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**WHAT IS THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF  
EARLY MOTHER LOSS ON DAUGHTERS?**

by

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THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS**

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the subjective meaning of early mother loss from the perspective of those who experienced it. Eleven women participated in this research project. A multiple case study strategy was followed. The initial data was collected via mail, using an in-depth questionnaire. To clarify and expand upon the participants' written responses, telephone interviews were then conducted.

Out of this rich data, eleven narrative accounts emerged. Special care was taken to retain the unique voice and style of each participant. Ten common themes were drawn from the narratives. These themes were then divided into interpersonal and intrapersonal categories. The interpersonal category: *Feeling Different from Others, Lack of Discussion about Mother, Influential Role of Stepmother, Creating Emotional Distance and Fear and Anxiety in Relationships*, described the impact of others on the daughters' adjustment to mother loss. The intrapersonal category: *Intensified Feelings of Loss, Unanswered Questions about Mother, Adult Coping Strategies, Independence, and Integrating Loss of Mother*, concentrated on the participants' internal experience of loss and development.

Protocols were followed to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study. The results most closely aligned with contemporary models of grief, which explored the experience of early maternal loss from a feminist perspective (Edelman, 1993; Rando, 1986). Practical implications for therapy and psycho-education with bereaved children, fathers, surrogate parents, counsellors and school educators were also presented.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of the Study

Whether it is the sudden death of a celebrity, images of a war torn country, or the aftermath of a bombing, the media attention often shifts to the children of the deceased. There is a collective compassion for young children who lose a parent, their primary provider/protector, through untimely death. Recently, extensive news coverage examined the tragic deaths of Nicole Simpson and Princess Diana. Watching their children mourn is painful; we know they have a difficult road ahead. These children are forced to face one of life's hardest realities, the death of a loved one, before they have experienced many of the simple joys in life, such as a first bike ride or a childhood crush. Throughout history, many well-known individuals have expressed the profound impact of early mother loss in their writings, art, and music. Some well-known individuals who lost their mothers as children include Virginia Woolf, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Bronte, Edvard Munch, Ludwig van Beethoven, Marilyn Monroe, Oprah Winfrey and Madonna. The loss of a loved one is always difficult, yet the death of one's mother in childhood presents special challenges. This study explored the question of how the untimely death of one's mother in childhood impacts a daughter throughout her subsequent development.

### Rationale

Historically, there has been a taboo in North America on the topic of death. Although this taboo is gradually being challenged, its influence was reflected in the limited empirical data on the subject of death. Three decades ago only a handful of researchers specialised in grief and mourning. Grollman (1993), recalled how there were

so few of them, they could have held a conference in a telephone booth. However, the emergence of social concerns such as AIDS, violent crime, and euthanasia has called for a more direct and extensive look at the social, psychological and medical issues related to death.

Despite growing awareness of death related issues, “ in too many instances, children are still the forgotten mourners” (Grollman, 1993, p.xi). Children raised in a death- denying culture are often excluded or “protected” from participation in the mourning rituals. Webb (1993) proposed that the desire to shelter children from grief is a more accurate reflection of the adult’s death- related fears or anxiety.

Until the later part of this century, only minimal research was conducted on early parental death. Of these studies many did not specify which parent had died (Biller & Berlinsky, 1982; Edelman, 1994). The research that did specify the gender of the deceased parent, more studies focused on early father loss. This may have been due to the higher fatality rate of young fathers often caused by work accidents, illness, and war (Biller & Berlinsky; 1982).

There was a gradual increase in books on early parental death. However, these books primarily emphasised on crisis management over long- term adjustment. In 1994, Edelman wrote Motherless Daughters, in which she interviewed hundreds of women who had lost their mothers at different ages, to investigate the long-term implications of this loss on their lives. The overwhelming response to this book exposed the need and demand for continued research on the subject of the long-term impact of early mother loss. Edelman (1995) wrote a second book in which she compiled many of letters she had

received from women. Within many of these letters one recurring theme was the long-term nature of grief resulting from early mother loss.

The death of one's mother in childhood is a powerful, life changing loss. Inadequate knowledge concerning the needs of motherless children can lead to further pain and secondary losses (Wortman & Silver, 1989). Thus, further research is required to update and expand our understanding of the experience of the maternally bereaved.

### Research Strategy

For an in-depth look into the current phenomena of mother loss in a real-life context, case study approach is recommended (Yin, 1984). The multiple case study approach is considered more robust than the single case study method. The multiple case study strategy regards each case as its own experiment. Themes emerge from the participants' stories in a multiple case study much the same as they do in the single case study. However, results are further strengthened when common themes are repeated across the narratives. Yin (1984) referred to this process as replication logic. Therefore, the researcher selected a multiple study design to elicit rich, detailed accounts of the long-term impact of early mother loss.

In-depth questionnaires were mailed to the participants in lieu of face-to-face interviews due to the wide geographic dispersion of the participants. The aim of the questionnaire was to explore the participants' experience of growing up with early mother loss. The data collected from each participant was then organised into separate narrative accounts. To ensure that the narratives were accurate, the participants were contacted by telephone to clarify any ambiguity in their written responses or missing gaps in their stories. These interviews were then transcribed and incorporated into their

narrative accounts. A conscious attempt was made to retain the unique style and voice of each participant in her narrative.

Each story was considered its own case study. Emerging themes were drawn from each account and then compared across the narratives to identify any commonalities. Common themes were then isolated, defined, and supported with evidence from at least six of the eleven narratives. Participants were then contacted a final time to confirm the results.

### Developmental Perspective

Traditionally, age six to twelve represents the latency period in childhood. However, only participants who were between the age of six and eight, at the time of their mother's death were included in the present study. This more specific age margin was selected due to the study's interest in the implications of maternal loss on children just entering the latency period.

The questionnaire included five questions, which focused on different age frames. The questions explored the ages (6-12, 13-18, 19-24, 25-35, and 35-50.) These age frames were not intended to directly coincide with traditional stages of development. Their primary purpose was to focus the participants' attention as they recalled various memories related to early mother loss.

### Definitions of Concepts and Terms

The following definitions include terminology commonly encountered in grief literature, along with terms specifically relevant to the present study.

### Grief

Grief has been defined in the literature in different ways. Some commonly used descriptors for grief have included: an affective response ( Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987); emotional pain (Dershimer, 1990); an emotional syndrome (Lindenmann, 1944); and a response to loss (Bowlby, 1980; Rando, 1988). Some definitions have also included a physiological component in grief (Bowlby, 1980; Sanders, 1989; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987).

### Mourning

An early definition of mourning based on Freud's (1957) psychoanalytic theory focused primarily on the individual or intrapsychic process of loss. The definition of mourning has since been expanded to explore social expressions of grief such as the mourning rituals or behaviours unique to each culture (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987).

### Bereavement

Bereavement has been defined as a process of recovery following the loss of a loved one which often includes a series of tasks (Dershimer, 1990). Some authors argue that the definition of bereavement is restricted to only those who have lost a loved one through death (Dershimer, 1990; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987), while others propose that the bereavement process can be generalised to different types of losses (Bowlby, 1980; Rando, 1986).

For the purpose of this study grief, mourning, and bereavement are used interchangeably in reference to the experience and expression of loss as it relates to death of one's mother in childhood.

### **Complicated Mourning**

Complicated mourning is also referred to in the literature as pathological, unresolved, morbid, or maladaptive grief. There is some variation on what defines complicated mourning. The present study selected Rando's (1993) definition which states complicated mourning attempts to: "(1) deny, repress, or avoid aspects of the loss, its pain, and the full realization of its implications for the mourner; (2) hold onto, and avoid relinquishing the loss of a loved one" (Rando, 1993, p. 45).

### **Loss of Mother in Childhood**

When discussing the present study's sample, both the "loss of mother in childhood" and "early mother loss" refer to the death of a girl's mother when she is between the ages of six and eight.

### **Developmental Markers**

A developmental marker refers to a meaningful event or rite of passage associated with the daughter's developmental growth such as; the onset of menstruation, special birthdays, graduations, weddings, births of children and grandchildren, and career advancements. In this study, the terms developmental "milestones" or "landmarks" were used interchangeably with "developmental markers".

### **Significant Events**

Significant events referred to special occasions the participants identified such as: mother's day, mother/daughter events, special anniversaries, and religious or cultural holidays.

**An overview of the literature found on grief was reviewed in the following chapter. Early and contemporary models are presented. Research findings on the long-term impact of early maternal loss were of particular interest.**

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes a review of both classic and contemporary theories of grief. Within this section both stage and task based models of grief were compared and contrasted. A contemporary process model of mourning was then presented. Next, the major findings on the effects of early parental loss were reviewed. The issue concerning a child's ability to mourn was then addressed. This section included a look at the differences between child and adult bereavement. The following section examined mourning in the context of childhood and adolescent development. A subsection of this identified the specific impact of maternal loss on feminine identity development. Next, a brief review of adult development was explored. Additional factors that influence the child's adaptation to loss were then discussed. A summary of the literature review completed the chapter.

### Classic Theories of Mourning

#### Sigmund Freud

Freud (1957) developed the psychoanalytic theory of mourning based on his extensive research in this area. He explored the psychological process of mourning with individuals who lost a parent through death. He normalised the process of grief and mourning by identifying healthy responses to loss. He recognised the challenging work of mourning and noted that, although the grief reactions during this work are intense in nature, they should not be considered abnormal.

Freud (1957) presented his theory of mourning in a paper entitled "Mourning and Melancholia," in which he differentiated between healthy and unhealthy mourning. His



theory primarily focused on the individual process of mourning. He proposed that individuals develop attachment or love to significant others who are involved in satisfying their needs. The more important the person, the greater the attachment. Love is defined as the cathexis of libidinal (psychic) energy to the love object (person). When the loved object is lost through death, the survivor's libidinal energy remains connected to the deceased through thoughts and memories. Freud argued that detaching or severing energy from the lost object is necessary. This process, called hyper-cathexis, is achieved by reviewing all of the person's memories of the deceased. He acknowledged that the process of letting go of the lost object was very painful, yet detachment was considered critical, to free the ego, to invest in new relationships. Thus, psychoanalytic theory proposed that if hyper-cathexis did not occur, melancholia or unhealthy mourning would result. In melancholia, there was a lowered self-esteem caused by the unresolved ambivalence in the relationship with the deceased.

Pollock (1961) extended Freud's theory of mourning. He suggested that the main purpose of mourning is to facilitate the work of coming to terms with life without the deceased parent. According to Pollock, the process of mourning occurs in stages. The first stage is one of shock, which is followed by a period in which the work of mourning takes place. The final stage included a separation reaction in which the representation of the love object is restructured from present reality to that of memory.

### John Bowlby

Bowlby (1980) originated the theory of attachment. This theory proposed that people instinctively establish bonds with others throughout life. Thus, the purpose of attachment behaviour is said to maintain proximity to these attachment figures.

Bowlby extended this theory of attachment and moved away from Freud's intrapsychic or individual model of grief. He began to concentrate more on the bereaved in a psychosocial context. Bowlby (1980) also incorporated significant findings from other disciplines such as biology and sociology. He cited Darwin's (1872) work on emotional responses in humans and animals. Darwin's research explored the relationship between muscle reflexes and expressions of grief, fear and anxiety. Attachment theory recognised the physiological nature of loss and separation.

Bowlby examined grief and mourning in light of attachment bonds (1960,1961, 1963, 1977, 1980). He studied infants after losing their first love object. He found that their responses began with (a) protest and searching, then progressed to (b) disorganisation, despair and finally resulted in (c) reorganisation, which involved transferring previous attachments with the deceased and reinvesting in new relationships. Bowlby's theory postulated that such responses to loss were universal, innate survival responses.

The protest behaviour and searching in mourning were identified as instinctive responses to separation, and natural attempts to retrieve or maintain proximity to the lost object/person (Corr & McNeil, 1986). Bowlby (1980) also included findings from the work of sociologist Shand (1920) that argued that the powerful longing to recover the lost person was a biological response to loss. He proposed that the origin of crying comes from a primitive, instinctual response of the young to call back their caregiver. Searching behaviour, in the form of denial or clinging to the image of the lost one, was also identified as a natural reaction to loss. These responses were considered a normal part of the grieving process, which reflected a longing to bring back the lost loved one.

Bowlby (1977) also proposed that one's reaction to major loss would be either normal or pathological depending on the type of early attachment style established between the parent and child. He classified attachment in terms of a secure or three insecure attachment styles, which include anxious, avoidant and compulsive care giving. From this observational research on children, Bowlby found that those who experienced parental rejection, threats by a parent to leave or commit suicide, or discontinuity in parenting were more vulnerable to develop insecure attachment styles in adulthood.

Stage Versus Task Based Models of Grief. These classic theories of grief were based on a stage model for understanding and defining the process of grief. This stage model is a linear progression in which the bereaved moves through specific phases or stages of grief in order to reach the goal or state of resolution. The first stage of grief involved denial, shock, and feelings of numbness. The second stage included acute symptoms of grief such as intense emotional pain, social withdrawal, physical symptoms, and identification with the deceased. The final stage of grief included a return to normal functioning and reintegration. Success or resolution was determined by the extent to which the bereaved was able to give up his or her original attachment with the lost loved one (Wilcox-Rittgers, 1997). Many stage theorists proposed fluidity in this linear model; the bereaved may move back and forward between the phases. While others could get stuck indefinitely in a particular phase of mourning.

The stage-based model is critiqued for having limited empirical evidence to support the existence of such stages in the grieving process (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). One alternative to the stage model is a task-based model of grief.

### Erich Lindenmann

Lindenmann (1944) developed the first task-based model of grief. He isolated three main tasks necessary for successful grief resolution. These tasks included: (1) severing ties with the deceased, (2) adjusting to one's new environment without the deceased loved one, (3) creating new bonds with others.

The notion that complete resolution is necessary for healthy grief was widely accepted by early theorists. This linear approach to conceptualising grief was criticised for failing to recognise individual differences, other relevant variables, which may trigger upsurges of grief through out the bereaved's life (Rando, 1988). Silverman (1987) preferred the idea of adaptation to the loss over the notion of complete recovery.

Contemporary researchers widened their scope to examine other contributing factors that could influence one's bereavement process. From this broader perspective certain individual, gender, cultural and developmental differences emerged. Further research is now required to illuminate these differences and identify the particular needs of different grieving populations.

### Contemporary Theories of Mourning

#### S.S. Fox

Fox (1988) identified the following tasks for children coping with grief or loss:

1. Understand and begin to make sense out of what has happened.
2. Identify, validate, and express strong reactions to the loss, constructively.
3. Commemorate the life that was lived.
4. Learn to go on with living and loving.

He also identified other important factors which influence the process of bereavement in childhood such as; their understanding of death; the type of loss; and subsequent life circumstances.

### Phyllis Silverman

Silverman (1986) offered a transitional model of adjustment in bereavement. This model proposed that “grief work” was necessary for healthy adjustment. However, her model emphasised on the work of accommodation and change rather than the goal of complete resolution.

### Therese Rando

Rando (1988), a current researcher and clinical psychologist in the area of grief and loss, has pioneered this new process model of grief. Her theory is based predominantly on her clinical research in the last two decades with women who have experienced a major loss. This process model is an alternative to both stage and task based approaches which offers a unique look at female bereavement. Some basic tenets of this model state: (a) the goal of mourning is to adapt to the loss of the loved one while maintaining a connection through memory; (b) the grief process is not linear, but rather circular in nature, with the final goal being accommodation of the loss, not resolution, and; (c) significant gender differences exist in responses to grief and loss.

Rando’s (1988) process model of grief has three phases: (1) avoidance, (2) confrontation, and (3) accommodation.

The Avoidance Phase The first phase described the period immediately after the death of a loved one. This avoidance phase is an initial period of time when the bereaved wants to avoid the reality of the loss. This phase is marked by feelings of numbness, confusion,

and lack of ability to understand all that has occurred. After the initial state of shock subsides, it is usually replaced with a sense of denial. Denial is used as an important defence or buffer while preparing for the next stage.

**The Confrontation Phase** This phase is the period when grief and mourning are most intense. There is a strong desire on the part of the bereaved to reconnect with the deceased. Feelings of anger, intense sorrow, anxiety, and longing are common at this time. The confrontation phase marks a coming to terms with the loss. A gradual acceptance of the reality of the loss replaces the denial. The bereaved often then moves from disbelief to depression and despair. However, if disbelief and denial are extended for too long, it may turn into a complicated response to grief due to the bereaved's inability to accept the loss.

Another component of this phase is defined as "angry sadness" in which the mourner vacillates between avoiding and addressing feelings related to the loss. This represents an attempt to work through the feelings while maintaining psychological balance. The reactions of sadness and anger facilitate during this phase. An underlying premise of this theory is that unacknowledged or unexpressed emotion is a precipitant of pathology.

**The Accommodation Phase.** In the third phase, there is a decrease of the symptoms of acute grief. The bereaved begins to reinvest in relationships socially and emotionally. Some theorists often refer to this phase as "resolution". However, parts of the loss remain present in the bereaved's life and temporary upsurges of grief may occur throughout one's life. Therefore, the word resolution was replaced with the term accommodation.

Rando(1988) argued, “the goal of accommodation is to learn how to live with the loss and readjust one’s new life accordingly” (p. 41).

This model argued that healthy accommodation is not defined by the absence of mourning. Instead, this type of mourning does not interrupt healthy functioning. The mourner learns to adapt to the loss by moving forward and accepting the reality of death yet upsurges of grief or “STUG” reactions may still resurface.

**STUG Reactions.** Rando (1988) coined the term STUG reactions, which she defined as significant, temporary upsurges of grief, which can occur long after the death of a loved one. Reminders of the lost loved one often trigger STUG reactions. Early theorists often identified this phenomenon as part of complicated grief. Rando argued that STUG reactions are part of healthy mourning. These reactions are viewed as opportunities to work through unresolved aspects of the grief.

Triggers that often cause STUG reactions include birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and special family events. Other triggers may be related to developmental markers, such as the birth of one’s child. This is especially relevant for women who lose their mothers in childhood and then give birth to their own children. A STUG reaction may cause a strong emotional reaction that could even briefly inhibit functioning. Therefore, STUG reactions may shed some understanding without pathologising the emotional upheaval often experienced by new mothers who have experienced early loss.

The process of mourning is considered cyclical rather than linear in nature. This process not only allows a revisiting of grief at different times, but also validates a type of ongoing connection with the lost loved one. Current theorists are recognising a daughter’s need to maintain a connection with her deceased mother. (Wilcox-Ruttgers,

1997). Rando disagreed with Freud's (1957) original perspective on successful mourning, which required a complete relinquishment or withdrawal of emotional investment for the loved object/person. Rather, as long as the mourner adapts to the changes, not all connections to the deceased must be severed. Thus, the mourner redefines a new type of connection with the lost loved one through memories and rituals.

Further research that examines gender differences in mourning is required. Increased knowledge concerning the unique mourning process for women could improve current resources. For example, by identifying experiences that commonly trigger grief helps to prepare and support those living with early mother loss. Thus, there is a need for further understanding of the unique needs of females in the mourning process. The following section reviewed the major finding on the short and long term implications of early death of a parent.

#### Effects of Early Parental Loss

“One of the greatest crises in the life of a child is the death of a parent. Never again will the world be as secure a place as it was before” (Grollman, 1967, p.15). Even though there remain only a limited number of conclusive studies on the long-term effects of early parental loss, its profound impact is widely accepted (Harris, Brown, & Bifulco, 1986). Major studies on the effects of early parent loss can be divided into three categories, which examine the (a) immediate effects, (b) intermediate effects, and (c) long-term effects of the premature death of a parent.

Findings on the immediate responses to early parent loss identify feelings of denial, sadness, anger, and fear. Common behavioural responses include sleep and eating disturbances, especially with children under the age of five. Other behavioural responses



found with school age children include withdrawal, concentration and learning difficulties, phobic behaviours, and excessive care-giving tendencies (La Grande, 1983, cited in Corr & McNeil). Grollman (1995) also included bodily distress, idealisation, panic, guilt, and hostile reactions to the deceased and others.

Intermediate effects in childhood bereavement refer to the time period of one to six years following the death. A study conducted on bereaved children growing up in a Kibbutz who lost a parent through death found that 40 percent of the children continued to demonstrate severe maladaptive behaviours three and a half years after the death. In this same study, less than one-third of the children had achieved healthy adaptations within their family, school, and social environments. (Kauffman & Elizur, 1979). Another study found that 52 percent of their sample were experiencing autonomy conflicts, 27 percent experienced anxiety depending on their relationships and 39 percent had difficulty redefining their relationship with the opposite-sex surviving parent anywhere from four months to two years following the death of a parent (Krupnick, 1981). Behavioural responses commonly found in the intermediate period of bereavement include disrupted academic performance and delinquency, especially among school aged boys. The girls more consistently participated in over-sexualised behaviour in search for love or comfort. It was suggested that sexualised behaviour was an unconscious attempt towards ego fusion (Raphael, 1983).

Early research on the long- term effects of death of parent in childhood often focused on pathology (Brown, 1961; Bowlby, 1961; Birtchnell, 1980; Furman, 1974). Many of these studies found a relationship between early parental loss and later depression (Birtchell, 1978; Denneby, 1966; Gay & Tonge, 1967; Heincke, 1973; Lloyd,

1980). Birtchnell (1980) found a significant correlation between early loss of mother and later clinical depression. His sample was drawn from both a psychiatric and non-psychiatric population of women who had lost their mothers at different ages. However, Wilcox-Rutgers (1997) challenged the validity of Birtchnell's results. They argued that although this grief response looks similar to depression, it could be considered a normal part of adaptation to loss. Therefore, the significance of these results was critiqued for overpathologising a non-psychiatric population by failing to identify the range of "normal" grief responses. Brown and Harris (1978) also studied the relationship between early maternal loss and adult depression in women. They did not find early mother loss directly caused depression in adulthood but increased one's vulnerability to depression. Therefore, if another major crisis or difficulty occurs later in the life of the bereaved, the chance of developing depression significantly increases. Another study found the loss of mother before age 11 placed the bereaved at significant risk for developing later depression. It was reported this risk was especially relevant for women (Patten, 1991).

Barnes and Prosen (1985) explored the relationship between the early death of a parent and later depression. No significant results were found between early maternal loss and depression. However, this study was critiqued for failing to specify the gender of the child, an important consideration due to the unique implications of losing a same sex parent. Another limitation identified was the lack of reference to the particular developmental period the child was in at the time of the loss.

Many studies have examined the link between early parental death a later development of clinical disorders such as depression and anxiety. However, the results often produced inconclusive outcomes (Bifulco et.al., 1992; Gay & Tonge, 1967; Lloyd,

1980). Earlier research conducted on parental loss has been critiqued for failing to acknowledge other variables, which influence the bereaved's adjustment to the loss. Recent studies remedy this limitation by exploring the bereaved children in a broader, richer context.

Another long-term effect identified in the research explored the impact of early mother loss on becoming a parent. Edelman (1994) suggested that women who lost their mother in childhood face special challenges when becoming a parent. Harris (1995) echoed this sentiment, explaining that when a bereaved daughter loses her mother at an early age she also loses her primary role model and social guide. Harris (1995) noted this was especially evident in girls who lost their mother through death before the age of 12. These new mothers are often struck with intensified feeling of loss as they experience the absence of their own mothers during this important time. Altschul, Beiser, and Benedek (1959) explored how the child's movement through different development stages can trigger the parent. Their findings support a theoretical but not empirically based contribution to the phenomenon of becoming a parent. Another study by Altschul and Beiser (1984) found that parents who had previously lost their own parent during latency had the most difficulty adjusting to the role of parenthood, especially if it was a same sex dyad. The generalizability of this study is limited because its sample was drawn from a specific population already seeking psychoanalysis for parental conflicts. As well, its findings were based on observations rather than statistical findings.

Another challenge for parents of early mother loss was the over-identification with the child (Edelman, 1994; Harris, 1995). The child often represented the parent's

own young internal grieving self. As a result, these parents tended to overprotect their child. (Harris, 1995).

According to Zall (1994) survivors of early parent loss were more prone to depression, suicide ideation, and more frequent drug use during adolescence. However, there was no significant difference in adulthood or parenting functioning. From these results, Zall suggested that parenting can either lead to parenting difficulties or serve as a catalyst for healing among parents who have survived early parental loss.

The review of the literature began with a look at the foundation established by early theorists on the subject of grief and mourning. Early models of grief were criticised for failing to identify other important variables that influence one's bereavement process. Contemporary studies explored other significant factors in the research on the theory and implications of childhood bereavement.

The validity of many early studies conducted on childhood bereavement have been challenged due to a failure to identify other important variables which strongly influence the bereaved's adaptation to the loss (Furman, 1974; Wortman & Silver, 1987).

### Childhood Mourning

There is an ongoing debate concerning children's capacity to mourn (Sekater, 1987). Psychoanalytic theory argues that young children do not experience true mourning (Miller, 1971). Rather, these bereaved children have well-developed systems of denial, such as conscious or unconscious denial of the parent's death, increased identification and idealisation of the deceased parent, avoidance of affective responses to death, and fantasies of a continued relationship with the deceased (Miller, 1971).

Arguments proposing the children's inability to mourn are based on the premise that they are unable to master the tasks of mourning due to a lack of ego strength. They are developmentally unprepared to handle the intense pain and realities of the death of a parent. Therefore, children utilise a self-protective response to restrict the overwhelming process of mourning. As a result, some of the bereaved may never consciously experience the emotion or affect of grieving. Silverstein (1988) suggested the ego is not developed enough until the end of adolescence to tolerate the difficult painful process of grieving. He proposed that only when the ego has self-differentiated enough can one effectively handle the tasks of remembering, hyper-cathecting and de-cathecting involved in mourning (Silverstein, 1988).

Developmental arrest and the inability to mourn have also been examined (Fleming & Altschul, 1963). One study reported a 29-year-old woman who became fixated at an earlier stage of development after being orphaned at age 15. The results of this study attributed the patient's inability to express such as: sadness, yearning, and grief to her losses alone. This study was criticised for failing to examine other significant variables such as the history of the child's relationship with the deceased and availability of emotional resources after the death.

The other side of the debate includes theorists who believe that young children do have the ability to mourn. (Bowlby, 1963; Furman, 1968). Furman (1974) presented a set of abilities that must be present for successful mourning: (a) understanding of the concept of death, (b) object constancy, (c) an ability to express feelings freely, (d) a flexible personality structure, (e) knowledge that one's physical and emotional survival needs will be met and (f) acceptance of expressions of feelings by others in the environment. Of the

researchers who support the concept of childhood mourning, there is a general consensus that such a process can only commence at the end of the latency stage when children typically grasp the meaning of death both cognitively and developmentally (Mahler, 1968).

Studies which reported children were unable to mourn were criticised either for being descriptions specific to children with pathological responses to grief caused by unusually harsh conditions, or for a failure on the part of adults to elicit the childhood mourning process. Thus, returning the responsibility to the adults to provide a conducive environment for mourning. Furman (1974), argued that children do have a capacity for bereavement and made a clear distinction between, “. . . a child's not mourning and his incapability of mourning” (p.329). Furman pointed out how children are often not given as much opportunity to mourn the death of a loved one as an adult is. Children are dependent on their caregivers to provide a supportive environment to successfully initiate the tasks of grieving.

Such studies, which depict children as able to mourn, are criticised for focusing on “superficial” mourning behaviours, such as crying, while ignoring significant cognitive differences between adults and children. In normal development, adults are able to grasp the meaning of the death of a loved one upon receipt of the news, where young children may express sadness but not yet understand the full meaning or permanency of such a loss.

One possible way to bridge the gap between two such opposing views is through a redefinition of mourning specific to children. Webb (1993) described how childhood grief looks different than adult grief. Children may react to feelings of loss through

physical symptoms, behaviour or sleep disturbances. According to Stroebe & Stroebe (1987) children cannot manage the intensity of the emotional pain for extended periods of time and thus their process of bereavement is extended. Webb (1993) suggested as children develop they may need to update the meaning of their earlier losses. Edelman (1994) presented a similar perspective on childhood mourning through the following analogy:

Adapting to the loss of a parent requires some elements young children have not yet acquired. Some of these elements include: a full understanding of death; the language and encouragement to talk about their feelings; the realisation that intense pain will not be forever; and the ability to shift their emotional dependence from the lost parent back to the self before attaching to someone else. These capacities develop and accumulate as a child grows, like a train that picks up a new passenger at each stop, and she may have very few riders at the time a parent dies. This does not mean a child cannot mourn at all; they just do it differently than adults. This process is more protracted, extending over the course of their development as their cognitive and emotional abilities mature. (p. 6)

#### Impact of Early Loss on Development

Another important consideration when examining the child's adjustment to early loss of parent is developmental maturity. According to Manusco (1995), the child's age is a significant factor determining whether the bereaved child can successfully work through the developmental challenges of identification and separation – individuation in the absence of his or her parent (Saeker, 1987). Krueger (1983) examined children who

lost a parent at different developmental periods and their subsequent adjustment to this loss. A cross-sectional look at children who lose a parent during different developmental periods, which result in different responses to the loss, is presented below. (Finklestein, 1988 ; Krueger, 1983).

### Pre-oedipal Development

Krueger (1983) suggested that loss occurring in the pre-oedipal development period (2-4 years old) often result in narcissistic development and fear of abandonment. Since children at this age have not yet developed object permanence, they often have fantasies that the deceased parent will return.

### Latency Period

Children entering the latency age (6-12) begin to develop capacity for guilt. Therefore, if, in a fit of anger, they wished their parent would die, they feel responsible for the death (Sanders, 1995). The latent child often experiences intense feelings of helplessness and strong needs for dependence which may be intensified by the death of a family member (Moller, 1967). However, during this age children are learning how to control their emotions and often avoid uncomfortable feelings (Furman, 1974). These children have a low threshold for acute pain and therefore often use an approach-avoidance style to cope with painful emotions. Therefore, upon hearing the news of the death of a loved one, these children may carry on playing as if nothing happened. This common reaction for latency age children should not be misinterpreted as not caring.

During this period children begin to broaden their experiences and roles as they enter school. Latency aged children especially dislike discussing the death of a parent or sibling with their peers for fear of being different or pitied (Sanders, 1995; Webb, 1993).



In latency loss is associated with an increase in fantasies of responsibility and reunification. There are also heightened feelings of grief and sadness. Denial is not utilised as much in this development period possibly due to an increased understanding of the meaning and permanency of death. Some children take on the role of the deceased parent with increased responsibilities at home. Krueger (1983) proposed that these children assume the role of their deceased parent by, in essence, becoming that parent and therefore, holding onto the parent. However, Finkelstein (1988) found that in adulthood, those who lost the same- sex parent had little idea how to parent due to lack of role model and guide. Finally, beginning in the latency age and continuing throughout adolescence these children begin the task of identification to establish a sense of identity (Webb, 1993).

### Adolescence

Facing the death of a parent in adolescence (13-19) could result in later difficulty in developing a clear sense of identity (Krueger, 1983; Finkelstein, 1988). Both Krueger (1983) and Finkelstein (1988) found the child's developmental maturity was an important factor in predicting the child's adjustment to the loss of a parent. However, both researchers are criticised for omitting other relevant variables such as the type of relationships and support the children had before and after the loss

The child's ability to understand the meaning of death greatly influences the mourning process. Early studies focusing primarily on chronological age to determine a child's cognitive level are criticised for being simplistic. Current theorists argue childhood development is complex with many dimensions and thus propose early bereavement is influenced by a variety of individual and environmental factors

(Grollman, 1995). Children are in a continual state of change. Their development is described as multifaceted and includes aspects of their physical, cognitive, spiritual, emotional, social, psychological, and behavioral growth. Other variables, which influence the bereaved child's experience of development, include the type of support provided at home and school. Also, a child's religious and cultural background will play a role in his or her experiences in adjustment to loss (Grollman, 1995).

#### Impact of Loss on Development of Identity

It is important to understand the impact of early mother loss on a daughter's development of self-concept. Self-concept can be defined as a multi-faceted view that one holds of oneself, which evolves over time. It is considered abstract, symbolic, and dynamic (McCandless, 1967). Identity is a major component, within the construct of self-concept that is primarily focused on roles. Self is viewed as a collection of identities, which comprise a life story. New experiences can either heal or harm an individual's sense of self (Howard, 1991). Within western society the mother/daughter relationship is viewed as unique complex and emotionally charged. It has also been considered one of the strongest bonds throughout life (La Sorsa & Fodor, 1990). Gardiner (1981) suggested that the process of establishing one's self concept is different for boys than girl. Boys tend to separate from their mother much earlier to achieve self-definition. As a result, boys tend to develop more clearly defined ego boundaries. Girls more commonly define themselves in the context of their relationships with their mother and others. La Sorsa and Fodor (1990) argued that the daughter's bond with her mother is maintained across her developmental life span through the process of mirroring, separation, and self-definition. Chodorow (1978) also proposed that a daughter normally establish her gender identity by

becoming like her mother. It is through this relationship that the daughter learns what it means to be a female. Thus, the daughter develops a sense of identity through watching and mirroring her mother in her roles as mother and wife.

Lowinsky (1992), proposed that from the mother/daughter relationship the daughter “. . . gains female authority, provides a life-cycle perspective and which ultimately grounds a female in a gender, a family, and a feminine history,” (Cited in Edelman, 1994, p.208). Understanding the crucial role that mother traditionally assumes in a daughter’s development, provides a richer context from which to examine the full impact of early mother loss. Edelman (1994) stated how her “. . . mother’s death had been the most determining, the most profound, the most influential event of my life. It had become my organiser, the focal point of my identity . . . ” (p. 19).

Edelman (1994) argued that the death of one’s mother “. . . occupies a central place in the individual’s personal narrative often as the event on which the entire narrative pivots and a daughter’s identity thus becomes inextricably interwoven with the loss” (p.34). She suggested such an impact is profound and long lasting but not necessarily pathological. Rather the impact of early mother loss on identity may continue to evolve and change over the daughter’s developmental life span.

Thus, a deeper understanding of the meaning of early death of mother on the daughter’s identity is required. Questions arise concerning how the daughter establishes her identity in the absence of her mother? Without the opportunities to mirror, separate, and thus define herself in the context of her mother, how does she establish herself as a woman and confidently assume her different adult roles?

### Theories of Adult Development

The study of development has now extended beyond childhood and adolescence to explore change and growth in adulthood. It is recognised that adults continue to experience transitions which result in new relationships, behaviors, and self-perceptions (Schlossberg, 1979). These transitions are caused by biological, sociological, and environmental phenomena (Spieler, 1977). Each transition provides an opportunity for psychological growth or deterioration (Moos & Tsu, 1976). The end of a transition is often marked by reorganization into a stable new life and identity. Adaptation to a transition occurs as an individual moves from being preoccupied with the transition to integrating it into his or her life (Lipman-Blumen, 1976). Schlossberg (1979) proposed that each type of transition might have its own pattern of adaptation. The balance of resources and deficits in the individual's pre and post environments influences the ease of adaptation. This view of adaptation is dynamic, thus over time an individual may acquire a better balance of resources and deficits (Lowenthal et. al., 1975).

Vaillant (1977) argued that childhood traumas did not necessarily predict later dysfunction. But rather it was the quality of sustained relationships that were more influential. Brim and Kagan (1980) argued that the capacity for change can occur across and individuals life span making human development more open than earlier theories proposed. This theory compliments Rando's (1993) definition of complicated mourning. She proposed that what becomes complicated has the potential to become uncomplicated over time with the appropriate supports and resources. This challenges earlier more narrowly defined models of psychosocial development.

### Additional Factors which Influence Adjustment to Loss

The impact of losing a parent in childhood must be examined in the context of other contributing factors. The impact of early parent loss is embedded within the context of many important situational and relational variables, which affect the bereaved child's adaptation to the loss.

There is a number of contributing factors, which can influence the mourner's adaptation to loss. According to Parkes (1965): (a) antecedent factors such as past experience, type of relationship with the deceased and cause of death; (b) concurrent factors which include age, gender, personal style, family, religion, culture, and socio-economic status; and (c) subsequent factors in terms of type of support system, secondary stressors, and emergent life opportunities. Rando (1988) identified the contributing factors in light of psychological, sociological and physiological variables. Some contributing factors, which influence the type of adjustment a child makes to early parental loss include pre-loss relationship with the deceased, reason for death, mourning rituals, and influence of other family relationships.

#### Pre-Loss Relationship with the Deceased.

The quality of the relationship between the bereaved child and the deceased is a crucial factor in later adaptation (Furman, 1974; Laufer, 1966). Furman (1974) emphasised the significance of a close relationship with the deceased parent for the child's identification with aspects of the deceased's personality. According to Furman this identification was necessary for healthy mourning.

Raphael (1983) examined the quality of the relationship with mothers and bereaved children before maternal loss. She found that the intensity of the pre-loss

attachment, ambivalence or dependence played an important role in the mourning process. Schoonover (1990) found that the type of pre-loss relationship was significant to healthy adjustment for girls who lost a mother in adolescence.

### **Reason for Death**

The reason for death is also an important situational variable, which can influence the child's adaptation to the loss. There are different implications for the bereaved depending on the type of death. Many studies differentiated between anticipated versus unexpected death.

Goldberg (1973) identified "anticipatory grief" as resulting from anticipated death, such as a prolonged illness. He found the bereaved family's responses in an anticipated death were usually more gradual and occurring over a longer period. With unexpected death there is no forewarning at all such as sudden death resulting from a motor vehicle accident, homicide or fatal illness such as heart attack or stroke. Another category of "sudden death" assesses the level of intention. Suicide was the most frequently cited research sample; thus is criticised for being biased towards maladjustment (Biller & Berlinsky, 1982). According to Dorpat (1972) if the surviving child perceives the suicide to be in the control of the parent and child, feelings of guilt are often increased in the child. The results of different case studies show that suicide has traumatic effects on the bereaved child (Dorpat, 1972; Ilan, 1973; Warren, 1972). The bereaved child commonly reacts to a parent's suicide with psychosomatic and other physical symptoms, such as depression, preoccupation with suicide, guilt, self-destructive behaviour, arrested development, and over-identification with the deceased parent.

Anticipated death and the level of intention were found to have the strongest impact on children losing a parent through death. However, generalizability is questioned due to the fact that the case studies were conducted in a clinical setting.

### Mourning Rituals

The purpose of a mourning ritual is to validate the expression of grief and facilitate emotional support from others (Krupp, 1972). Each culture has its own particular set of acceptable mourning practices (Rando, 1984; Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993). In Western society, young children have often been denied the opportunity to attend the funeral due to the notion they should be sheltered from death. However, the validity of this perspective is now being challenged. Current research shows the benefits of assisting children through mourning rituals (Grollman, 1993).

### Influence of Family Relationships

Family structure and dynamics after the loss of a parent play a significant role in the bereaved child's adjustment to the loss. Those family members often playing an influential role in the bereaved child's life include the surviving parent, siblings, and replacement figures (surrogate parents). Extended family members can also assume an important role. These individuals may include grandparents, aunts and uncles. Krupp (1972) suggests that the active involvement from extended family can serve as a collective identity to support the bereaved child.

One study explored the qualities of the relationship with a "replacement mother" with a sample of hospitalised women (Birtchnell, 1980). Replacement mothers were identified as women who assumed the maternal role in the bereaved child's life. Those women who reported a poor relationship with their replacement mother were hospitalised

at a younger age. According to Biller and Berlinsky (1982), having a surrogate mother could be either positive or negative depending on the rapport established. One determinant of success is when the surrogate parent compliments the style of the surviving parent. There are a number of significant factors, which can influence the bereaved child in both the short and long term. Extended family can potentially reduce the traumatic effects of early parental loss.



### CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a qualitative approach using a multiple case study design. A questionnaire was utilised to gather data. Telephone interviews were conducted to clarify any ambiguity in the participants written answers. The data from the questionnaires and interviews were compiled to create narratives, which provided a unique report of each participant's experience. Common themes were then drawn from the narratives.

The researcher selected qualitative analysis because its paradigm was more compatible with the purpose of the present study. According to Yin (1984) case studies are implemented to answer "how" or "what" questions. This study explored the question of how the death of a girl's mother impacts her throughout her subsequent developmental growth.

The qualitative approach can be defined in the following way: "Qualitative research is based on a narrative phenomenological philosophy that views reality as multi-layered, interactive, and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals. [It is] . . . concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993, p. 373).

The qualitative data collected in this research was based on the participant's existential, phenomenological experience. The philosophical perspective of existential phenomenology looks at how people experience and interpret phenomena. The philosophy of existential phenomenology values human understanding and validates

lived experience. The present study allowed the women to share their experiences of living with the early loss of their mother.

### Case Study

"Case study" is a research strategy that investigates phenomena by asking "how" and "why" questions about events over which the researcher has little or no control.

Descriptive case studies are primarily exploratory in nature and their purpose is to be open to discover rather than predict and confirm a pre-set hypothesis (Newman, 1991).

Case study takes an in-depth look at phenomenon in its real life context (Yin, 1984).

Multiple case study design, was employed in this research, and is a distinct method that considers each study as its own experiment. It is regarded as a more robust strategy than a single case study due to its replication logic, the identification of commonalities across individual cases. This strengthens the trustworthiness of the results (Yin, 1984).

This approach runs the risk of being subject to bias, a risk that must be addressed to minimise contamination the interpretation of the results.

### Controlling For Research Bias

Qualitative research acknowledges the presence of the researcher conducting the research. One way to monitor this influence is through a section titled the Perspective of the Researcher. In this statement the researcher identified her personal biases, which could possibly influence the understanding of the co-researchers and interpretation of the data collected (Osborne, 1990; Farnsworth, 1990). The purpose of the perspective of the researcher, outlined at the end of this chapter, provides the reader with a clear understanding of the researcher's background as another measure to guard against potential bias in the study (Valle & King, 1978). This early, heightened awareness

allowed me identify and then distance from potential biases during data collection and analysis. Information on my personal and research biases also provides the reader a clear understanding of the researcher's viewpoint while he or she examines the findings drawn from the study.

### Participants

In qualitative research the term "subject" is replaced with "participant" or "co-researcher". (Colaizzi, 1978). For a more accurate interpretation of the experience of early mother loss, direct consultation with the participants or co-researchers was sought.

The participants were recruited from the Motherless Daughters Society and through referrals from personal and professional contacts. The initial letter of contact is found in Appendix A. All participants were selected on the following basis: (a) female (b) presently between the ages of 19-50; (c) between the ages of 6-8 at time of mother's death. Each participant was informed of the study's purpose prior to the commencement of the study and how it would be conducted.

### Screening Interviews

All candidates were initially screened for gender, current age, and age at time of mother's death. The purpose of the study was then presented. Next, the questionnaire and telephone interview processes were described. Then questions raised by the candidates were addressed. The participants' right to withdraw from the research at any time was also discussed. Finally, potential participants were confirmed.

## Data Collection

### The Questionnaire

This study employed an open-ended questionnaire to gather information from the participants. This format was chosen over face-to-face interviews due to the geographical distances of the participants. The participants were encouraged to write as much as they desired for each question using additional sheets if necessary. The goal of the questionnaire was to understand the participants' experience of losing a mother in childhood and its meaning to that person. The questionnaire, as shown in Appendix C, began by asking for some demographic information. The predominant part of the questionnaire asked each participant to respond to questions by describing her experiences related to the loss and absence of her mother. The questions asked how the loss of her mother impacted her at different developmental stages.

An open-ended questionnaire is similar to the interview method in that a respondent fills out and returns to the researcher a self-administered "interview" in which the question and instructions are complete and understandable enough that the respondent can act as his or her own "interview". (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht, 1984, p. 135)

One limitation of the questionnaire method is that the researcher cannot follow on questions or different leads by asking supplemental questions. To counteract this problem the researcher implemented follow-up telephone interviews to clarify responses and confirm the results with the participants. Another disadvantage of mailing questionnaires is the statistically low return rate. However, higher return rates are often reported for

specialised samples (Dillman, 1978). In the present study, twenty questionnaires were mailed out and eleven completed.

The major advantages of a questionnaire format are convenience and economy. Utilising the questionnaire method enabled women from across the United States to join this research project. The second advantage of an open-ended questionnaire is that the participants had time to reflect on the questions and review relevant records before responding. Thus, with the questionnaire format, participants have less time pressure than they would in an interview (Chadwick, Bahr, & Albrecht, 1984, p. 137).

### Narrative Accounts

The data for this study are based on the narratives provided by the participants. The researcher began to reconstruct the life history of each participant by first putting together her questionnaire responses in chronological fashion. Where there were gaps of information in the stories, the researcher telephoned the participants for more details. The words of the participants are used verbatim, as much as possible, to retain the style and perspective of the participant. There are eleven narrative accounts in the present study.

### Telephone Interviews

The researcher interviewed the participants over the telephone to clarify any ambiguous sections in their stories. The women were also given an opportunity to share any additional information related to their experience of living with early mother loss. These taped interviews were approximately one hour in length. All tapes were then transcribed verbatim. This data was then incorporated into their narrative accounts.

### Data Analysis

Due to the unique goals of quantitative and qualitative research, threats to their reliability and validity are also different (Osborne, 1990). The quantitative inquiry aims to control and predict human behaviour while qualitative research takes a more exploratory, subjective look at human behaviour. According to Mischler (1986) in case study design, threats to internal validity must be assessed along with the interview process, its documentation, and opinions of the participants and others, to accurately determine the plausibility of the results.

### Validity

Validity refers to whether the research investigated what it originally set out to explore. The present study has face validity because all the questions in the questionnaire relate to the participants' experience of early mother loss. One of the threats to validity, in qualitative research, is researcher bias. During data collection the influence of the researcher was reduced through the use of open-ended questions. To minimise researcher bias during data interpretation the participants and an independent judge were consulted to confirm the plausibility of the results. The researcher conducted telephone interviews with the participants to discuss the results. They were asked if the titles and descriptions of the themes resonated with their experience. An opportunity to address any gaps in the results was also given to the co-researchers.

Procedure for Establishing Validity. The data drawn from the narrative accounts were interpreted according to recommendations by Yin (1986), Guba (1978) and Patten (1990). The procedural steps taken in analyzing the data are listed below:

1. The completed questionnaires were reviewed.

2. Telephone interviews were conducted to clarify and expand upon the participants' written responses.
3. Data from the taped interview transcriptions and written responses were then combined to yield more comprehensive narratives.
4. Each "meaning unit" containing a clear statement or idea related to early mother loss, was assigned a theme.
5. Similar themes were then grouped together while themes too broad in nature were broken down into two or more themes. The main objective of this step was to have themes that were neither, too broad nor too specific. Guba (1978) stated that the themes should be plausible, acceptable to the participants and reproducible by an outside judge.
6. Concrete examples were provided to support the validity of themes (Patten, 1990). Evidence from at least 6 of the 11 narratives was necessary to be considered as a common theme.
7. The results were compared with current research findings in the literature.

The narrative accounts were compared and contrasted to discover whether there were any commonalities across the participants' stories. It is important to note that items, which are too general could reflect a faulty category classification system (Guba, 1978). According to Patten (1991), to avoid bias, the researcher must remain open to the categories that emerge rather than looking for patterns.

### Reliability

Reliability commonly refers to how consistent a measure is. In qualitative research, reliability relates to the dependability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited

in Creswell, 1998). Thus, the repetition of a highly reliable study will produce similar findings. To strengthen the reliability of this research, case study protocol was followed. All the procedures concerning how the questionnaires were administered, telephone interviews conducted and the data interpreted were recorded to enable future researchers to repeat this study. One test of reliability is called inter-rater reliability. This involves more than one person making independent judgements to assess the consistency of the results (Dare, 1990). Two steps were taken to assess inter-rater reliability, in the present study. First, the thesis supervisor tested the classifications of themes with an outcome of 80% correct. Next, an independent judge was asked to match the themes with the appropriate quotes or “meaning units”. The outcome with the independent judge was 90% correct. See Appendix D for instructions given to the judge.

Procedure for Establishing Reliability. The procedural steps taken in analyzing the data are listed below:

1. Presented the judge with written instructions on the task.
2. Provided brief descriptions of all the themes along with a number of quotes or “meaning units” to match.
3. Asked judge if she had any questions.
4. Did a trial run for clarification providing the judge with a “meaning unit” to correctly place in order to see if she understood the procedure. The trial run went smoothly. No part of the procedure was unclear to the judge, therefore she continued on to complete the test.
5. Provided the judge with approximately 10% of the meaning units to place with the appropriate themes.



6. Calculated the percentage of correct answers.

### Ethical Considerations

Measures were taken to ensure that the proposed study was conducted in a responsible and ethical manner. The Research Ethics Review Committee evaluated all of the procedures at Trinity Western University. An information letter was mailed to all potential participants after the researcher explained the purpose of the study via telephone in an initial screening interview (See Appendix A). A consent form was also enclosed along with a self-addressed stamped envelope (See Appendix B). Each participant was provided with a brief description of the purpose of the study and the data collection procedure. Opportunity for asking questions was provided. Each participant was informed of the confidential and voluntary nature of the study, with the option to withdraw at any point without penalty. To ensure anonymity, each participant was given a pseudo name and other identifying information was also removed. Careful measures were taken to ensure that the only two people with access to the original questionnaires and audiotapes from the telephone interviews were the researcher and supervisor. Finally, all tapes will be erased at the conclusion of this study.

### Perspective of the Researcher

As the principal researcher in this study it is important to clarify my relationship with the phenomena of early mother loss. As I approach and engage in this qualitative study I am keenly aware of my potential to influence the results. Presenting my perspective is a twofold attempt to minimise researcher bias. First, through this process I have become more self-aware which has enabled me to more accurately identify the participants' experiences. Second, providing a statement of my academic, professional

and personal background provides the reader with a context from which to critically examine the results.

On an academic level, I wondered if different themes of grief and loss would emerge during various phases of development. However, what the research findings uncovered were that the themes of loss extended across the daughters' life span with particular relevance during certain events or developmental markers.

Professionally, I work as a First Nation's counselor with adults on issues of loss within the context of culture, family and identity. I also lead support groups for children ages six to twelve to address the issue of divorce or separation in their families.

My personal experience with childhood bereavement includes losing my mother just prior to the age of six. Her sudden death had immediate and long-term implications on my life experience. Personal experience has the potential to either contaminate or strengthen the research findings. Some of the participants reported that their willingness to join the study was influenced by the fact that I also had experienced early mother loss.

The following eleven chapters contain the narrative accounts of the study participants. The narrative accounts represent the lived experience of the participants. Therefore an attempt to retain the individual style and voice of the women was sought. The names and identifying information was changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Table 1. A descriptive summary of the participants.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Age at Time Of Mother's Death</b>	<b>Current Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Educational Level</b>
Ann	F	7	44	Seamstress	Married	Attended College
Bev	F	6	49	Manager & Librarian	Married	Master of Arts Degree
Carol	F	7	35	Drug Treatment Specialist	Single	Master of Arts Degree
Connie	F	7	31	Business Owner	Married	College Graduate
Jane	F	7	34	Sales & Marketing	Single	College Graduate
Jill	F	6	36	Secretary	Married	Highschool Diploma
Laura	F	8	30	Self Employed	Married	B.A.S.W., C.M.A
Mary	F	8	29	Social Worker	Single	Master of Arts Degree
Nicole	F	6	23	Editorial Assistant	Single	Bachelor of Arts
Pam	F	6	22	Retail & Waitressing	Single	Attended College
Trudy	F	6	29	Early Childhood Educator	Married	Associate of Arts Degree

## CHAPTER IV: CASE STUDY ONE

Anne's Story

Anne is a forty-four year old married woman with two children. Her educational background includes high school and some college and she works as a seamstress. Anne was seven years old at the time of her mother's death. She has a brother four years older and a sister two years older. The following is an account of Anne's story.

The image I have of my mother is of someone pretty, funny and quiet. She was a depressed woman who endured critical verbal abuse and some physical abuse by her husband. She had emotionally abandoned her three children, locking us out of the house or up in the playroom/attic, yelling at us, and inappropriately spanking us. She was rigid in her demands of us. I remember my mother being emotionally unavailable. I felt that I didn't please her and wasn't acceptable to her.

On the day my mother died my parents were arguing, which was normal for us to hear, so it didn't bother me too much. My great grandfather came in and asked if we would like to go see our cousins, which of course was always a great thrill. We arrived at our cousins around lunchtime and just played all day. I was having a good time. But then when it got dark I wondered when we were going home. Then my uncle called my sister and I upstairs and I thought, uh-oh, I'm in trouble. He sat us down on either side of him and put his arm around us and told us of our mother's death. Then, after a few minutes he called up my cousins and told them. It was havoc from that moment on, trying to get the kids to bed. I remember that first night; I just cried a lot and looked out at the light that came from under the door. I had to sleep on a little mattress on the floor. I'd go to sleep and I'd wake up. My aunt did come in one time and she kind of held me on her lap, but

she didn't say anything. Not a word. Probably because there were two other kids in the room and she didn't want to wake them up. But there was not any real sharing about, what's this look like, or any kind of reassurance of where we were to go, and what was going to happen to us.

My mother was murdered by my father. He killed her because she wanted a divorce to have a better life for herself and us kids. His attitude was, "If I can't have her, nobody will." He came from behind so she wasn't aware of what was going to happen and he shot her in the left temple. I attended the funeral, but not the burial because my Aunt thought I was too young. This is always vivid in my mind as if it happened just recently. It's imprinted. It was difficult. There were a lot of people around, but suddenly there weren't and we were left alone. Three of us were sitting in a row of chairs while the adults were out in the foyer. I didn't know what to expect to see of my mother. I just remember thinking when I saw her how pretty she was and that she didn't look dead. She looked like she was asleep. I just observed her from head to toe, because I didn't understand exactly-I knew she was shot in the head. I was looking for where it was, and it was on the side where you couldn't see. It was on her left side and I was on her right. My brother, sister, cousins, and I knelt by the casket for a few moments, and then we were ushered back to the seats. I sat in the middle of my brother and sister and I remember looking around the room and I was okay as long as I looked around the room. But if I looked at my mother, I cried. I remember consciously thinking, if I don't want to cry, then don't look. I remember looking up at my brother and he was just very stiff looking, very emotionless, and I looked at my sister and she was the same. That's what I've done most of my life. If I didn't think about it I would be okay, but if I thought about it and

shared it with anybody, I cried. It's the avoidance of the pain. If I didn't look, then I didn't feel. I didn't understand and couldn't put the feelings into words the feeling. I just knew it hurt.

After the funeral the three of us went to a foster home. They were an older couple. We didn't talk about anything there. I loved both Mom and Dad C. I felt safety, trust, security, acceptance, and freedom to be myself. I was their shadow and I was happy. I didn't miss my Mom or think of her much when I was there. I was fulfilled. I lived there for two and one-half years. My brother got moved when we were at Mom and Dad C.'s house, 'cause he was a rebellious teen. He was probably working out his anger 'cause he was a very angry puppy, very angry. They didn't know how to cope with him, his rebellion, his bedwetting, and being a teenager. He ended up going to Boystown. Even when he left he didn't say goodbye to me. Words weren't expressed. Feelings weren't expressed. I just knew I had great sorrow that he was leaving. I was aware of my feelings but I just couldn't identify them. Sadness was one I could.

I was told that the last foster child that they had stayed until she was 18, so I just honkered right in. I thought, hey, cool! I thought this is where I was going to be. And then one day I was told, "no," we were being moved. Now again, another huge significant loss. First my brother got moved from us then four years later I got moved from my sister.

About five or six years after my mother's death, my aunt took us to see my father in prison. We weren't asked whether we wanted to go, she just took us. I wasn't real comfortable with that. It was just an odd experience. I think it was after he was sentenced. No one ever helped us through dealing with the loss. In adolescence, I was in

other foster homes and became aware of not having a mom. I missed my mom and I would cry for her when I was alone and things got bad. I also fantasised about her being alive for a day so we could be together. I felt alone, like an outcast from the girls. I was needy for love and attention and acceptance. I attempted to cope by being perfect, good, nice and giving so that I could keep from losing that which was so vital to me. "Don't leave me," was a core scream in me. I was angry at being used by people. Between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, I lived in five foster homes and went to three different high schools. I wished that my mom hadn't died and all those losses wouldn't have happened.

I don't think I coped. I just tried surviving each day. My world continued to be out of control all those years. I never really had a say as to what was going to happen to me. Adults or the foster care system always determined final decisions. So I felt pretty helpless and I was always at the mercy of whatever everybody else decided. The intensity of missing my mother was the greatest then, probably, because I was old enough to intellectually know that if my mom's death hadn't happened, all this crap wouldn't be going on.

Within the first week of her dying I only dreamed of her once and she was the only one that was in colour. And I remember being on the boardwalk in Atlantic City, because that's where I lived. There was a crowd of people, very tight squeezed people, and I saw her jacket. And that's what was in colour. She was away from me and I couldn't get to her. Then she just disappeared. And then it was many years later that I probably had two more dreams about her, and that was probably, eight years ago.

With my peers throughout high school, I never felt that I fit in or belonged because I had this secret. I had no mom, I lived in a foster home, and I couldn't relate to

or be related to. I feared that if I told anyone, I might be an outcast. Between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, I longed to have a mom to do things with. I married, had a child, and wished my mother could have been there to share it. Life was a struggle, fighting for survival. I wondered why it had to be so hard. I wondered what it was like to have a mom.

There were times in my life when I felt different from my peers as a result of being motherless. Mother's Day was not a day to celebrate as the other girls did. When I was in Brownies and the children were to make something for their moms, I instantly sank into despair and cried because I couldn't give mine to my mom. That was just a few months after her death. Other times when I felt different were at weddings, the birth of my daughters, my divorces, mine and my mother's birthdays, and graduation from high school.

The loss of my mother affected my ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships. I was afraid to get too involved for fear of loss and abandonment. It always brought up the fear of death of that person and I crumbled over that thought. Not being accepted or being abandoned was equally tough. Trusting people was difficult. I feared being taken advantage of because of my neediness to be nurtured, respected, and accepted. I don't know how to maintain healthy relationships. My confidence is very low about my ability to have a relationship. Fear of loss is huge in my being.

The loss of my mother affected my relationships between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five because the neediness wasn't any better. Life continued to be overwhelming. I wanted to belong to a family and fit in, yet I questioned why I attracted



people who didn't understand or want me. I felt tired of being on the outside looking in at people who got what I wanted and needed.

At thirty-five my life changed again as I got married for the third time to a man who I feel I have a place with. In our marriage, we both work on our personal baggage to make the relationship healthy. I still freeze inside with fear of death and how I would survive and figure out how to take care of my world alone again. I don't like to be alone, physically, or emotionally. But I'm doing better with that one too because my husband's job makes me be alone by myself for a short time during the week. I realise this isn't too bad. I get more sewing done this way. Sometimes I even say, "Go to work. Call up and see if they're ready for you yet". Humour has been a saving grace in my life. Just be funny. I'm a great audience. My husband says, "You're the only one that really laughs at me this way". I say, "Well I guess those people don't appreciate your kind of humour. I like it!"

Ten years ago when I married my husband, my therapist said that if I did not address some different issues I would not have healthy relationships. I really like my husband so I started digging in. It was tough those first four or five years. Real tough. He's been doing his own work for the relationship too, and he still has more to do, but I know he's doing some of it so I feel closer to him for that. He seems to have an appreciation more for why I am the way I have been. So he's a little easier with it too.

What I missed which would have helped in adjusting to the loss of my mother was the freedom to show my pain and tears. I also missed feeling that I could ask questions; having others show their anger, pain, and tears, and embracing each other and staying together; having more things explained to me to answer my fears; and being

comforted and given a sense of security. Back then, in the 50s and early 60s families didn't talk about things. It was-it's over and done with and you move on.

Other significant losses I have experienced include the loss of my first foster parents as well as relationships with siblings and other family members. After my mother's death, there is no relationship between my father and I, by choice on both sides. My father first remarried about nine years after the death of my mother. He married three times. I never knew his wives. My brother was moved away and eventually my sister and I were separated. Presently, there is no communication with any of the siblings. For me, the feelings of loss are greatest over my brother, but none for my father or sister.

My oldest nephew told me a few years ago about some of the things in my father's life over the years. I did call my father four years ago and it was hard to get his phone number, but I got it. I did not confront him about what he did, but who he was before that day. Because, as I said, I knew that's where some work had to be done and so . . . the minute I heard his voice, and what he said in conversation, it was like, this man has not changed one bit. The arrogance, the power, vocabulary-everything! I knew he was real stuck and still not taking honest responsibility of what he chose to do. He has never said "I'm sorry." I don't need a relationship like that. And apparently he has his reasons for not having a relationship with me, very little with my brother, and a lot with my sister.

My sister didn't like me from the very day I was born. I love my brother, but he's a guy, and he's also an emotional abandoner and he's got his way of dealing with this, too. Even when we used to live right around the corner from each other, I never saw him.

Therapy wasn't available then. So, the loss was not just my mother, but over the years, the whittling away of everything else.

The loss of my mother has affected the way I interact with my children. Parenting has been a very difficult challenge for me. Not having a positive role model made it tough to try not to repeat the ways I was treated. The issues of loss and grief over the years have had a negative impact on my relationship with my two daughters (sixteen and twenty-three). I took good care of their physical needs, but the emotional needs have been a huge strain on me emotionally. I was angry with my oldest daughter at a young age because she had a mother and I had none. The way I have been treated by my daughters has been painful, for I feel that they don't understand what it's like not having a mother because if they did, I would be respected and appreciated for the efforts I made for them.

The loss of my mother has fostered the development of certain strengths in my life. Being very aware that death is sudden has always motivated me to appreciate and respect life. I have empathy for people who experience the death of someone. I know the pain. I try to make things work out and not abandon people. I learned to survive and to give love.

I feel the damage that was done to me has also been repeated, not necessarily by my choice, but just by the way life was for me. And the pile of poop was huge to get through and my daughters, unfortunately, they had to go through that with me. Now they're damaged, too. Even to this day I don't really feel a very good feeling about my mothering, even though I've changed. Things are better for me and I feel that my relationship with them has improved. I don't think that it's come back at me yet. I do have a grandchild, and I know that I'm very much different with him. And I feel sorrow-I

feel glad and I feel sorrow that he is now getting the better that I wanted my girls to have. So I feel sorrow that they got gypped out of it. But I can say that at least I know that my grandson is getting more of who I wanted to be. So that says, hey, I'm making it.

I get an "A" for effort. I don't know what I'd get for outcome, but I get an "A" for effort.

I'm learning to let my daughters be more that they are. Not have as much poop. Give them what I didn't have so that they could be healthier. I know that some of my beliefs were not quite in sync, that they were in error. I think that was because if I really faced the enormity of the illness it might have been real overwhelming.

It's not just her death that made my world chaotic. It was who we all were before that day, and it wasn't very healthy to begin with. That thought and acknowledgement helps me look more into my emotional well being. Life wasn't peachy-keen and it wasn't a loving family. Emotional immaturity has come through each generation.

It also gave me strong determination to do it differently. I wasn't going to let those things happen to my children, or now my grandson.

I sought counselling to try and make sense of my "out-of-control" life and to deal with abandonment and loss. Counselling has been very supportive. With the consistency of it, the same therapist, and the trust that I've established with her, and the belief of what she says and being able to take it in, it's been working pretty good. I know that stuff will always be a part of me. Instead of getting over it, I'm learning more how to get through it at each opportunity. I'm real determined to be healthier, emotionally, and not be so angry at the pain.

I am learning more how to help myself instead of looking toward other people. My goal is to not keep the focus on the anxiety or the tension, but to remind myself of

what I've been accomplishing. This is an opportunity to take another step to do things differently and to improve it and to say to myself, "see you are still okay." I don't scream so much inside. And deciding not to literally sit in it and make myself get up and get motivated for a little bit. Slowly it grew into a longer time where I could be motivated and get out of it quicker. I have choices.

As a young adult I had no choices. If I wanted to change the patterns both internally and externally, I found the only way to change the external was through the internal. Part of that was standing up and saying "no" to other people. That's excruciating. In the beginning, it was very difficult. The fear of rejection was the most difficult part. Not knowing whether I had the right to say "no". So, I just continued pleasing and trying to understand and working with that grip, to hold on even when things were awful and a detriment to myself. It was the fear of loss.

In the past two years I've been learning to say no and not worry about my choices or not being liked. I don't fear the abandonment and rejection as much. I'm getting braver. If I need to relax, I need to be calm inside and being that way wasn't doing it. I really feel hyper inside. Like I am just bouncing up and down and, "yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah." It is a feeling of loss of control. In my therapy over the years it finally sunk in and I was willing to give up the fight within myself, prove it differently, by just saying, "This is the way it is." This is the way people are. These are my lessons I need to work at to be more productive and healthier for me.

Talking with significant others is reassuring. Knowing that I do have a few significant people that will help hold me. My confidence is more up and I feel I can do it. Because I say to myself, look at what you've already done, so that you can do this too.

You see, I wouldn't call what happened to me a "story." I call it a nightmare. If I wrote a book, it'd be "Nightmare." I'm trying to be friendly with it, cause being angry at it is not going to make it go away. It's just a part of my life. There's still a lot of sorrow inside my being, in the very core of me.

But I've learned to deal with it if I have to do a lot of head talking and I have to reassure myself that that's not what's happening today. This is where you are. Try to keep myself in the present and not fear and worry about that. I have a couple good friends and my therapist for support. I have to run down this list of assurances so I don't stay in the fear very long any more. I learned a technique from my dentist because I used to get anxious about going to the dentist. He taught me to, when I would think about the appointment weeks ahead of time, he told me to say to myself, "that day's not here yet" and then move on. And then I kept doing that, practising it, and I've taken that technique and applied it to other areas of my life. It really helps me. Just like your phone call this morning. I knew it was coming and everything and it wasn't until 9:00 that it kicked in, "Hello." I turned on my soft music and I took deep breaths.

Looking back, I didn't cope with my mother's death in childhood and adolescence because I was too busy trying to be perfect and acceptable so as not to be abandoned or rejected. I am now making an effort to search for the positive, as I already know the negative. I am in a Motherless Daughter support group and that has helped tremendously. I feel I belong with other females. I hear their difficulties and their progress through their experiences, and I get encouraged that there is a positive place. In the Motherless Daughter group every girl talked about all the dreams they have of their mother still. I don't dream about my mother. I got gypped on that one too.

When I had an opportunity to join a motherless daughter group for that 8 weeks, that's when I think things really clicked for me, because the first meeting we had, you know, I was uptight and anxious. But hearing nine other women talk about what it was like for them and stuff, it was like, "oh! I belong here. I don't feel like I'm not fitting in." I knew I fit in. Like, "here I am!" That really helped. I had a connection. And that, so I think my therapy really started to blossom then and I'm still in contact with a couple of the gals and one of them is so like me, we giggle at each other. So it's that family feeling. Even though it's a family of loss, of a mother, it really soothes me.

The depth of loss was exacerbated by the kind of relationship that was before my mother's death. For me there was emotional abandonment. I have lived longer than my mother did. I don't and won't know what ailments or menopause would be like for her. I don't know what it is like to be in a relationship that has been long term. And still that will be always until I die, probably. I don't know what her medical history would have been like, for me. Of course not ever really having the opportunity of a long-term relationship. What would she have been like at 46? What would she have looked like? What kind of grandmother would she have been? And what kind of great-grandmother would she have been like? There are no shared moments that words can't describe, but you know you feel it together and experience a sense of oneness. I look for a mom in any relationship but know that hole will not be filled by anyone. Finding ways to fill the hole with food, material possessions, or drive for accomplishment are only temporary and the hole gets empty again.

I'd say the first 35 years have been the heaviest. And now the last three, the beginning of the last two years have been where it's not as heavy. The loneliness is still

there. You know, the wonderment of how long would she have lived? What would she look like, what would menopause be for her so I would know. And how different I might have been if, I mean, I know she wasn't real wonderful, but I think I would have had a better sense of self. I still have some of it, and I'll just look at it, acknowledge it, hold myself and move on. I still do not have any relationship with any of my family, with my siblings or father. I don't need that one! Even with my aunt and uncle and cousins and the family poop they choose to live in, I chose not to, so I get to be the black sheep. So I've had to grieve and get through a lot of the loss of that for all these years, and the years to come. So I say to myself, that's real sad. I still feel envious of women who have a mom, how they respect and love them and can acknowledge that. I feel that I know do better with life without a mom most of the time. Sorrow is a companion, grief is painful and I try to positively accept it as my life's task to make peace with it.

When I hear about a father killing a mother, or even with Princess Diana. It's like umph! I know what you're in for. And that's still going on. When O.J. Simpson was on trial, I used to yell at the TV. I still get a heavy heart when things happen in the world today.



## CHAPTER V: CASE STUDY TWO

### Bev's Story

Bev is a forty-nine year old woman who is married with two children. She has a master's degree and works as a manager and librarian. Bev was six at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Bev's story.

The image that I have of my mother is that she was about 5'5" tall, and heavysset, with a buxom figure. She had dark brown hair and hazel eyes. She was a comfortable and friendly person, one who went out of her way to do things for others. My mother was an "accommodator," putting other's needs in front of her own. I have met many people from her childhood through middle age who, when they find out I am Ida's daughter, tell me what a wonderful person she was. This gives me an image of someone that reached out to others and brought them "in" to her. I see my mother as warm and kindly, one who would have understood problems, supported me in every way, and been forgiving of my faults. These physical images come from photographs of her that I have seen, and the personality image from comments made by family and friends.

The most salient memory of my mother is of her kissing me goodbye on the front porch of the house where we lived. For some reason, I think this is on the day she died but it may not be. I'm not sure whether it is real or not. The most salient thought is of how much different my life would have been if my mother had lived.

My mother had high blood pressure and died of a cerebral haemorrhage. She went shopping and while in a card store, collapsed and died shortly after reaching the hospital. My parents lived in the suburbs of Pittsburgh close to my aunt and uncle. I was taken to my aunt's home and told nothing. The day after my mother died, my aunt took me on her

lap in the living room and asked, "Would you understand if I told you your mother had gone to heaven?" I think I said yes. I had had some inkling that something very bad had happened because the night before my older cousin gave me a barrette my mother had bought for me and told me to keep it safe.

I attended my mother's funeral. I can only remember my father turning away from the gravesite, crying and holding me to him, with my face buried in his legs. That is all I remember of my mother's death. I think it is strange that I don't have any more memory of a mother who died when I was six: I obviously don't allow myself to remember more. Years later, I was drawn to go to that card store where she died and talked with the woman who was with her at the time. I certainly didn't need to have her death "proved," but was obviously looking for something.

In 1952, it was not "accepted" for a father to raise a daughter alone. My older sister had been married one year, and my father and my mother's family (dominant force in all our lives) felt it would be wrong to "burden" a newly married couple with a child. So my father's unmarried sister moved into our home to keep house for my father and me. She apparently was very difficult to get along with, and within a year she returned to another brother's home (Family legend has it that she managed to get into arguments with everyone in the neighbourhood, including the paperboy).

Then I moved in with my aunt and uncle, who had two daughters. I lived in their house as a sister to my cousins. Although my father came for dinner almost every weeknight my aunt and uncle were definitely in "loco parentis". Thus, my relationship with my father was almost non-existent. Even though it was an odd situation where my father came

every night for dinner and then left, I still had a living parent which was better than not having any parents.

During this period, my father was quite overwhelmed by my mother's family telling him what was best for me. I do not remember even seeing my sister for several years. It is possible that I have blocked the whole thing out.

I stayed with that aunt and uncle for six years then moved in with another aunt and uncle when the first set moved to Florida. My father was still alive at this time and continued to come for dinner each weeknight. The aunt I lived with at this time had her own problems. She was not encouraging and actively tried to build a wall between my sister and I. Through all these moves I learned to adapt. "You know that you are the outsider so if anyone is going to change their behaviour, it's going to be you. You need to learn to adapt to others' wishes."

When my father died I was twelve, my sister fought to build our relationship. I left my aunt and uncle under very difficult circumstances and went to live with my sister, who had three children of her own. We are extremely close to this day. My father did not remarry after the death of my mother. I think he was quite a man for the ladies. He dated on those nights he didn't come for dinner. He was also probably becoming ill at the time, since his death followed six years from arteriosclerosis.

Between the ages of six and twelve I was pretty oblivious to the loss of my mother. I was cared for well and had my cousins for company. I certainly knew that I did not have a mother, and knew that adults always treated me extra kindly, "poor child, you know her mother is dead". I remember the cleaning woman they had always being extra nice to me (the orphan) and always knowing that I was living in someone else's house. I

was very close to my aunt and uncle and I don't think even recognised that my relationship with my father and sister should have been different. The Family replaced individual need, I guess, except for rare lonely times.

Between the ages of thirteen and eighteen I didn't have many close relationships. I was aware that I lived in others' homes. I had very few friends. My father had just died. There's nothing like having your father die at the very beginning of adolescence anyway, which is such a difficult time for all of us. My father died and I was living in yet my third environment. Well, as I said my father had come for dinner every night of my life until that time, and even though I was living again with other, in other people's homes, I had that consistency. Now I had no one who was mine, so to speak.

I had a very negative body image at this crucial time. I am built much like my mother (constant battle with weight and a big chest) and the aunt I lived with was tall and thin and very androgynous looking, probably not the ideal mother figure. She had a lot of image problems, and self-esteem problems of her own. She was very critical of my body, once commenting that a heavy period like mine was not "normal." Also, I had major complexion problems. I think I pretty much hated everyone and myself too. I was aware of being the outsider.

My mother was one of nine children, sisters, who were very close. My mother was the oldest and the first one who died and all the sisters wanted to put an oar, so to speak, into raising the orphan child. So instead of having one set of people who were both supportive and yet corrective when necessary as most parents are. They love you, want you to grow, but when you do something wrong or inappropriate then it's their job to have to correct that. So I had a number of people who were doing that and no one who

was just there for me. The milieu in which we live right now, divorce and single parenthood is very normal. But quite frankly, in the 50s and 60s it was not a normal thing not to have your parents. It was another way of standing out. You don't have your place in the world, I guess, is the best way to describe it. You are always aware that you live in other people's homes, even if they're very loving and good. Certainly it was nothing like abuse or anything like that, but if you're a sensitive child I think you always know you're the one who doesn't belong. Even if you try you can't make it better. Being an orphan to me I think is not having your place in the world.

When you don't have your own parents there are very few people from whom you get direction or that firm love. My grandmother did, but I only saw her on weekends, my mother's mother. In addition to all of that, because we were a Jewish family living in the suburbs, and there were only two Jewish families in our entire area, I went to a school of 2,000 people and there were two Jewish children. So there again is something else that sort of singularises you.

My grandmother told stories. We used to say, "Tell me a story." And she would tell a variety of stories from when her children, that is, all of our parents, were children. She would say, there was the time E. did this, there was the time L. did this, and there was the time A. and your mother went here. She would tell stories about them, their childhood, I guess the next generation is always very fascinated by stories of their parents as children. That was one way I heard stories about my mother's childhood. And all nine of these children were growing up during the depression and as first generation Americans and so there were funny stories and sad stories and, so they lived in a small town in Pennsylvania so it was kind of like the "Waltons" but with an immigrant flavour.

I think you always become “the child whose parents are dead” as part of your identity. And I identify very much with, a child’s book called Scent of the Roses and the author is Aileen Lesley. It’s a mystery story for teenagers I think, but the protagonist is a child of I think 10, and her parents are dead and she’s been taken by someone, I think a relative or friend to live with. In fact she’s brought here to Pittsburgh to live which is why, the reason the book was given to me was because the author, Aileen Lesley used to be a reporter on the Pittsburgh Press. The book was very powerful for me. I got it when I was maybe 13 or so, and the last line, very central to the mystery, is the fact that the child’s parents are deceased and they don’t know what is happening, or what happened to them. The last line of the book says something like, “My mother died when I was six years old and I will always be very alone.” And when I read that I thought, “That’s me.” When I read Hope Edelman’s book again it was the same, the exact kind of identification with the things that I underlined. It does become a part of your identity. Not only it’s the way other people think of you, it’s the way you think of you. I must say that the word orphan was never used in our family or by anybody that I knew. First of all because it’s rude, and second, it just wasn’t used. And I, although you know your parents are dead, I never associated with the word orphan, which is kind of dumb because I’m really a very verbal person and I should have made that. But when I was getting married my sister came in one night. She was laughing hysterically and I asked her what was so funny. My sister replied, “I’ll tell you but it’s the kind of thing that could make you unhappy if you don’t see the humour in it.” And I said, “You know I’ll see the humour in it.” She said one of our aunts had called her and said she couldn’t come to my wedding and her comment to my sister was “I so wanted to be there when that little orphan got married.”

And I said, "Oh my God, we're orphans!" She said, "I know, I never thought of that before." It was a very sweet thing for her to say, she so wanted to be there for the orphan, but then I didn't know I was one. I never used that label (laughs). I didn't use the word that is commonly used in society.

My relationships with peers in high school were few and far between. I was a loner in that time period. Anytime there was anything at school or Sunday school that called for parental involvement I felt my differentness. This includes parent days (introducing my aunt to teachers) and events when parents worked with the class (Sunday School breakfast for the Confirmation Class). I'm sure my aunt felt equally different as the only "non-parent" who attended. It did not help that I was one of three Jews in a school of thousands. When I was eighteen I went to live with my sister and brother-in-law and everything in my life turned around. From the time I left my aunt and uncles and then went to college, I had more self-confidence and self-esteem, related well to classmates and roommates, and got married. Once I was more comfortable with myself, I was more comfortable with others.

The turnaround was dramatic, almost like being given a miracle drug because my sister was the one who never hesitated to talk about my mother. In fact she always made a point of talking about mother and dad and about and telling me things about herself which if I had talked about myself I would have said the same thing. From that I gained a sense of identity that I was both related and connected to someone because we're very alike. And also now it was okay to talk about it and to ask questions. Although I think I didn't really ask a lot of questions to start with. I just listened to what she said in drips and drabs and kind of filed it all away, because the learned behaviour of not discussing it

was very strong. As a matter of fact it was sort of startling really to hear her talk about it at first. I think that my connection with her gave me a sense of belonging and also of self-esteem. She and my brother-in-law went out of their way to always be exceptionally supportive and positive about things and praised and they knew how to raise kids with good self-esteem and of course I was so much younger that really it was almost to them like raising another child.

Whereas the aunt and uncle that I had lived with all those years were good people and good hearted, had their own problems and were very critical people. And so the sense of everything that was wrong when I was with them was a sense of everything right when I was with my sister. For example, I have always had a very heavy menstrual period and the aunt that I lived with well she had no problems, no pain. She never had any children and had a very, almost masculine physic, and very flat chested. And just had no, very little female aspect or qualities. And she said to me once, I've never known anyone who had a period like you. Then I was with my sister once and she made the comment, oh well, having my period for six days is a good month. I replied- Oh, I'm like that too. I've always had a period like that. It's perfectly normal. That's the way we are. There was nothing wrong with me, was what she was saying.

Being with my sister gave me a different sense of self. When I was a teenager my sister said we're both built exactly like mother and we carry a little bit of too much weight in the same place that my mother did. Whereas this aunt was very, very thin, very angular, sort of. My mother was much more "softening" is the word in Yiddish, which means touchy, softer. So I thought there was something wrong with me, but as my sister



phrased it, we're both built like mother and that's a good thing. She gave me a sense of where we came from and built on it.

Between the ages of twenty-five to fifty I noticed that both my sister and I approached and then passed the age at which our mother and then our father died we had hard years, watching one another carefully for signs of illness, taking extra care of each other. We are very aware that every year is a gift. My relationship with my husband has always been a close one, but as I approached fifty and began dealing more with feelings about mother loss, I feel he knows me better than ever.

Other significant losses in my life include my father's death when I was twelve. My father had not been close so his death didn't mean much in the day -to- day arena, except for the knowledge that I was now truly an orphan. It caused my sister and me to become close, which was healing and wonderful for both of us. Between the ages of sixteen and thirty, most of my surrogate parents (one aunt, two uncles) died. And between the ages of forty and forty-five, both of my husband's parents, to whom I was very close, died. I think I have coped okay with each of these, because none of them was as bad as the first losses of my mother and father. I compare myself to children of divorced parents, who no longer have to worry about the worst happening because it already has.

Looking back at what helped my cope with the death of my mother was probably all of the family around, moving me into a household with other children and the relative stability of the situation (with my father at least always around) which helped me cope in childhood. Nothing much helped me in adolescence when I was very aware of my difference from others.

What I think would have helped me deal with the loss of my mother, but I missed, was if my relationship with my father had been a real one, rather than abdicating his parenting to others, albeit a "couple". It would also have helped if others had talked about my mother. One of the things that strikes me about this, is that NO ONE ever mentioned my mother (not my father, my sister, my aunt and uncle or cousins, grandmother, or teacher). It is as though by not mentioning her, I would not notice that my mother was not there.

It's hard to figure out how you felt when you were a child. I'm not sure that I could have verbalised that when I was that age, but as you get older you think, what's going on here? Do they just think I'm stupid. But of course, understand I didn't mention her either. So you kind of learn when nobody else will talk about that fact, you can't talk about it either because it's obviously a forbidden topic. My grandparents and my mother's sisters spoke Yiddish because that was the language they spoke when they were children. Normally they spoke English, but when they didn't want the kids to understand they would lapse into Yiddish. Anybody who has immigrant parents knows that because maybe they don't want the kids to know where (the chocolates) are, whether they're Norwegian, Danish, or whatever. In our family, whenever they didn't want the kids to hear things, they would speak Yiddish. But I learned, I don't know when I learned the words for (sounds like: "sharte") is dead, so I always knew when they were, we'd go someplace and they'd be talking to the other people and they would always say about me, the mother and father are dead. And I knew what they were saying but of course you always have to pretend like you don't understand. I never talked about my mother either.

As an adult, of course I realise that since my mother was the eldest of nine children and usually referred to as the “heart” of the family, it is likely that they didn’t talk about my mother because of their pain. But, it would have helped me. I believe that I did not bond to an adult female until I became close to my sister, when I was about sixteen. I was cared for and close to my aunt, and other caretakers at various times, but it was not a bond.

The first aunt and uncle that I lived with, that was 6 to 12, my mother died and my father didn’t want my sister and my brother-in-law burdened with a child. And for those six years when my father came every night I don’t think I saw my sister more than six times a year, at family things. And then when my father died we got reconnected and the trouble was that my sister had been left as my guardian, that is, my legal guardian, according to my father’s Will. But I lived with the aunt and uncle, which is kind of like being given a job with none of the power and responsibilities to do the job. And unfortunately as I said before probably these people should never have had children in their life. My aunt used to say things to me like, someday we’re going to have to go in front of a judge and you’re going to tell him that you want to stay with me, not with your sister. She kept implying that my sister would go to court. That was a horrible thing to do to a child who only had one real blood connection and my aunt was in her own way so insecure that she fought to cement her place in my life by doing that. If she hadn’t I probably would have been very, very close to her and she would have had the equivalent of a daughter. But because of the approach she took, I could not wait to leave and go be with my sister. And my sister watched what was happening. It was, I think she didn’t want to, it was hard to know what to do, what would be more disruptive, so to speak. I

stayed there (with aunt) for six years. My sister and I were getting closer and closer and spending-it would get to the point where I would go to her house on weekends instead of my grandmother's. And of course I was moving through adolescence too, you know, all that kind of stuff.

I don't feel that the loss of my mother has affected my ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships now, although it did when I was younger.

As a parent I am aware of the need to live to be around for my children. I think I overcompensate with them. I tend to be controlling, a legacy from having no control over my own life, but I am aware of the tendency and to moderate it. I am a good mother, and often tell my children and my husband that I love them. No one said this to me as a child. The loss of my mother has fostered a sense of independence in me because of the knowledge that I am a survivor. Like most characteristics there's both a positive and a negative. I have learned to take care of myself, not to depend only on others. I have a good education. I've got a good job. My husband right now for example is doing engineering consulting. He is in Chicago four days a week and of course our children are grown now. There are a lot of women, I think, who are not able to be as independent as I am in regards taking care of themselves. I've always thought that no matter what, I will always be able to take care of myself. The way I describe it to my husband is, together we're better, but by myself I would be okay. When you have been dependent on others and it's not comfortable then you learn that you must learn to depend on yourself. Probably the weakness of it is, if you're too independent you can be really obnoxious (laughs). Another strength is I told myself that if I had children, I would live. I would make sure my children had a mother through a reasonable age. And that means you take

care of yourself, you pay attention to your health, and you don't take foolish chances. Also you make a pact with yourself, I will be there for my children. It's not to say that I blame my mother, I don't. Maybe I did when I was a child. I'm sure that's the way a child responds. To be without parents is so hard on a child that if you're going to have them you're making a commitment to try your very best and to be aware of how lucky you are to be with them. And I have told my children a couple of times, when I was your age my mother had been dead this long, my father had been dead this long. Of course they can't appreciate that. That's good. But I'm aware of it.

Also I have an ability to adapt to and work with almost any group of people. I am so used to making my self "fit in" that I do it without thinking or angst. I find this very useful in work and social situations. I find it difficult to say how the loss of my mother has been integrated to create a more meaningful life. It's a hard one because who's to say whose life is meaningful or not? I know that I am a hard worker and ridiculously loyal to those who are supportive of me. As a result, I am often more supportive of others than the average person. I am a creative and a good writer. I write within my profession a lot, and teach. I use my writing and people skills to help others achieve their objectives. Some of this writing talent is undoubtedly because, as a child, I buried myself in my books. I also tend to "obsess" over thoughts of my sister dying and leaving me completely alone. I realise that everyone fears the loss of a sibling, but because we lost our parents at young ages and my parents were young when they died, I think this is worse for me.

As I got older and got married of course I developed my place in the world, so in that sense, I was no longer bereft, so to speak. I had my own. But in all honesty I can't say that it got much better. The mother part is the same. The lack of a mother part is still

difficult, especially when you have your own children which you know your parent would have liked. Also my husband's parents showed me what it was like to have parents. For me it never really got better, you simply adjust in different ways that's all. You make your own place. And every year when we go to memorial services on the holidays, my sister and brother-in-law and I sit together always. I fall apart because there's a particular portion of the prayers that you read talking about your mother or your father. And my sister's just as bad. And this year my mother's been dead 45 years and we look at each other and say why isn't this getting any easier?

## CHAPTER VI: CASE STUDY THREE

### Carol's Story

Carol is a single, thirty-five year old woman with a Master's degree in Community Social Psychology. She works as a Drug Treatment specialist. Carol's mother died when she was seven years old. The following is an account of Carol's story.

My image of my mother is that she was a young, petite, joyful and progressive woman, who took heart in raising four children. She was a registered nurse so she was educated. She was also well cultured and travelled. She was very private according to some family members, as well as eccentric. I recall her warmth and patience with presence comfort and me when I experienced nightmares. I also have an image of her being a humanitarian.

The most salient memory I have of my mother is lying next to her in her big bed one night when I couldn't sleep. I crawled into her bed and I felt as though life was so peaceful. I think I must have been five or six years old.

On my mother's death certificate it says, "metastases/coma cancer of the colon." My mother died after being in the hospital for three months and in a coma for one week. She died only three years after my father so I think she died of a broken heart. That's what I was told by one of my aunts, my godmother, who was a very dear friend of my mother as well. She told me that because my mother was very much in love with my father and he died before her, and just having four kids, it was like having one of the legs of the ladder broken. Obviously, medically, she died of colon cancer, but how do you get colon cancer? By not taking care of yourself, by not eating properly, and so forth. And how does that happen? Because of depression and so on. And why does depression

happen? Because the love of your life is now gone. I think that ultimately she died of colon cancer, but the emotional explanation was she died of a broken heart. I thought that that was really profound information my godmother told me. Even though I knew it through pictures, I could tell that they definitely loved one another; I could tell.

Friends of the family told my sister and me of our mom's death. They came to our rooms and told us right out: "Your mother died." They woke us up from our sleep and I remember feeling awkward and shocked. My mother died in August. I did attend the funeral, although it's a blank to me. I have no recollection whatsoever of that day. Within four months my siblings and I were living with my aunt (mother's sister) and uncle and their five children. We moved there at Christmas time. I remember it being a pretty chaotic time. Living with this aunt and uncle, we had our needs taken care of. I remember there was always lots going on with so many children in the house. As a kid it was kind of exciting because there were just so many people in the house. There was a lot of activity. Most siblings got along. I think there was a good harmony. There didn't seem to be any kind of resentment or any kind of distance between any of us. Some of us were closer in age than the older ones. I think the oldest one would have been about in her 20s. And the youngest would have been a year and a half younger than me, so maybe six. I come from a family with an Italian background. In that sense it was part of our culture to be closely connected to extended family which made it a little bit easier to adjust.

At first, as a young kid, I bonded very quickly to my aunt and I felt okay with trusting. She was a very emotional woman, very Italian, boisterous. But it's very hard to go back and think about what my relationship might have been. I think I bonded very



well and I think I kind of just did things to not get in trouble, and did my share of responsibilities.

Between the ages of six through twelve I was detached, hyperactive and very hard to attach to. I felt like it was easy to make friends but I didn't let anyone get too close. I tried to release my stress, anger and confusion through sports.

Between the ages of thirteen through eighteen I rarely thought about my mother. In retrospect I believe I repressed my thoughts and didn't allow my mother to surface. This created tension in my interpersonal relationships with both friends and family. Of course there was my rebellious years, in adolescence, but for the most part, it was the ups and downs that any kid would normally go through. I felt estranged at some points, real bitter and angry at other points. However, now as an adult 37-year-old woman I look back and I say "wow" it was pretty good considering the circumstances. I don't think I had any major blowouts. Obviously there was some fighting, but I can't think of anything that got me too riled. My aunt supported a lot of the things I did as a child. She also encouraged my participation in sports. I think by feeding off of that need for approval from her kept me on the right track.

They're like my second parents today. Very much a family unit. It was just a matter of transfer over, a mother figure, basically. Not that I called her mother. I called her Aunt Sophie, but it was a gap long enough for me to refer to her just as my caretaker at that point. It continued up until I left for college when I was 18.

I got into sports. It really relieved a lot of whatever was going on for me. I still feel that there's some residual anger even today, and I'm not able to appropriately deal with anger constructively. Sports have always been my outlet and it always was. I think

the fifth grade was when I played my first team sports. I was always athletic before my mother died, as a kid, tomboy type. Sports were a way to channel that anger in an appropriate fashion. I got the approval from my peers and I was a very good athlete. I did kind of alienate myself and I didn't want to get close. I didn't want to get into it. Not that I didn't have my friends, but I always felt separate because of what had occurred, and I knew that I had an aunt and an uncle instead of a mother and a father, whereas everyone else had a mother and a father. That, to me, made me feel separate. I tried to compensate for that through sports and I really did well, and I gained the approval of them based on that level. I still have very meaningful friendships from high school today. But at the time, I kind of maintained my wall, my defence, for fear of having loss occur. I think it started early. It actually probably started developing right away, before the age of high school. The fear of getting close was probably more paramount throughout high school.

I think that it started to show itself more as friendships got deeper, relationships, maturity, and then adolescence, things of adult nature. When you're a kid, I don't know whether or not you can talk about it, because people don't know what it is. I think it started developing between 7 and 10, 11, 12. You start becoming more social. This is my home and these are my neighbours. I had friends, but I developed my forte in work, via paper routes and sports. In an effort to protect myself from getting hurt, I got more involved in doing things than being in relationships.

My relationships with peers throughout high school were somewhat turbulent, distant and judgmental. I didn't socialise with any of them, nor did we discuss thoughts, feelings or attitudes concerning death. I felt like I went through high school alone, rather than intimately. I played sports, so that was my level of socialising. I don't know how

deep I could have made my friendships because my defences were high. There were times in my life when I felt different from my peers as a result of being motherless. Since the age of seven onward, I always felt different on Mother's Day, at mothers and daughters banquets, and when people just talked about their mothers.

My oldest sister, who was 14 when mother died, passed away at 17 due to drug related causes. Her death continues to haunt me and I feel I was not there for my sister when she needed me. I think my current choice of profession is related to this fact. Her death affected me a lot. I was 17 when she died and I was so wrapped up in my teenage activities, basketball, softball, and doing things a teenager did without having any kind of feeling for family members. My sister was going through a major problem area in her life, obviously, being 14 when her mother died and kind of being semi- responsible for three younger siblings. It must have been extremely traumatic for her. But I don't think I appreciated it at the time. I looked up to her as an older sister, while she was an older sister, but tended to lose respect for her when she chose the wrong path in life. I think as a result of that, I abandoned her and I have a lot of guilt about that, because I don't feel like I was there for her when she needed it. I was 17 and didn't know a lot, but I still feel I was old enough to have not been as self-centred. Or maybe I was in denial of what I was doing. I was probably in major denial and was trying to do just like I said survive by myself and not wanting to look at the issues. I had a very good relationship with her, and I feel very sad that she's gone now. I mean, my profession is based on her. There's no doubt in my mind that I've chosen this as a result of that. I decided to join the Peace Corp. My parents had served their country in the military, but me being more pacifistic and not wanting to pursue a military career, I did the Peace Corp., which is just as good,

servicing the country. Joining the Peace Corp was my way of following in their footsteps, wanting their approval even though they're dead. I'd say many, many, many, maybe 80% of the choices I've made in life have been a result of my parents. My current profession is now as a result of the nature of my sister's death. Guilt is really predominant. It's not as much as it was. I know a lot of that is irrational; I couldn't have had anything to do with any of their deaths, but it still doesn't resolve it in my head. It probably always will influence my decisions. There's no doubt in my mind that it will. I don't know to what extent, or what capacity I'm going to allow it to, because there's been times that I've said, I've got to let go and move on. I have three guardian angels, watching, guiding and helping me make choices in my life.

Between the ages of 19 to 24 I found my defences were high and I rarely took risks, intimate risks where commitment was concerned. I preferred the "free spirit" lifestyles at this time in my life. I made close friends but liked solitude more and more. I think I acted out rebelliously in many ways as well.

Between the ages of 25 and 35 I noticed that my three intimate relationships ended due to my inability to commit and/or deal with rejection. I am single, date infrequently, enjoy living alone and do not like to commit. I fear that growing old with someone will threaten my individuality and produce a dependency in my thinking and behaving that is not in my character.

I still love sports and use sports as an outlet. Obviously I'm better at communicating and developing more meaningful relationships without that fear and I take more risks, now, than I did. But still, the anger problem, I'm still working on. I don't know where it comes from. I think it's definitely somewhere, somehow, something to do

with the losses. But because my anger is real, it gets very powerful. I have my moments in terms of being involved in an intimate relationship. What I don't like happening now is having people leave me. I would rather do the leaving. For instance, when people come to visit me, it's really hard to have them leave. I would rather do the visiting so that I can leave. I'm single and I live alone. It's by choice, obviously. It's definitely still impacted me, but I'm at least a little bit more aware of it. I'm educated enough to know how those things can affect one's life.

I think at age 7 I felt that I did something to cause my mother's death. I know that's irrational today, but it's still a thought that continues to penetrate. I've had a lot more losses in my life besides my mother. I feel like there's a curse. So getting close with somebody, if there's a love there, it seems almost as though there could be the potential for loss or they'll leave. The whole idea of commitment was my way of protecting myself from not committing so that I wouldn't be able to feel the love. But I've gotten through the commitment issue. I think I can get over that. But I still have the fear of rejection, which is a very common. It's that feeling I always take into relationships. I am able to commit to more now but I still fear the rejection. I always have that but it doesn't keep me from at least going out and trying. I realise that staying on the sidelines and keeping safe is not gonna get me any love in this world. Now it takes a lot for me not to resort to that old behaviour. This shift has occurred over the last couple of years. I did a lot of thinking when I was overseas, from '91 to '93. When I got back in '93, I was single and didn't have any interest in anything but work, work, and work. I think the last year and a half, I've really said, no. I'm getting older. I'm getting older, this is not a way, I don't have to protect myself so much. So I started taking a little bit more control over my life

as opposed to having the loss of my mother or my father control me. What has occurred in my past doesn't necessarily have to ruin my future. 'Cause my old patterns need to be broken. It just seems really ingrained. So I've had to work a lot on changing those beliefs.

I also lost two cousins who were part of the extended family, after my mother's death. One died by suicide, the other by murder. My Uncle Charlie, my mother's youngest brother, passed away as well. There is no doubt in my mind that my attempts to cope with these, as well as other deaths, have been affected by both my parents' deaths.

The loss of my mother has affected my feelings toward my siblings, but I am not sure how. We are probably closer as a result of the trauma we encountered. After the death of my mother, I admired my second and fifth grade teachers, but I don't think I was capable of developing a special bond to them. I feared attachment and just admired them from a distance. The swift transition to my aunt and uncle's house with all of my siblings helped me cope with the death of my mother in childhood. In adolescence, basketball and other activities such as work and school helped.

I feel that counselling may have helped me with my confusion and sorrow a bit more. I didn't think attending the funeral was a big deal because I didn't know what it meant. If someone had clarified its purpose, I don't think I would have developed a growing sense of rugged individualism at an early age and a mistrust of other. This is a big issue for me. That probably tops anger in terms of an issue for me. I trust myself completely, but I don't trust others. It's usually the reverse that happens with people . . . or naïve people who will trust others before they trust themselves, and it's the reverse for me, because I know me. I'm the only person I can really feel comfortable in trusting. There are levels of trust I have with real close friends and family members. The basic

trust issues concerning love and intimacy, commitment, and abandonment—now that's where it gets shaky. And the rugged individualism is, you know, I've done well for myself despite what happened. And that's where I say if I waited for other people to come through for me, it wouldn't have happened or I wouldn't be where I am today, and all that. So I back it up with facts on what I've done. I've pursued and I've gone out to make the most for myself as a result of trusting my own abilities, as opposed to waiting and for someone else to come through. Which is not to say that there haven't been people who have assisted me. And I can trust some individuals with some things, but I don't trust all individuals with all things.

I mean, not that I haven't let myself down at some time. Of course I have. But if I want something to get done, or I want to accomplish something, I just have to choose to do it by myself, as opposed to relying on someone else. This affects my relationships. It takes so much time. Sometimes people don't want to wait around, or they get tired of my slow approach, but that's the way I am.

I think the kind of mother I would be is overprotective and cautious. I think I would communicate with my children at a very early age and would possibly fear their growing sense or need for independence and that would confront my own loss issues. Perhaps this latter issue is why I have chosen not to have children.

I feel the loss of my mother has fostered independence, self-reliance, and freedom to choose my own path in life. I feel that my parents influenced my decisions in some ways, such as perseverance and good health habits (for fear of dying young and of the same diseases my parents did). As for being able to integrate this loss into my life in some positive way, people tell me that I have, but I feel I have a chronic depression that

others do not see. I also feel as though there is a love loss that affects me daily and at times when anniversaries or holidays arise. I think I am successful despite my losses, but am not successful in terms of intimate relationships. I fear loss and I have a grudge against my parents. I would like to find an appropriate therapist to help me sort out unresolved grief and loss issues associated with both my parents and my sister. I would like to discover to what extent early loss has impacted my personality traits and characteristics so that I can begin to comprehend whether these can be changed and whether these behaviours are the result of my nature from birth.

I have sought counselling for depression, other deaths, break-ups, and vocational/career issues. I wanted somebody that really specialises in bereavement and grief work. It seems like most people are generalists today and they'll say, well I'm a licensed clinical social worker. However, I'm a generalist, I don't specialise in that, but I know about it. I've read a few books, I've taken a couple of classes. To actually find somebody who's a thanatologist that really deals in grief is difficult. There are a few, because I've been to conferences that have specialised in bereavement and loss, but not around here. I did find one, but we didn't click. There was something missing, or I found that she was focusing more on her own grief issues and I was just trying to get a feel for my own. I've been learning that there are not a lot of people that specialise in this field. So I'm trying to find somebody. It's not like when you find a doctor who's an internist, or you find someone who's a paediatrician. A specialist within the doctor's medical field is very different. I would call and ask do you deal with grief and loss issues? They would allude to the fact that they knew something about it but didn't specialise in it. But I've since lost that notion. I figure that the great force that needs to be done is with me, and I



could do it with any counsellor. It's just what issues come up for me in the process. So it's worked itself out since I wrote that, but I was really looking to talk to somebody and it was a very important part of my development. I wanted somebody who literally knew what they were doing, who could empathise, who could really suggest and who could make observations based on expertise. People have written books on the subject. I even took the time to write to the authors.

I wanted that empathy. I wanted that insight. I wanted that counsellor to know the issues, what happens, and what some long-term effects of early mother loss are. Not a lot of people know it as trauma. I never considered it trauma, but the more I think about it, I think it was. It certainly wasn't treated as a trauma when I experienced it. The people who took care of me and dealt with my siblings and me at the time didn't consider it a trauma (back in '67 or '68). So I don't know if it's even considered now, approximately 30 years later. If it is considered a trauma now, what does that mean? Does that mean there was something? Those are the kind of questions I was really trying to find an answer for. So that's what it was. I was really focused on knowing. I don't know what it was. I think it was maybe the book, Motherless Daughters came out. There was a lot of literature that came out and the more I read, the more questions I had. That's why I said, I have got to see a specialist. All of a sudden you find out that you've lived through something and it's in the literature, it's important, but you've lived through it, and it's like, well, I've lived (it) and didn't get treated for it. What does that make me now? How does that affect me?

Especially when you have other women who are responding to a similar situation and you can kind of nod your head and say, yeah, that's exactly it, or nod in agreement

and say, yeah, that makes sense, then you want to say, well, how have they been working through it. And you become more inquisitive. My sister, for instance, she doesn't want to have anything to do with it. She feels she has her own experience and doesn't want to know about other people. She doesn't really get into the same inquisitive issues I do, how the death affected us. She just lives her life and goes on. Totally different orientation from what I have. It's different for each sibling, and gender, and age.

Today my mother, father, and sister are still a positive influence. When I feel down and depressed, a little gloomy—whether it's Christmas or their anniversary, there are times I feel down, I get so angry. This is a specific time in my life I'd like to have them there, but usually there's usually a good feeling, having their presence in my life. It's not like I want to get rid of them totally. I try and remember their lives in a good light. I grieve when I can, and I have pictures around the house. I have a lot of their furniture still, that I hold onto. For the most part it's positive. It hasn't always been that way. I think the choices I've made have been healthy choices. I guess one could make unhealthy choices as a result of the legacy of their deaths. But I've made healthy ones, so I feel good in that respect. But I'm always going to wonder whether or not my life would have been different had they not died. Whether choices would have been different if I'd felt differently about them. So, that's just always going to be a question.

I wonder about the impact of my early losses versus what characteristics I was born with. That's always going to be a question. Would I have this much determination or will power and so forth, had they not died? Would I have gone as far as I did in school? Would I have chosen the military versus the Peace Corp.? Would I have been real rebellious? I question that all the time, but then I say, well, that's not what happened.

This is who I am. This is where I've been. This is what occurred. I do wonder how much of my character was developed or got altered as a result of those things occurring versus how much is natural. It's not just what we're born with, it's our environment. So that's what I'm saying, that I'll never know, but it's an interesting inquiry that I have for myself.

The chronic depression I have experienced is getting better too. I don't think it's as bad as it was in my 20s, because I'm taking a nutritional supplement that seems to be helping. But there are certain times during the year based on who passed away, the different anniversaries that come up at different times of year, different holidays, when it might set in. I do think that I might have more; as opposed to calling it depression now I call it melancholy. I have just that melancholy existence. Not that I don't feel happy and I have my moments, I do, but it's just this sense of melancholy. It's not as intense. I mean there are some days where I feel up and great, and then there are other days where it's full-blown and I'm just spent. So even on those happy days, I'm still reminded. But I do enjoy days I am able to be happy. That's great. But I think that there's this undercurrent, this constant varying in greater or lesser degrees of that feeling.

How I cope with the pain depends. Currently I have healthy approaches. I might just take a mental health day. Sometimes I go for a walk. Sometimes I drum, I listen to music, or I write. Sometimes I pray. I call a friend. I go seek therapy. Sometimes I just cry, and then there times when I haven't done all those healthy things. It's been very destructive. I could act out, I could hurt people, if I punched kids when I was a kid. I'm sure that was displaced anger. I didn't identify it as depression, but it could-there was anger coming out. So, obviously I've re-channelled that and I've learned to deal with that

in a more healthy constructive way. So depending on my mood, and depending on how intense it is, it could be something as small as calling somebody and talking about it. Or it could be just a journal entry. But if it's really severe, sometimes I just need to sleep. In the last few years I'd say there's been a major shift in the way I deal with the pain.

I think it's the profession I'm in, the more I learn about drug abuse and addiction, the less it makes sense. That does not create options. It more or less prevents options. It becomes more devastating. And then I've cried a lot more. I've learned to cry in front of people rather than keeping it in. I still maintain a good healthy diet. I don't overeat or sleep when I'm depressed, I've never really done that. But the shift came as a result of the last step that's happened in my family, the suicide, and I think that really forced me to look at a lot of things and how I related to death. There's only going to be a lot more coming in my life. And I said, look, I can either chose to continue living this way, or I can approach death in a new light. We don't always know why things happen. I can't feel like I'm cursed. Yes I've had my share. I just try to sympathise and comfort myself. Death is just a fact of life and through education, through therapy, through just my own maturing process, I've come to different ways of dealing with it so that I don't act like a 17-year-old kid. You know, woe is me. Yeah, it's not a good break when those things happen, but they occur and it's something I just have to . . . so I've become a little more religious, looking to the spiritual realm for guidance and some answers in that respect.

That suicide was back in '94, no, it was '95. That was one of my aunt's sons. He was like a brother, one of the five that we moved in with. Yeah, there have been a lot of deaths in my family. So that just keeps hitting home. I wonder what it is? Am I supposed

to just live through this life having faced all these deaths? Before my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, three immediate family members died. It was bizarre.

And now that I'm 37, it's a little bit easier because I know more. I've read more. I've been to workshops and talked to people. But then, I start to develop more walls. But I don't want to live like that. I'm not saying it's easy. It's been a struggle. It still is a struggle and it always will be, but at least my attitudes changed about it. It just seems like every month out of the year there's at least one, something to remember.

My mother was in a depression for three years. I'm wondering how that may have affected her parenting. Because I always thought she was available and was there and was fun and did stuff with us. I never knew what might have been. I've learned from people who knew her that she never really showed how much pain she was in. So she was a lot like me. She really knew how to hide her pain well and dealt with it in her own way. I find that learning about my mother, and making those connections to myself, is healing. Going to another parent for information is not something I've been able to do. Although my aunt's full of some information she wasn't right about every little thing. I didn't know her that well.

Obviously this is a lot of information I think that I have that is relevant to this topic. I think it comes throughout conversation as opposed to suddenly thinking, well, what else? Other than how the impact of this loss has affected me and I just don't know to what extent. It's really hard to measure. It's not like a cause and affect issue. I really sometimes I act certain ways and I don't know if it's a result of that or it's just me. That's what's most frustrating for me. So I don't even question it any more. I just am who I am. I've developed into who I am as a result of all circumstances.

## CHAPTER VII: CASE STUDY FOUR

### Connie's Story

Connie is a thirty-one year old married woman. She is a college graduate and currently owns a business. Connie was seven years old when her mother died. The following is an account of Connie's story.

I have no memory of my own, no images of my mother, but pieced together images from photos and from talking with relatives. She was pretty, with black hair and very fair, porcelain skin. She read books all the time and was a compulsive house cleaner. She loved to dance. That's all I know. She seemed to be a type A personality, not laid back like me.

The most salient memory I have of my mother was when she was in the Mayo Clinic for quite some time and away from home. I do have a memory of her falling down the stairs once when she was home for a visit from the hospital and being taken away in an ambulance. My family said it never happened but I swear that mother hurt her hand on broken glass and an ambulance came to the house.

My mother was an alcoholic and died of pancreatitis. I remember lying in bed, early in the morning, waiting for everyone to wake. It was a Saturday. The phone rang and I got up and went into my dad's room. When he hung up the phone, he told me my mother had died. I got under the covers and my dad and I just stayed there for a while. He finally said it was time to get up. He told me not to tell my brother J. because my dad didn't want to upset him before a Little League game.

During the ages of six through twelve I was very independent and in charge of my circle of friends. I was scared they wouldn't like me and afraid they'd leave. I was

popular and would do just about anything for them. I think it kind of goes back from 7 to 12. I was always trying to be the funniest, always trying to—and I still do this in many ways. Always just trying to be the best at what it is. Going overboard where people would say, you did such a great job, I can't believe you went to all that trouble. If I hear one more person say, I can't believe you went to all that trouble! For me it was no trouble. For me it was guaranteeing I wouldn't lose that person's affections. And I was definitely popular in school and I hung out with the popular crowd, but I always felt one step away from losing that. I was in that crowd but I was on just the outer edge. Almost like it wasn't a given that I would always stay in that crowd, so it would make me work even harder to maintain their affections. And I would do that by going overboard.

My father and brother and I were very close. I was afraid my dad would die too, and had nightmares and anxiety attacks. He remarried two years after the death of my mother. My stepmother and I were very good friends. She didn't try to replace my mother and I didn't want her to. We established rules early on and, due to this mutual understanding, got along well. We have grown closer every year. My best friend's mother became very important to me, too. She called me her second daughter.

During adolescence I became involved with boys at a young age. Too young, because I needed attention. My father was working a lot, and his attention was everything to me. I was insecure and sought attention during these years from boys. And as I became an adolescent, when I was able to drive, it became "sure I'd be happy to drive you there, and "no you don't have to take the bus". I was always the good one. As high school parties would go on and kids would be experimenting with drinking, I would never have a drop and I was always the one that would take care of everybody and drive them home.

I was the responsible one. "We could always count on Connie." That's what everyone would always say. I think one thing I definitely regret, is I became interested in boys and sexually active far too young, far too young. And I know there's a direct correlation to not having a mother, because my father wasn't overly affectionate, and kids have so many friends that they're friendly with everybody. If I was able to be with a boy, I was just the cat's meow. Oh, I regret that terribly! I was looking for love I wasn't getting elsewhere. I didn't feel strong enough in myself, who I was, to hold off, to wait, like I would've wanted to. So I started experimenting much too young as a way to gain affection. Because at that age, with teenagers and that type of thing, boys were all hormones and if you were with them, they loved you. If I could get them to say, "I love you," I could say, "I have these boys in love with me," and that just made me feel so good. And then as I got older and realised what I was doing, I was so mortified because you can't take the past back. But I was definitely out on a purposeful mission to be loved by somebody. My father and I have spoken about it recently and he feels that if he had been more affectionate or paid more attention to me, things would have been different. I certainly felt different from my peers as a result of being motherless, on Prom night, first period, mother/daughter events, and on Mother's Day.

Between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four I met my husband to be and I was finishing up college. This was a good time in my life. I established very strong relationships with people, but only with a few people. I was a bit of a loner.

Other significant losses I have experienced include the death of my boyfriend in a car accident when I was nineteen and he was twenty. I didn't grieve or deal with it in any way. I just shut down. Also, I had no feelings when my grandmother died. I don't handle



death well. In relationship to people passing on and not dealing with it, I was so emotional when my boyfriend passed away, but only for a short amount of time. Then I noticed everybody else, including my husband-to-be who knew him for a much shorter amount of time, continued to cry day to day and stayed very upset or very emotional and I didn't. When I went out to the funeral, people said, "wow, you're dealing with it very well." And I thought, "No I'm not, I just don't know how to let it out. I don't know what to do with this." I was extremely close to him but seemed to be one of the only people not responding emotionally. That didn't seem right to me, looking around; I said there must be something wrong with me. But I guess that's just my way of dealing with it. I just, internalise it, or I don't let it out. That's what I mean by shutting down; it's not acknowledging it.

I talked about him and shared memories, but it was more important to me to automatically start talking about the good things, that he died in a very peaceful way and it was a great way for him to go considering the circumstances, and remember this, remember that—always the good things. Whereas other people seemed to be really in touch with how painful it felt. And I don't think that's right. I think that's kind of an inadequacy and it must have been caused by what happened to me at a younger age, not being able to deal with it then. It will be interesting, I haven't had that many people pass away, but now it will be happening more and more because my relatives are getting older. It will be interesting to see if I can deal with it better.

Once my girlfriend called me and said, sit down, I have to tell you something. And she said, "Daddy passed away." I immediately burst out crying, but then almost as quickly as I did kind of sucked it up. So more than anything I would say I felt numb, just

completely numb. Almost emotionless. I remember driving over to her house the days following and leading up to the funeral, but I didn't feel anything, so more than anything it was lack of emotion, lack of sadness, lack of anything.

As I began to mature, taking on adult responsibilities, getting married and so on, I began to become anxious and very aware of the fact that I didn't have a mom. I became jealous of what other people had in terms of mother/daughter relationships. The first time I became aware of these feelings was when I got married, when I was 24. No, it was earlier. It was when I was 18 and went to college. I went away to college and as we were all checking into the dorms, my suite mate who shared my dorm had a mother, everyone had mothers who had come with them. I was the only one out of a suite of four girls who didn't have anyone there. It was hard when I saw the other mothers just broken up over the fact that they were leaving their daughters there at college and going home. That's when I first started having nightmares and I'd get extremely homesick, and I had never been before. I was always very independent growing up. And I think part of the reason is that mothers would call and I'd take the phone calls and say, "I'm sorry she's at the library," or whatever. "Well just tell her I miss her and I'll call her tonight and I just sent her a box of cookies." Those typical college things that I couldn't say I had. So that was the first time that I started to get anxious and I would verbalise for the first time ever. I would say things like, "I can't believe I don't have a mother." Until then it wasn't an issue or a real factor in my life. Then all of a sudden at that point I went, wow! It's almost like being hit over the head with it. Wow, I can see the light. I didn't have a mother, I was different than everybody else. It was the first time it kind of reared its ugly head. Because growing up I was really close to my brother and my father. They filled the void. Then in

college, seeing other girls or women my age interact with their mothers I realised that not only have I never done that, but I never will do that. So I started to become more anxious about “no one will be there for me.”

Then when I went on and got married, when I was 24, it became very evident I didn't know what to do. I'd never been to a wedding; I had nobody to tell me what to do and take me through the steps and say here's my dress and here's my veil, those types of things. I had nothing. So that again was real difficult. How I reacted was that my husband's mother, my mother-in-law, whom I am now extremely close with—I wasn't very open or very friendly to her at the wedding. She wanted to have it video taped. She wanted me to wear her pearls. She wanted to do motherly things. I was not mean to her, but I was not open to it either. Now looking back on it I feel very badly about that, but I think what I was probably doing at that time was not allowing—if I didn't have a mother who would be there, nobody was going to step in and try to make amends. So that was a real big issue also. I would say those were the two major things, entering into adulthood. Very major changes in my life. At those times in your life I think you need your mother, whereas I would try to appear strong for my father, running off to college and saying, I'm an adult now. Getting married was further proof I was an adult. But those are times when you would love to turn to your mother and say, "I'm scared, and I don't know what am I doing?" I didn't have anyone and I was trying to be strong. It would make me very anxious.

How I coped with those feelings at that time was by trying to do everything perfectly and being a real over-achiever. I became overly independent, never being needy. If I wasn't needy, then not having a mother made it easier. After all I'm nearly

perfect in everything I do and I don't need a mother, so even if I had a mother I wouldn't need her. Which is silly thinking. I think I was trying to do everything as perfectly as I could and therefore I wouldn't need anybody, which can get very tiring, trying to be perfect all the time, on your own.

Looking back, I am aware that my family never talked about the death of my mother. I never coped with it until I was almost thirty. I have no memories so anything would have helped me adjust. I believe that attending the funeral, having pictures and talking about my mother would have helped. I don't know. See, the thing that's so odd is I don't have any memory. I was seven. She was out of the house at the Mayo Clinic for an extended period of time. We never visited her. She was sick for a long time, but I mean, if someone paid me a hundred million dollars to remember her, I have no memory. Nothing. I know from fact, from what I heard from my father and from everybody it was a very long, drawn-out process. But as a child I didn't even know she was dying.

Having no memory has really impacted me. It's the worst, just the worst. I see my niece who's now three interact with her mother, and she just misses her terribly when she goes away. They have such a great relationship and my little niece is three and we cite things about her mom and what she was wearing and all sorts of things. Mommy's new hair colour, hair cut, or mommy's car versus daddy's. All these things she knows as fact about her mother at the age of three. And I figure if a three-year-old can remember that and can have a data bank of information in her head about who her mom is, then I should because I was seven at the time. I've seen pictures, not many, but she was there at my birthday. She was there at Christmas. And a few memories have kind of come back, but I think I've built them around the photos, more than anything. But I mean, that's the worst

thing, because I feel like, why don't I remember hearing her laugh? Or remember her swimming with me at the lake, or those types of things, because surely by seven years old I should have some memories, and I don't. And I thought of doing the, what is that? The hypnotic regression, but I was thinking that possibly it's my body's way of, or my mind's way of blocking out. Maybe it was meant to be. So maybe that would be the wrong thing to try to uncover that. So that's been the hardest thing. I wish I had some memory. I was thinking about my girlfriend who just lost her father. I almost said to her, "well, it's almost as if you don't have a reason to be unhappy. You have all these fabulous memories. You've had 32 years with him." And it dawned on me that I don't have the market on feeling horrible. Whether I have no memories or whether she has a ton of memories, the point of the whole thing is that someone very dear to you dies. I realised I couldn't tell her, you have no right to be unhappy. But I'd give anything to have some memories.

The stories I have heard about my mom have come mostly from my father and from pictures. I think I've kind of put together my own little story. I did spend the very first part of my journey; I sat down with my oldest brother. We went out for lunch. And I said I want to know and I've chosen you. Just tell me. He told me things about her. About things I didn't know, that she was a fabulous piano player. And he said it really, really hurt my feelings when dad sold her piano. I said, "God! I can't believe there was a piano in the family and they gave it away and I didn't even know that she played it." And he told me little stories, of how she would go to my other brother's Little League games was always there to yell and call out for him. So I kind of just pieced those together and made my own little inaccurate—but my own story.

I am not a parent, so thinking what kind of mother I might be is a tough question. I am thirty-one years old, and married to a forty-seven year old man. We don't plan on having children but have not made a final decision. I have two dogs that I mother like children. I am great with my two-year-old niece. I am maternal in ways, but too afraid to be a mother.

I am very independent, very confident, responsible, and not spontaneous. I am very controlled as if I am afraid to let go. The death of my mother has been enough of a force in my life to make me a very effective, on top of it, person. I have not been able to integrate this loss into my life in any positive way. My feelings of emptiness caused me to seek counselling. I got individual counselling to deal with the anxiety attacks and to deal with my mother's death. I also joined a motherless daughters support group and relentlessly pursued issues regarding my mother's life and death. This has helped me tremendously.

When I turned 29 I started going on this journey, as I call it, trying to find out more about my mom, meeting my relatives that live on the East Coast, all of those types of things. And it became almost an obsession. I thought I could fix myself if I just knew more about her. I was on a mission to fix myself and it's at that point I went into therapy for a little over six months, started reading that book, "Motherless Daughters," and then joined a support group. As I did that, I realised that here was somebody who did really care for me and thought a great deal about me. She and I started talking a little bit about it because she realised that I was having a hard time. And my husband had told her, you know, Connie's going through this therapy and she's doing this and it's been very painful for her. And she came forward and she said, "I know I can't replace your mother, but I

think of you as a daughter.” So she made the first step-she was there for me and I was ready for her. And it’s been very healing for me to know that even though she’s not my mother she’s someone who I do the things I would hope to do with my own mother. We go out to lunch, and we go shopping when we’re together. We touch each other a lot, a lot of hugs. Things that you would hope to have with a mother. So out of eight years of marriage, only in the last three have we been close.

Until recently my stepmother had only been my father’s wife. Growing up she was never a mother figure to me at all. So starting my journey has been extremely beneficial. Before I did that, I felt like I was going to explode. Talk about anxiety, I was so anxious. And just that constant thinking, it was constantly on my mind, “I don’t have a mother,” over and over. I’d become such a basket case. I was just consumed, from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to bed, that I’m different. I have no mother and in many ways never really had, because I have no memory. Had I not gone on that journey and to therapy I don’t know where I’d be now. The result was I was able to open up to a lot of people, females, and it was really quite a saving grace.

I have to admit the individual therapy, one-on-one, with a licensed psychologist, was the most beneficial. The therapy, the motherless daughter support group was very good for me, but I’m glad I had the therapy first because it’s kind of hard to open up in a group setting, and it took us all session before we were completely comfortable. Whereas one-on-one with the counsellor, she really challenged me, really made me see things. One thing I was doing was putting my mother on a pedestal and thinking that had she lived she and I would’ve been the best of friends and would’ve gone to lunch-we would’ve done all these things. It would have been wonderful. She said, “you really have no idea

because there are women out there with mothers who would love nothing more not to have them." She made me start looking at things a little more realistically, and taking my mother off a pedestal helped too.

At first I got very angry. I took all her photos down. She was a bad mother. So I kind of swung totally the other way. And that's the wrong thing to do. So now I'm seeing her more as someone who had an illness. She drank too much, but she was, from what I understand, a good mother while we were all children. So yes, she wasn't perfect. She wasn't worthy of being on a pedestal, but she wasn't evil either. She never hurt any of us or anything like that. She just had an illness. If she had not died, I realise that probably, knowing me, we still would have had a good relationship. It would have been very good. But I realise that that's not a given; it's not that had she lived, everything would have been perfect. But I did get very angry in the beginning.

This journey has made a real big change for me. When I turned 30 I was finally able to say I was truly happy and truly pleased with whom I am. The year I turned 30 and the following year has been the best ever. Now I've regained a little of my anxiousness and some things like that, but what I did gain from that journey was realising that if I had known my mother, I would not have been a happier person. Wait, that's not right. Not knowing her didn't mean I was deficient. I had to find who I was and know that whether she had lived or not, I would still be who I was. So it made me a little more certain that- it's so hard to explain. I just felt more confident about who I was as a person and didn't need to strive so hard to be perfect and do things perfectly and I realise that if people liked me they had to like me for who I was, not for how well I did things. So it gave me a different sense of confidence. Calmed me down. After going on that journey I calmed



down. I was less anxious, less concerned, and I was able to say well, it's a shame that I didn't have a mother, but it's okay. I was finally able to accept that it was okay.

Also, it was okay in the sense that that was a part of life. I realise that some people had even less than I had. I feel fortunate that I had such a good relationship with my father and my brothers. I was okay with it because I could finally accept the fact that I would never see her again. I would never know her the way I wanted to. I was able to say, that's okay. I can deal with it. So there was more acceptance instead of being so angry at the fact that I grew up without a mother. Instead of being angry, I was able to say that's just the way things are, and you've moved on and you've grown up well in spite of this.

When I started on that journey, I was still the perfectionist and I still was going to do it exactly a certain way. And as I started to take her off the pedestal and see her as a human being, then I think you're right. I did start to become a little more relaxed with who I was and realised that I did have imperfections and that people could accept it or they couldn't and that's just who I was. At that point I started to not try quite so hard to please everybody.

I did not cope very well with anxiety and nightmares. I still have this fixation on people dying, but . . . how did I cope with it? I remember in college having a very vivid dream of my father dying and calling him, and I couldn't get through and kept calling him and kept calling him. Literally sat at the desk with the phone and I must have been there a good solid two hours. Just kept hitting redial every few minutes until I finally got through. When he picked up I started crying when I heard his voice. I said, thank God you're okay, and he said, "Did you have a dream, did you have one of your dreams?" I

said, "Yes, I'm fine," and he flew me home. That's how I dealt with it. I had to go home. Let's see, when I was younger, I remember I was in the hospital. I'd had my appendix out. I got absolutely crazy and the nurses had to call my father down. It was late at night, it was long past visiting hours and they couldn't console me until he came down. And I was just so worried about him dying before I got out of the hospital. It was the same before I came home from college. And he came down and he said I'm only 40-whatever he was at the time. I'm young, I'm not going to die. But they literally had to call him down. So, I didn't deal with it very well or in a rational way. It was a very needy thing. I needed to make sure that that person was okay. And one thing that came out in the support group, the motherless daughters support groups, was that I play out in my mind people, my husband, my father passing away. I see myself there afterward, at the funeral and then afterwards coping with it. I thought that was extremely morbid. The leader said no, it would be extremely morbid if you were going through the way they died. She said that's your way of coping if you experience their death over and over; you feel that when it actually happens, you'll be more prepared. I still do that in my mind. I do feel that I'm preparing myself. If anything, I kind of chastise myself and try to get myself to stop doing that. Especially with my husband, because he's only in his 40s and it's kind of embarrassing that I do that. Sometimes I'll see him afterwards and I'll think, gosh, why do you keep doing this? But as my father gets older and his health is not as great as it was the year before, that type of thing, I keep going through that. It hasn't affected those relationships. I guess in my own way it's just going to help me prepare for it. I don't know. It's just a coping skill. I never discuss it with anybody, with my husband or my

father. Just little scenes in my head happen so that when that day comes I know what to do. I do it over in my head, and by the time it comes, I've already dealt with it.

I don't know how this ties in, but being around my three-year-old niece opens my eyes. I've been close to her ever since she was born. She lives nearby. That has been more and more difficult when I'm with her because I see all these neat little things that she does, both on her own and with her mother. I'm dealing with that a little better. It's just a quick example. The other night, or a couple of months ago, I was over babysitting and we had to take a bath before bed. She had all her little toys and all her little rituals. She had me put this coloured stuff in the water. She was having such a good time and one time she put her head under the water to where her ears were under the water, making this little noise. Her eyes were shut. And I'm sitting there right on the edge of the tub and she's going, mum, mum, mum, mum, mum. And I'm trying to think, what she's doing is she's hearing herself under the water and I wonder what she's hearing. And then she'd come up and open her eyes real big and I said, what is it? Do you hear something funny? She said, yeah, it tickles, because it vibrates under the water. She kept doing that and she was having so much fun and so curious, and at that point I thought, "Wow, did my mother do that? Was she ever sober enough? Did she ever sit at the front of the tub and just get tickled pink over something I was discovering for the first time?" And I thought, I'll never know, and that was really hard for me. And there are things that she'll do now that will make me wonder, not wow, how great for her, for my niece. I'll think, wow, I wonder if my mom ever did that? So that's been kind of difficult and I swear I won't take it out on my niece, it's not her fault. And I'm thinking I'm not going to avoid babysitting her or anything like that, because that's just not fair.

The only other thing is that one of the girls I met from one of the support groups, she and I have maintained contact. We get in touch and we get together about every four months or so. She's having a very hard time and I told her I thought she really needed to do some therapy, that the support group alone wasn't enough. She and I had decided the last time we got together that you don't fix yourself by going through therapy and support groups and reading books. You just get better tools to learn how to cope with the bad feelings that are going to be with you forever. There will be things that are going to trigger it. It's never going to go away. It may be less painful or just different as time goes on, but it's never going to disappear. I really thought I guess by going through therapy and by going on this journey that I would arrive at the other end and I would be cured, never be unhappy again over the loss of growing up without a mother. I think I fooled myself for a little while. That's why the year I turned 30 was so good. What I've come to realise is that it's always going to be with me. It's a part of who I am and I just have to keep updating the tools to deal with it.

## CHAPTER VIII: CASE STUDY FIVE

### Jane's Story

Jane is a single thirty-four year old woman with a college education. Her occupation is in sales and marketing. Jane's mother died when she was seven years old. The following is an account of Jane's story.

"The image I have of my mother was warm and nurturing. I remember her treating the children special when we were sick, or for special occasions, or on ordinary days. When my mother was sick, we were quiet and tried to be good to let her rest. Dad took care of us then. My mother apparently had a great sense of humour, was pretty, and smart. Depression was a problem for my mother which, in those days, (the sixties), was exacerbated by mistreatment of sleeping pills for medication.

The most salient memory I have of my mother is once when I was sick and my mom made a special ice cream shake, she put it in fancy containers to drink it out of, and got out their sterling silver spoon/straws for them to drink it with. This made me feel loved and special.

The night my mother died something woke me up. I thought I heard my mom's voice calling. Shortly after my dad came up the stairs and I went back to sleep. My mom had slipped in the bathroom and fell through the shower glass door. The glass severed her aorta. My dad called on the phone for help and they were on their way but she had already bled to death. It happened quickly. I heard heavy footsteps and voices, which woke me again. It was all the ambulance attendants coming and going. Then I fell back to sleep when it became quiet. In the morning early my dad came into my room to tell me my mom had died. He came in and sat on my bed. He woke me up and told me. Then

there was a little period when we had relatives coming. But we pretty quickly returned to normal. It was like we were not really talking about it. Normal in the sense of just pretending, not pretending, but not really addressing it very much. There was a short period where we had a little bit of out of the ordinary things happening, like a priest coming to meet with us, and going to the funeral. Then pretty quickly we were back in school and after a few months we moved away altogether. It was kind of a quick uproot and transition to life. After we moved we lost touch with my mother's relatives.

Between the ages of seven through twelve I was withdrawn, shy, unsure of myself, different, quiet, cautious, not that interactive with other children. My father remarried approximately two years after the death of my mother. He fell in love with a beautiful, young, talented, bright but emotionally very unstable woman. She was very abusive. They were married about seven years. It took my dad a while to get out of it even once he found out what was going on.

I was able to detach myself. I could feel myself looking down on the situation with my stepmother. I kind of just detached and separated myself from it. And then I also prayed and I also took a lot of strength in the time I had alone when I wasn't with her. I think that's why I enjoy time alone now because it's a relief not to be with someone and having to watch every word I say and having to be perfectly behaved and this and that. It's a relief to be by myself. I had a lot of time by myself when she was around because we were locked downstairs in the house so we'd never see our dad and we only occasionally saw her. We saw her probably every other day or so.

My stepmom didn't let my dad see us. He was also really busy, so often he would come home late and leave early. She was jealous of him spending time with us. As a kid I

didn't really know how things could be different. Also I didn't really know how other kids' lives were. You don't know what normal is, you kind of just deal with what you have. You know it's a little bit unusual but think, "well, this is the way it always is or the way it is with other kids too."

Shortly after this relationship ended, my father began dating a wonderful, kind, and generous woman whom he never married but who lived with us for seven years. After a lengthy separation my first stepmother finally granted my father a divorce. She wouldn't do it for a long time. During their separation my stepmother was living in another state, and my father met B. After he was divorced they had a relationship and she and her daughter moved in with us. Because she and my dad both had had divorces, they weren't anxious to get married again so they never actually did marry, but she was like a mom to us. She was very loving but also structured and disciplined. She gave us a lot of responsibility. She was always getting my dad to try to let us take the car or take a weekend trip or whatever, as long as we acted responsibly.

The impact that B.'s relationship had on me was probably the difference between me being a functioning individual and I don't know, not having been able to make it this far. Like not being able to cope or have a career or just be a lot sicker. She definitely had a big influence. B. lives in another state and has her own daughter but we're friends. If she lived closer we'd do more together and everything but we're both really busy. I don't talk to her that much, but she is still a kind of a mother figure for me.

Between the ages of thirteen through eighteen I felt uncomfortable with forming closer relationships. I was somewhat of a loner, being drawn to motherly, nurturing types and feeling comfortable interacting with them. There were times in my life when I felt

different from my peers as a result of being motherless. Reminders of this came up when we made projects for our moms in school, on parents nights, sleeping over at a friends' houses and seeing friends with their moms, Mother's Day, holidays, and dealing with banks who use mother's maiden name on account forms and for authorisations.

Between the ages of nineteen through twenty-four I had a mother figure in my life. My personality was pretty formed though, so I continued to be slow to develop relationships and get close to people. I was becoming somewhat of a private person.

I had difficulty forming attachments, having intimate relationships, and was fearful of loss. I developed a pattern of being the one to end relationships probably to avoid being 'ended on. I often felt trapped, smothered, stressed and finally couldn't take it anymore. I felt the need to escape, so I would end things abruptly.

Between the ages of twenty-five through thirty-five I started to have a real problem with depression, and all the difficulties it brings. My depression might be genetic. My mom was probably predisposed a little bit. But also I think having early loss, despite how great my stepmom was for us, it just was not the same as having your own mom and so I just I didn't really get close to people. I certainly had relationships but nothing really close. I had the opportunity, but always put a little distance there, so that kind of led to depression because you're isolated. You never really connect in an intimate way with people. I'd feel kind of like there's this world going on and I'm on the outside looking at it, watching it happen, but I'm not really a part of it.

I think what often stops me from having that connection with others relates to not having a maternal bond at an early age. Somewhere when I was in those years where I was just trying to develop an identity, sense of self and those kind of things that you



know, earlier at age 8, 9, 10 and early teens, just didn't have one there for that. I had no one to support me, and no one to give me feedback when I wasn't feeling good about myself. In fact, it was the opposite, the other extreme with my first stepmother.

More recently, I have been somewhat reclusive and less inclined to seek and keep intimate relationships. Thinking much more about my mother and her death lately, I believe this is because I am approaching the age my mother was when she died. The last two years have just been really tough and I wasn't exactly sure why until I did some reading about it and talking to people. I've felt a little bit of doom and really feeling her loss more. Not really feeling whole, partly because of the abruptness of her death and not having any information on her, or her background through all those years. But also approaching the same age my mother was when she died.

Another significant loss I have experienced was the death of my father in a plane crash when I was twenty-seven. This was very, very hard for me to cope with because of the prior loss of my mother. My father's death also represented a lost opportunity to get information regarding the unanswered questions I still had about my mother.

I find I have much difficulty dealing with even seemingly small losses. Such as the end of the relationship even when it is my choice. I have found the loss of my mother has affected my relationship to my father and siblings. I was close to my father. I am a little closer to my older brother because we both remember our mother. My other siblings were too young to remember. We rarely talk about our mother. I hope this will change in the future and that we will become closer.

I don't believe the loss of my mother affects how I interact with others. However, I do study mother/daughter interactions longingly. Just wishing I could have the same

mother and daughter relationship, and knowing that I could never have it. I think that's such a core relationship for a woman is the mother. And I know not always for good. I certainly know women who have a lot of friction with their mothers. I don't fool myself to think that if she was here, we'd be best friends. But it comes up a lot like in movies, or with my friends, or on Mother's Day. There are lots of reminders of what I don't have. Or like when my friends are having babies and I'm just thinking, oh gosh, their mom's so involved. Before it was when my friends were getting married, I'd think, "oh gosh, their mom's are so involved." Moms are big parts of major events and I don't have one to be there for that. Although I do think I would be a good parent. I have had enough exposure to the situation to know that it comes naturally to me and I am thankful for this.

There was a wave a number of years ago with the weddings and now it's the babies. And after a while there'll be deaths. For a long time none of my friends lost either parent. For the first time I have a guy friend who lost his mom a couple weeks ago. So that'll be happening more, too. That was one thing that was really hard, too, was just how unique and different it made me feel to not have a mom because no one else I knew was similar in my classes or anything. It was just really uncommon.

Looking back, I believe it has been my 'inner' strength of character that has helped me the most in coping with the death of my mother in childhood and adolescence. Also, attention from my dad, activities, and some friendly, nurturing teachers helped along the way. The entrance of a warm, loving, generous woman into the family when I was fourteen also made a difference and was significant for me.

Growing up I missed talking to my dad talk about my mother more. Also staying in touch with her instead of uprooting our family only four months after her death and

moving across the country. I have missed staying in touch with my mother's relatives. I stayed out of touch with my mother's relatives after we moved. My mother was also an orphan. I don't know if I understood it correctly as a kid. I just somehow thought we didn't know much about her relatives. But in fact we did know some things. It's just that my dad didn't really keep up with that side of the family. Also, my mom didn't want my dad to know very much about it because she wasn't that proud of her family background. So that was probably why I didn't know very much.

I didn't have any contact with any of her relatives at all. And only in the last year, I don't remember if it happened before or after I sent back your questionnaire, but I did track down and do some research and found out that my mother had a half sister. I followed up with her and went to visit her last year. Now I know much more than I did before, about her family background. That's so important because that's half of me, my mother and her side of the family. I didn't know anything about it. Nothing about grandparents or her growing up or anything like that.

My aunt actually wasn't really very involved or close to my mom, again because my mom put that distance between them and I found out it was because she had a different father than this woman, my aunt. So there was, I guess some shame there. My Mom somehow felt that. But she didn't know growing up. She found out when she was 16. In any event, let's see my aunt didn't have too much information for me. She reminded me how she came to visit after my mom's funeral. She made dinner and I went and hugged her leg and said, you're the next thing to my mom or some funny thing like that. I don't think that my mom was really that healthy when she was alive. She had a lot of down time. I guess she probably suffered from what would now be diagnosed as

depression, but they didn't know it as such then. So they probably gave her tranquillisers, which was ridiculous because that didn't help her at all. I do have some really good memories of her brushing my hair, doing basic things. My dad was really involved too, though, because she wasn't always able to take care of us. There were four of us. I'm number two.

It was what caused me to really try to find out where I could go to find someone who knew something of her. That's where I came to get my aunt's phone number and that's what initiated the trip out there and everything. So all that was a result of how I was feeling, 'cause that hadn't happened certainly before that. It was great to find out more information about my mother. I just ate it up. I wanted to know all I could and, I mean it wasn't all peachy. She was not that happy as a child and young adult growing up. There were a lot of challenges in her life because she lost her mom and then her dad and then she was raised by her grandmom until she was 16 and then her grandmom passed away so then she was adopted and went in a different direction than my aunt. So it was all pretty rocky. I did learn a lot about her. She was very bright, had a great sense of humour, quick wit, and was hard working. I found that she was a nurse, a good nurse, and she also was doing some training for other nurses. I was surprised because I've done training and teaching too. I probably got that from her. I didn't know that before.

Hearing about my mother has had an impact on me and how I see myself. I felt some pride. Pride in that I'll look at pictures and she was small boned and I'm similarly small framed and I know where I came from. I feel a bond with her that way. Also as I heard these stories I learned how she had a similar sense of humour as me. There are some similarities there, so I just feel a bit of a connection. And it also answered some

questions like why didn't she keep up more with her family or at least a couple of relatives that she had? Now I understand more. She didn't even invite my aunt to her wedding because my aunt is very different than my mom. My mom was very refined and concerned what other people thought, while my aunt is much more brash and outspoken. They don't even look alike. They have different fathers and they're quite different from each other. Since they had different fathers my mom actually was conceived before her mom was married. She conceived from another man than my aunt's dad.

I'm finally a place where I let myself connect and become close to someone maybe because I had so much loss already and it can't be worse than that. I've already had some of the biggest ones. Now, if anything else, it should be easier. I have much more of the big picture. But I am still single. My last relationship was not a relationship I should be in, whereas some of the others were potentially something I should have pursued. So I think I'm getting to a place where I can probably have an intimate healthy relationship.

The suddenness of my mother's my mother's death makes it hard I think. Also when it's such a violent sort of end. These things can make it harder too. It's not like she fell asleep and didn't wake up or something. 'Cause kids minds go. I had dreams--I haven't had one for a while, but for many, many years I just would have nightmares about the night of her death. Not necessarily nightmares in the scariest sense but just really bizarre things, like . . . she had this big zipper on her body and from where like she'd been cut but I could go and get in it. You know how when you get in your parent's bed at night, she would let me in there to sleep. It would freak me out at first when I saw it but then it was a good thing. It used to be very unnerving to have that dream and then wake

up. There are times when little things might remind me of her. Her name was Jean, so if I'd meet someone named Jean . . . and things like that.

My dad would answer questions if I talked about my dreams. When he passed away we were going through some of his things and we came upon a box with her obituary. There was also a glass shard in there. It was the one that they'd taken from her, the one that had cut her aorta. So there was a feeling of connection there and it's kind of weird, but it was kind of neat to look at it. My dad would answer questions that we had. He didn't bring it up ever but he would answer, he'd be open to answering questions. I guess we just didn't really ask many questions. We couldn't really ask any for all the years when our stepmom was around. After that we could've. He definitely saw it as in the past. It wasn't really something he ever brought up. I think he just kind of in his own way was dealing with her death by putting it behind him.

I feel the loss of my mother has fostered the development of certain strengths in my life such as independence, strong will, emotional depth, appreciation of life and a deeper perspective on life. I have been able to integrate this loss of her life in a positive way and thus live a more meaningful life. It gives me strength to have survived such losses, an ability to keep things in perspective better and try not to worry about the little things.

## CHAPTER IX: CASE STUDY SIX

### Jill's Story

Jill is a thirty-six year old woman who is married with two children. She graduated with her high school diploma and is currently working as a secretary. Jill was six years old at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Jill's story.

The image I have of my mother is of her being sick all the time. When my mother was well, I remember she would dance around the house. My mother had a strong relationship with my brother who was two years older than I. I also remember my mother rocking and singing to me. She was gentle with me, yet strong.

The most salient memory I have of my mother is my mom dancing with my brother and doing the can-can. I also remember when I was five years old, lying in bed. The priest was there. I felt afraid that I would die with her. My mother died of Hodgkin's disease. My father told all three children at my Aunt's house. I did not cry. Everyone else around me did. I felt I had to be strong. I attended the funeral and still did not cry. My father jumped into one relationship after another. He remarried when I was eight. The woman he married was emotionally unstable. He got my stepmother pregnant, which changed all the children's lives. She was jealous and mean. My stepmother had three children of her own, one on the way and did not want three more.

During the ages of six through twelve I did not have a role model. I did not have a person to listen or comfort me. I felt alone and abandoned. I felt I had been in a shipwreck caused by my mother's death and my father's remarriage, and I was a piece of driftwood looking for a secure island to land on. I also remember I felt I had to be strong

for my sister even though she was a year older. My brother was very angry so I stayed away from him.

I withdrew into books because books gave me a sense of being able to withdraw into another world where I didn't have to face the grief or face the loneliness. Between the ages of six to twelve I was an avid reader. I also withdrew into TV because again it was stories that didn't have any affect on me but was affecting other people. I think that started the basis of really not paying attention to my own problems but paying attention to other people's problems. This pattern began here and lasted through adulthood and just within the last 5 or 6 years, I've been able to slowly realise that I have to look at my own problems and deal with them and not focus on other people's problems as much. I'd want to fix their problems. By fixing their problems, I could keep my problems and feelings of grief away. It was anaesthesia of my own feelings by helping and solving other people's problems. It was a way of avoiding mine. I felt good helping other people and fixing other people's problems, but they never fixed mine.

Between the ages of 6 and 12 I was drawn to mystery books. I was drawn to mystery books because always at the end of the story there was always a problem solved. Whereas with my mom dying, I always felt that it was never solved. She just died. There was no reason why. Looking at mystery books was a way I could solve the crime.

With my mother it was different. I questioned why she died so young. Why my mother and not anybody else's mother. At that time I didn't know anyone else who didn't have a mother. I was the only one in my small little world.

In my adolescent years I found the joy, fear, anguish and excitement, of becoming a woman was more intense and uncertain because I did not have a mother to see me



through that very turbulent time in my life. My relationships with my peers in high school were sometimes difficult because when girls were doing something with their mothers I felt jealous. Also, when my friends complained about their mothers I was angry because they did not appreciate what they had. A specific time when I felt different than my peers as a result of being motherless was when there was a sex education seminar that each girl was asked to attend with their mothers. My stepmother refused to take me so I never got to attend. I felt left out.

During adolescence, my friends were just as clueless as I was. There really was no older adult that I could really turn to. The only one close was my cousin N. who was about three years older than me. I could turn to her and ask her, "What is a douche? What about this? Is that normal? If I kiss this boy, am I pregnant?" She could answer those questions, which she did. I think we had one long night session where she answered questions that I asked. But then she took off. She went to another state to go to college, so that was it. I had one night to answer those types of questions. As far as coping, I turned to books. I learned about sex through reading "The Godfather" and then going to the dictionary and looking up the words. I became really resourceful looking at ways to find the answers. I was very curious. I did not avoid the answers or look the other way or pretend they didn't exist. I wanted to know. I was just careful of whom I inquired because of the sensitive nature of such subjects. The only time my sister and I really communicated about anything about adolescence was one time she woke me up in the middle of the night. We slept in the same room, and she told me to come into the bathroom because she had something really important to show me. I went in the bathroom and I remember trying to get my eyes accustomed to the light because it was

like two o'clock in the morning. She raised her arm to show me the hair underneath it. I'll never forget, because I looked and went, "Yuck! Why did you do that?" She told me it meant she was becoming a woman. I remember thinking, I don't want to be a woman if I have to get hair all over me. Then I asked her, "Does that mean you're going to turn all hairy?" And she said, "No, all the other women don't turn hairy; you just get hair under your arms and you'll get hair down there." I said, "Yuck, you woke me up for this?" And I went back to bed. That's the only time we bonded in that sense. We never talked about sex, we never talked about boys, and we never talked about any of that kind of stuff. I have to also mention here when I was 16 I was kicked out of the house. So my sister and I never really got a chance to bond later in our adolescent years. During the time that we were together I had a very mean stepmother who kept us apart. If we started to become friends she would get very upset and do things to push us apart. She did not like me at all. There was no bonding there. My first time I got my period, I went to my stepmother for a Kotex. I didn't say I had my period, I just said I need a Kotex, do you have one? She smiled and smirked and handed me one and then later that day my father called me in the room and asked me if I was pregnant. I was 13. I said no I'm not. He said that I must be because my stepmother had told him I had lost my virginity, I was bleeding. It wasn't a really wonderful moment into womanhood.

My dad and stepmom got married when I was 8. Actually, after my mother died my father dated several women. He was engaged to two before he married my stepmother. She was not a mother at all. I remember thinking when we met her we wanted to call her mom and we asked her, "Can we call you mom?" She said, "No, I'm not your mother."

My relationship with my father in childhood was basically non-existent. He was very rarely there and complained about us constantly and then he would come and beat us. After my mother died he went back to school. He took night classes at college. We went to babysitters all during the day and at night. So that's what I mean by non-existent.

I got kicked out of the house when I was 16 and I was taken to my Aunt Margaret's who was about 65 or 66 years old. She was married to my uncle who was about 75. I had a 92-year-old other aunt living there. It was prune juice in the morning. I wouldn't say my Aunt Margaret was a mother figure, because she was never a mother. She was from the old school. When I was 16 she was very worried I would get pregnant. She was very strict. I was fond of her, but I didn't understand where she was coming from. We had some good times and I'll always be grateful for her, but she didn't have any background parenting skills. All she knew was her experience of growing up, which was in the 1920s, so it was pretty strict. On top of that, my uncle got really sick and they said that he was going to die. She promised him that if he would get better that they would move down to Florida where he'd always wanted to live. My uncle fought it and got better so she wanted to move down to Florida because the doctor said we were going to be surprised if he lived the year out. She couldn't take me because I was under age and my father would not hand over legal guardianship to her. So I had to find a place to stay. At age 17, I moved in with a lady I used to baby-sit for at night. My aunt took my uncle down to Florida and within a year he had passed away. I went to school during the day and stayed over there at night. I found out what her profession was. She was a lady of the night. That's why she needed a babysitter at night. My whole story could be a book. I was exposed to a lot of different type of women. I was exposed to the senior citizens and had

to bathe my 92 -year- old aunt. Exposed to my Aunt Margaret, the 66 -year- old one who was always worried and concerned about money. Exposed to my stepmother who was just the biggest witch I've ever known in my entire life. And then of course, there was the lady of the night. I didn't think she was that bad. That's how she made her money. She had two little ones. Her kids were adorable, I loved them. I found out basically because her clients would call and ask how much she charged. That gave me a hint there. When I turned 18, one of her chosen favourites wanted me and she told me I could make something like two or three hundred dollars. I thought that was pretty good money. But I was dating my boyfriend who turned out to be my husband at the time, and I was just appalled and refused. My boyfriend got really pissed off and upset when he heard what had happened and wanted me out of the house. So to finish my school years he bought me an apartment so I could stay in it.

Between the ages of 19 through 24 I felt that the loss of my mother very much affected my relationships. During this time I got married, looking for security and unconditional love. If I'd gotten these things from my mother I would not have had to go looking for it. I found that I expected my intimate relationships to give me unconditional love and security. Instead of not trusting people, I trusted too many people, "begging like a puppy to be loved." This affected my self-esteem and self-respect.

I desperately needed a mother. My boyfriend and I got married when I was, I think, 19 and I had my son at 21. I had my other son at 24 and then my husband had an affair when I was pregnant. Obviously that ended the marriage.

Between the ages of 25 through 35 I had two children and got divorced. I felt so alone. I needed my mother as a stable rock, someone to hold on to.

But even through the divorce and through everything, the time I most missed my mother was when I was pregnant and when I had my children. That was the hardest. I think that was the most I missed my mother, looking back through everything I've been through. During my pregnancy and after having the baby, that's when I missed her the most. Being a parent. Even now although my son is 16 years old there are days when I would love to pick up the phone and call my mother and go, "I was never this way, was I?" You know, that type of thing. I don't like having to turn around and say to my girlfriends, "Well, what did your mother do when you did this?" They look at me very strange, wondering who cares what my mother said or did? Because they don't realise what I missed. But I'm curious. I want to know how their mother responded to this or what she said to that.

As a parent I often feel very insecure. I have no guidelines to follow, but my gut instinct. I read books to learn how to be a mother. My mother is constantly in my thoughts when I parent. "Would she have done this?" and so on. Now at age 36, I recall when my children were the age I was when I lost my mother. I cannot believe I was that young. With each age they grow, I realise I missed this in my life.

Between the ages of 25 to 35 I dealt with my feeling of loneliness through journal writing. The journal was more of letters to my mom. It's funny because I didn't even notice it until later on. I looked back at my journals probably about three or four years ago and a lot of them say "dear mom." And it's all written down. I go to her grave and I talk to her there.

I establish a connection as much as I can with my mother. I think it's stronger when you have a child. My sister just had her first child. During her whole pregnancy she

started asking questions. We're a lot closer than we were before. Personally, I think it is because she had her child; she asks me questions. How was it during your pregnancy? It would have been nice for me to have somebody to ask. Even among my friends I was the first one to get pregnant. So again that was hard. That was the hardest time for me because that's when I felt the most alone. I was going through this experience without anyone. I know my sister relied on me quite a bit when her baby was born. That would have been really wonderful to be able to rely on a mother or even a sister when my babies were born. For my sister, I went over there and showed her how to cradle him, how to wrap him and how to feed him. I had a strong sense of jealousy and almost anger, that she had me, but I had no one. I almost wanted to scream that to somebody. I remember leaving the house driving home crying thinking, who do I have to rely on? My sister relied on me even though she's older she has relied on me. That was very intense. I felt the joy that she had a child, but also a sense of "Damn you! Where were you when I had the boys?" She was nowhere when I had my children. So I did feel that resentment, though I would never take it out on her or the child at all. That's just the way that it happened in the circumstances. I was strongly aware of them those feelings and they surprised me. Then when my sister first got pregnant about two years ago, she lost the first baby. But during that time I got really angry with my dad because she kept asking me, "Well, how easy was it for you to get pregnant? Did you breast feed? Did mom breast-feed us? Did she have a terrible time with her pregnancy?" And I would look at her wondering, "How am I supposed to know? I was six, you were seven when she died." The only one that could give us an answer was my dad. After Hope Edelman's book came out I went in search of my mother. I went to my mother's sister in California and I asked

her a thousand and one questions about my mother. I wanted to know the bad, the ugly. I wanted to know if she smoked. I wanted to know if she ever got drunk. I wanted to know it all. At first she was very standoffish. "Why do you want to dredge this up? Why do you want to know?" I told her I have to know. I was searching for a sense of myself. I was searching for questions that I'd always had that I was always afraid to ask. And then on top of it, I called my dad and we don't have a relationship. My stepmother does not now allow him to call us. We're not allowed to call there or visit him. She has lots of power. I did get a hold of him and I told him that I needed questions answered and he was the only one that could answer them. He owed it to us. So he told me to write down all the questions I had about my mother and then send it to him. So I did. It took me weeks to think of questions. Not to think, but to make sure I had every question. It was a 60-page questionnaire. He sent it back. Half of it was full. Most of it stated, "I don't know" or "I can't tell you." Some of it he did go into. I was really surprised. He said that yes she did breast feed us and she wanted more than three children. He told us the reason why our names are the way they are, what we were named for. So I was surprised that he sent it back, that he actually filled it out, though partially done. I'm thankful for anything he could have done. When he sent it back, I went over to my sister's and we sat together and we read it. I made a copy and sent it to my brother in Florida. My sister at first was very uptight and said, "I don't really want to read this." We sat down with a bottle of wine and we cried and cried. I said I wanted to see my aunt in California and everyone said, "Why are you doing this?" The only reason I could give was that I had to. In doing this, and in trying to find my mother, I found myself. I found peace. For the first time I was able to find peace in her death. I guess it's because I didn't know her but I knew of her. That's a

big difference. Not knowing of my mother was a big void. So by going on this search I knew of her and it filled a void and gave me some peace. I still go to her grave, but I don't search any more. Not as much as I used to. Well I found one aunt, an aunt by marriage, who was more than happy to tell me anything I wanted to know. She gave me little anecdotes about my mom and things that I could connect to. She said, "Oh your mother was a wonderful hostess. She always had something in the house for anyone who came over." That's me. Did I pick this up from her? Did I do it instinctively, or does it just come naturally because of her? I could connect with my mother because she was that way? I'm that way. Or she'd say characteristics that were a lot like my sister. And she'd say she paints. She painted very well. I'd say, oh my God, my sister used to get all A-pluses in art class. Nobody told me that. My mom sang in a chorus. I didn't know that. My sister is a wonderful singer. Wow! So I could find out who she was. I knew of her. It gave me a sense of peace. It helped to fill the void, which I think was part of the loneliness. I knew who I was. I just didn't know how I was connected to her and I needed to fill the void. And like I said, by finding my mother I found myself.

My understanding of my sense of self has been tremendous. I feel the peace. I feel the void has been filled, it will never be filled all the way but it will be filled partial. I'm not saying that people who have lost their mother at 19 or 20 or 25 don't have a right to that void. They certainly do. But they knew their mother. When you're six years old, you don't know your mother. You have bits and pieces of memory and they're not much to build on. It sounds like I'm angry with people when they're 25 and they lost a mother and they say, "How can I go on?" I think that at least you knew your mother. I also get really angry when people take their parents for granted. What do you mean you don't know



when your mother's birthday is? You're how old? Thirty? And you don't remember when your mother's birthday is? How could you! She's your mother. You just took it for granted. What do you mean you don't know what colour she likes? You're 30 years old. You don't know what colour your mother likes? Did you ever ask her? Did you ever ask her if she was engaged before she met your father? I go into a whole series of things with my friends. Did you ask her if she ever smoked? Did you ask her if she ever had another boyfriend besides your father? Did you ask her how she felt when she was pregnant? They'd tell me chill out. Maybe that's what I'm here for, to wake you up and make you realise you have a good mother and you should appreciate her and get to know her as a person. Who's to know, if my mother had survived and lived, who's to know I probably would have taken her for granted and wouldn't have gotten to know her as a person. I'll never have that chance. But I will knock it into other people's heads.

My best friend did not understand when I started all this and she questioned "Why do you have to find your mother? She's dead, leave it alone." I said, "You don't understand. I said, "Do you know this about your mother, do you know that about your mother?" She looked at me and said, "My mother's alive and I'm 30 years old and I don't know any of that stuff." I said, "then maybe you should." She said, "But I'm saying that if your mother was alive you wouldn't know any of that stuff." I said, "Well maybe it's best that I'm giving this to you. Find out from your mother." She came back and she went, "Did you know that my mother was engaged to someone else before my father? My mother told me she did this. I didn't know she did that." It gave her a whole new perspective of her mother. I felt validated. Validated in the way that I had done something. I had given her a perspective on her mother that she would not have had from

before me. So maybe there is a reason why we lose our mothers, so we can make other people understand. I didn't want to get into her problems, but my problem was I wanted to find my mother at that point. But in doing so she found her mother.

I find it really hard to find meaning in all this. She died and I'm a stronger person. I am the person I am today because she died. I believe I would be a different person if she hadn't died. I remember when I was young I was extremely strong-willed. I was extremely stubborn and I believed in myself. I believed strongly that whatever I could do, I could do right. I remember standing there in some cape, saying, "I am Wonder Woman." I remember thinking that I'm going to be really big or famous or something. Having children never entered into my mind. I was very strong-willed, very domineering, and now, after everything I've been through with my mother's death and everything else I've been through I'm a wimp. I'm not strong-willed at all. I get intimidated very easily. I remember when I was seven-years-old, six months after my mom died I beat up the boy next door just because he was teasing my older sister. So I remember being very strong willed and no one's going to mess with me. But that quickly disappeared by the time I was 13. With all the beatings I received and everything it was just too much. It beat my spirit down. It's been a strong uphill struggle to get that feeling that I believe in myself back. So that's how I know that I probably would have been a different person. I strongly believe I would not have chosen a family so young in life. The reason why I did was because I was trying to be a mother. If I were a mother, then my mother would come back. So I'd have a mother because I'd be a mother. I remember lying in bed when I was 12 years old. I'll never forget putting a pillow by my stomach and caressing the pillow pretending there was a baby inside of it so that I could comfort the baby. Now I think that

what I was doing was trying to comfort the baby that I was. Comfort the baby that had no mother. Mothering myself. I had my kids so early because I was mothering myself through them. I believe strongly that I would not have had a family so young. I would have had a family eventually, but it's like all my life I've been searching for family. My first family was taken away when my mom died. My second family with my stepmother which was no family. My third family included my husband who left me for another woman. So hopefully this family is working. I feel I've been in search of a family. I think it is a unmet need I have for a family which wouldn't be there if my mother had lived. I had asked both my aunts to be honest with me. I even wrote to my dad and asked if my mother had survived, would my mother and my father ever have got a divorce? Not to pull any punches with me, tell me straight. All three of them, including my father, responded that there wouldn't have been a divorce. Both my aunts said "absolutely not. Your mother was a very religious Christian, Catholic woman. She would not have left. No she would not have divorced your dad." They both said she was the domineering one. "So she wouldn't have divorced your dad because of religion, your dad wouldn't have divorced her because he was too much of a wimp." I know that that family unit would still have been in tact and we would be so totally different. My brother and my sister and myself would be different people now if she had stayed alive. I strongly believe that. My brother said the day my life turned to hell was the day mom died. My brother is 39. When she died it really hit him hard. He got into fights, big trouble, and drugs. He's an alcoholic. My brother was extremely angry and refused to go to church because he vowed that God killed her. My sister went through the avoidance and I went through just survival, which I told my friends several times. My whole life they would say, "Are you

happy?" My reply is, "I don't know because my whole life has been one of survival."

Happiness was never something I'd tried to attain. The only thing I had to do was try to survive. Now I'm at a point where I could sit back and say I'm really happy with my life. I don't have to struggle to survive at this point in my life and that's really nice. It's a new place. It's a good place. Better than I've had before.

Searching for my mother was a search for what I had been when I was a child, what I could have been, and what I am now. What I had then is exactly what everyone says, stubborn, strong-willed, very domineering. Sometimes they thought that I was older than my sister because of my dominance. They also said I was always more mature than my sister, which I believe is true. Searching for my mother was a way of finding out who I could have been and through that I found out that I could have been someone who was more career oriented. They said that she strongly believed that a woman's place is not necessarily in the home, although she chose to raise a family. But since it was the beginning of the 60s she was starting to believe that a woman should have a right to further her education. She had talked to a couple people and had said that her two daughters were going to graduate from college. So I think that with her support I probably, I know it sounds like a cop-out because I'm not that now, but I could have been. Those people who make it through college despite their difficult childhood I applaud them because they went through a lot of hell to get to that point and they had to be very strong. My spirit was broken and I could possibly do it now, but I'm too tired. I really think with her support, and my dad's support that I would have been more career-oriented than I am now.

Another significant loss in my life was when I lost my grandmother. I felt like a small part of me died too, and my history felt like Swiss cheese. When my grandmother died I was glad to have known her that long, but I missed her and felt the loss of my mother again. The loss of my mother affected my attachment to my father and siblings. I remember how my mother was the rock that held all the family together.

I loved and was very fond of my grandmother but I was also very ashamed of her because she was an alcoholic and because she used and abused people. And I remember taking care of her. She relied on me, which is another person that relied on me. She was a strong domineering woman when she was younger but when she was older and became frail, she started relying on me as an adult. When I was a child she was an alcoholic and I always remember that she wasn't very nurturing.

Grandma didn't like my aunt and uncle, and they didn't like her. Nobody liked her. By watching her in my adolescent years being an alcoholic it really turned me away from drinking. Looking at her and thinking, "Is that all you have to your life? That's not for me." In that way she influenced me, although I'm sure she didn't do it on purpose. Although I loved her and was fond of her I have to admit I did not respect her. It was another person who relied on me. She used people to get what she wanted and she and my mother did not get along. So she was not a reliable source to get information from, either. So after my mother died she never ever put my mother down. I never once mentioned her when we were talking about anyone that I could turn to-she never ever popped into my mind.

Following the death of my mother I tried several times to develop a special bond with other adult females including both of my mother-in-laws, a special "aunt" and my

big sister. Not one of them lived up to my expectations. I wonder if my expectations were too high? These women never had the unconditional love for me that I hoped my mother would have had. I believe that talking about my mother, I could learn more about who she was. Asking questions about my mom, her personality, her background, what she liked didn't like, would have helped me.

I was about 18 or 19 before I met another person who had lost a mother. This turned out to be my mother-in-law who had lost her mother when she was 16. I remember thinking at the time, well, at least you were older. You were 16. Which was wrong because losing a mother at any age is very difficult. But my whole feeling was, at least you had her until you were 16. "Oh, she lost her mother young too but not as young as I did." I don't think that I met anyone who had lost a mother as young as I had until I read Hope Edelman's book. I still didn't know anyone personally, except my sister. When the motherless daughters' Mother's Day celebration came up just this past May, I wanted to go really bad but I didn't want to go alone. I stood here and thought, who do I know that can go with me? I went through all my girlfriends. Well, no, her mother's alive, her mother's alive, and her mother's alive. I couldn't think of a single soul who I could go with whose mother was dead, even if her mother had only died last year. I still could not think of one girlfriend I had that a mother had died. It was really strange because it dawned on me -my sister! It took me two days of trying to think of someone that I knew who didn't have a mother. It just never occurred to me that my sister lost her mother. I think it's because my sister doesn't show grief for my mother. She doesn't want to talk about it. She's never gone to her grave.

My sister and I didn't share our mother together. I remember being home because I was six and my sister being at school and my mother playing with me or taking me to the park. I think my earliest memory would be about the age of three. My mother was changing my diaper and I remember thinking, I'm too old to wear a diaper. Get this diaper off. Obviously my sister wasn't involved in that.

In my mid-twenties, I was able to begin looking at my own needs. This change was brought on by the break up of my marriage. I went to a counsellor and that's when the counsellor said, "You know, you're telling me about everyone else's problems and how they feel, but I'm not hearing anything about how you feel."

I see how the loss of my mother has fostered the strengths in my life. My mother died at the age of thirty-two. I am now thirty-six. I feel stronger and as if I survived her time line so I should make something of my life. I know I have inner strength and am capable of getting things done. One way I have integrated the loss of my mother into my life was to learn from it how to get things done. I don't put off 'til tomorrow. I realise this is because my mother left me undone. I feel I cannot leave this world with anything "undone." Also I have developed more compassion for people. I wonder what type of person I would have been if my mother was alive today. I would be different, I just don't know how.

## CHAPTER X: CASE STUDY SEVEN

### Laura's Story

Laura is a thirty-year-old married woman. She has a B.A.S.W., C.M.A. and is currently self-employed. Laura was eight years old when her mother died. The following is an account of Laura's story.

I remember my mother as a very kind, loving and religious woman. My aunt always says she was the kind of person you could just visit at any time and she always welcomed you. My dad says she was very loving. I only remember them arguing one time. I remember my mother being very beautiful on the inside and out. I never remember her yelling at me.

I really only have a few vivid memories of her which sometimes makes me sad. I wish I could remember more. The ones that stick out in my mind are of her reading bedtime stories to me, of her cooking my favourite meals, and of me and my mom and dad watching t.v. late at night with all the lights out. I'd always comb her hair and get it in knots and she'd never get mad. My dad would laugh!

My mom had breast cancer. She had a mastectomy, but it spread throughout her body. She was sick for a while and the family was in and out of the hospital visiting. Finally, she came home and we thought she was fine, but that's when the cancer had spread. She died soon after. I remember getting called out of where I was early and brought home. As soon as we rode down the street I knew something was wrong because it was too quiet. I went inside and my dad was on the couch and came to me. His parents were there too and it was just so quiet. I don't think any lights were on and it was just after dinner in the winter. The house was gloomy. My dad took me to the couch and held



my hand and said, "Honey, Mommy died." I remember right away asking him to see her picture. I don't know why I did this. I think it was because I just wanted to look at something alive of her one more time to really know that I'd always remember her. I don't think I cried then. My dad took me to the den and showed me my mother's picture, and I felt at peace. I accepted her death okay because she was sick for a while and we knew it might happen. Also because I had my dad and grandparents there and there was a lot of support.

My dad didn't cry. I knew he was sad and just wanted to be strong for me. I don't remember what happened that night. In my mind, I can only go straight to the funeral. I walked in and as soon as I saw her, I cried. My dad picked me up and carried me to my mom. I asked to kiss her and I remember kissing her on the nose by mistake, and I laughed and cried. We had the service and then went to the cemetery. I cried in the limo and I couldn't stop crying at the grave. It was a very rainy day. My last memory is of standing there with my dad behind me and hugging me, and I remember crying. I don't remember leaving there or where we went right after. It's hard for me to remember the time right after she died. I remember the day of the funeral, but I really have a hard time remembering from nine years old up until twelve or thirteen. I start having memories of my life again at twelve, thirteen. After my mother's death, I remember going back to school and everyone helping me. I don't really remember being sad until later in life. I felt mean not to think of her then, but I feel I didn't really need my mother until later.

Between the ages of eight to twelve, I don't remember a lot, but I feel if she would have lived I may not have been such a shy child. For example, maybe my mother would have had more kids. Because I had asked my dad and I said, "Do you think you and

mommy would have had more kids?" and he said, "Ya." I guess I knew some people that come from families that have more than one child. Sometimes, because they have to get to know their siblings and they kind of have to fight for things. An only child usually has their own room and has their own stuff and they can get away with being a little quieter.

I think my mother's death stunted my social growth. I still lived with my dad but I also stayed with his parents who were great to me. But I think going back and forth affected me at school. After she passed away my dad and my grandparents both took turns caring for me. I went back and forth between the different houses. I noticed a lot of kids in school would hang out after school when I left to go to my grandparents. Those kids would have hung out all weekend and then I came back to school and didn't really get to know anybody. I met a girlfriend later, in my early teens that I became really close to, but I did things more at her school than at my own school and she helped me get a little confident in myself.

Between the ages of 13 and 18, things only got worse until eleventh grade. I would talk to kids in school but not be with them on the weekends because I had to go to my grandparents in a different school district and never really had a chance to bond with my classmates. On Mondays, I would come back and my classmates would have all been together and I was not with them, so I felt detached and very quiet. However, I became a good friend with a girl at my grandma's and she was a great friend who helped me "open up."

My mom lost a child before she died, so I was an only child. This, as well as my mother's death, caused me to be very quiet around my peers throughout high school. But actually I remember being quite happy with myself. I loved to read and would read all

day. I also ice skated a lot and enjoyed doing that with or without friends. There were times, though, that I wanted to be more popular, but overall, I feel I did okay. Because I would read a lot and my dad was like, "I was always worried about you because you kept to yourself." They always took care of me. They never left me without anything. But I don't think he realised the going back and forth and not getting the chance to get close to some of the kids at school and then go back Monday morning kind of--everyone else hung out on the weekend, and I felt like, I don't even know these people. My dad was concerned, but we talked how once I met the other girl, she kind of gave me the confidence to open up a bit.

I feel that my dad and grandparents were really enough for a while. I became friends with certain girls, but one thing that always bothered me was I couldn't bond with some girls because they all had their mothers, and they sewed and were crafty. I tended to like cars and tomboy stuff. The other girls didn't seem to like me because I didn't do "female things."

I think I felt like something was wrong with me. For example, why don't I sew and why don't I like to do more of those things because my grandma taught me things? When I was probably about 11, she said, "Okay, it's time for you to learn how to wash clothes," and she taught me how to cook, but then she did a lot for me, too. And then I saw these other girls who kind of do things with their mom while my grandma seemed to want to do things for me. I think that was her way she felt would kind of make this up to me. I felt like they seemed to look down on me because I didn't want to know how to sew. I didn't want to know how to bake. I guess I felt like something was wrong with me until I said, well, you know your situation is a little different and you lean on your dad

more; you know your dad works on his cars and he does things in the yard and if my mom was there I would be in the kitchen with her, so instead I was in the garage with my dad working on the car. I think that it lowered my self-esteem because girls can be kind of mean how they make you feel bad if you don't do the same things as they do. A couple of girls I became friends with I lost touch with because they didn't seem to kind of say. "Well, I understand your situation; they just really looked down on me because I didn't have those interests. But my best friend really knew what I was going through and I think she respected me for who I was and that's why we stayed friends. I wonder about that too, if other girls who lost their mothers felt that some way, or maybe they find someone who teaches them all that and maybe because they lost their mother if they also don't have those interests because then you say, "Who teaches you all those things?" I'd be curious to see if they lost their mother at an early age if they don't really get into that until later, like once they're married.

From the ages of 19 to 24, I thought of my mom more, and felt hurt, angry and jealous of those who had their moms. I knew I couldn't blame them and that I just had to accept my mom's death.

Once I worked in an office with mostly women. One nurse was talking about going shopping with her daughter. This made me cry and I had to leave the room. I realised that I would never do that. I experienced an overall "different" feeling. I just didn't feel comfortable with other women.

I do remember when I was about 19. I was working at a doctor's office and there were a lot of women who worked there. One lady was talking about going shopping with her daughter and for some reason it just really hit me then that I would never really be

able to do that. When my mom died, I remember that day and I remember looking at her picture with my dad and I think I did that because I just wanted to look at something alive of her one more time to really know that I'd always remember her. For some reason I really kind of accepted her death okay, I think because she was sick for a while and we knew it might happen and I had my dad there and I had my grandparents there and there was a lot of support. Children for some reason accept it okay; they just seem to get through things and then when I got older I really started thinking about it because I think that incident made me really realise it and I don't know if at any time I was in denial too. I really just didn't think about it and then all of a sudden it kind of hit me.

I know I've done that with my grandma; she passed away five years ago in 1990. In the beginning of 1989 she started having double strokes. They just got progressively worse. That was hard. Grandma was my father's mom. And my mother's parents, my mother's dad, passed away when I was 4, so I have a couple of memories. And then my mother's mother passed away when I was about 16. I wasn't as close to them as to my dad's parents. Then my grandfather, he's still living, he's 93. My grandma was basically like my second mom. How have I coped with a second significant death? Again, faith. I feel I've accepted her death finally. I think the first year I was really kind of out of it here and there. They're gone but I still haven't totally accepted it; you just don't want to really believe it, but I think I've gone on with my life. I get sad and I miss them, but I'm able to get on with things. I don't think I get depressed enough that I don't get things done. I've been able to accomplish things in my life.

There was something I read one time where you accept it. A lot of people may grieve for a day or a couple of weeks or a year and I think you grieve for a certain time

and you accept it but you never forget them. Some people say, "Oh get over it, she's gone" but you just don't do it. You accept it but you never totally get over it.

I always thought about my mom. I always asked my dad questions, but for some reason the age of 19 or 20 and that time period in my life it really hit me. I remember she was just casually talking about going shopping with her daughter and I just went into one of the rooms and lost it. She came in and she said, "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to say that in front of you." I said, "That's not your fault. That's nothing. I'm not going to be mad at you. You and your daughter have your life." But it just really struck me for some time and for some reason at that time. What helped me through that time I'd say was probably more my faith. Just that death was part of life and you know that it's going to happen to everybody. I honestly believe that one day I'll see her again and that was kind of, like, people would ask me how you get through that especially after my grandma passed away. I said that I just believe and hope that we'll be together one day. My aunt made a joke. She said, "If this doesn't help, the heavens are going to roar with thunder. At least we'll be very upset." I think I believe that and I guess you just get to a point where, maybe because I saw all the mothers and the daughters together, it just really hit and my faith kind of got me through it. Since the age of 25 my belief in God has helped me get through. I honestly believe I'll see my mother again one day. That gives me strength to do what I have to now and go on. I try not to stay sad or angry for long. I really think about my mom a lot now.

I know my dad was devastated by my mother's death, but I don't remember him crying. When his mother died he really cried. I think that was good for him. I think he needed that. I think when my mom died he didn't want me to see him hurting because

then he'd probably thought I would have got more scared. He was just trying to keep strong for me.

It was really devastating to my dad and then my dad's sister, it was really hard for her, so I think all of us being together and just talking about it kind of helped us out.

I felt the death of my grandmother more than the loss of my mother because I didn't know my mom as well. They both hurt the same, but I think with my grandma's death it hurt more because I knew her so well. It was a different feeling.

I just got out of graduating from college when my grandma died. I was at a point where I had been so busy with college and I saw her a lot. Once I finished college and was working I had more free time so it was really hard, because it was then she passed away. It was like by the time that I was done with school and I was starting to get involved and wanted to learn how to bake, and do more things like that and then she was taken away. I was really angry for a while and kind of said, "Well, there's a reason why it happened." Because it was the time, I felt ready to learn all this now. It's sad. But my aunt has helped me out a lot.

I remember my grandma teaching me when I was younger, but it was just basic stuff. It was nothing fancy. Just enough that she felt I'd need to be responsible for washing and everything. I think when I got older I thought, "Wow! I really want to learn some fancy cooking and sewing."

The loss of my mother has affected my ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships, but I don't think this is on a conscious level. I recently got married. My husband and I were together many years before we got married. I have seen myself grow

with him and I can tell my mother's death affected me in this intimate relationship. I do feel better now and continue to let myself grow.

At my wedding I missed my grandmother. I know my grandmother would have been wonderful as I prepared for the wedding. So would my mother. My dad thought a lot about my mom as they made the preparations. My father had many tears in his eyes. I wished I got along with my dad's girlfriend, not to replace my mom because no one could do that, but it would have been nice to have an older woman to talk with. My mother-in-law is a great person, though, and she wants to help me.

I was kind of worried how I was going to be. The night before my wedding, I think up until the whole time of the planning, I felt like, "Oh, I really want my grandma here" and it was really hard I had been closest to my grandma." I wanted to make a speech but I knew I would just cry through the whole thing. We had programs, and I put a saying about my mom and grandma in that and I think it worked out good. My dad and everybody said that it was really nice. And then they're actually here with you. They're up above looking down on you. I got through it somehow. I thought I would really have a hard time. Maybe it was all the excitement. I think it was harder on my dad, actually. For some reason his girlfriend didn't come. The photographer had me hold a picture of my mom, a wedding picture, and my dad and I were looking at it and he took a picture of us looking at her and I could tell that it was a little hard for dad. But he was okay with it. I'm sure it brought back a lot of memories.

If I really examine my relationships, the death of my mother has made me more independent. But I also feel that I am more vulnerable in relationships and more sensitive.



I have a hard time leaving people and am afraid I won't see them again. I left for school and when I came home my mother was gone.

My grandparents used to come in the beginning and then as I got a little bit older, I was more like a latchkey kid. I would come home from school before my dad, so I'd come home and I'd start something to eat or I'd start my homework. I'm sure if my mom were there that I wouldn't have done all that. She would have had dinner ready because she stayed at home. She didn't work or anything. I had my grandparents there and my dad, but I did a lot on my own, too. Even though they showed me things, I had to do a lot on my own. I probably--I've seen girls who do everything with their mother. That's very nice, but I would have been like that with her and I do a lot of stuff on my own. That's part of independence. Vulnerability? Trying to think why I said that. Sensitive, probably, because maybe relationships, I'm afraid I'm going to lose that person. I'm a little sensitive if something happens to them or something between us. If there's an argument, I feel, "They're not going to talk to me any more because we argued. I'm going to lose them." Maybe those feelings come back and I'm a little more vulnerable to that.

I went to school. Mom had been sick and then she came home and the doctor said she was okay. I was at a Brownie's meeting and I got a call. A lady drove me home. I came into the house and my dad said she'd passed away. I notice a lot of times, I think because that morning was the last time I saw my mom alive, that when I leave my house some days, it's like separation anxiety, I guess. This may sound funny. I have a cat. Sometimes I've been so afraid to leave her. What if I don't see her again? What if I come home and something happens to her? I've wondered--and I don't do it a lot, but once in a while I will check the stove and I wonder if this is all from being still afraid. I come home

and the house is gone, or my cat, or my dad. Dad's that way too. If you say "bye" he is hesitant on saying bye because I think he is afraid. Wow! You realise how fragile life is. In all my social work classes I try to talk to myself and know what's going on. Some days it's hard. You still think, "What if something happens today?" but just try to cope with it. My dad and I sometimes will go, "Okay, bye." "Okay, bye." And we'll kind of hang on a little more. I don't think it's anything bad. I know my husband, sometimes in the morning I'll be leaving for work and he's always in a hurry. He has never really lost anybody significant. So he'll be like, "Okay, bye" and he'll walk out the door and I might be like, "Wait a minute." He'll say "I have to go, I have to go." But I think he knows what I'm going through. It doesn't happen a lot, so I don't think it's made a big impact as far as negative. I think it's made me more aware of--you always see movies where the one person rushes out and then something happens to them. I kind of look at people a little more and think, "Let me spend good time with them now because you don't know what's going to happen."

This has been so terrible. My dad has two brothers and a sister, and the one brother passed away right before the wedding. Then the other brother passed away in July. They both got suddenly sick and it's just been really tough. So we got through it, but that kind of makes you realise again. I remember my second uncle when he passed away. When he got sick I just had this feeling that something was going to happen to him, so I spent a little more time with him around Thanksgiving and then he got sick a week later. He had four strokes. He couldn't see and he didn't know anybody. He was in a nursing home for a little bit. I'm so glad I spent that time with him. And my grandpa had a hard time. That was his two sons. I was like, "Why am I still here?" My Aunt Judy lives in

Florida. We talk a lot on the phone, but that was really hard for her. I just made sure she was okay. She didn't expect that. Again, it's been our faith.

My father didn't remarry but he started dating two years after my mother died. I do not get along with his present girlfriend and feel as though she wants no part of me. This has put a strain on my relationship with my father, but we work it through because we will not let her hurt the relationship. I wonder why my father stays with his girlfriend. He won't discuss that with me, but we do have a good time when we don't talk about her.

The loss of my mother has affected my relationship with my father by bringing us closer. Sometimes I think my dad wants me to replace my mother. I know I'm a different, yet similar, person. It hurts me to see my dad hurt, but I can't let myself become my mother totally. I am his daughter, not his wife. At one time, this pulled me away from my father, but I realise that he is such a good father, I can't stay angry too long!

I guess I realised that it's wrong for him to expect me to replace his lost wife. That he has to realise I am not his wife, I am his daughter. Then I'd feel guilty because I could try and do those things for him, but I'd come home from school and I'd have a lot of homework to do. I could just sense that he wanted me to sit down and have dinner with him and talk for a little while. I'd be really pressured. "Well Dad, I have to get this done for school." It seemed a part of him understood that and part of him I don't think wanted to understand it. We never really talked about it. I think he realised that it was wrong what he was doing and that I am his daughter. I think it was an understanding between us. In fact I was trying to find something a little more--I'd like to read about that, if a lot of parents do that to a child. Even a mother losing the husband, may do that to her son, if she expects the son to take the father's part? My dad and I never openly said it. I'm

wondering if I imagined that or if it was just, "Hey, I want to spend time with you." But then some nights I wouldn't do as much homework and it would affect my grades because then I'd feel bad because he was in the living room by himself. It was always something we never talked about. It was just there and I think we kind of worked through it. He began to realise it and wouldn't put as much pressure on me.

It just seemed like he wanted me to, when I'd come home from school, from working, he'd want me to spend time with him. Like a husband and wife spend a lot of time together in the evening or they may go somewhere. Sometimes when I'd go out with my friends and he wasn't doing anything, it seemed like he kind of got mad because I was going out and not spending time with him. But I'd just spent the night before with him. I don't know if he was afraid of what was going to happen to me. Or if it was like, "You should be here with me more like your mom was." Since we never talked about it, it's not totally clear to me, but I just sense that he would kind of want that from me. I think that is a little bit normal for a parent to do that. That's why I was trying to find more information about that.

I remember when I was probably 19 or 20, one day my girlfriend and I--they had under 21 dances and we would go to those almost every Sunday. My dad and I would spend the whole Sunday together and then I could tell that for some reason when I'd go out at night, he would seem angry at me and since we never openly discussed it, I assumed he was angry at me; he thought I wasn't spending enough time with him, or I should be at home with him. My mom would have been there. Or he would say, "You have school tomorrow you know. You shouldn't go out." I always felt like sometimes when I pulled away a little bit he'd kind of try to pull me back in. We probably should

have openly discussed it though, but instead I have some assumptions. Then when I grew older, and became independent, I just kept doing my own thing because we would always spend certain days during the week together and I felt there was a nice balance. He would need to accept that. He needed to realise that I needed to develop my own life also. For some reason that was a little hard for him. And I just said, "I have to do this. I have to do my own thing now." A lot of times I would feel guilty. You hear about parents who control their kid's lives and I was like, I don't want that to happen. I want to develop my interests. I could tell my dad had mixed emotions. Some days he'd let go and other days he wouldn't, so I think it was on his mind. I think he knew what he was doing.

Usually if I ever asked him questions, I'd say, "Did we do this?" Or, "What was mommy like?" I think he was always there, but the one thing I noticed was it didn't seem like he went to her grave a lot and sometimes that kind of bothered me. But then definitely holidays he would go. So sometimes that kind of bothered me a little bit. But I never really questioned him on it. It was too hard for him. My dad is very sensitive and I try to respect that. If I need to really talk about something he'll open up to me. I know I read a story about a girl whose father just totally denied the whole death and that was really hard for her, and I'm sure that would be. And he went out and started dating right away. That would be difficult. I think that never really was a problem between us.

When he first started dating her, I think I was around 10. And then she came over a lot and we were closer then. When I became a teenager, I'd say around 15, I noticed she wasn't coming around and I asked my dad why. He said, "Well, she is busy." I don't think he really told me the real reasons and I just kind of noticed that. Ever since then, honestly, we don't even talk. I had a lot of anger towards my dad then, "Why did you stay

with her if she doesn't like me? You're my dad." He'd be like, "Well, that's been a hard thing between us but I want to be with her and I also want to be with you." So we had to work that out. I moved out of my dad's house probably right after my grandma passed away and that really took a burden off. It just seemed like my dad and I became friends again. She wasn't really getting between us. If I was at home, I could hear her ask him, because he'd say, "Oh, she'll be leaving later." Like she didn't really want me around, and then I'd get mad at my dad, and my dad was stuck in the middle. Once I became an adult we were able to become good friends again. I think he has mixed emotions, because she didn't come to the wedding and I'm sure that hurt him. Why didn't she come? He's trying to work things through with her, so he and I don't lose each other. We've just kind of accepted that for some reason she never wanted to accept me.

He told me later a couple of reasons. She was really bothered by these little things that I did around the house. Instead of taking the time to help me learn to do these, she just didn't want to accept it and be bothered. Right before I moved out, I guess I was 22, my dad and I just had a big argument. There was a lot of anger inside me and I decided to move out. Because I realised that this was wrong, she shouldn't treat me this way, and my dad was stuck in the middle and I didn't want to hurt his feelings. Once we talked about it that really helped. Just like with a lot of divorced kids whose their parents remarry a stepparent they don't get along with. Sometimes that's just the way it is.

Sometimes I still wonder, why did he stay with her? If I was a parent and someone I was dating didn't want to be with my child I would have said, "Well I'm sorry, then it's over." Maybe one day it will change with my stepmother. You just have to find

the peace with yourself or it will drive you crazy. I'd really like to sit down and talk with her, but she just won't do that. So it's her now, not me.

At times I had to stifle my feelings. I'd say "Dad, this is bothering me," and he'd say, "Oh, don't worry about it." I couldn't really talk to him when I really needed to. I grew up like that. So now, people who do something to me that I'm not happy with, I often won't say anything. I'll hold all these feelings in and then just blow up one day. I'm wondering what makes me not have confidence to just say, "Hey, I don't like what you did" instead of backing down and saying, "Well, okay don't worry about it then." I guess I learned to just let people do what they want until it gets to a point where I just can't deal with it anymore. Rather than tell people right away saying, look this is bugging me. I feel like I have to be quiet and not bother them.

I remember my dad was really open with me around my mom. We'd wrestle around in the living room. As we got older it was natural to not do that. It seemed like my dad changed a little bit. He wasn't as open around me. I think it all started when I asked about his girlfriend and he said, "Don't worry about it. Be quiet."

The loss of my mother has fostered certain strengths in my life. My mother's death, along with being an only child, has led me to be very independent in my everyday life. But there is also a part of me who needs others. I know that the death of my mother has made me stronger, but I feel it is such a big loss in my and my dad's life that I can't look at it in a positive way. So much was lost and changed. There is no easy way to make it positive. I just go on and do my best because I am sure my mother wants me to be happy.

Looking back, the one thing that helped me the most in coping with the death of my mother in childhood and adolescence was having my father and his parents there helping me and the family return to a "normal life." My grandparents became my second parents. They talked about my mother and didn't forget her. My grandmother passed away four years ago and it hurts me because now is the time I would really like to be with her. She died right after I finished college. In school and then in college I was so busy. I would visit my grandmother, but I don't remember having any deep conversations with her. I miss that. I miss her calling me just to say hi.

As well, my uncle recently died. That was very hard for me. Each death though, has helped me not to be afraid of death. For me it is a reality to accept death.

I feel my mother was with me long enough to teach me how to be kind and respectful. I feel she was a good mother at heart. I am scared because I have no experience with diapers and feeding and all that. I am sure my new mother-in-law will be getting a lot of phone calls. I hope I will have enough natural motherly instincts.



## CHAPTER XI: CASE STUDY EIGHT

Mary's Story

Mary is a single twenty-nine year old woman. Her education level includes a Master's Degree and her occupation is in social work. Mary was eight years old at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Mary's story.

"My mother noticed a cut on her tongue, which did not seem to heal. It turned out to be tongue cancer (she did not drink or smoke). She was very sick for at least a year prior to her death. At the time of her death, my brother and I were out of town at a family event. I was told later that my mother struggled with whether to send us, for fear she would die when we were gone. My aunt informed my brother and I that she died and made us repeat to our cousins what had happened. We then flew home with relatives rather. I was glad I didn't have to fly back alone. I did attend the funeral.

My father remarried within sixteen months of my mother's death. I was required to call my stepmother "mom" even before they were married. I wanted to have a mother so I latched on to her and attempted to please her by doing extra chores and being the perfect child. My stepmother later threw away all pictures of my mother and told me she could remember giving birth to me. My diagnosis of my stepmother now is paranoid schizophrenia.

Between the ages of six to twelve I was very fearful of rejection from anyone. I was a perfect child, did well in school, and walked on eggshells around the house. I forged relationships that I thought would please my stepmother. My stepmother was especially concerned about how I dressed and I can remember hating this and felt different from the other kids.

I was very depressed during the adolescent years in my life. I isolated myself from others by taking on lots of responsibilities and studying hard. I had a few good friends and felt jealous of their mothers. Other times, I was happy that I did not have conflicts with my mother like my friends did. It was also fun for me not to have a curfew or other limits, although I rarely took advantage of those loose rules.

When I was fifteen my father and stepmother got a divorce. Although I tried to develop a special bond with my stepmother, I was later disappointed by her psychosis. After their divorce I was reluctant to develop a special bond with any other adult female.

During high school I was reluctant to share intimately with female peers. I was more comfortable talking with guys, probably because I was comfortable with my father and my brother.

There were significant experiences when I felt different from my peers as a result of being motherless. I hated having to make Mother's Day cards in school; this made me feel out of place. Also, my high school prom was difficult because there was no one to help me pick out a dress, get ready, take pictures, and so forth.

Between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, I took more of a caretaker role with others during this time. I was a Resident Advisor in college (helping freshman adjust to college life) and a volunteer for a program which served people with disabilities. This was also the time that I decided on the career choice of social work. This was a way to get intimate with others, without having to focus on my self.

I became very self-reliant and had significant difficulty being intimate with others. I felt like I would be burdening others with my problems, so I did not share intimate details, and therefore, had difficulty getting close to anyone. If people were very

patient and stuck around for a while (usually through school or a work experience) I usually could open up more and develop more intimacy. Without an external force keeping me together I would not maintain the relationship, thereby avoiding intimacy.

When I was between the ages of twenty-five to thirty-five became more aware (able to admit to myself) of my homosexuality. This was confusing to me, since my intimacy problems were mainly with women. But I was also finding that men did not satisfy my needs for closeness and honesty in a relationship. I do not want to have a child because I feel like I would be very impatient and would fear leaving the child, by dying myself.

Another significant loss in my life was the death of my father, who died suddenly three years ago. I did a lot of mourning and felt like I was dealing with my mother's death at the same time. I felt like I coped with my father's loss much more effectively than I did with my mother's.

Looking back I see how my stepmother did not allow me to cope with my mother's death, which I feel was very detrimental. When my father divorced my stepmother I was fifteen, and then was forced to deal with this loss. I do not feel I had the skills and/or insight to seek any assistance.

What would have helped me adjust to the loss of my mother, was talking honestly in the home about my mother's death and how my stepmother was not a replacement of my mother, and thus not deny this loss.

I believe that my attachment with my brother and father were greatly influenced by my stepmother. I became closer to my brother in that we saw the stepmother as a

common enemy. My stepmother felt my father was too close to me so she prevented me from having much contact with him.

The image I have of my mother was as a very caring, compassionate person, who put other's needs before her own. My mother was intelligent and very well read. She felt education was important, and incorporated learning into much of my and my brother's play.

The most salient memory I have of my mother was when I was in nursery school, which was very near to our home. The entire class walked to my home, where my mother made a presentation to the class. I don't remember the content, but I remember being very proud of my mother.

I see how the loss of my mother developed my strength of being extremely self-reliant. I can take care of all my responsibilities well and have always been very mature for my age.

I have had a hard time identifying any part of the loss of my mother as positive. I often feel my life has less meaning because I don't have my mother to share it with.

The strength of my self-reliance is also my handicap, I feel, as I have difficulty reaching out to others and sharing experiences with other people. I often feel isolated and alone.

## CHAPTER XII: CASE STUDY NINE

Nicole's Story

Nicole is a single twenty-three year old woman. Her educational level is a Bachelor of Arts and she currently works as an Editorial Assistant. Nicole was six at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Nicole's story.

I think of my mother as an incredibly warm, loving, sensitive, compassionate woman. I know my mom adored me and that I was her life. I have flashbacks of my mom hugging me so tightly and filling me with love. She was very petite and, unfortunately, quite frail and weak, which I now know she was. Yet I remember feeling strength from my mother. I am sure that was the strength and depth of my mother's love for me. My mom had beautiful shiny hair, the softest skin, and always smelled so good. She was always dressed simply, but ever so chic. For the most part, my mother was soft spoken. She was a thinker. I recently discovered from my grandmere that she had a hard time making decisions, always contemplating the pros and cons, just like I do. My mother was a very refined and sophisticated French woman. She spoke French beautifully and her English was perfect, always grammatically correct, and lacked any trace of an accent. I know she was extremely protective of my health, my surroundings, hygiene, diet, and so forth. You could say she might have been slightly obsessive about those things. She would always carry around toilet seat covers when we went out places, and little scented towelettes. I was well taken care of. My education was also extremely important to my mother. She always read to me and would take the time to explain everything. I remember being outside our house in the spring and we were very carefully studying one little flower as she explained how it bloomed and why. I always seemed to come first

with my mother. My mother was adored by my father, and everyone, friends and family, just loved her so much. The family all knew how much goodness she had inside her. She wanted so badly for me to have a sibling, and to have another child, that she sacrificed her life in a way. I don't think my mother ever thought it would kill her to have another child. I wish my mother could have had more time with my brother. She was so unselfish and her children were more important than living out the rest of her life.

The one memory that creates a lot of inner emotions for me is Christmas, when my mother was in remission. My mother looked radiant; her face was alive and glowing, despite the chemotherapy that she had recently finished undergoing. Everyone was there in my family, my brother, father, grandmothers, Aunt M and Uncle C. I remember my mother opening a present from my father, pulling the card from the box with such an adorable, child-like pleasure. This day was what my mother had longed for--her two healthy children, her husband, and all her family was around her. She was living her dream. I can still see the joy on her mother's face. She died ten months later.

I'd become very close with my aunt again, recently my mother's sister, the one I used to stay with every other weekend. We lost touch for a while so we've really reconnected. I speak to her frequently and I've visited her a few times. She's actually told me a little more about my mother. It gave me a sense of closeness to my mother. I imagine if she were still alive we'd probably be so alike and this thought made me laugh. It definitely was very warming to know that we were similar in some ways.

Mother was adored by so many people who just loved to be with her and spend time with her. It's hard, because I put pressure on myself to live up to that image of her, and that's an image in my mind. I don't remember really many negatives about her at all.

If anything, it's hard sometimes, because if I'm not living up to those expectations, I become very hard on myself and I think I'm very stringent with myself. I give myself a very hard time. If anything, it does make me put this internal pressure on myself, probably a little unrealistic because I'll never be her. I am who I am. Comparing myself to her and this image that I have of her is not easy. I have extremely high expectations. It's funny, because when you're that young, I think you remember things in a certain way, because obviously you don't have cognitive skills yet as an adult. As an adult I perceive her more realistically. I still perceive some of her wonderful qualities, but I am also able to see some of the negative qualities. I think when I was six years old my mother was my life and she adored me and she did anything for me and so I don't remember any negatives at all.

My mother died at the end of October. She had been diagnosed with leukaemia about two years before her death, maybe less. My mother was never a very strong, healthy woman. As a child, she had polio and was always plagued by some ailment. My grandmere, with whom I am now very close, once told me that she can remember holding my mother as a baby and knowing somehow she would see her daughter die. When my mother was stricken with a mild case of polio for the second time, she was sent to a hospital for very sick children in Paris to recover. All the nurses loved her. She was like a big sister to all the very sick children. One day a nurse pulled my grandmere aside and told her she must take her out of the hospital, because the doctors were doing experiments on the children, some for certain strains of cancer. I don't know any more details about this, but the chances are that this weakened my mother even more. My mother wanted to have a second child when I was about four. My father and grandmere were concerned

that mother could not physically handle another pregnancy, but she was insistent. To prove it, she underwent a thorough physical and the doctor gave her the okay. She got pregnant. My grandmere saw the look of worry on my father's face when they announced the pregnancy, despite my mother's joy. A few months into the pregnancy, she was diagnosed with leukaemia. My brother was a miracle baby. He was born seven weeks premature and yet he is a healthy, bright, attractive young man today. Unfortunately, this pregnancy weakened my mother still more. Although she went into remission a few months after her son was born, she relapsed when he turned one, and died shortly after.

I was sleeping in my room and was awoken by my father coming in, first going to his bedroom with a full shopping bag of things. He gently awoke me and told me to come to the living room. The moment I walked in and saw my grandmere, aunt, and uncle I knew something was wrong. My dad sat me on his lap facing him and said, "Nicole, your mommy has died." He was crying, everyone was. He said, "She just couldn't hold on anymore. She held on this long for you and your brother. She is finally at rest and at peace.

There were so many people at my mother's funeral. It seemed like the entire world was there. I wore a beautiful green velvet dress with ivory silk. I recently realised that it was the first time I'd worn it. My mother might have bought it for me to wear at her funeral. She knew she was going to die.

My mother looked beautiful in her coffin. I was not allowed to look at her for a long time but she looked so much a peace. I also remember my baby brother holding a tic-tac box at one point in the service, it was almost like he was trying to make music as he rattled it. Maybe my mother wanted him to make music to celebrate her life.



The anxiety I felt about losing my dad took up so much of my time and life. I had terrible nightmares when he would go away on business. My housekeepers were not very empathetic and were never there for me emotionally. I was always feeling like there was something wrong with me, like there was a big "X" branded on my forehead. I never had any self-confidence as a child or teenager. I always felt very "mal adroit" or simply not right and out of place. I remember my first summer going off to camp when I was about ten. I lied to my closest friend and initially told her that my parents were divorced. I always had one best friend at a time. Friendships meant the world to me and if one dissipated, it shattered me. I don't have many happy memories of ages six through twelve. Those were some of the most difficult years of my life, the most damaging. I was however, very, very close with my aunt and my grandmere.

My father remarried a woman named J. about six years after my mom's death, when I was about twelve. When I first met her J. we bonded instantly. She had a daughter who was three and I was very jealous of my stepsister. J. moved into our house about three or four months after they began dating and I began to experience the same terrible anxiety about losing her. I wanted to be with her every second of the day. In fact, I would sometimes even mimic behaviours that my stepsister demonstrated to get J.'s attention. J. and my dad got married a few months later. Then I began to go through my puberty and had terrible mood swings. I was always cold and angry with everyone. I rejected J. as well as my father. It took about eight years for me to be able to become friends with J. We are finally close, but that happened in the last year and a half, after I really dealt with a lot of emotional problems from my childhood and losing my mother.

I know that I have always been extremely “clingy” to people, demanding one hundred percent of their attention and them having all of mine. I usually had one best, best friend at a time. This was difficult for me and I really had to learn how to deal with friendships and manage them. It was so much more comfortable for me to have one true confidante and then have less significant acquaintances at school. I was very sensitive as to how people perceived me during the ages of thirteen to eighteen. I still felt as though something was terribly wrong with me. I developed a bad habit of expecting and assuming always that others were thinking something bad of me in some way, I was bad or had done something wrong. This sense that I was a bad person became very strong. From thirteen to about sixteen, I was pretty social and wanted desperately to be liked by my peers and be admired by the older guys. At seventeen, I withdrew socially and became very serious about studies and losing weight. Food and weight became my world during my senior year of high school. I developed anorexia and bulimia and was absolutely miserable. Fortunately, I had one very close relationship with a boy whom I had grown up with. He was my best friend and was really there for me. But at eighteen I felt very much alone. From sixteen to eighteen my parents (dad and step-mom) became more and more distant, particularly because of my eating disorder. I avoided food however I could. I was angry too.

My mother was always very petite and very slim and, I discovered, had anorexic tendencies. She was constantly watching what she ate and she was so slim. She just wasn't a healthy child growing up. She had polio twice. I think she had a weakened immune system all her life, so she was always having health problems, but my aunt has told me that she definitely did have anorexic tendencies and really watched her weight

very, very carefully. Of course when she had leukaemia she probably lost even more weight, so I guess I remembered her like that. And again it's part of this whole thing of wanting to live up to her expectations in a weird way. It's like I think in the back of my mind, if I ever got fat, my mother wouldn't approve and she would reject me, even though she isn't alive. So I think that was maybe one of the connections with her. At least when I first developed anorexia I was in high school and then trying to get through that and deal with that, it actually evolved into bulimia in college. I think the bulimia had a lot to do with feeling empty. The eating was really so symbolic of feeling so empty inside; a space that can never be filled and the control that goes along with that. It really got to the point where I was numbing this awful pain inside because I felt lonely and I missed her so much.

When I stayed with my aunt and my grandmere after my mother died, they were wonderful cooks. They would cook these incredible French meals, food that was so warming and wonderful. I have such positive memories of eating meals with them and feeling so loved and cared for and pampered. And then during the week I would be at my dad's at my house in New Jersey and we had housekeepers. They were very abusive and they didn't care. I think the kind of food that they gave us was just horrible. It always tasted awful. There was a food connection for me- having it filled something inside me that was needy. It was nurturing. That's why I think it was so hard to work through the eating disorders because there were so many different connections and so many different things that the food, emptiness, thinness, looking weak and looking petite represented. That ideal in my mind is still being broken. It takes a long time to work through that. I don't have to be as petite and fragile as my mother was.

I always liked intense friendships. Respect, trust, honesty were all very important to me. I had very high expectations and was often let down. I think that people took advantage of my honesty and how nice I was. I often felt very betrayed.

I always felt as though there was something wrong with me. I had an intrinsic sense of awkwardness and just feeling out of place. I went along like this for a long time before I realised that it was because I did not have a mother like ever one else did. There were definitely some specific experiences, like in first grade, the first motherless Mother's Day for me. We were making cards in art class and my friend Patty yelled out, "But Nicole does not have a mother, so she can't do this!" I felt my face become hot and red as I fought back the tears. Another big problem was getting rides to school activities. My dad worked full-time and the house-keepers never drove. I managed to get rides in a car pool from some of my friends' mothers. I often felt that they were annoyed with me because they had to pick up an extra kid. I was always very anxious about this. I think that since I was always feeling so different and inadequate, I definitely felt a great need to please others. I was, and sometimes still am, constantly berating myself, criticising and critiquing what I say and do.

There's always this intrinsic feeling that there was something wrong with me I just stood out. It was a self-consciousness that I grew up with. It was a part of me. This probably had something to do with my body image and my extreme awareness about that, but I remember when I got to college, I felt really awkward. Sometimes when I walked I felt like, "Oh, is it my stride? Is it my gait? Does it look funny?" I didn't feel comfortable walking. Fortunately I started dancing a lot, at school, and the movement connecting with my body helped to wipe out my insecurity concerning how I walked, or how I moved.

That's just an example of how extreme it got, to the point where I felt there was something wrong with the way I walked, when there wasn't. I don't really feel that anymore, for a lot of different reasons. For instance, being aware that there are other women who grew up without moms like me. Feeling like I'm not alone. And I think accepting it has helped wipe out that strong sense that there's something wrong with me.

The first time I met someone who lost their mother when they were younger was not until high school. So I went for a really long time without meeting anyone who was in the same position as I was. I always felt like the black sheep among my friends, many of whose mothers didn't work. They were just moms and wives and they car-pooled. I remember there were a couple of the selfish mothers; one that I was in a car-pool with. She said something to someone about me, along the lines of, "Well, now that we have to come to the corner and wait for her. I can't go and pick her up at her house anymore. Her father never drives." It made me feel really awful. My therapy has been to try to ease up on myself. I have seen how the loss of my mother has affected my relationships with men.

My personal life has kind of gone through different stages. In college, just before the point that I really started dealing with the feelings surrounding my mother's death, which was the beginning of junior year. Sophomore year in college I was single. I was sort of going out and doing what most of my friends had done in freshman year, but because I'd had a boyfriend in freshman year I really hadn't done that before. Just going out and socialising a lot. I found that I was really looking for attention and needing so much male attention. I ended up sometimes going out with guys that only wanted to date me to sleep with me. I guess it was kind of like a promiscuous period for me. It would

happen over and over again and fortunately I wasn't sleeping with these boys. I would just kiss them or fool around with them and they wouldn't want to start a relationship or anything. It wasn't registering in my head. I must have been so numb, because I think my eating disorder was really, really bad at that point, too. Then I got involved in a very serious relationship that sort of became the focus of my life. I put everything into this relationship. This boy was my life and it became really unhealthy and we eventually broke up after we graduated. But I think losing my mother has something to do with just feeling a need for someone to take care of me. Knowing that someone was thinking about me and that I was important to someone. I sort of used my boyfriend. He was like my whole entire support system. He was to fill the void in my life. When we broke up I wanted to kill myself because I felt like I had nothing. I realised what I had made him represent. I think I did that with my boyfriend in freshman year in college. Again, when that ended I wanted to end my life. Fortunately, I realised that I'm a strong individual and I have a lot more to my life than just these guys. I haven't been in a relationship in the last two years. It's been a good thing because I've realised that I can have a whole life without a man. A man can only enhance my life. A healthy relationship can only enhance it. A guy is not going to fill that empty, lonely feeling inside because I was feeling this way even when I was with my ex-boyfriend. I think that's what I have looked for in a relationship; to really fill that need.

I had just split from a very serious relationship that lasted two and a half years. I was extremely and unhealthily attached to him. I was extremely depressed after the break-up. I still miss him a lot. I could have married him, even though everyone else thought he treated me badly. This experience has shown me that I relied on him way too

much. Too much of my self worth was dependent on that relationship. I sacrificed my self worth and my sense of self for him. I forgot that I mattered. It was a little obsessive the way I was with him, so afraid of losing him. I never thought I would last this long without him. I get sad thinking about how much precious time I wasted agonising over him, when he didn't even give me half of what I deserved. I noticed that I am opposed to letting anyone in and getting really close, but once I do, the relationship becomes too close and tends to smother the other person. This happened while I was in a relationship for about one year, and with a guy I dated for three months. It is good for me to be single now and rediscover myself and my self-respect and sense of worth and to strengthen those qualities.

There was definitely a certain amount of anger that I always had towards my brother because, when he came into my life, my mother got sick and died. This is how it appeared to me at age six. I can recall feeling sudden bursts of extreme anger, wanting to kill him at times. Those feelings were so severe that I have had a lot of difficulty dealing with the guilt for having that anger towards him. Also, for how mean I was to him. For all the pushing, fighting, and trying to make him feel bad when we were younger.

I was always very anxious about losing my father. I always had to know exactly what time he would get home from work and if he was one minute late, I would really flip out. I used to wait by my window in the evening, watching to see his car pull into our driveway. I always hated saying goodbye to him in the morning. The anxiety I lived with was almost unbearable. I still feel anxious sometimes and visualise losing my dad, but it is certainly very different than it was at age seven.

The anxiety problems that I've had I associate with losing my mother, because I don't think I would have had that kind of anxiety had my mother survived. I wouldn't have been so concerned that I was going to lose my father, because it wouldn't have been something I would have been aware of at that time. I've had a couple of panic attacks aside from those incidents where I was breaking up with my boyfriend. Some of them have been associated with arguing with my parents, with my father and my stepmother. But sometimes I've had a couple of panic attacks dealing with this issue of my fear of dying. I have this fear that I'm not going to live past my mother's age. I've had to deal with that a lot too. That's come up because I've had a horrible problem with flying and feeling like I was going to die. Not just because of the flying, but also from the belief that I'm not going to live beyond my mother's age. My therapist has been really wonderful in helping me deal with that. It's definitely more under control now. I do feel that a lot of these anxious feelings or issues are related to my mom's death.

I am now very close to my brother, but still having a hard time accepting the way I treated him when we were younger. My father and I are close, but we have our differences. There was a lot that he neglected to provide for me emotionally, when I was growing up, and it's difficult to forgive him for that.

I think I have certainly developed some kind of bond with my step-mom, but before she came into my life, my aunt was very close to me, as well as my grandmere. My aunt was a surrogate mother to me when I would stay with her every other weekend at her studio in New York. My memories of those weekends bring me much warmth inside. I became very clingy and would call her a lot on the phone during the week, when



she had her own life to deal with. She was always understanding and wonderful to me. She gave me a lot of comfort that I really needed at the time. She still does.

My aunt and grandmere definitely helped me the most in coping. I used to stay with my aunt and my grandmere every other weekend. They were both so nurturing and allowed me to be close to my mother and my roots in a safe and protective way. They allowed me to cry for her, to talk about her, to learn more about my mother's life. They also showed and taught me so much about so many things in life. I don't know where I would be without them.

Learning about my mother allowed me to accept things about myself. To say, "It's okay that I'm like that. I can work through it. It's not a bad trait; it's not something I should beat myself up about. My mother was like that too, so it's okay." It really made me feel so much more connected to her. I think that's been a really big problem for me. As time goes by, and as it becomes farther and farther away from when she was alive, it's becoming increasingly important for me to feel connected to her. I know that she's always been watching over me. I know that her soul has always been with me That's why when I'm with my aunt and my grandmere, I'm always asking questions and I always enjoy talking about my mother. Even with my aunt and grandmere, I missed mourning my mother, as I should have. I was not allowed to grieve in a healthy way. My father never really dealt with my mom's death and I certainly learned that from him. I don't want to blame him, because I know he suffered, but the suffering may have been less severe had he allowed our whole family to grieve, as we needed.

When thinking about having children I get nervous and avoid thinking about it. I just can't imagine being a mother. I know I definitely want children one day. Every time I

start to think about this, I get to a certain point and stop because it is very uncomfortable. I worry that I would be a bad mother.

I have also faced other losses in my life. I lost both of my father's parents. I was younger when they died. My grandfather died when I was eight or nine and my grandmother, when I was sixteen. She had cancer and the night she died, my dad and stop-mom were away. The nurse who was caring for her at the home told me over the phone. I had to tell my brother and sister and my uncle, which was hard. It seems like I didn't grieve enough at the time. Maybe that was the only way of grieving I knew, from losing my mom, and not being able to grieve as I truly needed to.

I am extremely sensitive, compassionate, and eager to help others in pain. Although my sensitivity can be detrimental to me at times, I am glad I have it, because I think it is very valuable in relationships and friendships. Should I pursue a career in psychology, which I may do, I believe it will take me far and will help me to reach out to people.

For me, it has been difficult to integrate the loss of my mother and I think that it is a never-ending process. Ultimately, I believe that if I will be able to help a lonely, young girl without a mother acknowledge her pain and help her grieve and move on, I will feel very fulfilled. I feel I have used my strength, sensitivity and compassion in other ways, especially in volunteer experiences with children and adolescents and this has been extremely fulfilling. At some point, I hope to be able to express more of what I know of my mother to my brother, but he is not emotionally ready yet. This will probably bring us closer. I hope to be able to help my brother, using my strength and emotional sensitivity, to build more self-esteem and self-confidence; to provide a strong sense of what his roots

are, and to let him know whom his mother was and how much she loved him. He needs all of this and I will feel very fulfilled when I can help him discover all these things.

That's always been a really painful issue for me. I think about my brother and sometimes I look at pictures when he was a child, a baby, and I get so sad and my heart just hurts because I remember how much I hurt losing my mom when I was six. Sometimes I feel so guilty, because I had six years of my life with her and he only had less than two. Things have been clarified since I've done that study, just in terms of the course of events, when she got sick. My mom became pregnant with my brother and then she was diagnosed with leukaemia after she discovered she was pregnant. Basically, my brother represented to me the beginning of the end of her life and he was considered a miracle baby because she was undergoing chemotherapy. My mom went into labour two and a-half months before my brother was due, so they tunnelled her over to a N.Y. hospital and he was a miracle baby. They didn't think he would ever survive. I think just giving birth to him weakened her body and took a lot out of her. I guess his whole existence represented the weakening of my mother. I didn't know that at the time, but that's what it looked like to me.

I was definitely harsh with him my brother. I used to tease him a lot. I loved him, but I was also angry with him. I still feel terribly guilty, no matter how much my therapist says, "But you were six years old, you didn't understand." I think only time will heal the guilt that I'm carrying. But our relationship has improved in the last year, actually. He is now in college and I'm seeing him grow up into a young man. There's something heart-warming about knowing that my mom is looking down on him and watching him. He's grown into such a handsome, bright young guy. He's overcome a lot. He had dyslexia

and he still has issues with it, learning problems and cognitive problems, understanding what he reads. He has problems expressing himself at times. He has problems finding vocabulary words. But it's funny, because it's so important for me that we have a strong relationship, almost to make up for what happened in childhood. All the bickering that I did with him and how mean I was to him. I feel that there's a lot of pressure on me to be really close with him

I feel very responsible for him. But this issue of guilt still affects me. It's going to take a long time, I think, to work through that. I think I'm very hard on myself about that.

Recently there has been a shift in my eating disorder. It's funny, the timing of these things. I think it's finally started to happen within the last few months. In fact last night I had a very interesting dream. It was the first time that I dreamt about my mother since I can remember. I really don't remember dreaming about her much at all in the past. In the dream, it was like she came back after all this time. She came back and she was very, very thin and looked like she'd been sick and she was very weak. I was in the dream with her, next to her and for some reason I looked like I was 400 pounds overweight next to her. It was so upsetting to me, I almost didn't want her to see me. I had just distorted myself, because I'm not that big. I'm 5'6" and 118 pounds, so I'm definitely normal. But in the dream I was totally obese next to her and she was probably very anorexic in the dream and there was a lot of representation. I saw my therapist and I was talking about it. I'm so glad I wrote down the dream after I woke up because I never would have remembered it in full detail.

After the dream, I walked away with a very deep understanding of this ideal in my mind that I have often felt I need to live up to. This memory of my mother was probably

the last memory I have of her, because she was probably so thin when she was sick and I do remember that. But also there's this need to feel like I have to connect with her by being fragile and weak. It's a weird connection. I think if I were to ever gain a lot of weight it would probably make me feel totally disconnected from my mother, like she was shunning me. I know that wouldn't be the case.

When I was a young girl I was seeing it through a six-year-old's eyes. I didn't have an adult perspective at that time. But it's just amazing how these feelings stay ingrained in your subconscious, in the back of your mind and you know that they're not always there and you're not always acting upon them. But they're there. And if it's during PMS and I'm feeling a little bloated, I'll start to get nervous and I'll start to feel like, "Oh no!" There's a part of me, a really deep part of me that at times wants to go back to being anorexic. Fortunately, that's not the part that I live by, but it is there sometimes. My aunt and grandmere really gave me that nurturing love that told me, you are worth it and you are so loved. If I hadn't had that I don't think I'd be alive anymore.

Looking at my eating disorders and addressing these issues has only happened in the last year or so. I was definitely a lot better in terms of recovering from the eating disorders after I graduated from college, but I was still struggling with the feeling. While I was able to master a lot of my emotions, I was these inner feelings would come up every now and then and I would just walk around feeling like I had the weight of the world on my shoulders and just hating myself. I think I've been able to become stronger, and in the process of that, access these feelings because they're so painful and so deep. You really need a lot of strength and you need someone who can help you. I found this incredible woman that I'm working with in New York and she is extremely nurturing,

really understanding and talented, and she has helped me. She's been instrumental in helping me come to the point where I'm at now. She has helped by letting me know that it's okay to be feeling all these things and it's natural and basically to stop beating myself up inside, thinking, "Oh, what a failure." It's been almost 20 years since my mom's death and I'm still suffering and struggling with all these issues. But considering the circumstances, I've come a long way. My counsellor has helped me gain strength and courage, presenting different ways of thinking about and processing these emotions and getting through them.

The psychotherapist I've been seeing helped me find my own courage and strength and to recognise that I do have a lot of strength. I'm very capable of growing and moving on with this. But there's also been other things like just crying when I'm missing my mom, crying even when I'm by myself in my apartment, and acknowledging that it's because I miss my mom. Even though I do have a wonderful stepmother, there are days when I still do miss my mom. Just being able to cry about that and not be afraid to cry has helped me a lot, and praying to her when I need to. That's been a big help. And learning more about her from my grandmother and from my aunt, through pictures and through stories.

Gathering this information about my mother has definitely been more recent, too, in the last two years. I want to know more. All the time I want to know more about her.

Learning more about my mother makes me feel so much more connected to her. It doesn't change how much I love her or how I feel about her. It obviously makes me feel like I know her more, makes me feel closer to her, and even though she's not physically with me, it's okay. It's just that closeness, the knowledge of who she was, what she was

thinking and what made her laugh, what she liked to do, what she aspired to, the kind of men she liked to date. what she thought of my dad when she first met him. Things that I would love to talk with her about now. I can get that information through my aunt and my grandmother. If I didn't have them I don't know where I'd be now. I really don't. They were there for me when I was growing up. Honestly, if I didn't have them I probably wouldn't be here. But it's been hard. It's been a challenging year, because there are definitely moments when I feel a little lonely and I see my other girlfriends who have very serious boyfriends. Two of my friends got married. But I'm not ready for that. I think it's the last year I've recognised I'm not ready for that. If I were to meet someone tomorrow and fall in love and get married it just wouldn't be the right time. I haven't been emotionally ready. In my last relationship, I always looked to my boyfriend to be a little mothering to me. To tell me it's okay and to encourage me and support me which important in a relationship. I certainly see a lot of my friends having that support in their relationships. But I think I wanted it so badly from him, it was so devastating when I didn't get it. I think the thing that says it all is that I still felt lonely even when I was with him.

It was interesting because when this last relationship was ending, I really held onto it for longer than I should have. I was, in fact, begging and pleading for him to stay. It sort of dragged out for several more months before I realised that I just couldn't deal with that anymore. I remember the first few times when he suggested maybe we should take some time apart, I experienced symptoms similar to a panic attack. I felt nauseous and shaky and my head was spinning. I remember they were the same feelings I had one evening as a kid when my father was 3 ½ hours late from work. It was during a

snowstorm. I was on the phone with my aunt crying because I was sure he was killed. It was the same panic that I felt then. I experienced it in a similar way when this relationship was ending. I just thought I was going to die at that moment. I mean, both when I was eight years old and my father was late and when I was 22 or 23 and this relationship was ending was such an unpleasant feeling. It was like death was looming for me. I really thought I couldn't live through that. I think it was probably anxiety of a loss of having it happen all over again. It was sheer panic, terror.

Feeling very out of control. Feeling I was losing my mind a little bit. Frantic, crying, and panic and feeling like "Oh my god! Someone's got to help me! No, no, this can't happen!" Like when I was eight years old and calling my aunt. That happened a lot, though. When my father was late I would panic and I would call my aunt or my grandmother, or I'd do that little window ritual: Run to the corner bedroom and just wait by the window and hope that the lights that were coming were going to be his car. Each time another car went by my heart fell. That's how it was. When W. and I were ending it, I became so light-headed from the panic symptoms. I especially felt like I was just going to go berserk. Like I could've screamed or fell on the floor and had a fit. Like I really was going to lose my mind. In my mind I wanted him to sort of take me in his arms and just appease me and make me feel better. But now in the last year I've felt comfortable with being single, although it would be nice to be in a serious relationship some day.



## CHAPTER XIII: CASE STUDY TEN

### Pam's Story

Pam is a twenty-two year old single woman. She has had some college education and she works in retail and waitressing. Pam was six years old at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Pam's story.

The image I have of my mother is of a petite woman with small features. She had soft, curly brown hair and silver and black horn-rimmed glasses from the '60s. She was an energetic and happy person, but could be stern when a lesson was to be learned. She was bored easily. She cared very well for her family. People have told me that my mother always dressed me in the cutest dresses. It makes me feel good when people say that I look like my mother.

I have a lot of little flashbacks from the time when my mother was alive. I can see myself standing in the corner of my Cinderella-wallpapered room while my mother showed me how to make my bed, folding and tucking in the corners neatly. I remember a plug-in record player sitting in the living room, playing, "On Top of the World" by the Carpenters, as I danced around while my mother sat and watched.

I remember vividly what a treat it was for me to ride in the little seat on the back of my mother's bike while we went downtown to run errands. One day, as I was heading upstairs to tease my brother because I got to go with my mom and he didn't, I remember standing on the stairway and joking with my brother, "Ha, ha, I get to go downtown with her and you don't." My mother had told me, "You need to be downstairs by the time I leave or I'll go without you," and she did. She left! When I ran out the back door I could see her riding away and I yelled for her and I can't believe that she didn't hear me. I was

yelling and crying for her and I could see her riding a block away. My mom didn't turn around. While I was sitting there crying, my neighbour, Mrs. G., who still lives next to my dad and stepmother, came over and gave me a stuffed cat that she had made for me.

It's such a vivid memory of just feeling left behind, even though it wasn't a continual feeling when I was little. It was just at that one point for some reason and that really stuck out for me. It is one of the more powerful flashbacks. When I do think of her though, I don't think of that specific flashback very often. There are others memories of her showing me how to do things. I remember her showing me how to make my bed or her being on the telephone while I was lying on the floor colouring in a colouring book. And she would colour with me, also, when I coloured. They're all good memories, but for some reason and I don't know why, I think nothing but good things about her but there was that feeling of being left behind.

The main cause of my mother's death was uterine cancer. She went through lots of treatments and chemotherapy at a hospital in South Bend, about eighty miles north of where we lived. I remember visiting and taking my book bag of school papers to show my mother. She died at home on March 20, 1980. The family was all there. My brother, my dad and I were getting ready for dinner. When I walked past my parent's bedroom, my mother asked me to go get my dad. My brother and I stood in the hall and could hear my mother telling my dad that she just wanted to die. The next thing I remember was it seemed like all the lights in the house were on, the ambulance was out front, and my dad was on the phone calling everyone. I stood next to my mother's bed and the doctor told me that she was gone. I had to ask what that meant. All three of us kids were at the funeral. I was told that the whole town was there. I stood next to my mother's coffin for a

long time and stared at her hands. At one point, I thought she moved and I ran to my dad and told him what I saw. I can just imagine what everyone standing nearby must have thought.

I remember my grandmother staying with the family after the death. My mother was an only child. I have developed a very close relationship with my grandparents because I have always felt a connection through them.

The very next day at school was "Clown Day," a big thing for first graders. Everyone had to dress as a clown for school and spend the day with a professional clown. Some children got their faces painted and marched around through all the other classes so everyone could see them. My teacher took me aside and told me that I could get my face painted and she hoped that it would make me happy.

My father remarried six months after my mother's death. I was angry for a long time. When I was younger, I was angry because my stepmother and I never got along. I thought my dad just didn't do a good job finding a new mom and wife. As I got older, I was angry because I didn't understand how my father could know he loved someone else in just six months. It is just in the past six to eight months that my stepmother and I have really talked and got along without any tension between us. Growing up with my stepmother between ages 7 to 19 was very hard. She seemed to be mad all the time. She was always very short with me in her tone. All I did was try to make her happy, but my stepmother never said thank you for the things I did right. She just yelled at me for the things I didn't do. There wasn't an unusual amount of yelling, but my stepmother did a lot of pouting and slamming things, which I found just as bad as yelling. I was always confused and upset and couldn't understand why my stepmother didn't like me.

Whenever I talked to my stepmother, she never looked at me. She just kept looking at whatever she was doing. My dad gave me lots of freedom and responsibility. My stepmother got angry when I was able to do lots of things. My friends thought she was jealous. I am now happy with our relationship.

On Mother's Day, I told my stepmother that I loved her and that I appreciate her, something that has always been hard for me, coming from a family that was never really affectionate with each other. My stepmom really appreciated it. Now that I am grown and my feelings and maturity have grown, I really like my stepmother. We actually talk to each other now, and she doesn't mind doing favours for me, whereas before she would roll her eyes and say, "I suppose so." Even though we argued a lot, I am glad she was there for the kids and my dad. My stepmother seems a lot happier now, too. All of the kids have been out of the house for four years now, including her own three children, and she and my dad both retired this year.

I don't remember a lot about the time period between the ages of six and twelve. I didn't have a certain group of friends until the sixth grade when I was eleven years old. I just played with whomever. I was always described in my reports from school as a happy and co-operative child, who thought and talked a lot. I still do!

Between the ages of thirteen and eighteen was my angry period. I was realising and understanding everything much more. I have always been a very happy person and got along with everyone around me, but I was always angry deep inside. I was angry because my mother had died. I was angry because I didn't think my stepmother loved me. I was angry because my dad never stood up for me when my stepmother and I argued. I was mostly angry because it all happened to me. I question why it had to happen to me. I

was also angry because my stepmother acted differently when I was around. My stepmother would laugh and talk with my dad or with her own children, but when I would walk in the room she would turn quiet and stone-faced again. I never understood that. I just didn't know why she became so stone-faced when I walked in the room. I'd think, "What did I do? What did I say? Why do you resent me?" Because that's totally the feeling that I got from it; she resented me, so she didn't want to look at me. I reminded her of someone else, or she was jealous of my relationship with the rest of my family or with my dad. I can't pinpoint it. Maybe it's a combination of everything. She's the only person that does that to me. I have no problem like that with anybody else. But I really felt strong resentment from her. It is still there at times and that's what surprises me. It's there at times and at other times it's not. It's very unpredictable, but I know I'm not imagining it.

I had very good relationships with my peers in high school. I never felt like a loner or like nobody liked me. I never had to be the centre of attention all the time. There were four of my friends that were always together a lot. After being out of high school for five years, I still keep in touch with two of the other three girls.

After the age of nineteen, even though I had a rocky start with my stepmother, I had made my peace. I have come to love and appreciate her. I have discovered what I really want for myself and who I am in the past year. That gave me strength to let my ex-fiancée know that we were not going to be.

I don't feel that the loss of my mother has affected my ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships, although I have gone through a broken engagement. I wonder if broken relationships are common among motherless daughters. My ex-fiancée

was healing for me while I read the book called "Motherless Daughters." I would read a few sections and then we would talk about it and he would let me vent when I needed to, then I would read some more and vent again. My ex-fiancée and I were together for four years and I probably did most of my coming to terms with my loss with him. I never doubted him for a minute. He would have done anything for me. No matter what I said or did, he still loved me and understood everything. His was a true love, but mine wasn't. I doubted myself and wondered too long and too hard if I could be happy with this person for the next fifty to sixty years.

I finally said out loud what I had been thinking for quite a while. I just knew that if I said it, I would have to face it, and I didn't want to do that. I will never forget the feeling of turning someone else's life totally upside down in one day. I still have a lot of pain from this, since it happened within the past nine months. I am just glad that I was mature enough to realise it and strong enough to do something about it. In one of my Motherless Daughters newsletters, a lady kept and shared a journal on one of the first Motherless Daughters Support Group sessions. During one of the sessions, she said of the women there, that not one could allude to a positive intimate relationship with her partner. That was what got me thinking about the connection, if any, between broken relationships and early tragic loss.

I've just discovered from hearing about other friends' losses and broken relationships that I'm finding a pattern with people I know who are motherless daughters or who are orphans, and their patterns of broken relationships. It just seemed to me that I was starting to grow a pattern also. Reading my "Motherless Daughters" book, there seems to be a pattern with other people also. I don't know how that's formed. What's

interesting to me is the psychology behind it. I've just noticed the pattern and I've wondered why that is.

How did I find the pattern in my life? Sometimes I wonder if we're all searching for the perfect mother again. And when we don't find it in someone, then it's like the relationship has failed. That's almost what I feel like. I have been engaged for four years, and that was broken. You find a few things that are wrong with the person and if they don't become the perfect mothers to you, then you become frustrated. You just keep going through relationships and that's what it feels like to me, you're trying to find the perfect mother again.

I am very mature for my age and I know what needs to be put into a relationship to make it work. I feel that I have the ability to initiate and maintain relationships. I am just looking for the right person. I think the wait will be worth what I find at the end.

I believe that, for a twenty-three year old, I have experienced quite a few big losses. My losses include my mother, my nephew who died in 1991 at five months from SIDS, my break-up with my fiancée, and my grandmother (my mother's mother) who died this past April. By far, the death of my grandmother has affected me the most. Her death was very, very hard for me. The death of my nephew was very sudden. I came home from school one day and my parents and my minister were standing in the dining room. I thought it was strange for the Reverend to be there at that time and my parents (both teachers) normally did not get home from school before I did. My dad told me what happened and it was a total shock. I remember thinking that my nephew was fine just yesterday. The Reverend said a prayer and left. I walked upstairs in a trance, trying to process what I had just heard in the past few minutes. Then I lay down on my bed and

cried. The funeral was on Sunday. I stood outside in front of our church after Sunday School with my friend. I walked to the funeral home, which was only two blocks away. I was so scared. When I finally got there, I stood in the back of the room for quite a while. I could see the tiny casket, but I couldn't see my nephew. It seemed to me that I was easing myself into the death. It took me a long time to get to the funeral home from the church, then it took me a long time to walk from the back of the room to the front to see my nephew. I wonder why that was? I feel I have coped with the loss well. It was a shock and very hard at first to see such a small child enter and leave the world so quickly, but maybe because I only knew my nephew for five months, it was also easier.

Losing my fiancée was almost like a death. I haven't seen him since last October and memories and pictures are all I have. I have used my coping skills and moved on. I remember, I laugh, I cry, but I don't regret.

The death of my grandmother has been the hardest. It was like going through my mother's death again. I have been especially close to my grandparents all my life, and now it seems I am even closer to my grandfather. My grandmother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's five years ago. We all noticed a drop, a plateau for a while, then a drop again. I thank God that my grandmother never got to the point where she didn't know who people were. My grandmother went into the hospital in March, and then steadily dropped until her death in April. I visited my grandmother about once every week and it was so heart wrenching to see her changing weekly. I knew that was it. My grandmother was never going to be the same again, even if she did make it home from the hospital, which I knew was unlikely. The morning I found out about her death, my brother called me at work. I wondered why it was him and not my dad who called me. I went straight to



the city where my grandmother lived and helped my grandpa through the day. I can't imagine living with and loving someone for sixty years, then losing that person and having to be left behind. Part of me is glad, though, that my grandmother died before my grandpa. My grandpa is very mentally well and gets around better than most people his age. He has moved into a Masonic Home and loves it. When I talked to him a week after he had moved in, he said things had been going so well, he was just waiting for a let down. He knows things have changed and he needs to adjust. He doesn't fight it. He tries his best to go with the flow.

It's hard for me to describe the relationship I have with my grandfather. We are very close. And of the three of my two brothers and I, I am the closest one to him in distance and also in relationship. He only lives about an hour and a half from me, so I see him nearly once a month; I try to. But it's a really good connection and I'm glad that I have that.

My grandpa is not afraid to tell me how he really feels when I ask. If he's feeling good, he'll tell me. If he's upset or worried about something, he'll tell me. He doesn't complain about anything. We walk and talk about everything. My grandma's death was good in that she isn't sick anymore; she was very depressed towards the end, and she is with my mother now, and it has brought me and my grandfather closer. The hurt is not painful anymore. The sadness was very painful for about a month after her death. Now when I think of her, I smile. Maybe it's because I still have my grandpa.

I'm sure that when my grandfather dies it's going to be the same--very hard for me. I know I spoke a lot about the relationship I have with my stepmother. She surprises me sometimes with her actions and how thoughtful and how nice she can be. And then

the next time I'll see her, she'll be quiet and not look at me or talk to me very much. So she goes back and forth a lot, and when my grandmother died, it was my stepmother's idea to have a picture of each of us grandchildren buried with her. She even called my grandfather and said, "I have an idea, if you don't like it, that's fine, but I found these pictures that we could bury her with." They put them under her hands. I couldn't believe that was her idea, she wanted to do that for us. But then the next time I see her, it'll be totally different and I don't know why. The whole mystery is, I don't know why she is like that towards me, or why I feel so much resentment from her. That's the biggest mystery to me and that's what upsets me the most. I'm happy when she's happy. But when she's not, I always think it was something I did. It's me. I'm in the room and she doesn't want me there. That's the biggest thing that upsets me about her now.

I know how my relationships with my father and siblings are now, but sometimes I wonder if the things I feel were affected by my mother's death, or if I would feel the same even if she were alive today. My father and I are close, but he is a private person and doesn't like to talk about the past. I have wished for a long time that there will come a time when I can let my father know everything that I have been thinking and feeling and that he can do the same. I really look up to my father. He kept the three of his children and his teaching position with the School Corporation, together while going through a major tragedy.

My oldest brother and I are not close. He built a wall around him right after our mother's death, and it is very hard for me to talk to him sometimes. He has also gone through his own tragedy when his son died of SIDS. He and his wife also have a little girl.

My other brother and I are very close. We are both very open with each other and share a lot. There is five-year age difference between this brother and I, we have talked a lot about our mother and different things we remember.

Following the death of my mother, I did not develop an attachment or special bond to any one particular adult female. I found out everything I needed to know about coming womanhood from my friends and their mothers. Through the years, I have had a few special relationships, but nothing special soon after the death of my mother.

I did feel different from my peers as a result of being motherless, but it was more an overall feeling than certain experiences that I can remember. I do remember a time right after my mother's death before my father remarried. I was in Brownies and we had a Mother/Daughter dinner. I took a friend of the family and I remember asking how I should introduce her. I felt awkward.

I did not come from a very emotional or affectionate family, yet I have become that way. I am sure that I will carry that into my family also. In the segment on motherless daughters becoming mothers in "Motherless Daughters," Hope Edelman says that the girl will probably be one of two things: She will not want to have children at all because she feels that she will have the same destiny as her mother and that she will leave her children also; or she will want and have children, but in trying to build a connection which she felt that she never had, she will become overprotective and overbearing, and in the process hurt the children. Part of me believes I would be the latter. I know that I do want to have children very much. I am a nurturing person and am known as the "caretaker" among my friends. Now that I know the dangers, maybe I can watch out for these things when I have children. I think that I will be a caring, nurturing mother and

wife, and very involved in my children's lives. That is one thing that upset me about my parents. I was in summer softball or pom-poms or marching and my parents never came to any of my games or contests like a lot of the other parents did. That always upset me.

Looking back, I think that talking with my friends and with my brother, and crying, helped me the most in coping with the death of my mother. I still cry today and probably always will. No one certain person or thing helped the most. Whenever I brought something up with my dad, he would give me a short answer and then tried to change the subject.

I missed talking to my father about my mother. I feel this could have aided me in adjusting further to the loss of my mother. I also wish my stepmother could have been more understanding of what she was coming into with a seven-year-old who just lost her mother.

My grandparents helped me cope with the death of my mother. They were always willing to talk about her. I learned so much about my mother through them. I have been given so many pictures of my mother as a little girl and growing up and of my brothers and I when we were little. They are the best gifts I have ever been given.

I will always have sadness and a huge hole in my heart that I feel every day. It's there all the time. Sometimes when I'm in the mood, I'm talking about her now and the hole feels bigger. I'll probably feel that way for the rest of the night and I'll probably cry myself to sleep tonight. But tomorrow you go on with work and you go on with life. I think about her every day, but I don't know exactly how I cope with it. It's not like it's the first thing on my mind every morning because I happened so long ago. I guess it happens at times when I talk about. Last week, my friend and her boyfriend were asking

me questions about my mother, stepmother, and other things I remembered. It didn't bother me at all. I don't mind when people ask me questions. It was actually a happy talk and I was fine with it and it didn't bother me. I wasn't that upset. Then at other times it upsets me more. You just cope with it. How I've coped with it has changed over the years. I don't cry as much. I feel sad, but I don't cry as much. I used to be angrier than I am now. That was the time I lived at home; I would get upset about it; I would get angry with my stepmother because she was there. I felt a lot more anger than I do now. Now it's just more sadness and more of a "why" and more of wondering what she would look like. Would I be where I am right now? Would I be living in a different state? Would I be more focused, because I'm a very unfocused person. As for what I want to do with my life, I have three jobs, just because I get so bored with one and they are three totally different jobs from the other. All my friends are graduating and getting thirty, forty thousand-dollar jobs and they're turning to me and saying, "What are you going to do in ten years?" I have no idea what I want to do. And that's another part of it. That's another psychology question. I want to know how and why about everything.

My brother does the same thing. One of my brothers actually used to live in Florida and just moved to Nashville last spring. We have talked about it before and he always wonders, "Am I making this decision because of this impact? Or would this be happening to me, or would this be what I'd decided if mom hadn't died?"

The book, Motherless Daughters also helped me a great deal in coping with my mother's death. I could see things more clearly and I knew the things I felt were not abnormal. All motherless daughters felt and thought the same things! The book helped me heal tremendously. I am so glad my friend, who is a motherless daughter,

recommended the book to me. I couldn't read the whole thing at once, but I read it before I went to bed every night. Sometimes I couldn't stop; sometimes it was a good stopping point. But I probably finished it within four days.

It was weird. A woman in the book says, "this may seem weird but when I pray to God, I pray to my mother too," and I do the same thing. It's weird how I came upon the second book, "Letters of Motherless Daughters," because I wasn't even looking for it. I don't know if I knew it was out, but I was walking into a bookstore with a friend one day and there happened to be two tables of books between the two double doors. They were sale books, and this was on sale for \$5.00. It was just sitting out there on top of everything and I thought, "Wow! This is for me." The author was feeling and thinking the exact things I have always felt.

What continues to help me deal with the loss of my mother is talking about it. I'm sure if I didn't have as understanding friends as I do, or friends that wouldn't listen to me, then it would be a lot harder. Sometimes it doesn't happen. I don't just sit down on the couch and start talking about it. Maybe a friend will ask me a question that will spark it and if we have time we'll sit and talk. So definitely talking about it and also reading about it helps.

I haven't been a part of a Motherless Daughters support group and I would have loved to be. I've heard it's been an incredible thing. But the nearest one would be Chicago, Illinois, which is about two and a-half hours away. I'm in the process of trying to be. I've contacted a local organiser up in the Chicago area and two weeks later she got back to me, actually last week. She said, I'm sorry I haven't got back to you but the reason is that I'm not a local organiser any more. So I'm going to try and get hold of

another one. But she talked about the eight to ten week support group and how it was incredible and she would definitely recommend for me to do that and gave me the name of somebody to get in touch with. I would love to, because I think that a lot of my feelings could be really discovered, analysed, and maybe I could figure out things, or feel at ease or at peace with other things, other feelings.

When completing the questionnaire, I had to do it in sections. It took me a while, and actually I was starting to feel bad that I had it for so long. But then I guess I was one of the first ones in. I had to be in the right mood, the right mindset, to really think about it. And even when I finished it I wondered if it really was all that I wanted it to be. Sometimes I wondered. It would be funny to read it now and see what I've written. But it did take a while. I definitely had to do it in segments. Sometimes I would keep it away for a week, a week or two at a time, and not write anything. I believe that I added extra pages, didn't I?

I believe that the loss of my mother has fostered the development of some strength in my life. I think that my responsibility and independence has matured much more than it might have otherwise. I think dealing with a stepmother whom I wasn't close to help me become independent.

I just find independence different now than I probably defined it when I filled out the questionnaire because it's been a while. When I first moved out of my parents' house and moved out on my own, I defined it as independence. I can hold a job, and I can keep my appointments and run my own errands. I can cook my own dinners and be independent in that way. But now, independence is more being your own person and being comfortable with that and not needing much emotional ground from other people,

whereas I feel like I do. My roommate and I are very close. She's 27 and even though sometimes I feel like she's mothering me, sometimes I don't like it and other times I do like it. When I think about moving, doing my own thing, or moving out, it's scary. I don't want to do it by myself; I want to do it with her. I'm sure you can feel it but it's hard to explain. It's just the hole that's always there. And you think, "I'm independent and I can do this, I can make it on my own." I guess it goes back to the emotional ground. I don't need emotional grounding from anyone, but I do. The motherly thing. I just need someone there to mother and hold me. A lot of other people don't understand, and they think, "What do you need?" They don't understand the emotional attachment that you need. So when you're going through relationships and you don't have that grounding or you can't find that mother, then it's like a relationship has gone sour. I become frustrated. I just ended a relationship about a month and a half ago and we'd dated for over a year, but all of a sudden every time I was with that person I became very frustrated with everything he said.

As you get older you look for that emotional grounding in a relationship. When you don't find it, it's almost like an all-of-a-sudden a failed relationship and you feel like you'll never be happy until you find that. And it's not. Some people have asked me if I feel pressured because all of my friends from high school are married already, and I've been at all of their weddings. I'm thinking, "I'm only 24. No, I don't feel pressure." I don't feel pressure from other people, but I almost feel pressure from myself because I want to find the perfect relationship. And even though I like being by myself, a lot of times I don't. Everyone else has found the one that they want to be with. Everyone else is so happy, living with the person that they love. Why can't I find that? I need that. Out of



anyone else, I need that. I don't think I necessarily deserve it. I can wait for it. But it seems that's the one thing you do look for in your relationship. Sometimes I get my hopes up too high. Like right now, I've started dating someone and on the very first date I felt a connection because his father didn't die, but his parents were divorced and he had a stepfather that he clashed with all his life. And there were a lot of the same feelings. There was resentment, jealousy. He knew exactly what I was talking about. So I thought, "Wow! He must know the feelings that I need." It was very surreal on the very first date. I mean, I've yet to see where that goes, but it's interesting. Other people and other friends can listen to you, but they don't understand. They need to live it.

I know that your personality is formed by age three, they say, and my mother died when I was six. I was very happy. We had a very happy family. I think, why I am the way I am today. I'm very outgoing and very talkative. I have a life outside of the town I grew up in. I'm out in the real world and I have my own friends and my own place and I'm a happy person and I have a good time. But there's another part of me that's very bitter towards other people in certain ways. Like in the last relationship I had, which broke up a month and a half ago, I was very jealous on the inside because he was a mommy's boy and he was very close to his parents. We went home all the time from school and I liked it because when I went home with him his mother mothered me. I was with him this past Christmas and I had the best Christmas I'd ever had because I felt so welcome there and they treated me like part of the family. That filled a void in me, but I will not stay in a relationship just because of that. He did not do it for me. I was very frustrated with the relationship. That's why we broke up. But I was very jealous on the inside, or very bitter on the inside when he talked about his mom; "Moving home after college, gosh, my mom

would pay me to live at home.” Why do we have to talk about that? I don’t want to hear that, because it was never like that for me.

Growing up with my stepmother left me with chaotic emotions, you could say. But that’s it. I’m fine now. I’m a happy person but sometimes I feel very jealous and bitter towards other people because of what they had and I didn’t.

My roommate is another example. She and her mother are very close and when we talk about what we did when we were little or about the different memories we have, she doesn’t rub it in about the relationship she and her mother have. I tell her memories that I have or things that my parents did. Sometimes she shakes her head and says “I don’t see the understanding behind that,” or “I don’t see why they would do that to you.” So then I know, of course, it was never like that for her. It was never bad in our household. It was never a physical abuse type of household. It wasn’t a bad household compared to how some people grow up today. But it was just the hidden feeling that bothered me.

I noticed in high school that all of my friends were close to their mothers. So our house was never the hangout house. We always went over to my friend Missy’s or my friend Jenny’s house. Nobody ever came over to my house. I noticed how my friends were close to their mothers, or noticed how they joked or talked.

I probably first became aware of it when I started hanging out at other people’s houses, or going over to friends’ houses, because of course when you’re in middle school you just meet up with your friends at school, you don’t hang out at their house. You don’t notice it as much.

I take one day at a time. I am thankful for what I had for such a short period of time, and for what I have now, the friends and family I have been blessed to have in my life. I try not to worry about the future. It has not been a conscious effort to integrate the loss of my mother into my life.

**CHAPTER XIV: CASE STUDY ELEVEN****Trudy's Story**

Trudy is a twenty-nine year old married woman. She has an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education and works as a teacher. Trudy was six at the time of her mother's death. The following is an account of Trudy's story.

My mom had nine children and the most prominent image I have is of my mother taking care of all of us: changing diapers, feeding us, clothing us, and so forth. My older siblings have told me that mother was a smoker and social drinker and that she could be the life of the party. I didn't see her in this way, as a wife and a woman. I only saw her as a mom, who looked tired, overworked and had a million things to worry about. Many of these images have come from photographs that I have seen because I have very little memory of my mother.

The most salient memory I have about my mother is of the ambulance coming to our house because something was happening to my mom. She was on the dining room table and her body was moving uncontrollably. The only other memory I have is of standing outside the hospital on the grass looking up at her room. We were able to see her through her hospital window. They had to shave her head. The children were not allowed in to visit her. I never got to see her when she was sick in the hospital.

She was sick for a while before she died. She was in and out of the hospital often. I don't know, maybe they were just trying to shelter us, keep us kids from really knowing what was going on. I was never really able to see her or talk to her or anything. But I do remember being outside of the hospital, and we kids were able to see her through her

hospital window. There are 9 of us. I'm number 7. The oldest at the time was 16 and the youngest was 3, and I was 6.

I did go to my mother's funeral. I don't really remember it. I only remember that there was a very long funeral procession and a lot of people there. I don't recall how the loss of my mother affected my relationships between the ages of six to twelve years. I've always been "motherless" so it's difficult to know how it affected my relationships with others. I had lots of friends, went over to their houses, played and had fun. I did well in school, got good grades, co-operated and helped out. All of it seemed typical to me. If I had feelings about my mom and her death they were buried so deep I could never get to them.

I always felt different as I had more choices to make and more rules to abide by. I felt very alone when all my friends were being picked up by their moms after slumber parties. I would either get a ride with one of them or walk home. For class parties I would always sign up to bring paper plates or napkins because there was no one to bake cookies or brownies.

My dad remarried five years after my mom died. She had never been married and didn't have any of her own children, so it was pretty amazing that she should marry a widower with nine children. My stepmother and my dad had three children together. I never bonded with my stepmother and actually don't feel like I have any type of relationship with her even today. We were never close at all. She seems closer with my older sibling, my older sisters and my younger sister.

I don't know if it was me. People in my family say that I like to take care of things myself and I resent that because I feel that I've had to do that. Maybe it's hard for

me to ask for help. Sometimes I need someone to draw things out of me. It's hard for me to take the first step. It would have helped me at that young age of 12 or 13, when she married my dad, for her to take the first step and try to establish a relationship with me. I don't feel that she did that. As far as affecting my self-concept, it would have helped if I could have had someone in that mother role. There was really no one there, even though I've got 3 older sisters. My oldest sister in a way filled that role because she was the oldest and a girl, so she had a lot of responsibility to take care of us. But I guess I feel pretty good about myself. I've done a lot and am pretty secure in who I am. I think life could have been a lot easier, or better for me, or I could be a stronger person if I would've had someone to fulfil that mother role, whether it was a stepmother or whoever. It would have been nice if it could have been my stepmother. We just never established that relationship. Soon after my stepmother and dad married they had a baby, who became the focus.

I always felt like I had to handle things myself because there were always so many other things going on. I remember getting my period and taking care of things myself. I never felt that I was able to talk to my stepmother about things. I don't remember my stepmother ever being interested in me or what I was doing. My stepmother must have figured out that I started my period because one day we were at the store together (a rare occasion that we would go to the store together) and she asked me what I needed. I picked out a box of tampons and my stepmother said, "Are you sure?" and I said, "Yes." That was the extent of it. I didn't even know how to use tampons until almost a year later. I didn't even feel comfortable talking to my three older sisters about it, although I did talk to my girlfriends.

I recently got married and planned the entire event for three hundred and fifty people by myself. I knew that I would probably have to do everything and I felt very good about it, but as I look back it would have been nice if my stepmother had offered to help. I figured she wouldn't because we had never been close before, so why should this be any different? I don't really have negative feelings towards my stepmother. I always just accepted the way things were and knew that's how it was. I never really expected much from her. I never once thought my stepmother would be a mother to me or even wanted to be. I do have respect for her and feel that she had a lot of courage to marry a man with nine children. They are still married after eighteen years.

I was not able to develop such a special bond or attachment to another adult female after the death of my mother. I long for it.

Between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, I was unsure how the loss of my mother affected my relationships. I was always considered a somewhat shy and quiet child, but I had friends and did the things my friends did. I was shy around boys and sometimes didn't know how to act. It would have been nice if I had an adult female to talk to about boys, dating, sex, and so on. Still, my friends didn't talk to their moms about these things either.

My relationships with my peers in high school were pretty good. I had lots of friends and felt comfortable with them. For the most part I felt pretty typical with the same interests and hobbies. I was shy and more or less stayed with the same group of friends. I think I lacked self-esteem or confidence to just "jump in" with any group. I could not initiate relationships so I needed someone to pull me in. I wasn't a real

outgoing type who fit into any group. High school was hard enough and I had feelings of insecurity. But mainly I had trouble taking the first step in meeting new people.

I don't believe the loss of my mother has affected my ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships. Between the ages of 19 and 24 I started dating. I didn't really date a lot of guys. Mostly between 19 and 24 I was involved with one guy for five years. I think I brought a lot of insecurities to that relationship and I felt like I wasn't good enough. I don't know how much of that was related to my mother or not. I was still trying to figure out who I was and what I wanted. I was confused with going to college and what was I going to do. I was just trying to figure a lot of things out. That relationship ended, but he was very supportive of me. He was always trying to convince me that I was wonderful and I was a really great person. He really helped me feel good about myself and showed me things about myself that were positive.

I never understood why I felt so bad about myself. As I've gotten older and matured, this has changed. I feel better about myself now. I didn't feel worthy and this affected my relationship. My boyfriend tried to make it better for me, but it didn't help. My early twenties were a confusing time for me. Again, I don't know how much of that is related to not having a mother or not.

After that time period I met my husband and I don't know how it affected it. We were together for 7 years before we got married. This has been a real healthy relationship. It's been the only relationship that I've had since age 25 (that's about when we got together). He's very supportive of "motherless daughters" and he always listens to my concerns. He's my soul mate. If anything, he's an outlet for me to talk about my feelings. I discovered "motherless daughters" when I was with him.



I happened upon the book, Motherless Daughters at the bookstore a couple of years ago and I'd never heard anything about it. It was like a light going on. I saw it and started reading and said, "Oh my gosh!" because I just had no idea. With everything in the book, I thought, that's me, that's me. Then I got the other little book, Letters From Motherless Daughters . I never really talked to females about mother loss. thinking that I was the only one feeling this way, then knowing there was all these women out there feeling the same way, it was, "oh my god, I don't believe it." I was just blown away, totally blown away. It was really comforting and it was just amazing finding out through the stories that I read that others shared the same feelings that I thought I was feeling by myself.

I am not sure how the loss of my mother has affected my attachment to my father and siblings, because all I've ever known is life without a mother. I wonder how things would be different had she not died. I have never been very close to my dad. I wanted to keep things calm, so I never bothered him much. I did what I was told. I figured dad had enough to worry about making sure his nine kids were fed and clothed. We didn't have a chance to really form a strong relationship. I never blame him. He did the best he could and I respect his efforts.

Coming from a big family, there are some siblings I am closer to than others. Now that we are adults, most of us have pretty good relationships with each other. As I look back, I feel that some of us really stuck together and supported each other—not a great deal, but some. After all, we really didn't have any role models for guiding us in the relationship area. We siblings had, what I considered, typical sibling rivalry. We would fight and tease, but would usually find support in another sibling. The older siblings were

usually in charge, so the younger ones had to do what they were told. They took on the parent role, rather than sibling role.

There were many things that we didn't talk about. Mom's death was one of them. Maybe we wanted to talk, but were unsure how to do it, we dealt with those issues on our own. We kept things bottled up inside. It's unfortunate that we never talked about our mother's death when we were younger.

Looking back on my childhood and adolescence I know I never coped with my mother's death. I never talked about it or let myself feel any feelings about it. That's how I coped. Maybe I did want to talk about it, but had no idea about how to go about doing that. I think the only thing that would have helped me adjust to the loss of my mother would have been to be able to talk to someone about it. I needed someone to initiate this communication because I had no idea how to begin.

In regard to feelings of grief towards my mother, I think I go through stages sometimes. I think right now I might be going through one, because it just seems like its been such a long, long time since she died and I don't feel that I was able to grieve healthily for her, because we didn't really talk about it when I was younger. I think dad did all he could to keep just the basics together. I can see that. But as more time goes on, I just don't think that I've even tapped into all the feelings that I have because of it. I'm thinking, gosh, I'm 31, when am I going to--not that you can deal with it--but put it away and go on? It shapes who you are. Sometimes I just feel like I haven't even begun to get to the root of all the feelings that I have about it. Now that I've become a mom I'm thinking about it a lot more.

I feel that I just miss—I don't know if it's my mother, or if I just miss a person to fall back on. This is our first child. It's the first grandchild for both sides, so there's a lot of excitement because none of my older siblings have children yet. Now that I have my own child, I still don't feel I could call my stepmom. Well, I could, but we just don't have the kind of relationship where I could call her on the phone all the time and ask questions about how to do this or that. How to be a mom and that sort of thing. It would have been really nice if I would have someone to call, but I don't. My siblings don't have kids, so they're unsure. I look at all my friends and some of the girls at work and their mom came and stayed with them after they had their baby. I just don't have that. The only one I can fall back on is myself.

I'm totally free to call my sisters at any time and they've been wonderful, but it's not the same thing because they don't have kids. They know some things, but it's just not the same as having a mother who raised you your whole life come to your house and stay with you a few weeks. Especially because my son was premature and had to stay in the hospital after I was released so there was a lot of emotions going on, because I was released from hospital but he couldn't come home with me. He's home now and he's doing great. I think if there was any time I could use a mother, it is now.

This feels like an important time in my life. I am feeling the loss of my mother, because now I'm a mother. Never having had a mother myself, I worry, "Am I going to be good, am I going to know the right thing, am I going to know how to do this?" I hope to be a great mother someday and want to share as many experiences as I can with my

children. I want to have open, honest, close relationships with them. I want to give them all the things that I couldn't have. I want to give them a happy, complete life.<sup>1</sup>

One recurring thought that kept with me the whole time when completing the questionnaire was, the only life I've every known is without a mother. Even though I had one for six years, I don't have any memory of her. This is all I've known. I don't really know what would have been typical or normal had I known my mother.

I believe I am more independent and self-sufficient as a result of my mother's death. I am also very responsible and have a pretty good head on my shoulders. I learned these things at a very early age in order to survive. As a result of the loss of my mother, I am more appreciative of the little things in life. I have also developed more sensitivity towards others and situations. I believe these things have given my life more meaning and depth.

Now I'm pretty set and secure with my friends. I've got a few close friends and I'm real happy with that. My friends at work and my siblings are my friends too. I think I'm a lot more confident now. I'm a lot older and more secure in who I am. I don't see it as a problem now. But then I don't know how much of it before was related to just being a teenager and being awkward and not knowing what to do. Not knowing who I am. A lot of it has just come with maturity and life experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time this participant originally completed her questionnaire she had no children. At the time of the telephone interview she had had a baby.

## CHAPTER XV: RESULTS

The data analysis began with an examination of each participant's written questionnaire and telephone interview transcript. This data was combined to present the participant's complete narrative. Each narrative was read through several times. Quotes or "meaning units" that contained one complete idea were drawn from the narratives and grouped together. The meaning units were then assigned a descriptive word or phrase that reflected its meaning. Next, meaning units from across the narratives were compared to one another to determine any commonalties. To qualify as a common theme concrete evidence from at least six of the narratives was required. The outcome revealed ten common themes. The following example illustrates how a theme emerged in this study. From reading their questionnaires, listening to their stories, and compiling their narrative accounts the experience of feeling different emerged in each case. Nicole always felt that there was something wrong with her, like she had a big "X" branded on her forehead. Bev attributed this sense of being different to not having her place in the world. Ann, Trudy, Carol, Jill, Jane, and Connie all described specific experiences which amplified their sense of feeling different. Such events included: Mother's Day, school activities or events, graduations, special holidays and birthdays. Laura recalled feeling different from her peers because she did "tomboy things" with her father instead of "female things" like the other girls. Thus, experiences that sparked a sense of "Feeling Different From Others", in the narratives, led to the formation of the theme by that name.

For each theme, the researcher sought concrete evidence from the narratives. The themes were refined or abandoned as the inclusion of further experiences confirmed or

contradicted their validity. For example, an earlier version included the theme “Impact of Mother Loss (Questions and Evaluations)”. Upon further review of the theme it was renamed “Unanswered Questions About Mother.” The emphasis appeared to be on the unanswered questions concerning their mother’s life and death. Many of the women also had enduring questions about how different their life may have been if their mother had lived. Some also wondered what effect this loss had on their overall personality and identity.

To ensure that the theme titles accurately represented the participants’ experience they were continually compared with concrete evidence from the narratives. Originally there was a theme entitled “ Negative Impact of Stepmother” because many had described this as a difficult and negative relationship. However, two of the participants reported the very significant and positive role their stepmothers had assumed. Therefore, the theme was changed to “Influential Role of Stepmother.” The theme “Adult Coping Strategies” was originally divided into the two themes of childhood and adulthood strategies. The theme related to childhood coping strategies was discarded due to the lack of consistent support found in the narratives.

The beginning of the narratives were marked by the early death of the participants’ mothers and the subsequent impact this experience had on their development. The following ten common themes were identified: Feeling Different from Others, Lack of Discussion about Mother, Influential Role of Stepmother, Creating Emotional Distance, Fear and Anxiety in Relationships, Intensified Feelings of Loss, Unanswered Questions about Mother, Adult Coping Strategies, Independence, and Integrating Loss of Mother.

The impact of early mother loss was explored through each participant's retrospective at her experience of growing up without a mother. Thus, both the common threads of loss and developmental growth run throughout all the themes.

The participants were asked to describe their lived experience of early mother loss from the time of their mother's death up to the present. Only a small number of themes were solely associated with childhood or adulthood. Rather, a larger majority of them extended through the participants' life span with a resurgence during specific developmental markers such as: onset of menstruation, high school graduation, entering college, getting married, or births of children.

One way to view the results is to loosely divide them into intrapersonal and interpersonal categories, recognising some overlap. The interpersonal category identified themes that reflect the participants lived experience of mother loss within the context of relationships with others. The interpersonal category included: Lack of Discussion About Mother, Influential Role of Stepmother, Feeling Different from Others, Creating Emotional Distance and Fear and Anxiety in Relationships.

The intrapersonal category contains common themes, which represent the impact of early mother loss on an individual, internal level. The intrapersonal category included themes, which examined the impact of early mother loss on development, the establishment of identity, and the internal process of grieving. The intrapersonal category included: Intensified Feelings of Loss, Unanswered Questions about Mother, Independence, Adult Coping Strategies, and Integration of Mother Loss.

### **Theme 1: Lack of Discussion about Mother**

Seven participants noted there was an overall lack of discussion about mother and guidance in the grieving process. Bev described how,

NO ONE ever mentioned my mother (not my father, my sister, my aunt and uncle or cousins, grandmother, or teacher). It is as though by not mentioning her, I would not notice that my mother was not there. So you kind of learn when nobody else will talk about her, you can't talk either because it's obviously a forbidden topic.

For some, this type of family silence began shortly after their mother's death. Ann recalled how after her mother's death she and her siblings were left in the dark concerning their immediate plans. "But there was not any real sharing about what this looks like or any kind of reassurance of where we were to go, and what was going to happen to us." Pam noticed her father's resistance in discussing her mother. She recalled, "Whenever I brought something up with my dad, he would give me a short answer and they try and change the subject. I missed talking to my father, something I feel could have aided me in further adjusting to the loss of my mother."

Besides having little discussion regarding their mothers the participants noted an overall lack of guidance in grieving her death throughout childhood and adolescence. Certain participants attended their mother's funeral while others were excluded from this ritual. Carol noted how attending the funeral was not meaningful to her because she was not guided through the process. Jane described her family's quick return back to 'normal' soon after her mother's funeral, "normal in the sense of just pretending, or not really addressing it very much." Reflecting back Jane felt it would have helped if her dad had



talked about her mother more, and not uprooted the family by moving across the country only four months after her death. She also missed staying in touch with her mother's relatives. Trudy echoed this sentiment explaining she felt unsure how to initiate a conversation about her mother.

There were many things that we didn't talk about. Mom's death was one of them. Maybe we wanted to talk but were unsure how to do it, so all of the siblings dealt with those issues on our own. We kept things bottled up inside. It's unfortunate that we never talked about our mother's death when we were younger. Looking back on my childhood and adolescence didn't deal with my mother's death. I never talked about it or let myself feel any feelings about it. That's how I coped. Maybe I wanted to talk about it but had no idea about how. I needed someone to initiate this communication because I had no idea how to begin.

Mary's experience and feelings were similar, "I did not feel I had the skills and/or insight to seek any assistance. What I missed which would have helped me adjust to the loss of my mother was talking honestly in the home about my mother's death."

Nicole recalled, "My father never really dealt with my mom's death and I certainly learned that from him. I don't want to blame him because I know he suffered, but the suffering may have been less severe had he allowed all of the family to grieve, as we needed."

Bev made reference to the era she grew up in by describing the taboo of talking about death during the 1950s and 1960s, "families didn't talk about things. It was 'it's over and done with' and you move on." Ann echoed this same sentiment

I missed feeling that I could ask questions; having others show their anger, pain, and tears, and embracing each other and staying together; having things explained to me to answer my fears; being comforted and given a sense of security. Back then, in the 50s and early 60s families didn't talk about things. It was it's over and done with and you move on.

### Theme 2: Influential Role of Stepmother

Six participants described the overall impact of their stepmothers as generally poor, ranging from non-existent to abusive. Many felt their fathers got involved in new relationships prematurely after their mother's death. They reported how their fathers had started dating or remarrying new partners anywhere from six months to two years after their mother's death. Pam stated, "When I was younger, I was angry because my stepmother and I never got along. I thought my dad just didn't do a good job finding a new mom and wife. As I got older . . . I didn't understand how my father could know he loved someone else in six months" Mary remembered how her father remarried within sixteen months after her mother's death.

I was required to call my stepmother 'mom' even before they were married. I wanted to have a mother so I latched on to her and attempted to please her by doing extra chores and being the perfect child. My stepmother later threw away all pictures of my mother and told me she could remember giving birth to me.

Jane described her first stepmother as "a beautiful, young, talented, bright but emotionally very unstable and very abusive woman."

For some participants, a negative rapport with their stepmother affected their opportunity to talk about their mother and grieve loss in the family. Pam noted, "I wish my stepmother could have been more understanding of what she was coming into with a seven year old who just lost her mother." Mary remembered, "My stepmother did not allow me to cope with my mother's death, which I feel was very detrimental." Some stepmothers also had an effect on the overall family dynamics. Jill recalled how her stepmother "was jealous of my dad spending time with us." Mary believed that her attachments to her brother and father were greatly influenced by her stepmother. "I became closer to my brother in that we saw our stepmother as a common enemy. My stepmother felt my father and I were too close, so she prevented me from having much contact with him." Pam recalled how her stepmother seemed to be mad all the time.

She was always very short with me in her tone. All I did was try to make her happy, but my stepmother never said thank you for the things I did right. She just yelled at me for the things I didn't do . . . I was just always confused and upset and couldn't understand why my stepmother didn't like me. Whenever I talked to her she never looked at me. She just kept looking at whatever she was doing.

Pam concluded, "Growing up with my stepmother left me with chaotic emotions." Laura wished that she had a better relationship with her dad's girlfriend to have an older woman to talk with. She went on to explain how "We've just accepted, that for some reason, my stepmother never wanted to accept me . . . If I was a parent and someone really didn't want to be with my child I think I would have said, well I'm sorry, then that's it." Trudy how she never really bonded with her stepmother,

We were never close at all. I remember getting my period and taking care of things myself. I never felt that I was able to talk to my stepmother about things. I don't remember my stepmother ever being interested in what I was doing or me. I never once thought my stepmother would be a mother to me or even wanted to be.

By contrast, two of the participants described a close relationship with their stepmothers. Both participants alluded to a mutual understanding of the stepmother's role in their life. There was a sense that the stepmother did not replace the mother but still assumed some of the mother's responsibilities. Connie noted that her relationship with her stepmother was positive because she didn't try to replace her mother and they had a mutual understanding and established rules early on. Jane had two stepmothers and along with that two very different experiences. She described her second stepmother like a mom. "She was very loving but also structured and disciplined. She gave us a lot of responsibility. She was always getting my dad to try to let us take the car or take a weekend trip or whatever, as long as we acted responsibly." Jane felt the positive impact her second stepmother had on her life was, "probably the difference between me being a functioning individual and not being able to make it this far. Like not being able to cope, have a career or just be a lot sicker. She definitely had a big influence."

For a couple of the participants their stepmothers played positive roles without trying to replace their predecessor. For the majority of the participants, however, a negative relationship with their stepmother amplified their sense of isolation.

### **Theme 3: Feeling Different from Others**

Feeling different from others was a heightened awareness or self-consciousness of not having a mother like everyone else did. The awareness of feeling different was often reinforced at school, especially when interacting with peers. Nicole recalled how she, “always felt as though there was something wrong with me. I always felt an intrinsic sense of awkwardness and just being out of place. I went along like this for so long before I even realised that it was basically that I did not have a mother like ever one else did.” Carol reported feeling separate from others, “I knew that I had an aunt and an uncle instead of a mother and a father, whereas everyone else had a mother and a father. That made me feel separate.” Connie compared feeling different “to being hit over the head. Wow, I can see the light. I didn’t have a mother, I was different than everybody else.” She explained, “I was just consumed, from the moment I woke up to the moment I went to bed, that I’m different. I have no mother.”

None of the participants actually knew another motherless daughter or son apart from their siblings, until much later in life. For the first time at age 34, Jane has a friend who just lost his mother. She recalled how difficult it was growing up. “One thing that was really hard was just how unique and different it made me feel to not have a mom, because no one else I knew was similar in my classes or anything. It was just really uncommon.” In a sense the participants were a minority, yet it was a hidden minority because they had no way to identify other children in the same situation. Bev also explained how

In the 1950s and 1960s this was not a normal thing not to have your parents. It was another way of standing out . . . you live in other people’s

homes and even though they're very loving . . . I think you always know you're the one who doesn't belong. Being an orphan, to me, I think is not having your place in the world.

This sense of feeling different increased as the participants attended school, interacted with their peers, and went over to their friends' homes. Some participants also remembered the impact of hearing others talk about their mothers, sleeping over at friend's houses or seeing friends with their mom's (Jane, Laura, Trudy, Pam). Trudy recalled feeling different when all her friends were getting picked up by their moms after slumber parties. "I would either get a ride with one of them or walk home. For class parties I would always sign up to bring paper plates or napkins because there was no one to bake cookies or brownies." Laura recalled not being able to, "bond with some girls because they all had their mothers, and they sewed and were crafty. I tended to like cars and tomboy stuff. The other girls didn't seem to like me because I didn't do 'female' things." Ann reported how with her peers in high school she never felt that she fit in or belonged because "I had this secret. I had no mom, I lived in a foster home, and I couldn't relate to or be related to. I feared that if I told anyone, I might be an outcast."

Many women recalled specific experiences that intensified their sense of feeling different. Nicole described her first motherless Mother's Day in grade one, "making cards in art class and my friend Patty yelled out, 'But Nicole does not have a mother so she can't do this!' I can recall feeling my face became so hot and red as I fought back the tears." Pam recalled how soon after her mother's death, "I was in Brownies and we had a Mother/Daughter dinner. I took a friend of the family and I remember asking how I should introduce her. I felt awkward." Bev noticed how adults treated her differently

because of her mother's death, "I certainly knew that I did not have a mother, and I knew that adults always treated me extra kindly (poor child, you know her mother is dead). I remember the cleaning woman they had, always being extra nice to me (the orphan) and always knowing that I was living in someone else's house" She vividly recalled in her family, " Whenever they didn't want the kids to hear things, they would speak Yiddish. But I learned the words for dead, (sounds like: "sharte") so I always knew when we'd go someplace and they'd talk about me and say her mother and father are dead. I knew what they were saying, but of course I always pretended like I didn't understand."

Some participants also reported times they have felt different from others in adulthood. Laura recalled a time when she worked, "in an office with mostly women. One nurse was talking about going shopping with her daughter. This made me cry and I had to leave the room. I realised that I would never do that. I experienced an overall 'different' feeling. I just didn't feel comfortable with other women."

Thus, the theme of "feeling different" extended throughout childhood, adolescence and into adulthood. These women described an ever-present awareness of not being the same as others, both over the course of time and intensified during specific events.

#### Theme 4: Creating Emotional Distance

Creating emotional distance referred to a deliberate attempt to maintain a sense of emotional distance with others in their relationships. It was described as a purposeful behaviour utilised by some of the participants to manage or control their environment and thus survive the loss of their mother. Emotional distance was identified as a coping strategy by six of the participants.

Carol explained how she used emotional distance already at an early age, “I kind of maintained my wall, my defence, for fear of having loss occur. I think it started early. It actually probably started developing right away.” Carol described herself as, “detached, hyperactive and very hard to attach to. I felt like it was easy to make friends but I didn’t let anyone get too close” In adolescence, she continued to use emotional distance to avoid intimacy. She described her relationships with her peers as “ somewhat turbulent, distant and judgmental. I didn’t socialise with any of them, nor did we discuss thoughts, feelings or attitudes concerning death. I felt like I went through high school alone, rather than intimately.”

Emotional distance left some participants feeling separate or disconnected. Jane described how this distance often led to depression due to isolation. “You never really connect in an intimate way with people. I’d feel kind of like there’s this world going on and I’m on the outside looking at it, watching it happen, but I’m not really a part of it.” During adolescence Mary recalled how she isolated herself from others by “taking on lots of responsibilities and studying hard.” Bev noted that in high school her relationships with peers were few and far between. “I was a loner in that time period.”

Nicole used emotional distance for a period of time high school, “ at seventeen, I withdrew socially and became very serious about studies and losing weight. Food and weight became my world during my senior year of high school. I developed anorexia and bulimia and was absolutely miserable.

#### Theme 5: Fear and Anxiety in Relationships

The most prominent feeling or emotional reaction associated with mother loss was fear or anxiety in relationships. Seven of the participants identified this feeling in the



terms of fear of rejection, loss or abandonment. For some, it was also described as a general state of anxiety. Such feelings impacted the participant's relationships in profound ways. Three participants described how mother loss increased their anxiety around losing their father. Nicole recalled,

I always had to know exactly what time he would get home from work and if he was one minute late, I would really flip out. I used to wait by my window in the evening, to see his car pull into our driveway. I always hated saying goodbye to him in the morning. The anxiety I lived with was almost unbearable . . . I do associate this with losing my mother because I don't think I would have had that kind of anxiety had my mother survived. I wouldn't have been so concerned that I was going to lose my father.

Connie recalled how her anxiety around losing her father continued into college.

She described how she reacted after having a vivid dream of her father dying;

I couldn't get through and kept calling and calling him. I literally sat at the desk with the phone and I must have been there a good solid two hours. Just kept hitting redial every few minutes until I finally got through. When he picked up I started crying when I heard his voice. I said, thank God you're okay, and he said, did you have a dream, did you have one of your dreams? I said yes, and he flew me home. That's how I dealt with it.

Laura attributed her increased sensitivity in relationships to fear of further loss

I left for school and when I came home my mother was gone . . . I'm a little sensitive . . . if there's an argument, it's like, they're not going to talk to me any more because we argued. I'm going to lose them. Maybe those

feelings come back and I'm a little more vulnerable to that . . . I notice a lot of times, I think because that morning was the last time I saw my mom alive, that when I leave my house some mornings, it's like separation anxiety . . . My dad's that way too. If you say "bye" he is hesitant on saying bye because I think he is afraid . . . It doesn't happen a lot, so I don't think it's made a big negative impact. I think it's made me more aware . . . I look at people a little more and think, let me spend good time with them now because I don't know what's going to happen.

Carol expressed how her sense of fear affects her intimate relationships. I am single, date infrequently, enjoy living alone and do not like to commit. I fear that growing old with someone will threaten my individuality and produce a dependency in my thinking and behaving that is not in my character. In intimacy, what I don't like happening now is having people leave me. I would rather do the leaving. For instance, when people come to visit me, that's really hard when they leave. Between the ages of 25 and 35 I noticed that my three intimate relationships ended due to my inability to commit and/or deal with rejection.

Nicole also described experiencing anxiety in her intimate relationships "it was a little obsessive that way I was with him, so afraid of losing him. I never thought I would last this long without him". Anne remembered how she coped with her anxiety growing up.

I attempted to cope by being perfect, good, nice and giving so that I could keep from losing that which was so vital. 'Don't leave me' was a core scream in me . . . afraid

to get too involved for fear of abandonment. Fear of loss is huge in my being . . . the fear of rejection was the most difficult part. So, I often continued pleasing others, holding on even when things were a detriment to myself . . . I've been learning to say no and not worry about not being liked. I don't fear the abandonment and rejection as much.

Many of the participants associated feelings of anxiety with their early experience of mother loss and, thus, feared further loss.

#### **Theme 6: Intensified Feelings of Loss**

Many participants were acutely aware of times they have experienced intensified feelings of grief and loss of mother. Although waves of grief could occur at any time, specific periods of heightened feelings of loss were identified. The three common triggers which intensified feelings of mother loss included: observing other mother/daughter interactions, special events (Mother's day, anniversaries, holidays) and development markers (first period, graduations, weddings, or births of children). Eight of the participants referred to experiencing intensified feelings of mother loss

Most of the women recalled how observing other mother/daughter interactions triggered feelings of grief. For many this began in childhood, when visiting at friend's homes, where they saw friends interact with their mothers. For Jill, her adolescent years were especially difficult because, "the joy, fear, anguish, excitement, of becoming a woman was more intense and uncertain because I did not have a mother to see me through that very turbulent time in my life. My relationships with my peers in high school were sometimes difficult because when girls were doing something with their mothers I felt jealous." Most of the participants noticed an increase in feelings of loss during late adolescence and into adulthood. The women began to see a shift as their peers began to

establish more of a friendship with their mothers in adulthood. Laura described being triggered at work, “ for some reason that age or that time period in my life it really hit me. I remember she was just casually talking about going shopping with her daughter and I just went into one of the rooms and lost it . . . it just really struck me at that time.”

Jane commented on the range of experiences, which can trigger feelings of loss for her. She explained how it “ comes up a lot when watching movies, with my friends or mother's days. There are lots of reminders of what I don't have. When my friends are having babies and their mom's so involved. Before it was when friends were getting married and their mom's were so involved. Moms are big parts of major events and I don't have one to be there for that.” She concluded, “I have been studying mother/daughter interactions longingly. Just wishing I could have the same and knowing that I can never have it. I think that's such a core relationship for a woman, the one with her mother.”

The women noticed how the feelings of grief were intensified during specific developmental markers or rites of passage. For many of the women such markers included specific experiences such as; their first period, high school graduation, entering college, getting married, or having children. For Connie, the two developmental markers in which she missed her mother more intensely included entering college and getting married. “I tried to appear strong for my father, running off to college. Then seeing other women my age interact with their mothers I realised that not only have I never done that, but also I never will do that. I then became more anxious about how no one would be there for me. Getting married was further proof I was an adult. But it was at those times I longed to turn to my mother and say, I'm scared and I don't know what I'm doing.”

One participant's experience of growing up motherless was exacerbated by an era, in the 1950's, when societal norms limited the type of involvement or role a single father could play in a daughter's life. "In 1952, it was not 'accepted' for a father to raise a daughter alone."

Jill recalled noticing the absence of her mother as her guide when learning about sexuality. "I turned to books. I learned about sex through reading The Godfather and then going to the dictionary look up the words. I became really resourceful looking at ways to find the answers. I was very curious. I did not avoid the answers or look the other way or pretend they didn't exist. I wanted to know." The experience of early mother loss was intensified if the daughter did not have a female role model. "Following the death of my mother, I did not develop an attachment or special bond to any one particular adult female. I found out everything I needed to know about on coming womanhood from my friends and their mothers." (Pam) Many participants remembered the difficulty of growing up without the guidance of a nurturing woman to guide them through the unspoken rules, subtleties, and societal norms traditionally taught by one's mother. Trudy reflected on how it would have helped her to have someone in a mother role. "I was not able to develop such a special bond or attachment to another adult female after the death of my mother. I longed for it. I was shy around boys and sometimes didn't know how to act. It would have been nice to have an adult female to talk to about boys, dating, sex, and so on." Jill also felt the weight of the extra responsibility she undertook after her mother's death despite having an older sibling. She recalled how she felt after helping her older sister through her first pregnancy. "I had a strong sense of jealousy and almost anger, that

she had me, but I had no one. I almost wanted to scream that to somebody. I remember leaving the house driving home crying thinking, who do I have to rely on?"

Thus, feelings of loss were often intensified for the bereaved daughters' who were left to face the normal challenges of female development with little guidance or support. Laura reported not "being sad until later in life . . . I didn't really need my mother until later . . . the time I most missed my mother was . . . during my pregnancy and after having the baby, that's when I missed her the most." Jill also felt that she missed her mother the most when she became a parent. For many participants the feelings of loss continue on throughout one's life. Bev described her present feelings of loss, 45 years after her mother's death.

The feelings around the loss of my mother are still the same, especially since I have had my own children whom I know my mother would have liked. Also my husband's parents have showed me what it was like to have a parent. It doesn't really get better. You adjust in different ways that's all. You make your own place. And every year when we go to memorial services on the holidays . . . my sister, brother-in-law and I always sit together. I fall apart because there's a particular portion of the prayers that you read that talks about your mother or father. And my sister's just as bad. This year my mother's dead 45 years and we like look at each other and say why isn't this getting any easier?

#### Theme 7: Unanswered Questions about Mother

Eight participants raised unanswered questions they had about their mother and the impact of her death on their lives. Such questions were not the type that could be

answered with clarity or full satisfaction. They were enduring questions with no easy answers, if any at all. Although the questions were interrelated, each one explored a different angle of mother loss.

Certain questions raised were musings “I wonder how things would be different had she not died.” Anne questioned, “I wondered what it was like to have a mom.” She went on to muse, “ what ailments or menopause would have been like for her mother –so I could know what to expect. I also don’t know what her medical history would have been like. Of course not ever really having the opportunity of a long-term relationship with my mother. What would she have been like at 46? What would she have looked like? What kind of grandmother would she have been? And what kind of great-grandmother . . . the wonderment of how long would she have lived? And how different I might have been, I mean, I know she wasn’t perfect, but I think I would’ve still had a better sense of self.” Bev also wondered how different her life would have been if her mother had lived.

Certain questions explored the influence of mother loss one’s identity. The nature versus nurture question was raised to examine how much of one’s personality resulted from heredity and how much was shaped by environment. Carol wondered what “extent early loss impacted my personality traits and characteristics, to comprehend whether these behaviours can be changed or are a fixed result of my nature from birth . . . Sometimes I act certain ways and I don’t know whether it’s a result of my experience or it’s just me. She concluded, “ I’ve developed into who I am as a result of all my circumstances.” Jane felt early mother loss impacted her sense of identity. “ Not having a maternal bond at an early age . . . in those early years (ages 8,9,10,and early teens) when I

was trying to develop an identity I didn't have one for that. No one to support me, or give me feedback when I wasn't feeling good about myself. In fact, to the opposite, to the other extreme with my stepmom.” She also explained how the lack of information about her mother affected her sense of self, “Just not really feeling whole. Partly due to the abruptness of her death, and not having any information on her or her background through all those years.” Jill felt that she probably would have been a different person and made different decisions had her mother lived.

I strongly believe I would not have chosen a family so young in life and the reason why I did was because I was trying to be a mother. I'd have a mother because I'd be a mother. I remember lying in bed when I was 12 years old. I'll never forget putting a pillow by my stomach and caressing the pillow pretending there was a baby inside of it so that I could comfort the baby. Now I think was trying to comfort the baby that I was. Comfort the baby that had no mother. I had my kids so early because I was mothering myself through them. I would have had a family eventually but it's like all my life I've been searching for family . . . I might have been more career- oriented. I found out that my mother . . . believed that a woman should have a right to further her education. She had talked to a couple people and said that her two daughters were going to graduate through college.

Pam questioned the impact that of early mother loss had on adult intimacy.

During one of the sessions, she said of the women there, not one could allude to a positive intimate relationship with her partner. That was what



got me thinking about the connection, if any, between broken relationships and early tragic loss. I'm finding a pattern with people I know who are motherless daughters or orphans, and broken relationships. Sometimes I wonder if we're all searching for the perfect mother again. And when we don't find it in someone, then it's like the relationship has failed. That's almost what I feel like.

Trudy explained how difficult it was for her to assess the impact of mother loss on her life without having any other point of reference. "One recurring thought that kept with me the whole time when completing the questionnaire was the only life I've every known is without a mother. Even though I had one for six years, I don't have any memory of her. So this is all I've known, therefore, I don't really know what would have been typical or normal had I known my mother." Carol reflected in general on the enduring nature of these questions. "I'm always going to wonder whether or not my life would have been different had they not died. Whether my choices would have been different if I'd felt differently about them." Thus, the experience of losing one's mother at an early age has left some with difficult, and perhaps life long, unanswered questions.

#### Theme 8: Independence

Six of the participants described a sense of independence or inner strength, which they felt, resulted from living with early mother loss. "One strength the loss of my mother has fostered in my life is independence and knowledge that I am a survivor. Like most characteristics there's both a positive and a negative. I have learned to take care of myself, not to depend only on others" (Bev). For Laura, growing up without her mother resulted in additional responsibilities at home. She recalled how in her grandparents

initially came to help out but as she got older, “ was more like a latchkey kid. I would come home from school before my dad so I'd start something to eat or my homework. I'm sure if my mom had been there that I wouldn't have done all that. She would have had dinner ready because she stayed at home.” Mary associated her self-reliance, maturity and ability to manage all her responsibilities well, with being forced to face the realities of early mother loss. Overall, this sense of independence was identified as strength, although Carol explained how; “the strength of my self-reliance is also my handicap, I feel, as I have difficulty reaching out and sharing experiences with other people. I often feel isolated and alone.” Bev described how she defined this sense of independence in her marriage. “ I've always thought that I will always, no matter what be able to take care of myself. The way I describe it to my husband is together we're better, but by myself I would be okay.”

Other participants described how a greater sensitivity and compassion accompanied their independence (Jill, Nicole, Trudy). As succinctly put by Trudy, I believe I am more independent and self-sufficient as a result of my mother's death. I am also very responsible and have a pretty good head on my shoulders. I learned these things at a very early age in order to survive. As a result of the loss of my mother, I am more appreciative of little things in life. I have also developed more sensitivity towards others and situations.

### Theme 9: Adult Coping Strategies

Seven participants described new strategies they now employed in adulthood to cope with the loss of their mother. For many, these strategies incorporated supports and

resources they had missed growing up. For example, a lack of discussion about mother was replaced with talking openly about the impact of her life and death.

Other women found reading the book Motherless Daughters very instrumental in changing how they coped with the loss of their mother. They noted that identifying with other women's stories was validating and transforming. Pam found this book, "helped me a great deal in coping with my mother's death. I could see things more clearly and I knew the things I felt were not abnormal. All motherless daughters felt and thought the same things! The book helped me heal tremendously."

Anne described how meeting other women who had lost their mothers in childhood was also transforming. She stated:

I had an opportunity to join a motherless daughters group for 8 weeks. . . hearing nine other women talk about what it was like for them, . . . I felt a connection . . . I'm still in contact with a couple of the gals and one of them is so like me, we giggle at each other. So it's that family feeling . . . Even though it's a family of loss of a mother, it really soothes me.

Carol explained how she copes with her pain. "Currently I have healthy approaches. I might just take a mental health day. Sometimes I go for a walk. Sometimes I drum, I listen to music, or I write. Sometimes I pray. I call a friend. I go seek therapy."

Laura's belief in God helps her cope. "Since the age of 25 my belief in God has helped me get through. I honestly believe I'll see my mother one-day, my dad and myself together. That gives me strength to do what I have to now and go on." Jane also identified how she values prayer and time alone.

I will always have sadness and a huge hole in my heart that I feel every day. It's there all the time. Sometimes when I'm in the mood, I'm talking about her now and the hole feels bigger. I'll probably feel that way for the rest of the night and I'll probably cry myself to sleep tonight. But tomorrow, you go on with work and you go on with life. I think about her every day, but I don't know exactly how I cope with it (Ann).

Rather than something they must get over they expressed an easier partnership with the loss as an ongoing part of their lives. Some participants described a process of accepting feelings of grief, perhaps lifelong grief, without such feelings immobilising them from functioning in society.

#### Theme 10: Integrating Loss of Mother

Many participants reported that the loss of their mother was not something they would "get over" nor was this their objective.

The majority of the women explained that ultimately the impact of losing their mother was profound and long lasting. There was a sense that they may always experience feelings of grief concerning the loss of their mother. Such feelings are intensified at different times throughout life. As a result, the goal has become to learn how to live with this loss and acknowledge the feelings around it.

So there was more acceptance instead of being so angry at the fact that I grew up without a mother . . . you don't fix yourself by going through therapy and support groups and reading books. You just get better tools to learn how to cope with the bad feelings and that are going to be with you forever. There will be things that are going to trigger it. It's never going to

go away. It may be less painful or just different as time goes on, but it's never going to disappear. And I really thought I guess by going through therapy and by going on this journey that I would arrive at the other end and I would be cured, never be unhappy again over the loss of growing up without a mother. That's why the year I turned 30 was so good. I think I was kind of fooled into thinking, wow, I've got a handle on this . . . What I've come to realise is that it's always going to be with me. It's a part of who I am and I just have to keep updating the tools to deal with it."

The integration of mother loss also includes the recognition of the impact of this loss on their identity. "And it does become a part of your identity. Not only it's the way other people think of you and it's the way you think of you." In childhood, mother loss left the participants feeling different, whereas in adulthood some have embraced this identity and reclaimed it in a more positive light. For example, Mother's Day often left participants feeling different, ashamed and alienated from others. Presently, some join with other motherless daughters to collectively remember their mothers. Being identified as a motherless daughter has led to a greater sense of affiliation and increased support.

Another component of integration of mother loss among the participants was an increased insight or awareness concerning the value of life. Jill stated she learned how to get things done. "I don't put off till tomorrow. I realise this is because my mother left me undone. I feel I cannot leave this world with anything undone."

Subsequently, this increased awareness impacted many of the participants' relationships with their peers, intimate relationships, family members, and their own children. One participant said, " Maybe that's what I'm here for, to wake you up and make

**you realise you have a good mother and you should appreciate her and get to know her as a person. I'll never have that chance. But I will knock it into other people's heads (Jill)."** Nicole believed it would be very fulfilling to "help a young girl without a mother and acknowledge her pain and help her grieve."

One participant described going on an active quest or journey to discover new information about their mother. Jill initiated one example of a quest for mother:

After Hope Edelman's book came out I went in search of my mother. I went to my mother's sister in California and I asked her a thousand and one questions about her. I wanted to know the bad, the ugly. I wanted to know if she smoked. I wanted to know if she ever got drunk. I wanted to know it all. At first she was very standoffish. "Why do you want to drudge this up?" I explained I was "searching for a sense of myself." She gave me little anecdotes about my mom and things that I could connect to. She said, "Oh your mother was a wonderful hostess. She always had something in the house for anyone who came over." That's me . . . I also got a hold of [my father] and I told him I needed questions answered and he was the only one that could answer them. So he told me to write down all the questions I had about my mother and then send it to him .I did . . . it was a 60-page questionnaire. He sent it back. Half of it was full. Most of it stated, "I don't know." Some of it he did go in, I was really surprised. He said that yes she did breast-feed us and she wanted more than three children. The reason why our names are the way they are, what we were named for. So I was surprised, (a) that he sent it back, that he actually

filled it out, though partially done . . . Not knowing of my mother was a big void. So by going on this search gave me some peace. I still go to her grave, but I don't search any more. Not as much as I used to . . . Searching for my mother was a search for what I had been when I was a child, what I could have been, and what I am now.

Integrating loss of mother can incorporate many components. The past present and future are examined in light of mother as a person and loss of mother to understand the grieving process and identity development. Many participants explained how in such integration they do not get over their mother's death nor can they justify this tragedy but they have learned to integrate it into their lives. As one participant succinctly put it, "For me, it has been difficult to integrate the loss of my mother and I think that it is a never ending process (Nicole)".

Table 2. Themes of Early Mother Loss

<b>Interpersonal Themes</b>	<b>Intrapersonal Themes</b>
Lack of Discussion About Mother	Intensified Feelings of Loss
Influential Role of Stepmother	Unanswered Questions About Mother
Feeling Different from Others	Independence
Creating Emotional Distance	Adult Coping Strategies
Fear and Anxiety in Relationships	Integration of Mother Loss

## CHAPTER XVI: DISCUSSION

In this study, content analysis of the data has yielded a total of ten themes. These themes can be further grouped into the broad categories of interpersonal and intrapersonal. This section will examine the interpersonal themes followed by the intrapersonal themes. A statement from one of the participants, which seems to capture both the intensity and the scope of the loss is, "All I've ever really known is life without a mother". The results will be interpreted from this perspective.

### Interpersonal

One important area the participants recognised as significantly influencing their experience of early mother loss was within their interpersonal relationships. The type of relationships and support they received with surviving family and peers after the death of their mother had a profound impact either positively or negatively. Some research supports the claim that immediate and extended families, along with surrogate parents, play an influential role in the bereaved daughter's adjustment to the loss of mother (Krupp, 1972; Birtchnell, 1980; Biller & Berlinsky; 1982).

The participants were asked what they missed growing up but which would have aided them in better adjusting to the loss of their mother. The participants suggested that remembering her in conversation and receiving guidance through both their grief and subsequent development would have been beneficial.

Many participants recalled an overall Lack of Discussion About Mother while growing up. They especially missed talking with their father about their mother. The



bereaved daughters recalled how they wanted to talk about their mother and her death but did not know how to initiate this discussion, as they needed.

The participants felt that if their father, surrogate parents or other significant adults had initiated discussion about their mother and guided them through their grieving process, this would have helped them in their adjustments to this major loss. Trudy explained that she didn't talk about her mother nor have any feelings about her death because she didn't know how to initiate this discussion and lacked any guidance in how to cope. Nicole believed that her father's inability to deal with her mother's death prevented the rest of the family from working through their feelings of grief.

From a sociological perspective, all of the participants grew up in North America where the topic of death has often been considered taboo. Two participants attributed this lack of discussion to the era in which they grew up. They explained that during the 1950's and 60's families didn't talk about death; rather 'it was over and done with, and you move on'. Children have often been sheltered or 'protected' from the topic of death and associated rituals. Currently, the value of allowing children to actively participate in the rituals surrounding the death of loved ones has been well-established (Grollman, 1995, cited in Doka, 1995).

Another significant relationship for some participants was with their stepmother. The majority of participants experienced the impact of a negative stepmother. The participants recalled what they found negative in this relationship included not being able to talk about their mother, interference by stepmother in the father and daughter's relationship, and a lack guidance or nurturing on the part of the stepmother.

Two of the participants had a positive relationship with their stepmother. What made this relationship successful for them was a mutual defining of roles where the stepmother did not attempt to replace the person of mother, yet she assumed some of the mother's responsibilities as a guide and nurturer for the daughter. For most of the women in this study, this important role was not filled by the presence of another woman; rather the absence of these qualities added to further hardship and isolation. Biller & Berlinsky (1982) also suggested that having a surrogate mother was potentially positive or negative depending on the type of relationship established.

The next two themes, Fear and Anxiety in Relationships and Creating Emotional Distance, were examined in light of Bowlby's theory of attachment. Attachment theory identified anxious and avoidant as the two insecure attachments. Many of the women recalled experiencing fear and anxiety in their relationships while growing up. This anxiety began in childhood, as many participants were highly anxious about losing their fathers. This anxiety remained in their relationships throughout their development. Although some of the women still experience anxiety, they do not perceive it as detrimental or incapacitating in their adult relationships. Some participants have noted a decrease in their fear. They associated this sense of fear or anxiety in relationships with fear of loss, rejection or abandonment. The participants attributed this anxiety to their early experience of mother loss and thus fear of further loss.

In Bowlby's (1980) theory of attachment, he suggested that the impact of the death of a parent might lead the bereaved child to form an anxious attachment style. The degree to which an individual establishes this attachment style can also be attributed to

other variables such as the child's pre-loss relationship with the mother as well as post loss experiences with one's father and other significant adults while growing up.

Certain participants recalled a conscious awareness of Creating Emotional Distance in their relationships. It was considered by some to be a coping strategy employed to guard or protect herself from further loss or pain. This behaviour appeared to be a response to mother loss. It was a way of managing their fear of abandonment. It may be considered a self-protective mechanism similar to Bowlby's (1980) description of the avoidant attachment style. Edelman (1994) applied Bowlby's theory of attachment to motherless daughters by describing secure, avoidant, anxious and ambivalent daughters.

Feeling Different from Others was a theme experienced by the participants at various times in their lives both interpersonally with peers and intrapersonally in light of identity development. Growing up, the women experienced this sense of feeling different in childhood most profoundly with peers at school and at friends' homes. Specific events such as Mother's Day and mother/daughter banquets were awkward for the bereaved daughters. Feeling different was described as a heightened awareness or self-consciousness directly linked to not having a mother 'like everyone else did'.

A unique challenge often faced by the bereaved daughter was that she often did not know another child who had lost a parent through death. In this sense she was part of a hidden minority. This intensified the feeling of being different. Many participants noted they did not meet another person who lost a parent in childhood until much later in their lives.

### Intrapersonal

For the bereaved daughters, the natural challenges of development were faced within the context of her loss. Therefore, the processes of development and grieving were interconnected. As the daughter matured, each developmental marker provided a new opportunity to experience and work through her loss on a deeper emotional and cognitive level.

Many participants reported episodes of acute feelings of mother loss. The experiences, which triggered intensified feelings of loss, included developmental markers such as learning about sexuality, graduations, moving out, weddings, and birth of children. Other triggers were special events such as mother's day, holidays, birthdays, anniversaries as well as observing others in Mother and Daughter interactions.

For an effective examination of the full meaning of the loss of mother in childhood, a clear understanding regarding the typified role of mothers in western society is required. In western society, mother traditionally plays an important role as guide through such developmental markers in the daughter's life. Therefore feelings of grief and loss may be further intensified if there is no one to fill this role as teacher or guide for social and emotional growth. Death of one's mother in childhood means not only the loss of the person that she was but also the loss of the role she played. In western society the responsibilities assumed by mother often include the role of being a nurturer, supporter and guide. One's mother teaches the protocol for many cultural norms, ceremonies, and rituals.

Part of the mother's role is typically that of guiding a daughter into womanhood. Thus, the repercussions of losing a mother prematurely are multifaceted. Developmental

markers such as the girl's first period, her graduation, her marriage, or the birth of her children trigger feelings of mother loss. As previously mentioned, women described Intensified Feelings of Loss during special events such as Mother's Day, birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, other holidays, graduations, and pertinent religious rites and ceremonies. These events triggered intensified feelings of grief throughout the participant's development. Rando (1988) referred to these intense feelings as STUG reactions, which she defined as temporary upsurges of grief, which occur during special events or developmental milestones. In many of these celebrations the mother typically assumes a prominent role; therefore her absence seemed to intensify feelings of grief. Subsequently, as the daughter develops into womanhood she may be expected to assume certain roles and responsibilities with little knowledge or support on how to successfully do this. Giving birth is one example of an event, which may trigger feelings of loss. For most of the participants this role was not clearly assumed by a significant adult female, and they experienced, and often still experience, this lack of guidance. The women described the importance of specific events, which may act as triggers in the grieving process. Thus, the results from this study more closely aligned with Rando's (1988) process model than with traditional stage theories of grief.

Looking across a participant's developmental life span since the time of her mother's death provides a panoramic view of the grieving process. In childhood, there was a period of denial or a quiet period in the grieving process. In adolescence, this began to change with the increase in developmental markers and emotional and cognitive awareness. By late adolescence and early adulthood feelings of mother loss increased again, which some attribute to the "markers" mentioned earlier. There was clearer

understanding of the permanence of the loss along with all the future losses as well. Some participants noted that looking over their life, the present time is when they miss their mother the most.

The development of a bereaved daughter's identity occurs within this context of grieving. Traditionally within western society the daughter first moves towards her mother to gain a sense of identity, and then individuates. The premature separation caused by mother loss leaves the bereaved daughter with only a memory or image of her mother from which to establish her own identity. The daughter's personal experience with mother is limited to her original perspective as a young child. Thus, as the daughter matures, she finds her original image of her mother is incomplete. The daughter is left with many questions related to who her mother was. Sometimes other family members or friends who have an adult perspective of the person of her mother can answer these questions. Some participants sought to learn more about their mother to work through their grief as well as gain a clearer sense of their own identity. The bereaved daughter's identity is partially established though gathering a more complete image of her mother. Bev specifically recalled how simply learning about her mother's body type, through her older sister, helped her gain a clearer understanding of where she came from, and whom she looked like, which was further confirmation of who she was.

However, certain unanswered questions about mother could not be easily solved. Many participants raised "what if" musings. They wondered what their mother would have been like in the present or in the future.

The nature versus nurture question is raised by some participants concerning how much of one's personality is hereditary and how much is a result of the daughter's

environment. This question considers the impact of early mother loss on development of one's sense of self.

Exploring the close relationship between loss and identity may help clarify the strong reaction of certain participants concerning the idea of ending the grief with complete resolution. Perhaps this type of resolution is associated with a loss of self. Or instead, a positive value may emerge, that of integrating both the image of mother and the impact of her death into the daughter's life. This means not getting over the loss but rather adapting to it. Part of the resolution of identity comes with an acceptance of mother loss and the unfinished nature of this story as an integral part of one's identity.

Two clear themes emerge around identity, which the participants attributed to the loss of their mother. Both feeling different from others and independence described the way the participants viewed themselves, in part, due to the early death of their mother.

This sense of feeling different from others as previously described in the interpersonal category can also be understood in terms of identity. One participant described this sense of feeling intrinsically different due to early mother loss. Nicole described herself as being marked with a big "X" on her forehead. Another clear theme that emerged as a common personal was a sense of independence. One participant attributed this independence to her increased responsibilities as a child after her mother's death. Living with the knowledge of what they have survived provided the women with this strong sense of independence. Interestingly, some of these participants also identified fear or anxiety in relationships. On the surface this may appear contradictory; however, it may be related to a slightly different definition of independence, one rooted in the

knowledge of surviving a major traumatic loss early in life, which may create both a sense of inner strength and increased sensitivity or compassion towards others.

In the process of Integrating Loss of Mother in childhood the individual examined her loss in the context of the past, present, and future. With adult eyes she now looks back to the past to discover who her mother was. The daughter compared this with who she is to further understand her identity. The daughter then referred back to the past to understand the impact of mother loss on her identity. She examined how her life experiences have shaped her perspective, choices, and personality. Another component of integration of mother loss among the participants was increased insight or awareness. Being forced to prematurely face tragic loss left the participants to struggle with existential questions concerning the value and fragility of life.

This theme aligned with current theories such as those of Edelman (1994) and Rando (1993) which differentiated between the complete resolution of grief and healthy adaptation to the loss. The participants in this study clearly stated their goal was not to 'get over' the death of their mother but rather learn how to live with this loss, even to embrace it and her as an important part of who they are. Thus a re-conceptualised view of grieving early mother loss implied a healthy adjustment defined by integration, not resolution. Thus, rather than perceiving it as an obstacle they must "get over", the women aimed to achieve an easier "partnership" with the loss as an ongoing part of their lives. They described a gradual acceptance of feelings of grief, perhaps even life long grief, but without such feelings immobilising them or preventing them from functioning in society.

Most of the participants employed different coping strategies in adulthood from those they had utilised growing up. For many participants there was a shift in their



**grieving process as they matured. In childhood, the focus appeared to be more on avoidance of pain through coping strategies. In a sense many participants “tabled” their feelings of grief until they were better equipped cognitively and emotionally to understand the full realities of mother loss. The coping strategies the women chose in adulthood often embraced the antithesis of their childhood experience. For example, in childhood there was a lack of communication about their mother in their families. Presently, many of the women are talking openly about their mother and gathering information about who she was. For some women this is more of an informal search, whereas for others it became a conscious investigation, exploration or quest, which included interviewing family members, gathering pictures, and meeting with others who knew their mother.**

**There appears to be a qualitative difference between coping strategies in childhood and those in adulthood. In childhood the focus appeared to be more addressing the common challenges of development rather than consciously working through their feeling of loss. In late adolescence and adulthood the participants seem to have acquired the emotional and cognitive resources to address the loss of mother more directly and on a deeper level.**

**Many of the women identified a sense of powerlessness after their mother’s death. Not only was the death of their mother out of their control but also so were many of their life circumstances and experiences following this loss. The Adult coping strategies that the women chose to cope with in early mother loss appeared more internal, creative, and introspective. Such strategies included finding support though therapy, spirituality, and creativity such as music and art. For some of the participants, part of their healing as**

**adults has come from regaining a sense of power or personal agency in their grieving process. Many of the participants have assumed the responsibility of finding updated resources and emotional support to cope with the loss of their mother. This change in coping strategies over the course of one's development supports current research conducted by Edelman (1994) and Harris (1995).**

Table 3. Relevant Theories Related to Results

<b>Areas of Concentration in the Literature Review</b>	<b>Relevant Theorists</b>	<b>Themes Drawn from the Narrative Accounts</b>
Cultural taboo in western society on the topic of death	Grollman, 1993	Lack of discussion about mother
Positive or negative impact of surrogate mothers	Biller and Berlinsky, 1982; Birtchnell, 1980	Influential role of stepmother
Death as stigma and embarrassment	Bertman, 1982	Feeling different from others
Attachment styles	Bowlby, 1979	Creating emotional distance
Attachment styles	Bowlby, 1979	Fear and anxiety in relationships
Significant temporary upsurges of grief	Rando, 1993	Intensified feelings of loss
Impact of loss on feminine identity development	Edelman, 1994	Unanswered questions about mother
Impact of loss on identity	La Sorsa and Fodor, 1990 Chadorow, 1978;	Independence
A look at the continuing relationship between development and grieving,	Webb, 1993; Schlossberg, 1979; Brim and Kagan 1980; Harris, 1995	Adult coping strategies
Adaptation to early mother loss	Edelman, 1993; Rando, 1986, 1993	Integration of mother loss

### Implications for Practice

When examining the impact of early mother loss, we discover that certain implications for counselling and psycho-education emerge. The surviving family unit needs support and resources to cope effectively with this major loss. A profound change within the existing family structure has occurred. The research participants have recommended open discussion about mother, her death and the current impact it has on the family, both individually and systemically. The participants noted that they had wanted to talk about their mother but didn't know how to initiate this discussion. Clinically one might seek a balance between child directed discussion and the adult initiating the topic of mother. Allowing the child to actively participate in the discussion of mother and encouraging questions could do this. The participants identified opportunities for involvement in the funeral or other rituals as important. An important component of discussion about mother includes guidance in the grieving process.

This guidance begins prior to the funeral. One participant noted that she attended the funeral but it was not meaningful because she didn't know what it meant. It is important to prepare the children for the funeral and explain the meaning of the ritual in terms they can understand.

Fathers, guardians and other significant adults could be provided with information concerning the needs of the bereaved daughter. This information should include an explanation of the differences between childhood and adult grieving. The potential needs specific to daughters should be understood and addressed. This may include recognising the relationship between developmental markers and significant events, and the

daughters' grieving process. Prior knowledge or foresight concerning the potential challenges faced by daughters during such events could be helpful for fathers, guardians and daughters. Specific events such as Mother's Day, anniversaries, holidays and developmental markers such as or the onset of menstruation special birthdays, or graduations may trigger feelings of loss which then be considered further opportunities to work through the daughters' feelings about mother and the impact of mother loss.

When a daughter is between the ages of six and eight at the time of her mother's death the image and understanding of who her mother is frozen in time. As the daughter grows so does her longing for new updated information about who her mother was. Many participants talked about a lack of discussion about mother along with unanswered questions about her. Some of the mystery is not solvable. For example, who would mother have been at a later age or how may the daughter's identity have been possibly different? However, many questions about her mother's personality, interests, talents, quirks and unique tastes could be described to the daughter. Thus, bereaved daughters would benefit from significant adults relaying stories and information about her. Opportunities for discussion about mother will undoubtedly arise in the family long after the death and funeral.

For fathers, guardians, and relatives it is important to both initiate such discussions and to be open to new questions about mother which the daughter may tentatively pose as she develops cognitively and emotionally. Both education and emotional support can facilitate this process for them. Therefore, the counsellor plays an important role in normalising intensified feelings of loss and uses this time as a proactive part of the daughter's healing. The loss of mother is commonly experienced throughout

development. Therefore actively remembering mother helping or family adult members provide new information to the daughter relevant to that particular developmental marker or event would be valuable.

In adulthood, the daughter longs to know her mother as a woman and then compare and contrast their differences. Had she lived, they would have continued to redefine the mother-daughter relationship over time and developmental changes. The bereaved daughter faces two challenges here. She seeks to redefine and integrate her understanding of her mother in a healthy way even, or perhaps especially, in light of her absence. Additionally she often faces an unspoken societal expectation that she should “get over it.” Many participants fight the idea of the resolution of grief because it implies an ending of the relationship and moving on. They suggest a qualitatively different model of grief, which involves integration rather than an ending. The experiences of loss may be revisited during significant events, and developmental markers during a bereaved daughter’s entire life span using such experiences of intensified loss as opportunities to rework and understand the meaning of losing their mother in early childhood. The counsellor’s empathy regarding this process may represent a significant departure from her normal day-to-day experiences. The counsellor must support the daughter’s exploration and help her anticipate events that may trigger intensified feelings of loss.

In terms of the loss of mother as a life guide, this study indicates that a counsellor could help the father or guardians to consider asking a significant adult female who is close to the daughter to assume some of the responsibilities of guiding the daughter in her development. Psycho-education could help potential adult females define her role in the daughter’s life. It seems important that she not try to replace the daughter’s mother but

instead establishes a new supportive role in her life. Open communication and trust will promote successful bonding between the two. This new and unique relationship need not threaten the child's loyalty to her deceased mother. It can encourage and support it. The experience of feeling left out at mother/daughter functions would be avoided or minimised given such a female role model.

Another significant adult who plays an influential role in the daughter's life is the stepmother. The introduction of a stepmother into the existing family unit may have a profound impact either positively or negatively on the bereaved child. The therapist could be proactive in providing public education and guidance. The father and stepmother may consider conjoint participation in counselling. Information, workshops, community resources, and support networks would be helpful.

The participants recalled that their relationships with peers and teachers at school were also influential in their adjustment to mother loss. Considering the length of time children spend at school it is important to examine the bereaved daughters' needs in this setting as well. Thus, the implications for practice in this area may focus primarily on psycho-education. Information should be provided to the teachers and principals concerning the specific challenges faced by bereaved children. This includes pertinent information regarding the impact of significant events such as Mother's Day. The participants recalled feeling different and awkward during these experiences. Thus, it is important to educate teachers and principals on the unique challenges bereaved children face at school and their vulnerability to feeling different. The remedy may lie in role modelling and promoting respect for diversity as a standard in the classroom and school.

**A few specific suggestions for teachers in the classroom include the following. Incorporate an educational component into the curriculum, which addresses diversity in family constellations. Present information on family diversity through children's books, videos, and puppet shows. Follow-up the presentation with a discussion on the various types of families. Brainstorm with the children all the possible family constellations such as single parent homes due to death or divorce, blended, adopted and foster families.**

**The teacher can act as a role model respecting the diversity in family units by using inclusive language when discussing the children's families when providing reminders for the children to take home (i.e. always referring to the parent or guardian), and being sensitive to the bereaved children on Mother's Day. By considering more creative approaches to this special occasion teachers may provide more support for bereaved children. Finally, to address grief and loss specifically, the teacher may consider death education as an ongoing part of the curriculum. One possible activity during this component may include remembering loved ones who have died, via the media of art, poetry or stories. The teachers should keep the focus on providing information to the children about death, while remaining sensitive to those children who may need further support through individual counselling or groups. Therefore, updated resources and referrals for the children, parents and teachers are important.**

**Many participants recalled not meeting another motherless daughter until much later in life, which intensified this sense of feeling different. Support groups for children are valuable as they provide a sense of affiliation and connection. Such groups led by a professional counsellor can dispel myths about grieving and provide information concerning what to expect after the loss of one's mother.**



Fear and anxiety in relationships was another common experience for many participants. They recalled feeling this anxiety from an early age following the loss of their mother and especially with their fathers. Thus, when addressing the needs of bereaved daughters it may be valuable to educate fathers on the potential for this response from their daughters. Support and collaboration on how best to address these fears with the daughter could be valuable for both parties and serve to reduce anxiety reactions. Such fear and anxiety along with emotional distance may be examined in light of attachment styles. Individual counselling is another way to work through the fear and anxiety related to early mother loss as well as fears regarding future losses in meaningful relationships.

Individual counselling for bereaved daughters would allow them to work through their emotions and their grief and find ways to cope with mother loss. Counselling may also be valuable at various times during the daughter's development. Therefore, understanding of this is helpful for the daughter. Having the knowledge that it is normal to rework feelings of grief at different times while growing is valuable. Meeting with a therapist who understands the relevance of significant events and developmental markers would be useful in allowing the natural flow in and out of therapy when it is most needed throughout their life span.

Participants found that, in adulthood, it was helpful in dealing with early mother loss to talk about their mother in counselling, support groups, with other motherless daughters and with family or friends who knew their mother. They also accessed resources and information on motherless daughters through books, newsletters and the Internet (relevant websites). Eventually they discovered a level of comfort in the idea that

they did not need to get over the loss of their mother but rather could continue to learn how to integrate this loss into their present lives.

The death of one's mother in childhood can be compared to the experience of adjusting to chronic pain. Living with mother loss is constantly reworked and adapted to differently, throughout the daughter's developmental life span. Further exploration to understand what makes these events and markers so integral to the daughters' grieving process is required. The bereaved daughter potentially experiences new and intense feelings of mother loss at each developmental marker because she could not experience this aspect of mother loss until exactly that moment. Therefore, it is important not to pathologise these feelings of loss even when they are vividly experienced at certain points, years after the death. Considering grief in this light calls for a clearer definition of what a healthy picture of adaptation to early mother loss looks like.

The results of this study support the notion that a resurgence of grief and loss throughout the life span is normal in response to mother loss, and healthy. Thus, such long- term feelings of loss can be welcomed and viewed as new opportunities to understand mother loss at a deeper level.

#### Limitations of the Study

One limitation of the present study is related to the use of retrospective, self – reporting measures to gather the data. One inherent limitation within this methodological approach is the recognition that memory is a re-constructive process. Thus, early memories evolve under reconstruction. Also, memory can be coloured by the individual's mental state at the time of recall. Therefore, if an individual is currently depressed it is likely he/she will recall more negative than positive events. Finally, early memories are

buried under layers of other events. Thus, accurate recall of early memories requires deliberate focus on recollection and search strategies to retrieve memories. Many actual events may not be retrieved through recall due to the potential suppression, repression or interference of these memories. In addressing this limitation it is important to clarify that the purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of the subjective experience of those who suffered early mother loss. Therefore, even though there may be inaccurate or incomplete recall due to memory attrition, it is the actual, lived experience of the participants, which is most highly regarded in qualitative research.

Examination of the long-term impact of early mother loss and its relationship to human development was recognised as an understudied area. Further qualitative research is needed to understand this phenomenon. Due to the geographic distances, the participants completed a written questionnaire along with a follow-up telephone interview to gather the data. This study could have been further strengthened by the use of face-to-face interviews. Participants responded to questions on the questionnaire and the researcher attempted to get clarification and elaboration in the telephone interviews. The face-to-face interview method is considered more revealing than self-report measures (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). According to Yin (1984) the face-to-face interview is the most highly effective method for gathering rich detailed narratives.

Recognition of limitations of the present study is presented along with clearly described research protocol to allow future researchers to replicate, confirm or challenge the results reached in this study. As a result, the theoretical and practical implications drawn from the study can be strengthened, clarified, or extended.

### **Generalizability of the Results**

. In qualitative research, generalizability refers to whether the results can be generalized to other studies of the same phenomenon or theoretical construct. Thus, replication of a study with strong generalizability would produce similar results. The purpose of this qualitative study is to extend our theoretical understanding of the long-term impact of early mother loss. Themes extracted from the data corroborate with current literature on early mother loss. Thus, current research provides additional support for the validity of the themes extracted from the present study.

### **Directions for Future Research**

To increase our present understanding of the long-term effects of the death of a girl's mother during childhood, a holistic approach to research is required. Increased knowledge concerning the differences in bereavement with special consideration to children, development, gender differences and the long-term impact of early mother loss.

Following Bowlby's (1980) example, incorporating current research findings from other relevant disciplines is valuable. In the context of the present study, a clearer understanding of the sociological impact of mother loss within particular cultures is relevant. For example, in the present study, an understanding of the dominant western culture in North American society was useful to understand the context from which to explore the phenomenon of early mother loss.

Within a cultural framework further exploration of the long-term impact of mother loss on daughter can be sought. McCormick (1994) examined the meaning of cultural loss among Aboriginal people in British Columbia. Another important direction

for future research includes exploring the impact and meaning of early mother loss within First Nation cultures.

After gaining a cultural framework, it follows that socialisation of children and gender differences are also important variables to explore to clarify potential differences in grieving styles and needs of boys and girls. There are a number of other possibilities to consider when discussing the needs of future research.

First, a closer look at the ongoing study of developmental differences between childhood and adult bereavement is needed. Acknowledging the differences between the cognitive and emotional resources of adults and children and how the specific needs of each population vary substantially (Edelman, 1994). Traditional models of grief, which do not fully recognise the subtle differences and needs of grieving children, must be updated. Such information must continue to be gathered to further increase our understanding of childhood bereavement. Further qualitative research may provide rich detailed accounts of early mother loss to add to our theoretical understanding of children and their subsequent needs. As this theoretical base is further established, quantitative inquires can be implemented to strengthen the research findings.

Next, there is a need for further research in the area of the long-term impact of mother loss. Studies examining childhood bereavement have often focused on the immediate and intermediate effects of the untimely death of a mother. Examining how mother loss is experienced and managed throughout the developmental life span is crucial. Again early research in this area is deficient, possibly due to its original theoretical base, which suggested all long term grieving was complicated. Thus, research that studied extended grieving explored it through the preconceived lens of pathology.

Therefore, further research exploring healthy adaptation to mother loss including its long-term impact would be desirable. As well, further clarification concerning our understanding of complicated grief is needed.

Another area requiring future research is the unique response and needs of females in the grieving process. Traditional models of grief fail to identify gender differences. Such an omission leaves the theoretical framework incomplete. From a sociological perspective, a difference in the socialisation of boys and girls begins early in life. This influence colours one's experience in areas such as development, identity, and relationships. A more holistic examination of the bereavement process in children, which includes the unique needs of boys and girls, is required. Recent theorists have identified gender differences in the area of grieving (Rando, 1993; Edelman, 1994). Further understanding of the relationship between development and grief from a feminist perspective is necessary. A closer examination of the experience of female bereavement in the context of significant events and developmental markers would be beneficial.

Finally, under the umbrella of feminist grieving, more understanding on the development of a daughter's identity. For example, to understand and the norms for feminist identity development in the context of a particular culture. Then how a bereaved daughter establishes her identity in that culture within the context of mother loss. Results from further study may improve our understanding of the diverse needs of bereaved daughters.

Another research question that can be funnelled from this study may focus on the impact of mother loss on the bereaved daughter's identity development, or what factors contribute to the successful establishment of self-concept and identity in motherless

daughters? Finally, another critical area of study concerns how early loss of one's mother in childhood impacts sons? Further understanding in this area and the unique needs of bereaved boys.

Further exploration in these areas would contribute to our present knowledge of bereaved children and their continued needs throughout their development. It would help clarify what is meant by, and how to achieve healthy adaptation to the loss of mother.

### Summary

The impact of loss of mother in childhood is profound. This topic has been the inspiration for many paintings, books, poems and songs. In his album Poetic Champions Compose (1987), Van Morrison sang a song entitled, Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child. In this study, eleven women describe their experience of being a motherless daughter. From their narratives common themes then emerged. The themes encapsulate the core experience of losing a mother in childhood on a daughter's development; identity and relationships. The results also challenged the common notion of bereavement the long- term nature of mourning early mother loss. The women associated more strongly with the idea of integrating mother loss into their life than completely resolving this grief.

All participants who were reached via telephone confirmed the results. The participants agreed with both their own themes and with the majority of other applicable themes which they were not originally included in. Researcher bias was addressed by including the Perspective of the Researcher found in Chapter Three.

The present study took a life span approach to studying the grieving process for bereaved daughters. It did not presume a stage model of grieving or development but

rather remained loyal to reflecting participants' experience, what seemed relevant to them. Developmental markers and significant events emerged as being highly relevant. The unique feature of the present study is its explicit exploration of the relationship between grieving and development over the life span of the participants up to as long as 45 years after the death of one's mother.

### Conclusion

The experience of losing a parent in childhood is fundamentally different than the experience of loss in adulthood. Most bereaved children have not yet acquired the language or point of reference from which to fully comprehend the meaning of this type of loss. As co-researchers in the study, the participants provided a rich account of their experience of early mother loss. Healthy adjustment to the premature death of one's mother commonly occurs over the bereaved daughter's life span, with upsurges of grief during significant events and developmental markers. The results from this study did not view the intense reoccurring feelings of loss as complicated but rather further opportunities to rework the grief. With each developmental marker, the daughter gains a fuller understanding of the meaning of living with early mother loss.

Secondly, the participants identified the profound impact various adults had on their experience of growing up without their mother. Influential adults included fathers, stepmothers, surrogate parents, extended family, and teachers. The daughters recalled the important role (both positive and negative) these adults played on their experience and on their process of grieving and development.

The participants identified unmet needs they had while growing up without their mother. The most critical need included ongoing communication about their mother.



Discussions about mother include remembering the person of mother along with the impact of her death and her absence in the family. Updated discussions about mother may be especially timely and relevant to the daughter prior to or during significant events and developmental markers.

The results from the study indicate that a bereaved daughter may search to learn more about her mother in order to discover how she is like her. She may also question the impact of her mother's death on her identity. These questions evolve and expand with the daughter's developmental growth. Thus, a crucial part of a bereaved daughter's adjustment to early mother loss includes ongoing open communication about her mother with significant others in her life.

Each developmental marker presents a more detailed picture of the meaning of early mother loss. The study indicates that both grieving and development are interrelated, dynamic processes that change and evolve over the daughter's life span. Therefore, with developmental maturity has come a more sophisticated cognitive and emotional understanding of early mother loss. One insight highlighted by many participants in adulthood is the idea that complete resolution of the grief is not their end goal. Thus, present coping strategies they employ are not used to get over the loss of their mother. Instead the women describe finding new ways to live with this loss that do not inhibit their ability to fully experience life. Support groups, individual counselling, resources and information were a few positive steps the women found useful to promote this process. Connecting with other motherless daughters directly or indirectly by means of newsletters and books were also considered valuable. Individual counselling was

considered helpful to address the impact of this loss on the daughter's identity, self-esteem, and intimate relationships

With the ever-changing experience of this grieving process, the opportunity for healthier adjustment to early mother loss is present. Finally, the women described that their goal in grieving was to integrate both the memory and image of their mother along with the implications of her death in their present lives.

More research is needed to provide additional information and resources to counsellors, teachers, parents and other concerned adults. Both counselling support and psycho-education must be further developed. Communication of information to the family unit, including stepmothers or other surrogate parents is called for. Clearly, the father plays a critical role in the daughter's lived experience after death of her mother, and both he and his daughter could benefit from improved educational and psychological resources.

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APPENDIX A

Letter To Participants

Angela Voght

4278 Watling Street

Burnaby, British Columbia V5J 1V2

Phone: (604) 434-4777, Fax: (604) 888-2364

February 13, 1996

Dear

Thank you for the interest you have shown in my research. Your involvement in this study will be invaluable and I would like to thank you in advance for your time and commitment to this significant topic. The death of our mothers has impacted each of us and I appreciated the way you have readily agreed to share you experience.

I want to give you an update on the progress of my research and let you know what to expect in the coming weeks. Currently, two more steps must be completed before you will receive the written questionnaire. I am in the process of designing the questionnaire and I would be interested in your input at this stage. If there are some questions that you think should be included in my questionnaire please feel free to mail or fax this information to me. Please note, though, that sending this information is optional.

Secondly, I am waiting on approval from the University on my proposed study. Once this has been granted I will mail you the questionnaire regarding your life experience and dealing with the loss of your mother. I will enclose instructions and a return address as well. It will be approximately 6-8 weeks before you will receive this.

If you have any questions please contact me via mail, fax, or telephone. Thank you again and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Angela Voght

**APPENDIX B**

**Participant Consent Form**

**This study explores the long- term impact of the death of one’s mother in childhood.**

**Researcher: Angela Voght**

**Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Paul Wong (604-) 888-7511**

**The purpose of the study is to understand the meaning of early mother loss from the perspective of those who have experienced it. Participants are volunteers who have agreed to complete a written questionnaire and a follow-up telephone interview related to early mother loss. The telephone interview will be conducted to clarify any ambiguity or missing gaps in their story. The participants will be contacted a final time to confirm and discuss the accuracy of the results. Through the duration of this project the researcher can be contacted to answer any questions. Participants can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. If you are interested in participating in the present study please sign and return the consent form below.**

**I CONSENT to participate in this study and acknowledge receipt of a copy of this form,**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## APPENDIX C

Written Questionnaire

## Part I

Please fill in the blanks with you responses:

1. What is your
  - A. Current age \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Occupation \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Number of children (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Educational level \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. How old were you at the time of your mother's death? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Did your father remarry? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_. If so, how long after your mother's death? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Have you ever sought counselling? YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ . If so, for what purpose? \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Part II

Please complete the following questions using as much extra paper as you wish. Include anything and everything you remember. Don't worry about making it into an essay, just put down the thoughts that come to you.

1. Write a paragraph describing the image you have of your mother. What was she like? (This may include your own memories as well as family members' descriptions.)
  
2. Please describe the most salient memory or thought you have about your mother.
  
3. Write a paragraph describing the cause of your mother's death and the circumstances soon after her death (i.e. who told you, did you attend the funeral . . .)
  
4. Has the loss of your mother affected your attachments (relationships, feelings, and communication) to your father and siblings? If so, please describe how.

5. Did your father remarry? If so, please describe your relationship with your stepmother?

6. As far as you recall, how did the death of you mother affect your relationships between the ages of 6-12? (Thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards others).

7a Looking back, what helped you the most in coping with the death of your mother in childhood and adolescence?

7b Can you think of anything that you missed which would have aided you further in adjusting to the loss of your mother?

8. As far as you recall, how did the loss of your mother affect your relationships between the ages of 13-18? (Thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards others).

9. Following the death of your mother were you able to develop an attachment or special bond to another adult female?

10. How would you describe your relationships with your peers throughout high school?

11. Was there a time in you life when you felt different from your peers as a result of being motherless? If so, please describe significant experiences that caused you to feel different.

12. As far as you recall, how did the loss of your mother affect your relationships between the ages of 19-24? (Thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards others.)

13. Has the loss of your mother affected your ability to initiate and maintain intimate relationships? If so please elaborate.

14. As far as you recall, how did the loss of your mother affect your relationships between the ages of 25-35? (Thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards others).

15. If you are a parent, how does the loss of your mother affect the way you interact with your children?
16. If you are not a parent, what kind of mother do you think you would be?
17. As far as you recall, how did the loss of your mother affect your relationships between the ages of 35-50? (Thoughts, feelings, and attitudes towards others).
18. What other significant losses have you experienced? Please describe them and indicate whether your attempts to cope with these losses have been affected by the death of your mother.
19. Do you think the loss of your mother has fostered the development of certain strengths in your life? If so please elaborate.
20. Have you been able to integrate this loss into your life in some positive way and thus live a more meaningful life? If so, how and to what extent have you been able to do this?
21. Please write on any area in your life that has not been addressed by this questionnaire, but has been impacted by the loss of your mother.

### Part III

Please answer the following questions by circling the appropriate number. For example, please circle 1 for Not At All and circle 5 for A Great Deal. If your response falls in between 1 and 5 please circle the appropriate number on the scale.

1. To what extent has the loss of your mother had a long- term impact on your life?

Not At All

A Great Deal

1      2      3      4      5

2. To what extend does the loss of your mother still affect you negatively (inhibiting your growth)?



Not At All A Great Deal

1      2      3      4      5

---

3. To what extent has the loss of your mother affected you positively?

Not At All A Great Deal

1      2      3      4      5

---

4. Did you ever experience a sense of helplessness and dependency after the death of your mother?

Not At All A Great Deal

1      2      3      4      5

---

5. To what extent have you regained a sense of control of your own life?

Not At All A Great Deal

1      2      3      4      5

---

## APPENDIX D

### Instructions for Independent Judge

Please read through all instructions prior to judging. If you need clarification on the procedure please ask the researcher.

Your task is to match the quotes with their appropriate themes:

1. Please review all the quotes and the themes.
2. Pair each quote with its appropriate theme.
3. Begin with a trial run by placing one quote with its appropriate theme. The purpose of this trial run is to assure you understand the procedure and will not be included in your final score.
4. Pair the remaining themes with the appropriate quotes.

## APPENDIX E

### Description of the Motherless Daughter's Society

The Motherless Daughter's Society evolved from the feedback of the hundreds of women who had read Hope Edelman's (1994) book Motherless Daughters. On August 30, 1994 six women gathered together in Greenwich Village, New York to plan the first Motherless Daughters' Support Group. Currently, these support groups have spread across the United States and Canada. The society also publishes a regular newsletter which is mailed out to women nationwide (Edelman, 1995). In this newsletter I placed an advertisement which, requested women, currently between the ages 19-50 who had lost their mothers between the ages 6-8 to join my study.

APPENDIX F

**Resources Related to Childhood Bereavement:**

Bernstein, Anne (1977). *Loss: And How to Cope with It*. NY: Clarion.

Boyd, Nancy (1993). *Helping Bereaved Children*. NY: Guildford.

Buscaglia, Leo (1982). *The Fall of Freddy the Leaf*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack.

Grollman, Earl A. (1990). *Talking About Death: A Dialogue Between Parent and Child*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Heegard M. (1988). *When Someone Very Special Dies*. Minneapolis: Woodland.

Johnson Joy & Marv (1980). *Tell Me, Papa: A Family Book for Children's Questions about Death and Funerals*. Council Bluffs, IA: Centering Corp.

Krementz, Jill (1981). *How It Feels When A Parent Dies*. NY: Knopf.

Schaefer, D. & Lyons, C. (1986). *How Do We Tell the Children: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children Understand and Cope when Someone Dies*. NY: Newmarket.

W. Warden (1995). *When a Parent Dies: Counseling Bereaved Children*. NY: Guilford.