would be about it; there’s none of this carrying the Eskys and the tables and having a whole feast there. I think from what I’ve heard, they believe that they eat with the person and the person’s there eating with them and they also leave food for those people and the food attracts pests.’
'I've gone on Sunday's and there are picnic baskets and Eskys and tables; when you're going there to pay your respects to someone, others are having a feast. I've even gone after they've left and there are empty beer cans hanging around and bins are overfilled and it just looks so terrible. For someone's resting place to look like that is really heartbreaking, so that really annoys me. It should be a beautiful place: a place that you enjoy visiting. For example, the rose gardens are just beautiful. They're so clean and it's pleasant for someone to walk through, whereas with our area, down the road there's banana peels. It just looks really messy and it's just not right. For me, there's no respect for those that are lying there: it's just terrible.'

Despite her strong feelings toward the way that some visitors treat the Orthodox area, when her time comes, Adriana still wants to be buried there. 'I would like to go in the Orthodox area, because of my religion and of course, because Mum's there - I don't know if it would be in the same area or somewhere else - so of course the Orthodoxy does play an enormous role. I'd feel comfortable in the fact that I'm amongst others of the same religion. It's the place to be. It's just like when the Greeks migrated, they all landed in Richmond and Brunswick. It was the place to be. Of course, once we go it doesn't really matter where our body is, it's our soul that plays the important role, but you still want to be amongst those who have had the same beliefs as yourself.'

Visitation

'The fact that I work makes it difficult to visit Mum's grave as much as I'd like to. We attend every weekend unless something major is happening: for example, a christening. Dad actually attends on a Tuesday and Thursday, so he comes every second day and on weekends. Dad comes more often than we do. On the weekends, we visit both Saturday and Sunday.'

'Straight after Mum's funeral I went on a daily basis, because I had about two and a half weeks off from work, but since I've been back it's just on weekends, because I'm obviously unable to take time off work to visit. My brother only comes on weekends with Dad and me.'

Adriana feels that her faith has an influence on how frequently she visits. 'But I don't think it's only faith; I think it's also how much you love the person. I think that they go hand in hand: the faith and the love that we have for the person that we've lost. The church hasn't got any ground rules on when you should visit or how often you should visit; it is up to each individual. However, I personally feel that the more you visit the cemetery, the more it helps you. And in visiting them, I also pray for them, so that sort of helps us to communicate in a spiritual way.'

'We try to go to church as a family every week, but then of course there are some days that we are unable to. Church starts at about eight and finishes at about eleven thirty, so it's about three hours or so. If Dad might not be able to make it, I'll just go off on my own and straight after church we go to the cemetery. Even if we don't go to church we'll still go the cemetery.'

'On a typical Saturday, the three of us come by car, between two and three o'clock. We would stay for about an hour, or an hour-and-a-half; it depends on how we're feeling at the time. Mum always believed in fresh flowers, so we bring her fresh flowers. Dad buys them on Friday, because he goes to the market then. The first thing we do when we approach her grave is our cross. We do the sign of our cross and kiss her icon: her photo and then Dad lights the little oil burner. There's a monument on Mum's grave with an oil burner sitting just in the
front there. My brother usually lights the incense thing as well and then we just sit around and have a bit of a conversation between the three of us.'

'Dad always cleans the monument; he waters it down and then wipes it with a cloth. He enjoys doing that, so I just leave him at it. My brother doesn't do much; he just stands there, but he helps with the flowers. Dad talks to Mum; I don't (not out loud) as yet, but Dad tells her what we've done and what we're doing. I pray pretty much the same at the gravesite as I do away from the cemetery. Whatever I feel at the time, I just let out and tell her through my thoughts. For most of the time, I'm just watching Dad and of course, reliving some of the memories that we have. He usually goes for a quick walk around and just visits the other monuments and that would be how it is. It's pretty much the same on a Sunday, except that we usually cut flowers from home and put them with the other flowers we bought.'

'I've always felt easy about visiting Mum's grave. I haven't had a problem with that, but leaving is difficult. I feel very comfortable being there, it's just a matter of when I'm actually leaving, you know. It's really heartbreaking to leave someone behind under those circumstances. It's a little bit easier to leave now, but I still have that thought; I wish I could stay that little bit longer.'

Adriana's family doesn't normally eat in the cemetery. 'Only the Macedonian Orthodox do that, not the Greek Orthodox. The only time that we actually take a few biscuits along – or boiled wheat – is on the Memorial Day itself, that's on the fortieth day anniversary. The first one is actually nine days after the death and then at six months, nine months and then the year. That's when the priest actually says a few words and blesses the grave and they're the only times that we actually take wheat and some dry biscuits to the cemetery.'

'So the first blessing of the grave is on the ninth day after the passing and then on the fortieth day after the passing. However, if the fortieth day falls on a weekday, it's always done on the weekend before the actual fortieth day; it's the same at the three months, the six months, or whatever the case may be. Then we have the year anniversary and then it's up to each individual. They don't have to wait for the third year, they can do it at anytime: whenever they feel they need a memorial service and this can continue until the third, sixth, or the ninth anniversary.'

'Blessing the grave is usually done on a Saturday. The priest will come to the cemetery where we'd be waiting for him at the grave. He prays for her soul and we have a bowl of boiled wheat with raisins, sugar and almonds mixed in and that symbolises the body of the deceased. The priest blesses the wheat and then once it's all over, we just have a bit of the wheat and a biscuit or whatever anybody else brings along. We spend a bit of time there with the deceased and then they usually all come over to the house and have a coffee.'

'All of the wheat has to be consumed, because it has been blessed by the priest; it shouldn't be thrown away. We usually take it home and then give it out to families who couldn't attend on that day. That's normally done on a Saturday, but the blessings used to take place on a Sunday as well. I remember that with my grandfather, it used to be done on the Sunday after the church service. But I think, now there are so many – I mean the Greek population has grown so much – that the priest doesn't have time to go on a Sunday, so he prefers to do it on the Saturday.'
NON-RELIGIOUS FARMER HELPS WIFE DIE PEACEFULLY

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Psychosocial history

Michael was born in Holland fifty-one years ago, the first of seven children. When he was six, his family immigrated to Australia where his youngest two siblings were born. Michael considers himself 'most definitely Australian'. He says, 'I went back about fifteen years ago to see where I belonged and I definitely belong in Australia.'

Michael has been dairy farming since he left school. He was originally in a partnership with his parents, but has now managed his own property for almost twenty years. He was brought up a Roman Catholic, but supposes he now has no religion. 'But I'm not against religion either, I just don't participate in any religions. I leave the census form blank on this one.'

'I've been married twice. The first was about twenty years ago, but that ended in divorce. We had no children. Then, I married Anna, twelve years ago. Anna grew up in a sheep area of New South Wales. I think she went to a local primary school and then to a private secondary college in Melbourne. There are no children by that marriage either, but Anna already had six of her own; her eldest is now twenty-nine and the youngest is eighteen. Only the girls lived with us; the three boys were all older and they stayed with their father.'

Bereavement

Anna died just over two months ago, at the age of forty-nine. 'She had a very magnetic personality; people were drawn to her fairly quickly. She loved flying and just loved life and the family; she loved her kids. She was Anna. She was fun to be with. She kept our place together. Not a night went past that we weren't together, til she got sick.'

'Anna had a seizure one morning and that was the start of it. She was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was ill for fifteen months. She had radiation treatment for six weeks and the tumour reduced about sixty or seventy percent in mass. They expected her to be right for another seven or eight years, but within six months, she had another seizure. They found another tumour, which they treated with chemotherapy, but that didn't work. Two months later, she had another MRI scan. They found another tumour and treated it with another sort of drug and that didn't work. She had a bad fall during an interstate holiday and then she had another scan; it was really diseased. She only lived about eight weeks after that.'

'We were very lucky. She only spent ten days in hospital after the first seizure. They only did a biopsy and then we had six weeks of radiation treatment and then she went back to milking cows for the whole year. Well, there seemed nothing wrong with her. She did everything again. She had a terrific year right up until she had that fall; she had an excellent life til then. But it went downhill very quickly after that. The last five and a half weeks, she spent in the
local hospital (about fifteen minutes from home) and the rest of the time she was at home. For two weeks, she was in bed.'

'About six months earlier, I was pretty sure she was going. Once she got the second lot of tumours we knew she wouldn't last too much longer. We just hoped against hope that she would.'

'The week before she died, I'm sure she didn't know who people were - or if she did, it was only for a split second - because she was on six hundred milligrams of morphine, plus boosters. I suppose that in the last fortnight she wouldn't have had too many boosters: just every now and again. I feel this worked out because we could boost her ourselves and a few of us worked out that if she got upset or aggro, we could boost her and bring that right. I suppose it was only the Sunday before she died that she really got bad. She couldn't swallow any more and saliva was running out of her mouth and she didn't know anybody. She just lay there; she didn't move any more.'

'I think I went home and did the milking and when I got back, she was really bad. Her mouth was open, her tongue was half hanging out and she started vomiting blood. That's when I called the main people who had helped look after her, because I thought, she's not going to last much longer. Her kids then went home about ten o'clock. She was really bad. She just kept vomiting blood every half-hour and she was sort of whimpering like a baby. It took a while to come to terms with boosting her morphine, but we did it. Then she went to sleep just after midnight, about twelve-thirty. So she died peacefully, but she had hell for four hours before. I'll never regret doing what we did.'

'There were only four of us there at the time she died - plus the nursing staff - and we could've stayed there all night, if we wanted to. I had heaps of opportunity to say goodbye and sorry for the stupid things I've done, though at the end, you couldn't hold a conversation with her. I split my head open very badly, about a fortnight before she died, when I came off my motorbike, but I don't think she ever knew I got hurt.'

**Other losses**

With both his parents still alive and most older relatives in Holland, Michael had not previously experienced the loss of anyone close. 'I still haven't lost a relation: just one old bloke. He was pretty close and that affected me a little bit, but nothing like a close relation would, I think.'

**Adjustment**

Michael considers that the knowledge and duration of Anna's illness helped him prepare for her ultimate death. 'It prepared a lot of us. For the last seven or eight weeks, she had someone by her side twenty-four hours a day; and that was a group of about six or seven people. We used to sleep there; we had a roster made out and it was good. That's a stupid thing to say, but it was: it was good.'

Despite the recency of bereavement and own acknowledgment that he is still going through 'quite a bit of turmoil', Michael believes that he has changed a lot. 'I don't think I've got a temper any more. I had a very bad temper. The little things everybody carries on about just aren't very important any more. I'm probably more emotional. I cry and laugh more. I just appreciate things more. Laughter and tears tend to come a lot easier. I appreciate life more.'

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I wouldn’t be able to comment on her kids, because I don’t see them much any more, but I’m sure Anna’s death has had a big impact on her eldest son. He used to ring her up every couple of days. He’s still quite emotional about it, actually. I get on with him the best. He hasn’t got the influence of the father, I’d say; he’s a different bloke all together.

Anna’s death has not challenged Michael’s personal beliefs. ‘It hasn’t stirred a renewed interest in God or made me hate him for everything. I can understand why people do turn away from their faith after something like that happens, or I suppose, to some people it’s a good crutch to hold on to, but to me it’s made no difference whatsoever.’

‘I was ready to give the business up about thirteen years ago, then she came along. She loved it and made it good. She made me want to save it. It was a good working relationship and we worked well together, all the time. I always said that if Anna left, I’d leave the farm and it was on the market just before she died. Only Anna kept it going, so it’s now time for me to do something different, or do nothing: whatever I feel like doing.’

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think I’d want one just about the same. It was great – especially the fly-by. It was beautiful and very moving.’

To Michael, the funeral was everyone’s opportunity to say a final goodbye to Anna. ‘After the viewing, you couldn’t just leave: you’d have to have something else, so it was the final goodbye: the end of a chapter.’

Cemetery

Anna is buried in a lawn grave in a small town cemetery, which to Michael, is just a cemetery. ‘It’s where Anna’s body is. I used to go down there nearly every day for a couple of weeks after the funeral and there was sort of nothing there; it was just a pile of dirt. I don’t know what it will mean to me in the future. I don’t know how often I’ll go. I suppose it’s been ten days since I’ve been there – no, it’s probably only a week. It doesn’t seem to change much; it’s only a bit of bare dirt at the moment. I suppose I’ll go there every now and again, but I don’t know.’

Michael believes that Anna is not really at the cemetery. ‘She’s not in the ground, just under a bit of dirt over there; I think she’s probably everywhere. Whatever I do reminds me of her. I think she’s looking out over us. Don’t ask me why, but I think there’s something out there. I don’t know what it is, but I think there’d be something once you’ve gone. I suppose the reason is probably, that you’d hope for yourself that there is something after you die. I don’t know.’

‘The cemetery is not a sacred place, but I suppose it would have some heritage value. It tells you a lot about the town, because you can usually see in a mining town that the people died a lot younger – mainly accidents – than in an agricultural town. You can learn a lot about a place by its cemetery and they are interesting places.’

‘I don’t feel close to Anna at the cemetery, probably because we did everything together. It doesn’t matter where I go: in the house or on the farm or wherever, she’s been there. She’s done something here; she’s helped me with something there, so I feel her more at home than I do at the cemetery. Sometimes I feel a little bit of sadness at the cemetery and other times, I have a laugh and chuckle; it depends on what I think about at the time. If you think about a good time, you sort of laugh and chuckle, but if you’re thinking about sad things, then you will be sad.’

‘I guess the cemetery is a sad place, not because Anna’s buried there, but because of some of the other people you see come there. Like, there’s a little old lady who just sits there; she’s done this nice little garden and she just sits there for hours on end. She brings a cup of tea and dinner. That’s sad: not that it’s a particularly sad place.’

Anna’s grave does not yet have any monument or specific marker. ‘That bit of ground doesn’t do much for me at all. It doesn’t make me feel sad; it doesn’t make me feel happy. It’s just a bit of dirt, but I know Anna’s buried down there somewhere. I think putting a permanent marker there is important. Well, that’s where her body is and it was important to her. She used to look up old family graves in other cemeteries and once, we couldn’t find a grave, so she wrote to the cemetery trust and got a map and she found it. It was just a bare bit of dirt and she was very upset, because there was nothing there. So it’s important I think; it’s very important. When I die, I think I’d like somebody to say, “Look; he’s buried there”.’
Visitation

'In the beginning, people expect you to go there. If I were really truthful, I’d probably have to say that most of the times I went, were because people expected me to. To be honest, I felt a bit guilty if I hadn’t been when people thought I should have. Now I go when I want to go: when I feel like it and not when other people think I should be going.' However, Michael does not feel that his earliest visits were solely to meet other people’s expectations. ‘I probably also had a need to be there in the beginning; I wanted to be there.’

‘I mainly visit on my own, but sometimes with someone else. It’s a funny thing I know, but I was there probably only a couple of days after the funeral and there were these two bottles of wine that she just wouldn’t let me open. I don’t know why; they were nothing special, just two bottles of plonk, but she just wouldn’t let me open them for no reason at all. So I went down and opened those bottles of wine and poured them all over her grave. I had a mouthful of each and threw the bottles in the rubbish bin. Why I did that, I don’t know, but I couldn’t drink them after that. One bottle wasn’t bad actually; it was a waste.’

‘If I go to town to get pizza by myself, I’ll eat it near the cemetery. That’s when I sort of think of her. When I’ve talked about her to other people, then I probably tend to go there a bit, if I’ve got nothing else to do. I’ve only ever driven in there a few times just to go and see her.’

‘When I visit the grave, I just stand there for a couple of minutes. The time varies, but I suppose five minutes would be the longest. I wonder what she’s like down there in the coffin; I wonder what stage she’s at. I know the coffin is good wood; it’s supposed to last twenty-five years, but I wonder what she would be like in there. It’s pretty clinical I suppose, but that’s the thing I mostly think about. I suppose now and again I say a few things, but I don’t know whether she hears me. I took flowers out of our own garden for a while, but not the last few times.’

‘I suppose I’ll probably go at Christmas and on important days and I’m sure I’ll go on her birthday and maybe the day we were married: a few things like that. I’ve now got past the stage of going because I thought people expected me to go there. I’ll go there when I want to go there.’
FATAL ACCIDENT PRECIPITATES SISTER-IN-LAW'S MENTAL BREAKDOWN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bereaved</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age: 43</td>
<td>Relationship: Brother-in-law</td>
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Psychosocial history

Andrea was born in northern Queensland forty-three years ago. She was the sixth of four boys and four girls and her parents separated when she was twelve. 'I had a fairly traumatic upbringing. We moved down to Brisbane, but my father stayed up there. When I was eighteen, I went to New Zealand and met my husband on the ship.'

Andrea has now been married for twenty-three years and lives in Melbourne. She and her husband have four children, aged fourteen to twenty. 'The youngest is still at school; the others have all got jobs. I was a nurse, but then my husband bought a publishing business and I worked there and reared the kids at the same time. My eldest daughter works with my husband now.'

'I don't get to Queensland to see my family very often. My Mum's a pastor of the Assemblies of God church and my second-eldest brother is also a pastor, so I was bought up quite religious. I was raised in the Assemblies of God and religion was rammed down our throats from when we were knee-high to a grasshopper. I was a Sunday school teacher and that sort of thing, then my faith drifted. I stopped going to church when I was sixteen. That's when I went nursing and had shift work, which was just a poor excuse, but that's when I was able to not turn up, or whatever. But it was rammed down our throats.'

'When I turned twenty, I married a Catholic. That was seen as a bad thing, because Mum used to be Catholic. It's like an ex-smoker or an ex-drinker, or something; she did everything to stop our marriage. She didn't like my husband, because he was Catholic. Then I chose to bring the kids up Catholic, because if my husband's Mum and Dad struggled to bring their six kids up as Catholics, in private schools and everything, well then I could do the same. My husband didn't take the kids to mass, so I took them and I would sit there. It is different to what I was brought up with, but they learnt the Catholic side and I also told them the Protestant side, so they actually got two sides of the coin. And it's what they believe that counts, it's not a bunch of laws up there that you've got to do.'

'I went along to mass and all that sort of thing with the kids and they went through Catholic schools, but I didn't actually accept the Catholic faith myself. Now they've got their own beliefs, but it's not Catholic and it's not Assemblies of God. I don't really believe in churches to give a person a safety blanket. I think it's what you believe in, not the name of the church that counts.'

Three years ago, Andrea suffered a mental breakdown following the death of her brother-in-law in a car accident. Although much improved, she is still under treatment and has not returned to work.
Bereavement

‘Bob was fifty years old. I have known him since I was ten, so that loss was pretty heavy. He was like a brother; I was very close to him. He had a sort of hobby farm really. He was a boilermaker by trade and they moved north from Brisbane. He couldn’t get work for a while, then he milked cows and that sort of thing and he ended up working on a cane field. His father died of a heart attack at the age of forty. When Bob was forty, he was very afraid of dying of a heart attack, but he lived till fifty. I was only ten when he was going with my eldest sister. He was sort of like a father figure, I suppose. They’ve got four kids of their own.’

‘His eldest son (who was seventeen) was driving the car and Bob was the front passenger. His other son was in the back. They were turning off the highway, into the road that goes to their farm and were somehow hit head-on by a car that was towing a boat. There was no one hurt in the other vehicle, but the eldest son lost half his face, the youngest son was scalped and Bob was cut in half, so he died instantly. The two boys weren’t expected to live, but they did. The older one has now only got a little scar on his head; they were able to put his face back and they sewed the younger one’s scalp back on, but he’s got a little bit of brain damage. They both had every bone in their bodies broken, but they’ve come through it fine.’

‘My sister is forty-seven and she was very, very close to Bob. The day of the accident, she was working in town and as she was coming home there was a news report to say there was a horrific accident on the highway and she just got this cold feeling and thought it was her family. They’d been south to a car meet, or something and she kept driving and they kept saying over the radio, “There’s been a massive accident. Avoid the area”. The road was all closed off, but she got home, because there are two ways of actually getting into their farm and she came home the north end. When she got home, no one was there, so she got in the car and went out the south end and saw the accident. The helicopters and all that sort of stuff had arrived. They wouldn’t tell her that Bob was dead and they wouldn’t tell her about her sons. It must have been terrible for her.’

‘The boys were flown to the nearest hospital and they couldn’t do anything for them, so they flew them straight down to Brisbane. The younger boy was in the children’s hospital and the older one was in the adult hospital; they were both in comas. The ambulance chap at the scene had been in the service for thirty years and said he had never seen an accident like it.’

‘My sister eventually found out what had happened and insisted on going and seeing Bob. The doctors didn’t want her to, but she pleaded with them that she needed to see him, so they ended up taking her with them. She said her goodbyes to him and then was flown down to Brisbane to the boys. With that, I got the phone call, so of course I flew up.’

‘It was about a week and a half before they had the burial, because the boys were so bad they needed her there. She had to live in Brisbane. Their lives were so touch and go; they’d say, “No, they’re going”, and then, “Oh, they’re back”. She never left their sides; she just went from one hospital to the other the whole time. Then, once the boys were actually stabilised enough, we had the funeral – it was just a small burial – and then after the funeral, she was back down in Brisbane again to the boys.’

‘She needed to be with her boys, which would have been extremely hard for her as well. They had operation after operation. The boy who was driving had massive, massive injuries and he had just one operation after another and they’d think he wasn’t going to pull through and then he would pull through. It was the same with the younger one. She’s a firm believer in prayer—
so is my Mum — and she just stayed by their sides. Her daughters also stayed there and they were her strength; they held her up. Then gradually, her boys just started getting better, but they cannot remember the accident whatsoever. The older boy doesn’t believe his Dad is dead. He still talks about him as if he’s just gone off to work and hasn’t come home yet. My sister found that very hard to understand."

‘The younger boy also had a hole through his skull, so he’s got a plate in his head. He’s not severely damaged; he’s just a little slow. His brother has still got pins and plates and goodness-knows-what in him, but no brain damage whatsoever. They thought that he would be blind in his left eye, but even his sight came back.’

‘They had a very big inquest into the accident. The driver of the other vehicle (an off-duty policeman) said that Bob’s car went onto his side of the road, but because the boys can’t remember, they had to sort of try and work out how it actually happened and they came to the conclusion that no one knew. There was no evidence of the boys going on the wrong side, or of the other driver’s vehicle being on their side. I believe it was meant to be. The boys were meant to live; it was Bob’s time to go and he didn’t suffer any pain at all, it was so quick. The ironic part about it is my sister always said that Bob wouldn’t wear a seatbelt; he didn’t believe in seatbelts and the day of the accident, he had a seatbelt on and that’s what actually cut him in half.’

‘The moment my Mum found out about the accident, she rang me and I went up the next day. I met my Mum at Brisbane and then we went up to my sister’s place and then back to Brisbane. We just stayed in Brisbane, because that’s where the hospitals were and Mum wasn’t capable of driving at that stage, because she was just in complete shock. Not long after the funeral, I went home. There was nothing else I could do and my sister needed her space; she needed to grieve with her girls. While the boys were critically ill, she actually lived at the hospital; they gave her a unit there, just near the hospital. I stayed with my Mum and my sister from New Zealand came over and she also stayed at the unit. But it came time for me to go; I’d sort of been there and she needed to grieve. I don’t think she ever grieved properly.’

‘Bob was a good man. He would help people; he would help people before himself. Many times he would give someone his last egg, because that person needed it, or he’d fix their fences when his fences were falling down. But he didn’t have any insurance policy; he didn’t believe in that. His house was falling down — and I mean falling down — and he never showed his boys how to put a washer in a tap or how to fix the pump that comes from the dam into the house. When we stayed at the house — for the funeral — there was a massive hole in the floor. There were white ants through the house. So, the family had to start from scratch.’

‘My sister had to go into a lot of debt to actually fix the house. He was always going to do it, but he always did things for other people first, but he died and he left her with everything. And I think, when I look at it now, that was meant to be, because my sister relied on him so much that she had to stand on her own two feet. In a similar situation, I had to stand on my own two feet, because you can’t rely on a partner or anyone else for the rest of your life. So, she hit rock bottom and then had to get up and learn how to put a washer in the tap: how to fix the dam, how to get builders in to fix the hole in the floor and plumbers and all the rest of it. She’ll work for the rest of her life; she’ll never sell the place, because it’s Bob’s. Bob left so much behind. There were a lot of good things, plus all the other things that he never got around to do. I know with Bob’s death, my husband learnt a lot: don’t put off til tomorrow what you can do today. So we’ve all learnt a lesson out of one death.’
Other losses

Andrea’s grandparents died many years ago. ‘Also many years ago, my husband’s brother went on a cruise and disappeared off the ship. He was out in international waters on a Russian cruise ship and he went up to the top deck to watch the sunset with a mate, who left him and went to bed. One of the crewmen also saw him there on a deckchair, but the next morning, they stopped at some islands and he wasn’t around. His mates just thought he’d gone ashore, so they went ashore and when they came back he wasn’t there. When the ship started to pull out, they went to the Captain and said, “Look: we’re missing a passenger”, but the ship kept going. They stopped at the next port and radioed back, then they ended up searching the cabin and his passport and everything was still in his room.’

‘It was the biggest bungled job that you could ever come across. I was actually at my husband’s Mum and Dad’s house when the phone call came to say that he’d disappeared, presumed drowned. They never, ever found his body. The Australian consulate wouldn’t do anything, because it was outside their waters and the French consulate wouldn’t do anything, because it was outside their waters. It was days before they got a plane up to look for him and that was only because of pressure from the family. It was horrific for my husband; absolutely horrific. I was extremely pregnant at the time with our first. My husband’s other brother and their brother’s girlfriend ended up going over to the islands with an Australian Consul, a couple of weeks later, but that only happened because a television network pushed it through. Anyway, they went to the islands and had a look around, but they found absolutely nothing. There’s never been an answer.’

‘His mates say that aliens got him. I’ve been on a ship and if you’re on the top deck you can’t fall off into the water, because there’s another deck that sticks out and there’s another deck, so if he had fallen, he would’ve been on the next deck. Then they tried to say that he’d committed suicide. The crew had changed ships. Another ship had come up and the whole ship’s crew had changed around that area, so whether he had seen something he shouldn’t have seen and something happened to him, no one knows. He just disappeared off the face of the earth. Then after seven years they said, “OK; he’s dead”. I think my husband’s used to the fact that he’s not going to come back. I think that was the closest thing that I’ve had to do with death really.’

‘Just before Bob’s accident, my Mum’s sister died of leukaemia; I was very close to my aunt and Mum’s brother died of cancer at the beginning of this year. I also had a scare with my Mum. She had breast cancer and had a mastectomy only a month before Bob was killed. The mastectomy was very quickly done; I didn’t go up for that. My sister in New South Wales did and was with Mum for that and then with the news of the accident, I went up. I think I was actually on the verge of a breakdown when the accident happened. It toppled me over.’

‘Around the same time as Mum’s illness, I had two operations on my breasts to remove lumps. I’m in a very, very high category for breast cancer. I was petrified of the first operation; it was very, very frightening. I thought my husband wouldn’t love me any more and all that sort of thing. The second one was after the breakdown and I thought, “So, if I get it, I get it”. I thought, “Oh, well. So be it. If it’s there, it’s there; if it’s not, it’s not”, and that’s how I look at it. If I’m going to get breast cancer, well I’m supposed to get breast cancer and then I’m going to learn from that.’

‘I have a very, very close friend who’s dying of breast cancer at the moment. She’s younger than I am and I find that hard: very hard, because she’s been sick for six years. The doctors said, “Oh, no; you haven’t got breast cancer”, and now she’s dying of it. She was the
bubbliest person you could meet and we are very close; we’re like sisters. So I think that might be a pretty hard thing when the time comes.’

Andrea does not consider that any previous bereavement in any way helped prepare her for Bob’s death. Nor does she think that any other loss experience has compounded her grief for her brother-in-law.

**Funeral**

Andrea was not involved in planning Bob’s funeral service. ‘My second eldest brother did the service; he’s a minister. One of his sons played the saxophone and the other son played the piano. They played Amazing Grace and because that was Bob’s favourite song, it was extremely emotional and my Mum got up and read, so a lot of the family actually took part.’

‘I remember my son saying that it was the most beautiful funeral and the happiest he’s ever been to – not that he’s been to very many funerals. My brother did the talk on him – he and Bob were mates – and he brought up all the happy things that he and Bob had done, so there was a lot of laughter in the church. It wasn’t all crying; it was a real lot of laughter. About two years before that, my second eldest brother and his wife and kids lived with them for about twelve months, so there was a very strong bond there. But he spoke about all the good bits; all the funny pieces of Bob’s life came out and people who hadn’t seen him for years could remember those funny pieces. So, it was sort of a sad occasion, but it made you feel really good, because he was such a good bloke and had done so much. It was a very nice funeral.’

‘If someone suffers before they go, I think it’s harder for someone else to cope with that, because they know that the person has suffered and there is a lot more grieving and sorrow to go through, because of that person’s suffering. But Bob didn’t suffer at all; it was just: Bang! Goodbye, gone. And I think it was different, because of the other two boys being so critical. The funeral was left for such a long time, because of the boys and then they couldn’t even go to the funeral. That was sad, that his own two sons couldn’t be at the funeral, but it works out that they don’t remember anyway, so they’ve never gone through a grieving.’

**Adjustment**

Andrea has experienced dramatic change in her life since Bob’s death. ‘I had a mental breakdown since then. I think it was Bob’s death that actually popped it. I think it had been coming, but I just went and fell off the top as soon as I heard about the accident, but I stayed pretty strong when I was up there with Mum and my sister. I more-or-less collapsed when I came back. I didn’t know that I was having a breakdown until I came back, but one day I just knew I was, so I went and sought help.’

‘I think Bob’s death didn’t cause the breakdown, because I was already starting. I had migraine everyday; I just lived with migraine, but it was my body saying, “Excuse me, slow down”. But because I wasn’t listening, I just kept going and going. I sort of look at it now, that the soul said, “Well, OK; here, have a breakdown, then you’ll listen”, and that just happened to be when Bob was killed. That just toppled me over the edge. Then I had to start from right down the bottom and work my way up again. So yeah, I hit rock bottom.’

‘My breakdown has been very, very difficult for my immediate family. My husband didn’t understand what a breakdown was. He thought I should just snap out of it. Most people think, “Well, OK; so you’re depressed. Now get better”. But it’s like a disease; mental illness is a disease and you can’t snap out of it. It put horrific strain on my husband and I and the kids. I
couldn’t do basic things, like get in the car and go to the shop; I had agoraphobia. I couldn’t cook meals; my second daughter cooked meals for twelve months. I can’t remember a lot of that twelve months.’

‘My husband would take me to the psychiatrist every week. To start with, it was twice a week. He actually wanted to admit me in hospital and I said, “No”. I was on a lot of medication; I could not sleep and I couldn’t eat. I went down to forty-five kilos. I had OCD, which is obsessive compulsive disorder. I was afraid of germs. I would wash my hands until they were bleeding. I would disinfect the ceiling, the walls, everything. And I would run; I could not stop. I couldn’t go slowly; I had to go very fast, which was a strain on the family. I didn’t stop running. There was something in me that just couldn’t stop. I just had to keep going and going, and going until I was so exhausted I couldn’t breathe.’

‘I felt that it was my husband’s fault and I hated the business. I thought it was the fault of the business. I felt like a nobody at work. I had started off with the business and I had been told what to do the whole time. I started out the back — in the factory — like the factory workers; I had the kids and still went to work out in the factory. Eventually I got to the front office, but I didn’t have a desk and I didn’t have a chair, but I needed to be there, for moral support. Whether there was work for me or not, I was needed, so I sort of stood around like a wallflower, which I felt. I put up with that for a long time, because I didn’t know any different. That was the old me.’

‘Then the migraines would come and I still had to go to work. I still had to stay at work and do deliveries in the car. They tested my brain to see if I had tumours, they did everything. I got to the stage where I hated work. A lot of pressure was on my husband at work and I felt it was all my fault, so I took everything on. This was before Bob’s death and I didn’t know any different, so I just kept pushing and pushing, and pushing myself. I had to be the perfect wife and perfect mother. Well I couldn’t be; there’s no such thing. Then there was Bob’s death and I had the breakdown. So, a lot of things were causing me a lot of stress at the time; the accident was just the icing on the cake, as they say.’

‘In Queensland, we didn’t really have a lot of time to grieve, because the boys were so ill, but we knew that Bob was gone and there wasn’t anything we could do about that. Everything was then focussed on the boys. I think my sister didn’t have time to grieve for Bob. Everything was just focussed on how the boys were going; just about every organ in their body had something wrong with it. They’re miracles. The doctors say they’re miracles and the ambulance drivers said they’re miracles; they should not have survived. The older one’s now married. But yeah, she didn’t actually have time: we didn’t have time to grieve. There was nothing we could actually do for Bob; he was gone and that’s it.

‘It’s a bit strange really; the car that the accident was in is in their backyard. Now I couldn’t have that myself, but the car that Bob was killed in is still sitting there. It’s very hard to let go of the vehicle, but it doesn’t mean a thing to the two boys. I don’t know whether they’ll ever go through a grieving time, or one day it will just hit them and all of a sudden their memory might come back. I don’t think their memory was supposed to be there, because if they remembered the accident they wouldn’t have coped with their own injuries. I think the universe was looking after the boys, so it worked out just right. “Bob’s time was up: Bang! gone, but you two can’t remember it”.

‘I had a lot of psychiatric help and counselling. Then I got into yoga, which has been absolutely fantastic; it helps you balance. You’re thinking not only physical, it works on four levels: your physical, mental, emotional and your spiritual levels. I’m now doing a course to
become a teacher and I’m doing esoteric studies as part of my course. The last five weeks of the esoteric studies course have been on death and it just works out so simple, how it all is. I do look at death differently. When your time is up, it is up; when your soul is ready to leave, it leaves and that’s it. So I think if anything does happen, at least I can understand what death’s all about and the stages that you go through after death and the stage you go through before death. I think if anything happened now, my grieving would be different, because I can see it differently now. So the yoga and the esoteric studies have helped me heaps: absolutely heaps.’

‘I know I’m a stronger person now. I’m mentally stronger. I was weak before; I’m not now. I’m stronger in my personality, stronger in my thinking and in my understanding of things. I class my mental breakdown as a breakdown that was meant to happen.’ Andrea considers she is a happier person today, and that she is more honest with herself. ‘I’m not a person’s person; I am my own person now. I just look at life differently. We’re here for a job and that’s what we’re here to do, so get on with it. Enjoy life, but you’re here for a purpose, so find that purpose and do it.’

‘Bob’s death brought the family closer together, but also put a little bit more tension between myself and my eldest sister. Her eldest daughter got married two years ago: only twelve months after her dad died. I went up for that; I was very close to her, so she insisted on us going and staying with her. I didn’t really want to and she pleaded with me to stay. I thought, “Oh, you’ve got enough on; you’re going to be the mother of the bride”. But we stayed and she was so stressed. She’d never really got over the grieving and I couldn’t handle all that. It sort of brought back everything, so I was busting my neck to leave. She found it very difficult and I actually said something pretty nasty to her at the time. It was her daughter’s wedding and we were all there helping and she was doing the wedding cake and she was getting extremely frustrated and she was nasty to everybody. She was nasty to her daughter. Her daughter’s wedding presents were coming and she didn’t care. It was really getting to me, because it wasn’t her daughter’s fault.’

‘I had been through a very bad time with my Mum, before I got married and I didn’t want that to happen here. On the morning of the wedding, she asked me what was wrong. She said, “You don’t seem very happy. What’s wrong?” Well, the honesty came out instead of a white lie and I said, “It feels like we’re here for a funeral, not a wedding”, and she got extremely upset and did grieve. She grieved. I’d never heard anybody wail so much, but it released her.’

‘I went to pieces and I told my husband to go to her. She just wailed and wailed: something terrible, but as it turned out, it sort of snapped her out of this grumpiness and all the rest of it. My husband calmed her down and nobody else knew, so it didn’t spoil the wedding. The girls were at the hairdresser’s and when they came back, she was a different person. She was happy and was nice to her daughter and the wedding turned out beautifully, but I never forgave myself for being nasty to her. That day, she actually grieved. The next day she came to me and said, “I hadn’t cried”. She said, “I’ve had little weeps, but I had not cried since the accident”. She was not thanking me, of course and it did put a strain between us. I couldn’t wait to leave; I couldn’t stand it.’

‘Oh, because she didn’t have time to grieve when Bob died – because everything was put onto the boys – she hadn’t actually had a good howl at all; she just kept going. Then her eldest daughter decided that she was going to get married within that twelve months and that was on the anniversary of Bob’s death. That was sort of very heavy for my sister, but I think in that way she actually did release all the emotions that she’d been hanging onto for such a long
time. She was able to release it and then let go and then she was able to get through the wedding.

'Her eldest son gave the bride away. He was able to walk down the aisle and give his sister away. It was a beautiful wedding, but I sort of went through a little bit of regression, because it took me back to the accident time. I'd only just started getting strong on my feet from it and then this toppled me back down again. By the time we got back from Queensland, I was a wreck again and I had to start off again.'

'I actually stopped taking my medication a month ago, now. I still do see the psychiatrist, but not very often. I know he is there, if I do need him; I can always ring him, or whatever. But the yoga teacher training course that I'm now doing is a very heavy course and the esoteric study hits a lot of raw points. So I was told not to give up on the psychiatrist just yet, but to get through the course and just see how I'm going, because there's a lot of things that can be brought up. I've had a couple of not-so-good days in class, talking on death and things like that. Mental stability is like that; it sort of hit home a little bit to me, but I'm getting a lot stronger through it.'

'I don't attend church now, but I still find that I am religious in my own way. I'm not Assemblies of God, I'm not Catholic and I'm not Church of England; I'm not a name as such, it's what I believe. My husband doesn't go to church and the kids don't go to church, but I do have faith and I believe in God and I do read the Bible and all that sort of thing.'

'I suppose there is an obvious connection between Bob's death and my faith that I believe in now, because I had the breakdown and then had to start from scratch. I never said, "Why me?" and blamed God; I don't believe in that personally. But it was going to yoga and doing the teacher training course that has brought me closer to God, because you study a wide range of religious beliefs. It's not a denomination or anything like that. It looks at a bigger picture in understanding death and understanding life and why are we here and that's given me a lot of understanding and growth.'

'I personally don't believe one religion is correct, because Jesus didn't have a religion. He wasn't Catholic and he wasn't Protestant. It is only in the last two thousand years that religion has actually come with names and a lot of religions are there to frighten people. I do have a lot of faith, but it's not under a name as such.'

'I believe in reincarnation: our soul is put here to learn something. I believe in karma: what goes around comes round. I think Bob was a very giving person and a very kind-hearted person. I don't think he's in heaven to stay in heaven, but he's gone up. He'll see what his plan on earth was supposed to be, because we're all here for a purpose and whether he's actually done his purpose, I don't know, but it will be shown to him. "Now, you should've really done that, but your personality got in the way and you chose not to, because you've got free will. So now, you've got to go round and do it all again. You're going to go back and learn and you can do something very nice to that person. So you're going to cop it when you go back, so you know what it feels like". So, I think he's up there, but he's going to come back in another human body to learn something else.'

**Cemetery**

Andrea has not visited Bob's grave since the funeral. 'The day before my niece's wedding, my husband took my sister out to the cemetery, to sort of help her get through her depression.
We thought it might have helped her, but it didn’t. We haven’t been back since the wedding. The older son got married earlier this year, but I didn’t go to that.

‘I don’t think I would have liked to have gone and visited Bob’s grave. Why put yourself through another sadness when you don’t need to? I know that if I went there, all these memories from the accident would all come back, so it’s best, I think. Maybe, it’s because we’re in Melbourne and they’re in Queensland. I don’t know what the situation would be like if I was up there, but I don’t think I would go. I’d hate to go back to where I was when I had the breakdown: not that I’m going to go right back to the beginning, because you don’t, but I don’t want to go anywhere near that spot.’

‘I think if someone said, “Oh, look; do you want to come with me while I go and visit Bob’s grave?” I’d say, “Oh, OK”, but I really don’t think I would just make a special trip to go and see the grave, because it’s only a grave. I haven’t dwelt on that a lot, because I can get on merry-go-rounds and I can’t get off them, so I try not to dwell too much on one thing. I also think a goodbye is goodbye, and you should move on. I don’t know whether my sister goes to the grave, but I don’t think the boys do.’

‘Bob was supposed to have a monument on his grave, but I haven’t seen it. I think a plaque saying something about the person is beautiful, but it’s not necessary for me to go and see that. I think it would probably be a little different if it was my husband or one of my kids.’

‘My husband’s aunty died about sixteen years ago. She’d lived with his Mum and Dad for eighteen years and I went to the funeral, but I’ve never been back. I’ve never had an urge to go to the gravesite. So maybe that’s just me, whereas the next person might have to go each Sunday, or whatever, but I don’t get the urge to go.’
BAPTIST FATHER CONSTRUCTS LIFE FOR STILLBORN DAUGHTER

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<thead>
<tr>
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Psychosocial history

Paul was born in Victoria, thirty-seven years ago. He has four older sisters and considers himself the spoilt baby of the family. 'It’s a great position to be in really. We were brought up in a Baptist family with both our parents heavily involved in the church. I ended up doing the normal teenage thing of throwing that all out and then returning to it, but in a slightly different shape than it was given to me as a child.'

Paul and Jane have been married for eleven years. 'I was on a dairy farm we owned when our daughter died. That was nearly three years ago. Now I'm a university lecturer and we have a six-month old son. I think my Christian-based faith has served me reasonably well through the death of our child. Never well enough, but it has served to help somehow through the crisis.'

'We attended church regularly for the first couple of years of our marriage, but neither of us go these days. She'd like to go more than I would. I think that occurred partly from having lived in the country. It's difficult to find a church with more than twelve people and a dog in a small country community with most of the people over sixty-five, so it happened naturally. We attempted to find a country church, but it just didn't happen and then we came back to the city and haven't got involved again.'

Bereavement

'Jessica was our first child. We lost her at thirty-nine weeks gestation. She was an IVF child, so was our new boy and although there was a secret wish to have another girl, I think we're lucky that we had a boy. He's very much his own little individual now. He hasn't filled Jessica's shoes and I think that's been nice for both Jessica and our memory of her, or our attempted memories that we've tried to build. Now we have our son and I think that's good.'

'With Jessica, the pregnancy went terrifically well; the child was healthy, but she was always very quiet in the uterus, so when she died, neither my wife nor I assumed anything was wrong. We were probably naive, even though we'd been through quite a lead-time to have a child. You live in a sort of naive vacuum, that everything will be all right. It's amazing, the human capacity to create that sort of sense of security. I mean, even with the second pregnancy I think we did feel very insecure, but it didn't take long to feel secure at times. So we oscillate now and most of the people we know, who have been through a similar experience, are somewhat the same. They go between complete fear and insecurity, to feeling quite secure about the child.'

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'After two years of trying to conceive naturally, we were on the IVF program for two years before Jessica was conceived. Friends of ours went through a coroner’s inquest on the death of their child and during the inquest, the obstetrician stated that, “No child is more valuable than another child”, and I guess from our perspective that’s true, but it’s also false. I think that in reality, the replacement of that child – and replacement sounds horrible – is far more difficult for people who have been through IVF or have had trouble conceiving. And it’s not just the child you lose when a child dies; it’s also the lifestyle that you imagine with that child that disappears as well, so it has far greater consequences. I think that’s possibly where infant death is very different from the death of a parent, or an older person. Your lifestyle doesn’t necessarily change a lot when your eighty-year old mother or father dies, whereas our lifestyle was turned upside down. We had created it in a new way through that nine months. We knew how it might be: and then it wasn’t. So I think there is a sense in which IVF is very costly in that way – not financially – because if you lose a child after IVF, it’s very difficult to rebuild your life again from that position: and we know people going through it now.'

'With Jessica’s death, there was no warning at all. On the Monday night, she was fairly quiet. We were going through the birth centre for the delivery and they taught me to listen to the heartbeat, so I could hear the heart beating away, quite well as far as I was concerned. So we went to sleep with a fair degree of confidence. She’d often been very still for long periods of time; it was just her nature I think. But on Tuesday morning, she was still quiet and Jane decided to go to the local hospital – we were living in the country – and they couldn’t find a heartbeat, so that was the first indication we had. Then at about eleven o’clock, we had an ultrasound and discovered that she was – that her heart had stopped – and she was dead.'

'For Jane, it was an instant response. She was just wrecked, but for the first fifteen minutes, I don’t think I really knew what had happened, whereas Jane seemed to know straightaway. At that point, all I could think about was her: her pain, the fact that she was just distraught. And it wasn’t until we got home, an hour and a half later – because it’s a forty-minute drive to the hospital – and I think it was actually ringing someone and saying that she’d died, that it hit me. I can remember just staring out the window across the farm and not being able to breathe: almost hyperventilating. At that point, Jane had my stepfather support me and I think that’s the way it has been since then: each needing support at different times, but we’ve both lost our way at times. That initial reaction was just shock and for weeks we both felt fairly numb. I guess this is where the background of faith comes into it. I think that through that period of numbness, we did have a sense in which there was an understanding of being still: of just letting time take it’s course and we’d be better. It wasn’t until six or eight weeks later that we actually felt absolutely terrible again. I think that we knew our life was a mess, but there’s a sense in which you’re just numb: and thank heavens you are, because I don’t think you’d deal with it all at once. But then after that, it gets raw again and people stop visiting as much.'

'At the ultrasound when they found she had died, we wished we had asked what sex the baby was. That’s about the only regret we have through that, because we had to make decisions. We were lucky enough I suppose, to have an obstetrician there. Jane had private backup, as well as the birth centre and that slowed everything down. Jane said, “I just want to get this done. I can’t deal with this”. She said, “I want to have a Caesar”, and he said, “No; come up tomorrow morning to the hospital”, so we stayed with Mum that night and went to the hospital the next morning. So she died on Tuesday, we ended up at the medical centre on the Wednesday morning and it was actually the Thursday before Jessica was delivered. So Jane had this for two days. We wish we had known that she was a girl at that point, but I guess we got the surprise that she was a girl when she was stillborn.'
'I think the birth was really difficult for Jane; being a midwife, she knew what was coming. Before Jessica was actually delivered, the birth seemed futile, but she was delivered in the kindest possible way, where Jane felt in control of the situation. I felt like I was contributing to her pain and the midwife and the obstetrician were actually involved in a sympathetic way. But once she was delivered, there was a sense in which bringing her into the world still happened and if anyone went through the same thing, I'd say to go that way: never just say, "Cut this baby out," or, "Pull this baby out". She was born – although still – she was warm and you know, there was a sense in which life was still there, even though it wasn't.'

'So, I think those two days after the ultrasound were incredibly valuable, although they were hard. It was hard to go to sleep at night, knowing that we were going to sleep with a dead baby and it was hard to think of Jane carrying a dead baby. We got time to read the SANDS book; we got time to think about what we wanted for the service. We had to have that time. Most people we've talked to since didn't get that time and are still suffering, whereas I think that we moved along fairly quickly, because we had that time; so it's incredibly fortunate. And I think the delivery was really important to us, even though she wasn't with us. But that's not the right thing to say, because I think we both felt like she was with us for about six or eight hours. I think that's associated with her getting colder: her body naturally getting colder. There was a point in which we felt she'd had enough. We kept her over the Thursday night in the room, but I think we knew the next morning that there was no point in staying any longer.'

'We have photographs. The hospital did a little memorial book and Jane's father took black and white shots, which are actually terrific. Because Jessica died two days before, she'd lost a little bit of skin around her eye and a bit on her arms; we didn't see that when she was dressed. The black and white makes this all softer than the colour photos.'

'I think we said goodbye as much as we could. I think we felt like she was leaving us through the night. You know I keep saying this, but we were lucky. We'd had a midwife with us on the same shift, for three shifts and she was just wonderful. We actually put Jessica in her arms, rather than just have her wheeled out. That was a very difficult thing to do. Jane talks about wanting to turn around and run back, but I think I accepted then that Jessica had passed it. Blood was starting to come out of her nose and there was a sense in which she needed to be put somewhere and not touched again. Touching her was starting to upset her whole physical being, or what was left of it.'

**Other losses**

'My father died in a car accident when I was fifteen. I was at home by myself when the police came to door and that was our first knowledge of it; Mum was actually arranging flowers in the church. But I think for me, the shock of Jessica's death really taught me what bereavement was. I wasn't very close to my father, so in a sense it was a change in our family life, but for me in some ways it was probably a change for the better. It was a little bit more solid and easier to deal with our family after his death. So if someone asks me what it was or if I knew anything about grief at that stage, I don't think I did really. I knew things had changed and I knew it was different.'

'I wasn't involved in any of Dad's funeral arrangements. I was the youngest of five; the girls probably arranged it and did all they had to do. I can remember having a half a sleeping tablet poked down my throat on the first night. My Grandmother was saying, "Oh, you have to take it; you have to take it". I thought it was a terrible thing, because I had terrible dreams in response to that sleeping tablet, but it was interesting: the way people wanted to take over and not have us feel as much.'
‘My stepfather died six years ago and I was involved then; I actually did the service for his funeral. I was probably closer to him than I was to my father, but once again, his death didn't change my life. So it’s hard to say there was an impact then, because our life was very separated from him and Mum, in the sense that they lived in their house and Jane and I were continuing our life as normal.’

‘Grief is a place where only you can go; I don’t think anyone goes with you. I know there are faith concepts that come into it, but in terms of everything we understand easily, it tends to be a really lonely place. I never felt that after Dad died, whereas after Jessica died – even though I’d never met her – that feeling was very intense and the physical concept of death was real. I couldn’t breathe and I experienced all those things that you read about grief, whereas none of that occurred with my father. My concern then was for my mother – and it was easy – whereas with Jessica’s death, my concern was for my wife, but there was also a sense in which I was more intimately involved with Jessica.’

Funeral

‘Jessica died on the Tuesday; the birth was on Thursday, around seven-thirty in the evening and we kept her with us until the next morning. We left the medical centre around ten-thirty that morning and the funeral was on the following Monday. She was born three year’s ago, on our wedding anniversary. The world’s a very strange place.’

‘She was buried at our local cemetery, where we lived; it’s just a small country one. We were lucky – look, I keep saying this, because we really were – when I compare us to other people who went through a similar thing and just have so many regrets. We don’t have those sorts of things to regret, so it was really important for us to say we’re lucky in that way. I was at Bible College for three years and met a good friend of mine who is now the minister of an Anglican Church. He actually came straight to the hospital when he heard and spent some time with us then, so we asked him to do the service and he did. So, having someone who knew what we’d been through – who knew us and actually saw Jessica – made the service all that much better. Now I realise that’s a sort of really privileged position and most people don’t have that option, but in the service, he certainly managed to bring Jessica to life with the people that were there.’

‘Over those couple of days that we got time to think, we decided that we wanted pictures of her in the entrance there, so I guess we made it really hard for people. We wanted people to know that she was there and we made sure that they did know and I think that’s been good ever since, because people have this picture of our little girl. In fact, we do have one friend who came to the church and had to go back to the car, because she couldn’t cope with being confronted by the pictures, whereas we just felt that was really important.’

‘Now that I think back, the day itself was really important to me. I’m very much a pragmatist. I knew she was dead. I knew she was dead before the funeral; it wasn’t as though I needed the funeral to tell me she was dead. I needed the funeral for other people to know that she had been alive. That’s what I needed the funeral for and that’s what it did, I think.’

‘Jane and I probably spent three or four hours just talking about the service and then my friend the minister and I spent more time talking about it. Again we were lucky, we had a choice of two funeral directors and we chose the right one; they were just really sympathetic and understanding about it. Also Jane’s mother – and this is a contradiction in her – wrote a poem and so did Jane’s Dad – the night that Jessica was delivered – and they were used in the
service. It just fitted together really well and made us feel that they were representations of the fact that: yes, she was dead, but she'd been alive. And they said it really well, I mean it's something that Jane and I couldn't do then - and still can't do - write that sort of thing.'

'I look back now, on the day that I carried the coffin and all these things we're scared of doing and they were really important, you know. I don't know how others handle it, but the coffin was between Jane and me - just in the back seat of the funeral car - just put on one of those fold-down arms. I guess all that was good, because we got to take her away; no one else did so.'

**Adjustment**

Paul recognised differences in family attitudes towards his wife's situation and his own experience. 'I certainly had the sense in which most questions after the death were directed to me about Jane and at that time, I didn't feel betrayal or anything like that. In a way, I still don't, but when someone asks, the question would be, "How is Jane coping?" The family was better than that. I think we were really lucky with the family support and the honesty we had from our family, especially my side of the family who'd been exposed to a lot. We've had a couple of divorces in the family; my father died when I was fifteen, my grandparents died the year before. So we've had a lot of having to deal with things not going right, whereas Jane's side of the family weren't exposed to that as much, so for them it was a bit more difficult. Jane's mother has trouble talking about it still, especially to me. I don't think she's ever actually talked directly to me about the death of Jessica. So I didn't feel left out by people, but the orientation was certainly towards Jane's grief. I still felt supported on the whole, especially by family and a couple of close friends.'

'It's funny, now that we've had our son, I do feel a sense of having got to know Jessica as a person. I've got a comparison now. He was incredibly boisterous in the womb, but she was really quiet. Appearance wise they are very similar, so although he's a boy, I guess we have some idea of how Jessica's features might have matured. So I have more of an image of what she'd be like now than I did before. I think before he was born, I really struggled to have an image of her and I think that was one of the hardest things for us, that we couldn't develop an image.'

'I have a stronger belief in a sense of heaven than I ever had before. In fact, I was probably one of those Christian people who could almost think that heaven didn't exist. Now I have to believe it exists, otherwise I think it's all pointless. I couldn't describe it for you, but I think in most ways she's more whole than we are now but I couldn't describe what that means. I guess I see Jessica being looked after. It's too easy to say it's an old man with a white beard and that's not the impression I have any more, but when you're bought up with that so much, it's hard to get rid of it. I really just have an image of her being looked after and cared for and held really, really well: and that's all I have. She exists still, but not for us: not now anyway. I expect to be reunited with her one day. In fact, I think it would be wrong not to see that sort of unity completed. I still see us as a family and Jessica's still part of it; she's just not with us. So I think the family will be together one day and I guess I need to think that I will see Jane holding her. I need to think that.'

Paul finds he is more emotional now, following the death of Jessica and more sensitive to the plight of parents. 'I don't necessarily cry more, but I'm more emotional. The most recent experience would be this morning. On the news, there was a mother with a cerebral palsy child who'd got a walking frame designed for cerebral palsy kids and when she said what it had meant to her, that's when I nearly cried. That happens a lot now - more than ever - and
it's still happening. It often just takes a comment by a parent to have that affect. I guess I have a better understanding of the loss that parents suffer; I think I do. So I'm definitely more emotional, but not necessarily to the point of tears and I don't know whether that's a conditioning thing, or that it just doesn't happen.'

'I think that Jane and I understand each other's frailties more than we did before Jessica was stillborn, but I also think a lot of that had occurred through the process of IVF. I mean, it's a horrible way to put it, but IVF prepares you for stillbirth in a way, because you have lots of little ones: you have embryos. Of course, not many people ever see their embryo. Well, with IVF you get to see them and you get to have an incredible level of expectation that is often destroyed. So I guess we were used to seeing each other's reactions: our weaknesses and strengths, in those situations. It's hard now, to go back to what we were like before that, because it's seven years ago now since we started the process of trying to have a child. It's hard to say what we were like before that period of time, because it's been a slow process of change for both of us. I think the best description would be that we are just very comfortable gloves for each other now and that gives us the warmth and security to keep going and I don't think we can imagine doing that without each other. We probably have more arguments now that we've got our son than we had before, but that's more because kids have this capacity to make you feel short on patience and on the edge. But our relationship is very secure in each other's presence and I guess that's developed over seven years.'

Jessica's death has not really had any significant effect on other family relationships. 'At thirty-seven, I tend to just accept that people are like they are and I try and take my mother-in-law for the strengths she has. She has trouble talking about death and emotional things, you know. It's upset Jane occasionally, but I think she sees that as the way that her Mum is and she sees the good things. I think it's taught us to do that more. The only problem we have at the moment is that when Jessica died, I guess it created a separation with Jane's sister-in-law (who had a child only a few weeks before and they've had other children) but that was occurring anyway, because of IVF. We had an expectation that Jessica would include us in that club (the baby club) and we lost that inclusion, I suppose. In fact, we had a bigger wrench between us. My interpretation is that we belonged to a small group already (that of IVF parents) we moved into a smaller one (of stillbirth), but then we really found that it was actually smaller still: it was stillbirth and IVF. So it changed our relationships more with other people rather than with family, except for that sister-in-law.'

'Ve found difficult to say what IVF is like. When an embryo is implanted you have a high degree of confidence and it's only experience that tells you that really only ten percent of those are going to take, but no matter how much experience you have, the expectation is still high. I guess we went through that quite a few times, though not as much as most people do. I don't think there's any doubt that those incidents are more than disappointments. They are mini-griefs and they grow in intensity, depending on how many failures you've had. You get better at dealing with them, but you're also weaker. As I said earlier, it's hard to put a value on a baby, but a baby born through IVF needs special treatment to make sure they get there alive.'

'I think the process of IVF and then stillbirth puts conclusions to things. The evangelical faith tends to bring you up as a person who believes in an interventionist sort of God: a God who jumps in and fixes problems. Now that's the immature view of God and I've had to change that, otherwise there could be no concept that there was anything bigger than we are, because I couldn't believe that there could be a God that could allow these things to happen intentionally, without jumping in to fix them up. So I guess the faith I have now says that we don't have this interventionist God, but I haven't quite put together what this God is. I don't know and I'm not as worried about that as I used to be. I just think I have a stronger concept
of the idea of relationships with people and I think that indicates that I have a stronger idea of a relationship with this God. I don't quite know what shape that relationship will take – or should take – in time. I just don't believe that he jumps in and out of history, like I used to.’

Paul believes that Jessica’s death has affected his faith, but that changing circumstances along the way have been more significant. ‘On reflection, I guess that when we went through that six or eight week period I was talking about earlier, I really felt there was a God, because I have no other description. I could feel far more a sense of presence and a sense of peace about that, but I guess the scientific part of me says, “Oh, my goodness; it’s just hormones and all the rest of it helping you deal with grief”. But you know, I still try and hold onto that period as something really valuable. Then when we moved back to the city, I decided to actually go through a period of spiritual guidance with a Christian-based organisation. And through that I discovered that the concept of God I had developed through that period of time was one where I still felt – it’s very difficult to explain – that there was a separation between me and God, and I couldn’t seem to get rid of that. So I wanted to feel a sense of intimacy and I could when I was in grief, because maybe all my reservations were broken down by the physical and emotional wreck you are at that’s occurring. I think once I felt that I was back in control to some degree, I could rebuild these separations. I don’t know; I just can’t seem to get rid of them. So my relationship has changed, but I can’t really say how. I don’t know whether I ever had one; I’m probably still in the same boat. So that’s a historical thing that changed slightly during grief, but I don’t know why. I realise that doesn’t make any sense, but I can’t really make sense of it all.’

Cemetery

‘The cemetery is an ideal location for Jessica, because of the life we imagined her leading. Some cows walk within five or ten feet of her grave and there are some trees with koalas in them. It’s right in the middle of a pastoral environment and I guess that fits into my concept of where she would have been living, even though I don’t think she lives there, it’s my concept of where she would have been living. It makes sense that she’s in that location, whereas if she was in the city, I’d probably find that wrong.’

‘It’s a mixed cemetery; there’s a lawn section and then there are monuments. Jessica is buried in the lawn section; it’s got a sloping concrete bit where the plaques are facing either way for graves on both sides. She has a small gold plaque.’

‘To me, the cemetery doesn’t have any sacredness, heritage value or much other significance. Jane finds it more important than I do. We were thinking about this, because we are moving back to the country. We’ve actually bought a farm again, in the same district. I guess the importance of it is that I couldn’t move anywhere else in Victoria, or interstate. We thought about other areas, but when it came to the crunch, I needed to be close to the cemetery. But I know I won’t go there a lot. I’ll go when Jane wants me to, basically. I wouldn’t plan to go there on my own. We haven’t had picnics there or things like that. I know some people do really spend a lot of time at the gravesite.’

Paul feels no sense of God, nor any closeness to Jessica at the cemetery. ‘The location doesn’t have that impact. For me, when I go with Jane, the only thing I do feel is that it helps her loss – but not my loss – because for her it is an emotional place. I mean, she’ll normally cry there. For me, it’s reminding me of those days when she was like that all the time. I guess I’ve seen it enough now to know that it has to happen and it will pass, and it will come back again and that’s fine; it’s quite healthy. It’s only if you stay there for three years or something, that you’ve got a problem. I have no problem with the idea of her crying.’
‘I think I have a different view of the cemetery to a lot of people, but maybe a lot of males are the same. For me, it’s a location where we buried our daughter and it’s important that she was buried in that location: that the cemetery fitted what I imagined being our life and her life together. It was in the middle of the country and that’s important, but in terms of it bringing things back to me, or heightening emotional responses: it doesn’t. To Jane, it certainly does, but it’s one of the things though, it’s not necessarily the only thing; other things would be seeing a child of similar age or something like that on TV.’

Visitation

‘We’ve probably only ever gone twice, specifically to visit Jessica’s grave. Jane just really needed to go, so we drove down specifically to go and then we’d only be there maybe five or ten minutes. It takes about two-and-a-half-hours or so, to get there. It was important to be able to go there for her first anniversary, but it was not as important when we went there for the second anniversary; that had nowhere near the same importance.’

Paul and Jane do not make a point of visiting on Mothers Day or Fathers Day. ‘We tend to try and down-play Mothers and Fathers Days; we got used to that during the IVF program. It might be different now that our son’s been born, but it was difficult on those days, because of the advertising leading up to it. We had quite a few years of Mothers Day and Fathers Day coming and us feeling, “Oh, well; it’s lucky that some people can celebrate it I suppose, but we’re not in that position”.’

‘I have two sisters and good friends who live in the area, so we mainly call in to Jessica’s grave when we are visiting somebody. I think there’s a sense in which Jane always wants to go to the cemetery and I don’t. She will sometimes go on her own or we’ll go together, or she’ll go with a friend. Before we moved back to Melbourne she would tend to go regularly. At the start, she went very regularly and then it dropped off. Even Jane would say that there was a sense in which she couldn’t let Jessica go. It was important that as a mother, she could go and be there. In that sense, when you think about sprinkling ashes across the sea or something like that, neither of us could’ve done that. The location is important and I think that is indicative of the fact that I couldn’t go to the other side of the state to live, because that would be too far from the location. I don’t necessarily want to be there often, but I need to know that I could be there. I need to be able to go and see the small plaque.’

‘Over the last twelve months, I’ve probably been four times: once on the anniversary and then a few times recently, probably because we’ve been in the area making arrangements to move. Very early on, I wouldn’t have found myself there at all, unless Jane wanted me to go, whereas she would’ve been there almost daily at the start and then it broke down quite quickly to weekly and then less. I just don’t believe that’s where she is. I don’t see it as a rite of passage or anything like that, for me to be there. It doesn’t help me get anywhere and it doesn’t remind me of Jessica; I have enough ways to do that.’

Paul does not pray and he does not find himself talking to Jessica at the gravesite. ‘I don’t think either of us does. I tend to look at the cows across the fence and say, “Well, if she’s got to be anywhere, I suppose this is it”. We talk a little bit, but not a lot: sometimes about what she would have been doing, but the cemetery’s not the place that prompts that discussion; that happens pretty naturally in lots of instances. When I visit, I walk up and shine the plaque with my hanky and basically that’s about it. We’ve got a small cylinder for flowers and because we can’t be there regularly, we tend to change silk flowers once every few months. We get plenty of nice silk flowers; we won’t take live ones, because we just don’t want dead looking flowers.’
'We sometimes only stay for two minutes, if it’s blowing a gale: sometimes ten, but no longer. Even on her first anniversary, when we let go a balloon with her name on it and a couple of other things, it still would have been only fifteen minutes. Because I mainly visit at Jane’s prompts, I just respond to her need to go. It’s not important for me personally; it’s more that I go to support Jane. It’s not something that I have to do and I have no perception of guilt about it, none at all.'
SALVATION ARMY WIDOW KEEPS HERSELF BUSY

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Psychosocial history

Elisabeth was born in England, nearly sixty-seven years ago. After the death of her mother when Elisabeth was a baby, her aunt and uncle raised her. 'My Aunty brought me up and played the mother role. I was about a year old when I was taken to live with them. I had one older brother and three sisters. My brother and sisters were still with my father in the family home, but my eldest sister was actually married. My brother was about seven years older than I was. My aunt had one girl who was older than me.'

'I'm on the pension and I do some voluntary work. I always worked in the past; I worked in an office and then I worked as a weaver. Here in Australia, I did clerical work at a hospital for a while and then paymaster work, you know. I worked part-time while the children were growing up.'

'I'm a Christian. I'm a member of the Salvation Army and I've got three boys who are all married and gone. Now there's only me and the dog.'

Bereavement

'Richard and I were married for forty-five years and we came to Australia thirty-two years ago. He died nearly four years ago. He was really lovely and kind: a good father, Christian, Salvo, you know, hard worker. He worked at jobs he didn't really like when we first came here, to just keep a roof above over our heads and food on the table. He was very caring and conscientious.'

'He was seventy-three when he died; he retired when he was sixty-three, so he'd been retired ten years. He had a slight heart attack then, so he had to give up work. He was the chief cashier where he worked. Previous to that he did all sorts. He was a miner for twenty years; he'd done a lot of work.'

'Richard was musical; he played a tenor horn and trombone. The boys were all musical and the grandchildren are fairly musical. In fact, my grandson who gets married in a couple of months, is doing music at uni; he's going to be a music teacher, so it's a very musical family. I could sing, but that was it. I played the tambourine when I was younger.'

'Richard had motor neurone disease; it started a good two years before he died. It started in his feet and worked its way up, but it wasn't until the September previous, that we actually found out what it was. Because they thought first of all he'd had a stroke or a heart attack, or it was muscular, but we weren't sure, so we were going backwards and forward for tests: about once a week for tests and in between for getting the results. So he was affected for
about two years altogether, but it was very brief that he was really bad. He was totally helpless by that time, but I nursed him at home.'

'He died at home. We were actually just getting ready to put him into a nursing home, for me to have a break, but it never occurred; he died before that happened. It was a shock when it happened, but it wasn't a shock like he'd gone out and got killed and a car crash, if you know what I mean.'

'The children all came of course, as soon as they knew what happened. Because two of them are Salvation Army ministers, their work's always taken them off. They've lived all over the place, like Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia, so they'd been out of the state for years, but we always went to see them. That's where all our money went: travelling to see the children.'

'We were always laughing, outgoing and positive: we were. I probably cry more, now. I was more positive than Richard was. He was a bit more negative, but I think that probably stems from the fact that they were very, very poor when he was younger and things like that, you know. He came through the war of course, as I did. He wasn't a military person, because of the job he did. He was a miner and they weren't allowed to go into the military, so he never went into the military, because they needed the coal.'

Elisabeth feels that the experience of Richard's illness did help her to prepare for his ultimate death. 'I think so, because I'd virtually lost him previous to that, if you know what I mean. He was just a shell of the person he was.' However, she does not feel that she had an adequate opportunity to say a personal goodbye to Richard, because he died in his sleep. 'Usually, he wanted to get up straightaway, but he didn't that particular morning and then a lady came to talk to me about his diet and when she'd gone, I went to see if he was all right. He was just lying there and he wasn't breathing. I thought he was breathing, because he had oxygen tubes in, you know. He slept with oxygen tubes in his nose and that, so I didn't know. I didn't get to say goodbye.'

'Well, I rang the ambulance, because I thought that he'd better go into hospital and they said, "You don't know how to do CPR?" They explained and I said, "Yes, I did", and they said, "Well, try that until we've come". Of course he always sat up to sleep, so I laid him down. I tried that and I yelled at him and I screamed at him, but it didn't work and when the ambulance people came, they said it wasn't worthwhile using those electric things, you know, because of the condition that he was in. He said it would probably break his ribs, because he had no flesh on his bones, so they thought the best thing was just to leave it go, which we did.'

'The ambulance men wouldn't go until I had somebody here. I had to ring up somebody to come and stay with me and the band was going away to Japan that morning - the Salvation Army band - so everybody had gone to the airport. It took me ages to find somebody who was still home; they'd either gone to see to them off, or they were going. But I found a friend - an old retired brigadier and his wife - and they came and stayed with me, so the ambulance men could go before my family started to arrive. All the children came eventually.'

'I stayed with him in the bedroom, but the dog went and stayed under the bed - because she was really his dog - and she got on the bed close to him and she never moved til the people came to take him away. She just stayed there; she really missed him, you know.'
**Other losses**

"That year, in the January I lost my brother, the February I lost a sister and in the April I lost Richard: all in the same year. It was a bad year. My brother and sister were in England, but we stayed fairly close."

"We used to travel about and we went over there about every four years. I was over last year actually, but I didn’t get over to either of those funerals. When you go and book a seat, it’s just a terrible price; I couldn’t really afford to do it. You can’t do a deal with, you know, twenty-one days in advance, or things like that if it’s just up and go. Consequently, nobody came for Richard’s funeral from England. There were five brothers and two sisters in Richard’s family."

**Funeral**

"We didn’t actually talk about his funeral and things, before he died. No, we didn’t, because you know, we were too busy living: because we still went out. Even the day before he died, we’d been out in his wheelchair and that, because he couldn’t just stand sitting there and looking at the four walls. We’d have to go somewhere, even if it was only to the shopping centre, but we’d always been used to going out and doing things: picnics and stuff like that, you know. So we just kept that up right till the end; we never did talk about a funeral."

Richard was cremated after a service at the local Salvation Army church. Elisabeth planned the service with the funeral director. ‘My sons were here too, so we chose the songs that he liked and I liked. We had it all written down like a lot of people do now; yeah, some people have it all planned. Our eldest son read the Scriptures.’

‘The hall was packed; it was a very packed hall and the veteran’s band played. I thought that was really nice that so many people were there and that was helpful. We have a nephew in Adelaide and he came over for the funeral.’

**Adjustment**

Elisabeth does not have any more or less contact with her own children and their families now that she is on her own. ‘They are so busy with their own families, involved in what they are. I mean they come; like one son came yesterday because he had a day off and his wife’s away. I am so busy as well and they’ve got to book to see me, you know what I mean? I find I have to keep myself busy, that’s my salvation, if you like; you know, better to keep busy.’

‘I’m quite a positive person. I’ve continued to do what we always did, you know, when Richard was alive. I’ve continued to do those things and I have my voluntary work: the Girl Guides at the Army, and things like that. I took some of them to England last year, to a big jamboree type thing. Yeah, I’m still involved in that. There was only four of us went, because money-wise it was very expensive and some of the girls just couldn’t afford it. There was about a thousand in camp; it was great and then I took them all round England to show them all the things and all the places that I like. I’m in charge of all the division in Melbourne, so that keeps me occupied, but then I’ve always been involved for the past forty-five years. It’s not something I’ve just taken up.’

Elisabeth has always had a strong faith and feels that, if anything, Richard’s death has brought her closer to God. She believes Richard is now in heaven. ‘Well his soul’s in heaven. I mean, I know his body’s not, but his soul’s gone to heaven, because that’s our belief, that as soon as
you die, your soul goes back to God. But he’s here too; his spirit is still here. I really don’t
know – nobody knows – what heaven is like; it’s only what you read and what people tell
you. You just know it’s a better place. I mean, you get a long white robe. It’s no good them
giving me a harp, because I’m not very musical, so they’ll have to give me a triangle when I
go.’

**Cemetery**

Richard was cremated and his ashes were interred in a rose garden at a large memorial park. ‘I
chose that; the roses are beautiful there. I’ve got photographs of them somewhere, when
they’ve been in bloom. The cemetery is beautiful; it’s really nice, you know. It’s not a
morbid, dreary-looking place, like some cemeteries are. They were beautiful flowers, but then
I’m a rose freak, so I think it’s beautiful.’

‘To me, the cemetery is no more sacred than any other place. Everywhere is sacred really,
because God is everywhere. I mean, some people consider churches are more sacred than
anywhere else, but they’re just fellowship centres to me. I worship God everywhere. I do my
ironing saying my prayers, you know.’

‘This cemetery doesn’t have any history to me. All my family is buried in England. When you
go to England, there’s really old well-known people buried there, like we went to Keats:
where Keats is buried and other places, you know, where people of note are.’

**Visitation**

Elisabeth reckons that she would visit Richard’s memorial every couple of months or so. ‘On
his birthday, anniversary, or Father’s Day, I take flowers in. I’m not one for going every
week, like on the same day: just when I can and when I feel I need to. I went for Easter last
year as well. With Easter coming up again, I’ll probably go then. It was his birthday in
January, so I went then. It’s also our anniversary in January, so that was a combination one,
but I don’t make it a ritual.’

Elisabeth feels no closer to Richard or to God at the cemetery than she feels wherever she is.
‘Just after his ashes were put in the garden, I might have gone about once each week for
perhaps the first month, but no more than that, because it’s just a symbol.’

‘I take flowers every time I visit; I usually buy them on the way. Sometimes I’ll take roses, if
there’s any decent ones in the garden, but I’ll put them in with whatever I buy: carnations
usually, because they seem to last a bit longer. But it’s only a ritual; it’s got no significance
that I can think of.’

‘The rose garden area is very well looked after. I just sort of take up any leaves that might
have dropped on the plaque; I seem to brush them off, that’s all. I would pray, because it’s
something to do. I talk to Richard as well, but not about anything in particular, because I can
talk to him anytime; it’s the same with my prayers, they’re no different.’

‘I drive to the cemetery and don’t stay there long: probably about five minutes to ten minutes
would be it. I don’t hang around long. If it were raining, I wouldn’t go. I don’t think I’ve been
when it’s been raining. I just sort of get the water, put the flowers in and, you know, stay for a
couple of minutes. My dog always comes and she knows where the plaque is. I know of one
or two others that are there, but no, I don’t visit those.’
'The cemetery is a peaceful place; I don’t ever feel frightened. There is a sense of sadness when you see a plaque with somebody that’s young. Sometimes I’ll read some of the plaques as I’m walking around or coming back or throwing the rubbish in the bin and I feel sad when I see a little person that’s died.'

'I feel sad about Richard when I’m at the cemetery, but I’ve got his photo and everything around me. That brings back memories and I’ve still got things I haven’t let go of yet. I don’t hold them to remember him, but I keep them in memory of him. I mean, if I didn’t have a photograph it wouldn’t make any difference, you know. I still have him in memory and I’ve got all these photo albums anyway, besides the ones that are around, you know. I took a lot of photos, I did: I still do.'

Elisabeth does not really know why she visits the cemetery. ‘I mostly go for a special reason, you know, but then I just think, “Oh, I’ll go and get some flowers and take them”, or if I’m going away, I’ll go before I go away. I don’t feel that I have to go; it’s just, I go on special occasions. It seems to have settled down to anniversaries, birthdays and before I’m going away, you know. It’s just that I can’t buy him presents: because we always exchanged gifts on these occasions.'
Psychosocial history

George was born in Malta, sixty-six years ago. He was brought up a Catholic and met Olive when they were both seventeen years old. He came to Australia by himself, at the age of twenty-two. Olive joined him six months later and they married the day she arrived. The first of their two daughters was born the following year and the second, two years later.

‘In Malta, I was working first as a bus conductor when I was sixteen. Then I worked as a building contractor: just a labourer. That’s when I decided to come here, because the job was hard and money wasn’t much. When I came to Australia, I worked in a small paint factory: just very small, there wasn’t many people: maybe about twenty. Then I got another job making plaster and then in the boot trade for seventeen years making shoes. Then after that, I got a job with the airline and that’s when I retired. I retired seven years ago, because I had a serious car accident and I couldn’t work any more.’

Bereavement

‘Olive was sixty-two. She passed away over four years ago, one year after she retired. She wasn’t ill when she left; she was still good. She worked in the same place for thirty-three years. She had ovarian cancer and was ill for six months before she passed away. As soon as they told us she had ovarian cancer and it’s spreading very quickly, we knew. Ah, well; I accepted it, but the kids didn’t want to accept that she was going to pass away.’

‘Olive was a very strong and happy-go-lucky woman. She was very active. She worked for thirty-three years without being sick, except when she had the kids. She never had a day off from work or anything. She was just really strong and she never saw a doctor until she was ill.’

‘Olive and me went to Malta nearly five years ago and while we were there, my mother passed away. My mother was a bit crook and I wanted to go in the summer, but Olive said, “No; you better go early, because you might not see your mother”, and sure enough, when I was there, my mother passed away. I was lucky enough to see her and I was with her when she died, you know.’

‘Then, that’s when Olive started to get sick. When I was in Malta I realised, because we went to the doctor there and the doctor said to me, “How long you staying here?” I said, “Not long”. He said, “Well, as soon as you get home go and see a doctor, because your wife is very sick”. A week later we just left Malta, because I knew Olive wasn’t well. Olive went six months after that.’
‘Olive passed away in hospital. The whole family was with her: my daughters and my son-in-law. We didn’t want the kids to come, so we left the kids, but the children loved her.’

‘With Olive, we didn’t talk about her dying, to keep giving her hope, because she sort of knew she was going to die, but she never bought it up: not to me and not to her daughters. She never talked about that. She fought strongly all the way. She never showed anything: not to me, not to her daughters, not to anyone. She was very ill – especially the last six weeks – because she had a blockage and she couldn’t eat anything. For six weeks she never ate anything: just liquid and that’s all.’

‘The six weeks she was in hospital we never left her side. I would go home and have a bit of sleep, then one of my daughters will be there. When she went home to look after the family, the other one goes in, so we were all taking turns. So, for six weeks she was in hospital, there’s always someone there. After she’d passed away, we spent maybe an hour and a half with her, because it was a very early in the morning. One o’clock in the morning she passed away, so we stayed there till about three, then we came home.’

Other losses

‘I was still getting over the loss of my mother when Olive died. Because, although I hadn’t seen my mother for a long time – I was very young when I left my mother – we were still very close. I used to phone her very often, you know.’

‘They were very different experiences: totally different. I was very, very sad in my Olive’s death, but it was to be expected with my mother. She was eighty-eight, although she wasn’t bedridden or anything, you know, but I wasn’t with her that often, you know. Like my sisters for example, they took it very hard, because she lived with them, but me, I was too far away. It was easier to accept my mother’s death, because of her age. My mother was eighty-eight, so it was expected, you know, she wasn’t going to last that long.’

George’s eldest daughter was widowed about twelve years ago. Her estranged husband collapsed and died at the age of thirty-three, within two hours of his own father’s death. In some ways, this relieved serious family concerns rather than imposing any significant grief on George. ‘My daughter practically had no say about what happened. Mostly, his mother and his brothers were involved; they buried their father and the son together. They had one funeral for both.’

Funeral

‘Olive had a lot of friends at her funeral. There were a lot of people who came, even from the hospital. Half a dozen nurses came to her funeral, because even though when she was in hospital she knew she was sick, she always used to joke with the nurses, even with the professor that operated on her. Sometimes she used to say to him, “Today you’re going to do a bit of butchering”. So, she had a very, very big show, because people from her work were there. The church was packed, because she was very lovable woman. I think the funeral is how people come together, you know, saying goodbye; yeah, I think it’s more saying goodbye.’

The funeral director was very, very good; we got exactly what we wanted. The kids and me were involved in planning the funeral, but I tell you, we made the right decision, because we didn’t know much when we were going bury her. At first, we thought we were going to bury her in another part of the cemetery, where there is already plaques. Then, a friend of ours who
recently lost his wife too, sort of said, "Why don’t you go to the cemetery and have another
look and tell them to show you where my wife is?" So that’s what we did and then we
changed and we’re very glad. My daughters came with me – the two of them – because I
didn’t want to do anything without them, you know; just whatever was good for them was
good enough for me."

Adjustment

"My daughters and their families they come to my place every Sunday for lunch. That started
when Olive was alive, you know. We’d been doing that for maybe the past fifteen years
without missing. They always come to my place. So when Olive passed away I didn’t want to
break that tradition. I just kept getting the kids up at my place. I suppose I look forward to the
Sunday when they come."

"It is more important to me now than ever that they come, but I don’t sort of feel happier than
I was: no way known. I do get very sad. I don’t show it very often in front of the kids, because
I don’t want to get them upset by it. You see, one of my daughters (the eldest one) doesn’t go
to the grave very often, because even though four years have passed now, she still doesn’t
accept the death of her mother, but the other one she goes every Sunday. I go every day: every
day without missing one day, except when I went to Malta for a visit. I go every day and it
just helps me to sleep. I talk to her about the kids."

"Actually, since Olive passed away, I went back to Malta twice. Once, I took my daughter
(the widow) and two of her sons with me and I went again later, so I went twice since Olive
passed on. I only stayed six weeks. I have all my relatives still there: my two brothers and two
sisters. I have no one here."

George considers that Olive’s death has drawn the remaining family closer together. ‘But it’s
hard to explain. The grandchildren are all grown up now; the youngest one is fifteen and the
other one is close to seventeen. When the other five go out, they all go out together; they
don’t go their separate ways, so the family is much closer. And the sisters, they see each other
very much more than before, these days and they ring up each other twice a week or so.’

George’s faith and church attendance have not changed in any way following Olive’s death. I
go to church every Sunday (that’s the Catholic Church). I believe Olive is now in heaven,
because she never, ever had a cross with anyone. She never hated anyone and I think that’s
the worst sin, if you hate anyone, and she was very Catholic: confession and communion
every Sunday. She was very religious and you never heard her say a bad word. I really believe
she’s in heaven. I don’t know what heaven is like, where she is. We were always taught that
when we die, we all get together again – like your immediate family – you meet God and
that’s all.’

Cemetery

Olive was buried in a lawn headstone area at a large cemetery. ‘It’s a good area; we couldn’t
choose a better place. I’m happy to go there too.’

‘The cemetery is a quiet place. Everyday I go, ever since she passed away, except like I said,
when I went to Malta, otherwise every day I go. If I’m doing something at home and
sometimes I forget, even if it is half-past-four, I just leave everything and I go before the gates
close. When I go there, I just always stay for about two minutes, but just say hello to her and
talk to her about the kids, but I do it everyday.’
Visitation

'I look forward to it actually. I look forward to going to the cemetery. I talk to Olive about how things are going and when someone is sick from the family, I just ask her to pray for them. I also pray; I say a few Hail Mary’s. I don’t take flowers every day, but as soon as they start to wilt, I just replace them. I usually buy them; I get some from home too, but not very often. Once a week, I wipe down the monument. I get a small bucket to carry the water, but I usually have a damp cloth.’

George feels a sense of Olive’s presence at the gravesite, but no sense of God’s presence in the cemetery. ‘I come to the cemetery everyday purely because, well Olive and me have been together for close to forty-eight years, so I just want to be with her for a few minutes: no other reasons.’

George has found that his visits have generally become progressively less emotional. ‘I don’t feel sad everyday when I go there; I just feel unhappy til I go there. I’m happy to be with her for those few minutes. Occasionally I get a bit emotional, but it’s been nearly five years now. On a long visit, for example some special occasion, maybe I stay ten minutes. Earlier on, maybe the first six or eight months, I used to stay much longer, like half an hour or so. I stand at the grave praying and talking, mostly about how the kids are growing up and how they’re progressing, because she loved those kids so much, you know.’
SRI LANKAN BUDDHIST REQUIRES NO MEMORIAL

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Psychosocial history

Leela was born in Sri Lanka, fifty-nine years ago. She has one brother and five sisters. She was a teacher by profession, has been married for thirty-four years and has two adult children. Leela and her husband were raised in Buddhist families and continue to practice Buddhism. ‘We came to Australia sixteen years ago, to complete my higher studies. My son was about thirteen at the time and my daughter was seventeen.’

Leela completed her PhD in education at a Victorian university. ‘My research was about education, employment and leadership in a colonisation scheme in Sri Lanka. I spent quite a bit of time there, so I maintained contact with my family and I’ve been visiting every two years since. I also taught in Australia, but I gave up working last year.’ Leela’s husband was a policeman in Sri Lanka and has now retired after working in Melbourne as a security officer.

‘Sri Lanka is a small place compared to Australia; actually, it’s about half the size of Tasmania, but has the same population as Australia. The customs change, like the people who live in the crook of the mountains and those who live in the valley have different customs, though basically everything is the same. The cities are modern and the rural areas are more traditional.’

Bereavement

Leela’s eighty-seven year old mother died just over three months ago in Sri Lanka. ‘She suffered a stroke and lasted for ten days afterwards; I was there for those ten days. I got the call in the morning – early morning – and by ten thirty that night, I was there. I thought I was very fortunate to be in Australia, because if I were in any other country, I wouldn’t have been able to go so soon. I was really glad.’

‘My brother and sisters were all present at the hospital when she passed away. Before this stroke she had high blood pressure, but that’s about all she had, no previous strokes or anything.

Other losses

‘My husband’s mother died a long time ago. My father also died a long time ago, just before we came over to Australia. When one of my husband’s brothers died, he didn’t go to Sri Lanka, because he couldn’t. I mean, if something happens like that, you can’t go every time; it’s getting so expensive.’
‘When I got the news of my father, we were not living near them. My Dad was living away from me. He just passed away early in the morning and when I got the message, it was similar to my mother’s death in the sense that it happened, the way I got the message and the time I reached my Dad’s place to see him. Although I was overseas at the time of my mother’s stroke, I went at very short notice, so we went to see her in hospital. My father didn’t suffer; it was just after being asleep in the early morning and he was still smiling when I left there. But with my mother, she suffered. For ten days, she was unconscious and I saw her suffering. Maybe she didn’t feel anything, but I felt it; that was the difference. It’s all complex: very difficult to analyse why I feel different.’

‘My mother’s death actually showed me what death is. My Dad’s death didn’t have that much of an impact on me, maybe because he didn’t suffer, or didn’t show any pain or anything. Maybe he did at the last moment; I don’t know. But with my mother, I just saw what death did. Now I know that I can go through anything; that’s how I feel. I know I can go through any suffering, because she did. I could feel my mother suffer. Maybe it’s because I’m a mother too, that I feel that way; I don’t know.’

After her mother passed away, Leela stayed with her brother and sisters for about four weeks. ‘I think it brought us closer together, but whether it will stay on like that I don’t know, because mother was really the link. We still keep in touch. We talk all the time: no more or less, same as before.’

**Funeral**

Leela’s mother was cremated two days after her death. ‘That’s not really typical; it just depends. Sometimes, people keep the body for several days until people from overseas come over. It varies; there’s no hard and fast rule. My brother and brothers-in-law are the people who contacted the funeral parlour and they did everything. They took her straight from hospital to the funeral directors and to the home and the cemetery.’

‘Usually, we bring the body home after embalming, so the body was brought in the night. They dress the person in the order that we tell them to and the body is brought to the house: in the lounge. There’s a custom that there must be somebody near the body throughout the night and we light a lamp throughout the night. We take turns to sit with the body; that’s sort of customary in our country.’

‘When the people come to see her, they all come; that’s fairly customary. On the day of the funeral, the Buddhist priests come and then there are certain rituals they perform. We offer some cloth to the priests. That is just a symbol to say that you’re offering something on behalf of the deceased and then the priests chant, you know, and then we transfer merit. There’s a custom to transfer merit to the deceased person. We just pour some water from a teapot into a cup until the cup spills over. This means – when spirits are awakening – that the merit has gone over to the deceased. It’s very symbolic. That’s done in the house after the coffin is closed. The coffin is closed and the priests chant and all this happens before they take the body out of the house. Some people do it outside the house. Yes, normally it’s done in the garden, they do all these rituals there, but we did it inside the house. We leave the doors and windows open in the night, because of incense. That’s just to keep the air fresh, you know; there is no spiritual meaning other than to keep the air fresh.’

‘We take the body in the coffin to the cemetery and we all walk along, just behind the hearse. Then at the cemetery the coffin is opened, because there may be people just coming into the cemetery to pay their last respects, so the coffin is opened again, for those people to pay their
respects. It’s opened for some time and then, after it is closed, the family and close relatives all take the coffin and then go around the cremator three times; we go around with the coffin and then finally it goes in. It is actually traditional that we would be cremated in a funeral pyre. We would construct a structure in the cemetery, but nowadays it’s done in a building, but we still take the coffin around it.’

‘Traditionally we construct a pyre and that’s still done in rural areas. For example, my Dad died in his ancestral home, in the village and because the garden was huge, we cremated him in the garden itself: inside the garden. We made a special pyre and we piled up wood and covered that, so that was traditional and then we all looked out the window. The nephew lights up the pyre and approaches it walking backwards, but now it’s done more in a crematorium.’

‘The funeral pyre is usually in the cemetery, but if you have a large property, then you can do it in any part of your property, as long as all the family members agree. My Dad’s funeral was on the property, just alongside the house. We really wanted that to happen, because it was my Dad’s house (my Dad’s Dad’s property); it was very ancestral. The cemetery was close by, but we agreed with my mother to have the pyre alongside the house. Actually, if my mother passed away in her traditional ancestral home we’d have done the same thing, you know, but she was staying with my sister in the city, in the suburbs. She was looking after her, so the home was there. Everybody was saying, ‘Why don’t you take the body to the village?’ but we never did and mother hadn’t made any request either, so it was convenient.’

‘The funeral ritual gives you a feeling that you have done whatever is required on behalf of the deceased: that you have transferred merit. You feel that the funeral gives the satisfaction of having done everything possible for the deceased.’

‘After the cremation we have an almsgiving to the priests in the temple. The almsgiving is part of the ritual. Before the cremation, we give cloth; after the cremation, we give food to the priests and the laity and we transfer merit to the deceased. Then after seven days, we also prepare the almsgiving. We invite the priest home and provide him with food. That’s how we communicate, by giving alms and after giving we transfer merit. We think of our mother and think we transfer merit because we are doing good. We always say – not a prayer really, but we just make a statement: “May this good pass over to my mother”.’

‘As soon as a person dies in the family, we don’t cook. We shan’t cook in that house until the body has been cremated and we have a lot of friends who would do that here. I mean, here you can practise that if you wish, not like in Sri Lanka, where you have to. Even here, the priest goes to the crematorium – to the chapel – and the priest does the ceremony in there. The only thing is it’s more formal like, but it’s the same thing.’

‘We have been to a couple of Buddhist funerals here. Once we only went to the house; we didn’t go to the cemetery, but we did to a couple of funerals. It is quite different to funerals at home. Here, you have to go to the undertakers to see the body and you don’t see what is happening. They don’t cremate then and there; they just put the coffin down and cremate it later. You’re not there when they light it up. In the urban areas, we’re the same now, but we have a custom that the lighting of the pyre is by the son-in-law, or a nephew, who lights the fire.’

*Adjustment*
Leela feels that she is somewhat different following the death of her mother. ‘I have changed a bit. Anytime I think of my mother, you know it’s a very difficult experience, but I’m coping. I think I’ve become more mature in the way I look at life. I’m sort of ready to accept suffering and other people’s sufferings too. You become much more mature as a person. My mother’s death had a real impact on me, I think. I feel both more frail and also stronger at times.’

‘I think I have a deeper understanding of my religion after my mother’s death. In Buddhism, we believe that everything is impermanent: nothing stays the same. I think that my mother’s death showed me that. I’ve always been a believer in the Buddhist doctrine. I mean, the philosophy – or way of life – of Buddhism is very peaceful and she was a Buddhist. I can’t say my belief strengthened; it just remains with me, you know.’

‘According to our beliefs, we don’t believe there’s a soul. We believe in rebirth and that’s why we transfer merit. We think that the person will be reborn and at least they can gather that merit, because we believe that people are reborn according to the good that they have done. We believe that if you have done bad or demerit, then you will be born in a place where you can’t make use of that merit, but we don’t know wherever they are reborn, so anyway we do the transfer of some merit with the cup. So maybe they benefit: you don’t know.’

‘I believe that my mother is now in a good place, because I believe that she has done good to deserve a good birth, but I don’t know just where she is now. I believe that she has been reborn as a human being. I mean, heaven and hell are both on this earth really, but there may be other worlds. We believe that there are other places and she would be in the most heavenly place, so I feel my mother must be somewhere in a better place, you know. That’s what I believe in.’

Leela does not have any concept of communicating with her mother. ‘I’m just reflecting and giving merit all the time, because that’s our ritual. As a Buddhist, your next life depends on your karma. If you’ve done good, you will be reborn as a good person; if you have done bad, you might be born as a cripple, but it doesn’t mean that that person should be treated any differently. If he does good and merit is transferred, then he can be a normal person, so that’s what we do. It’s not only for us, we can also transfer merit to a person who’s in need of it. But some person might be born in a place where they can’t gather merit. For example, as an animal in the animal world, you can’t gather merit, you have to be born as a human being.’

Regarding the relative serenity with which Buddhists seem to accept a death, Leela considered: ‘I think it is more due to a religious factor than customs. The priests do some preaching and we soothe our minds, you know. I did feel a great sense of loss with the death of my mother; I still feel it all the time. I’ve lost my mother and she’s never going to come back, but I reflect on the good things she had done and what I have done to give her merit. We do whatever we could to make her future lives happy. We always feel that if we do something good now, it’s because of our Mum and that gives comfort. Whatever we do, we transfer all the merit to her. It’s also a case of keeping her memory alive and also, we believe what we do is important to our children. What we do to our parents, our children are willing to follow and they learn to appreciate and feel gratitude and send some gratitude to us.’

‘In Buddhism, we keep changing all our lives. When you go out, you’re not the same person that you were when you came in. Life changes. So we hope our children take note of that and will grow up with that. We go to sleep firmly believing that if we do good, no harm will come upon ourselves and our children also. What we sow, we reap. Whatever we do to our parents, our children will do to us.’
'We believe that once a person dies, there’s nothing there: just ashes. It’s just like a piece of bread, you know; there’s no soul. Rebirth does not necessarily occur immediately after the death. It could happen much later, you know; there’s no specific time. There could be a bit of a spirit, but it’s just waiting for rebirth.'

**Cemetery**

'After a cremation, we collect the ashes and we normally put them into a river; it has to be into flowing water. That’s what we did with my mother. Usually family members get together and do this sometime after the cremation.'

'At the cemetery, there are burials as well as cremations. Some Buddhists are buried and some are cremated. I don’t know which ones are buried; I’m not sure of the custom of burial. In our area, the customs are different from other areas. The families from other areas are buried. When a younger person dies, he is usually buried. Younger people tend to be buried and older people tend to be cremated in accordance with customary traditions, but not everywhere. In some parts of the island, our custom is not there.'

Leela's mother has no specific memorial. 'You can have a memorial if you want. There’s no hard and fast rule; it’s just an option, you know. But we don’t focus on material things, you see. We might just plant a tree. For example, where my Dad was cremated, we just planted a flowering tree where the funeral pyre was lit. Now that tree blooms.'
TURKISH MUSLIM COUPLE SHARE GRIEF WITH OTHERS

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Psychosocial history

Abdullah was born in Cyprus, fifty-two years ago. He came to Australia at the age of twenty-three. ‘The year after I came, I brought all my family here. We come from Cyprus; we are Turkish, we are Muslim.’ He worked as an electronics technician with an international communications firm for several years, before operating his own repair shop for a short while. Thirteen years ago, he suffered back and arm injuries in a car accident and has not worked since. ‘I am now on a pension.’

Fatima is forty-seven years old and also Turkish. She commenced work at the same firm, the year Abdullah arrived. ‘I married Fatima three years after I came and we had three children: a son and two daughters. One of my girls is now twenty-one and one sixteen; my son was twenty-three years old, but he passed away fourteen months ago.’

Bereavement

Ali died in a motorbike accident. On the previous day (also his mother’s birthday) Ali’s girlfriend had given birth to their baby boy. ‘His was son born on Sunday and he died on Monday. He was a good boy and he used to go to work and he was doing his apprenticeship. It was his last year to finish his apprenticeship.’

‘They say he was riding a bike with his friend: two separate bikes. Suddenly, his friend stopped and he looked behind to see what happened to his friend and he lost his control. I was overseas when he died. My wife rang me and I came to his funeral. I took a plane Tuesday morning and I came Thursday morning. His funeral was on Friday.’

Other losses

‘I lost lots of relatives. When I was three, I lost my father in Cyprus, but I was too young to remember. My mother remarried and all my family is here in Australia. When I was in my country, my young brother died; he was three-and-a-half years old. I lost my grandmother in Australia; she’s buried in this cemetery.’

Funeral

Ali was given a traditional Muslim funeral. ‘He was in a freezer, three or four days and they were doing that operation and checking, you know. But in my country, if someone dies, say he dies in the morning, they bury him lunchtime.’
Friday morning, we went to the mosque and prepared for the funeral. First they wash his body and they put him into a white cloth, in a coffin. But we don’t bury our kids in that; we keep the coffin, we just take them out of the coffin. But in the mosque, we put him in a coffin and keep him all day at the mosque. It was on Friday: a special day for Muslims on Fridays. After praying in the mosque, everybody comes out.’

‘Anyway, we put him down on the mosque and everybody comes out after they pray and we pray for him again. We take him to the cemetery and after that, take him out from the coffin, putting him down into the ground and we cover him with wood. I mean, he lies under the wood and the Hoca reads the Koran. Then we stay there; he reads more – mostly part of the Koran – we pray and we put flowers on top. We go home and we have three nights grieving and crying for him. After the three nights, forty or fifty days pass and then people cry for him.’

**Adjustment**

Abdullah is certain that his son’s death has not in any way changed his faith. ‘No; my beliefs are still the same. We believe everybody will be going when their time comes up. I don’t know what will cause a death: accident or age, or sickness. Only God knows; nobody else knows. We believe when your time comes up, you go.’

‘It’s not really changed the family: a bit, but not much. Our daughters, they’re really upset. They go to his grave, you know, but they are still in shock. Fourteen months passed, but they are still in shock, but it had an affect on me and we changed a lot, you know. We can’t enjoy any more and we are not going out much. We are not going to parties and we are not going to weddings. We don’t feel like going; we just stay at home. We have a room and we have his pictures in the room; we just go in and, you know, sit there.’

Eight months before his own death, Ali’s best friend also died in a motorcycle accident. At the time, the two young men’s parents did not know each other, but have since developed a strong relationship through their regular meetings at the cemetery. ‘Yeah, we met first at the cemetery and then we met at a restaurant. We are best family friends now; we visit each other and just talk, you know. We try to give us a bit of comfort, you know.’

Abdullah and Fatima find talking to others and maintaining personal details of other family’s situations to be comforting to them. They have befriended members of several other families, which they recognise as having experienced greater tragedies than their own. ‘You know, once we stop and talk to people, we find there are two boys and one was sick and one had an accident; they’re both buried in the same grave: brothers. One was sick; he died the same day his brother had an accident and he died too. One is twenty-five and one is twenty-two. So when we see that, I say, “Gee; we lost one and they’ve lost two”.’

Fatima produced a laminated Turkish-language newspaper clipping, which featured some eight young people from Turkish families, all of who had been buried in the cemetery recently. ‘All the kids here died in one year’s time. These two were walking on the footpath and one drunk went on the footpath with a car and he killed them. Another one, he’s thirteen, sitting on a bicycle; he was crossing the road and someone hit him and killed him.’

‘The poor boy we talked to yesterday – young boy – his sisters died. He’s a very good boy, you know; he’s friendly and always he says, “Hello, how are you?” He told me that they died from an accident and his father is an ambulance man and his mother was a nurse. They rang his father and said, “There’s an accident”, and he was with his ambulance and he was going to
pick them up and said, “Oh, gee; my two daughters and they both are twins”. So when we
learn these, you know, we are getting a little bit of relief. We’re saying we are worse, but
some people are more worse, you know.’

Abdullah sees his grandson and Ali’s girlfriend quite regularly. ‘She’s not Turkish, but she’s
good, you know. I see my grandson; she brings him to us every couple of days, you know. So
far we’ve got a strong relationship, but I don’t know in the future.’

‘I always remember him, you know. Even now, he’s in my mind; I can see him anywhere and
everywhere. He’s a spirit, now. I believe he’s a spirit: always with us. He’s coming around
and most of the times we feel he is with us, because we saw things we didn’t expect, so he is
with us, you know, all the time. Two times, at twelve o’clock, the lights in the car came on.
No one touched the lights; the doors were locked and the lights come on, without the switch
on. The switch was off, but the lights on. And when he used to drive the car, he put the seat
like this when he was driving. You know, we found his seat like that and we feel things. Like
sometimes, his son comes and he’s looking there and I’d be looking there too and see nothing,
but he just starts laughing like this, you know. I feel him then, you know, I sense him.’

Cemetery

Ali was buried in a Muslim section of a large public cemetery. To Abdullah, the cemetery is a
sacred place. Fatima says that the cemetery is now more important to her than her house is.
‘Because everyday I go there.’

A large European-style, granite monument covers Ali’s grave. ‘You know in our country,
they put memorials on the graves, but they don’t close the top; they just leave soil on top and
they plant on top of them.’

Abdullah feels closer to God in the mosque than he does at the cemetery. ‘We are closer to
God when we go to the mosque and pray. We really feel like close to him then.’ However, he
does feel a presence of God and a particular closeness to his son when at the cemetery. ‘In
visiting him and praying for him, we feel like he’s next to us. While we’re visiting, we feel
close to God too, because we’re praying for him there, you know.’

Fatima maintains a written record of monthly interments at the current Muslim section,
including the ages of the deceased. She introduces herself to other visitors and enquires about
recent bereavements. ‘As soon as she sees someone digging the grave she goes and talks to
them and asks them. We just go in and meet each other and talk and she writes it in the book.’

They both consider the cemetery to be a peaceful place. ‘There’s no fear, it’s just peaceful,
you know. All the people have broken hearts. Any people that come over there, they’ve lost a
son, children, father, mother or a family friend. It’s the same problem.’

Fatima insists on visiting and staying at the cemetery on her own, despite cautions from
others. ‘People even told me, you know, “Don’t go over yourself, because of the danger”. I
said, “No, I go; I’m not scared”. It doesn’t matter if they kill me; I want to die anyway, you
know. I don’t care now if I live or die: I don’t care.’ Abdullah feels similarly. ‘It doesn’t
matter; time comes and your time comes up. It’s in God’s hands.’

Visitation
'What my wife does, everyday she goes to cemetery and she has a little recorder, which is someone reading the Koran. She puts that on for our son, but also she puts that on for all the whole area. Because speaking on the cassette, she has most of the names of the people there and after that, sayings for everybody.'

Abdulah visits the cemetery about once or twice a week. 'It is very important to be there, especially on Fridays. I come every Friday and sometimes on Sundays or Saturdays. I feel very sad and I feel I'm going to visit my son, but it shouldn't be like that, you know; he should be alive. I feel terrible, you know, same as my wife. I go twice a week, or maybe three times a week— not everyday. But what she feels, I feel the same. I go and I pray for him. I fix his flowers; I take him some flowers sometimes. We never really keep his grave without flowers, you know, always we have flowers.'

'There are Turkish special days, two times every year. One of them is after the fasting— end of the Ramadan— and two months after that we have another special day and we come on those special days and we visit the cemetery.'

Fatima visits the cemetery everyday. 'Sometimes, two times a day. In the morning, I stay there for two hours then I go home and if I'm feeling his death, I come back again. It makes me feel much better. I talk to him, you know, about everything. I tell him I miss him.' Sometimes, Fatima stays at the cemetery for up to six hours at a time.

Abdulah visits both with Fatima and by himself. 'But I won't stay long. Most of the times I'm visiting with my wife, so I stay there about an hour. Then I sit there, because when we go together, she's not comfortable with me. I said to her, "Why don't you stay with him as much as you want?" So she stays on and she talks to him. When it's raining, she stays in the car; she goes there, but she stays in the car.'

As well as placing flowers and praying, Fatima also spends her time looking at other graves. 'In the summer, I put water on his grave and a few friends' graves. I fix the flowers you know. I look everywhere. Sometimes I go to the Christian part and talk to people and put water on graves. I talk to ladies there, you know.'
Appendix 8

REVIEW LETTER

[Name]
[Address]

[Date]

Dear ,

Thanks for recently sharing with me your personal bereavement and helping me to understand your experience, beliefs and practices. Since our meeting, the recording of our interview has been transcribed and I have edited and condensed it into the enclosed ‘Case Study’.

It is intended that the case study will be used with others representing people of various backgrounds, faiths and relationships, to help us understand what is common among cemetery visitors and also how they vary. From this, we hope to develop a much more personal understanding of cemetery visitors.

I would be grateful if you could find time to read it and let me know how well you believe it captures the essence of our discussion. I have tried to retain as much of your actual words as possible and have also endeavoured to capture a sense of the emotions expressed at the time.

You will notice that the names (and some other minor details) are intentionally changed to protect your anonymity. But if any important experiences, beliefs or expressions have been lost or misunderstood in the process of transcribing and editing, I would like to correct this. It is most important that the final case study represents, as closely as possible, a very real personal experience.

I will call you in a week or two. Thank you, again, for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Philip Bachelor
# Appendix 9

## ANALYSIS THEMES

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| Bereavement                   |                |
| Cause of death                |                |
| Duration                      |                |
| Grief                         |                |
| Goodbye                       |                |
| Other loss                    |                |
| Comparison                    |                |
| Compounding                   |                |
| Experience                    |                |
| Preparation                   |                |
| Relationship                  |                |
| Quality                       |                |
| Type                          |                |

| Visitation                    |                |
| Activities                    |                |
| Conversation                  |                |
| Flowers                       |                |
| Maintenance                   |                |
| Other                         |                |
| Prayer                        |                |
| Company                       |                |
| Duration                      |                |
| Emotions                      |                |
| Fear                          |                |
| Guilt                         |                |
| Happiness                     |                |
| Pain                          |                |
| Sadness                       |                |

| Funeral                       |                |
| Disposal                      |                |
| Ritual                        |                |
| Values                        |                |

| Adjustment                    |                |
| Acceptance                    |                |
| Afterlife                     |                |
| Changes                       |                |

| Reflection                    |                |
| Experience                    |                |
| Own mortality                 |                |
| Philosophy                    |                |

| Other                         |                |

- **Psychosocial History**
  - PA
  - PEd
  - PEM
  - PM
  - PN
  - PR
  - PS

- **Bereavement**
  - BC
  - BD
  - BGr
  - BGb

- **Funeral**
  - FD
  - FR
  - FV

- **Adjustment**
  - AAC
  - AAF

- **Visitation**
  - VAC
  - VAF
  - VAM
  - VAO
  - VAP
  - VC
  - VD

- **Cemetery**
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  - CCn
  - CMS
  - CMT
  - CVVC
  - CVH
  - CVPS
  - CVPr
  - CVRM
  - CVRop
  - CVSA
  - CVSo

- **Other**
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Appendix 10
CODING SAMPLE

FORMER SOLDIER HONOURS WIFE'S MEMORY

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<tr>
<td>Marital status: Widower</td>
<td>Cause of death: Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion: No religion</td>
<td>Family nationality: Australian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of loss: 4½ years</td>
<td>Service type: Burial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency of visits: Monthly</td>
<td>Memorial: Lawn plaque</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychosocial history
[PA][PR][ACS]
Born in Sydney sixty-two years ago, John describes himself initially as 'nominally Catholic, but lapsed, and verging on atheistic'. He now lives alone as his two sons, aged thirty-five and thirty-three have 'gone their own way'.

[Ped]
Having retired from a military career, John is currently undertaking tertiary studies in business. He left school with the Intermediate Certificate, completed the Army’s First Class Certificate of Education and a technical certificate in the early 1960s. More recently, he qualified in financial planning and attained industry accreditation.

His wife Mary was born in northern Victoria to an Irish family, which had been there since the convict days. 'They were on the land and were squatters who drove sheep a hundred and eighty years or more ago. She strongly identified with her Irish ancestry, her Roman Catholicism and her rural background. She was a happy-go-lucky, vivacious person but very serious about her responsibilities as a mother. She raised the children and John went out to work. From the advancement of her first pregnancy she didn’t work for wages again'. John and Mary had what he described as 'the old fashioned idea that the husband was the breadwinner and the wife was the home-maker'.

Bereavement
[BD][BRT]
Mary died four and a half years ago, at the age of fifty-three. They had been married for thirty-four years. John recalls: 'She was very much into raising the children and virtually took total responsibility for the family unit as such. Being a soldier means prolonged periods of times away from the family and the wives of professional soldiers do all the things, which in other ordinary nuclear families, the husband does or they both do together. Wives of soldiers are much more experienced in just about everything. If there's a nail that needs to be driven, they get the hammer and they drive the nail. So she was the lynchpin of the family.'

[BFRQ]
'We had a very happy relationship. The only point of strain was me getting out of the army. I did go back in again, because I thought it would make her happier, but it made me dreadfully unhappy. She was the family, if you like, and I funded it.'
Appendix 11

SAMPLE CATEGORY ANALYSIS

VISITATION REASONS: IDENTIFICATION AND ANALYSIS

88 references, mentioned by twenty-four informants (including two non-visitors). Three non-visitors made no comment on visitation.

Marie
(Remains not interred in a cemetery)

John
'I sort of felt that somehow it would be disrespectful, selfish, in bad taste, not to go in there.'
'I hope I'm not rationalising here, but as one begins to get on with their life, the tendency to revisit their old one - which is what I think they're doing when one goes to the cemetery - diminishes. Part of what one is doing is revisiting their past.'
'I then found that I wasn't feeling guilty about not visiting the grave ... as other interests in life began to intervene.'
'I found then that I would be saying to myself, "Oh, God: I haven't been to the cemetery, I'd better go over." I would go as a matter of deliberate intent, because I'd say, "I haven't been". So I'd go and get in the car and I'd drive over there and tidy up around the grave, which served a few purposes. First of all it stopped me feeling guilty, because if I haven't been there for a while I might feel a bit guilty about it, so I went.'
'I've only been over there a few times with my friend, when she's been going to her father's grave. ... I observe that she is far more attentive to her father's grave than I am to my wife's. I believe that makes me feel guilty too. Also of course, I wouldn't want a friend to regard me as being a terrible person who doesn't go, so maybe there's a bit of hypocrisy creeping in here at the same time. So yeah, I don't have a need to go there, but yet, if I've forgotten for any period of time, I feel guilty and I assuage that guilt by going.'
'I just keep it clean and tidy. Now it might be a moot point to ask whether or not that's part of respect for Mary and part of it is the habit and the instinct almost of looking after, keeping things neat, clean and tidy. It seems disrespectful not to.'
'At first after she died, every time I drove past, I used to feel that I had to go, otherwise I was somehow letting the side down.'
'I think it's a combination of a mark of respect to Mary, but also part of the old soldier's habits. I think you would need someone skilled in psychology to be able to determine exactly what it is, but I would say it would be half-and-half. Let's put it this way, if one let the whole thing go - and imagine the cemetery authorities also let it go - I would find that quite disgraceful on my part, not to go to the effort to maintain it properly.'
'If you're not religious, it tends to become a combination of a sense of obligation, a sense of duty and a habit, and the need to maintain the plaque and the grave site at a standard which satisfies me. Now, this sounds rather selfish I know, but it's as if I'm deriving a sense of satisfaction by fulfilling a duty to maintain an emblem of what was once my wife.'
'Maybe there's a sense of indicating to my children (who are well and truly adults) that I'm remembering their mother and treating her memory with respect.'
'There's not a sense of visiting her, but there is a sense of duty done and respecting a memory: of ensuring that anybody else who goes there will see that the memory is respected and not neglected.'
Brenda

‘In the beginning I went because I had to. I felt as if I had to, because it was the right thing to do, but now I go because I want to and it’s much nicer.’

Kevin

‘I’ll go up on birthdays including my own, because he can’t come to my birthday, so I have to go up and see him. I tend to go at Christmas, birthdays and Easter and those types of things. I want to go on days that I want to go. I don’t feel obliged to go; I just feel as though I want to go. But I have been known to be driving that way and just pull off the road and go to the cemetery for no reason.’

‘Another person we know used to go every day. ... Their son got killed in a car accident; he was only twenty-one. I don’t think the father has even been to the cemetery since the funeral; that was ten years ago. He won’t talk about it, like it just didn’t happen, except that his son is not there.’

‘I feel that going to the cemetery does you good, because you know, that’s where they are. That’s why you’re going to the bloody place; if they weren’t there you wouldn’t go.
I felt that for Brenda, it was becoming a compulsion: “I’ve got to go; I’m relied upon”. Brenda is a little bit that way, you know, though she may not admit it, but I didn’t want to get to the stage of going to the cemetery like that: “I’ve got to go, because I’ll be relied on to be there”. I thought that would have been extremely unhealthy, not only for her, but also for me too, but anyway, she broke out of it herself and worked her way through it.’

Rosa

Rosa considers that her faith influences the frequency of her visits, as ‘the Catholic thing to do is go once a week’. She sees her regular visits as ‘a religious obligation and a duty to Joe and to God’.

Tony

‘I don’t visit out of any religious obligation, purely out of a feeling that I should see Dad.’

‘I sometimes do the rounds of the family, but that’s more out of respect than anything else, if I’ve got time.’

‘The kids like coming, because they like their Nonno, but my wife doesn’t like going to the cemetery.’

‘On Fathers Day, we all go; on his birthday, I would go. It just depends. Fathers Day would be the main day and not so much his birthday and anniversary day, but sometimes we just might go for no reason.’

‘On Dad’s anniversary, I went to the cemetery. ... To me, it was just important to go. ... The important thing is that I saw Dad’s photo and said a couple of words. I always tend to say, “Just look after us if you can, if that’s the way it works. Look after the family and make sure that everything goes well”. It was important to go.’

‘Sometimes, if I feel I haven’t visited Dad for a while, I just get that urge to go. I can’t explain it and sometimes, when I’m feeling a little low, it helps. I feel that he feels I’m there: that I’m showing respect. I feel that I’ve got that support; that shoulder, that he gives me strength.’

‘I would’ve gone to visit my grandparents just purely through respect, but with my father, it’s a bit more. There is more emotion attached to the visit, because it’s my father.’

‘You feel that you need to go because your hurt is still there, but as you start to get your life back together or back to normality, the pain eases off.’

Frank

‘I’ve been to my grandfather’s grave about four times since his burial, but only one of those occasions was by myself. The others were to show relatives who had come to town.’
'Personally, I don’t need to go.'
'When I did go by myself, ... I was just driving past and I thought it was a good time to go in and have a look at the headstone, which I hadn't seen. It was good to see that he's been memorialised in a nice way.'
'I don’t think going there is significant in the grieving process, in the sense that some people do.'
'I'd be more than happy to call in if my grandmother wanted to go there and I'd spend some time there with her, but I wouldn't instigate that sort of thing.'

Natasha
'For the initial twelve months, I needed to go there and leave flowers and talk to her. I think that helped me in my own personal grieving process.'
'For the first two and a half years, I went once a month. It was a routine. I felt I had to. I needed to do that. I just felt that it was the right thing to do. That's what people do when they lose family; they go and visit them. You don't just stop thinking about them.'
'I felt really relieved the last time I went, because I felt so guilty that I hadn't been for a while.'
'I feel I have less of a need to visit now than I did earlier, but I'll still go. ... I just couldn't feel comfortable within myself, not doing that. I think she'd be hurt.'

Max
'In the very early stages, we would have visited more frequently, when family and friends might have wanted to go.'

Margaret
'We don't need to go all the time, you know, and our younger daughter doesn't like to go at all. She'll go if we want her to come with us, but she doesn't really like it and won't go on her own.'
'I think Marjory would feel like we do: that we wouldn't want the family coming up all the time. I'd rather they got on with their own lives. You can remember without going to the cemetery, of course.'

Elsa
Elsa considers that her faith strongly influences how frequently she visits. 'Of course, that's what you feel. That's why you go into the cemetery, because if not that feeling, well what for do you go?'
'Sometime I have the feeling to go, but my son is at work; everybody is at work. I wait for Sunday to come, or Saturday, to go over there, because who'll take me? I don't drive, you know. If I had a chance, I would go everyday, but no.'

Marisa
'I often wonder why I go to the cemetery. I think I like going to see him, but I get really sad walking away, because he's there. ... I think I stopped going because of that reason. I like to visit, but I get very sad when I walk away, but I go there often enough.'
'When I go, I feel that I'm doing so for my own benefit rather than for his benefit, but I'm also not quite sure what that personal benefit is.'
'I think it is perhaps a sense of duty that I feel to go there now. I feel it's a duty to me, because - it's a silly thought - if you don't go, you feel that you're forgetting the person.'
'I also visit on his birthday, but not Christmas, because Greg wasn't really big on Christmas.'
'I don’t think that you have to go to the cemetery to remember the person. I mean, I used to think when he first died and I used to go every month, that it’s like going to visit him. But ... you remember what you remember yourself; you don’t have to go and visit a cemetery.’

‘In the first year or two, you feel that it benefits yourself to go to the cemetery.’

**June**

‘I feel that if I went to that cemetery, I’d feel that it just happened yesterday. I would feel that I’d lost him all over again and I’d start from the beginning now. It makes it definite, you know. But perhaps, I’m playing a game where I think he’s away somewhere and perhaps he’ll come back. I don’t want to look at that ground and know he’s there: it’s too final, it’s absolutely too final. I keep away from there.’

**Marion**

‘I’ll keep going; I promised my father I’d keep going for him.’

**Naomi**

‘It’s like the only place that I could identify in a physical sense with the last existence of him as a person. That made me understand why people do go to the cemetery. I could never understand why people go all the time; and I still couldn’t go all the time. But the people who do go every week, go because they’re looking at that place and saying, “That’s where that person is; that’s where that person lies”, and therefore to visit and see and communicate or contact that person, they must be in that place.’

‘I personally would never have just gone to the cemetery for the hell of going to the cemetery. I’ve always gone to the cemetery because it was – like I said before – the high holidays or anniversary or something like that.’

‘The monument is being organised at the moment and next month we will have it consecrated by a rabbi and we’ll all probably go to the cemetery.’

‘Jewish law actually states that it is more important to go to the cemetery on important days like birthdays, memorial days, prior to high holidays and the anniversary of the death. It is not required to go daily, weekly or on a fortnightly basis and have a routine. Some people would actually condemn frequent visitation to the cemetery.’

‘After a funeral, the immediate family is not permitted to go to the cemetery for thirty days or four weeks, so as a family we all went four weeks later. After the thirty days, we have a special service.’

‘I don’t want to ever get used to it to the point where you go every Sunday and wipe it down and clean it: and that’s what you do next Sunday as well. I don’t want it to become a routine that I just get used to.’

**Veronica**

‘I have to come and see him; I have to look after him. I make sure his flowers are pretty and that his headstone’s maintained. I have to do something. I can’t do anything for him at home, so I have to come and just talk to him. People might think I’m being silly, but quite frankly, I don’t care what people think. That’s my child there and this is the last thing I can do for him.’

‘I’m just his Mum. It’s my motherly instinct to look after him and to make sure everything’s well maintained and pretty, just as if he was at home, where I could look after him. That mother/child bond will always be there. I mean, I gave birth to him and I’ve got to do what I can for him: and for myself.’

‘I’ll always come and see him a lot. I mean, that’s my son there and until they bury me, I’ll always come frequently. I’ll always make sure that it’s maintained and looked after and he’s got fresh flowers.’
Donna
‘I come here for comfort. ... I feel really sad for the people who feel that they have to come to the cemetery everyday, because this is where they are. I don’t feel that way. I come here because it brings me comfort, because the area is just beautiful and because I like to have fresh flowers there all the time as a sign of respect. That’s why I come, because it is, in a sense, where she lives and I like her garden area to be the best; I want it always to look great. That’s very, very important to me.’
‘I’ll spend ten minutes when I go to visit my brother and I visit him only on special occasions now. I go and see him on birthdays and at Christmas and he’s just over the road and I’m here all the time; I still don’t go across there.’
‘If I’m anywhere this side of town and I’m in the middle of work, I’ll never drive past the gates without driving in: never, ever. I wouldn’t care how short I was for time; I could never drive past. It’s a very different area in that it certainly brings the parents a lot of peace and a lot of comfort and I know cemeteries are probably meant to do that anyway, but I find it a lot more in that area.’
‘I come down to the cemetery because it makes me feel really good and because I can arrange her flowers. ... That makes me feel really good, because I can’t mother her any more; there’s no mothering left. I can’t feed her, I can’t change her, I can’t hold her and I can’t stop her from crying; I can’t do any of that. All I can do is trim her grass and do her flowers, so I’m more than happy to make sure that I do that, because here is my outlet for mothering. ... This is the place where I can do things for her.’

Peter
(Cemetery not readily accessible – Interstate)

Adriana
‘At times – and I have felt this on quite a few weekends – we go there just because it’s something that we do; it’s just become a custom to us.’

Michael
‘In the beginning, people expect you to go there. If I were really truthful, I’d probably have to say that most of the times I went, were because people expected me to. To be honest, I felt a bit guilty if I hadn’t been when people thought I should have. Now I go when I want to go: when I feel like it and not when other people think I should be going.’
‘I probably also had a need to be there in the beginning; I wanted to be there.’
‘If I go to town to get pizza by myself, I’ll eat it near the cemetery. That’s when I sort of think of her. When I’ve talked about her to other people, then I probably tend to go there a bit, if I’ve got nothing else to do. I’ve only ever driven in there a few times just to go and see her.’
‘I suppose I’ll probably go at Christmas and on important days and I’m sure I’ll go on her birthday and maybe the day we were married: a few things like that.’
‘I’ve now got past the stage of going because I thought people expected me to go there. I’ll go there when I want to go there.’

Andrea
‘The day before my niece’s wedding, my husband took my sister out to the cemetery, to sort of help her get through her depression. We thought it might have helped her, but it didn’t.’
‘I think if someone said, “Oh, look; do you want to come with me while I go and visit Bob’s grave?”’ I’d say, “Oh, OK”, but I really don’t think I would just make a special trip to go and see the grave, because it’s only a grave.’
‘Why put yourself through another sadness when you don’t need to? I know that if I went there, all these memories from the accident would all come back, so it’s best, I think. ... I’d
hate to go back to where I was when I had the breakdown: not that I’m going to go right back to the beginning, because you don’t, but I don’t want to go anywhere near that spot.

‘I think a plaque saying something about the person is beautiful, but it’s not necessary for me to go and see that. I think it would probably be a little different if it was my husband or one of my kids.’

‘My husband’s aunty ... lived with his Mum and Dad for eighteen years and I went to the funeral, but I’ve never been back. I’ve never had an urge to go to the gravesite. So maybe that’s just me, whereas the next person might have to go each Sunday, or whatever, but I don’t get the urge to go.’

Paul

‘I have two sisters and good friends who live in the area, so we mainly call in to Jessica’s grave when we are visiting somebody.’

‘Even Jane would say that there was a sense in which she couldn’t let Jessica go. It was important that as a mother, she could go and be there.’

‘I don’t necessarily want to be there often, but I need to know that I could be there. I need to be able to go and see the small plaque.’

‘I’ve been ... a few times recently, probably because we’ve been in the area making arrangements to move.’

‘Because I mainly visit at Jane’s prompts, I just respond to her need to go. It’s not important for me personally; it’s more that I go to support Jane. It’s not something that I have to do and I have no perception of guilt about it, none at all.’

Elisabeth

‘I’m not one for going every week, like on the same day: just when I can and when I feel I need to. ... It was his birthday in January, so I went then. It’s also our anniversary in January, so that was a combination one, but I don’t make it a ritual.’

‘I mostly go for a special reason, you know, but then I just think, “Oh, I’ll go and get some flowers and take them”, or if I’m going away, I’ll go before I go away. I don’t feel that I have to go; it’s just, I go on special occasions. It seems to have settled down to anniversaries, birthdays and before I’m going away, you know. It’s just that I can’t buy him presents: because we always exchanged gifts on these occasions.’

George

‘One of my daughters – the eldest one – doesn’t go to the grave very often, because even though four years have passed now, she still doesn’t accept the death of her mother, but the other one she goes every Sunday.’

‘I go every day and it just helps me to sleep.’

‘I look forward to it actually. I look forward to going to the cemetery.’

‘I come to the cemetery everyday purely because, well Olive and me have been together for close to forty-eight years, so I just want to be with her for a few minutes: no other reasons.’

Leela

*(Cemetery not readily accessible: overseas)*

Abdulah

‘What my wife does, everyday she goes to cemetery and she has a little recorder, which is someone reading the Koran. She puts that on for our son, but also she puts that on for all the whole area. Because speaking on the cassette, she has most of the names of the people there and after that, sayings for everybody.’
'It is very important to be there, especially on Fridays. I come every Friday and sometimes on Sundays or Saturdays.'

**Fatima**

'In the morning, I stay there for two hours, then I go home and if I’m feeling his death, I come back again. It makes me feel much better.'

**Principle reasons for visitation**

**Fulfil a sense of duty or obligation (14)**
- **Obligation (4):** John 4, Marisa 1, Marion 1, Michael 2.
- **Religious duty (5):** Rosa 1, Tony 1, Elsa 1, Naomi 2, Abdullah 2.
- **Duty of respect (3):** John 1, Tony 3, Donna 1.
- **Compulsion (6):** Brenda 1, Kevin 1, Veronica 1, Donnal, George 1, Abdullah 1.

**Maintain sense of relationship (12)**
- **Maintain reltnshp (9):** John 1, Tony 2, Natasha 2, Marisa 1, Naomi 1, Veronica 3, Donna 2, Paul 1, George 1.
- **Special days (7):** Kevin 1, Tony 2, Marisa 1, Naomi 3, Donna 1, Michael 1, Elisabeth 2.

**Ease grief, discomfort or sense of guilt (11)**
- **Comfort (10):** Kevin 1, Tony 1, Frank 1, Natasha 1, Marisa 1, Donna 3, Michael 1, Andrea 1, George 2, Fatima 1.
- **Guilt (3):** John 3, Natasha 1, Michael 1.

**Other reasons (9)**
- **Accmpny. others (4):** Frank 2, Max 1, Andrea 1, Paul 1.
- **Inspect monumnt. (2):** Frank 1, Naomi 1.
- **In vicinity (4):** John 1, Donna 1, Michael 1, Paul 2.
- **Habit (3):** John 2, Naomi 1, Adriana 1.

**Non-visitation (11+4)**
- Marie 0, Kevin 1, Tony 1, Frank 1, Margaret 2, Elsa 1, Marisa 1, June 1, Naomi 2, Peter 0, Andrea 4, Paul 1, George 1, Leela 0.
Appendix 12

PERSONAL LOG

Informant Summary

1. Marie (34-year-old, Australian Anglican *de facto* wife, bereaved 3 years)
2. John (62-year-old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 4½ years)
3. Brenda & Kevin (60 & 62-year-old, Australian non-religious grandparents, bd. 5 years)
4. Rosa (70-year-old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 3 years)
5. Tony (40-year-old, Italian Catholic son, bereaved 3 years)
6. Frank (25-year-old, Australian Catholic grandson, bereaved 1 year)
7. Natasha (35-year-old, Australian non-religious grand-daughter, bereaved 4 years)
8. Margaret & Max (64-year-old, Australian Uniting parents, bereaved 3 years)
9. Elsa (66-year-old, Italian Catholic wife, bereaved 5 years)
10. Marisa (45-year-old, Australian non-religious secret-lover, bereaved 3 years)
11. June (75-year-old, Australian Catholic wife, bereaved 14 months)
12. Marion (47-year-old, Australian daughter of no specific faith, bereaved 14 & 5 months)
13. Naomi (37-year-old, Australian Jewish sister, bereaved 8 months)
14. Donna (27-year-old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 10 months)
15. Veronica (33-year-old, Australian Catholic mother, bereaved 2 years)
16. Peter (54-year-old, Australian Catholic son, bereaved 10 months)
17. Adriana (27-year-old, Greek Orthodox daughter, bereaved 4 months)
18. Michael (51-year-old, Australian non-religious husband, bereaved 2 months)
19. Andrea (43-year-old, Australian sister-in-law of eclectic faith, bereaved 3 years)
20. Paul (37-year-old, Australian Baptist father, bereaved 3 years)
21. Elisabeth (67-year-old, English Salvation Army wife, bereaved 4 years)
22. George (66-year-old, Maltese Catholic husband, bereaved 4½ years)
23. Leela (59-year-old, Sri Lankan Buddhist daughter, bereaved 3 months)
24. Fatima & Abdullah (47 & 52-year-old, Turkish Muslim parents, bereaved 14 months)
Interview #01

Pseudonym Marie

Date & Time 24 June 1998: 1.00 - 2.30 p.m.

Means of contact Informant is a business colleague directly approached by researcher.

Interview location Researcher's home in Melbourne, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Thirty-four-year-old para-professional Australian-born recent single mother of Anglican faith. Fiancé (de facto husband) of six years died from HIV/AIDS almost three years ago and was cremated. Remains have not been interred and memorialised.

Ease of communication Informant was specifically selected for the first interview, as we have worked together for nine years and know each other well. I had attended the funeral, and she had some familiarity with my earlier research, having assisted with quantitative data collection. Rapport was very good and open. Honest communication was very easy. Conversation was clear, frank and scarcely emotional. The tape recording was clear and did not impede our natural conversation.

Closure Somewhat awkward, as my questioning seemed to come to a fairly abrupt end. Without the decedent's remains interred in a cemetery, I was unable to explore the issue of cemetery visitation, but regard this interview as a 'lead in' experience for me. In response to my final question, "Has any part of this interview appeared to be insensitive, or suggesting any lack of understanding of your feelings", I was assured that the respondent had felt very comfortable.

Personal response Feeling quite uneasy myself with the prospect of interviewing bereaved people in detail about sensitive, emotional and intimate issues, I considered 'Marie' would be somewhat forgiving of any indiscretion on my behalf resulting from personal ignorance and lack of experience. I approached the interview feeling very self-conscious about my lack of experience and real ability to adequately empathise with the respondent. I felt unsure of how I would console the informant, having brought up painful memories, and yet keep the interview flowing to extract adequate information. During the interview, I felt somewhat surprised and greatly relieved that the informant spoke so freely and frankly without any significant emotional disruption. I feel honoured to have been privy to such intimate personal details. I feel a sense of achievement having successfully completed my first interview and now feel somewhat more confident about questioning relative strangers about personal bereavements. But I am not sure if I can really use this particular case in my analysis, as there is no cemetery visitation to examine.

Knowledge to date I now feel that I am able to conduct in-depth interviews with bereaved people. At least up to the point of cemetery visitation, I am confident that my semi-structured framework for questioning can draw out the sort of data I seek. This interview addressed about half of my intended questions. I believe a full interview is likely to take two to three hours.
Interview # 02

Pseudonym John

Date & Time 4 August 1998: 8.00 - 11.30 p.m.

Means of contact Informant responded to an appeal through a service club.

Interview location Informant's very-neat, average middle-class home in Melbourne, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Sixty-two-year-old agnostic/atheistic Australian widower, retired professional and part-time tertiary student, living alone. Wife died of cancer four and a half years ago and was buried in a lawn grave.

Ease of communication Excellent. Very articulate, pragmatic and without emotion. Informant was straight to the point, not needing to use euphemisms. Informant appears to be managing bereavement very well. Recording is very clear and easy to follow. Again, the tape recorder has not presented any barrier to naturally flowing conversation.

Closure In response to my final question, I was assured that no part of the interview was insensitive, or in any way suggested a lack of understanding, but rather it was, "most professional". The respondent then showed me around the house where he and his wife had lived together and she had spent most of her illness. He showed me her photographs, his awards and military paraphernalia, then we had supper together.

Personal response My primary questions seem to be stimulating the type of responses I had hoped for. I was surprised and greatly relieved at how well this second interview went. The unexpected lack of emotional distress and clarity of thought and speech made this interview so much easier on me than I had anticipated. The depth of data gained is considerably greater than I expected from any initial interviews. I now feel much more confident about conducting further interviews with bereaved people. Two days later, I visited the grave alone, to read the plaque and gain a sense of visiting the site.

Knowledge to date I can see that some bereaved people are happy to discuss their experiences with someone showing a genuine interest, in the hope that their experiences may be helpful to others. Honouring the memory of the decedent is one explanation for visiting. While the desire to visit may be strong, a satisfactory understanding of the reason for visiting may defy the visitor. The respondent directly related his own wane in visitation and subsidence of emotions, to the evident statistical decline in general cemetery visitation.
Interview # 03

Pseudonym Brenda & Kevin

Date & Time 12 August 1998: 7.30 - 10.45 p.m.

Means of contact He responded to an appeal through a service club meeting.

Interview location Informants' large modern home in Melbourne, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Sixty- and sixty-two-year-old, Australian, semi-retired blue-collar business couple of no religion. Four-year-old grandson died accidentally while in informants' care just on five years ago and was buried in a monumental grave.

Ease of communication Not as easy as the first two interviews. I generally directed each question to her first, then to him, to allow separation of different responses. This generally worked well, but some interjection, joint responses and discussion did occur. Both became quite emotional (her more so) from early in the interview, when asked to tell me about the decedent. Later on, her anguish interrupted the interview, but she declined to take a break, when offered the opportunity. Both advised that they were not at all embarrassed about crying in front of me. The resultant emotional three-way conversation was more difficult than were the preceding two interviews to transcribe and edit.

Closure Again I was assured that my questions and approach were not at all offensive or insensitive, and that the tears were something that needed to flow. I was then shown around the house to see photographs of the deceased grandchild and his extended family, some dried flowers from the funeral wreaths and sympathy cards. Our conversation continued for over half an hour after concluding the 'formal' interview.

Personal response Wow! A very emotional experience. I felt I was acting in an unfamiliar play and juggling my responses. I knew I needed to avoid taking on the emotions of others and yet still show as much empathy as possible. I tried to look concerned and sympathetic, yet strong and understanding, showing no surprise or personal opinion concerning what was said and how it was expressed. Again I felt honoured to have had such intimate, delicate details freely expressed to me. As I drove home, I felt somewhat emotionally frail. I found myself telling my wife about some of the most difficult aspects of Brenda and Kevin's experience with great expression. The next morning, their story and their grief remained quite vivid, but subsided over several days. Some weeks later, when in the area, I visited the rural cemetery and located the grave. The informants subsequently thanked me for the interview's cathartic value and were touched that I had visited the grave.

Knowledge to date The presence of a tape recorder is not an issue, once conversation starts. Informants have not shown any signs of self-consciousness nor reluctance to say anything on tape. Selecting a more-intimate, personally appropriate style of cemetery is evidently important to some people. Personal accounts are reinforcing statistically evident, subsidence in visits and suggest that emotions correspondingly subside. I believe I am obtaining very raw, but excellent and reliable data.
Interview # 04

Pseudonym Rosa

Date & Time 19 August 1998: 7.30 - 9.00 p.m.

Means of contact Informant is a friendly neighbour approached by the researcher.

Interview location Informant's modest home in Melbourne, daughter present as interpreter.

Psychosocial summary Seventy-year-old, Italian born Catholic widow of almost three years, sharing home with daughter and family. Blue-collar husband died of stroke and complications and was buried in concrete vault.

Ease of communication Informant was selected as first non-English-speaking respondent, as she and her daughter are known to me. I had also known the decedent, but was overseas when the death and funeral occurred. I had also visited the grave. My familiarity proved very helpful, as I anticipate that establishing trust with someone I could not easily explain my research to, could be quite difficult. Nevertheless, communication was still difficult. Sometimes the informant and I understood each other quite well and at other times our interpreter needed to reconstruct both questions and answers. Non-verbal communication was used extensively in response to questions. The informant was quite emotional and her distress interrupted the interview twice. She declined my offer to cease our conversation, but took a brief break to regain her composure. The interview proved quite illuminating to the daughter as, although living with her mother since her father's death, the two had not shared their emotions and discussed their personal grief responses before. Three parties speaking a combination of English and Italian, and the informant’s crying, made transcribing and editing quite difficult.

Closure Again I was assured that the interview had been quite sensitive, and that the tears were to be expected. I was then shown the informant's bedroom where, three years earlier I had visited the decedent when ill in bed. This time I was shown the dresser, which dominated the room and had been set up as a shrine, constantly reminding the informant of her loss.

Personal response Informant appears to be coping with bereavement as is usually expected of an Italian widow. She will never let go and try to get over her loss. The difficulty in direct communication with the informant left me feeling that this interview has not been as successful in capturing the essence of personal thoughts and feelings as have the preceding interviews. Although I have certainly gained some important data and expanded my insight into Italian Catholic ways, I feel the data is not as thick as from previous interviews.

Knowledge to date Routine weekly visits by an Italian widow may be seen as a religious obligation and a duty to both the decedent and to God.
Interview # 05

Pseudonym Tony

Date & Time 20 August 1998: 8.30 - 11.00 p.m.

Means of contact Informant responded to appeal made through service club bulletin.

Interview location Informant's large modern, middle-class home in Melbourne; separate from family.

Psychosocial summary Forty-year-old married Australian-born professional Catholic father of three and son of Italian migrant parents. Father died of sudden heart attack three years ago and was entombed in a mausoleum vault, leaving informant the new ‘head of the family’.

Ease of communication Very good. Informant is intelligent and articulate of thought and speech, making conversation easy. He also appears to be coping very well with bereavement. Discussion flowed pragmatically and unemotionally. At one point, two of the children came in to say 'goodnight' to their dad, but this had no real disruptive effect on the interview. Transcribing and editing were relatively straightforward.

Closure Informant's wife joined us towards the end and contributed some additional information. Again, I was assured that the interview process and my approach were 'sensitive and professional'.

Personal response I am feeling quite confident now as an interviewer and believe I am competently bringing out the personal bereavement experiences of a range of people appropriate to my study.

Knowledge to date Faith is not always challenged to any significant degree by bereavement. Visitation can relate to a desire to maintain a sense of communication with the decedent. Above ground burial (out of any ground water) is important to many Italian people. Due to the particular clarity in recalling details of such a profound incident as a recent close bereavement, and the earnest desire of respondents to convey their thoughts, emotions and feelings, I feel very confident that the data I am obtaining is very trustworthy.
Interview # 06

Pseudonym Frank

Date & Time 1 September 1998: 1.00 - 2.15 p.m.

Means of contact Informant responded to appeal made during Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association conference presentation.

Interview location Researcher's hotel room in Alice Springs, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Twenty-five-year-old Australian-born Catholic male of Dutch origin. Informant lives with fiancé and is a partner in a local machinery business. Maternal grandfather died of heart failure, just over a year ago and was buried in a monumental grave.

Ease of communication Very good communication. Informant has evidently adjusted well to bereavement. Although informant was previously unknown to me, discussion was quite easy, objective and unemotional. The interview was relatively simple and straightforward.

Closure Once more, I was assured that the respondent was very satisfied with the interview experience.

Personal response Interview lacked the same depth of emotion and thickness of description as some others. I consider this relates to a somewhat lower personal perception of loss on the death of a grandparent than with a more intimate relationship.

Knowledge to date The closer the relationship which is severed through death, the greater the degree of grief experienced. As quantitative data suggest, whatever draws bereaved people to visit a grave does not appear to be as strong with the loss of a grandparent as with closer relationships.
Interview # 07

Pseudonym Natasha

Date & Time 1 September 1998: 3.30 - 5.00 p.m.

Means of contact Informant responded to appeal made during Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association conference presentation.

Interview location Researcher's hotel room in Alice Springs, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Thirty-five-year-old Australian-born married female local government employee with no children and no religious conviction. Informant's maternal grandmother died of pancreatitis and complications almost four years ago and was cremated.

Ease of communication Although informant was previously unknown to me, good rapport was readily established and open discussion flowed easily. Informant was quite passionate in expressing feelings and attitudes. She now appears to be coping reasonably well with her bereavement.

Closure Yet again, the respondent was very satisfied with the interview experience.

Personal response I am now feeling very satisfied with my interviewing process and relatively comfortable with asking fairly intimate, probing questions in a 'one-on-one' situation with various bereaved people. I am still surprised at the way relative strangers are willing to share their experiences, open up and speak candidly 'from the heart'. I am also very happy with the fact that I am making good progress towards collecting the total data required.

Knowledge to date My previous generalisation: 'the closer the relationship lost, the greater the degree of grief', has been challenged. Obviously, the relationship in every bereavement is unique and there will always be exceptions to any generalisation. Maintaining some sense of communication and a relationship with the decedent are values derived from visiting.
Interview # 08

Pseudonym Max and Margaret

Date & Time 8 October 1998: 2.00 - 3.45 p.m.

Means of contact He is a former member of researcher's service club and was directly approached.

Interview location Informants' comfortable, middle-class home in Melbourne, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Sixty-four-year-old, retired Uniting Church, married couple. Adult daughter died in car accident three years ago and was cremated.

Ease of communication Being known to the informants for some years, and having attended the funeral, helped greatly in establishing trust. As with a previous couple interviewed, I generally directed each question to her first, then to him, to allow separation of different responses. Again, this technique generally worked well. Both became somewhat emotional at times, and although he tried harder to hold back tears, neither was embarrassed about crying in front of me. The three-way, sometimes-emotional conversation was not easy to transcribe and edit. Informants are still endeavouring to accept their bereavement.

Closure As with all interviews so far, the respondents were happy with the interview experience.

Personal response I am experiencing a pleasant bonding with informants through sharing their most significant personal experiences. Most informants have not previously considered their own specific bereavement responses, and therefore find sharing with someone who specifically asks questions that most people avoid, to be a cathartic experience.

Knowledge to date The unexpected death of a child, including adult offspring in this case, can make parents (or grandparents, in the case of interview #03) think about and plan burial or memorialisation for the whole family unit.
Interview # 09

Pseudonym Elsa

Date & Time 10 October 1998: 2.00 - 3.15 p.m.

Means of contact Informant's son responded to appeal made during Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association conference presentation and referred researcher to mother.

Interview location Informant's small, modest home in Melbourne, daughter present as interpreter.

Psychosocial summary Sixty-six-year-old Libyan-born Catholic widow, living with two unmarried adult children. Italian-born, retired-labourer husband died of cancer five years ago and was buried in a lawn grave.

Ease of communication Referral by the informant's son was crucial to agreement to participate. Daughter's tertiary studies and familiarity with social research also greatly helped to establish credibility and assurance to informant. Communication was rather difficult and in several ways this interview was similar to #04. The informant and I understood each other quite well at times, but our interpreter needed to reconstruct both questions and answers throughout. Non-verbal communication helped considerably, and the informant was emotional at times. As with interview #04, the experience was quite illuminating to the daughter as, again the two women had not shared their emotions and discussed their personal grief responses before. Again, three parties speaking a combination of English and Italian made transcribing and editing a somewhat difficult task.

Closure Again I was assured that the interview had been more-or-less as expected.

Personal response Informant appears to be coping with bereavement as is usually expected of an Italian widow. She will never let go and try to get over her loss. The difficulty in direct communication with the informant again left me feeling that this interview has not been as successful in capturing the essence of personal thoughts and feelings as have others. I have certainly gained some more data, but consider it not as thick as that derived from most other interviews.

Knowledge to date Interviews through interpreters have not proven as productive as those where I can quickly establish a one-to-one relationship and rephrase questions myself, where necessary, to improve understanding and draw out maximum useful data.
Interview # 10

Pseudonym Marissa

Date & Time 12 October 1998: 1.00 - 2.45 p.m.

Means of contact Informant has been known to me, through work, for several years and was referred through a mutual colleague.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Forty-five-year-old unmarried Australian female clerical officer with no religious beliefs. Secret lover died of heart attack almost three years ago and was cremated. Deep grief has necessarily been suppressed at home and at work.

Ease of communication Excellent. Informant was very keen to talk, considering it perhaps now appropriate to 'come out' with people other than her close family, and reveal the most significant incident in her life and what has been affecting her behaviour and relationships with everyone else.

Closure As in all previous interviews, the respondent was pleased with the interview experience.

Personal response Informant appears to be now coping reasonably well with bereavement. I am feeling quite comfortable now in the interview situation, but have just been reminded that we shouldn't take others for granted, as we never quite know what internal burdens they may be carrying.

Knowledge to date The strong desire to maintain a sense of afterlife relationship with the decedent can stimulate spiritualistic beliefs, even in an atheist.
Interview #11

Pseudonym: June

Date & Time: 13 October 1998: 2.00 - 3.45 p.m.

Means of contact: Referred by bereavement counsellor

Interview location: Informant’s very neat, but modest home, no others present.

Psychosocial summary: Seventy-five-year-old Australian Catholic widow of Irish parentage. Husband died of heart attack just over a year ago and was buried. Informant now lives alone and has never visited the grave.

Ease of communication: A very different interview. Informant is evidently not endeavouring to work through grief. While happy to talk, she is difficult to warm to, due to severe pessimism and self-pity. Informant sobbed continuously throughout the interview and constantly sought commiseration.

Closure: Closure happened in the usual way with the usual response from the informant.

Personal response: On one hand, I felt great sympathy for the informant who had lost the great strength of her life, but on the other hand I felt somewhat irritated by her indulgent self-obsession, self-pity and lack of interest in readjusting to become a cooperative family and community member. At first, I felt somewhat disappointed to learn that no cemetery visitation had occurred, questioning the value of the interview. I then realised that it may also be just as important to consider non-visitiation of cemeteries and explore reasons why some people do not visit.

Knowledge to date: The desire to maintain a sense of afterlife relationship with the decedent can also stimulate a somewhat renewed interest in former religious beliefs. This interview has added another dimension to my data collection, and it appears that data gained from interview #01 may also be useful after all.
Interview # 12

Pseudonym Marion

Date & Time 19 October 1998: 1.30 - 3.15 p.m.

Means of contact Referred by bereavement counsellor.

Interview location Informant's modest, outer suburban home, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Forty-seven-year-old, Australian, blue-collar, mother of four and grandmother, with no religious commitment. Both parents died within past fourteen months.

Ease of communication A rather difficult interview, due to the informant's level of understanding and evident stress. She is evidently not travelling well in her bereavement, but appreciates the efforts of a professional bereavement counsellor. Although very friendly and cooperative, she is not well educated. Vocabulary was somewhat limited, so questions often had to be rephrased in very simple terms. Informant became quite tense and emotional during the interview, expressing anger towards other family members.

Closure The respondent showed me around the house and in particular, the dining/lounge room glass cabinet which served as a shrine to both of her parents. One half of the cabinet contains her mother's paraphernalia, including a large portrait photograph and personal items such as spectacles. The other half of the cabinet contained similar items relating to her father, but including a container with half his cremated remains. The rest of the cremated remains are interred in the mother's grave.

Personal response Informant clearly needs further professional assistance with bereavement counselling and family therapy. There are many unresolved issues in this case.

Knowledge to date As in case #07, whilst in latter stages of dying, people may report seeing spiritual beings. Although survivors may consider the dying to be losing their minds, they may also be half inclined to believe in the presence of such beings. Mitigating guilt over an ambivalent relationship may be another reason for regular cemetery visitation and seeking to maintain a sense of afterlife relationship with the decedent. Honouring a promise made to the decedent is another reason for visiting.
Interview # 13

Pseudonym Naomi

Date & Time 21 October 1998: 8.00 - 10.45 p.m.

Means of contact Referral through Australian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association Executive

Interview location Informant's modern home unit, with mother present.

Psychosocial summary Thirty-seven-year-old single Jewish businesswoman living alone. Mentally ill brother took own life eight months ago and was buried in urban, Jewish cemetery.

Ease of communication Informant seemed rather tense at first. She had deferred the interview twice and ultimately requested her mother attend for emotional support. I requested her mother refrain from contributing, to enable the interview to concentrate on the personal experiences of one specific individual. Good rapport was established before commencing the recorded interview. Our shared familiarity with Lamm's (1969) The Jewish way in death and mourning and acquaintance with Melbourne Chevra Kadisha helped establish common threads. Informant was very expressive and keen to ensure that I understood her feelings. The mother was even more emotional than the respondent was throughout the interview. This informant is evidently having some difficulty coping with bereavement.

Closure Interview concluded in the usual manner.

Personal response Another very valuable experience, not just because it involved a different faith, but the informant was so passionate. The family impact of the suicide of a much-loved member and the experience of loss is very great; the interview was quite emotional. It was another 'heavy' interview, from my perspective, and the sixth interview in less than two weeks. I feel I am on a roll now with interviews flowing well, but am feeling a compounding sense of grief within myself. The experience of sharing one's emotions and personal beliefs, pertaining to the most significant incident in one's life, establishes a sense of intimate friendship. I believe I share a greater insight into informants' feelings and beliefs than most of their close friends would currently have.

Knowledge to date The tragic loss of someone close may not only challenge existing religious beliefs, but also stimulate a new sense of spiritualism. The interview indicates how such a legalistic, traditional religion deals with problematic contemporary issues. Clearly there is also an important lesson for monumental masons to learn from the informant's frustration at lack of consideration by masons.
Interview # 14

Pseudonym Donna

Date & Time 30 October 1998: 2.30 - 5.30 p.m.

Means of contact Direct approach to informant at child's gravesite.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Twenty-seven-year-old government-employed Australian Catholic married woman. Seven-month-old daughter died ten months ago from blood disorder and was buried in a children's section of a large urban cemetery.

Ease of communication Excellent, though emotional at times. Informant is very friendly, cooperative and articulate. One of the easiest people to speak with so far, yet one of the saddest stories. Under the circumstances, she is evidently coping quite well with bereavement. The informant was pleased that I was interested in her situation and was keen to share her experiences. Considering the recency of such a trauma, emotional release throughout the interview was less than might have been expected.

Closure Interview concluded well in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response Another emotionally difficult, but most valuable interview. I warmed instantly to the informant's friendly cheerfulness and positive outlook, despite the traumatic ordeal she had so recently experienced. The data gained from this interview is rich in detail, which deserves to be better known. I look forward to sharing this data with staff and other personnel wanting to better understand cemetery clients. This interview has given great insight into the personal experiences of a bereaved mother.

Knowledge to date Evidently, some people can derive a special kind of pleasure from visiting the cemetery. The provision of a specific children's section at the cemetery has facilitated the formation of a self-help social group. Previously unrecognised but significant peer support is occurring within the cemetery. A married couple, having shared the same loss, can evidently grieve quite individually.

Postscript Having subsequently shared this informant's ordeal with a social worker from the hospital concerned, and provided a copy of the case study report, the hospital has undertaken some significant changes to improve the experiences of subsequently bereaved parents. I have now advised the informant of this and she is very pleased that her experience has been used to improve the awareness of professional staff and ultimately benefit other parents.
Interview # 15

Pseudonym Veronica

Date & Time 5 November 1998: 9.00 - 10.45

Means of contact Researcher directly approached informant at child's gravesite.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, with another bereaved mother present.

Psychosocial summary Thirty-three-year-old blue-collar married Australian Catholic full-time mother. Thirteen-month-old son died two years ago from liver disease and was buried in the same children's section of a large urban cemetery as was the decedent in case #14.

Ease of communication Good, though somewhat emotional. Informant is very friendly and wants to share her knowledge and experiences, but is not necessarily the brightest of informants. She appears to be coping reasonably well with bereavement. The other mother present had come to offer emotional support to the informant, but was very anxious and more distressed herself, crying frequently throughout the interview.

Closure Interview concluded in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response Another very valuable interview, further illuminating value of the previously unrecognised, but evidently significant mothers' peer support group. This interview has also given further insight into the personal experiences of bereaved mothers. I am finding that I re-experience much of the emotions of informants as I edit transcriptions. One objective of my editing and condensing is to retain a sense of the informants' emotions through their words. I am finding constant concentration on grief to be somewhat taxing of my own emotions. I intend to implement my wife's suggestion that I talk to a professional grief counsellor, to find out how such professionals cope with continuous immersion in the grief and trauma of others.

Knowledge to date Unsatisfied searching for meaning in the event of tragic death can erode faith in a spiritual belief system. Maternal bonds can evidently remain very strong, well after the death of a child. In this case, the urge to 'mother' the decedent remains a major life focus of the bereaved. Tending the grave can provide a means of expressing one's innate maternal desires.
Interview # 16

Pseudonym Peter

Date & Time 9 November 1998: 1.00 - 2.45 p.m.

Means of contact Informant is a friend of a business colleague.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Fifty-four-year-old divorced alcoholic Australian Catholic male invalid pensioner. Seventy-nine-year-old, alcoholic father died of cancer ten months ago and was buried in the monumental section of a small rural cemetery.

Ease of communication Good. Informant was frank, unemotional and seemingly quite objective in his description. Little education was evident and the informant's background had left him somewhat 'rough around the edges', but he seemed quite intelligent. Experience in open sharing at AA meetings resulted in no hesitation about revealing all to a stranger. He appears to be coping very well with bereavement.

Closure Interview concluded well in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response Some prior experience of working with alcoholics, familiarity with AA literature and meetings, helped me towards gaining immediate acceptance. Not a rich interview, in terms of cemetery visitation data, but another different experience and perspective.

Knowledge to date The loss of a close physical relationship, where a correspondingly close emotional bond is lacking, does not necessarily invoke a significant grief reaction. Reasons why some people do not visit cemeteries probably also needs to be considered in my data analysis. These reasons are evidently varied and should contribute to our understanding of the character of visitors and, in some cases, who they may not be.
Interview # 17

Pseudonym Adriana

Date & Time 23 November 1998: 2.00 - 4.15 p.m.

Means of contact Referred by local Orthodox priest.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Twenty-seven-year-old Australian-born Greek-Orthodox female bank employee. Forty-eight-year-old mother died of cancer four months ago and was buried in Orthodox section of large urban cemetery.

Ease of communication Very good, but emotional. Informant was very friendly, but rather timid at first. Referral by parish priest gave credibility to the research and confidence to informant. Having attended a service at the informant's church, and some background reading on Orthodox beliefs and practices, helped me establish good rapport and mutual sharing. She appears to be coping reasonably well with bereavement.

Closure This interview also concluded well, in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response I am feeling quite competent now as an interviewer of bereaved people of various backgrounds, though it is difficult not to take on some of the personal tragedy of each informant. I discussed my own feelings with a grief counsellor (a business colleague and friend) and asked how he and fellow professionals cope with heavy counselling loads. I was informed that they simply don't. He advised that he and his colleagues are closely supervised in small teams, are restricted in the number of cases they can take on, must log their personal responses to each case, undergo regular debriefing and have all cases and their responses reviewed weekly. Through our discussion, I derived some typical benefits of counselling; I acknowledged my difficulty in coping, was assured that my response was normal, and I learned how to avoid accumulating some of the grief of others.

Knowledge to date Reliance on traditional beliefs and practices can be significantly helpful to those facing death and endeavouring to cope with bereavement. The untidy practices of some people, which affect the whole presentation of Orthodox cemetery areas, can be quite offensive to other Orthodox visitors to the same areas. I must use my wife or another confidante to regularly unload my otherwise accumulating personal emotions. I should also endeavour to space out remaining interviews a little more.
Interview # 18

Pseudonym Michael

Date & Time 4 December 1998: 10.30 a.m. - 12.15 p.m.

Means of contact Introduced by mutual friend.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, close mutual friend of informant and researcher present.

Psychosocial summary Fifty-one-year-old Dutch-born dairy farmer of no religion. Forty-nine-year-old wife died two months ago from brain tumour and was buried in a small town cemetery.

Ease of communication Very good, though quite emotional. A close friend, who saw the interview as a cathartic opportunity for herself and the informant, emotionally supports him. However, I requested the friend refrain from participating in the interview, to enable data collection to focus on the bereaved husband's personal experience. At one point, the informant became quite distressed. When asked if he wished to take a break, he simply requested a drink. The friend went out and returned with a cup of water and the informant chose to resume the interview. He is evidently having some difficulty, at this stage, coping with such a recent traumatic bereavement.

Closure The interview concluded well and then we three went out to lunch together.

Personal response I had not sought to interview anyone so soon after a significant death. Although originally intending to interview informants after a minimum bereavement period of three months, I have found longer intervals between respective deaths and interviews to be more rewarding in terms of valuable data. The timing of this interview was driven more by the informant and partner's urgent desire to talk about complex, shared personal experiences during the decedent's illness, death and subsequent weeks. While rich on the bereavement side, the data gained is somewhat thin on cemetery visitation. I chose to focus on the husband/wife relationship and regard the mutual friend's involvement as a separate case.

Knowledge to date Even at this brief interval since the loss, a non-religious husband may be far more pragmatic than might be expected of, for example, a religious wife. Sharing in hastening an otherwise undignified, protracted death for a terminally ill loved one can help draw already close friends to a whole new level of intimacy and joint loss. I have also found that my most productive interviews are generally those at least a year after the death. By this time, early personal turmoil has usually subsided, visitation (or non-visitiation) patterns are well established and informants are more able to be somewhat objective in describing their own feelings, beliefs and actions.
Interview # 19

Pseudonym Andrea

Date & Time 17 December 1998: 2.00 - 4.45 p.m.

Means of contact Wife of service club colleague and friend.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Forty-three-year-old blue-collar Australian married mother of four, of eclectic religious beliefs. Fifty-year-old brother-in-law died three years ago in horrific car accident, precipitating informant's mental breakdown.

Ease of communication Very good discussion. She had agreed to participate two months earlier, but had twice put off appointment. Hesitation is a product of the informant's low self-confidence since breakdown. The interview was easier and less emotional than I expected, with the informant evidently striving to demonstrate personal control.

Closure The Interview again concluded well, in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response The informant is evidently not yet coping well with bereavement. I feel quite relieved at how well the interview went. I expected it might have been more emotional and perhaps erratic as a result of her current mental state. The interview was richer in 'thick description' than in cemetery visitation data, but it certainly adds another dimension to the total data gained to date. I have specifically taken the opportunity to debrief myself after this interview.

Knowledge to date The strength of emotional bond can be more significant than the closeness of physical relationship, in invoking a grief response to death. Bereavement can certainly have a significant impact on one's mental health. Fear of triggering a response that the bereaved feels unable to cope with, is evidently a factor in some non-visititation cases.
Interview # 20

Pseudonym Paul

Date & Time 26 February 1999: 9.30 - 11.15 a.m.

Means of contact Friend of business colleague.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Thirty-seven-year-old Australian Baptist married father of one and a university lecturer. IVF daughter was stillborn three years ago, and buried in a small rural cemetery.

Ease of communication A very good and satisfying interview. The informant is intelligent and articulate. Although it was our first meeting, he opened up without hesitation.

Closure This interview also concluded well, in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response The informant appears to be still experiencing some difficulty in coping with bereavement. I could relate very well to his religious background and church experiences. The interview response is much richer in valuable data than I had expected from the father of a stillborn. Again, I specifically debriefed after this interview, unloading some of my own emotional tension with my wife, who also reviewed the preliminary draft case study to help understand my own response. I now feel a great sense of accomplishment, in that I have concluded my supervisor's suggested, "twenty or so", interviews. I don't really have to do any more.

Knowledge to date Evidently, with some people, under circumstances such as IVF, the antenatal death of a baby can be as significant a loss as a postnatal death. The emotional investment of the father, in this case, was much greater than that of many other fathers. A sense of parental deprivation through stillbirth may be mitigated, to some extent, through constructing a life and personality for the deceased. This may also help 'legitimate' to others the parents' grieving the loss of a child.
Interview # 21

Pseudonym Elisabeth

Date & Time 4 March 1999: 9.30 - 11.45 p.m.

Means of contact Introduced by service club colleague.

Interview location Informant's modest, outer suburban home, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Sixty-seven-year-old English Salvation Army widow. Seventy-three-year-old, retired blue-collar husband of forty-five years died four years ago of motor neurone disease, was cremated and memorialised at a large urban cemetery.

Ease of communication Good rapport from the start. The informant was not at all emotional and spoke with the confidence of an unquestioned faith. Her education and general knowledge are quite basic, so that some questions needed to be simplified to solicit useful responses. She appears to be coping quite well with bereavement.

Closure The interview concluded with a cup of tea together and chat about family and mutual acquaintances. I was shown photographs of the decedent, his children and grandchildren.

Personal response Emotionally, a very easy interview, due to the simple frankness and quiet confidence of the informant. I have almost concluded my quota of 'around twenty' interviews, extended by myself to include a good representation of people of especially significant faiths among cemetery visitors.

Knowledge to date Keeping herself busy in altruistic Christian service has evidently helped this informant achieve a satisfactory bereavement outcome.
Interview # 22

Pseudonym George

Date & Time 11 March 1999: 10.00 a.m. - 12.00 noon & 1 April 1999: 9.00 - 9.20 a.m.

Means of contact Introduced by a business colleague.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, no others present.

Psychosocial summary Sixty-six-year-old Maltese-born Catholic widower. Wife of thirty-nine years died of cancer four-and-a-half years ago, and was buried in monumental lawn section of a large cemetery close to home.

Ease of communication Quite good. Although the informant has a strong accent, he speaks very well in English. Little emotional disturbance occurred, with the informant generally able to speak quite objectively. Somehow, my tape recorder missed the first seven minutes of our interview, including responses to introductory questions. However, the informant was very happy to reconvene and re-record answers to my introductory questions.

Closure Both interviews concluded well, in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response Another relatively easy interview. The informant appears to be coping reasonably well with bereavement. I now feel quite competent in interviewing bereaved people about their personal circumstances and no longer feel a sense of pressure to conduct further interviews. In this case, I specifically sought a respondent who visits every day. I have, in a way, enjoyed collecting the data to date. I would now like to do just two more interviews, to include Buddhist and Muslim experiences.

Knowledge to date Visiting a grave to maintain a sense of communication and relationship can give a sense of happiness, or at least, significant satisfaction. Where a man has no desire for a new sexual relationship, maintaining a sense of relationship with a deceased wife may be most important. Catholic notions of intersession for the dead, and through the dead, appear to be strong among those who seek to maintain a sense of relationship through communications at the graveside. Husbands have tended to be less emotional than wives, and as anticipated, informants have generally been less emotional where intervals between death and interview are greatest.
Interview # 23

Pseudonym Leela

Date & Time 19 April 1999: 2.00 - 4.00 p.m.

Means of contact Referred by a Buddhist priest contacted at a local temple.

Interview location Informant's modest, outer suburban home, husband present during latter part of interview.

Psychosocial summary Fifty-nine-year-old retired professional Sri Lankan Buddhist married woman. The informant was present when her mother died of stroke, three months ago in Sri Lanka. Her mother was traditionally cremated and the ashes scattered in a river.

Ease of communication Whilst the informant's accent and command of English language presented some challenge, communication was reasonably good. She is very intelligent and well educated, and shared an interest in doctoral research. Her husband disappeared after our initial introduction and rejoined us towards the end of the interview. He was much harder to understand. Buddhist cooperation made the appointment and interview quite easy.

Closure The interview again concluded well. I graciously accepted a cup of tea (which I normally don't drink), as it was important for my Buddhist hosts to offer such hospitality. She showed me an album of photographs from her recent visit to Sri Lanka. Photos included the deceased shortly before and just after death, and also ritualistic Sri Lankan funeral procedures.

Personal response Another culturally interesting interview. My informant appears to be coping very well with bereavement, although the serene acceptance of a Buddhist death was betrayed slightly by a little emotional disclosure in response to loss of her mother. I feel very humbled, and somewhat envy those brought up with Buddhist philosophy. I am now keen to complete one final interview of a Muslim.

Knowledge to date Another reason for some non-visititation is due to following traditional cultural practices which may involve no specific interment site or memorial.
Interview # 24

Pseudonym Abdullah & Fatima

Date & Time 29 April 1999: 10.00 a.m. - 12.15 p.m.

Means of contact Direct approach to her at a Muslim gravesite.

Interview location Cemetery client counselling room, another bereaved father present.

Psychosocial summary Fifty-two-year-old invalid pensioner husband and forty-seven-year-old unemployed wife; Turkish Muslim couple. Twenty-three-year-old son died fourteen months ago in a motorbike accident and was buried in a Muslim section of a large general cemetery.

Ease of communication Somewhat difficult. My original intention was to interview her, but she asked her husband, who came along and also spoke better English. It took a while to explain the purpose of the interview and their friend wanted to discuss his loss (also a son through a motorcycle accident) and what additional facilities they would like at the cemetery. I asked the friend to refrain from contributing (to enable the interview to focus on one specific case) and initially directed my questions to the husband only. However once started, the interview progressed well and contributions from the wife became valuable, even though she was very emotional throughout. Transcribing broken English with strong accents and crying was also rather difficult, especially when both spoke at once.

Closure This interview also concluded well, in the usual friendly manner.

Personal response Yet another culturally interesting interview. Both informants (but especially her) appear to be having some difficulty in coping with bereavement. I feel a significant sense of achievement and considerable relief that interviews are now over. Though a fairly stressful experience, I have actually enjoyed the privilege of sharing such intimate experiences of diverse individuals, and I feel that I have gained a great deal personally, professionally and academically.

Knowledge to date Apparent inability to overcome chronic grief, and reluctance to accept change, appear to be involved in at least some daily visitation. Also, bereavement can be a social and cultural leveller, allowing people of different faiths to share intimate personal experiences. Sharing grief with other cemetery visitors (even when they hold different religious beliefs) can provide a sense of comfort to some bereaved persons.