

**MAKING MEMORY AND MEANING:
THE MEMORIAL FUNCTION OF ART**

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ABSTRACT

MAKING MEMORY AND MEANING: THE MEMORIAL FUNCTION OF ART

ESTHER KALABA

While art therapists readily work with bereaved populations, there are only a few articles that mention and describe the process of creating art memorials within art therapy literature (Junge, 1985; Kaufman, 1996; Malchiodi, 1992). The present research describes the experience of creating an art-based memorial in honour of the author's brother, who was stabbed in his teens, with the aim of understanding the unique role that art can play in grief. The use of heuristic methodology, which values knowledge found in the self, permitted the researcher to explore and discover meaning in this major life event (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990).

The documentation of this art process lasted for a period of three months and consisted of the author's artwork and journal entries. The journey of creating a memorial allowed the author to process traumatic memories surrounding her brother's death, develop more positive representations of him that eventually led to a deeper understanding of herself in relation to the loss. Core themes relevant to the artistic process emerged, such as the role of metaphor in change and self-definition, the experience of immersion within the liminal space, the ability to produce a tangible art object external from oneself, as well as personal transformation through the development of meaning and self-narratives. By focusing on current bereavement theories such as the

Meaning Reconstruction Model (Neimeyer, 2001a), the author demonstrates how this lens is relevant, current, and can be applied to the field of the creative arts therapies when working with clients who have lost a loved one.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My brother, Alexander (Sasha) Kalaba died 9 years ago. He had gone out with his friends on what was a regular Friday night and through the course of the evening was stabbed through the heart by an older student in his high school after a fight. He ended up being locked in his car and his friends not realizing the seriousness, did not call 911. Eventually, they managed to open the car door and realizing that my brother was unconscious, drove him to the nearby hospital. Here, because of government cutbacks, the emergency department had recently closed, and the security guard on duty sent them away. His friends drove to another hospital 20 minutes away and by the time they made it there, my brother had already died. There were three perpetrators involved in his stabbing, only one of which was caught and sentenced to 8 years in jail. The others, not having permanent residency status in Canada, fled the country.

I contemplated for a long time on how to begin this paper. I had originally intended for a more gradual transition to deliver the facts about the night my brother died. However, this research stems from Sasha's death and through the process of working on it, I realized that there was nothing subtle about murder, nothing pleasant about my experience of grief and the enormity of my feelings surrounding the impact of his loss. Although I wanted to protect the reader from experiencing hardship, I quickly realized that this was not possible if I was to tell my story and share my honest experience. Through writing about my brother in this paper, I realized how much I have been used to playing down the details of his death in everyday life, because I am all too familiar with the awkward reactions received from others in the past.

When I am asked by people, “do you have any brothers or sisters?” I have to hesitantly reply, “yes, well kind of... not anymore... my brother actually died”. After which follows, “how?” And here I repeat the same words again, “my brother died 9 years ago... he was stabbed... he was 17 at the time”. The harsh bare facts delivered casually in every day conversation. The painful, evocative and horrible imagery infiltrated into the normalcy of daily life. All by one simple question, the look on their face reveals they wished that they had never asked. The conversation all too often stops here and moves on, usually to the weather. As a result of not being able to share this story readily with others, it has become like a dark secret I carry. I have developed a silence, which obliterates not only the horror of my brother’s death, but his life and identity as well.

First-hand experience is my entry point into the world of grief. I have cited the bare facts, however the story does not end here. It took me years to realize that my brother was not his death. Rather, the opposite from it. He was a very outgoing, happy and well-liked teenager. He never had been in a fight in his life and his death not only shocked my family, but also his schoolmates and the community. He liked to ride his BMX bike and play video games. He had a dry and sarcastic sense of humour. He was more patient and calm than I ever was and at times, as his older sister, I could boss him around. His death has overshadowed all of these things and left me in front of a great open hole and abyss, searching for the right way to remember him, honour him and his life, and carry on his legacy within my family. Since his death my life has not been the same. It changed everything, shattered my world and the last 9 years have been a process of relearning, rebuilding, ... finding a way to understand.

After his death I believe that I developed symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although it was not diagnosed at the time. I suffered from panic attacks, nightmares, flashbacks and depression. I felt extremely isolated as I was living abroad at the time. Because his death was so sudden I never had been given the time to truly grasp what had happened. In addition, as the only surviving sibling, I felt like I could not burden my mother with my emotions, as she was dealing with enough herself. In a way, after Sasha's death, it was like I lost the support of my mother as well. My brother's death also destroyed my assumptions about the world, safety, trust, order and the stability of family. I carried a lot of anger within me, directed at his friends for not having done the right thing, his perpetrators, the judicial system, the hospital security guard, as well as the hopelessness of the entire situation.

The turning point for me occurred about 4 years after his death when I joined a bereavement support group for young adults. This was the first time I was given a space to share my story with a group of people who were willing to listen and who understood my experience. In hearing other people's stories, I was able to not feel so alone. This opened me up to new ways of exploring my grief, namely through art, as I enrolled in a textile program at the Ontario College of Art and Design. It was during this time that I decided I wanted to study art therapy. I felt that through my increasing involvement in working with other bereaved young adults, I could contribute a significant amount to this field.

As the years passed, my anger gradually gave way into acceptance. My life became more stable and I often felt that it was getting more difficult to remember my brother in daily life. I felt like something was missing and I realized that I did not have a

place to remember him within the context of my 'new' life. I was so overwhelmed during his funeral that I barely remembered anything at all. I never had the chance to say good-bye to my brother and, because I lived in England 2 years before he died, I felt distanced from him for much of the period when he had 'grown up' into a young man. I really wanted a way in which I could honour his memory, remember him amongst my busy life and continue his legacy. My memories felt increasingly more fleeting with the passing of years and anniversaries. Embarking on this journey to create an art based memorial at this point in my life seemed like the right thing to do.

RESEARCH QUESTION

For the purpose of my research inquiry, my primary research question was: *What is the experience like of creating an art-based memorial in honour of my brother, Sasha Kalaba?*

A subsidiary question in my inquiry, which links my research to the field of art therapy was: *How can my experience and process of creating and having a memorial in honour of my brother help me further understand the unique role that art can play in grief?*

HEURISTIC RESEARCH

This research paper is about my process of creating a memorial for my brother using art. As the focus is on my internal subjective experience of this process, heuristic methodology is most well suited to my inquiry. The heuristic model permits me to explore and discover meaning in the phenomenon I have experienced, and values the

knowledge that is integrated and only found within the self (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Moustakas, 1990).

While art therapists readily work with bereaved populations, there are only a few articles that mention and describe the process of creating art memorials within art therapy literature (Junge, 1985; Kaufman, 1996; Malchiodi, 1992). More recently, an article by Lister, Pushkar, and Connolly (2008) suggested the creation of a memorial piece to help the bereaved person cope with unexpected painful emotions that are sometimes triggered by anniversaries or significant dates.

Using an exploratory model like heuristic research is indicated when investigating little understood phenomena. Heuristic inquiry does not bring about concrete truths that can be generalized to others from a single life experience or world-view; however, research can bring about themes, patterns and identify important categories of meaning (S. Lister, personal communication, November, 2008). Through identifying and synthesizing some core themes that emerge from my research, I hope to be able to convey knowledge gained through my experience. While my conclusions may only be relevant to myself, as my research is grounded in my personal experience, I hope that my in-depth analysis of creating a memorial will give readers a chance to intimately witness an experience of creativity in the face of loss. I hope that this will be useful to other people, specifically other art therapists who are working in the field of bereavement. In addition, because this methodology encourages expression through art and creativity, it is closely linked to the work of an art therapist and thereby is relevant to the field (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998).

As I am also an emerging therapist, I hope that my inquiry into the use of art after loss in creating a memorial will further my understanding of the grief process and help me grow on a personal level as well. One of the goals of heuristic research is that the researcher comes to a deeper understanding of their research question and, as a result, this growth on a personal level will initiate self-transformation (Sela-Smith, 2002). This self-transformation, which may occur as a result of heuristic inquiry has both social and transpersonal implications (Moustakas, 1990). I feel that it is only through direct experiential knowledge of this subject that I can increase my competency as a practitioner to work with others who have also faced loss.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

It will be useful to define terms that will be used throughout this paper. Bereavement is defined as the objective event of loss, or the state of having suffered a loss (Rando, 1984). Grief on the other hand is defined as the subjective experience of loss that can include emotions such as sorrow, anger, guilt and confusion (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2002). Mourning is the culturally constructed rituals or social responses to the death of an individual done with the goal to 'heal' the pain of grief (Homans, 2000).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF

The loss of a loved one is intrinsically part of being human. However, adjusting to this loss is multifaceted, affecting the bereaved person on psychological, physical, social and symbolic levels (Rando, 1984; Riches & Dawson, 2000). Depression, anxiety, anger, fear, sadness and shock are commonly reported as well as a whole range of physical

symptoms such as sleep disorders, heart palpitations, fatigue, breathlessness, and substance abuse (Littlewood, 1992; Rando; Riches & Dawson). A large body of literature describes the period following a death as a time of isolation and loneliness, as grief can affect social interactions through an inability or lack of desire to sustain relationships (Dyregrov, 2003; Spooen, Henderick, & Jannes, 2001). The death of a loved one can result in the loss of a social role, such as parent, child, sibling or spouse and can also extend to cover symbolic losses such as hopes, dreams, fantasies and unfulfilled expectations for the future (Rando; Riches & Dawson).

Research has shown that deaths related to unnatural means such as suicide, homicide, and accident produce additional obstacles and complications in coping with and making meaning of the loss, in comparison with anticipated deaths (Riches & Dawson, 1998). These challenges include decreased levels of social support, shattered assumptions about the world, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and complications as a result of dealing with the judicial system (Currier, Holland, Coleman, & Neimeyer, 2008; Riches & Dawson). In some cases, violent deaths, most notably suicide, result in disenfranchised grief, where the bereaved person has little opportunity to mourn publicly and to be socially supported in doing so (Doka, 1989).

GRIEF THERAPY

The term ‘grief work’ has been coined to describe the therapeutic intervention used in grief counseling and is based on the assumption that loss is painful and goes through stages (Rando, 1984; Worden, 1991) By going through these painful feelings in therapy, one can successfully ‘get over’ their grief with the final goal being to relinquish attachments to the deceased so that this emotional energy is able to be invested in other

relationships (Rando; Worden). Failure to relinquish emotional ties with the deceased is equated with pathology (Noppe, 2000).

This notion that one can break ties with the deceased has been an important theoretical perspective that has dominated psychoanalytic grief literature throughout the 20th century (Hagman, 2001; Marwit & Klass, 1994; Noppe, 2000; Silverman & Klass, 1996; Stroebe, 1992; Stroebe & Schut, 2005). It is based on Freud's (1957) essay, "Mourning and Melancholia", where he writes that after a death, the lost 'object', which has been introjected (incorporated within the self) must be given up. Decathexis (detachment), from the memories of the lost object (person) is painful and it is only by passing through this mourning process that psychological equilibrium can be restored (Hagman).

Many authors have challenged the 'broken bonds' hypothesis (Attig, 1996; Hagman, 2001; Noppe, 2000; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996; Silverman, Nickman, & Worden, 1992; Stroebe, 1992; Vickio, 1999; Walter, 1996). These authors write that maintaining a relationship with the deceased can actually serve the same positive functions as if they were alive, such as having a role model and receiving guidance (Marwit & Klass, 1994). Some examples of continued attachment with the deceased are affective involvement, looking for help with decision making, carrying out wishes or commitments that the deceased would have liked, hallucinations or dreams, or just a sense of their presence (Marwit & Klass). Datson and Marwit (1997) reported that 60% of bereaved participants in their study perceived the presence of the deceased loved one and reported that this brought them great comfort. Silverman et al. found that a year following a parent's death, many children viewed their parents with the same attributes of

a living person, and felt their presence. As the children matured, it was observed that their relationship to the dead parent changed appropriately (Silverman et al.).

Other cultures maintain close emotional bonds with the deceased. In Japan, ancestor worship through rituals performed at a home altar is an important part of culture (Klass, 1996). In Latino culture, altars created in the home are often used to idolize, memorialize and communicate with deceased loved ones (Bermudez & Bermudez, 2002). In Mexico, the day of the dead is a special occasion where family members can name and call upon loved ones who have died (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2002). Even accounts from a century ago showed that Victorians valued sustaining bonds with the dead, even if it meant one would die of a “broken heart” (Rosenblatt, 1983; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1996).

Severing bonds with the dead could be a product of modernist Western culture, which places high value on autonomy and individuation (Stroebe et al., 1996). When a relationship no longer fulfills its role of providing satisfaction to the individual, such as in death, the relationship must be severed (Silverman & Klass, 1996). This notion that grief can come to an end or be resolved is taken from a medical model, where etiology and symptoms can be generalized and monitored as they follow their prescribed course (Attig, 1996). Failure to relinquish emotional ties with the deceased is equated with pathology (Noppe, 2000). However, it is questionable whether the process of grieving can ever be resolved. Many theorists agree that grief is a normal part of life that can and does recur over a lifetime, with variations and fluctuations in intensity (Attig, 1996; Hagman, 2001; Neimeyer, 2001a; Rosenblatt, 1996).

Within the medical model of grief, the focus of treatment emphasizes individual recovery independent of social relationships because Western society values autonomy (Noppe, 2000). Perhaps much of the focus has been on the individual, rather than the relationships between the bereaved individual and his or her environment and also the relationship to the person they lost (Klass & Walter, 2001). The medical model fails us because, “a model of isolated mourning does not recognize the important role of others in mourning” (Hagman, 2001, p. 21). Levels of perceived emotional and social support from others have been significant in the bereavement process and the best predictor for high levels of distress one month after a loss (Brabant, Forsyth, & McFarlain, 1995; Dyregrov, 2003; Klass, 1993).

THE ‘NEW’ GRIEF THERAPY

Many authors state that grief is a normal part of life that can and does recur over a lifetime, with variations and fluctuations in intensity (Attig, 1996; Hagman, 2001; Neimeyer, 2001a; Rosenblatt, 1996). The term accommodation, rather than recovery, or resolution may be more appropriate when talking about the goals of grief therapy (Silverman & Klass, 1996). Accommodation is dynamic, continual, and relates to others as the social environment changes, and development takes place (Silverman & Klass).

Neimeyer (2001a) writes that the reconstruction of meaning after a loss is the main goal of grieving. Mourning within this paradigm involves the “transformation of meanings and affects” associated with the relationship to the deceased (Hagman, 2001, p. 24). Intrinsic within this assumption is that grief can offer growth and greater awareness of an individual’s sense of identity as they learn to negotiate life without the loved one (Neimeyer). This model also acknowledges the uniqueness of an individual’s grief

process, validating cognitive as well as emotional reactions. Finally, Neimeyer also states that maintaining bonds with the deceased can be a positive and natural experience.

COPING WITH LOSS: HOLDING ON WHILE LETTING GO

There have been identified ways in which individuals have positively sustained bonds with the deceased. Parents found solace in holding inner representations of their deceased children and were able to do so more readily in a socially accepting environment such as a bereavement support group (Klass, 1993). Keeping memories alive through story-telling and narrative has shown to not only serve a cathartic function, but also to help understand and find meaning in the loss, offer alternative perspectives and insights, and integrate the transformed memory of the loved one into a person's life (Attig, 1996; Bosticco & Thompson, 2005; Klass; Neimeyer, 2001b; Walter, 1996). Linking objects such as personal items used by the deceased, photographs and possessions can all serve as symbolic representations that can function to connect and maintain a link from the living to the dead (Vickio, 1999; Volkan, 1981). Linking objects reminds us of Winnicott's concept of the transitional object, which allows the child to maintain a fantasy connection to the mother as s/he learns to separate for longer periods of time and adjust to unfamiliar environments (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Klass found that linking objects provided comfort to bereaved parents because they served as physical proof that, although their child was dead, their memory and presence would live on.

MEMORY, MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS

The term memory has been defined as the ability to remember (Hallam, & Hockey, 2001). "Memory establishes life's continuity. It gives meaning to the present as

each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity” (Sturken, 1997, p. 1). In this way, remembering the dead can give purpose and consolation to the living (Junge, 1999). Klass (1993) in his longitudinal study involving bereaved parents attending a support group found that memory functioned as solace. Initially memories were extremely painful because they were reminders that the child was gone; however, as Klass writes, one mother discovered that “letting go of the pain did not also mean letting go of the child” (p. 358). Through memory, the dead become immortal and the living can maintain links with their past, present, and future.

Memories are mediated through cultural forms (Hallam & Hockey, 2001).

Traditionally, the monument has been the material structure for which memories of a deceased loved one were supported, and carried individually and collectively (Homans, 2000). What remains of the deceased is presented in a material or symbolic form and provides a concrete rendering of what is culturally acceptable to remember (Hallam & Hockey). Through representing the event or person in question in a monument, the viewer is transported back into their memory, given a space outside of everyday life to reflect and release their memory, thereby allowing them to return to the present (Homans). It is in this way that monuments serve to help heal the loss, render it less painful and integrate it within the discourse of life.

GRIEF AND THE ARTS

For centuries people have turned to the arts to express their feelings of grief. Literature, music, drama, art, and poetry have all been mediums to explore personal responses and meanings of death. Not only reserved to professional artists, the arts have

been used as a 'traditional' response to death, both at funerals and after (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001). Dominant cultural practices in the West have incorporated the arts during funeral ceremonies to commemorate the dead. However, since the end of the First World War, funerals have lost much of their ritual significance (Riches & Dawson, 2000). The post-modern era and a largely secular culture has resulted in a shift towards a multiplicity of perspectives and a concern to recognize huge variations in the experience and outward manifestations of bereavement (Homans, 2000; Stroebe et al., 1996). As a result, people are freer to create their own mourning rituals, which reflect their beliefs and personal values, rather than adopting more conventional ones.

There are countless examples in which people have used art and created their own rituals to remember, honour, and transform their relationship with a loved one who has died. Planting trees, creating special monuments or memorials, quilts, and personalized urns, are all examples of individual manifestations of loss (Zeitlin & Harlow, 2001). Roadside memorials, placed at the death scene of a motor vehicle accident have become a cultural practice in the United States to commemorate victims (Clark & Franzman, 2006). Significant objects placed at certain sites such as the Oklahoma city bombings, the Vietnam war memorial, and the site of 9-11, have all been ways in which people have 'reclaimed' death by making it meaningful on a personal level (Doss, 2002). Using art to create a memorial such as the AIDS quilt can be a way to allow disenfranchised populations to mourn publicly within the dominant culture by giving a space to name, personalize and create a memory of each person who has lived (Junge, 1999; Kerewsky, 1997).

Art has many benefits, which can greatly help with coping after a loss. The desire to express oneself is heightened in times of mourning and art can help to express that which words cannot (Malchiodi, 1992). In addition, art can not only help preserve memories of the dead, but can also encourage the creation of something out of the loss (Junge, 1999). The act of creation is active, allowing feelings and memories to be transformed and eventually integrated.

Because art moves away from the literal and into the representational it creates metaphor (Kaufman, 1996). Lambek and Antze (1996) suggest that memory can only be understood and communicated through metaphor. Thus remembering the dead through metaphor offers additional possibilities. Art and metaphor can produce new meanings and narratives out of the experience of loss by drawing together fragments of past and present experience (Hallam & Hockey, 2001).

ART THERAPY AND BEREAVEMENT

While it appears that there are numerous benefits of using art to cope with grief, there are few articles that describe the use of art therapy with this population. The dominant model of 'working through' one's grief is found in most of the art therapy literature (Raymer & McIntyre, 1987; Schimmel & Kornreich, 1993; Simon, 1982; Speert, 1992). While it appears in these studies that clients benefited from using art therapy to explore and express their emotions, there is very little literature on the use of art therapy from the 'continuing bonds' paradigm.

A literature search for art therapy used with the intention of creating a memorial for the deceased loved one yielded few, yet promising results. An article by Junge (1985) described two case studies of families creating a book about a deceased family member to

aid in coping and processing the death. A book provided an ideal container that allowed the family to house their feelings about the loss through revisiting their memories about their loved ones. She feels that this is “crucial in the process of saying goodbye, for it is the beginning of letting go and of going on” (Junge, 1985, p. 10). Malchiodi (1992) also writes that art can be used to remember or commemorate what and who has been lost. She writes about her own personal process creating a memorial quilt for a cousin who died of AIDS. Kaufman (1999) similarly explores the use of art in her heuristic inquiry exploring the death of her young son. Bermudez and Bermudez (2002) write about how making an altar dedicated to a loved one can be a healing and comforting process for an individual or entire family, and it can serve as a constant reminder of the deceased. The present research documents my process of using art and writing to create an art-based memorial in honour of my brother, Sasha.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

HEURISTIC INQUIRY

My research grew out of my desire to document my experience of creating a memorial in memory of my brother. The heuristic process seemed best suited to my inquiry because it is predominantly autobiographic, subjective, and it allows for a self-directed search and dialogue to emerge while the researcher is actively immersed in a significant life experience (Moustakas, 1990). Through becoming aware of the internal pathways of the self, feelings and perceptions, the researcher ultimately comes closer to knowing the essence of an experience and eventually communicating this through the research (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HEURISTIC INQUIRY

It will be useful to define the terminology used in heuristic research in order to better understand the process. Underlying all the concepts of heuristic research is that of tacit knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). Tacit knowledge is a type of internal personal knowledge involving experience, feeling and meaning that together guide the way in which one sees, navigates, and understands the world (Sela-Smith, 2002). It is not readily apparent or communicable through language, however it is present at the feeling level and gives birth to insights that are characteristic of heuristic inquiry (Douglass & Moustakas 1985). This concept is well suited to my research question that focuses on a process, which is difficult to approach and articulate in a purely logical way. It also translates beautifully into the world of art and art therapy, as the images and expressions produced reflect the tacit dimension.

Intuition is another way of obtaining new knowledge in heuristic inquiry. Through intuition, the researcher uses internal processes to arrive at knowledge without logic and reasoning, by drawing on internal clues, and observing patterns as they emerge (Moustakas, 1990). Intuition guides the researcher in the direction the research will take.

Focusing is also an essential process of heuristic inquiry that is about maintaining an inner attention and staying with an experience to further understand it. This enables the researcher to discover qualities about this experience that were previously unknown or inaccessible because the researcher has not devoted the time to experience the phenomenon (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). By focusing, I allowed myself space within my life to explore the research questions and to take the time to observe whatever emerged through indwelling.

Indwelling is a process whereby the researcher consciously turns inwards to obtain a deeper understanding of the meaning or the quality of a human experience that is not linear or logical (Moustakas, 1990). It asks the researcher to consciously focus inwards to reach deeper meanings.

The researcher's internal frame of reference is their base, which guides them to know and understand all knowledge that is obtained through tacit, intuitive, or observable phenomena of the experience under study (Moustakas, 1990). The internal frame of reference is what holds all the other processes together and characterizes the unique life experiences that each researcher brings to the study. It requires continual reflection, self-scrutiny, awareness, self-dialogue, openness, and honesty.

DATA COLLECTION

The heuristic process was quite natural for me because it largely reflected my own previous artistic practice. It allowed me to have openness within my inquiry that was based in experiential practice rather than intellectual theory. It required me to have an extremely rich inner dialogue with myself in exploring my research question and valued my journey and path to obtain the answers. Where normally I kept my grief largely to myself, by using heuristic methodology, I could allow myself the space for focusing on my question. It also allowed me to give myself permission in the creative synthesis to voice and share my journey with others. All the while, I felt quite guided by the framework of the 6-step approach designed by Moustakas (1990) for collecting and analyzing my data. The phases are outlined as follows:

1. Initial Engagement: During the initial engagement, the researcher discovers a topic or question that touches them deeply. My initial engagement with this topic began a

few years ago, as I carried within me a desire to create a memorial for my brother.

Documenting my process with heuristic inquiry seemed like an engaging way for me to deepen my knowledge about my experience. My question did not materialize until the research component of my course was presented to me, which opened up the pathway to begin this project.

2. Immersion: The aim of this phase is to be fully immersed in the experience in order to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and social aspects of the research question (Bloomgarden & Netzer, 1998). From January to March 2009 the research question was at the forefront of my thoughts and experiences. I kept a journal with me at all times and would note down ideas or thoughts as they emerged. I also did artwork that focused on the question during this time. I used pastels, ink, paint, and watercolours as my media. I sometimes worked from a preconceived image that came out as a result of my journaling. Other times I left it open, working spontaneously with a feeling, allowing images to emerge and find me. During this phase I also refrained from reading any literature about loss, death and art therapy in order to remain fully attuned to my experience.

3. Incubation: During this phase the researcher steps back from focusing solely on the research question in order to allow intuition and tacit knowledge to open up new avenues of meaning and understanding beyond conscious comprehension (Moustakas, 1990). Sometimes by taking a step back the researcher can gain another perspective on the experience. For myself, this occurred during a period of 2 weeks after the immersion phase, where I did not journal or think about my research question.

4. Illumination: This is a time within the research where themes and qualities of the lived phenomenon break through in consciousness and illuminate the research question (Moustakas, 1990). For myself, this occurred while I spent four days alone in the country and had returned to my research question and my data. I felt that at this point I was able to identify themes gathered from my writings and images, and to synthesize what previously felt like scattered thoughts. Through opening myself up to this new-found awareness I was able to find a way in which I could consolidate this new experience within my narrative.

5. Explication: During this phase the researcher attempts to describe and understand the meanings behind what has become awakened in consciousness (Moustakas, 1990). Using skills of self-reflection, focusing, intuition, and indwelling, I re-examined my new found understandings and knowledge in light of my internal frame of reference. Taking the themes, which had emerged, I began to understand and contextualize my experience by using theories and concepts from the literature.

6. Creative synthesis: Through writing this research paper, I was able to present the themes generated from my inquiry in a creative fashion. In this final piece I can tell my story to others, show art works of my process, all the while communicating the meaning and transformation that I have derived from this experience.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

As heuristic methodology is based entirely on subjective self-report and inquiry, its validity does not lie in correlations or statistics, but is rather one of meaning (Moustakas, 1990). The judgment on whether this research portrays the most accurate meaning of this experience is entirely left up to the researcher who returns again and

again to check raw data (Moustakas). It is for this reason that in heuristic research or for that matter in any type of qualitative inquiry, one of the starting points is the researcher's own narrative of the experience under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). The researcher must be properly identified, described, and situated within their personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, ethnicity, and biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). My reflexivity as a researcher had to be clarified in order for the findings to have any relevance or significance. Because I am the primary instrument in this research, I have reported any information that may affect my data collection, analysis and interpretation as well as defined own my voice and perspective (Patton, 2002).

Heuristic inquiry allows the researcher to have a voice throughout the research process. Acknowledging the authorial presence of the researcher has a powerful effect of transforming the narrative that is produced (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988). This directly pertains to my research given the nature of my brother's death. I have often felt silenced or discomfort when communicating my story of loss to other people. There is a reluctance to listen to stories, which are tragic, sad, and just terrible. In fact it is a common occurrence that social networks disintegrate after a traumatic death perhaps due to lack of clear societal guidelines on how to act or speak with survivors (Currier et al., 2008). Yet silence is counter-productive and through denial the trauma becomes further impacted.

My story becomes important, and above all, through this research, is heard by others. The personal narrative then has the potential to become a social phenomenon where it is possible to learn about the whole by accumulating different individual

narratives (Wright, 2009). Applied specifically to the field of art therapy, it is predominantly the voice of the therapist, which is heard. Through giving myself authorship of this research project, I also become the voice of the client/survivor/victim, a perspective not usually given within art therapy, or for that matter, grief literature.

However, there is the danger that it is only one voice, my voice, which is being heard throughout this paper and consequently it may not be relevant to others. As Patton (2002) writes, "Qualitative inquiry can present accurate data on various perspectives, including the evaluator's perspective, without the burden of determining that only one perspective must be true" (p. 578). While this research is based in my personal experience of loss it can offer me a tremendous amount of first hand insight into the topic, but it can also create a bias. An assumption underlying my research is that my experience of grief, and consequently this research project, can be generalized to other people. My intention, however, is to present my findings as only one of a multitude of possibilities, with each person's being valid and authentic in their own right.

In order to be open to other perspectives, I have used triangulation to confirm the consistency of my findings by speaking to a colleague about her experience of making art after the sudden death of her son. Triangulation in qualitative research does not need to obtain the same results to be credible (Patton, 2002). By having had a dialogue with another person who has had a similar experience, I have gained a deeper understanding of my research question, received validation, as well as become aware of new avenues to explore. I have used the process of triangulation in my research only after the end of the immersion phase. I did this because my process of acquiring data, which came solely from my experience of the research question was intensely personal and I did not want to

have the influence of another. I wanted to stay true to my inner experience and voice throughout the course of the research so this journey was, for the most part, solitary.

The credibility and the quality of research are also dependent on the interests and needs of those who are reading the analysis, as well as what purpose the research is intended to fulfill (Patton, 2002). My study's utility lies in its ability to build on knowledge and contribute to the scant literature in understanding how art can be used after loss, specifically after the death of a loved one. In addition, through offering my subjective account, other art therapists who perhaps have not yet experienced the death of a loved one, can gain valuable knowledge of what their clients may be going through during their therapy. Furthermore, this process has helped me deepen my understanding of grief resulting in an increase in my competency as a future art therapy practitioner. After all, "Education, experience and life are all inextricably intertwined" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 154).

REFLEXIVITY: MY ASSUMPTIONS AND BIASES

In heuristic inquiry, the researcher is the instrument and also subject of study. As a result the researcher must honestly examine their values and interests as this will affect their research (Ahern, 1999). This type of self-reflection called reflexivity attempts to name rather than eliminate biases. It acknowledges valid research can only be obtained by understanding how the researcher's own experiences and background will affect their understanding (Patton, 2002).

I am influenced by a constructivist paradigm. Having a constructivist perspective means that I see death as a socially, culturally, and historically constructed phenomenon, in which attitudes and reactions are in flux and relevant to time and culture (Neimeyer,

1999; Westgaard, 2006). Consequently, I believe that our practices surrounding death are not adequate, and that significant political and social change has to occur for death to be reintegrated into our experience as a community. This fits into Neimeyer's (1999) model of grieving, which involves finding meaning in the experience as well as maintaining connections to the deceased as a natural way to honour their presence in our life.

My view of grief is based on my cultural and social world, where my experience is that of a White, female, middle class citizen of immigrant parents, having grown up in a large city in Canada. In the neighbourhood I grew up in murders were not a common occurrence hence my brother's death was something 'out of the ordinary'. The traumatic nature of my brother's death and as a result my involvement with the judicial system has strongly influenced my grieving process. My relationship to him prior to his death, as well as our personal family dynamics and history will also influence my position. This research took place 9 years after Sasha died, and voices different needs and concerns than those I had shortly after, or even a few years after his death. Furthermore my health status may have also affected my inquiry and results. While not directly linked with my research, recent health issues have led me to think a lot more about my relationship to loss in other areas of my life. In addition, I undertook this research project without a therapist because I wished to remain immersed in my own experience as is consistent with this type of research. I also felt sufficiently confident with the use of art materials and had support available if I so required.

LIMITATIONS AND PRESENTING CHALLENGES

A major drawback to my research was the time limitation due to the need to complete my academic requirements for my program of study. For this reason I do not

feel that this could be characterized as a period of immersion from a truly heuristic sense as defined by Moustakas (1990). Moving from each stage to the next was not based on intuition, but rather external time constraints. However, with that said, I feel that my immersion was genuine and that while limited, I was still able to be open and receptive to the experience without letting preconceived notions or ideas lead the research.

Furthermore, embarking on this research inquiry felt right because of the time that had elapsed since Sasha died. In retrospect, I feel like this inquiry was the beginning of a larger process and has planted the seed for understanding the direction in which the memorial will take, as well as its greater significance.

CHAPTER 4- FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The idea to create a memorial came out of a tugging sensation in my gut, a vague feeling that I still had more to explore around Sasha's death, and despite the years which had passed, the feeling of a profound sense of loss that was not being acknowledged or represented within my current life. As anniversaries would go by, I felt increasingly more disconnected from my brother and a pervading sense that something was missing. Yet undertaking the creation of this memorial was surprisingly more involved than I had originally imagined as it was a process intricately linked with remembering and representing him. What I didn't realize was that embedded within my memory was also a whole gamut of other previously unacknowledged emotions, thoughts, and physical sensations surrounding my brother, his death and our relationship. The journey of creating a memorial in his honour has led me on the path to explore these in more detail,

of which I give my account in this paper. Writings taken from my journal are presented in italics throughout the course of this section.

HOW DO I REMEMBER?

My challenge in representation was to give what began as a largely undifferentiated jumble of sensations and fragments, an image, a space, a direction, and a voice to occupy within the context of the present. I began this process by asking myself how do I remember my brother, Sasha, 9 years after his death? It was quite a difficult question because my answers were not those I wished I had. I wished he played more of a role in my present life. I wished I could have positive memories of him. I wished I could be at peace with his death. In fact, I felt that while his death was defined in my life as a significant turning point, his presence did not occupy much space in my day-to-day thoughts and life. I felt guilty. I wanted him to be a part of my life yet did not know how to include him. *“I want to stop denying you existed and make you a part of my life, a part of my history, our family history”*. It was as if his story had ended, prematurely, and as his sister I wanted to continue his legacy but did not know how to do so. I had a tremendous fear of forgetting him, losing him more than I already had. In an effort to retaliate, I wanted to take control. I wanted to scrutinize, categorize, and document my memory so that it would be impossible for me to ever forget. *“I need to hold onto memory because it is all I have left of you. I feel like I have lost you and this project is about finding you again”*. This project was about finding a way to keep Sasha’s presence held within my memory.

NOTHING TO HOLD ON TO

When I think of a memorial I think of something solid. A rock, a tombstone, something permanent, heavy, that makes a mark on the world and that communicates the permanence of a spirit. I think of traditional memorials and other monuments that I have seen. I think about other ways people commemorate the dead through personal ceremonies and special objects. They all seem so meaningful, poignant and beautiful to me. They resonate with me and I think I would like to do the same. I come up with ideas; book making, painting a portrait, creating a sculpture in his memory, my list is full of possibilities. However, all of them feel contrived, intellectually thought out, socially accepted. This is how people remember so why is it not good enough for me? Why does it not feel right? I go back to my process. This journey is about my process and how I came to the final product. I bring myself out of my head and back into my feeling body, and ask myself, how do I remember?

“Your lasting presence in the absence of your physical body on earth. Your physical body is you- the you I knew in the world. And now your body decays beneath the earth. How do I create something out of nothing? How do I make a part of you appear to me, now, when you have been dormant for so many years? There is no proof, nothing to hold on to. How do I make a memorial when I don't feel like you existed or for that matter, don't know if you really died? I spent a few short moments with your body, all wrapped up and mummified, ready to be dropped into the earth. It was all so rushed, those last moments, the funeral directors needing to get on with it, I stuck in my disbelief that this was you, cold, not as I remembered, and that I could not touch your hand for one last time. And I felt you all around me, and yet I also felt like you were taken so

quickly from me. There was no time to say good-bye, with all the other people present, hurried, quick. I asked for a lock of your hair. The funeral director seemed annoyed. He had to go get scissors. It prolonged my time with you. This is my only evidence of your body. This, and the cold sensation of my hand touching your forehead. This was our last time together, my last memory.”

Remembering for me is fraught with trauma; my brother and his traumatic death co-exist. It was as if the knife that went through his heart pierced mine as well, cutting off all connections and inhibiting me from seeing him, as he was, alive. I see my experience of trauma before me as a large, heavy, and insurmountable door- uninviting. The metaphor touches me profoundly. The door does not want me to enter, and I do not want to remember and reconnect to a violent past. Yet it seems like I must pass through this gateway in order to be able to reach the land of the living once again, the land I once knew, in order to be able to see my brother as he was, alive. *“Why is it so difficult for me to go back there and revisit? Why can't I fight the demons of the past in order to find you- to find us, somewhere?”*

I am painfully aware of the reasons behind my hesitation. I know the signs of my avoidance. I do everything but work on this project. I find excuses and things that are more important. Daily life finds tasks to keep me busy. I secretly wish that this was not so difficult to do. I think about writing a theoretical paper instead of a heuristic one, in my effort to procrastinate. Part of me is happy in the place of denial and in the fleeting fantasy that life would just go on as ‘normal’. However, I know that, *“Disappearing is not the same as never existing”*. And so I urge myself forward. *“Avoidance- is about running away from you. Running away from that pain of separation. Looking away,*

silent, not speaking, frozen. It is running away from myself as well, and from the world. It is denying not only your life, but mine as well. It is like all life ended when you died. The world ended as I knew it.”

LONELINESS

“The truth is I am a bit scared of what might emerge if I let myself have a space to create in... I keep thinking that this would be easier if I had someone with me, if I wasn't alone. I think the feeling of aloneness echoes strongly within me. I am now alone to deal with my mother, my father etc... I am also alone to deal with your death. No more people around. Emptiness.”

I chose to enter into this research alone. I felt it was important. I had reached a time where I felt strong enough to go back to the places that were once too frightening. I was aware of the slightly foreboding landscape before me and felt threatened by this new place in which I would venture by myself. I wanted guidance or advice from another person who had also experienced loss, a direction, something. But I felt it necessary to stay with my feelings and find my own journey through the grief. Too often in the presence of another person, have I overlooked my own experience; silenced, edited and selected what parts of his story to tell, denying myself to truly feel the experience of my loss. This was a personal memorial, something that would emerge from me, a reflection of my brother and his specialness, a reminder. While I was strong in my convictions and knew my purpose, I still heard a small voice, doubting whether I could ever create something good enough.

TRAUMA

What became increasingly more apparent to me is that creating this memorial was both difficult and necessary because my brother had been stabbed. My writing and images focused around the moment of his death and my perceptions of where he was now.

“I am amazed that I remember with clarity the day the phone rung at 7:00 am on the Saturday morning. And I didn’t pick up. While in bed, I let it ring, kind of annoyed. And then a few minutes later, it rang again. I answered, half asleep, to hear my mother on the other line. She told me you had died. I didn’t understand. Incomprehensible. I told her it must be a mistake. It was not possible. I felt myself become weak. I put down the phone and started to gasp for air. It was at this point that I lost my words and things stopped making sense.”

The shock of my brother’s death never allowed me the time to process what had happened, to grasp this new reality I was suddenly thrust into. There was no time to prepare for the death, time to say good-bye or even be with his body. I was on a plane the next day and going straight to his funeral. Vivid memories of how he died preoccupied my thoughts for years to come and culminated by the court hearing for his perpetrator, 2 years after. My anger, horror and shock tainted memories of my brother. In creating this memorial I realized how much of these representations I still carried with me as I desperately tried to remember who my brother was before his death.



Figure 1: On the Edge of the Abyss

I created this image (Figure 1) of myself on a steep and rugged mountain watching Sasha's body free-falling into the unknown. I wanted to jump down and catch him but I knew that it was beyond my power to do so. It reminded me of my passivity when watching his casket being lowered in the ground. There was absolutely nothing that I could have done to make things better, to bring him back. I felt helpless and bound to the laws of the physical realm. Within my silence in the image is an indescribable rage, an all-consuming cry, which shakes the earth. The flooding awareness of my human limitations reveals itself to me, paralyzing, numbing, and disorientating me.

"I was so frozen after you died, there is a place that the grief hit me- so hard- where my cells contracted in response to the pain. In my throat, speechless-

dumbfounded- I felt at times all I have done is adapt to my life without you- and not ever truly mourn your loss... A lump in my throat. So much sadness, stagnation, stuck....Nothing to hold onto without falling, struggling to look back and remember, but all that is left is a void, empty pit with no bottom, darkness, fear of falling into the unknown. I want to catch him and hold him –a bad dream I cannot grasp- do I fall too?"



Figure 2: An Outline of a Shadow

“Lost, lost, lost, far away, gone within the ether. A shadow, an outline, black figure, wrapped, mummified, preserved in, cloaks of clothing, shreds of fabric, body,

lifeless, unfamiliar.” In Figure 2, there is only an outline, the silhouette of a body amongst a tortuous background. Sasha doesn’t exist in this image, he is hollow, blank, only identifiable through his wounds. He feels so far away that I cannot see any part of him. The presence of his absence is beyond my grasp. I am trying to understand how I can transform my darkness and suddenly the art materials speak to me.

“It is hard to look at the destruction, the blood, the ashes, smoke and clouds, a desolate and barren landscape around me. And suddenly I am given some colours- art to explore this process, this place. Art to illustrate my journey, where I am in this moment. I don’t want to be here yet I am imprisoned by only myself. Art threatens the stability of my slow annihilation. Threatens the darkness with shades of yellow, pigments of rich reds, deep blues, purples... Vividness, brightness, the antithesis of the place in which I stand, the place from which I remember you. Awareness of your memory is like trying to piece together your remains. It seems like an impossible feat. Seems undoable... how could I ever get there? I don’t want to remember you like this anyway... At times the art materials are sitting there, not used up. The blank page just needs to be covered in black. It feels wrong, you are not black. Then why is my memory playing tricks on me- deceiving me? Who are you? Where did you go? Why can’t I find you anymore?”

SEARCHING

When I began this project I felt like I had nothing. I had no physical possessions of my brother’s, few photos that were outdated, and worst of all, memories of him only tainted by trauma. Our past seemed very cloudy, indiscernible. There was a five-year age difference during which time adolescence took us on different paths. I always felt like we would have become good friends once both of us got out of our awkward teenager

phases. As that never happened, I was left with only what I had, nothing more, which did not seem like enough. Nothing new could ever be generated, or could it? This memorial challenged me as it allowed me the space to craft a new story, one that did not end in tragedy, one that grew with me, one that was alive and dynamic.



Figure 3- Hands Reaching Out

What often came up for me was this image of two hands reaching for one another, yet not being able to ever touch (Figure 3). What struck me was the gap, a space in between, which could not be crossed. An area which separated the world of the living, with the world of the dead. I felt like I had no part of Sasha with me, nothing tangible to hold and yet I was longingly trying to reach out to something that was continually beyond my grasp. *“I desperately was looking for something tangible that I could hold on to and feel in his absence.”* During this period of immersion, I allowed myself to go into the

depths of what I was feeling and explore this imagery, which was difficult. I felt at times there was no structure and the presence of this open void in front of me, the emptiness as a result of his death, stared me defiantly in the face. I recognized that I could easily fall as well, and in a way I felt ungrounded already as there was nothing holding me back. In my grief I was swimming in an ocean of uncertainty, fear, and nothingness at times. The image of chaos and the formlessness of his being pervaded my thoughts. There was nothing solid, nothing tangible as I floated in this in-between space.

THE EMERGENCE OF FORM

During my immersion phase, I enrolled in a painting class based on working from the unconscious. The directives were simple and involved painting with no preconceived notions, allowing the intuition to guide your choice of colour and shape every step of the way. When the painting felt complete, it would be viewed on all sides from a distance, whereby recognizable images could become apparent. Once an image of personal relevance was spotted and selected, the artist would work to make it more defined by shading in the background.



Figure 4- Untitled

What emerged out of this painting class one day struck me powerfully. I had created a canvas full of many colours, shapes and patterns. Hanging it on the wall and taking a step backwards to look, I was amazed. Two figures clearly became visible, of which I defined as a girl on the left and a boy/man on the right. Upon viewing this painting, tears came into my eyes as I identified the figure on the right as a representation of my brother. From my unconscious he appeared as I never would have imagined him to be, a wise old man starring at me with deep eyes. I was with him, delicately and tenderly trying to reach out and stroke his face. However, my hands were invisible, they went right through him. He was present yet not tangible.

This image was what I had been waiting for, a sign, something I could see and touch. This painting then became the catalyst for much activity and thought about the memorial, as I felt like a new image of my brother had taken shape and through the art

media, had been validated. I experienced this painting as the breakthrough I had been waiting for, as something to bring me out of re-experiencing the trauma of his death and which would allow a new dialogue to begin. Perhaps it was in seeing him- a visual representation, that my need for 'physical' proof had been satiated.

NEW GROWTH

The idea to create a doll had emerged towards the beginning of my inquiry, yet I had not been aware of its significance until this moment. A doll was a representation of a baby, small enough to fit in the palm of my hand. It was reminiscent of childhood and of holding my brother in my arms when he was a baby. It brought me back to the past and allowed me for the first time in a long time to be curious about memories we shared.

“The baby is how I can begin telling his story, who he was rather than the tortuous memory of my imagined journey into the underworld. It is consciously bringing up to the surface to light all the recesses and shadows which appear frightening... I see the picture of me holding you- a memory, the beginning of our history together. You a baby, brought into this world in our crazy family. We could laugh about it together now, we could laugh about a lot of things... I miss your laughter.”



Figure 5- Photograph 1982

“As I sat with it, the metaphor felt more and more right. A baby, a new beginning, beauty, purity, magic- the synthesis and creation of new life, new growth, new potentials. An opening out of the darkness where his memory had been imprisoned. A mirror of my creative act... the opposite of my brother’s destruction. It could contain within it the duality of holding on while letting go. The paradox that out of loss comes a new life.”

This doll would need nurturance, tenderness, and love in order to grow and occupy a space within my world. It would be created from a piece of Sasha’s clothing. His clothing, that which remained close to his body, collecting sweat and tears, was an emblem of his identity. It reminded me of the traditional Jewish white burial shrouds (tachrichim) in which he was wrapped and buried. Using the same process I too would wrap the cloth around the doll creating a type of ritual, a prayer, a space in which I could

slow down his death, allowing myself the time to grieve at my own pace. *“Through this act I will be able to slow down time and maybe even begin to understand.”* I had struggled for a long time to accept my powerlessness in preventing his death or my lack of involvement in his funeral. I did not sit with his body after he had died, wash it, and prepare it for the burial; a task which I believe would have led me to more of a sense of closure. It was all so rushed. In the creation of the doll I could regain some sort of control over my brother’s death while at the same time, foster a new attachment to him.

ACCEPTANCE



Figure 6- Baby

In Figure 6, the woman holds a baby in her arms and yet the baby is not clearly defined. She spends a few last moments with him, knowing that there is a rope tied

around him and that he soon will be taken away. She is aware that their time together is fleeting. *“In this image I want to slow down your death. I want to recreate a last moment together before I have to let you go again. A race against time...”* As I drew this image, I understood the stories of Rumpelstiltskin and Sleeping Beauty for the first time. Both queens were told that their children would have to leave them at a certain age. I never understood why the queens didn’t fight back the evil witches and reverse the curses that were placed on them. It dawned on me that these were forces beyond their control. They were, just as I was, ultimately powerless against death despite a cultural upbringing that denied and taught the opposite. With this realization I changed my frame of reference. Despite the fact that my brother’s life had been cut short, I became grateful for the time that we did have together. The little memories of him suddenly transformed into precious jewels and I was filled with gratitude. The floodgates of my memories of Sasha opened. I began the telling of my brother’s stories and reliving moments in the past that we had shared inspired by photographs and other mementos. I wanted to create a scrap-book that would document his life. Out of the jaws of trauma, I felt that this was a positive change and that it was an important way to continue his legacy.

CHANGE

Yet as the collector of memories, I found that while I started this inquiry with a desire to preserve frozen moments of the past within a tangible form, it no longer felt like enough. The function of the memorial to represent both the life and death of Sasha was greater. It had to also let my memories of him live on within the present, to transform and breathe new life. *“There is nothing stagnant about death, only permanent... A deep breath- air, living, movement. Taking in life.... Cold hard stone memorials, made to*

withstand time, made to be unaltered, a beacon in our memory – a reminder- something permanent to remind us of our impermanence. It doesn't make sense". At this point the memorial ceased to be an object of all importance as I realized that it was my process of engaging in its creation that had led me to a deeper understanding of loss. It was important that the memorial reflected this, was dynamic, continually in motion, and allowed to evolve with time. The physical body rotted away in the ground after death just as my memories throughout the years have also been subject to change, a continual decomposition.

To reflect these realizations, I thought about the doll I wanted to create. It would have to be impermanent and I imagined myself letting go of it at some point. Perhaps by recreating a funerary ritual of burying it and planting a tree in its place, I would be able to demarcate a sacred space where I could reconnect to Sasha within the context of my current life. Being made with only natural materials and exposed to the elements, the doll with time would eventually decay while the tree planted in its place would grow and change with the seasons. While the doll has not yet been fabricated due to the time constraints of my research, the seeds for its creation have been planted. It is a project that I aim to continue working on and documenting after the writing of this paper.

While I wrote about sewing this doll in the future, I simultaneously realized that important changes have taken place within myself. The idea of being able to let go of such a significant piece of art was a sign to me that I felt comfortable with the changes that had taken place and was integrating the reality of my brother's death within my life. For the first time I felt a sense of peace about being thrust in duality, the feeling like I understood the perpetual contradiction of living with loss. I became aware of the dialectic

unity of life and death, control and surrender, by allowing myself to hold onto his memory while also being okay with letting some of it go. After all, Sasha was no longer the same little brother I once had, the same way I was no longer the same person.

“Acceptance is about allowing memory to fade with time, recognizing fluidity and change in the day to day experience, and knowing that one can always create new stories within the realm of the imagination. Boundlessness, which was once scary becomes a place of exploration. Love ultimately lets go.” By ridding myself of any fixed concepts of a memorial and by allowing the element of change to infuse its presence, I permitted more possibilities to unfold for the future. I could now imagine how some memories of my brother would be let go and forgotten, some held onto, and others transformed, all the while trusting that the essence would remain. My acceptance paved the way for a greater understanding and awareness of living where I was given the opportunity to truly live with the acknowledgment, rather than the fear, of Sasha’s death.

NEW LANDSCAPE

When I sat down to write the creative synthesis of this paper, what had begun as a narrow experience of loss suddenly opened out to a more expansive landscape before me. My understanding of the concept of a memorial also deepened. Originally it had begun as a quest for a product that was tangible, questioning me about what I remembered of my brother, as well as how I wanted to remember him. The memorial then became a way to create a new connection with him, one not solely coloured by trauma. However, the more I became immersed in the process, the more I realized that the memorial was also asking something different of me. My involvement throughout this inquiry encouraged me to look inside myself and question the meaning I derived from his death, and more

importantly, how I situated myself in the present in relation to it. With this realization, I had the feeling of coming back to myself and reclaiming a 'new' identity, where I was able to acknowledge my brother's death within the story of my life. I felt a sense of strength from surviving a difficult past, as well as hope and love for the future.

I remembered a poignant dream I had 6 years ago that had communicated this, however before this moment I had not been able to understand its message. The recollection of this dream inspired by these new insights was drawn in Figure 7, as I wrote: *“And as suddenly as I drifted into this land of monsters and ghosts, you appeared in my dream. You were an angel, old and wise, yet your skin was the softness of a young child. You were caught in between the worlds of dying by being young and becoming wise all at once- I felt guided, I felt peaceful, I knew it was you. And in my dream you wore a sweater of bright red, warm and shining with the sun. Your eyes were clear and peaceful, your presence enveloped me, held me.... I hugged your body one last time, we stared together at the fields, saturated pigments shining of vivid greens, the rays of warmth filling my being... It feels as if only now, years later, I awoke and realized that I had been searching for you in the wrong place. You were safe, you were at peace and you guided me towards beauty and love, your love, infinitely and always present.”*



Figure 7- Staring out into the World

I had come full circle. Remembering this dream at this moment served the same purpose I originally wanted the memorial to. It gave me a sense of comfort and security because I felt that my brother was safe. I felt connected to him, knowing that he was not lost forever and could be present in my life, albeit in a different form. I could also hold him in my dream, as if I was being given the chance to say goodbye. I was taken by the exquisite beauty of the landscape and how the colours nourished me. Through remembering this dream, I realized that the feeling of closeness to him was within myself. All I had to do was close my eyes and remember this place.

Through drawing and positioning myself within this 'new' landscape, I realized that this image was also about finding myself again, finding my footing as I was ready to rejoin the world of the living. It was about acknowledging both the separateness and

connection within our new relationship and that there was space for both to exist concurrently.

TRIANGULATION

While I have shared a very personal account of my experience of creating a memorial, I questioned whether this process was unique to myself alone and wondered if the themes I brought up would resonate with others. Triangulation is used in qualitative research for this reason. It is used to confirm the consistency of findings, to gain a deeper understanding of the question, offer validation, as well as new avenues to explore (Patton, 2002).

A colleague shared with me her experience of doing art after the sudden death of her 21 year-old son, who was hit by a train. Although she had not set out to create a memorial, many aspects of her experience had direct relevance to my process and confirmed some of my findings. I will discuss the main points of our conversation.

Initially, after his death, she described a paralysis, which inhibited her from working. However as a professional visual artist she began taking pictures and journaling about her experience as a natural response to coping with his death. It was only later that she realized she had actually been making art, and from that point on worked with more conscious intent and recognition of her work as art objects. She described her continual engagement in the art process throughout the years as a type of continual memorial, because inevitably a lot of her work was centered around him. She described the need for the tangible and the physical after his death. She worked with her son's ashes as an art material from which she would sculpt and create. She explained how art helped her externalize her sorrow and bring the grief out of her physical body, the art being a visible

form outside of herself. In many ways, she felt in many ways it was a life long journey, a part of her, evolving and on-going. She found it difficult to think of making her memories ‘archived’ and stagnant. Art was her way of continually processing the experience, akin to survival.

CONCLUSION

Like my friend, I too believe that it doesn’t end here. It is a continual process to acknowledge loss within my life, to keep asking myself how I am situated in relation to Sasha’s death, and to keep making art in response to this. Through creating a memorial, I feel that my inquiry has helped me organize my experience, process the trauma as well as lay out the foundations for an art piece I would like to create in his honour. More importantly, the process of creating a memorial has left me with a representation of my brother that I can carry within me. This image of me under a beautiful sky is etched in my memory reminds me that I can hold the love for Sasha and access it whenever I want to. Art and colour reminds me that I am never alone, and that through the imagination stories can be endlessly created. If I continue telling these stories, and engaging in the art process, his memory will always be able to live on. While some things will be lost, new things are always gained. I am able to look out into the horizon, as life moves forward.

CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION

I began this research inquiry with the calling to create and document a personal art-based memorial as a response to the death of my brother Sasha, and share the process that emerged as a result of this experience. Through my involvement with the art materials, writing, and continual self-reflection, a journey unfolded before my eyes. In no

way a linear process, it began with a sense of departure from a familiar and comfortable place. There was movement as I traveled to new lands, discovery, and transformation that led to an awakening of sorts, unlike I would have ever imagined. The purpose of creating a memorial, although not initially predetermined, was revealed as a need to find meaning within this profoundly painful and incomprehensible life experience, as well as to have a representation of my brother that I could carry with me in the context of my present life.

While my main intention was clear, I felt that there were other processes that occurred, simultaneously and interdependently. From my current vantage point I am able to see an alternate story that was born out of my desire to create a memorial, leading myself to a deeper understanding of what it means to remember. This new story was one that encompassed an additional narrative, unfolding facets of a new self, allowing the emergence of my transformed identity forged through the art making experience.

I still find it difficult to articulate how deeply the art process had touched and moved me, how many realizations had come to my conscious awareness through the simple movement of lines and colour on paper. This inquiry has made me realize the profound impacts that art has played in all aspects of my bereavement experience. It was the silent underlying guide leading me through the unknown, patiently waiting, holding, and revealing itself only when I was open to receive its teachings. I believe that it was solely through the creative process that I was able to shift that which was horrible and unfathomable into an experience in which I could not only derive meaning from, but also learn and grow. Art was like the glue holding pieces of myself together and the memorial was a vessel in which I could safely explore my feelings of loss, external from myself

and yet of myself, of the 'real' world and yet representative of an other-worldly, imaginal realm.

I will discuss the main themes that emerged as a result of my inquiry using aesthetic theory that is the basis of work done in art therapy. I will also weave in the Meaning Reconstruction Model as outlined by Neimeyer (1998) as I feel that it offers a current and solid theoretical basis for understanding the goals of grief and bereavement therapy. Using my artistic process as the backdrop, I will discuss ways in which the art memorial has facilitated the creation of meaning after the death of my brother, while also allowing the reconstruction of new self-narratives, essential after the experience of a significant loss.

TRAUMA AND SELF-CONCEPT

Humans have self-narratives, which are significant in relation to other people, who validate and sustain their shared memories of identity (Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002). These representations or core assumptions of self within the relational, external world form the basis of interaction, self-concept, and are the foundation of meaning systems influencing behaviour, perception, and the sense of security (Lister et al., 2008). My identity, deeply linked and defined through my brother held fixed notions of 'family' and shared expectations as a sibling of a future together. When he died, and because of the way in which he died, I was left abruptly in a desolate place without him and was alone to re-organize my entire frame of reference about a world in which all safety, stability and order were gone.

In the documentary film, "Griefwalker" (Clarke & Wilson, 2008), Steven Jenkinson, a well-known palliative care counselor, tells a dying woman, "the greatest gift

that you can give your children is by dying well". Before my inquiry, I had not realized that the manner of death was so deeply influential in the grieving process for the survivors. When death is traumatic in nature or violates a certain 'natural order' such as in child loss, it poses additional challenges for adaptation and the construction of 'positive' memories of the deceased, as well as in adapting the self to relearn the world (Attig, 1996; Neimeyer et al. 2002; Riches & Dawson, 1998).

The beginning of my inquiry was dominated by traumatic imagery that overshadowed all other representations of Sasha. Initially, there was a panic and deep-seated anxiety that I would not be able to create anything at all. I felt my work during this time was like swimming in a pool of bewilderment, losing myself to what felt like a void of chaos continuously evident at my feet. My fear presented itself on a visceral level; my heart rate would go up, I was tense, I would sweat and frightful images would appear before me as flashes. It was as if I had been transported to the time right after he died, re-experiencing all that pain again. I painted what I felt, as it had been laying dormant in my body, surprisingly reawakened after all these years.

My artwork consequently felt rigid and needed to be controlled. I wanted desperately to create and yet felt paralyzed many times, unable and avoidant. I felt lost and like I needed guidance. My work was messy, unorganized and full of darkness. I began pieces, which I never finished, little tidbits I was unhappy with, as they were contrary to what I wanted to remember of my brother. I chose to use inks, the red reminding me of blood shed. By letting it spill over the page, immersing all in its path, I had the feeling that it had taken over everything.

The pervasiveness of traumatic death is such that trauma literally floods the brain with fragmented imagery, dissociated sensations and emotions of helplessness and horror that can last for years (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1995). Researchers have also described a 'speechless terror' that is present after trauma (Harris, 2009). This too is rooted in brain physiology and is caused by a shut down of the left side of the brain responsible for verbal dialogue (van der Kolk, 1996). As a result, words and rational thought processes cannot speak about the unspeakable. It was as if I was bound. I was silenced by the trauma, there was nobody who wanted to listen, and although the experience had been stored in my body, it was subsequently and until this moment, further denied. Yet I knew that before I could proceed, I had to find a way out of this place and that the way was through expression.

THE ART PROCESS: THE CREATION OF MEANING

There are many articles citing the benefits of using the creative arts therapies in the treatment of trauma (Buk, 2009; Collie, Backos, Malchiodi, & Spiegel, 2006; Crenshaw, 2006; Spring, 2004) of which I will not discuss in length here. Art, however has been shown to be an effective non-verbal modality, helping with externalizing, visual processing, and eventually transforming a traumatic experience (Johnson, 1987). More importantly, art can also help to restore meaning and ultimately help make sense of our lives after a traumatic event.

When assumptions about the world have been threatened or destroyed by trauma or a significant loss, there must be a process akin to rebuilding in order for the person to go on (Lister et al., 2008). The reconstruction of meaning after loss thus becomes the

main goal of grieving (Neimeyer, 2001a). The art process can facilitate the reconstruction of meaning. Gordon (1978) writes:

Essential to and underlying the creative process is the search for meaning; and meaning, so it seems to me, evolves out of a synthesis of the process of differentiation and ordering on the one hand and the making and discovering of something new on the other. (p. 130).

Through my experience I felt that the art process was very much akin to life, in fact a reflection of it. Through the creative act, I was able to literally construct a new representation of reality, bring forth a new life into the world. Art allowed for possibilities and change, mirroring the continual dynamism of life as my imagination was set in motion thus allowing me for the first time to envision a new universe outside the trauma, whereby my own meanings and understandings became developed. All throughout my grief journey and even before this project, I have felt a deep urge to create and much artwork that I have made was unintentionally in response to Sasha's death. This consciously focused inquiry led me to imagine the creation of a doll in his honour. It was unexpected and yet held a deep symbolic connection to the growth, nurturance, and almost daily care it would need to live as form within the world. The child is also a symbol for growth, development and the existence of a future within a creative life, a new beginning (Gordon, 1978). The art process was in essence the matrix or womb, nourishing, incubating, and developing the unborn fetus until it would be ready to be released in to the world.

While this insight was quite profound, I also realized that in order to mirror life as it was, was to also accept the reality of death. I would at some point have to let go of this

doll. Being made with natural materials, it too would decompose and it too was vulnerable just like a body, reflecting impermanence. Art, the never ending well of life giving energy, could also represent death. In fact the more I worked, the more I realized that creation and destruction are one of the same, each existing in a dialectic unity, whereby one could not remain without the other.

ART AS THE TANGIBLE: CREATING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING

Upon beginning this inquiry, equally as significant as the impact of the trauma, was my awareness and continual pre-occupation with my brother's physical absence. I questioned Sasha's existence because there was nothing tangible of his remaining, nothing left to hold onto or to touch that could remind me of him. The feeling of physical yearning, or literally 'empty, aching arms' has been reported by women who have lost a child prenatally or perinatally (Speert, 1992). In my case, I spent little time with my brother's body. This denied me the space to accept that he was actually dead, to hold his hand for one last time, and to create any final memories that would surpass the shock of his violent death. In the absence of his physical body after his death, my memory became the central means to recreating him. However, it too felt fleeting, and was not tangible.

Originally my goal was that the memorial would serve as an object that would affirm Sasha's identity, validate his existence, and reflect memories shared together. Material memories of the dead, such as postmortem photographs, jewelry made from the hair of the deceased, dolls or sculptures created in honour of the deceased, occupied a large place in mourning rituals and traditions all around the world (Hallam & Hockey, 2004; Hilliker, 2006; Johnson, 1999). Hand and foot castings as well as photographs of babies and young children in critical care units in hospitals are routinely encouraged so

that parents are able to have a tangible keepsake, sometimes the only record of existence for that child (Johnson). Mona Rutenberg (2008), an art therapist working in palliative care, routinely creates hand-castings of the dying person that allow them to leave their legacy visible and accessible to their families in a concrete form. These cultural objects could reflect the need for material reminders of a loved one, fear of social erasure, as well as the annihilation of identity after death, especially true in relation to the death of children who have not yet had their opportunity to make a mark on the world (Hallam & Hockey). Perhaps the need for these objects takes on more importance when death is sudden and there hasn't been adequate time to say goodbye.

The art process was able to produce tangible evidence, physical proof, and documentation, not only of my experience of the loss, but also an attestation to my brother's presence. I really felt that the turning point in my inquiry was a type of breakthrough after the creation of the painting from Figure 4. My brother had appeared before me in a visible, physical form, by which I felt validated, moved, and also reassured. I felt that this painting propelled me to continue my inquiry with a newly found hope that would later evolve into a more complex understanding of the memorial as a process rather than a product.

THE OTHER REALM: THE LIMINAL SPACE

Towards the beginning of my immersion and through the traumatic elements being brought up in my artwork, I felt as if I was thrust in some in-between land existing somewhere between life and death, and not yet either. This place was frightening. I was terrified and wanted to leave, however my yearning to find my brother had caused me to lose my way home to the land of the living. Interestingly as shown in Figure 1, and also

written about in much anthropological literature is that the grief period is one of transition, where both mourners and the deceased occupy a space neither here nor there, neither betwixt nor between, characterized by ambivalence, paradox and confusion (Homans, 2000; Turner, 1969). Van Gennep (1960) used the analogy of crossing borders from one territory to the next to a no-man's-land in between that applied to not only the deceased, but to mourners as well. Traditionally the burial ritual would serve to end this liminal phase, allocating the deceased to cross the borders and safely enter the world of the dead, while the mourner rejoined the world of the living, thus restoring harmony and balance to society (Westgaard, 2006).

I am struck by the similarity of my experience of living in a world in between worlds as a result of my brother's death to that which is described as the liminal or playspace in the field of the creative arts therapies. While this 'in-between' area located between client, therapist and artwork, between the literal and the abstract, can also be frightening, with proper containment it can serve as the area for transformation to occur (Johnson, 1998; Kaufman, 1996)

The transitional space also allows for the creation of an art object or memorial (Kaufman, 1996). The art object, a transitional object, then becomes a representation that bridges between the inner and outer worlds, whereby the artist, therapist, and/or audience are united (Dreifuss-Kattan, 1990). Through the integration of art and the creation of a memorial within the liminal space, the bereaved person is given an opportunity to refine, recreate, and ultimately transform their experience while unifying the feelings of separateness and union, me and not me, inner and outer reality. The art making experience can promote new levels of perceptual organization whereby splits and

dichotomies can be integrated within new wholes (Robbins, 2001). The bereaved person is able to experience duality, to hold on while letting go, experience death and also rebirth, chaos and order, control and surrender. The memorial thus becomes the gateway to the liminal and sacred space (*limen* in Latin meaning threshold) and in essence brings the mourner closer to the deceased, while also demarcating the separateness. The memorial becomes autonomous from the deceased person, developing a life of its own, while also retaining a presence of 'otherness' from reality as the concrete real relationship transforms into a symbolic one (Kaufman). The art process can situate oneself by being able to differentiate what is the remembered experience and the art experience, resulting in solidifying the difference between past and present and also being freed from what was holding oneself down or was frozen in the previous reality (Johnson, 1998).

Re-entering the liminal realm within the play/artspace 9 years after, differed significantly from entering this space alone in the aftermath of the trauma of his death. The art materials were able to contain my experience within this imaginal realm, creating boundaries and, consequently, protection against doing harm. Through the art I was able to give the vague sensations from my inner world a form, communicable to others and validating to this inner realm. What was initially frightening and chaotic, with the support of the art in my case, or an art therapist, this area can become a potential space for growth, change and the creation of metaphor.

ART AND THE METAPHOR

A metaphor is defined as a word or phrase that involves figures of speech and/or symbolism that is not meant literally (Living Webster Dictionary, 1974). Derived from

the word *meta*, in Greek meaning above or beyond, and *phorein*, meaning to carry from one place to another, metaphors in language and art also serve as carriers (Moon, 2007).

Imbued with many meanings hidden within one symbolic form, metaphors allow for a more complex story to emerge, offering a subtler, less confrontational delivery of messages enabling listeners to interpret the metaphor for themselves (Moon). Metaphors allow for a multitude of possibilities to exist at once thus forming the basis of work within the creative arts therapies.

The Meaning-Reconstruction Model also states that the need for symbolization and metaphor is sometimes more congruent with the tacit dimension of a deeply felt experience such as the experience of the death of a loved one (Neimeyer, 2000, 2001b). Sometimes the most significant meanings escape the logical, verbalized processes of language. Therefore metaphor, poetry, and other narrative strategies are the only way to capture the layers of meaning of a loved one's life and death (Neimeyer, 2000). Metaphors explored through the arts enable form to move away from a mere literal representation of reality to the abstract, imbuing the metaphor with more meanings (Kaufman, 1996).

Metaphors begin to give form to experience, stimulate embodiment and become spatialized as they are usually referred to as physical phenomena (Henzell, 1984). Through the metaphor a translatable bridge from inner felt experience into the outer world is created, remaining open to not one interpretation, but a multitude.

As such, metaphors of memory, which connect the intangible with the material, either convey notions of fixity and stability or they highlight process and

transformation. At either end of the spectrum, however, metaphor of memory always allude at some level to continuity (Hallam & Hockey, 2004, p. 27).

To create metaphors is to deepen the meaning of a story, thereby giving it a future. Shengold (1981) writes, “Metaphor leads to memory” (p. 303). As memories are deeply entrenched in personal identity they become important in the reconstitution of the self after loss (Sturken, 1997). Lambek and Antze (1996) imagine memory not as a fixed object of our gaze but, through metaphor as an active practice, serving as the phenomenological ground of identity. Through the art process I was actively engaged in creating metaphors that described the intensity of my emotions, allowing me to create new meanings out of my experience, which was translated into a greater awareness of myself and ultimately allowed for a transformation to occur.

ART AND TRANSFORMATION: THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW SELF

A corollary of the predominantly cognitive interpretation of meaning in our field is that it is often regarded as a product, as something that is “searched for” and “found”, rather than created by the persons or groups who seek it. Although it is important to acknowledge that some meanings of loss are indeed discoveries as well as invented (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 554).

I began this process as a type of quest, looking for something tangible to hold onto, something I thought was found outside of me and would be found through the art materials. Through my surrendering to the art process by working in a loose and spontaneous manner, and the ability to remain in a state of openness, I was able to receive what I believed to be a physical representation of my brother (Figure 4). “The moment one lets go of producing the artwork as if it were under our control and instead receives

it, opening oneself to another realm, is the moment of transformation we have been seeking to describe” (McNiff, 1991, p. 91). This affirmed my process and I was able to relax and to a certain extent, let myself trust in what was beginning to unfold.

However, as I continued with the process, I felt like I ended up coming to a place which was much more profound. I began to realize that the process of creating a memorial was more significant than the product itself. Throughout my journey I came to a place of finding myself again, discovering my identity in the face of loss and holding a new-found representation of not only Sasha, but myself in the world after his death. I created a self-portrait shown in Figure 7 where I stood with an open horizon in front of me. I was free to remember a past not shrouded in fear and darkness, rather, I could remember my brother as he was, very much alive.

This final image (Figure 7) served as the beacon for my resilience, a marker of hope and strength gained from this experience. It showed me that I have grown. Nourished by the pigments, I let the colours seep into the essence of my daily world. I could find delight, beauty and a reaffirming will to live in each moment, with an acceptance that this too would one day end. It felt like a transcendence, a moment of clarity. I had reached a spiritual place with a deep respect for the patterns and processes of the universe that existed beyond my control and comprehension. In irony, by wanting to create a memorial, I searched for the tangible when in essence these lessons escaped material manifestation. They could only be felt through my heart and body, imparting a greater wisdom, larger than my experience alone.

ART AS MYSTERY: CONNECTION TO THE SACRED

While writing this paper, I thought of how I would rather have my brother back in a second than have learnt the many truths about living that I have in coping with his death. Had I done this inquiry earlier in my grief process, I might have been plagued with finding a reason 'why' this all happened. I find it interesting that this inquiry never led me to this place. Perhaps this is because art is deeply connected and respectful to the mysterious. While it has given me a way to find some meaning of his loss at present, I am always left in front of a great haze of mystery, never fully able to understand why he had to die how and when he did. However, in this new place of acceptance, I felt okay in not knowing all the answers. The art process that was deeply wise and guiding could protect the silence of perfect knowledge, which was ultimately inaccessible.

The image in Figure 7 is based on the place my brother had tried to show me in a dream years ago, but I was not yet ready to listen. In this place, with all the exquisiteness of the landscape around us, he stood peaceful and beautiful as an angel. The mood was solemn, comforting, and profound. We both looked out at the horizon together and I was struck by the intensity of the colours around us. The process of creating a memorial has reawakened the memory of this dream, a subtle communication that beckoned me to find the healing and restorative powers of colour and art back into my life. By initiating an exploration with pigments, media, line, and form, the memorial had led me back to eventually finding myself. In Figure 7 I stood, now changed, transformed, and able to reconnect with my brother in this peaceful place while holding a profound sense of gratitude, grace, and love within my heart.

CONCLUSION

While I have initiated this journey, it is nowhere near completion. In fact it feels more like a life-long pursuit as I am continually growing, learning, evolving, and redefining my concept of self and my relationship to my brother. The Meaning Reconstruction process is also dynamic, acknowledging the experience of loss that continues through one's lifetime (Attig, 1996; Hagman, 2001; Neimeyer, 2000, 2001a; Rosenblatt, 1996). I intend to continue working on the memorial, the creation of the doll as well as the ritual ceremony to bury it, acknowledging that this idea may evolve as well.

The art based memorial functioned as a gatekeeper, bridging the land in between the living and the dead, and creating an accessible place to retrieve memories. It became more significant in light of the trauma which had occurred, as it became symbolic to the representation I carried of my brother into the future. Creating a memorial rather than using a premanufactured one (such as the gravestone) was much more powerful because the process of creating it touched on personal aspects of our relationship, validated my brother and memories that were once shared together, as well as helped me process the trauma of his death, and organize my experience of his loss. By having a 'sacred' space demarcated by the time spent in the creation of the memorial allowed me a living, and dynamic way to honour my brother's death, while simultaneously affirming my life.

Death can result in the loss of identity, of which the experience of grief is one of rebuilding foundations. Within our death denying culture, sometimes this is done without any social validation or support. However, through the undertaking of this research project and sharing my story with the reader, I have begun the process of being witnessed by others. As with traditional cultures, after a ritual or ceremony where a significant

change has taken place, the community welcomes in the new person (van Gennep, 1960). And similarly, the construction of meaning is an interpersonal process negotiated within a social domain (Neimeyer, 2000). The creation of a memorial, while predominantly a private affair, ultimately implies an audience, a witness of one or many that acknowledges and accepts the life lived, the relationship, as well as the hardships of the loss.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH

The art process is intrinsic to meaning making and facilitates the creation of new narratives, essential in coping with a significant loss. I have discussed aspects of the art process as it was relevant to my experience of losing my brother, and creating a memorial in his honour. I have shown how art can profoundly impact trauma, and grief by positively integrating the loss within a new schema of myself, in a way re-illustrating reality to fit within the current time.

Likewise, art therapists need to keep current with the times. What is lacking in art therapy literature about bereavement is an updated theoretical lens that reflects relevant goals for therapy. The Meaning-Reconstruction Model as proposed by Neimeyer (2001a) fits well within the creative process as is demonstrated by my thesis, as well as in a recent article by Lister et al. (2008). By having a thorough understanding of the complexities of the grief process, art therapists can facilitate a healing environment for their clients.

Based on the limitations of my study, future research could be directed towards the creation of art-based memorials in group therapy for individual or collective losses. By including people who have experienced the death of a loved one from different causes may provide a wider scope of knowledge about the usefulness of the memorial and

perhaps its relevance in other situations. It might also be interesting to note whether the memorial would be equally as significant to someone without any previous art experience. Using the theme of an art-based memorial in art therapy workshops for survivors of conflict or trauma could also be a useful contribution towards the creation of public monuments, which could then be able to truly reflect the needs of the community they serve.

The art-based memorial in this respect not only has a huge potential to the field of art therapy, bereavement, and trauma but can also promote social change, whereby death is actively addressed within the dominant culture. Mourning practices are acknowledged, as death is made visible through the art of remembering. Memorials are direct ways to capture memories of a person who has died, the relationship, and what it represented. Memorials can be incorporated into everyday life, uniquely stylized to suit the purpose of their creator, with the possibility of functioning equally well for individuals as well as groups. Memorials ask us how and what we remember about our loved one and, more importantly, question where in relation to these memories do we situate ourselves in the present and how we want to incorporate these memories within our current lives. The memorial acknowledges the past and, therefore allows for new possibilities to emerge for the future.

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