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Faculty of Education and Social Work
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Ways of Being: The alchemy of bereavement and communiqué

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This thesis is presented for the
Degree of
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NSW, Australia

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Author’s Declaration

This is to certify that:

- This thesis comprises only my original work toward the PhD Degree.
- Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material utilised.
- The thesis does not exceed the word length for this Degree.
- No part of this work has been used for the award of another Degree.
- This thesis meets the University of Sydney’s Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) requirements for the conduct of research.

Signature: ..................................................

Name: Michele T Knight

Date: 31st August 2011
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and to my son. Embodying what has gone before, and what is yet to come, their lives conjoin to create what is now.
Acknowledgements

A social science research study positioned within the body of enquiry of bereavement exploring the subjectivity of after-death encounters occurring between bereaved individuals and the deceased, defined by the study as communiqué, takes the individual into fathomless depths. It is there in those depths that the unseen is seen, the unknown known, and the unspoken spoken. The echo from those depths and the experiences of those who plumbed them are rendered in print on the following pages.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Lindsey Napier and Dr Margo Rawsthorne, whose expertise, critique and support of the study guided it to its completion. I also acknowledge with the highest regard the co-researchers who participated in the study. Their willingness to participate and their support and enthusiasm for the study never once faltered. Their generosity in sharing a deeply private and profoundly meaningful aspect of their life is a true testament to the courage of the human spirit.

There are many who have believed in this study and whose faith has endorsed it. Of these I would like to acknowledge Ms Jackie Adams and Mr Sol Cohen. I also acknowledge the time and effort of Dr Stephen Juan, Ashley Montagu Fellow for the Public Understanding of Human Sciences, Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Sydney, who edited the thesis for clarity of text, syntax and grammar.
Abstract

This qualitative research study utilises heuristic enquiry (Moustakas, 1990) to explore the natures and meanings of communiqué; unexpected and unsought after-death encounters occurring between bereaved individuals and the person/s close to them who died, the deceased.

The study has its origin in the author’s own lived experience of bereavement which provided the psychosocial and psychospiritual context for her experiences of the returning deceased. The study focuses on the lived experience of these encounters and explores them in open-ended interviews with twenty-one bereaved men and women. Together with the author they embark upon a journey of self-discovery and self-awareness, plumbing the depths of sorrow and anguish to discover for themselves an internal reservoir of resilience, a greater sense of connectedness, renewed hope and a new way of being in the world.

Their perceptions reveal that the impact of a death, regardless of its nature, can be traumatic and difficult enough without the added complexity of communiqué, after-death encounters, occurring between themselves and the deceased. As they shared their stories, they constructed their own bereavement narratives in accordance with what death, life after death, after-death encounters and spirituality meant for them. These narratives reveal that the impact of their communiqué challenged how they defined and understood themselves as human beings, how they defined and understood themselves as spiritual beings, and how they lived in their metaphorically visible social and cultural worlds.
Glossary of Terms

The following terms are utilised in the study in order to establish and distinguish key contexts and relevant relationships:

Alchemy

Within the context of the study, the term *alchemy* or *alchemical* is analogous with and informed by Carl Jung’s interpretation and understanding of the scientific practice of alchemy as an external representation of internal psychospiritual transformation and growth. Alchemy, which strove to scientifically transmute base metals into gold and considered to be the forerunner of modern chemistry, is a correspondential representation of the development of the human psyche and of the psychological process of individuation. “Alchemy represents the projection of a drama both in cosmic and spiritual terms. The opus magnum had two aims: the rescue of the human soul and the salvation of the world ...” (1977, p 228). Thus, the terms *alchemy* or *alchemical* correspond to the metaphor of self-change and psychospiritual growth through transformation.

Being

Within the context of the study, *being* is a term analogous with that which is known through direct experience. Through means of observation, sensing and feeling, the individual can gain an intimate awareness of their being. “In the simplest and most direct form, we can say that *being is you*, what you are ... to have being is to be alive, to exist. The affirmation ‘I am’ is a declaration that I exist as a living being” (personal communication, P.W. Groves, 24 May 1998).
Bereavement

Within the context of the study, bereavement is contextualised as the subjective experience of a death-event and can be described as “the objective situation of having lost someone significant” (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hanson, 2005, p. 5). DeSpelder and Strickland define bereavement as the experience of the loss by death of a significant other, or of someone close. It derives from a root word meaning shorn off or torn up. Thus “at root, bereavement conveys a sense of being deprived, of having some part of one stripped away against one’s will, of an intense disruptive force over which there is no control” (2005, p. 268).

Communiqué

Within the context of the study, communiqué is utilised as a collective term referring to after-death encounter phenomena occurring between a bereaved individual and the deceased. These subjectively meaningful after-death encounters are diverse and occur when the now disembodied and non-material person/s, after experiencing their own death, spontaneously and without assistance or provocation from any embodied individual, engage and interact with the bereaved individual in a manner deemed by that individual to be significant or meaningful.

Co-researcher

Within the context of the study, the term co-researcher denotes study participant. Heuristic inquiry acknowledges participants who contribute primary data in the research process as co-researchers (Moustakas, 1990). The essence of heuristic inquiry is the intersection between the researcher and the co-researcher of a shared commonality of a particular subjective experience. In a heuristic study the researcher brings the subjective experience of the topic of investigation to the co-researcher as the co-researcher brings that same subjective
experience to the researcher. Both originate from the same ontological perspectives.

Death

Physical death is the complete cessation of relevant biological functioning which enables a human being to exist as an embodied and material individual in the visible social world. Within the context of the study, death is contextualised as a transitional life event which enables the material body to be put off. This putting-off enables the now disembodied and non-material individual to exist post-mortem in non-material form.

Disembodied, The

Within the context of the study, the disembodied constitute those individuals who as the result of undergoing their own subjective death-event subsequently exist as non-material individuals in non-material reality.

Embodied, The

Within the context of the study, the embodied constitute those individuals who exist in material form, who live life in the materiality of the visible social, cultural and material world, and who are otherwise known as “human beings”. Embodiment is “the mode by which human beings practically engage with and apprehend the world” (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2006, p. 128). Thus an embodied individual is one who exists as a material being in the material world whereby life is experienced in ways “profoundly influenced by social processes and shaped by particular social contexts” (Howson, 2005, p. 12).

Material Reality

Within the context of the study, material reality is utilised as a collective term which encompasses all aspects of the space-
time world. This space-time world, which is observable, is delineated by flowing linear time in which human beings dwell and exist as embodied individuals. This observable and scientifically measurable space-time world includes for example planet Earth and its geographical phenomena, the galaxy in which the planet is located, the Milky Way, its astronomical phenomena and the expanding universe itself. It is the space-time world in its entirety. Material reality is known and experienced via the human sense organs of sight, sound, taste, smell and touch.

Non-material Reality

Within the context of the study, non-material reality is utilised as a collective term for a specific locale and for the phenomena originating from that locale. This locale and its phenomena co-exists with the space-time world and though at times interpenetrates it, exists outside of flowing linear time and is not sequenced by time-regulated events. Permanent entry into non-material reality, in contrast to brief encounters resulting from near-death events or alternate out-of-body experiences, is affected when an embodied individual undergoes their own subjective death-event.

Psychospiritual

Within the context of the study, the term psychospiritual represents the interconnected systems-relationship between an individual and the growth of their emotional, psychological and spiritual selves. This systems-relationship exists in relation to, and is intersubjective with, varying influences occurring within the individual’s visible social and cultural world and their life-cycle. Accordingly the individual perceives crisis events as opportunities for self-growth and growing spiritual understanding and/or emergence. The term psychospiritual is
closely aligned with another term ‘growth-relationship’, which
denotes the same or similar, and which is used interchangeably
throughout the study.

**Spirituality**

Within the context of the study, *spirituality* is a term
broadly defined as a belief-system embodying diverse behaviours,
values and elements. These may include for example, an
individual’s emotional and psychological engagement and
relationship with that which is concerned with the profound
and/or ultimate questions and meaning of human existence. Or,
it may involve a sense of relatedness with the material universe
and an understanding of that universe as a creation which is a
living organism comprised of systems within systems.

**Systems**

Within the context of the study, the terms *systems, systems-
relationship*, and *systems-view* are used interchangeably and
define “a particular approach, a language, and a particular
perspective” (Capra, 1984, p. 139). This systems view of reality
and of the visible social world understands that world in terms of
“relationships and patterns or organisation, and interactions,
rather than as a composite of individual entities or structures
existing in isolation, independently of one another” (Vaughan,
1985, pp. 20-21). Thus the individual exists in intersubjective
relationship with the world in which they live, and also in
relationship with the phenomena delineating that world.

**Transpersonal**

Within the context of the study, the term *transpersonal* is
utilised to denote those things “concerned with the study of
humanity’s highest potential, and with the recognition,
understanding and realisation of unitive, spiritual and
transcendent states of consciousness” (Lajoie & Shapiro, 1992, p. 91). That which is deemed transpersonal practice comprises those things relating to what Ken Wilber terms “contemplative discovery” and “meditative or contemplative unfolding” (1997, p. 94). A transpersonal perspective and approach “recognises the necessity of modifying human consciousness and of allowing and evoking transcendental experience and identity” (Walsh & Vaughan, 1980, p. 16).
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Prologue

The new vision of reality is ecological, but it goes far beyond immediate concerns with environmental protection. It is supported by modern science, but rooted in a perception of reality that reaches beyond the scientific framework to an intuitive awareness of the oneness of all life, the interdependence of its multiple manifestations, and its cycles of change and transformation. When the concept of the human spirit is understood in the transpersonal sense, as the mode of consciousness in which the individual feels connected to the cosmos as a whole, it becomes clear that ecological awareness is truly spiritual ... According to contemporary physics, the material world is not a mechanical system made of separate objects, but rather appears as a complex web of relationships. Subatomic particles cannot be understood as isolated, separate entities but must be seen as interconnections or correlations, in a network of events.

Self-actualising people are, without one single exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in something outside themselves. They are devoted, working at something which is very precious to them – some calling or vocation in the old sense, in the priestly sense. They are working at something which fate has called them to somehow and which they work at, and which they love so that the work-joy dichotomy in them disappears ... all, in one way or another, devote their lives to the search for what I have called the ultimate values which are intrinsic, which cannot be reduced to anything more ultimate ... they are the values of Being.

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the study. The chapter presents the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research to perceptions and understandings of communiqué. The chapter introduces the context of adult bereavement and communiqué occurring within contemporary Australian society. The chapter also introduces the frame of reference for the intersubjective psychospiritual growth-relationship between communiqué and the self and the interconnectedness of that frame of reference with notions of transpersonal research.

Introduction

Death, bereavement and subsequent after-death encounters between bereaved adults and the deceased, a phenomenon defined in the study as communiqué, can be profound events occurring in the life of the experienc (Attig, 1996; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; LaGrand, 1999; Palmer & Braud, 2002). Although Bereavement is not the specific topic of investigation of the study, it provides the context in which communiqué phenomena are positioned.

Although a number of international studies have reported the phenomenon in their findings, they have done so in terms of it being one of the elements of the general experience of bereavement. The current study differs to previous studies exploring the phenomenon in two significant ways. First, the study is positioned within a contemporary Australian context. Second, the study privileges only this element of embodied adult bereavement. Contemporary Australian society is one of multiculturalism in that it inclusively represents ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious and spiritual diversity. Census data (which do not acknowledge or record communiqué) from the
Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicated that New South Wales, the primary data collection site for the study, contained the largest population in Australia of people born overseas from both English and non-English speaking countries (ABS, 2006).

According to Sociologists Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, embodiment is “the mode by which human beings practically engage with and apprehend the world” (2006, p. 128). As a correlate to this engagement and apprehension, “the body is lived, experienced, but done so in ways which are profoundly influenced by social processes and shaped by particular social contexts” (Howson, 2005, p. 12). Thus, there is in a sense an intersubjective relationship between the individual existing and living as an embodied human being with the self and with the other, and with how one defines and understands oneself via the relationship that self experiences with the visible social and cultural world in which it exists.

The study is exploratory, non-experimental in design and utilises a qualitative heuristic strategy of inquiry, methodology and interpretative approach to data analysis. In addition to exploring the subjective experience of communiqué, the study also explores the interconnectedness of the self with communiqué, particularly as “bereavement restructures the individual’s thinking on the meaning of the self” (Lee, 2003, p. 85).

In exploring this individual and social construction of the self, the study challenges strictly empirical and reductionist social constructs of communiqué phenomena as “abnormal, aberrant or different” (Howe, 1994, p. 521) The researcher acknowledges the individualism of the phenomenon (in that how it is interpreted, understood and contextualised by the experient is in accordance with the individual’s world-view and belief-system), and its psychosocial and cross-cultural relevance from within a pluralistic postmodern context. The researcher
acknowledges and supports the “growing dissatisfaction with traditional models of mourning” as articulated by psychologists and grief researchers Robert Neimeyer and Nancy Keesee with their “implicit presumption of universality” (1998, pp. 225-228). The researcher also acknowledges that societies and cultures, and individuals living within those societies and cultures are diverse, changing and subject to varying influences, and that within such a milieu communiqué is understood and interpreted differently at different times by differing individuals.

Sociologist Glennys Howarth notes that in contemporary society recognition of difference is essential, as is the requirement to develop alternate concepts and approaches which can accommodate what are termed, “the differentiated” experiences of bereaved individuals (2000, p. 136). Howarth appears to sound the call for a revisioning of how relationships with the deceased are understood in that it is not new relationships that are being discovered or sanctioned by a particular grief model, but that what is taking place is, “an uncovering [of] a layer of communication which has until now been viewed as deviant or pathological and therefore hidden” (2000, p. 136).

There is a whisper of Howarth’s uncovering of communication between the living and the deceased captured by poet, playwright, and literary critic T. S. Elliot in his poem *Four Quartets*:

> And what the dead had no speech for, when living, they can tell you, being dead: the communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. (1968, p. 39)

The researcher acknowledges the metaphor of Elliot’s communication of the dead as being tongued with fire beyond the language of the living. There is a metaphorical correspondence
within the words that transcends their literal interpretation. The current study is a response to Howarth’s call for an alternate way of understanding ongoing social relationships between the bereaved and the deceased. It is not my intention with this study to present a new model of grief. Furthermore, although I found that these after death experiences both correspond to and transcend the continuing bonds theory of grief (Field, Gal-Oz & Bonanno, 2003; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Rubin, 1985; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993), it is not my intention to sanction them through their relationship to that model.

Defining Communiqué

Communiqué is defined in the study as after-death encounters occurring between the bereaved individual and the person/s close to them who died, the deceased. These encounters occur when the now disembodied and non-material person/s, after their physical death, spontaneously and without assistance or provocation from any embodied individual, engage and interact with the bereaved individual in a manner deemed by that individual to be significant or meaningful. The occurrence of these communiqué encounters are an unexpected and unsought component of bereavement which become an additional constituent of the multi-dimensionality of the death event.

The Context and Background to the Study

The impact of being bereaved can be profoundly life-altering, with the death of a close family member recognised as “the most psychologically and socially significant life event that most people experience” (Bachelor, 2001, p. 43). Bereavement “not only disrupts the dynamic equilibrium of social life” (Blauner, 1966, p. 379), it is seen by most bereaved individuals as “a tragedy unequalled by any other” (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 2005, p. 3). Notwithstanding that bereavement is “complex, for it reaches
to the heart of what it means to be human and what it means to have a relationship” (Klass, 1987, p. 13), the Centre for the Advancement of Health note that in their simplest definitions bereavement refers to “the loss of a loved one by death” (2003, p. 8).

Communiqué occurring within the context of adult bereavement is not uncommon, nor is the beneficent impact such encounters assume in adaptive grief outcomes unreported (Barbato, 2002; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Drewry, 2003; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1996; Klugman, 2006; LaGrand, 1999; Lindstrom, 1995; Parker, 2005). Historically such experiences have tended to be ignored or de-emphasised in many areas of Western culture because of their “transpersonal or, anomalous nature” (Palmer & Braud, 2002, p. 4). However, a growing trend of interdisciplinary research and literature has reflected a gradual change of attitude toward the occurrence of the phenomenon and to the recognition and understanding of the transformative growth-relationship such experiences can engender in the bereaved experient (Howarth & Kellehear, 2001; Klugman, 2006; Nowatzi & Kalischuk, 2009; LaGrand, 2010; Parker, 2005; Rhodes, 2000; Wechsler, 2010).

The occurrence of communiqué suggests that something other than material reality is both at work and being revealed because the event itself occurs as an intersection of what is material and what is non-material. Transpersonal researchers William Braud and Rosemarie Anderson propose a methodology suitable for exploring such non-cognitive or non-material phenomena which they term, “integral methodology” (Braud, 1994; Braud & Anderson, 1998). Integral methodology affirms that human experience is “multileveled and complex”, and that research methods “must be correspondingly multifaceted and pluralistic” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 29).
Furthermore, Braud and Anderson note that at a time when scientific paradigms are shifting, “the presentation of new transpersonal research methods is timely” (1998, p. 28). Additionally, they caution against missing opportunities to explore profound human experiences such as moments of clarity, illumination and healing, which can result when limited and conventional research perspectives and methodologies are applied to topics of investigation:

By privileging only certain ways and aims of knowing – and by ignoring or devaluing others – we, as researchers in the social or human sciences, are unnecessarily and unwisely limiting the content and approaches to our disciplines. (1998, p. 3)

It can be argued that communiqué are multileveled and complex and constitute a dimension of human experience for which integral methodology, one of which is heuristic inquiry, is well suited. This is particularly so because it privileges not only the vantage point of the experient, but because it provides a methodology which can explore and extend these farther reaches of human nature (Maslow, 1971). Additionally, if the current paradigm of postmodernism is indeed an opportunity for the exploration and utilisation of alternate ways of knowing, then researchers not only have exciting opportunities of discovery awaiting them, they have the means by which to gain even greater insight and deeper understanding of what it means to be “human”.

**Heuristic Research and the Research Question**

Heuristic research is a search for the discovery of meanings in significant human experience in which “plurality of voice” is emphasised (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 40). This plurality encompasses the voices of those interviewed, those of the
researcher/s, and those of others who have written and researched in the area. Key components of heuristic research include:

1. The researcher has experienced that which is being researched;
2. The researcher refers to and identifies with an intense or passionate concern which causes them to turn inward for tacit awareness and knowledge;
3. The research indicates that the researcher has “surrendered” to the research question (living, waking, sleeping and dreaming the question);
4. The researcher has engaged in self-dialogue;
5. The researcher has engaged in a self-search, and
6. The research evidences that a transformation has occurred and that the transformation is portrayed as a story which contains the transformation and which may transform those who read it. (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 11-124)

In formulating the research question for the study, the researcher engaged in continual self-dialogue regarding her own experiences of communiqué. In so doing the researcher encountered and lived her own “autobiography” and “immersed” herself in the topic of investigation in an attempt to determine the natures and meanings of communiqué occurring with two significant individuals in her life who had predeceased her (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-28).

As a result of this deeply intimate and passionate immersion with the topic of investigation, the research question took form (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). The research question the study
answers is: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?*

**Aim and Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to explore the subjective experience of communiqué occurring between bereaved adults and the deceased. In order to conduct research relevant to the “subjectivity of lived human experience” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 1) of communiqué occurring within bereavement, and to explore “pluralistic meanings, interpretations and understandings” of the phenomenon, a qualitative research design was selected as the most appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research methodologies, in particular, “contribute rich theoretical understandings of the subjective aspects of death” (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001, p. 14).

The purpose of the study is to deepen understandings of ways of knowing the self and ways of knowing reality, and the interconnectedness and inter-relationship of those ways of knowing with communiqué occurring within a context of adult bereavement. The researcher acknowledges that bereavement presents “a major existential challenge” in the life of the individual and that bereavement is intimately linked to “meaning-making and re-formation of the self” (Thompson, 2007, p. 70). The researcher also acknowledges that communiqué has the potential to “bring about a new way of being in the world” (Brown, 2000, p. 103). This new way of being in the world brings with it the hope that the changed individual will find acceptance in a world whose citizens will value and acknowledge the unique individualism of such an event in the experient’s life and be such that ongoing social relationships between the bereaved and the deceased are not considered pathogenic.
The purpose of the study is to also enhance the capacity of the interdisciplinary human services workforce. As a result of exploring communiqué phenomena, the study provides rich insights into the subjective complexity of the relationship of the phenomenon and its interconnected psychospiritual growth-relationship with the bereaved individual. Thus the study will assist human service practitioners in their understanding of the internal dimensions of those bereaved individuals who report and wish to explore their communiqué experiences within the context of the uniqueness of the experience as defined by them.

An additional purpose of the study is to privilege heuristic inquiry and the transpersonal research paradigm as an alternate means and systematic approach of qualitatively exploring non-material subjective human experience. When utilised as a framework for research, heuristic inquiry “offers a disciplined pursuit of [essential] meanings connected with everyday human experience” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 39). In heuristic research, within the larger macrocosm of subjective human experience the researcher is in effect a microcosm. Yet when the lives of both the researcher and the co-researcher converge and intersect, metaphorical worlds-within-worlds are revealed which are interconnected by a shared patterning of the same subjective experience.

**Significance of the Study**

The social relevance of the study is significant because it highlights the potential of communiqué to be a means of initiating a psychospiritual paradigm shift, not just at the individual level, but possibly at a broader social and cultural level as well. The phenomenon has this potential because it can challenge notions and definitions of ways of knowing the self, the other and the visible material, social and cultural world.
Communiqué as an idea, which is discussed in Chapter Seven: Discussion, extends an invitation to consider life and one’s participation in life from an alternate philosophical and transpersonal perspective and understanding.

A feature of research which has previously reported the phenomenon has been not only to highlight its inter-relationship with adaptive grief outcomes, but in terms of it constituting an event which can occur within the general experience of adult bereavement. The current study differs to previously conducted research in that its primary focus is the exploration of the natures and meanings of this one event. Furthermore, the study is conducted within a contemporary Australian social and cultural contextual milieu. As such it will contribute toward existing national and international social science and bereavement research literature by building upon and furthering existing knowledge and understanding from an Australian perspective.

**Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

Delimitations of the study are such that it is exploratory and non-experimental in design, cross-sectional, and utilises a qualitative heuristic strategy of inquiry, methodology and interpretative approach to data analysis. It confines itself to face-to-face in-depth interviewing of purposive sampled self-selecting bereaved adults concerning their experiences of communiqué between themselves and the deceased. Specifically, individuals will be at least eighteen years of age, they are to have experienced communiqué phenomena, and they are to be in good physical health with no recent major surgeries/illnesses reported. Scheduled interviews will avoid special dates such as for example anniversaries or birthdays.
In the social sciences, cross-sectional observations are the form of data most commonly used for assessing the determinants of behaviour (Blossfeld & Rohwer, 1995; Coleman, 1981; Davies, 1994). Cross-sectional research explores a phenomenon during a specific moment in time. This moment in time facilitates the collection of data in a relatively short time frame, and additionally, entails simultaneous collection of data from more than one research participant at the same time (Bryman, 2004, p. 48).

A limitation of cross-sectional research however, is the difficulty in measuring change of the phenomenon over time. This limitation constitutes, “safe generalisations of the findings” (Pinsonneault & Kraemer, 1992, p. 10). Another limitation is that purposive sampling procedures decrease the generalisability of findings. Findings cannot be generalised beyond the co-researchers, as such they are limited (Polit & Hungler, 1991, p. 645). Additionally, findings may be subject to other interpretations (Kunes, 1991, pp. 21-22). Irrespective of that possibility, findings will have relevance to practitioners in the interdisciplinary human services workforce who may come into contact with bereaved adults who may wish to explore, understand and find meaning in their after-death encounter experiences.

**Organisation of Chapters**

This study consists of eight chapters. Chapter One: *Introduction* introduces the study and presents the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research to understandings of communiqué. The chapter also introduces the context of adult bereavement and communiqué occurring within contemporary Australian society and the intersubjective growth-relationship between communiqué and the bereaved experient.
Chapter Two: Autobiographical Connections presents the researcher's autobiographical connection to the study. Written in the first person, the chapter presents a reflective narrative of significant life events of the researcher. Essential to heuristic research is the researcher's subjective relationship with the research question and topic of investigation. This subjective relationship which is termed the Autobiographical Connection is an essential component of the overall research design. Accordingly, this chapter presents the juxtaposition between the subjective relationship of the researcher with the research and the relevance of that juxtaposition to the study within the context of the researcher's personal epistemology.

Chapter Three: Literature Review presents a review of bereavement research and social science literature relevant to communiqué. The chapter reviews literature relevant to the pre-industrial sociohistorical context of the phenomenon, and findings from post-industrial interdisciplinary research which has further explored it. The chapter also reviews notions of spirituality and the intersubjective relationship between those notions and the transpersonal paradigm.

Chapter Four: Theoretical and Philosophical Considerations presents the theoretical and philosophical considerations which inform the study. The chapter discusses the theoretical influences contributing toward the development of heuristic inquiry and the applicability of heuristic inquiry to understandings of the subjective inter-relationship between communiqué and the psychospiritual growth-relationship of the experient. The chapter also discusses the competing conceptual paradigms and influences of modernity and post-modernity, and the inter-relationship of those paradigms with communiqué.

Chapter Five: Research Strategy, Design and Methodology presents the research strategy, design and methodological
rationale utilised by the study. The chapter also discusses research instrumentation, recruitment of co-researchers (throughout the study the term “participant” is replaced by the heuristic term “co-researcher”), and data collection. Validity, ethics and issues pertaining to communiqué research are also discussed.

Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings presents the findings from the study in four sections: Internal Frame of Reference, Exemplary Portraits, Illumination of Themes and Composite Depiction. Internal Frame of Reference metaphorically represents the communiqué experiences occurring between the co-researcher and those close to them who died. Exemplary Portraits presents Individual Depictions of four co-researchers which though unique to the individuals themselves generally characterise the experiences of the group as a whole. Illumination of Themes presents eight themes which emerged during the Illumination phase of data analysis. The themes reveal groupings and frequencies across the group as a whole distinctly representative of communiqué phenomena. Composite Depiction presents the diverse elements which permeate the experience of the co-researchers as a collective utilising the written form of prose.

Chapter Seven: Discussion presents a discussion of the findings from the heuristic analysis and interpretation of data presented in Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings. The findings are discussed with reference to the research question that guided the study and bereavement and social science research literature relevant to communiqué. Implications of the findings and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

Chapter Eight: The Creative Synthesis concludes the study. The Creative Synthesis is rendered in prose form, and in accordance with heuristic research design presents a comprehensive expression of the realisation of the natures and
meanings of communiqué. The Creative Synthesis, entitled *by Me all is pervaded*, presents the answer to the research question explored by the study: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?*

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has introduced the study. The chapter presents the research focus and the significance, importance and relevance of the research for bereaved adults and for the interdisciplinary human services workforce. The chapter has presented the background and context of communiqué as experienced by bereaved adults in contemporary Australian society, and the intersubjective growth-relationship between communiqué and the experient. The chapter has also presented the delimitations and limitations of the research design and discussed the organisation of chapters. The following chapter, *Chapter Two: Autobiographical Connections* presents the researchers autobiographical connection to the study.
Chapter Two: Autobiographical Connections

_A play in ten Acts_

God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my wilful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions, and change the course of my life for better or for worse.

Carl Gustav Jung, _Modern Man in Search of a Soul_, 1933, p. 276
Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the researcher’s autobiographical connections to the study. Positioned within the context of the researcher’s personal epistemology, and written in the first person in a reflective narrative style, the chapter discusses the juxtaposition of the subjective relationship of significant life events of the researcher with the topic of investigation.

Introduction

Essential to heuristic research is an exploration of the researcher's subjective relationship with the research question. “In heuristic research the investigator must have had a direct, personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). This personal encounter with the phenomenon being investigated is explored in this chapter. The interconnectedness of this relationship with the research question embodies the construction of a personal narrative of communiqué and the transformation of that narrative into the service of community activism and social change. It also delineates the researcher's personal epistemology, how what is known is known, and constitutes the lens through which the researcher looks to understand, know and derive meaning of the world.

Individuals in a sense create their own personal epistemology, their own knowing and understanding of the world in which they live, which itself is often a converging of diverse and changing influences. As it impacts and interacts with the individual, this confluence converges to manifest as a specific interpretive lens, and various proclivities and attitudes, and is the framework which provides the structure of my world-view. It encompasses my culture, my education, my gender, my ethnicity, my familial and social context and environment, my thoughts, my religious and spiritual beliefs, experiences and behaviours, my
sexual orientation and my emotional, psychological and psychospiritual history. It is derived from the subjective experience of my existence as an embodied being, and constitutes the lens through which I look to view, know and find meaning in the visible social, cultural and material world.

There are a number of threads which when woven together have coalesced into the tapestry of my interest in communiqué. The central thread is the subjectivity of my experiences of communiqué. Adjacent to that is the context of my bereavement, another, my world-view, and yet still another, my spiritual belief-system. The subject matter of this thesis is deeply meaningful and intensely private for me. It is also deeply meaningful and intensely private for those individuals close to me who died. Our voices are interwoven with those of the co-researchers whose stories similarly join and intermingle with ours to produce this written record; a collective tapestry of the authenticity of a shared human experience, a portrait of the “living human document” (Boisen, 1936, p. 10) and its “text within” (Auger, 2007, pp. 14-15).

**Act I: Childhood influences**

Upon reflection, it seems that the apparent quantum leap from child to adult can occur in what appears to be the twinkling of an eye, yet the events which constitute that quanta can be intimately recalled, studied and taken into oneself. The journey toward the destination of my after-death encounters began with my conception in my mother’s womb. Nine months later I was born on the same day as that of my deceased sister.

Other than our births occurring on the same day of the same month, the only difference between my sister and me was that she was born at five am in the morning and I at five pm in the afternoon. Perhaps there was something prophetic in my sister
and I sharing our birthdays. She had died five years prior to my being born, when only two and a half years of age. My gender convinced my mother that God had answered her prayers. I bear the name of the saint she had prayed to on a daily basis so as to be delivered of a girl child, Saint Therese of Lisieux, otherwise known as The Little Flower.

As an adult I see quite clearly that the first steps I took in the play dramatising my life were those taken in my childhood. I never questioned any of the events that took place, I just accepted them; they were as they were. Each event provided the raw material and stimuli for an accumulation of experience and knowing which was sequentially embedded in my being and psyche year after year. These events varied and included prophetic dreams, dream visitations from the disembodied, communiqué with the disembodied, mystical experiences, visions and pre-cognitive experiences. This layering became the structure which framed both my education of non-material phenomena and my familiarity with it. Reflecting on those experiences I can only say that in a sense I was not only born into the existence of diverse non-material phenomena, I was socialised into it.

As a child I did not categorise these experiences, I accepted them because they were how I experienced life. I can remember even then that I knew life was revealing aspects of itself to me not unlike the turning of a page in a book reveals the unfolding story to its reader. Although I did not understand what was at work, I knew irrevocably that something was at work. While this duality of seeing granted me simultaneous entry into both realities it also bore with it a responsibility that constantly pressed itself upon my awareness, the responsibility to know and acknowledge both yet not to speak publically of either, until now.
As a direct result of these experiences I knew that there existed a vast and limitless non-material reality beyond that which I could see, hear, feel, smell and touch. As my childhood progressed I learnt and understood that these two distinct realities, these “places” not only co-existed with one another, they interpenetrated one another.

While both realities had distinct phenomena which defined and delineated them the boundary between the two was permeable. In a very real and tangible way I was educated into knowing that the materiality of human beings did not define their existence, nor did physical death end that existence. Human beings were something above and beyond their material bodies and emotional and psychological selves. As a result death was normalised as was, “life-after-death” as were “the dead”. There was nothing special or mysterious about it, it was just the way things were, the way things are. I learnt when still a young child that human beings did not cease to exist when they died, they just went to live somewhere else. I somehow knew they had to die because that other place was where they actually belonged, that was their home, which was what they were born for; to go home, to return.

What I learnt from direct experience as a child was that the dead were fully present amongst the living, something I knew because I interacted with them in various ways. I also understood that although I knew and experienced the reality of their existence, to my knowledge my family and other individuals around me did not. What I understand now as an adult is that death was never explained to me, not by anyone. It was never explained perhaps because it was never really understood. It was life that taught me about death.

As mentioned I never spoke about these occurrences as a child, and it was only in my later adulthood that I began to
disclose these aspects of my life, and then selectively. To this day I never speak of them lightly. As a child I was acutely aware that I was not like the people around me, nor were they like me. I observed this and simply accepted it. When I was barely into my teens however, my mother told me about my great-grandmother and her extraordinary mediumship ability known as “the Gift”. Born in 1890, great-grandmother Rees who heralded from Durham of County Durham in North Eastern England, was a Spiritualist and a trance medium.

In addition to being the Reverend for her own Spiritualist Church in Glebe, an inner-city Sydney suburb, great-grandmother Rees had been a Deaconess in the High Anglican Church in England, her country of birth. Very little of her remains, other than a few faded photographs, some handwritten notes, and a treasured oral record of her clairvoyance and mediumship entrusted to me by my mother. My mother told me that prior to her death which followed after a long illness, she had been informed “by the spirits” as to what herbal remedies would heal her ailing body. According to my mother her response was, “I want to go home”. Some weeks later she died and was quietly buried in a small fenced plot in a cemetery on a sloping hillside.

For the first time I was able to begin to conceptualise what might have been the cause for my experiencing life as I did. My mother introduced to me terms I had never heard before, such as Spiritualism and Spiritualist, the Other Side, a Sitting, a Séance, Trance Mediumship, Ectoplasm and Rapping. She also entrusted to me my great-grandmother’s crystal ball, which to this day remains in my keeping sealed in a black velvet bag. Despite my mother’s disclosure I did not tell her of my experiences; that came later when I was an adult.

My understanding of this inheritance from my mother’s maternal linage has changed since that time. Life experience,
contemplation, solitude, self-examination, and sixteen years spent as a student within a hidden Sufi school have considerably altered the initial context in which I had positioned the phenomena associated with the Gift. Once I would have defined “the dead” as “those on the other side” without really knowing what constituted “the dead”, or for that matter what constituted “the other side”. What did these terms mean? What did, “the dead” mean? What did, “the other side” mean? In order to answer these questions I knew that greater insight and deeper understanding was required. I had become discontent with the explanations offered by Spiritualism for “the dead” and “the other side”. I knew that a vastness stood above and beyond the reality that I could see and experience with my physical self, and I knew that same vastness stood above and beyond the non-material phenomena associated with Spiritualism. Something immeasurable maintained both realities.

Act II: Mysticism unrealised

As a child I was very much aware of two things. The first was that I knew intuitively that I experienced life very differently to those around me; the lens through which I looked at the world was quite singular. The second was that I was acutely aware that I felt deeply and knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that something intangible yet tangible stood behind all that I could see. It was almost as though in a perverse way my senses contrived to work against me to produce a screen which prevented or obscured my seeing of what that was. Yet I also had eyes within my eyes, an ability that enabled me to see beyond that screen. This duality of seeing has remained with me my entire life and is one of the cornerstones of the worlds I inhabit and of my experiences of existence within them.
Having spent my childhood in the Tropics, never was I more aware of this intangibility seeping into me than when I found myself roaming the jungle with my father or swimming in the shallows of fast flowing rivers with crocodiles silently poised in anticipation watching from opposite banks. The sunsets, the stars at night, the moon, the garden, everything was alive because it was impregnated with something which made it so. Trees were not just sedentary structures to climb on; they oscillated with an energy which I could feel passing through my body. The jungle was not just a fecundate profusion of growth; it was something that had a soul. Life was profoundly meaningful in a way that I could not understand yet could feel with every fibre of my being.

Writing of that period now I see reflections of my childhood in the words of clergyman and author Charles Kingsley:

When I walk the fields, I am oppressed now and then with an innate feeling that everything I see has a meaning, if I could but understand it. And this feeling of being surrounded with truths which I cannot grasp amounts to indescribable awe sometimes ... Have you not felt that your real soul was imperceptible to your mental vision, except in a few hallowed moments? (Cited in Inge, 1899, p. 341)

Kingsley used the words “hallowed moments”. My childhood in its entirety was hallowed. Not only that, but the events which occurred during this time became the foundation upon which the pillars of my understanding rested when I matured into adulthood. These hallowed moments were like seeds which as they germinated fuelled my yearning to know the source of that which stood behind what life presented to me. Everything was meaningful, material and non-material. Everything came from somewhere; everything had an origin, a source, a destination and a purpose. Nothing was random; nothing happened by chance,
there was design in everything. This was something I felt and knew intuitively. My mind could not understand or comprehend how it knew this, because it was not my mind that was thinking it, it was another part of me that was feeling it and registering it.

**Act III: Death events**

As a child the emotional impact of death had always seemed to be something that stood at a distance. It happened to other things and other people. Throughout my growing years people around me had died such as my grandmother, other relatives, friends of my parents and family, even pets. But somehow these events seemed rather remote and made little impression on my awareness or understanding. That changed however when death heralded its emotional advent in my life when my closest friend died in December 2000. Her death was followed by that of my father in March 2001 after a long illness, my husband in August 2004 and then my mother in January 2005.

These deaths all occurred within a five year period. The death which touched me most deeply and profoundly was that of my husband and while my mother’s death made my siblings and me orphans it was the impact of my husband’s death that completely reshaped and redefined my life. With my husband’s death came the annihilation of my life up to that moment in time and the traumatic psychological death of large chunks of my assumptive world. The event and impact of death was no longer something that happened to other people, it was no longer remote, it was something that happened to me. As a result of the impact of these deaths and the communiqué phenomena which followed, I delineate between, “then” and, “now”. So profound was the emotional, psychological, psychospiritual and social impact of my bereavement that life as I knew it up to that moment in time simply ceased to be.
Although I had been involved with the University of Sydney as a student and employee since 1999, both studying and working in various teaching, research and administrative roles, and simultaneously engaged in volunteer and community development work outside the institution as well, my decision to undertake social science research within the body of enquiry of bereavement was fuelled by something else. It was the transformation of a personal narrative of communiqué into the service of community activism and social change. It was also the process of the individualising of my bereavement and the authenticity of my own self-reclamation.

There are additional death events which have relevance to this narrative. During the time my husband and I were together I underwent two near-death experiences. One in particular experientially re-introduced me to the timelessness of the realm of non-material existence in which time is suspended; eternity. Linear time as human beings experience it while living as embodied beings in material reality does not exist in eternity. It does not exist because eternity is the realm of infinity, which is without beginning and without end. A third death-event occurred during my candidature which involved facing and overcoming a life-threatening illness.

**Act IV: A stranger at the door**

In August 2004 my husband died. His death was followed five months later by the death of my mother in January of 2005. Three months after my mother died my sixteen year old son and only child, who had been with me from the moment of his conception in my womb left home to live with his father. At that time, in addition to my change in social status from wife to widow, from being a parented child to being an orphan, I saw myself as being childless as well. My son leaving home was equal
to that of experiencing another death. My bereavement was total and complete.

The death of my husband and mother plunged me into a world within myself which was frightening and bewildering in its intensity and unfamiliarity; never had I experienced such chaotic emotional and psychological instability. This was the world of bereavement, and it was characterised by an unknown terrain and by wild storms and a never-ending and terrifying darkness. Every waking moment was an agony and then when night descended, when all should be quiescent, thoughts tumbled and turned in my mind, searing and burning with an intensity that threatened my sanity.

I remember that I used to feel as though I lived in a bubble and that this was the only way I could exist. I moved through the days following my husband’s funeral bounded by the confines of a world that was not of my making. I felt lost, cut off from humanity, numb and disembodied from myself. Where was the person I used to be? Where was the person I used to know so intimately? Where were the familiar landmarks that used to define my world? Where was my world? What had become of it? I realised that I had become a stranger unto myself. I wandered alone in this unknown world, lost, unseeing and afraid. What was this madness of the mind and desolation of the spirit that threatened to consume my soul? Where was I?

In discussing heuristic meaning and individuality, Moustakas highlights the capacity of individuals to direct their own lives, to experience feelings in their own way and to discover their own unique pathways and meanings in life (1995, p. 14). This is exactly what I did with my bereavement. In order to find my way through it I knew I had to learn and understand its constituents. What was this place? What defined it? Where were its boundaries? Where in myself was it? It seemed to me
that my bereavement was a doorway that permitted entry into the labyrinth of my psyche. I reasoned that if it was the doorway by which I could enter the labyrinth then it would also be the doorway by which I could leave.

It is commonly advised by those who work with and support the bereaved in some capacity that major decisions, such as moving house, selling property or commencing study should be avoided until a certain length of time has passed. While there is unquestionable merit in this advice and sound judgement, my intuition told me to move house, and so I did. I had learnt as a child that I had the power to think for myself and to trust my intuition above and beyond all else. In so doing as an adult I was as Moustakas noted directing my own life. The choice I made enabled me to come to know and understand my bereavement in my own time and in my own way, free from the expectations and assumptions of others. It was also a rejection of the social expectation that my bereavement behaviours needed to be sanctioned by others; they did not. But my decision was something else as well, it was “a challenge to the conformity of professional expectations” (Currer, 2001, p. 40).

In order to discover for myself the meaning in all that was occurring, I chose solitude so as to come face to face with my bereavement and to better understand the encounters that were occurring between myself and those close to me who had died. I knew this would be difficult yet I was not afraid, nor did I hesitate. I moved house to the leafy suburb of Hornsby in New South Wales, and there I embraced my bereavement, I was in my bereavement. Much later when again intuitively I knew that it was time to leave Hornsby, I realised that a fundamental shift had occurred. I was not in my bereavement, my bereavement was in me. There was a demarcation now between it and me because I had learnt to live not with it, but in spite of it.
Act V: Communal dimensions

The death of a close family member is recognised as “the most psychologically and socially significant life event that most people experience” (Bachelor, 2001, p. 43). While bereavement is a deeply personal and intimate engagement of the impact and ramifications of the death of the individual who died, and is something which generally occurs privately, it also has “communal dimensions” (Neimeyer, 2002, p. 67). These communal dimensions include for instance stereotypes and expectations of how to grieve which are often imposed upon the bereaved by others. These not only reflect cultural and societal norms, they sanction “right” and “wrong” ways to grieve. Such expectations can lead to feelings of isolation and a sense of “personal failure” as the bereaved feel that somehow they do not quite measure up to what society expects of them (Rando, 1988, p. 5).

In addition to feeling disassociated from myself and my assumptive world, as a bereaved individual of the community I was “othered”. I gradually became aware that my bereavement had redefined my social status within my personal and wider social community. This was displayed in the manner by which individuals behaved toward me, both in their actions and their speech. As a result of this behaviour I was socially and communally isolated by misunderstanding and lack of community support, two factors which greatly added to the burden of my being bereaved.

For instance, although I was a widow and grieving the death of my husband, casual male acquaintances and long-time male friends perceived me as being single and available. This was reflected in their suddenly changed behaviour toward me which manifested as personal and sexual interest. It seemed that women also perceived me to be single particularly as there was a
sudden flurry of offers of “blind dates” and frequent statements of “we’ll find someone new for you”.

Social engagements with long-time childhood female friends who were married gradually ceased. Six months after my husband died a female colleague who was a professionally trained and practising holistic counsellor asked me if I had met anyone. In my shocked silence which followed her statement, she recapitulated saying that it was “too soon yet”. I did not know which aspect of what she said was more appalling. Within a year of the death of my husband only one female friend whom I had met when my husband was ill retained contact, and she was single. Four years after the death of my husband I had no male friends, and at time of writing, six years after my husband’s death, I have only one close male friend, himself a widower.

I began to feel penalised from the misunderstanding of my bereavement by friends, family and professional colleagues and that I was being judged by them on account of it. I felt that “I” disappeared, because it seemed to me that they constantly made me invisible. All that was seen by them was my bereavement and all that was seen by me was their constant misunderstanding of my bereavement. It seemed to me that people could not comprehend that the bereavement behaviours they were witnessing were simply a part of me, they were not the sum of me.

I wondered at the time why those around me were unable to understand or comprehend that these behaviours were attached to a selection of the range of emotions which human beings experience at different times of their lives in accordance with particular circumstances. What was wrong with sadness, sorrow and melancholy? Why did these emotions make others uncomfortable? Why did people tell me to pull myself together? How could I when I had no means of knowing what that meant?
Why did people tell me I needed help? Was there something wrong with me? Were not the emotions I was feeling ordinary human responses to the event of death and is there not currency, purpose and meaning in such emotions? Is this not the “human content” (Bronowski, 1956, p. 12) of our lives which exists alongside joy, wonderment and awe? Is this not “the text within” (Auger, 2007, pp. 14-15) of the “living human document” (Boisen, 1936, p. 10)? What was it about being bereaved that so unhinged others?

I read a book entitled *Against Happiness* which also discusses this. Author Eric Wilson laments the loss of sadness and melancholy and wonders why so many people experiencing melancholia take medication. He is concerned that depression and melancholia may have become confused. The result of this confusion is that melancholia is rendered “an aberrant state, a vile threat to our pervasive notions of happiness” (2008, p. 8). In concluding his discussion Wilson argues that what drives people to hide behind happiness is fear of confronting the complexity of the world, “its vagueness, its terrible beauties” (2008, p. 150). Fear of death also rates a mention with Wilson noting that most flee the situation because though in the end death is “exhilarating, a call to be creative” it is in the beginning something, “rather horrifying” which is accompanied by “a feeling of hovering in an unpredictable abyss” (2008, p. 150).

Bereavement impacts on many aspects and dimensions of the individual’s life. Those who have been bereaved know this. By necessity a new life has to be reconstructed as does a new assumptive world. This new assumptive world needs to accommodate not only the absence of the individual/s that have died, but be one which delineates the reality of a profoundly altered existence. In my professional work at the time as a Bereavement Support Program Coordinator delivering a support
program out of a community centre to bereaved adults, and in interviewing co-researchers for the study, this view is substantiated. Those in the program also discoursed in terms of how their lives and they themselves as individuals would never be what they once were. I would posit that as a result of being bereaved, many individuals evolve into quite different types of human beings who not only have new ways of understanding themselves, but new ways of understanding and interacting with life and the social environments in which they interact with the other.

This is a bold statement yet I have no qualms in making it. Psychiatrist Carl Jung articulated with reference to himself that his views are “grounded in experience”; so are mine, subjectively so (1977, p. 1731). Philosophy professor Elliott Sober also notes this, arguing “the mere act of thinking, unconnected with action or some other causal pathway, cannot make statements true” (1991, p. 16). This re-framed thought and re-directed thinking relevant to identity and my place in the world, which I bring as a researcher to the study, has its birth and emergence in the experience of my communiqué.

**Act VI: A knock at the door**

During my husband’s illness and after his death I not only read profusely, I watched movies and documentaries, generally about death. I was looking for something that would help me make sense of what I was experiencing. I became familiar with key authors writing in relation to bereavement: Tony Walter, George Bonanno, Allan Kellehear, Thomas Attig, Robert Neimeyer, Allan Woolfelt, Phyllis Silverman, Neil Small, Therese Rando, Michael Barbato, William Worden, Dennis Klass, Louis LaGrand, Collin Murray Parkes, Lynne DeSpelder. Some had experienced a death event themselves, some had not. Many
worked as practitioners or educators in the interdisciplinary human services workforce. Some had websites. Some conducted research. Some wrote journal articles, books and research reports, others popular fiction. A lot spoke about grief and the impact of death on the assumptive world. Fewer spoke about post-mortem interactions between the bereaved and those close to them who had died.

In my foraging into the literary world of death I came across some text written by Medium Gordon Smith from one of his books entitled *The Unbelievable Truth* (2004) which struck a chord within me. It was a book about his experiences as a medium. He wrote that from our current standpoint dying is the most major event that we will ever have to face. Well I had to agree with that. He also questioned what it was that would enable us to become more accepting of death. Is it the hope that stems from the knowledge that we live again? Good question. Or, to quote verbatim could it be that, “we have to reach a point of understanding that we are spirits already and that physical death is no more than a change of environment?” (2004, p. 46). Now here was food for thought. To me it was clear that he was onto something because it corroborated with what life had taught me, which is that death is the putting off of the physical body and the entrance of the now disembodied individual into the timelessness of non-material reality; eternity.

In addition to being the primary carer for my husband, as I was with my mother, and sharing their journey as well as traversing my own, I experienced diverse non-material phenomena directly related to my husband dying. Prior to his death I became used to seeing him standing outside his material body; a circumstance which I believed attested to the immanence of his physical death. Then there were visitations from disembodied friends of his who had died in the United States
some years previously whom I had never met. I would describe the appearance of these individuals and he would identify them. His closest friend who had died twelve years earlier was a regular visitor.

After the event of my husband’s death he communicated with me on many occasions. I was aware of his presence, heard his voice, felt his love envelope me, was touched and held by him, smelt him and experienced a number of profound dream visitations. This communiqué was extensive and my journals from that time hold the written record of all that transpired. I was gripped with the need to contact him in an effort to learn more about these encounters, this communiqué occurring between us. I thought back to my childhood, to my great great-grandmother, and the Gift. I searched my mind, looking for and locating the memories that related to Spiritualism. I spoke to my mother who was still living at the time. What did these post-mortem encounters between my husband and I mean? Why did they occur? What does engagement between the embodied and the disembodied mean?

From the literature I had encountered, I had learnt that the phenomenon has been variously termed as extraordinary experiences, anomalous experiences, paranormal experiences, after-death contact, after-death communication, post-death contact, and hallucinations. I have named this phenomenon, communiqué. The etymology of the term utilised such is from the Old French, communier, “to communicate, talk with” (Skeat, 2010, p. 124).

From the reading I undertook I learnt that after-death encounters between the bereaved and the deceased are widespread. Bereavement seems to be a unique opportunity in that it provides the context for the disembodied to make contact with their embodied loved ones. A significant element of this
communiqué is that it is at their instigation. It is unsought by the experient, spontaneous, and not the result of premeditated behaviours such as for example visiting a medium, mirror gazing utilising a psychomantium (Moody, 1992; 1993) or engaging in eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing to induce communication (Shapiro, 2001). It is they who contact us.

What enables these communiqué to occur? How is it possible? What process is at work? While these questions burned unceasingly in my mind something else gradually became apparent as well. One did not need to be a medium or have clairvoyant ability in order to experience communiqué. It seemed that a large number of accounts came from people who had had no prior experience with mediums, who themselves were not clairvoyant and who by their own admission were not particularly religious or spiritual, either in their thoughts or behaviours. These variables did not seem to constrain the experience, indeed communiqué occurred irrespective of that. What was enabling it, and why?

I had surmised from my reading of the literature that while death does not diminish a relationship it nonetheless changes it. I have since learnt that the embodied and the disembodied certainly do renegotiate the dynamics of their relationship as part of their adjustment to their changed circumstances. I had also read that what I was experiencing nestled comfortably into the Continuing Bonds theory of grief. Thus the communiqué that I experienced and all that that entailed was socially sanctioned. I was given permission to experience my bereavement in this way. I was not aware that I needed permission and by whose authority was that decision made? I certainly did not recall being invited to contribute toward the decision-making process.
Act VII: Cemetery behaviours

A study exploring community values of Australian cemeteries notes that not only are they, “virtual hives of activity” for the bereaved, they are among the most visited locales in the country (Bachelor, 2007, p. 405). According to researcher Phillip Bachelor, an estimated six million Australians experience the death of someone close each year, many of whom contribute to the approximate thirty-three million visits per annum to over 2,300 cemeteries (2002, p. 11). In 2005 it was thirty-three million and one.

In an attempt to find succour for the emotional pain I was experiencing at the death of my husband, I visited the gravesite of my parents. My need for comfort over-rode the intellectual comprehension that my parents were physically dead, that their bodies lay buried under a mound of earth and that their flesh was rotting and decaying in the caskets in which their physical remains lay. I knew they were not there, but the gravesite was a link to them. If I touched the earth that covered them, it was analogous to touching them physically. Sometimes love is simply beyond reason.

Completely overwhelmed by my emotions I had lain on the grass that blanketed the bodies of my parents. Suddenly I was aware of their presence. They stood a short distance from me yet close enough for me to see the concern on their faces. My husband was also present and standing discretely to one side. My father called me by the name he had addressed me as a child, and then I felt his concern and fondness wrap itself around me and hold me, just for a moment. He was never one given to such gestures in life which rendered his actions all the more poignant. Then my mother in her usual pragmatic manner told me that all would be well. They were distressed by my sorrow. My husband
stood respectfully to one side and slightly away from them, these were parents come to comfort a grieving daughter.

**Act VIII: Community activism**

My husband’s impending death brought me face-to-face with my own attitudes about death and my spiritual belief-system, which contrary to being challenged were complemented. His death and entry into non-material reality eventuated significant psychospiritual growth and transformation for the both of us.

In addition to heralding change in my private life, his death heralded change in my academic and professional life as well. The social response to my being bereaved was the impetus for my embarking on research into the area. As I had always intended to undertake doctoral studies once my Masters was complete, it seemed a natural progression to combine intellectual endeavour with exploring the subjectivity of communiqué. While the decision to undertake research within the body of inquiry of bereavement was both the culmination and commencement of my attempt to discover the meaning of communiqué between myself and my husband, there was an additional factor involved; community activism.

In trying to determine answers to some of the questions that my own experiences of communiqué with my husband and my mother had generated within my mind, I searched exhaustively for guidance. In conjunction with riding my intellectual steed into the battle of the written word, I also contacted the palliative care service which had attended to the palliative care needs of my father, husband and mother. I was directed to a faith support person with whom I eventually spoke on the telephone.

A self-confessed expert, I was bluntly told by the individual that communication between the living and the deceased was negatively viewed, and that such things lay in the realm of the
occult. I was also told that such ideas did not accord with Christian churches in Sydney. While this individual implied that the phenomenon was akin to a form of possession, I was also told that throughout their counselling of the bereaved very few individuals had reported this. When I told the individual that my encounters actually helped me cope with my being bereaved, they became angry and insistently stated that this was a side issue which had no relation to bereavement and grief whatsoever. They continued arguing that they dealt with the practicalities, what to do when you wake up crying in the middle of the night, that sort of thing.

In concluding the conversation, and when I mentioned that I would be undertaking doctoral studies exploring this phenomenon, already agitated, the individual became more so, reiterated that it was something which belonged to the occult, and that in their opinion it would not help the bereaved. In addition to this encounter, I experienced two similar conversations with individuals from alternate faith traditions.

I applied ongoing self-reflexivity to my experiences and observations with the result that I became “conscious of the process of knowledge creation” which was directly relevant to communiqué (Bishop, 1996, p. 995). So too had I become “suspicious of authoritative definitions and singular narratives of any trajectory of events” (Bishop, 1996, p. 993). Through the sum total of all these experiences told and untold in this narrative, I had learnt that competing bereavement discourses can socially displace and stigmatise the bereaved in various ways. It seemed to me that robust research could answer some of the questions posed by communiqué and perhaps stimulate attitudinal change, generate interdisciplinary debate and promote additional understandings of both the complexity and diversity of bereavement.
These experiences propelled me into community activism and with the desire for social change in my heart, I enrolled as a Doctor of Philosophy candidate at the University of Sydney in 2007. My reasoning at the time was such that social science research can stimulate social change “by focusing on personal and collective experiences of structural inequality” (D’Cruz & Jones, 2006, p. 3).

Act IX: Breakthroughs and breakouts

In the third year of my candidature I undertook a unit-of-study in the Master of Arts (Hospital Chaplaincy) degree offered by the Sydney College of Divinity. The unit-of-study was Clinical Pastoral Care and Education, which I completed through the New South Wales College of Clinical Pastoral Education at St Vincent’s Hospital CPE Centre. I had always wanted to become more involved with pastoral care after being introduced to it when my husband was ill, and believed it would make an excellent component of my overall professional practice.

My time as a student during the six months it took to complete the unit was a deeply formative and critical period; emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. I was introduced to a body of literature which provided a theoretical humanistic context and framework to many of my own thoughts and attitudes regarding bereavement and communiqué. I had been searching unsuccessfully for such material for many months during my candidature and never anticipated that I would locate such literature within a pastoral care context. I was both astonished and delighted.

This literature introduced me to a number of concepts including “seeing the same different” and “living human document” which have direct relevance and application to my understanding and conceptualisation of bereavement. The living
human document is the metaphor for a life in crisis, a life caught in “mental and spiritual disarray, in desperate search for resolution” (VanKatwyk 2006, p. 21).

Anton Boisen, American clergyman, psychologist of religion and founder of Clinical Pastoral Education, utilised his own experiences of mental illness, subsequent hospitalisations and spiritual suffering to demonstrate how periods of crisis are normalised when positioned within the context of growth and change (1960). The crisis is perceived from the perspective of “seeing the same different”. Crisis experiences become normative when seen as universal paths of “human growth and change” (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26). As such, the crisis becomes “a crucial period of increased vulnerability and heightened potential” (Erikson, 1968, p. 96).

Peter VanKatwyk, clinical pastoral care educator and practitioner argues that Clinical Pastoral Education is, “a truly postmodern movement entertaining a diversity of viewpoints” and is one which has “resisted the orthodoxy of sanctioning only one educational creed or set of required procedures” (2006, p. 24). Boisen emphasises the need to “see” human beings as living human documents requiring, “understanding and interpretation, not categorization and stereotyping” (Gerkin, 1984, p. 38).

**Act X: The final curtain**

Prior to experiencing my own bereavement I can truthfully state that I had no frame of reference for the trauma that can result from the death of someone close. So too was I ambivalent regarding the experiences of the disembodied and non-material reality which had been such a feature of my life. I had never truly appreciated nor understood the profundity of the two worlds in which I lived. As a direct result of my own life experiences however, I now have a frame of reference for the subjective
experience of communiqué occurring within the context of bereavement. So too do I now understand that within the birth pangs of devastating trauma lie buried the seeds of renewal, hope and psychospiritual growth. I also know that in a sense the bereaved speak a similar language amongst themselves, language being the metaphor for real experience. The bereaved understand one another because in real experience there is no possibility of disagreement.

My understanding of the event of physical death is that it does not end the existence of the individual. The event of death as a means of putting off the physical body merely realigns existence. I understand also that there is great diversity in attitudes toward bereavement and communiqué across cultures and societies in what can be loosely termed the Eastern and Western world, and that within those cultures and society’s individual world-views and spiritual belief-systems, behaviours and practices can yet again be divergent. I also understand that in their distress many of the bereaved reach out to those around them for comfort, understanding and support. How can those desiring of support be understood by others who so often misunderstand their needs? And where are those who not only understand the impact of communiqué but who can companion those bereaved individuals experiencing such phenomena?

There are events and circumstances, call them what you will, which occur in life that defy and contradict the known and expected or even the wanted. Things happen over which individuals appear to have no control. Situations occur in which life seems to propel one individual in one direction toward a certain end, while it simultaneously propels another in a different direction toward a different end. Sometimes events play themselves out initiated by agendas both known and unknown to those participating within the event. Life is indeed characterised
by the dramatic, by comedy, by tragedy, by hope, despair and love, and as the audience watch the performance of the actors upon the stage they are witness to elements of their own lives being played out before them.

In the event of my husband’s death both he and I found meaning in different ways, and from that meaning evolved into different kinds of human beings. I still live as an embodied being in material reality. He now lives as a disembodied being in the timelessness of non-material reality; eternity. I will exist in time-based reality until I experience my own subjective death-event. I exist and live in the present, my husband in the future. But we both still live. We are both still alive, vibrantly so, and to me what is most meaningful of all is that something above and beyond the both of us has made it so.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the autobiographical connections between the researcher and the topic of investigation. It was written in the first person and articulated how specific life events provided the impetus for the study and directly contributed toward its conceptualisation. The juxtaposition between the subjective experience of the researcher with the research and the relevance of that juxtaposition to the study has been explored and discussed within the context of the researcher’s personal epistemology. The following chapter, Chapter Three: Literature Review, will review literature relevant to the study.
Chapter Three: Literature Review

And the dead speak ...

I can now wonder whether one reason why we are so little aware of the presence of the dead ... may be ... that we have no concepts for their conditions and they therefore become unreal for us.

Rosalind Heywood, *Death and psychical research*, 1969, p. 248
Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a review of social science and bereavement literature relevant to communiqué, defined in the study as after-death encounters occurring between bereaved individuals and the deceased. The post-industrial sociohistorical context of the phenomenon as it occurs specifically within adult bereavement in contemporary Western societies, and more broadly across cultures, is also discussed and current research reviewed.

Introduction

The subjective experience and understanding of the meaning of death, the deceased and after-death encounters between the living and the deceased, or conversely, between the embodied and the disembodied, reflect a changing and shifting theoretical and intellectual discourse, and perhaps understanding. This understanding, which appears to be the cumulative impact of diverse social, cultural and historical influences, is generated in response to the stimulus of change. This change itself comprises a variety of factors deriving from an ongoing stream of material and non-material events and associated phenomena occurring throughout human history.

From the beginning of recorded history, realization of finitude has been a powerful concern and shaping force ... one of humanity's most distinguishing characteristics ... is its capacity to grasp the concept of a future, and inevitable, death. (Feiful, 1990, p. 537)

The impact of experiencing a death has far-reaching implications for the bereaved (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 2005), with the loss of a close family member recognised as “the most psychologically and socially significant life event that most people experience” (Bachelor, 2001, p. 43) and “the most momentous life
event that we are likely to ever experience” (Bachelor, 2004, p. 1). Within the social and cultural structure not only does death “disrupt[s] the dynamic equilibrium of social life” (Blauner, 1966, p. 379), it is seen by the majority of individuals as “a tragedy unequalled by any other” (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 2005, p. 3).

Occurring within the midst of this life event is the phenomenon of communiqué; an event within an event delineated by a bereaved individual subjectively experiencing the presence of the deceased in some way, shape or form. The term is utilised in the study as one that is overarching in that it collectively represents the diversity of phenomena bereaved individuals may experience in their after-death encounters with the deceased.


Interestingly, interdisciplinary discourse has reflected within this literature a gradual shift of researchers and theorists from the prevailing Western perspective of severing ties and attachments with a deceased individual (Bowlby, 1961; Klass & Goss, 1999; Parkes, 1986; Sanders, 1989; Worden, 1982) to one which now acknowledges an ongoing post-mortem relationship (Attig, 1996; Bonanno, 2001; Dawson & Marwitt, 1997; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005; Devers, 1997; Hagman, 1995; Klass, 1997; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Lifton, 1979; Neimeyer, 2001; Neimeyer, Keesee & Fortner, 2000; Neimeyer, Prigerson &

For example, a study of widows conducted by general practitioner Dewy Rees, concludes “[hallucinations] are normal experiences after widowhood, providing helpful psychological phenomena to those experiencing them” (1971, p. 41) prior to noting some years later “... a sense of the presence of the dead, is not an experience that society should encourage people to conceal” (Rees, 1997, p. 198). Attig notes, “those of us who desire it can find a dynamic, life-affirming, life-promoting, enriching, and most often, loving connection with those who have died” (1996, p. 187). Silverman and Klass concur in noting “resolution of grief involves continuing bonds that the survivors maintain with the deceased ... bonds which can be a healthy part of the survivors ongoing life” (1996, p. 22). And in their study of death attitudes among women in the Greater Los Angeles vicinity of the United States of America, Kalish and Reynolds note, “we need to re-evaluate the assumption that such encounters signify pathology” (1974, p. 191).

A Research Trajectory

Scientific research in the contemporary West exploring accounts of non-material phenomena, specifically after-death encounters between bereaved individuals and the deceased ostensibly commenced in 1882 when the Society for Psychical Research was established in London. The Society’s intent was to investigate diverse non-material phenomena which included apparitions, telepathy and spirit mediumship. Research endeavours soon revealed however that many accounts of non-material phenomena related to death, in that either a death was
pre-heralded by a dream deemed significant or exceptional by the
dreamer, either before they knew the death had occurred, or as a
result of an after-death encounter or what the authors term a
crisis apparition after the death had occurred. These research
efforts resulted in the large two volume work, *Phantasms of the
Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886).

In 1894, the further Report on the Census of Hallucinations
was published, of which approximately 400 pages were included
in the Society's *Proceedings* for the same year (Sidgwick,
Johnson, Myers, Podmore & Sidgwick, 1894). Interestingly, in
1885, American psychologist and mystic William James founded
the American branch of the Society for Psychical Research.
Additionally, “amidst all the fraudulent material collected by the
SPR in Britain and the American Society for Psychical Research
there was some evidence to suggest the existence of spirit beings
and consciousness after death” (Hastings, 1991, p. 7).

Following in the footprint made by the Society for
Psychological Research, Nicolas Camille Flammarion, who was a
founding member of the French Astronomical Society in France,
replicated their research. In 1899, he placed notices in three
journals requesting personal accounts of “cases of apparitions and
manifestations on the part of the dying and the dead, and of well-
defined presentiments ...” (Flammarion, 1900, p. 67).

Flammarion received over 1800 responses, selected 786
deemed especially informative, and published them in his
significant work, *The unknown* (1900). Flammarion continued to
receive reports of diverse non-material phenomena from the
public, publishing a three-volume work, *Death and Its Mystery*
(1921-1923). The first volume, *Death and Its Mystery: Before
Death* (1921), privileged premonitions and clairvoyance. The
second volume, *Death and Its Mystery: At the Moment of Death*
(1922), privileged death coincidences (manifestations of an
individual dying at a distance perceived within 12 hours pre or post death) and manifestations appearing several days prior. The third volume, *Death and Its Mystery: After Death* (1923), privileged manifestations occurring from between minutes to 30 years after the death of the apparent communicator. In summarising his conclusions, Flammarion notes:

> The object of this work has been attained. The evidence embodied in it is based on accounts which I have been amassing for more than half a century ... [They] prove that there is no death ... An intelligent force rules all. The soul cannot be destroyed ... These conclusions are in conformity with ... the esoteric traditions common to India, to Egypt, to Persia, to Greece, to the Hebrews, to the Essenes, to Cabalism, and to the alchemists of the middle ages ... Present scientific methods have brought practical confirmation and the beginning of an explanation. (1923, p. 346)

Research exploring non-material phenomena continued throughout the early twentieth century. In the mid 1930s JB Rhine studied extrasensory perception under controlled conditions, while his colleague and partner Louisa Rhine explored accounts of spontaneous psychokinesis, many of which involved death coincidences. These are reported in her book *Hidden Channels of the Mind*, which she describes as “puzzling physical effects” from the dying and the dead (1961, p. 24). In 1944, a number of years after the work of the Rhine’s had commenced, Lindemann noted the occurrence of what he termed auditory and visual hallucinations experienced by the families of those killed in the Coconut Grove fire, a night club in Boston, Massachusetts, in which approximately 492 people lost their lives (1944, p. 14).

In 1954-55, the editor of a German magazine, the *Schweizerischer Beobachter*, featured a series of articles which discussed non-material phenomena including prophetic dreams, coincidences, premonitions and apparitions. In response to the
editor issuing an invitation to readers to share their own stories of such phenomena, the magazine received approximately 1200 letters, an amount equating to approximately 1500 accounts (Jaffe, 1999, p. 11). The letters were handed to Carl Jung, who passed them to Aniela Jaffe, Jungian scholar, for analysis. Jaffe concludes:

> After reading more than a thousand letters, and comparing them with verified reports from other sources, a criterion forced itself upon my mind: fictions and fabrications are never typical, nor are they simple. On the contrary, most of them are atypical, complicated and exaggerated ... the lack of archetypal features seems to be a criterion of the improbability of the ‘experience’.

(1999, pp. 181-183)

Peter Marris, interviewing 72 widows in London, although researching the adequacy of available pensions, unexpectedly learnt that 50% of women reported sensing the presence of their husband. Approximately one-half of this percentage “had illusions of seeing their husbands, or more often hearing his voice or his footsteps, after his death” (1958, p. 15).

In 1961, the Parapsychology Foundation published the monograph, *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses* (Osis, 1961). In 1959 a questionnaire was mailed to a stratified random sample of 5,000 physicians and 5,000 nurses practising in the United States. Of these 10,000, approximately 640 were returned which reported a total of over 35,000 observations of dying patients. What is unique about this research is that its focus was on dying people who perceived what appeared to be the spirits of relatives and friends already dead, phenomena observed by the medical staff in attendance at the time. During the years 1961-64 the researcher Karlis Osis conducted another American study across five of the country’s eastern states before collaborating with Erlendur Haraldsson, a researcher with
parallel interests. In their book, *At the Hour of Death* the authors note:

... the finer details of otherworldly imagery seem to vary with the patient's background. Such major features as bright, saturated colors, peace, harmony, and extraordinary beauty seem ... to prevail regardless of whether the patient is a Christian, Hindu, Jew, or Muslim. (1977, p. 39)

In a Japanese study conducted by Yamamoto et al., (1969) twenty widows were interviewed within 76 days of the death of their husbands, with approximately 90% reporting sensing their presence. Also interviewing London widows, Colin Murray Parkes (1970) reported that approximately 72% of the women had sensed the presence of their husband within the first month of their death.

Research exploring after-death encounters has continued, with findings of Rees’ study being reported in the 1971 edition of the *British Medical Journal*. In total, Rees interviewed 227 widows and 66 widowers, a sample comprising 0.7% of all people widowed within his designated data collection site (residents within a defined area in mid-Wales). Utilising a semi-structured interview, Rees first encouraged participants to speak openly about their experiences, before having them complete a questionnaire “... to determine whether a relationship exists between basic personality type and post-bereavement hallucinations” (1971, p. 40). It is important to note that the term utilised by Rees “hallucinations” was analogous with sensing a presence:

For simplification and except where otherwise specifically stated the word “hallucination” is used to include all hallucinations and illusions ... the most common type of hallucination is the illusion of feeling the presence of the dead spouse. (1971, p. 38)
Statistical correlates note that of the 293 individuals interviewed, 137 (46.7%) experienced post-bereavement hallucinations, often continuing for many years. The most common reported hallucination was feeling the presence of the deceased spouse. 14% experienced visual hallucinations, 13.3% experienced auditory hallucinations, and 2.7% experienced tactile hallucinations. In tabulating and quoting statistics Rees highlights an important consideration, which is that those who experience after-death encounters should not be judged or viewed in a negative or unhealthy light. Rather, their engagement with the deceased reveals a deep bond and loving closeness undimmed by the spatial separation of physical death. Rees summarises, “hallucinations are normal experiences after widowhood, providing helpful psychological support to those experiencing them” (1971, p. 41).

In 1973 Kalish and Reynolds undertook a three-year study which explored the meaning of death and bereavement in a cross-cultural context. Findings report “over half of the black and the Mexican-American respondents had felt the presence of at least one person who had previously died, and nearly half of these persons indicated two or more such encounters” (1973, p. 218). Additionally, “the individual realities of a substantial proportion of residents of one urban area include interpersonal perceptions of dead persons who had returned” (1973, p. 220).

In 1974 Glick, Weiss and Parkes studied a sample of Boston widows for a period of thirteen months after the death of their husbands. Findings report that “almost all widows reported repeated experiences of feeling their husband was just about to arrive home, or was with them” (1974, p. 146), with one reporting “... [my] husband came to the door after work and put his key in the lock” (1974, p. 147). In summing up their findings, the researchers report “the greater part of our sample seemed to
maintain some sense of their husband’s presence ... during the first two months of their bereavement” (1974, pp. 136-137).

In 1975 Andrew Greeley reported results of a survey conducted in 1972 of what he termed paranormal experience. According to study findings, approximately 25% of individuals sampled experienced sensory contact with the person/s close to them who had died, while approximately 50% of those widowed had perceived their deceased spouse. And in 1979, a study of bereaved partners of AIDS victims reported that approximately 74% of participants experienced “visitation encounters” with their deceased partners (Richards & Folkman, 1997, p. 546).

In a 1980 study examining the structure and meaning of the presence and absence of the deceased, MacLaren notes that respondents “experienced the presence of the deceased in modes, frequencies and intensities that parallel those elements of their relationship when he or she was alive” (1980, p. 99). And findings from a study which formed the basis of a doctoral dissertation undertaken by Burton in 1980 both argued for the healing benefits of after-death encounters and addressed psychotherapeutic bias against such experiences (1982, pp. 65-73).

A 1980 edition of the journal OMEGA: The Journal of Death and Dying included an article by Hoyt, “Clinical Notes Regarding the Experience of ‘Presences’ In Mourning”. The article discusses several accounts of bereaved individuals experiencing after-death encounters, all of which occurred at various times throughout each of the mourner’s resolution of their grief. In 1982, Lindstrom, who had conducted research into after-death encounters, presented a paper “Exploring Paranormal Experiences of the Bereaved” at the Fifth Annual Conference of The Forum for Death Education and Counselling, San Diego, while in 1985, the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society
included an article by Olson et al., reporting a study of residents of two nursing homes in Asheville, North Carolina, who had experienced after-death encounters with their deceased husbands.

Across the years 1984, 1988 and 1989, the National Opinion Research Centre (NORC), University of Chicago, conducted its General Social Survey (GSS), a data-collection program designed to monitor social change within the United States. Each GSS included the question, “Have you ever felt as though you were really in touch with someone who has died?” Positive responses were 42%, 40% and 35% respectively. A 1988 study conducted in Iceland, Harroldson reported on interviews with 100 people who claimed to have had direct experience with a deceased person while in a waking state. Eighty-four people described the experience as sensory in nature (visual, auditory, tactile, or olfactory), whereas 16 reported having vivid feelings of an imperceptible presence. Visual apparitions were the most common experience reported by 59 of the 100 interviewees. The second most common was a feeling of an invisible presence reported in 16 cases. The majority of the experiences occurred either in daylight or fully lighted settings when the individuals were fully active or resting. The researcher concluded “the experiences occurred to a considerable portion of the normal population, not just the bereaved, and took place under a variety of conditions” (Harroldson, 1988, p. 112).

Also in 1988, Devers conducted a study examining direct sensory after-death encounters between the bereaved and those close to them who had died. Findings report that those experiencing such encounters deemed them to be real, that experiences of the deceased were consistent with the pre-mortem relationship and that experiencers felt their encounters to be an opportunity for communication and a means to assist them with
coming to terms with their grief (Devers, 1988, pp. 7-13). Of additional interest, prior to completing this study Devers completed a Master's thesis, *Experiencing an encounter with the deceased* (1987), followed by a Doctoral dissertation *Experiencing the deceased: Reconciling the extraordinary* (1994).

In 1996, Conant interviewed a group of 10 widows whose husbands had died suddenly and unexpectedly. All 10 described experiences in which they had felt the presence of their deceased spouses. Several reported visions of seeing, hearing, or touching their husbands, whereas others described symbolic messages using significant numbers, flowers, or flickering lights. None of the widows reported being frightened by their experiences; rather, they described having an emotional peace and conviction that the spiritual life of the deceased continued:

> Whether startling or practically subliminal, awake or asleep, the illusions or sense of the husband’s presence were a mental collision, a bumping up against the outer world by an inner world in protest. For a brief instant, the widow might believe her husband was standing in front of her or hear him call her name. Then the perception disappeared and she became aware of both realities: the image of the living husband and the memory of the death. As seen in these examples, the widow was often left with emotional peace, a conviction of ongoing spiritual life for the deceased and of resolution of her internal conflict over the death. (1996, p. 188)

Another 1996 study (questionnaire), conducted by Wiener of 56 parents who had had a child die of cancer or AIDS also examined after-death encounters, termed “evocative experience”. Weiner et al., asked the question, “Since the death of your child, have you had an experience in which you either saw a vision of your child, heard your child’s voice, had a dream or any other unusual occurrence involving that child?” (1996, p. 57). Findings report that of the 56 participants, approximately 47 answered in
the affirmative, with 23 reporting more than one experience. Specifically:

Eighteen parents reported having evocative experiences while awake. Six experiences were auditory. One parent wrote of hearing the child crying, another described a phone call in which the child was on the other end of the line, and another reported hearing the child’s voice at the graveside. Still others reported simply hearing the child’s disembodied voice. One mother however, recalled an intense smell of roses in the kitchen at Thanksgiving – her son, when alive, had given her flowers on that holiday. At least one experience defied categorization. Said the parent, “My mother-in-law snapped a picture of [my son] hours before he died and a wing appeared on his back … we then knew he was an angel.” (1996, pp. 58-59)

Following the 1996 study, a survey conducted by Davies of approximately 1603 individuals in four regions of the United Kingdom, reported that approximately 35% of respondents had “gained some such sense of presence of the dead” (1997, p. 154). It is important to note that additional studies have continued to be undertaken and recorded in the literature since Davies, further attestation to the growing recognition of the phenomenon by social scientists and cross-disciplinary researchers.

**New Directions**

Research endeavours following those up to the 1990s have not only built upon earlier studies, they have significantly contributed to raising awareness, disseminating knowledge and broadening and deepening understanding of the phenomenon. As a direct result of these endeavours, the study and exploration of communique has become a respected and international field of enquiry and research. This is not only reflected in the ongoing work of researchers, but in the establishment of academic and higher education institutions, peak bodies, national and international conferences, internet web sites, the publication of
research in books and articles in peer-review journals, all of which are devoted to the scientific endeavor of understanding the nature, relevance and meaning of these events not just for the individual, but for humanity as a whole.

Numerous studies have been reported in the bereavement, medical and social sciences literature describing the vivid imagery and visualization of a deceased individual (Daggett, 2002; Devers, 1994; Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Palmer & Braud, 2002; Parkes & Weiss, 1983; White, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Yakamoto, Okonogi, Iwasaki, & Yoshimura, 1969).

Bennett and Bennett (2000) for example in their study exploring after-death encounters experienced by widows argue that “sense of presence” does not occur at a single stage of bereavement, that it lasts longer than the literature has previously suggested and that both how the bereaved interpret their experiences, and how those investigating the phenomenon interpret the event result in competing discourses which they term “cultural artefacts” (p. 139). Data for the study was drawn from previously conducted research into the lives of widows in Leicester, the United Kingdom, and additional previously conducted research undertaken in Manchester, the United Kingdom.

In 2002, Palmer and Braud conducted a qualitative study exploring the relationship between after-death encounters, termed by the researchers “exceptional human experiences” (EHEs) and psychical, psychological and spiritual well-being. The project was driven by three aims:

1. To further explore the nature, accompaniments and life impacts of EHEs using correlational and qualitative research approaches, in order to gather more information
about such experiences and to bring them more fully to the attention of persons in the field of transpersonal studies;

2. To study the possible outcomes of working with and disclosing such experiences (individually or in psychoeducational group contexts), by means of an experimental design employing standardized assessment instruments, and

3. To examine the possible contributions of EHEs in expanding our view of optimal physical, psychological, and spiritual health and well-being. (2002, pp. 3-4)

In addition to these three aims, there were an additional two. The first was to provide more substantial evidence to support the nature, accompaniments and life impacts of EHEs. The second was to more formally explore the possible beneficial outcomes of practical interventions similar to those utilised by transpersonal psychologists and others for therapeutic, counselling, spiritual guidance and psychospiritual growth purposes. These consisted of such things as disclosure, undertaking systematic work with one’s unusual experiences, and psycho educational group work (Palmer and Braud, 2002, p. 10).

Although the researchers note that study findings may be conservative “in that disclosure was not as novel a technique as it could have been with less ‘practiced’ individuals” (2002, p. 42), the overwhelming conclusion was “… experienced and disclosed EHEs may play important roles in physical, psychological and spiritual well-being and in individual transformation” (2002, p. 41).

concludes that while findings cannot be generalised to larger populations of bereaved individuals ADC (after-death communication) can be:

... points of catalytic transpersonal insight. To varying degrees on a pragmatic/esoteric continuum, the participants experienced, as a result of their ADCs, long-term, liberating, transformational changes in awareness of self, relationship with the deceased, and new understanding of the meaning of life, death and the divine. (2002, p. viii)

In addition to completing a Doctoral dissertation in after-death encounters, _After Death Communication Experiences and Adaptive Outcomes of Grief_ (2004), Parker’s (2005) multiple case questionnaire/interview study of 12 bereaved individuals was undertaken “to better understand Extraordinary Experiences as they occur within the context of bereavement” (p. 258). Parker notes the intent in commencing the study was “to demystify these often-misunderstood experiences and to explore how they can facilitate adaptive outcomes of grief” (p. 259). In concluding study findings Parker notes:

It is not necessarily in the best interest of the bereaved for the helping professional, friends, or family members to minimize, explain away, or suppress the bereaved’s reports of Extraordinary Experiences with terms such as hallucinations, illusions, fantasies and/or “just a dream.” Particularly when that experience is perceived veridical by the bereaved, to do so can alienate the bereaved by stigmatizing, or pathologizing very personal, and sometimes profound, Extraordinary Experiences. This type of “helping” behaviour can be an assault on the assumptive world of the bereaved. (2005, p. 280)

A five year international study conducted by Australian researcher Dianne Arcangel culminated in a book _Afterlife Encounters_ (2005). Utilising the Afterlife Encounter Survey,
Arcangel collected data pertaining to the effects after-death encounters have on experiencers. Of the 596 survey respondents who experienced these encounters, 98% reported they brought them comfort to some degree which did not diminish over time. 82% scored their levels of comfort between 10 and 8 during their encounters, 8% immediately afterward, and 84% one year thereafter (2005, p. 51).

In a study exploring the counselling experiences of ten bereaved individuals and their sense of presence experiences with twenty-one counsellors across a long time span, Taylor concludes that while sense of presence experiences were a valid and integral component of the bereaved’s story, it was also evident that it was an area overlooked and unexplored in the counselling experiences of the study participants (2005, p. 61). In view of the generally positive impact of communiqué for the bereaved, Taylor’s findings, as do Parker’s, lend themselves to the suggestion that lack of acknowledgment of these experiences, or denial of them, may be a risk factor in adaptation to loss.

A random digit dial telephone survey conducted by Klugman asked respondents how their after-death encounters manifest. When the researcher asked the question, “Do you have a connection with someone who has died?” 62.6% of respondents answered “yes” (2006, p. 253). Findings reported participants hearing the voices of the deceased, hearing a song the deceased used to sing and believing it was a sign from them, hearing music that was associated with the deceased and believing it was a sign from them, dreaming of the deceased, seeing a vision or image of the deceased, feeling the presence of the deceased, having conversations with the deceased and being touched by the deceased (2006, p. 258).

Klugman’s study concludes that after-death encounters do not necessarily diminish as time since death increases,
suggesting an ongoing life-long bond between the bereaved and the deceased. Additionally, the prevalence of such encounters also suggests that the phenomenon is more widespread than once previously thought (2006, p. 260).

The *After Death Communication Research Foundation* (ADCRF) (http://www.adcrf.org/) who have been actively conducting online research into after-death encounters since the late 1990s, is part of a triad of interconnecting websites designed to collect information relating to all aspects of consciousness. The ADCRF considers itself a free public website dedicated to those who experience after-death encounters, and contains an enabling function which allows the experient to post accounts of their experiences online. Another website, *Extraordinary Grief Experiences* (http://www.extraordinarygriefexperiences.com) performs a similar communal and educational function to that of the ADCRF. The site aims to normalise, raise awareness and demystify after-death encounters, and features access to podcasts, testimonials and easily accessible relevant resources.

The site is home for Dr Louis LaGrand, Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus of the State University of New York and adjunct Professor of Health Careers at the Eastern Campus of Suffolk Community College, Riverhead, New York. LaGrand has researched, published and lectured extensively on after-death encounters for over 25 years, and is an international speaker conducting workshops on death-related topics in schools, hospices and health agencies in the United States, Canada and England.

In 2006 the *Anomalous Experience Research Unit* (AERU) (http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/research/groups/aeru/) was established. Based in the Department of Sociology, the University of York, the Unit was established to conduct interdisciplinary social science research into the contexts, characteristics and consequences of experiences which suggest
anomalous psychological processes and agencies, and exceptional states of consciousness. Research conducted by the AERU encompasses four overlapping elements:

1. The language of anomalous experiences;
2. The exploration and application of new social scientific methods for the study of anomalous experiences;
3. The role of the researcher in the study of anomalous experiences; ethics and reflexivity,
4. The social and cultural context of parapsychology and its relationship to the social sciences.

In its intent to actively encourage and promote interdisciplinary discourse, the AERU also conducts an annual conference, Exploring the Extraordinary (http://etenetwork.blogspot.com/). Since the inception of the conference, two further have followed, with a third planned for September 2011. The conferences provide an international forum for researchers from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to present their research. They also act as a platform which serves to encourage wide dissemination of knowledge, promote academic discourse of extraordinary phenomena and experience and to stimulate and encourage scholarly debate. The AERU defines “extraordinary” as phenomena and experiences that are considered to be beyond the mundane, referring to those that have been called supernatural, paranormal, mystical, transcendent, exceptional, spiritual, magical and/or religious, and the relevance of these for human culture.

The Rhine Research Centre (http://www.rhine.org/) originally established over thirty years ago at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, but which now operates independently, conducts parapsychological research. The Centre builds on and extends
earlier work conducted by John and Louise Rhine into the “puzzling physical effects” from the dying and the dead (1961, p. 45). The ethos of the Centre is defined by JB Rhine as follows:

The scientific worker seizes upon the inexplicable phenomenon as he (or she) would upon a suddenly discovered treasure. The more unexplainable and mysterious it is, the more insight it will yield when eventually explained. JB Rhine, 1947. (http://www.rhine.org/aboutus.htm)

The Centre also conducts educational programs into the scientific study of paranormal experiences, provides access to relevant resources, and offers an on-line feature in which users visiting the Centre’s website can post their accounts of after-death encounters, termed “extraordinary experiences” (http://www.rhine.org/extraordinaryexperience.htm). In 2010 the Centre hosted a public lecture, A New Approach to Grieving: The Role of After-Death Communication (ADC) in Grief (Wechsler, 2010), which sought to integrate after-death encounters with grief resolution. Interestingly, the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC) (http://www.adec.org), Deerfield, Illinois, hosted a Webinar, Clinical and Practical Uses of the Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved (LaGrand, 2010, http://www.adec.org/source/distanceEd/webinar_details.cfm?mtg=WEB1110) which highlighted how such experiences can be utilized as a positive and useful grief intervention, and also how they can establish a new or alternate relationship with the deceased. LaGrand’s lecture, in addition to being made available by ADEC as a Webinar, is currently conducting an ongoing series of public lectures, commencing October 2010 and scheduled to extend through to June 2011 (http://extraordinarygriefexperiences.com/ABOUT_DR.html).
Pre and Post-industrial Perspectives

After-death encounters between the bereaved and the deceased have been observed and recorded in literary accounts across pre and post-industrial societies and cultures (Barnett, 1960; Bowlby, 1980; Dozier, 1967; Lindstrom, 1995; Moody, 1993; Newman, 1965; Opler, 1936; Vandenberg, 1979). “Almost all societies, it seems, believe that, despite a bodily death, the person not only lives on but continues his relationships with the living, at least for a time and in many cultures these relationships are conceived as wholly beneficial” (Bowlby, 1980, p. 267). Reviewing the relationship between after-death encounters and culture occurring specifically within the West, Finucane notes “each epoch has perceived its spectres according to specific sets of expectations, as these change so too do the spectres” (1996, p. 223).

Both anthropological research relevant to pre-industrial societies, and sociological research relevant to post-industrial societies, have provided richly diverse accounts and belief-systems relating to the subjective experience of after-death encounters, “the ceremonial and burial rites of uncivilized man are the expressions of what is, to him, the unquestionable and proven truth, that the souls of men are immortal” (Vulliamy, 1997, p. 37).

For example, Frazer reports that in the Central Melanesian culture, individuals believe that at death the soul separates from the body and continues to exist “as a conscious and more or less active being” (1913, p. 361), while Kennard, studying the mourning beliefs of the Hopi culture of the American southwest has documented ceremonies that aim to establish connections with the spirit world. Additionally, the living can visit the world in which the deceased live via the medium of magic or dreams (Kennard, 1937). Opler (1936) presents an account of a bereaved
Apache parent hearing her deceased son’s voice through an owl call. Barnett (1960) reports that the ancestral spirits of the Palauans of Micronesia could be summoned at will in order to either access business advice or for their assistance in interpreting unusual events or circumstances.

Newman (1965) recounts the experience of an agitated spirit engaging with a New Guinea Highlander, who angry at hearing his name called out loud bit the Highlander before pursuing him back to his camp, while Dozier (1967) reports that for the Kalinga of the Philippines dreams are a conduit through which the spirits of the dead communicate with the living. In another anthropological account which discusses the death and cargo cults of the Kaliai society of New Britain in Melanesia, anthropologist Lattas notes that traditional Kaliai stories frequently tell of people meeting the dead and acquiring from them various food items. This contact is maintained through dreams which provides the villagers with access to magical spells, songs, rituals and masks. The dead were a key component of the ongoing fabric of Kaliai society, were accessed continually, and if life was to remain productive and healthy, gateways to the dead had to remain open (Lattas, 1988, pp. 102-103).

In his exploration of the afterlife, Sociologist Tony Walter examines various beliefs in life after death by both individuals and institutions and how they have shifted or altered through time. Walter’s thesis is that over time, belief in the religious concepts of heaven and hell have been eclipsed or seriously challenged by a number of idealist and materialist factors including the medicalisation of Western society and the secularisation of death:

The eclipse of eternity affects, perhaps uniquely, Western societies. These societies have been profoundly affected by one and a half to two millennia of Christianity, and even now a country like Britain has a
very low percentage of its population adhering to other religions. Despite religious pluralism - the presence and tolerance of a number of non-Christian religions - the influence of the beliefs of non-Christian immigrants on Western host populations is minimal. (Halsey in Walter, 1996, p. 12)

In highlighting this sociological trend, Walter argues that beliefs in life after death have not in fact completely disappeared from the social fabric of Western society, rather they have “been blocked from view” (1996, p. 191). Citing a number of studies, Walter illustrates what he terms a “revival of death” (1994) in western societies, especially the professional classes of Anglo-Saxon societies, in which death is no longer taboo, and in which the feelings of dying and bereaved people are addressed rather than ignored. However, “there has been no equivalent revival of life after death” (1996, p. 193).

In linking beliefs about life after death, which may be remote and abstract or painfully connected to bereavement, with research, Walter highlights the need for sensitivity. In doing so however, he highlights the following:

Even sensitive interviewers will not capture the meaning of an afterlife for many respondents, for ordinary language struggles to describe an existence out of time and out of space. Some who have had mystical experiences find it hard to communicate their understanding of eternity to others who have not had such experiences. If in the past there have been as many pictorial as verbal depictions of heaven, so a good researcher today may need a paintbox as well as a tape-recorder! For other respondents, poetry may be the preferred means of expression. (1996, p. 29)

Since the 1990s emerging research has served to integrate sociological and anthropological perspectives into theories of bereavement and counselling the end result being that findings have normalised many aspects of bereavement (Taylor, 2005).
For example, Attig highlights the need for the bereaved to relearn the world (1996). Walter focuses on rewriting the biographies of both the bereaved and the deceased (1996), while others focus on the recreation of role, self and identity (Riches, 1999; Walter, 1996).

As a correlate to anthropological research, bereavement researchers Rosenblatt, Walsh and Jackson sampled sixty-six societies for 118 variables relating to belief-systems incorporating after-death encounters. They conclude that “ghost beliefs” are present in a culture “if people in a culture typically believe either that ghosts, spirits, apparitions, or other manifestations of specific deceased persons are themselves capable of being perceived or that the results of actions by such entities are capable of being perceived” (1976, p. 51).

Wilson’s observation, that “experiencing the dead for people in antiquity seems to have been a very much more natural and accepted phenomenon than for ourselves; the greater the development of civilization the more this faculty faded” (1987, p. 7), is reflected in Grof (1994) noting that in contrast to post-industrial Western societies, pre-industrial societies view death as an important rite of passage and a means of transformation and transition. Over forty years ago Jung noted not only the frequency of post-mortem phenomena, he cautioned against misinterpretation of it:

There are universal reports of these post-mortem phenomena ... They are based in the main on psychic facts which cannot be dismissed out of hand. Very often the fear of superstition, which strangely enough, is the concomitant of universal enlightenment, is responsible for the hasty suppression of extremely interesting reports which are then lost to science. (1964, p. 316)
Historically, encounters with the dead have tended to be ignored or de-emphasised in many areas of Western culture because of their “anomalous nature” (Palmer & Braud, 2002, p. 4). As a direct counter to this, “Exceptional Human Experiences” researcher Rhea White argues that unless these experiences are attended to more fully, honoured, encouraged and worked with, “they may continually be treated as curious, transient experiences” and “flukes of functioning to be explained away” (1997, p. 89).

In reflecting a turn of the tide in conceptualising death from a Western social and cultural paradigm, sociologist Allan Kellehear, while noting that “the central question of dying, identity and meaning remains under-researched” (1998, p. 110), also highlights a shift away from a strictly biological and social definition of death to one including a transpersonal existential theme:

> The meaning we ascribe to death is undoubtedly our own and unique to our species, but the original challenge and the drive to make sense of death itself may have deeper roots in the developing consciousness of life itself … (2007, p. 6)

This transpersonal theme carries through in his book, *The Social History of Dying*, in which he articulates that a belief in immortality or life after death has been evidenced as early in humanity as the Stone Age period by the burial of such items with the deceased as food, cooking implements, spears and clothing (2007, p. 40).

Kellehear is not alone in highlighting the transpersonal. End-of-life researcher Michael Barbato, while noting that in Australia and throughout Western societies and culture a “new wave of interest in death and dying can be observed”, also articulates that within the last 100 years a scientific and secular
revolution has seen death reduced to a “biological event devoid of mystery and meaning” (2002, p. 208).

Contrasting this revolution, Barbato also highlights a certain irony in the situation, particularly because as death is relegated to a biological level, “extraordinary and unusual things are being increasingly reported at and around this time” which according to Barbato, challenges contemporary rationalistic and reductionist perspectives (2002, p. 128). Barbato has further extended his exploration into what he terms extraordinary experiences occurring at the interface between life and death, with the publication of *Reflections of a Setting Sun* (2009). With this publication, Barbato not only continues to inform and educate the reader with regard to “after-death communication”, he highlights the importance and relevance of the dying process as “a profound human experience that envelops all: the person dying, family, friends and those who deliver care” (2009, p. 3).

Tony Walter in his sociological discourse on death developed a schema defining three “ideal types” of death; traditional, modern and neo-modern (1994, p. 61). The schema identified a number of parameters, including Bodily Context, Social Context, Authority, Coping, The Journey and Values (1994, p. 48). These characteristics are then compared and contrasted with one another in accordance with the three ideal types of death; traditional, modern and neo-modern. Interestingly, Walter highlighted the malleability of death attitudes in observing that the types were historical, with traditional tending to give way to modern, which in turn tends to give way to neo-modern (1994, p. 49).

According to Walter these types highlight an underlying tension because they bring into sharp relief “varied and often conflicting elements which constitute the death culture of today” (1994, p. 61). Thus while the types can illuminate differences,
they also reveal conflicts and contradictions between for example different generations within the same family. According to Walter, while each of the types has internal consistency, each is also intrinsically vulnerable. Thus each type can collapse in order to give way to the next one (1994, pp. 63-64).

This historical tendency has given way to the arrival of the modern death or the neo-modern solution to death with an emphasis on “subjectivity and a centring of everything on the self” (Walter 1994, p. 64). Central to Walter’s argument is the revival of death which is composed of two separate strands; a late modern strand, driven by contemporary experts of death, and a postmodern strand, driven by ordinary people, the dying and the grieving themselves (1994, pp. 39-40). As a result, death is increasingly shaped “not by the dogmas of religion or institutionalized routines of medicine but by dying, dead or bereaved individuals themselves” (1994, p. 2). Thus this gradual socio-cultural and socio-historical evolutionary drift moves continually toward “a culture of individualism that values a unique life uniquely lived” (Walter, 1994, p. 2). As Tarnas notes:

The Western mind must be willing to open itself to a reality the nature of which could shatter its most established beliefs about itself and about the world. This is where the real act of heroism is going to be. A threshold must now be crossed, a threshold demanding a courageous act of faith, of imagination, of trust in a larger and more complex reality; a threshold, moreover, demanding an act of unflinching self-discernment . . . But I would also wish to affirm those who have valued and sustained the central Western tradition, for I believe that this tradition---the entire trajectory from the Greek epic poets and Hebrew prophets on, the long intellectual and spiritual struggle from Socrates and Plato and Paul and Augustine to Galileo and Descartes and Kant and Freud -- that this stupendous Western project should be seen as a necessary and noble part of a great dialectic, and not simply rejected as an imperialist-chauvinist plot. Not only has this tradition achieved that fundamental differentiation and autonomy of the human
which alone could allow the possibility of a larger synthesis, it has also painstakingly prepared the way for its own self-transcendence. Moreover, this tradition possesses resources, left behind and cut off by its own Promethean advance, that we have scarcely begun to integrate -- and that, paradoxically, only the opening to the feminine will enable us to integrate. (1991, pp. 444-445)

While opinion may vary with regard to the origin and intent of after-death encounter phenomena, it is widely purported that they have overall positive short and long-term effects (Barbato et al., 1999; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; LaGrand 2006; Parker 2005; Rees, 1971; Stafford 2006), that they are of “sufficient persistence, pervasiveness and profundity to qualify as transformative changes” (Palmer & Braud 2002, p. 32) and “people who report these contacts rarely seem confused by their experiences ... such episodes bring with them an utter conviction that life extends beyond the grave” (Rogo, 1990, p. 78). LaGrand argues categorically that in his work with counselling bereaved individuals, these experiences are viewed as a positive occurrence. Not only that, but the bereaved know “they have connected with another reality every bit as meaningful as the physical reality they live and grieve in each day” (http://www.pflyceum.org/154.html).

**Perceptions, Terms and Definitions**

Since first being researched and recorded in Western medical literature by Gurney, Meyers and Podmore (1886), and Sidgewick (1894), understandings of the phenomenon itself and of its inter-relationship with how experiencers contextualise material and non-material reality, the self, and pre and post-mortem existence have changed over time. This change reflects an interconnecting and at times overlapping and conflicting medico-psychological and psychospiritual interdisciplinary discourse. Highlighting this, Kalish and Reynolds note “behavioural
scientists and other investigators have rarely permitted mystical, other-worldly, extrasensory occurrences to become part of their personal interpretation of the world” (1973, p. 210).

An additional factor which comes into play in determining how the phenomenon is defined is the individual world-view and belief-system of either the experient or interpreter. In the study, after-death encounters are defined as communiqué while Lindemann for instance interpreted such events as “a preoccupation with images of the deceased” (1944, p. 142). Kalish and Reynolds term these encounters “post-death contact” (1973, p. 209), Rees as “hallucinations” (1971, p. 37), Glick et al., as “near hallucination” (1974, p. 147), Gorer as “dreams and visions” (1977, pp. 54-58), White as “exceptional human experiences” (1997, p. 88), Schulz as “illusion” (1978, p. 147), Barbato as “parapsychological phenomenon” (1999, p. 30), Devers and Robinson as “after-death communication” (2002, p. 241) and Martin and Romanowski as “any contact between a living person and the consciousness, spirit or soul of the so-called dead” (1997, p. 2).

Palmer and Braud highlight the spiritual and transpersonal dimension of communiqué, noting that 18th Century Swedish polymath-turned-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg described experiences very similar to after-death encounters, termed “remains”, in his twelve volume work, Arcana Coelestia (1976, p. 285). Maslow termed these and similar experiences “peak experiences” (1964, p. 19), Grof termed them “transpersonal experiences” (1972, p. 45), McClenon, “wondrous events” (1994, p. 21), and Van Dusen as, “high holy moments” (1999, p. 76).

Researchers from the After Death Communication Research Foundation, (http://aderf.org/ADC%20Overview.htm) who have been actively conducting on-line research into after-death encounters since the late 1990s, define the phenomenon as “a
spontaneous experience of communication with a deceased friend or family member” and while LaGrand (2006) opts for the term, “extraordinary experiences” Palmer and Braud term them “nonordinary and transcendent experiences” (2002, p. 6). Arcangel has chosen “afterlife encounters” (2005, p. 16), Cardena, Lynn and Krippner utilise the term “anomalous experiences” (2000, p. 4), MacDonald “idionecrophanies” (1992, p. 215), Stevenson, “veridical hallucinations” (1983, p. 1609) and by both Klein (1940, p. 45) and Winnicott (1971, p. 23), the phenomenon is defined as “hallucination”.

**Communiqué Typologies**

Bereavement and social science research on communiqué has identified a number of typologies or characteristics which delineate after-death encounters. These can range from the feeling or sense that “one is somehow being watched” to a “full-blown sensory experience – olfactory, auditory, visual and occasionally tactile” (Bennett & Bennett, 2000, p. 140).

Such occurrences between the bereaved and the deceased are generally spontaneous and have been found to occur without provocation from the bereaved; it is the deceased who initiate the after-death contact. Some individuals experience one phenomenon, while others can experience a range of phenomena. They can occur with immediacy after bereavement and/or with quick succession throughout the early months of bereavement. Generally there is a tapering off over time, however they can occur spontaneously again without provocation by the bereaved many years after the death occurred. Also, while these experiences are commonly reported by the bereaved, (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994; Klass, 1987; Kwilecki, 2011; Martin & Romanowski, 1988; Moody, 1993; Rees, 1971, 1997; Richards, Acree & Folkman, 1999; Taylor, 2005; Vickio, 1998) not all
bereaved individuals experience them (Devers, 1997; MacLaren, 1980; Rees, 1971).

LaGrand, and others, have identified a number of elements which appear intrinsic to after-death encounters. Although the following is not an exhaustive list, it is nonetheless an adapted schema which identifies a number of elements of the phenomenon (Daggett, 2002; Dawson & Marwitt, 1997; Drewry, 2002; Field & Friedrichs, 2004; Gorer, 1965; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1995; Haraldsson, 1988; Heimlich & Kutscher, 1970; Klass, 1993; LaGrand, 2006; MacLaren, 1980; Marris, 1958; Martin & Romanowski, 1997; Matchett, 1972; Olson, Suddeth, Peterson & Egelhoff, 1985; Parkes, 1970; Peterson, 2001; Rees, 1971; Rogo & Bayless, 1979; White, 1993; Yamamoto et al., 1969):

- **Visitation dreams:** Unforgettable, extraordinarily vivid or highly significant dreams, where the experient feels that the dream is more than a dream because they have directly interacted with the deceased.
- **Visual appearances:** The deceased is seen in partial or full form, and may appear as either solid or semi-solid. The deceased may appear to be illuminated from within by a light.
- **Mental telepathy:** Communication from one mind to another which is heard in the mind of the experient and believed to be that of the deceased.
- **Auditory or voice experience:** The audible voice of the deceased is clearly heard either in close proximity or through a telephone call, a computer, or a mobile telephone.
- **Olfactory or sense of smell:** Scents either associated with or used by the deceased are smelt by the experient.
These may include floral scents, pipe or cigarette smoke, perfumes and colognes or particular foods.

- **Unusual behaviour of birds or animals:** They appear unexpectedly in places or at times when never before seen and are associated in various ways with the deceased.

- **Symbolic experiences or synchronicities:** Rainbows presenting at unusual times, butterflies appearing repeatedly and staying with the bereaved, finding objects associated with the deceased or meaningful happenings believed to be directly associated with and/or attributed to the deceased.

- **Protective experiences:** These are happenings believed to protect the experient, or which prevent a tragedy or a suicide. The experient may receive a warning directly from the deceased regarding an impending tragedy or may receive support and encouragement when experiencing suicidal ideation.

- **Third-party experiences:** The bereaved receives a sign/message which comes through a third person, either a child or an adult who has the extraordinary experience.

- **Fourth-party experiences:** The bereaved receives a sign/message that comes through two other people, one highly intuitive.

- **Out-of-body experiences:** The bereaved experiences an out-of-body experience and reports seeing the deceased.

- **Psi kappa experiences:** Movement of objects (falling or flying through the air, moving from one place to another), a clock stops or starts at the moment of death, lights or other electronic equipment randomly switching on and off.
• **Sentient experiences:** The sensing of the presence of the deceased, often felt as an intuitive awareness or inner knowing that the deceased is in close proximity. This can also include a tactile or sense of touch experience such as being embraced, kissed, or touched on the arm or shoulder by the deceased or a divine being.

• **Frequency:** Experiences can occur with rapidity during the early months of bereavement with a gradual tapering off over time. Additionally, they may occur in an ongoing fashion for many years, or may reoccur suddenly after a period of relative quiet.

These characteristics illustrate the variance and diversity of communiqué phenomena. Through them, the deceased not only make themselves known to the bereaved, they blur the boundaries between life and death and challenge the understanding of how existence and reality might be defined.

**Pluralistic Considerations**

Although research findings have identified an overall beneficent impact of communiqué for the bereaved they also reveal that such encounters can be interpreted and understood to be negative or deleterious (Coelho, Tierney & Lamont, 2008; Devers, 1988, 1997; Drewry, 2002; Hastings, 1983; Hoyt, 1980; Kennedy et al., 1994; Kramer, 1989; LaGrand, 1990; Lindstrom, 1995; Milton, 1992; Peterson, 2001; Tart & LaBore, 1986; Whitney, 1992). For example, findings report that such encounters can result in avoidance of any association with the dead, and that the experient may think they are experiencing symptoms of mental illness. As a consequence, individuals are reluctant to discuss or disclose their after-death encounters for fear of ridicule or of being perceived as “crazy”. In other
instances, experiencers choose not to disclose their after-death encounters because they feel others will disbelieve or devalue both them and their encounter/s.

Despite these accounts which in the main occur infrequently, and within the context of bereavement, experiencing the presence of a person/s who has died is now considered to be an accepted correlate of bereavement (Berger, 1995; Dunlop, 1978; Glick, Weiss & Parkes, 1974; Hufford, 1992; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; LaGrand, 2010; Lindemann, 1944; Marris, 1974; Moody, 1993; Parkes, 1965, 1972; Rando, 1988; Rees, 1975; Ross & Joshi, 1992; Tatelbaum, 1980), which is not pathological, maladaptive or an indication of complicated, acute or chronic psychological, emotional and/or behavioural grieving (Attig, 2000; Bonanno, 2001; Dawson & Marwitt, 1997; Hagman, 1995; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Lifton, 1979; Neimeyer, 2001b; Neimeyer, Keesee & Fortner, 2000; Neimeyer, Prigerson & Davies, 2002; Rubin, 1999; Shapiro, 1994; Vickio, 1999).

This alternate approach to bereavement meaning-making acknowledges multiplicity, pluralism and diversity in how the bereaved may make sense of and understand the impact and meaning of death in their lives (Ingram, Hunt & Robson, 2000). This approach has also been reflected in a move away from some health care practitioners and professionals who have traditionally managed what was believed to be a predictable process to “a more postmodern individualizing of loss and rejection of grand theory” (Walter, 1996, p. 11).

With regard to the individualising of loss, the study acknowledges LeShan’s definition of individual reality, which accords with Walter’s individualizing as, “those aspects of reality that the individual perceives, responds to, or interacts with” (LeShan, 1969, p. 12). Though this individual reality can co-exist
with an alternate group reality, it does so as a parallel and distinct sub or alternate reality. Furthermore, this individual sub or alternate reality can itself become a group reality delineated by shared characteristics of the same phenomenon experienced by its constituent individuals. Communiqué occurring within adult bereavement is one such sub-alternate reality which portrays its systems-relationship with the self and the other.

The need to recognise individuality and individualism has been noted. Battersby argues that individuality needs to be thought about differently in that it needs to allow for the “potentiality of otherness to exist within it, as well as alongside it” (1993, p. 38). Fontana advances this argument and positions individuality within a postmodern paradigm. According to Fontana, postmodernism requires researchers to focus their attention on “the minute events of everyday life”, and “to understand them in their own right rather than gloss over differences and patch them together into paradigmatic wholes” (2002, p. 162).

The study also acknowledges and is influenced by the postmodern paradigm attributed to Heidegger (1962) and Layotard (1984). Postmodernism “rejects epistemological claims, refutes methodological conventions, resists knowledge claims, obscures all versions of truth and dismisses policy recommendations” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 3). Incorporating multiple perspectives, the postmodern paradigm privileges pluralism and what Rawls acknowledges as an overlapping consensus. “To see reasonable pluralism as a disaster is to see the exercise of reason under the conditions of freedom itself as a disaster” (Rawls, 1993, p. xxiv).

Overlapping consensus translates to the principle that the underlying procedures of a society are those constituent elements
which enable all individuals as free and equal the democratic right to endorse such elements within their own differing world views. Hence, while not agreeing on a single representative religion, moral doctrine or philosophical viewpoint or perspective, “the fundamental principle by which the society operates must be acceptable to all within their own views” (Rawls, 1993, p. 144).

Within the context of the study, heuristic enquiry parallels and endorses this democratic right. It does so because it facilitates the individual discovering for themselves their own understanding and comprehension of the meaning of their after-death encounters with the deceased, which will be different for each person. As a result difference is acknowledged and accommodated because there is a willingness to listen and appreciate the stories of others without denying their otherness. Intrinsic to this is the play of contradictions between alternate experiences and perspectives of reality, and of that which constitutes reality. Accordingly, “reciprocal understanding does not necessarily preclude disagreement” (Bernstein, 1992, p. 337). Further discussion of the inter-relationship between postmodernism, a systems-view of the world and study findings is included in Chapter Four: Theoretical and Philosophical Considerations.

Interdisciplinary Discourse

Since first being identified, studied and recorded in Western medical literature by Gurney, Meyers and Podmore (1886), and Sidgewick (1894), understandings of after-death occurrences and their accommodation within the body of inquiry of bereavement have changed over time. This changing understanding reflects the shifting perceptions and attitudes of and toward the phenomenon by both the bereaved who experience it and those individuals in various disciplines who research and study it.
For example, the phenomenon has been interpreted and understood from a rational perspective (Stroebe et al., 1992), a religious and/or spiritual perspective (Devers, 1997; LaGrand, 2006; Lindstrom, 1995; Moody, 1993), a transformative perspective (Cardena, Lynn & Krippner, 2000; Devers, 1997; LaGrand, 2001; Palmer & Braud, 2002), a psychopathological and/or psychoanalytical perspective (Berger, 1995; Freud, 1917; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Simon-Buller, Christopherson & Jones, 1988) and a paranormal perspective (Barbato, 1999; Berger, 1995; Simon-Buller, Christopherson & Jones, 1988). This is dramatically highlighted for example in the contrast portrayed by psychologists Stroebe et al., who then argued “proper bereavement requires that ties with the deceased be relinquished, and counselling and therapy programs are designed to further this breaking of ties” (1992, p. 1207) with the growing recognition that rather than severing ties with the deceased, “grief usually involves a process whereby the bereaved person incorporates the loss of a loved one into his or her ongoing life” (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005, p. 284).

Another example of how attitudes have varied is provided by Worden who when discussing mourning behaviours notes that mourners need to “effect an emotional withdrawal from the deceased person” (1982, p. 15). This attitude shifts to an alternate perspective a number of years later to one which acknowledges that mourners need to relocate rather than relinquish their relationship with the deceased. Influenced by Volkan, Worden quotes:

A mourner never altogether forgets the dead person who was so highly valued in life and never totally withdraws his investment in his representation. We can never purge those who have been close to us from our own history except by psychic acts damaging to our own identity. (1982, p. 326)
Kalish and Reynolds argue that personal encounters with individuals who are known to be deceased are rarely mentioned in behavioural or medical scientific literature, and when they are, are treated in terms of the pathology of the individual describing the encounter (1973, p. 209). Thirty-three years later, La Grand revealed that alternate views and opinions regarding after-death encounters have not only changed little, but that there is still much scepticism generally within the scientific community regarding communiqué phenomena (http://www.pflyceum.org/154.html).

Harner highlights another perspective, describing what he terms the wholesale rejection of other forms of reality as “cognicentrism” a counterpart in consciousness to ethnocentrism between cultures:

In this case it is not the narrowness of someone’s cultural experience that is the fundamental issue, but the narrowness of someone’s conscious experience. The persons most prejudiced against a concept of nonordinary reality are those who have never experienced it. (1986, p. xvii)

Kalish and Reynolds concur, arguing that if a given perception or experience is reality to a particular individual then [his] feelings and behaviour will be affected (1973, p. 209). Additionally, while this may be the case for the individual, it may also be the case that this reality is not shared by those in that individual’s social and/or cultural milieu. Kalish and Reynolds also highlight an additional element. If the bereaved individual comes into contact with for example those in the helping professions, a conflict regarding the nature of reality may ensue with the outcome being, “post-mortem engagement experience is interpreted as a form of emotional or social disorientation”
(Kalish & Reynolds, 1973, p. 209). Thus, rather than entering into the subjective world of the bereaved, “a focus is placed on diagnosis or treatment of what is seen to be a condition” (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973, p. 209).

Bennett and Bennett in their study investigating after-death encounters of widows highlight both the competing discourses between health professionals and bereaved individuals and the tensions generated by these at times disparate perspectives. Those experiencing the phenomenon were firmly convinced of the veracity of the experience. This contrasted with health professionals who pathologised the encounter, seeing it as something which was “psychological or medical in origin, and the result of acute or chronic grief which at best might help to identify certain stages or processes of mourning, at worst, a symptom of physical, emotional or mental dysfunction” (2000, p. 146). Thus, as Wieland-Burston argues, the order psychology strives to achieve can be reductionist because not only does it neglect the holistic systems-context of the individual, “it [order] becomes the equivalent of constraint and the compulsion to conform” (1992, p. 3).

With regard to validity, the study acknowledges these competing interdisciplinary discourses as broadly reflecting two concurrently existing paradigms; materialism and non-materialism:

The materialist, as much as the supernaturalist, is of ancient provenance, draws on well rehearsed arguments and acquired mindsets and takes a good deal on trust ... The two things that principally separate these discourses are their assumptions about the nature of the cosmos, and what each deems to be proper and sufficient evidence for those assumptions. (Bennett & Bennett, 2000, p. 148)
The current study acknowledges its alignment with the non-materialistic paradigm which accords with the veracity of after-death encounters as events of social interaction between the bereaved and the deceased, or embodied and disembodied individuals. The study also acknowledges its non-neutrality in that it is not positioned outside either the material or non-material paradigm, nor of the discourse relative to each.

What I am getting at is that it may well be impossible to obtain scientific evidence to say unequivocally that the contact experience is, beyond a shadow of a doubt, true. Unfortunately, but undeniably, the evasiveness of the contact experience is another reason mainstream scientists have shunned investigation of the phenomena. Who is ever going to pull off an apparition in a laboratory setting? Who will be able to obtain the cooperation of a deceased husband to talk to his widow with researchers standing by in white coats with pencils poised? ... I regret to say at this time that such a demand cannot be met, and probably never will be. (LaGrand, 1997, p. 164)

While opinion may vary with regard to the origin and cause of after-death encounters and of their impact on bereaved experiencers, it is widely purportied (Barbato et al., 1999; Gorer, 1977; Heywood, 1969; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; LaGrand, 2006; Lindemann, 1944; Parker 2005; Rogo, 1990; Stafford, 2006; Yamamoto et al, 1969) that though diverse in nature they have often, but not always, resulted in creating positive and/or alternate changes in health, wellbeing, beliefs, attitudes, values, meaning and spirituality. Additionally, “they provide closeness, communication and the continuation of an important relationship” (Bennett & Bennett, 2000, p. 140).

A Transpersonal Way of Seeing

According to Cowley and Derezotes (1994), a transpersonal context recognises and acknowledges the spiritual dimension of existence, which includes for example such non-quantifiable
aspects of reality as hope, meaning, wholeness, and emotional, psychological and spiritual growth, development and transformation. That which is deemed transpersonal is based on the assumption of the existence of a “higher or inner self distinct from the personal ego” (Guest, 1989, p. 63) and that which is deemed transpersonal practice as comprising those things relating to “contemplative discovery” and “meditative or contemplative unfolding” (Wilber, 1997, p. 94). With regard to defining spirituality, the International Center for the Integration of Health and Spirituality note, “generally, spirituality is characterized in our research as the broader context of seeking a relationship to something divine, transcendent or ultimate” (http://www.nihr.org/abuticihs/religiousvariable.asp).

Spirituality can extend beyond a belief-system; it can provide the foundation, framework and direction for how one chooses to live their life in accordance with certain values attached to ways of knowing, being and behaving. Within the context of the current study, an adapted definition of spirituality has been conceptualised as a belief-system embodying the following qualities, values and core elements:

One’s emotional and psychological engagement and relationship with that which is concerned with the profound and ultimate questions and meaning of human existence including the soul, spirit, consciousness, love, good, truth and charity, one’s sense of oneness or union with something which is ineffable and experienced, felt and known to be greater or beyond oneself, one’s sense of relatedness with the material universe and an understanding of that universe as a creation which is a living organism comprised of systems within systems. (deVeber, 1995; Groves, 1998; Nicoll, 1996; Schermer, 2003)

Communiqué like death is deemed significant, at times profoundly so, by the experient. “A striking aspect of some anomalous experiences is that, even when single and transitory,
they are reported to have an enormous impact on the experient” 
(Cardena, Lynn & Krippner, 2000, p. 5). This impact often 
extends into the experient’s world-view and spiritual belief-
��統。Brown notes:

Anomalous or Exceptional Experiences (EEs) have the potential to be 
experienced and subsequently integrated into new personal and world 
view contexts. At these points of catalytic transpersonal insight – 
where/when the event is no longer apprehended as separate from the 
experience of the event and the experient realizes that he or she is 
wholly integral to the creation and resolution of the EE – the 
experience is potentiated, transmuted and humazined ... (2000, p. 69)

Klass and Goss argue that communiqué phenomena have a 
spiritual quality in that a sense of the uncanny can accompany 
them and they are central elements utilised by individuals and 
547). These constructions both result from and in an internal 
psychospiritual transformation of the individual.

Transformation can metaphorically represent a 
psychospiritual shift from one perspective or understanding to 
another, growth of being, and/or change of an existing world-view, 
value or belief-system. This may encompass a deepened 
understanding of oneself and how one participates in and engages 
with life, as well as new ways of seeing the self, the world, and 
one’s relational existence with the social, cultural and spiritual 
environments in which one lives and to which one is subject to 
varying influences from. “When change is transformational, it 
moves people on their spiritual paths” (Canda & Furman, 2000, 
p. 252). Thus, a transpersonal perspective which by its very 
nature is intersubjective with transformation can “move beyond 
the person or beyond ego” (Smith, 1995, p. 403).

In emulating Klass and Goss, LaGrand notes that in his 
work with counselling the bereaved, individuals “know they have
connected with another reality every bit as meaningful as the physical reality they live and grieve in each day” (http://www.pflyceum.org/154.html). Palmer and Braud’s study investigating what they term exceptional human experiences indicates that disclosed experiences may play important roles in physical, psychological and spiritual wellbeing and individual transformation (2002, pp. 41-42). In disclosing these experiences, individuals were able to perceive greater meaning, profundity and life impacts of their experiences than they had previously realised (2002, p. 32). This accords with Dever who notes, “the sudden nature of ADC creates a paradigm shift in the survivor ... often this new paradigm embraces a highly spiritual, highly optimistic outlook” (1997, p. 146).

Drewry (2003) used a phenomenological approach to analyze semi structured interview transcripts of seven participants who reported having a total of 40 episodes of after-death encounters. According to Drewry, participants described the experiences not only as beneficial, but as events which facilitated the healing process. Feeling “blessed and privileged to experience ADCs,” the participants reported “an expanded awareness of the meaning of life and death, feared death less, felt confirmed in who they believe themselves to be, and had a new understanding of themselves in relation to a bigger picture or universal grand plan” (Drewry, 2003, p. 78).

Concluding Thoughts

The review of social science and bereavement literature has highlighted that though previous studies have explored post-mortem communication between the bereaved and the deceased they have done so largely in terms of it being one of the elements of the general experience of bereavement. While the current study differs to previous studies in that it is positioned within a
contemporary Australian context and because it privileges only this one element of bereavement, there is however an additional consideration; its systems-relationship between individual systems and those belonging to the world in which the individual exists. Thus the study builds upon and extends existing knowledge of the phenomenon because it positions findings within an “ecological world view of modern physics” which “emphasises the fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena, and the intrinsically dynamic nature of [the] physical reality” (Capra, 1984, p. 139).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the literature relevant to communiqué, defined in the study as after-death encounters occurring between the bereaved individual and the deceased. The post-industrial sociohistorical context of the phenomenon as it occurs specifically within adult bereavement in contemporary Western societies, and more broadly across cultures, was discussed and current research reviewed. Chapter Four: Theoretical and Philosophical Considerations will discuss the theoretical and philosophical considerations which inform the study.
Chapter Four: Theoretical and Philosophical
Considerations

The layers of the onion

Those attracted to post-modernism are not evenly distributed throughout the disciplinary ranks in the social sciences. It holds more interest for graduate students and junior faculty than for those further along in their careers. Does post-modernism’s selective base of attraction merely indicate that newness threatens those who have invested so heavily in other paradigms? Or does post-modernism simply reflect adolescent rebellion, midlife professional crisis, opposition to the, “establishment” by those who feel deprived of power? Could it be that the very content of post-modernism, with its emphasis on the marginal, the ignored, the decentred, those deprived of power, explains this differential attraction within the disciplines?

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the theoretical and philosophical considerations which inform the study. The chapter discusses the theoretical influences contributing toward the development of heuristic inquiry and the applicability of heuristic inquiry to pluralistic understandings of the subjectivity of bereavement and communiqué. The chapter also discusses the tensions generated by alternate paradigms and influences of modernity and the relationship of modernist and postmodernist understandings with bereavement and communiqué.

Introduction

The study is philosophically informed by a number of concepts attributed to the postmodernity paradigm. The term, which as for modernity represents an ideological construct and position, refers to the time following modernity or the modern era. There has been considerable interdisciplinary debate regarding the differentiation/s between modernity and postmodernity (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Grbich, 2004; Lash, 1990), postmodernity’s internal contradictions (Baudrillard, 1988; D’Andrade, 1995; Rosenau, 1992), and the determination of a precise definition, “post-modernism’s appeal is broad and varied, difficult to identify” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 11).

For example, Grbich observes, “many of the characteristics and trends of modernism moved forward in a continuum from fringe critique to mainstream” (2004, p. 17). Cooper-White notes, “postmodernism has become the very large umbrella term for multiple critiques beginning in the mid-twentieth century, [of this] confidence in objective knowledge and universal truth” (2004, p. 37). Jacquard observes that the postmodernist individual does not as such seek to dispense knowledge, but is rather one who “seeks to provide a basis for people to decide for
themselves because truth outside the individual, independent of language, is impossible” (1982, p. 195).

Denzin and Lincoln argue that postmodern research has precipitated a “legitimating crises” primarily because postmodern researchers and writers are challenging interpretive/constructivist notions of validity and reliability (2000, p. 17). Gribich extends this further, noting that within the postmodern research paradigm subjectivity replaces objectivity and that this replacement is seen as a shift from previously “powerful institutional control of ways of seeing and interpreting reality” (2004, p. 60). Finley highlights the impact of this alternate perspective on the research process, arguing that postmodern foundational shifts have “brought about new conceptualisations of how research might serve” (2005, p. 682).

Modernist and Postmodernist Understandings

With regard to contextualising modernity and postmodernity as discrete ages, Giddens argues that the 21st Century is not an age that is postmodern but rather one which sees a further development and refinement of earlier ideologies initially arising in modernity (1991). The ideological growth which is suggested by Giddens is also implied in Lyotard’s definition of postmodernism, which in a sense conveys a flowering of these earlier modernistic ways of framing, knowing and understanding the social world:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (1979, p. 81)
The ideological position and precursor to postmodernity is modernity. Parton defines modernity as “a summary term referring to the cluster of social, economic and political systems which emerged in the West around the eighteenth century, becoming increasingly pervasive throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (1994, p. 27). The ethos of modernity was the acknowledgement that human order is neither natural nor God-given but by the development and application of science can be subject to human control. It is the “key concept in the study of social change” that determines “patterns of social life linked to industrialization” (Macionis, 1991, p. 617).

A modernist worldview observes that diverse phenomena occurring in societies and cultural groups can in a sense be brought into order or be controlled primarily because its nature can be categorised into discrete and sequential units of operationality or functionality. Furthermore, the trajectories of certain phenomena can be charted in accordance with predictable outcomes. A phenomenon becomes linear and something that can be explained and understood in accordance with empirical measurement against determined ranges or accepted norms. Hence, understanding and experiencing the social world results from compliance with either acceptable or unacceptable norms, devised by those working in relevant fields of endeavour of social and scientific enquiry. Phenomena occurring outside the range of these socially defined norms are seen as somehow deviant and a threat to social wellbeing.

Within this ordered realm of modernity dwell human beings who are also subject to the same scientific laws of order, rationality and reason. Wooldridge in arguing that “man [sic] is essentially no more than a complex machine” (1968, p. 167) was similarly echoed by Sagan ten years later. “The fundamental premise about the brain is that its workings – what we
sometimes call ‘mind’- are a consequence of its anatomy and physiology and nothing more” (1978, p. 7). And almost twenty years later Flanagan posited, “the mind is the brain, a Darwin machine that is a massively well-connected system of parallel processors interacting with each other from above and below and every which way besides” (1992, p. 220) as did Crick, “you’re nothing but a pack of neurons” (1994, p. 3).

An interesting development of these earlier mechanistic perspectives of human biology are the concepts of artificial intelligence and smart or self-aware machines (Buttazzo, 2000), artificial consciousness (Buttazzo, 2001), and CyberEvolution (Paul & Cox, 1996). One hypothesis underpinning such ideology is that the transferral or interface of the human brain with a mechanised robotic framework accords with Darwin’s Theory of Evolution and represents a human evolutionary development.

CyberEvolution, as proposed by proponents Paul and Cox, both with backgrounds in biology and artificial intelligence, suggests that biology and computer sciences can be coupled together in order to create a new type of human being. Such a human being would interface with mechanistic components, resulting in enhanced mental capabilities, and freed from the human condition of mortality be able to experience potentially limitless existence. “We will download our minds into vessels created by our own machine children, and with them, explore the universe ... freed of our frail biological form, human-cum-artificial intelligences will move out into the universe” (Paul & Cox, 1996, p. 8).

It could be argued that such thinking personifies a reductionist materialistic ideology which dismisses alternate ways of experiencing, knowing and understanding the self and its psychosocial, psychospiritual and systems-relationship with the material and non-material universe. It could also be argued that
such thinking renders human beings not only into the status of robotic and lifeless mechanical machines, but also that it indicates a rather extreme form and manifestation of death anxiety.

In contrast to modernism with its linear trajectories and mechanistic and regulated view of human experience, postmodernism is characterised by a fragmentation and pluralisation of modernity marked by, “variety, contingency, relativism and ambivalence – all of which modernity sought to overcome” (Parton, 1994, p. 28). Postmodernism is as Jencks articulated, “a resistance to single explanations, a respect for difference and a celebration of the regional, local and particular” (1992, p. 11) which offers a “pluralistic way of understanding and being in the world” (Moules, 2000, p. 229).

Bauman argues that the postmodern age is one that facilitates and is characterised by constant change and reformation. This change decentres and localises truth to reveal “many truths in different times and different places” (1992, p. 24). Thus standards of truth are “context-dependent” and not “text-dependent” (Seidman & Wagner, 1992, p. 6) with “dispersal of truth across time and place” (Bauman, 1992, p. 24), all of which results in perception of truth becoming individually known, experienced and understood. As Howe notes, postmodernists observe “that those who believe in the transcendent powers of universal truths arrived at either by revelation [in religious fundamentalism] or by rational thought seek to fashion both the natural and social world according to those universal principles” (1994, p. 521).

The study is positioned within and informed by the modern versus postmodern ideological and contextual debate. What impact does this fertile and dynamic ideological milieu have on research design and methodology? And how does that milieu
impact on experiences, knowings, and understandings of bereavement, grief and communiqué?

The Influence of Paradigms

Attitudes and understandings of bereavement in Western society in the twentieth century have been largely influenced by modernist understandings. Modernism generally denotes “the cluster of social, economic and political systems which emerged in the West around the eighteenth century, becoming increasingly pervasive throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Parton, 1994, p. 27).

Characterised by Newtonian concepts of scientific rationalism, positivism, empiricism and reductionism, and inspired by such individuals as Russell, Carnap, Wittgenstein and Husserl, a modernist world-view posits that diverse phenomena occurring in societies and cultural groups can be brought into order or controlled because its nature can be categorised into discrete and sequential units of operationality or functionality. Furthermore, the trajectories of certain phenomena occurring within society and culture can be charted in accordance with predictable outcomes. A phenomenon becomes linear with a predictable trajectory, and something that can be explained and understood in accordance with empirical measurement against determined ranges or accepted norms.

Accordingly, the parameters for understanding the social world in different societies and cultures are defined by acceptable norms or unacceptable norms, devised by professionals working in relevant fields of endeavour of scientific or social enquiry. Phenomena occurring outside the range of socially accepted norms are perceived as deviant or aberrant, and are interpreted as a threat to socially recognised and sanctioned behaviour. The
study of communiqué has its roots in this milieu of Modernity, both in psychoanalysis and in the social sciences (Currer, 2001).

If society, as Goss and Klass note, regulates bereavement, then the construction of individual bereavement narratives run the risk of becoming the product of social and cultural conformity. “All societies have rules for how the emotions of grief are to be displayed and handled” (Walter, 2001, p. 120). These rules regulate and sanction grief and mourning in accordance with socially accepted norms by meanings of what Goss and Klass term cultural policing:

Policing, then, is the mechanism by which individuals, families, and communities are pressured to make their narrative congruent with the larger social narrative. Such coercion is, of course, a top-down matter. Those who do not conform to the social expectations are labelled aberrant. In contemporary psychotherapeutic culture aberrant grief is “pathological”, a term that can be applied to those who are seen as grieving too much (“chronic grief”), at the wrong time, (“delayed grief”), or not grieving at all (“absent grief”). (2005, pp. 189-190)

The constraining influence of modernist understandings has been noted by bereavement researchers and has been responded to (Klass & Goss, 1999; Valentine, 2008; Walter, 2001). Indeed as Walter articulates, “the social world of bereavement is currently undergoing conflict and change” (2001, p. xv). The Centre for the Advancement of Health Report on Bereavement and Grief Research also note, “no one disciplinary or theoretical paradigm is currently dominant in bereavement and grief research” (2003, p. 9).

This response has manifested as a move away from a strictly psychological and compartmentalising framework for understanding bereavement as an isolated aspect of the whole person, to one that now acknowledges both the individual and
their systems-relationship with broader social and cultural dimensions of loss. This shift has also been identified by Walter as a move away from modernism, in which counsellors “expertly managed a predictable process” to a more postmodern “individualizing of loss and a rejection of grand theory” (1996, p. 11).

In a study exploring how the social reality of death and bereavement in contemporary British society is characterised by diverse meanings and world-views, Christine Valentine notes that discursive approaches not only significantly challenge the scientific paradigm, they reveal that there is no “formula” for grief:

... in focusing on the way people talk about their experience, it reveals the separation of the inner world of consciousness from the outer world of what is said and seen as a social artefact. It highlights the way the human encounter with death and loss, and indeed any aspect of the social world, is constructed in the present, through social interaction to allow a very different picture from that presented by models and prescriptions of grief to emerge. This perspective is raising questions about the nature of reality and the production of knowledge ... (2008, p. 3)

Findings of the current study reflect Valentine’s sentiments. They also contribute to the social reality of bereavement by highlighting how post-mortem social interaction between the bereaved and the deceased can contribute toward pluralistic bereavement narratives. The findings of the study also address Walter’s lament that in general, bereavement literature “[in the modern West] depicts only isolated individuals ... Somehow, other people, culture and the dead themselves all get missed out” and this despite the observation that the bereaved “often find other people, culture and the dead as much of an issue as their own inner psychological journey” (2001, p. xv).
The study also contributes toward postmodern understandings of after-death encounters, primarily because of its qualitative methodology which facilitates “an active, empathic and reflexive engagement with the other” (Bradbury, 1999, p. 26). As a result of the study privileging the subjective experience of communiqué, findings pose a challenge to modernity’s rationalising discourse and understandings of material and non-material reality. Not only do they reveal what Small and Hockey term “grief’s bigger picture” (2001, p. 120), they highlight pluralistic notions, concepts and interpretations of what constitutes the self, and of what constitutes knowledge and meaning.

The Nexus between Bereavement and Postmodern Understandings

Concerning bereavement, Lee argues that death in modernity makes no provisions for the continuity of the self, that to die a modern death is “synonymous with self-effacement” (2003, p. 85) and that in contrast, the postmodern self ponders the meaning of death in an entirely different way. This pondering is the result of two key elements which appear to characterise postmodern understandings, “a modern reflexivity problematised self-consciousness of intensifying doubt regarding the essence of self-identity” and, “the revival of death-consciousness which has brought into relief the boundary between modern consciousness of the world and postmodern inquiry into that consciousness” (Lee, 2003, pp. 85-86).

This has implications for researching, understanding and contextualising bereavement and communiqué in postmodernity, particularly when considering that existent discourse, which has its roots in modernity, largely provides the framework by which these events are understood and responded to.
If modernity and postmodernity do intertwine and interconnect, and if the age of postmodernism is indeed an era characterised by ongoing development and finessing of earlier ideologies conceptualised in modernity, then there may be an opportunity for a movement toward a more holistic and flexible understanding of how research can validly, and with robust rigour, enhance and grow alternate ways of seeing the material and non-material universe, so revealing more of their complexities and depths. This intent could also sensibly transfer to a deeper and more profound exploration of the elements constituting the dynamic and chaotic lives of those who dwell within and inhabit those universes.

**Shake, Rattle and Roll**

Within the research context, how have postmodernist understandings impacted qualitative research inquiry and methodological practices? Finley notes:

> Postmodern foundational shifts brought about new conceptualizations of how research works, how meanings are made, and what social purposes research might serve. Social scientists began to act on their realization that traditional techniques of research were not adequate to handle the many questions that needed to be asked when the frame was shifted to take on new and diverse perspectives. (2005, p. 682)

One such shift is termed by Grbich, and others (Barthes 1977; Culler, 1983; Foucault, 1979; Rosenau, 1992), as the death of the author. This concept is taken up by Grbich who argues that with the advent of postmodern approaches toward objectivity and subjectivity and the decentering of the centred position of the researcher in the research, “the powerful centred author of earlier times vanishes” (2004, p. 67). What eventuates is a repositioning of author as owner of text to a context in which, “the voices of the
researched ... emerge more loudly and [are] viewed more substantially” (2004, p. 68).

Grbich argues that this decentering of the researcher suggests a more holistic approach to qualitative research, and a move away from linearity, objectivity, rationalism, certainty, legitimation and predictability. Their replacement is a thought-provoking and stimulating array of alternates, including, doubt, chaotic possibilities, complex interconnected systems and multiple selves. The inclusion of these alternates in the research process give rise to and challenge existing meta-narratives. The result is that these meta-narratives are, “largely discarded in favour of smaller local explanations” (2004, p. 52).

The study accords with this repositioning of author as owner of text and questioning of meta-narratives. Additionally, the study offers an invitation to consider alternate perspectives as a means of “seeing the same different” in order to gain deeper and more profound understandings of human experiences and of the role of the researcher in the research process (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26).

Transpersonal Research Paradigm

In keeping with Finley’s new conceptualisations, transpersonal researchers William Braud and Margaret Anderson propose alternate methodologies suitable for exploring those alternate or non-material human experiences which they define as existential and transformative. They term this methodology, “integral methodology” (Braud, 1994; Braud & Anderson, 1998). Integral methodology affirms that human experience is “multileveled and complex” and that research methods “must be correspondingly multifaceted and pluralistic” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p. 29). Integral methodology consists of five key elements:
1. It recognises and investigates multiple realities;
2. It acknowledges and incorporates multiple ways of knowing;
3. It emphasises wholeness rather than separateness;
4. It values balance at many levels, and
5. It concerns itself with values, meanings and purposes.

(1994, p. 31)

Integral methodology acknowledges the diversity, the expansiveness, and the existential and/or transpersonal dimensions of human experience. It achieves this by recognising the extraordinary, the mundane and the transcendent and by acknowledging complementary or alternate ways of knowing. These include for example, inner experiences, intuition, gnosis, mystical experience, and those experiences termed, “exceptional” (White, 1990) which in the study are termed communiqué. Integral methodology also recognises the important role of knowing, unexpressed knowing, and knowing gained through silence, imagination and non-discursive thought (Braud, 1994, pp. 31-32). Meditation, self-reflection, self-examination, solitude and silence, and pondering also qualify for inclusion.

Braud and Anderson note that at a time when scientific paradigms are shifting, “the presentation of new transpersonal research methods is timely” (1998, p. 28). Additionally, they caution against missing opportunities to explore profound human experiences such as moments of clarity, illumination and healing, which can result from limited and conventionalised research perspectives and methodologies:

By privileging only certain ways and aims of knowing – and by ignoring or devaluing others – we, as researchers in the social or human sciences, are unnecessarily and unwisely limiting the content and approaches to our disciplines. (1998, p. 3)
It can be argued that communiqué are multileveled and complex, and a dimension of human experience for which integral methodology, one of which is heuristic inquiry, is well suited. This is particularly so because it privileges not only the vantage point of the experient but because it provides a methodology which can explore and extend these farther reaches of human nature (Maslow, 1971). Additionally, if the current age of postmodern understandings is indeed an opportunity for the exploration and utilisation of alternate ways of knowing, then researchers not only have exciting opportunities of discovery awaiting them, they have the means by which to gain even greater insight and deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

**Heuristic Inquiry**

Heuristic inquiry, developed by humanistic psychologist and phenomenologist Clark Moustakas (1967; 1981; 1990) and Moustakas and Douglass (1985) capitalises on the researcher's subjective involvement with the research and with the researchers reflexive engagement with the topic of investigation.

> From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery. The research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration ... My primary task is to recognize whatever exists in my consciousness as a fundamental awareness – to receive it, accept it, support it and dwell inside it. (Moustakas, 2001, p. 263)

The subsequent developing of heuristic research as a strategy of inquiry has been influenced by a number of researchers and theorists in phenomenology and existentialism. These have included Maslow's research on self-actualising persons (1956, 1966, 1971) and Jourard's investigations of self-disclosure (1968, 1971). Also of significance is Buber's

Polanyi has been a contributing theorist toward the structuring of heuristic inquiry. Polanyi’s concepts of tacit knowing, indwelling and the term heuristic originate from his work on the subject, *Personal Knowledge* (1958). Polanyi argued that science was not value-free, and highlighted the influence of what he termed tacit ways of knowing. Tacit knowledge or pre-logical knowing consists of for example, hunches, imaginings, informed guesses and intuition. “We should start from the fact that we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1967, p. 4). Polanyi recognised and appreciated the beneficial impact of tacit knowing in contributing to and developing extant perspectives held by the individual:

To hold such knowledge is an act deeply committed to the conviction that there is something there to be discovered. It is personal, in the sense of involving the personality of him who holds it, and also in the sense of being, as a rule, solitary; but there is no trace in it of self-indulgence. The discoverer is filled with a compelling sense of responsibility for the pursuit of a hidden truth, which demands his services for revealing it. His act of knowing exercises a personal judgment in relating evidence to an external reality, an aspect of which he is seeking to apprehend. (1967, pp. 24-25)

Moustakas (1990) and Moustakas and Douglass (1985) emphasise the pivotal roles of both tacit knowing and indwelling in heuristic inquiry. Regarding tacit knowing:
Underlying all other concepts in heuristic research, at the base of all heuristic discovery, is the power of revelation in tacit knowing. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 20)

In actually obtaining data, the tacit dimension is the forerunner of inference and intuition, guiding the person to untapped aspects of awareness in nonlinear ways that elude analysis and explanation. In this sense, the tacit is visionary … Tacit knowing operates behind the scenes, giving birth to the hunches and vague, formless insights that characterize heuristic discovery. (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 49)

Indwelling, a processes originally described by Polanyi, is the concomitant of tacit knowing. Once tacit knowing has been observed by the individual, an internal and subjective identification with that knowing occurs. This further enriches logical knowing and the understanding of the individual:

Tacit knowing now appears as an act of indwelling by which we gain access to a new meaning … since all understanding is tacit knowing, all understanding is achieved by indwelling. (1967, p. 160)

Moustakas introduced heuristic inquiry with the publication of his exploration of loneliness (1961). At the time he was “searching for a word that would meaningfully encompass the process that I believed to be essential in the investigation of human experience” (1990, p. 9).

Moustakas’ interest in loneliness was precipitated by his daughter’s need for major heart surgery, an emotionally intense period which, “plunged me into the experience of feeling utterly alone, and pushed me to deliberately cut myself off from the advice or guidance of others” (1990, p. 91). This self-imposed inward self-exploration and self-habitation was “an attempt to discover a way to proceed” and one that “involved a process of self-inquiry, which was not planned or carefully sampled but
which occurred spontaneously at unexpected times and places” (1990, p. 91).

Moustakas identified and clarified what he termed the chain of conditions and factors which initiated and characterised his study as follows:

1. A crisis which created a question or problem;
2. A search of self in solitude, from which emerges a recognition of the significance of loneliness both as a creative urging and as a frightening and disturbing experience;
3. An expanding awareness through being open to lonely life and lonely experiences, through watching, listening, feeling, and through conversation, dialogue and discussion;
4. A steeping of myself in the deeper regions of loneliness so that it became the centre of my world;
5. An intuitive/factual grasping of the patterns of loneliness, and related aspects and different associations, until an integrated vision and awareness emerged;
6. Further clarification, delineation and refinement through studies of lonely lives, lonely experiences, and published reports on loneliness, and
7. Creation of a manuscript in which to project and express the various forms, themes and values of loneliness and to present its creative powers, as well as the anxiety it arouses in discontent, restlessness, and boredom, and the strategies used in attempting to overcome and escape my loneliness. (1990, p. 97)
**The Nexus between Heuristic Inquiry and Intuition**

There is an inter-relationship between heuristic inquiry and the use of intuition or intuitive inquiry. Anderson highlighted this interconnection, noting that at every phase of the research process an intuitive strategy of inquiry not only emphasises “the unique and personal voice of the individual researcher”, but that it is one dependent upon “the experiences and insights of the researcher at every phase of the research process” (1998, p. 75).

It is the intimate intersubjective engagement of the researcher with the self, in particular with their own intuition, which further enriches heuristic inquiry. Intuition is that insight that comes from the depths of being (personal communication P.W. Groves, March 8, 1995). Intuition is an essential characteristic of seeking knowledge, and guides the researcher in the discovery of patterns and meanings (Moustakas, 1990). Intuitive inquiry further enriches the engagement of the researcher with the research by advocating expanded states of intuitive awareness which as Anderson notes, affords the advantage of “plumbing the depths of transformative experiences by being more aligned with them state specifically” (1998, p. 76).

Salk defined this process as an “inverted perspective” (1983, p. 7). The process of undertaking inverted perspective involves becoming that which is observed through a process of intentionally imagining oneself to be the person or object being viewed, and trying to feel how life is from the perspective of that other person or object. This also parallels Schumacher’s notion of “adequatio” (1977, p. 339) which necessitates pre-knowledge, and Underhill’s (1915) cautioning against “not truly knowing a thing (1915, p. 4).

The application of inverted perspective is in direct opposition to how life is viewed from the perspective of oneself. In addition, this inter-related process facilitates a unique insight into a
different perspective of life, the result of directly experiencing it through the other. This merging with the other can open up new pathways of thought, experience and insight and aligns with postmodern research approaches toward subjectivity. These include “seeing the same different” (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26) regarding the “text within” (Auger, 2007, pp. 14-15) or frame of reference of, “the living human document” (Boisen, 1936, p. 10), the experient.

**The Nexus between Heuristic Inquiry and Systems**

Jourard in his text *Disclosing man to himself* argues that as a result of the influences of humanism, existentialism, phenomenology and personalism, practitioners and those endorsing humanistic-transpersonal psychology were using their experience of themselves as persons or human beings as a guide to exploring and understanding the experience of others. Jourard issues forth a plea that “the powers of rigorous inquiry be devoted to questions, answers to which will inform a growing, more viable image of man as a human being with potentiality, not solely a biological or socially determined being” (1968, p. 8).

This plea mirrors that from earlier voices. William James for example extolled the virtues of intuitive, imaginative and spiritual experiences of the individual (James, 1902). Carl Jung in his departure from Freudian psychology introduced and alternately revived and discussed a number of new and existing concepts that he related to the practice and understanding of a more humanistic and spiritual psychology at the time. These included such terms and processes as synchronicity (Jung, 1955), the self (Jung, 1969) and archetypes and the collective unconscious (Jung, 1969). Gestalt psychologists such as Max Wertheimer, Kurt Goldstein and Kurt Koffka were also important
contributors to the humanistic endeavour as were Alfred Adler, Rollo May and Abraham Maslow.

While this is not an exhaustive list, especially as it does not include proponents of consciousness and altered states, personality theory or discuss in detail developments in Western philosophy or the influences of Eastern philosophy and mysticism, it nonetheless highlights the significance of the human being as a dynamic and holistic system comprising mind, body and spirit. Vaughan captures this essence of the self as an interactive system, intricately intersecting with an array of mutually conditioned relationships that are essential to existence:

A systems view of reality sees the world in terms of relationships and patterns of organization, and interactions, rather than as a composite of individual entities or structures existing in isolation, independently of one another. A systems view of the self therefore challenges the assumption that we exist only as alienated, isolated individuals in a hostile, or at best, indifferent, environment ... The self as an open living system is continually in flux ... In acknowledging the continual flux and exchange of energy between self and other, whether biological or psychological other, we grow to accept and develop more of our potential being ... From this perspective individuals do not exist as independent, isolated entities. In fact, they are continually changing, interacting, and joining with others in subjective exchange, in shared ideas and shared purpose. (1985, pp. 20-21)

Heuristic inquiry implicitly engenders a systems-view of the individual and the social world in which the individual lives. It facilitates this through repositioning the researcher from sole author and owner of text to a context in which plurality of voice and shared ownership of the experience of both researcher and co-researcher is acknowledged, validated and presented to the social world. Within the context of this plurality of voice, both researcher and co-researcher engage with one another in order to
co-create the research manuscript, each serving the other through empathic communion, understanding and the shared humanistic endeavour and acknowledgement of the events and circumstances which brought them together. As Grbich articulates:

The researcher and the researched are no longer identifiably separate; they interweave their constructed meanings in a delicate dance of recognition and interpretation as the same narratives are told and re-told, presented and re-presented for the reader to become involved with. (2004, p. 28)

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the theoretical and philosophical considerations which inform the study. The theoretical influences contributing toward the development of heuristic inquiry and the applicability of heuristic inquiry to pluralistic understandings of the subjectivity of bereavement and communiqué has been discussed. The chapter also discussed the tensions generated by alternate paradigms, and the relationship of modernist and postmodernist understandings of bereavement and communiqué. *Chapter Five: Research, Strategy, Design and Methodology*, will discuss the research strategy, design and methodological rationale of the study.
Strangeness and familiarity are not limited to the social field but are general categories of our interpretation of the world. If we encounter in our experience something previously unknown and which therefore stands out of the ordinary order of our knowledge, we begin a process of inquiry.

We first define the new fact. We try to catch its meaning. We then transform step by step our general scheme of interpretation of the world in such a way that the strange fact and its meaning become compatible and consistent with all the other facts of our experience and their meanings.

If this process of inquiry succeeds, then this pattern and its elements will become ... a matter of course, an unquestionable way of life, a shelter, and a protection.

Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the research strategy, design and methodological rationale of the study. The study is exploratory in design, utilises a qualitative heuristic strategy of inquiry, qualitative methodology and qualitative interpretative approach to data analysis. The chapter also discusses research instrumentation, recruitment of co-researchers (throughout the study the term “participant” is replaced by the heuristic term “co-researcher”) and data collection. Validity, ethics and issues pertaining to bereavement research are also discussed.

Introduction

Within the context of bereavement, communiqué can be a profound event occurring in the lives of individuals who have experienced the death/s of someone close (Attig, 1996; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2005; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; LaGrand, 1999; Palmer & Braud, 2002). Understanding the subjectivity of such an event and its positioning within the context of bereavement requires an appropriate research strategy, design and methodology that supports, encourages and facilitates the answering of the research question.

Bryman defines a research strategy as a “general orientation for the conducting of social research” (2004, pp. 19-20). This general orientation for conducting social research divides into two distinct clusters of research strategies or methodologies which in turn give definition to the quantitative and qualitative research design. These two research designs are characterised and defined as much by differing philosophical, ontological and epistemological issues, values and concerns as much as they are by their methodology.
The aim of the study is to explore the subjective experience of communiqué occurring within the context of adult bereavement. In order to conduct research relevant to the “subjectivity of lived human experience” (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992, p. 1) of communiqué and to explore “pluralistic meanings, interpretations and understandings” of communiqué phenomena, a qualitative research design was selected as the most appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

The Qualitative Research Design

The research design locates the researcher in the empirical or visible world and connects the research question/s to data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Not only does it “provide the framework for the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2004, p. 27), it “determines the means and methodology of answering the research question” (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 88). The study is non-experimental and utilises a heuristic strategy of inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Non-experimental designs are those “informed by alternate methodologies” which emphasise “designing for description or exploration” (D’Cruz & Jones, 2006, p. 83).

The research design also determines “how the investigator will address the two critical issues of representation and legitimation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 14). Sim and Wright define research design as something that “specifies the logical structure of a research project and the plan that will be followed in its execution” (2000, p. 27). Thus the research design provides the framework which delineates and sequences the research process from the initial determination of the research question through to data collection, analysis, discussion and reporting of findings.
Wadsworth provides additional clarification regarding the constituents of the research design:

A good research design ensures you will get the best evidence – the most relevant, credible, valid, trustworthy, reliable and authentic possible – and also that you haven’t overlooked possible sources of criticism or possible counter-evidence. It matches up the sources available, and the questions needing answers, with the kinds and amounts of evidence needed to develop a case or demonstrate a situation. It allows time for reflection to creatively develop plausible explanation, and, it ensures the purposes of the research are properly met. (1997, p. 27)

In contrast to the quantitative research design with its intent and emphasis on measurement, causality, generalisation and replicability, the qualitative research design, “usually emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2004, p. 266). Rather than “how many” or “what proportion”, qualitative research seeks answers to the question, “What is going on here?” from the perspective of those who in the research context are being researched (Bouma & Ling, 2004, p. 165).

Patton fleshes this out further, positioning the strategy within an interactive and human context as one which “cultivates the most useful of all human capacities – the capacity to learn from others” (1990, p. 7). Qualitative research is also referred to as naturalistic inquiry as it is often carried out in a natural setting because “context is so heavily implicated in meaning” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 189).

Devers and Robinson argue that qualitative methodologies not only presuppose the existence of multiple subjective realities (which are continually being constructed and revised), they are well suited to explore phenomena that are not only “social and interactional in nature”, but “complex and multifactorial” (2002,
This methodology supports the aim of the study in that it facilitates the exploration of the natures and meanings of communiqué experienced by bereaved adults and the deceased.

Denzin describes the qualitative researcher as an individual who is not, “an objective, politically neutral observer who stands outside and above the study of the social world” (2000, p. 3). Indeed, the qualitative researcher not only brings an acknowledged gendered and historical self to the research process, they are historically and locally positioned within the processes being studied. “The qualitative researcher, as participant observer and interviewer cannot stand above and outside what he or she studies” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 19). Although the general development and practice of qualitative research has been finessed and refined from its interaction with “rich and complex historical processes” it is in its essence a “humanistic endeavour” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

This humanistic endeavour is acknowledged by Hesse-Biber and Leavy who note that qualitative research methods permit the researcher access to the voices and experiences of those who may be, “silenced, othered, and marginalized by the dominant social order” (2005, p. 28). Exposing and making visible to the social world, through the practice of qualitative research, the life experiences of such individuals can “do much to change the world in positive ways” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. x) by identifying gaps in service provision, highlighting need, raising and promoting awareness and advocating for policy change and/or creation.

**Heuristic Inquiry**

In identifying the procedures involved in heuristic inquiry as “a search for the discovery of meanings and essence in significant human experience” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 40),
Moustakas highlighted how a qualitative research process can reveal its intrinsic humanistic values and authenticity:

I saw the value of being open to significant dimensions of experience in which comprehension and compassion mingle; intellect, emotion, and spirit are integrated; and intuition, spontaneity, and self-exploration are seen as components of unified experience. (1990, p. 97)

Heuristic inquiry emphasises “plurality of voice” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 40). Plurality of voice metaphorically represents the voices of those interviewed (the co-researchers), the voice of the researcher, and the voices of those who have written and researched the topic. Additional elements of this plurality include “identifying with the focus of inquiry, self-dialogue, tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, and internal frame of reference” (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 15-27).

Notwithstanding that both researcher and co-researcher experience the same subjective experience and speak to it, there is an emphasis on the diversity of individual experience in heuristic inquiry. This includes the individuality of the researcher, the individuality of the phenomenon being explored (communiqué), and the individuality of those participating in the study. The researcher, like the co-researcher, brings a specific interpretive lens to the investigation. These include opinions and attitudes from familiarity and identification with the topic of investigation, lengthy immersion in and personal engagement with the topic of investigation, and self-examination, self-reflection and self-dialogue.

Although heuristic inquiry “offers a disciplined pursuit of essential meanings connected with everyday human experiences” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 39), it does not necessarily present as a “linear process” nor does it constitute a “rigid
framework” (West, 2001, p. 129). In privileging methodological flexibility, heuristic inquiry also conjoins and underpins the process of subjectivity with disciplined rigour, constant attention and unrelenting commitment:

It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14)

In addition to these qualities that the researcher brings to the investigation is the lens through which the researcher sees the world, a metaphor which represents the researcher’s worldview and belief-system. This worldview and belief-system is constructed and shaped by the impact of a variety of impressions resulting from varying and diverse life events. These impressions may include for example family environment (including interpersonal dynamics and family scripts), wider cultural, political and spiritual/religious influences, educational influences, gender, sexuality, and non-material experiences (including pre-cognitive experiences, dreams, intuition and mystical experiences). Particular activities such as solitude, contemplation, meditation, and for example pondering give rise to non-material impressions which may also become constituents of the individual’s worldview and belief-system.

Braud and Anderson contend that heuristic research yields “the richest and most satisfying description of an important human experience to which the researcher has devoted extensive and deep attention to for a long period of time” (1998, p. 47). This subjective experience has been defined by Schumacher as adequatio. Schumacher argues that to know, apprehend or
experience within any realm, the knower and his or her organs, faculties and capabilities must be appropriate to and appropriately prepared for the knowledge, apprehension, or experience. Thus the knower must have “adequatio” or adequateness with respect to that which is to be known (1977, p. 339) in that one must both know and have knowledge of that which is to be known more deeply and understood; one must have pre-knowledge.

Heuristic inquiry capitalises on this pre-knowledge, this adequatio, this interpenetration and taking into oneself of that which is metaphorically outside one. It acknowledges the researcher's subjective identification with the topic of investigation and enables the researcher’s subjective experiences to complement those of the co-researcher.

The researcher conducting the study has adequatio with regard to the topic of investigation. Having personally experienced bereavement and communiqué with two individuals close to her who died, she has been interpenetrated by it. Accordingly, the researcher conforms with these principles of heuristic inquiry, bringing to the study familiarity and a sustained and intimate engagement with the topic of investigation.

**The Phases of Heuristic Research**

The process of heuristic research is delineated by six phases which comprise the general strategy of inquiry. These include *Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication* and *Creative Synthesis* (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-32).

Initial Engagement refers to a topic, theme or question which represents a critical interest and area of search. It is governed, fuelled and motivated by an overwhelming and compelling desire to know. By its very nature it simultaneously
turns the researcher both inward into themself and outward into the visible, social and cultural world. The researcher is drawn into and engages with the self through reflection, intuition, pondering, contemplation and self-dialogue. From this inward sojourn emerges the outward manifestation of the research question. During the process of Initial Engagement the researcher “reaches inward for tacit awareness and knowledge, permits intuition to run freely, and elucidates the context from which the question takes form and significance” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27).

The Immersion phase engages the researcher with the research question to such depth that the question itself is lived. “Everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). During this process the question is literally embedded into the psyche and internal being of the researcher. Anything connected or seen to be connected with the question becomes an opportunity, and provides the raw material for staying with and for maintaining a sustained focus, intent and inner concentration. The researcher’s inward passion is reflected externally, it is perceived and sought after to the degree and with the intent that it becomes the driving force and motivation of the researcher.

Incubation is the phase during which the researcher intentionally distances themself from intense concentrated focus on the research question. “The period of incubation allows the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). This pre-meditated retreat from self-awareness and conscious identification with the research question enables and facilitates a process of fermentation to occur in the subconscious. This fermentation manifests as flashes of insight, revelation or understanding which
may at times burst into the mind unexpectedly, or alternatively, it may gently make itself known in moments of stillness and silent reverie. Moustakas termed this process of fermentation, Illumination.

The phase of Illumination is a naturally occurring process constituting a breakthrough into the conscious awareness of the researcher of “qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question” (1990, p. 29). This spontaneous breakthrough occurs when the researcher is in a receptive state of mind and is not consciously identified with the question. The process of illumination contributes additional dimensions of knowledge and discloses hidden meanings or meaning which may have been overlooked by the researcher. Reflectivity is an essential component of the process of illumination. During these moments of reflection “missed, misunderstood, or distorted realities [that] make their appearance and add something essential to the truth of an experience” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 30).

The Explication phase proceeds that of Illumination. “The purpose of explication is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). Explication is a demanding activity because it requires that the researcher “attend to their own awareness’s, feelings, thoughts, beliefs and judgments as a prelude to the understanding that is derived from conversations and dialogues with others” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). Explication, while similar to Illumination, is a still deeper and richer engagement with the themes identified during the Illumination phase and is premised by the notion that not only is human experience subjective, it is layered with meaning.

In seeking these meanings Explication reveals additional textures and nuances, allows for refinement and correction, and brings forth or realises particular components of the
phenomenon. “In the explication process, the heuristic researcher utilizes focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure, and recognizes that meanings are unique and distinctive to an experience and depend upon internal frames of reference” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31).

Two significant activities comprise the process of Explication, focusing and indwelling. These activities constitute concentrated attention and identification, the intent being to create an inward space in order to discover nuances, textures and further constituents of the phenomenon of study. This phase is a formative period during which the lens of the researcher, with respect to the phenomenon, “shifts to make room for a more complete apprehension” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). This shift ultimately results in the Composite Depiction; that which broke through into the conscious awareness of the researcher during the Incubation and Illumination phase has now become an essential and creative element of the process of Explication.

The Composite Depiction does not just reflect the experiences of individual co-researchers; it presents the qualities and natures that permeate the group as a whole which emerged during the process of Explication. This explication characterises the experience of communiqué for all co-researchers as a whole; that which constitutes the natures and meanings of communiqué between themselves and the deceased. It is developed through the process of immersion into and the concentration on the experience of the phenomenon as presented by each co-researcher. As Moustakas notes, “at some point in this process the qualities, core themes, and essences that permeate the experience of the entire group of co-researchers are understood and a universal depiction is constructed” (1990, p. 68).
The Creative Synthesis is the sixth and final component of the phases of heuristic research. “The major concepts that underlie a creative synthesis are the tacit dimension, intuition, and self-searching” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). The Creative Synthesis is the cumulative end-effect of the process of engagement with the topic or theme that has captured and ignited the researcher’s passion to know.

During the Creative Synthesis phase there is in a sense a type of transcendence that occurs. There is both a foray into the research question, and a deliberate retreat away from it. The researcher has consciously and actively engaged with the question and then just as actively disengaged from it. There have been periods of intense solitude, reflection, meditation and pondering which have resulted in a deeply intimate emotional, psychological and behavioural relationship between the researcher and the question.

The Creative Synthesis is the representation of a comprehensive expression of the realisation of the natures and meanings of the question and the phenomena the question is attached to, and to which it inwardly resonates. Thus emergent themes are drawn together into a synchronistic and harmonised representation, a snapshot in time almost, manifesting materially in the form of a poem, story, drawing or alternate creative form.

**Research Method**

A research methodology constitutes “the technique for collection of data utilising a specific research instrument” (Bryman, 2004, p. 27). The research instrument utilised by the study comprised extended in-depth, open-ended, conversational face-to-face interviewing. Hesse-Biber and Leavy argue that in-depth interviewing is particularly suitable for accessing
“subjugated voices and getting at subjugated knowledge” (2005, p. 123).

Within the body of enquiry of bereavement, the event of being bereaved has been described as a sensitive issue (Briller et al., 2007; Dickson-Swift, 2005; Goodrum & Keys, 2007; Parkes, 1995) with the bereaved often being referred to as populations that are vulnerable (Beattie & VandenBosch, 2007; Liamputtong, 2007; O’Mallon, 2009). Wellings et al., highlight an important consideration when conducting what they term sensitive research, “disclosure of behaviours or attitudes which would normally be kept private and personal may cause the respondent discomfort in their expression” (2000, p. 256). This is highly relevant to bereaved individuals who may be emotionally, psychologically or spiritually distressed. For this reason, bereaved individuals experiencing communiqué with the deceased may be considered as “hidden populations” whose membership, “is not readily distinguished or enumerated, based in existing knowledge” (Wiebel, 1990, p. 6).

Researching sensitive issues requires empathic involvement of the researcher with the co-researcher in order to metaphorically hear the voices of the researched. This is not only because of the intimate nature of the topic of investigation, but the “resulting subjective experiences” that occur in the research process (Rowling, 1999, p. 174). Although there are possible risks involved to those considered vulnerable or hidden participating in research studies (Cassell, 1978, 1982; Munhall, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1995) a number of studies have found that face-to-face interviewing does not necessarily pose a risk to such populations.

Notwithstanding the argument for and against qualitative research involving vulnerable or hidden populations, the researcher should at all times have the wellbeing of the co-researcher uppermost in their mind. “... the interview should not
only not hurt the interviewees but, if possible, actually leave them somewhat better off for having talked with the researcher” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 40).

**Research Question**

The research question the study answers is: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?* Twelve questions (Appendix 4) were formulated by the researcher for use during interviews with co-researchers recognising also that as Moustakas articulates, “genuine dialogue cannot be planned” (1990, p. 47). Rather than leading discussion the questions served as prompts during the “conversational interview or dialogue” which ensued (Moustakas, 1990, p. 47):

1. Can you tell me about the person close to you who died?
2. How did you experience their presence?
3. What do you think this experience means?
4. Have you shared this/these experiences with anyone else?
5. What was their response?
6. What did you make of that?
7. Have you noticed any feelings or thoughts that have been generated by your experiences, for example, have these experiences influenced your views of life, death, spirituality, your own mortality?
8. Have these feelings and thoughts resulted in different behaviours or alterations to your usual routines or schedules?
9. Do you know anything about these phenomena?
10. Do you have any thoughts about why these experiences have occurred?
11. Is there anything else you feel you would like to mention about your experience?
12. If I were to ask you to comment on how you experience life now, what would you say?

In formulating the research question for the study, the researcher engaged in continual indwelling and self-dialogue regarding her own experiences of communiqué. In so doing she encountered and lived her own autobiography and immersed herself in the topic of investigation. This was a deliberate and conscious act carried out in order to determine the meaning and impact of her own communiqué. As a result of this “deeply intimate and passionate immersion” with the topic of investigation, the research question took form (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

Recruitment of Co-researchers

Heuristic inquiry acknowledges those who contribute primary data in the research process as “co-researchers” rather than as “participants”. The intersection between the researcher and the co-researcher is the shared commonality of a particular subjective experience, which is the essence of heuristic inquiry. Thus the researcher brings the subjective experience of communiqué as it occurs within the context of their bereavement to the co-researcher, as does the co-researcher. Both are originating from the same ontological perspective which during the intersubjective encounter between the two converge.

The research design for the study utilised purposive sampling. Qualitative studies, unlike their counterpart quantitative studies, tend to rely on relatively small sample sizes. Regarding sample size, “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (Patton, 1990, p. 184). Erlandson et al.,
concur, noting that the emphasis in sampling is placed on “quality not quantity”, with “information richness” sought rather than “information volume” (1993, p. 84). Patton argues that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting “information-rich cases for in depth study” (1990, p. 169). Information-rich cases comprise those from which “one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (1990, p. 170).

In total thirty-two bereaved adults responded to the study and indicated their interest in participating. Of these initial thirty-two respondents, twenty-one respondents self-selected to participate. Reasons given by respondents declining participation included lack of financial remuneration, proximity of the death event with the timing of the study, reluctance to recall the death event, concurrent illness of a family member with the timing of the study and other (lack of communication by the respondent with the researcher, incompatibility of the respondent’s communiqué experience as defined in the study).

A press-release describing the study was advertised in one Sydney suburban publication and two Sydney metropolitan publications (Appendix 5). Once respondents had registered their interest with the researcher and discussed the nature of their communiqué, a letter of invitation was despatched which included a copy of the Participant Information Statement (Appendix 2), the Participant Consent Form (Appendix 3), documentation verifying ethical approval granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney (Appendix 1) and the Question Schedule which listed the prompt questions (Appendix 4).

Moustakas argues that in order to know and understand another’s experience one must, “enter into discourse with the
individual in an interpersonal context bounded by openness, trust, connection and empathic understanding of the shared lived experience” (1990, p. 26). A key element which facilitates this discourse is self-disclosure by the researcher to the co-researcher. In heuristic enquiry researcher self-disclosure presents the researcher’s autobiographical connection with the topic of investigation to the co-researcher. Such an endeavour, “sparks a similar call from others” and offers an invitation to, “more fully and freely explore, understand and find meaning in the subject matter at hand” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 50).

An important methodological consideration in heuristic research is that both researcher and co-researcher must share the same lived experience and that the researcher in particular must have pre-knowledge of the topic of investigation (Schumacher, 1977, p. 339). This pre-knowledge of communiqué was verbally demonstrated by the researcher during initial conversations with respondents who contacted the researcher in response to the press-release which advertised the study, and during the subsequent follow-up conversations which sought to confirm participation in the study.

Pre-knowledge of the topic of investigation by the researcher is not only an integral component of the heuristic research design and methodology of the study, it is critical to establishing rapport, building trust and demonstrating credibility with all respondents. Due to the psychosocial impact of her own bereavement and communiqué experiences, and because it was integral to the research design and methodology of the study, selective rendering of autobiographical information was provided verbally by the researcher in response to specific questions asked by respondents.

These responses from the researcher contributed to some respondents feeling ‘comfortable’, ‘at ease’, knowing they could
'trust' the researcher, knowing they were 'understood', knowing they would be 'listened to', and knowing they would not be 'judged'. For example, at the end of one interview and in response to the researcher asking how the interview experience had been, the co-researcher responded:

Well I want to say when I saw this, it impacted on me and I phoned you and within three or four words I just knew you and I were going to be able to talk, I just knew it, I felt it straight away in my heart, as you do about some things. And so I just want to share this with you, to be able to come and see you today, and you're everything I thought you'd be, a caring person, it has been a relief to share our story with you and you've got such credibility Michele because of Ken ... you're a credible person, you're a widow, I'm a widower, you know, you've had the pain of a loved person and the pain of your parents ...

A follow-up telephone call was made by the researcher to all respondents within two weeks of the letter being despatched. This two-week time-frame provided a cooling-off period and afforded respondents the availability of not only considering their participation but also to identify any arising concerns. The intent of the follow-up telephone call was to discuss proposed involvement, address any concerns that may have arisen during the cooling-off period, discuss the study more thoroughly, and if the respondent was in agreement, elicit consent for their participation. Once consent had been obtained, a convenient date and time for conducting the interview was arranged.

Although unintended, the research sample nonetheless reflected diversity (Devers & Robinson, 2002). Seven male and fourteen female bereaved adults ranging in age from between the early twenties to the late sixties participated in the study. Respondents came from varying cultural, social, ethnic, spiritual, religious and socio-economic contexts. Those close to them who had died included partners, spouses, parents, grand-children and
grand-parents. Proximity of bereavement to interviews ranged from six months to thirty years. Nineteen individuals had been bereaved for no less than six months and no longer than fourteen months. Two individuals had been bereaved between twenty and thirty years ago respectively. All respondents had experienced communiqué phenomena. All respondents but two resided within the Sydney metropolitan area of New South Wales, Australia. Of those two, one resided in Melbourne and one in Tasmania.

**Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted and primary data collected from four data collection sites dependent on the requirements and comfort needs of the co-researcher. These sites comprised either the home of the co-researcher, their workplace, a meeting room at the researcher’s workplace, or a meeting room at a suburban community centre. A total of twenty-four interviews were conducted: nineteen face-to-face and two by telephone as well as three subsequent face-to-face interviews with co-researchers who wished to more fully explore their experiences.

On the day the interview was scheduled and immediately prior to interviews commencing, all co-researchers were afforded another opportunity to discuss any additional questions or concerns that might have arisen since their initial contact with the researcher. Issues discussed included anonymity, confidentiality, researcher accountability, emotional safety, and publication and dissemination of study findings.

All interviews were audio-taped by a micro-cassette recorder with permission from the co-researcher and later transcribed. Co-researchers were advised that they could withdraw at any time if they were uncomfortable with the way the interview was being conducted. Co-researchers were also advised that the audio-taping of interviews was entirely dependent upon their
permission. At no time during the audio-taping of interviews did any co-researcher request that the micro-cassette recorder be switched off. At no time during the study, and subsequent to their interview being conducted, did any co-researcher withdraw from the study. Interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient for the co-researcher. Interviews ranged in length from one to three hours and averaged one and a half hours, with most lasting from one to three hours.

Verbal permission and written consent was sought and obtained from all co-researchers regarding audio-taping of interviews. To ensure transparency all co-researchers reviewed and approved their transcription when completed. All co-researchers agreed. Co-researchers were asked if they would like to receive a copy of the approved version of their transcript, as well as a copy of the thesis document upon completion of the study. All co-researchers agreed. Immediately after each interview, descriptive and reflective notes and diagrams were written and drawn by the researcher so as to record feelings, thoughts and additional issues or questions for consideration which arose out of the conversation.

Data Analysis

Essential to the process of heuristic data analysis is comprehensive knowledge of all materials for each co-researcher and for the co-researchers as a collective. This process requires “timeless immersion inside the data and intervals of rest and return to the data until intimate knowledge is obtained” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 49). Data analysis was conducted in several stages which were delineated by three phases of heuristic inquiry, Illumination, Explication and the creation of the Creative Synthesis (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-32).
Prior to the Illumination phase commencing, all audio-taped primary data were transcribed. Due to an occurrence of compassion fatigue, of the twenty-one interviews that were conducted only fourteen were able to be transcribed by the researcher. Permission was sought and obtained from each of the remaining seven co-researchers for their interview transcribing to be undertaken by a professional transcriber.

All transcriptions were cross-checked by the researcher with each relevant audio-tape recording, including those completed by the professional transcriber. This verified and ensured accuracy of translation from voice to text. Once complete, each transcription was forwarded to the relevant co-researcher which afforded them the opportunity to review and if necessary revise the document. Any amendments provided by co-researchers were incorporated into a revised version of the transcript, which was re-sent to the co-researcher for checking, validation and final approval. Of the twenty-one transcripts forwarded by the researcher to co-researchers for review, fourteen required minor grammatical amendments and corrections. All twenty-one co-researchers received a copy of the approved version of their transcript.

In order to commence the Illumination phase, all data were compiled for each co-researcher. This included their audio-tape recording and approved final transcript, any items given to the researcher during or after the interview, the researcher’s reflective notes, and the researcher’s memories and recollections as they emerged during the compilation process. The researcher then entered into the material in timeless immersion until it was understood. This consisted of listening and re-listening to audio tape-recordings, re-reading transcripts and re-familiarisation with notations made of the musings, reflective thoughts, and ponderings of the researcher.
The periods of timeless immersion, the process in which the researcher engages with the research question at depth, varied. At times this engagement constituted short intense bursts of time during the day, which extended over several weeks, while at other times it constituted a more reflective engagement for much longer periods at various times which extended over several months. During this period, “the researcher lives the question in waking, sleeping, and even dream states” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28). The immersion process creates a sense of “mutuality and communion” between the researcher and the research question, and while these periods permit “awarenesses and meanings” to generate, “at some point in the immersion phase it is necessary to stop being absorbed in the problem, to move away from it into another world ...” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 109).

All data were set aside, which encouraged an interval of rest and return to the data. This procedure facilitated the awakening of fresh energy and alternate perspective. All material was then re-reviewed and additional reflective notes made. The researcher constructed an Individual Depiction of the experience of communiqué for each co-researcher. The Individual Depiction is a faithful reconstruction of the co-researcher’s experience. This reconstruction includes their engagement with the researcher, the research and their experience of communiqué. To ensure that the Individual Depiction was an accurate reconstruction, each of the twenty-one Individual Depictions were revised three times by the researcher prior to the third and final version being forwarded to each co-researcher for validation and final approval.

The researcher returned to the data of each co-researcher to check that the Individual Depiction was a true and accurate capturing and portrayal of the co-researcher’s experience. This stage of the data analysis process necessitates that the researcher ask the question, “Does the Individual Depiction of the experience
fit the data from which it was developed?” When the researcher was satisfied that the depiction did fit the data from which it was developed, and that it was a true and accurate portrayal of the co-researcher’s experience it was forwarded to the relevant co-researcher for confirmation of its comprehensiveness and accuracy, and if necessary for any amendment.

In order to commence the process of Illumination, all co-researchers approved transcriptions were collated by the researcher. The researcher withdrew herself from social interaction with others and intentionally entered into a period of pre-meditated solitude and immersion in the data. During this period, and in order to be fully present to each transcription, the researcher entered into a contemplative and meditative state. The intellectual activity of mind was quietened such that the essence of each experience embedded within the text of each transcription gently revealed itself. The researcher also approached the process of Illumination from a perspective of wanting to gain an endemic or insiders organic knowing of the experience of communiqué as it occurred within a context of bereavement. In order to facilitate this, the researcher devoted a period of time in meditation on the question: What does communiqué want me to know about itself?

The process of Illumination revealed an initial cluster of qualities relevant to the topic of investigation. In order to explicate the natures and meanings of these qualities, the researcher emulated the process of Illumination in conducting the process of Explication.

In order to conduct this process, all primary data relevant to the thematic cluster were compiled by the researcher. The researcher withdrew herself from social interaction with others and intentionally entered into another period of pre-meditated solitude and immersion in the themes. During this period, and in
order to be fully present to the data the researcher again entered into a contemplative and meditative state. As for the process of Illumination, the researcher also approached the process of Explication from a perspective of wanting to gain an endemic knowing of the experience of bereavement and communiqué. Similarly with the process of Illumination, the researcher facilitated deeper engagement with the data by devoting a period of time in meditation on the question: What does communiqué want me to know about itself?

The process of Explication revealed the following thematic cluster constituting eight themes which encapsulated the natures and meanings of communiqué:

1. Communiqué manifesting as discrete types;
2. Additional experiencing persons;
3. Occurrences of communiqué relative to bereavement;
4. Conceptualised understandings of communiqué;
5. Conceptualised understandings of relationships;
6. Conceptualised understandings of being;
7. Conceptualised understandings of death, and
8. Intersubjective nature of the interview process.

The Composite Depiction is more fully discussed in Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings. The Composite Depiction does not just reflect the experiences of individual co-researchers; it presents the qualities that permeate the group as a whole which emerged during the process of Explication. These qualities reveal themselves as a result of the process of immersion into, and the study and concentration of, the experiences of the phenomenon as presented by each co-researcher. “At some point in this process the qualities, core themes, and essences that permeate the entire
group of co-researchers are understood and a universal depiction is constructed” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 68).

Following the creation of the Composite Depiction the researcher selects two to four co-researchers who exemplify the group as a whole and creates an Exemplary Portrait. Each Exemplary Portrait incorporates autobiographical material gathered during preliminary contact, contained in personal documents, or shared during or after interviews. The portrait is presented in such a way that “both the phenomenon investigated and the individual persons emerge in a vital and unified manner” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). Four Exemplary Portraits are presented in Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings. The creation of the Creative Synthesis, which is presented in Chapter 8: Conclusion, is the sixth and final component of the phases of heuristic research.

**Ethical Considerations**

Due to the diversity and sensitivity of grief reactions, bereaved individuals require, “special safeguards to ensure that their welfare and rights are protected” (Moore & Miller, 1999, p. 1034), because, as Parkes elucidated, “the credulous are vulnerable to exploitation and need to be protected from unscrupulous or potentially harmful intervention” (1995, p. 175).

In order to ensure that no harm be inflicted upon bereaved co-researchers by the researcher, ethical protocol as stipulated by the University of Sydney Human Ethics Research Committee provided the necessary ethical guidelines and approval for undertaking research activities. Ethical approval to conduct the study was granted by the University of Sydney Human Ethics Research Committee, 18 June, 2008 (Appendix 1).

On a number of occasions during interviews, the disembodied made themselves known to either the researcher
singly or to both the researcher and the co-researcher. This was an unexpected and unanticipated contingency which was not accounted for in ethical application and subsequent approval from the University of Sydney, which only accommodates “living human subjects”. This initially presented a dilemma for the researcher by means of a conflict observed between her tacit knowing (intuition), and pre-logical knowing (mind). Should the disembodied be included in the research?

Concerning intuition, Moustakas notes that “at every step along the way, the heuristic researcher exercises intuitive clues and makes necessary shifts in method, procedure, direction and understanding which will add depth, substance, and essential meanings to the discovery process” (1990, p. 23). Fontana and Frey also advocate for flexibility during the interview process, noting, “interviewing and interviewers must necessarily be creative, forget how-to rules, and adapt themselves to the ever-changing situations they face” (2000, p. 657).

The researcher followed the intuitive methodology as stipulated by Moustakas, and came to the pre-logical knowing that as the embodied co-researchers had self-selected to participate in the study, and had provided informed consent to the researcher, then the disembodied, the deceased had also self-selected to participate. Their manifestation indicated their intent to participate, and by default their consent, especially as they had come of their own volition.

Moustakas notes that intuition is “an essential characteristic of seeking knowledge” without which, “essential material for scientific knowledge is denied or lost” (1990, p. 23). Although ethical approval for participation by the disembodied was not sought by the researcher, which presented an ethical and methodological dilemma, the researcher wanted to capitalise on the “possibilities of knowing” and did not want to “restrict the
potential for new awareness and understanding” (1990, p. 22). Thus, as for the embodied, the disembodied were rendered visible to the social world through their participation and inclusion in the study.

Validity

Heuristic inquiry utilises qualitative methodology to draw forth and understand the essence and meanings of significance experiences which occur in the lives of human beings. “Heuristics is concerned with meanings, not measurement; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour” (Moustakas & Douglass, 1985, p. 42). In addressing issues of validity in heuristic inquiry, Moustakas emphasises that the question of validity is one of meaning, and poses the following question to the researcher, “Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one’s own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32).

The answer to the question is determined by the researcher conducting the study. They and they alone have holistically lived the heuristic process of inquiry from its passionate beginning to its cumulative end. They and they alone have captured and rendered into print after an exhaustive engagement with the research question the themes and essences that comprehensively, distinctively and accurately depict the meaning/s of the experience being investigated.

Data handling and analysis in heuristic inquiry is robust with the researcher playing an interactive role. Bridgman acknowledges this involvement of the researcher both with the data and the dependence of validity on the judgement and interpretation of the researcher. The heuristic researcher
repeatedly returns to the data to correlate depictions of the experience as they repeatedly engage with and then disengage from the research question seeking missed or overlooked nuances and welcoming additional flashes of insight and understanding.

This constant appraisal of significance and checking and judging correlates with that which Bridgman defines as scientific, and which is described as “continual apprehension of meaning, the constant appraisal of significance, accompanied by a running act of checking to be sure that I am doing what I want to do, and of judging correctness and incorrectness” (1950, p. 50).

Lincoln and Guba identified trustworthiness as an important component of qualitative research studies. The intent of trustworthiness, which is constituted by a number of discrete elements, is to establish the case for and to verify that, “the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of” (1985, p. 290). These elements have been identified by Erlandson et al., as, “techniques that provide truth-value through credibility, applicability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability” (1993, p. 132).

Credibility issues were addressed by the researcher through peer debriefing, member (co-researcher) checks and triangulation. Lincoln and Guba define peer debriefing as “a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (1985, p. 308). The researcher conferred on a regular basis with a senior researcher in a formal setting (monthly, or as required scheduled face-to-face meetings). During these meetings the peer debriefer received regular progress reports of the project, and posed questions regarding the research
question, methodology, theoretical framework and other research issues.

Throughout the duration of the study, the researcher presented on the research and on related aspects of the research at three local Australian conferences, two national Australian conferences, two international American conferences and one United Kingdom international conference. This enabled the researcher to capitalise on peer feedback and comment, and provided for fresh and alternate insight and perspective which informed and updated the research process.

The researcher is a member of three international e-mail list-serve groups, members of which are located in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia. This group consists of academics, researchers, professionals and clinicians who work in the field of death and dying, grief, and the funeral industry. This electronic forum provides the opportunity for the researcher to share and exchange ideas, explore individual understandings, discuss contemporary research paradigms, including transpersonal research and transpersonal research methodology with group members and to keep abreast of knowledge production and key theoretical developments in the field as they occur.

All contributing peer debriefer observations, comments and questions that have been posed throughout the process of conducting the study have informed, influenced and updated the research process.

Guba and Lincoln define member (co-researcher) checking as “a process of testing hypotheses, data, preliminary categories and interpretation with members of the stakeholding groups from whom the original constructions were collected” (1989, p. 239). In order to increase dependability of findings, upon completion of transcribing all audio-taped interviews, a copy of each
transcription was sent to the relevant co-researcher. The intent was to ensure accuracy of reporting and transparency, and to provide co-researchers with the opportunity to provide feedback or additional comments. This process was emulated with all twenty-one co-researcher narratives.

In order to ensure additional data reliability, the study utilised triangulation techniques to obtain supplementary data from different sources including personal intuition, doodling, diagramming thoughts, ideas and reflections on an Enneagram to identify possible causal relationships, field notes and a personal reflection journal. With regard to issues of transferability the study utilised purposeful sampling to access bereaved adults who had experienced communiqué with the person/s close to them who had died. This ensured that data obtained was representative in that it captured those elements of the lived experience of bereavement and communiqué as they pertained to the topic of investigation.

Confirmability recognises that complete objectivity is not possible in social research, that all research is value-laden and that the researcher will always bring a specific interpretive lens to the research study or project. Erlandson et al., argue that this objectivity is guaranteed by methodology which is explicated, open to public scrutiny and replicable, and which insulates alternate observations from those of the researcher (1993, p. 34). However, the authors also caution that while “the dangers of bias and reactivity are great the danger of being insulated from relevant data are far greater” (1993, p. 15), a stance which indicates a beneficial impact of researcher subjectivity. The researcher’s personal life experiences have been presented in Chapter Two: Autobiographical Connections.

In order to address researcher bias during data collection, a structured interview schedule was not followed. Instead,
interview questions served as prompts. At all times the researcher was fully aware and conscious not to lead the conversation. On occasion, clarification and expansion of key terms and phrases made by co-researchers, and lines of thought, were requested by the researcher. The intent was to further identify emergent themes, the potential of which could yield richer data relevant to the topic of investigation.

In order to provide for a check on dependability, the researcher must make it possible for an external check to be conducted on the processes by which the study was conducted through the provision of an audit trail (Erlandson et al., 1993). The audit trail includes documentation which pertains and records critical incidents, interview notes, and a running account of the research process itself such as the researcher’s daily journal. This audit trail needs to be accessible to peers who “perform the role of auditor in order to determine that proper procedures are being adhered to” (Bryman, 2004, p. 275).

The study addressed dependability issues through peer debriefing. The researcher conferred on a regular basis with a senior researcher in a formal setting (monthly or as required scheduled face-to-face meetings). During these meetings, all documentation relevant to the audit trail was openly discussed and available for review and comment. The only exception to this was the transcribed interview data, which ensured the privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all co-researchers.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented and discussed the research strategy, design and methodological rationale utilised by the study. The chapter also discussed research instrumentation, recruitment of co-researchers, data collection, data analysis, validity, ethics and issues pertaining to bereavement research
have also been discussed. The following chapter, *Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings* presents the findings of the study.
Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings

*The text within the living human document*

The aim is to evoke a human presence, a freedom to enter into peaks and valleys of experience, courage to walk through darkness’s and traverse shadows of life itself. To achieve these aims, one must become internally alive, embrace one’s own perceptions and senses, and face whatever appears in one’s awareness and understanding – the imponderable and unknown regions of the self that inevitably occur in individual and communal living.

Clark Moustakas, *Being-in, being-for, being-with*, 1995, p. x
Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the study in four sections: Internal Frame of Reference, Exemplary Portraits, Illumination of Themes and Composite Depiction. Internal Frame of Reference introduces all co-researchers who participated in the study and presents their communiqué experiences. Exemplary Portraits presents Individual Depictions of four co-researchers which though unique to the individuals themselves generally characterise the experiences of the group as a whole. Illumination of Themes presents eight themes which emerged during the Illumination phase of data analysis. The themes reveal groupings and frequencies across the group as a whole distinctly representative of communiqué phenomena. Composite Depiction does not just reflect the experiences of individual co-researchers; it universally illustrates the natures and meanings which permeate the experience of the co-researchers as a collective and is presented in prose format.

Introduction

The study explores the natures and meanings of the subjective experience of communiqué. Communiqué is defined in the study as after-death encounters occurring between the bereaved individual and the person/s close to them who died, the deceased. Although bereavement is not the specific topic of investigation of the study, it provides the context in which these after-death encounters are positioned.

This chapter is sub-titled The text within the living human document. The term “text within” has been adapted from sociologist Jeanette Auger’s use of the term (2007, pp. 14-15). The term is a metaphorical one which corresponds to the interconnectedness of being with subjective experience. This subjectivity contributes toward determining the individual’s
personal epistemology, how what is known is known, and subsequently becomes the lens through which the world is viewed and understood; one’s world-view and belief-system/s. The term “the living human document” has been adapted from clinical pastoral education founder Anton Boisen (1950, p. 10). As for Auger the term is metaphorical. The living human document corresponds to the dynamic multi-layered mind-body-spirit complexity of the human system in its holistic entirety.

**Internal Frame of Reference**

The internal frame of reference of each co-researcher is the authenticated text within; the event of communiqué as experienced within the context of bereavement by the living human document, the bereaved individual. The context for communiqué as experienced by each co-researcher is presented under a separate sub-title. The name of each sub-title was decided upon by the co-researcher which for them both reflected and captured an innate quality of their experience specifically meaningful to them.

In total, twenty-one bereaved adults, seven male and fourteen female, participated in the study. Individuals came from varying cultural, social, ethnic, spiritual, religious and socio-economic contexts and ranged in age from early twenties to late sixties. Five of the twenty-one co-researchers chose a pseudonym, while the remaining sixteen wished to be known by their own name. Those close to them who had died constituted partners, spouses, parents, grand-children and grand-parents. Proximity of bereavement to interviews ranged from six months to thirty years. Of the twenty-one, nineteen individuals had been bereaved for no less than six months and no longer than fourteen months. Two had been bereaved between twenty to thirty years ago. All individuals had experienced communiqué phenomena.
Richard: Encouragement to explore

During his interview Richard spoke at length about the pre and post-mortem relationship between himself and his mother, who had died in 1994, defining their mutuality as an experience of ongoing discovery. Since his after-death encounter, Richard has organically explored the dynamics of this closely entwined emotional and psychological relationship. This exploration has become for him a symbiotic process of understanding the context and constituent elements of the relationship itself. The result has been a repositioning of himself within the relationship in accordance with revised boundaries of engagement and interaction. This inward journey extended into his consideration four years after his mother's death of whether or not to leave the Society of Jesus which he had entered when eighteen years of age.

Richard's communiqué with his mother, which constituted him seeing her visually, occurred three to four months after her death and took place during the morning as he was shaving in the bathroom. Nothing pre-heralded this event. There was no premonition, no odd feeling that something was going to happen, no unusual bodily sensations, and no dreams the night before. The communiqué was spontaneous, arose of its own volition, and occurred in a day which had begun very much like any other.

At the time Richard was not sure whether the face of his mother was an image in the shaving mirror, or whether she was in fact momentarily actually standing behind him. Irrespective, what he could discern was that his mother was smiling at him:

I was shaving. Shaving at the beginning of the day ... there's sometimes days you look forward to and sometimes days you don't. That particular starting of the day is, I think for lots of people, it's where the demons gather or the angels gather. The beginning of the day is where the thought of what's ahead can impress. And there was
just this experience of her smiling, and she didn't say these words, but it was something like, *it'll be okay*. That was the message, *it'll be okay*.

While Richard did not hear the words auditorally he had, “this sense that that was being communicated to me, *that it would be okay*, was being communicated to me” and while the communiqué was not in Richard’s words, “overwhelming” or “earth-shattering” it was nonetheless “very gentle” and “comforting”.

Richard had no doubt or lack of conviction that what had taken place between his mother and himself was real, that the individual who was present was indeed his mother, and that something meaningful had been conveyed to him through his mother’s presence. He articulated this as, “it’s really the presence, it’s not the words as such, but the presence was a benign comforting presence”.

After the communiqué which lasted only a few seconds was over, Richard finished shaving and continued on with his day. There was something of the ordinary about this encounter between Richard and his mother, something that made it feel as though it was part of life and while it was not something that he revisited on a regular basis, it was something which nonetheless occupied a special place within him. “It wasn’t something that I necessarily kept going back to ... [pause] ... but it was there, it was there.”

In response to my question of what the communication “it’ll be alright” might refer to, Richard acknowledged that while the communiqué had been of use, that it had been soothing and that he had taken strength from it, he felt that it was not particularly specific to a “condition” he was experiencing at the time. However he told me that he felt there was something over and above this experience of communiqué that appeared to be at work,
something ineffable, and something which had at its core a quality of goodness:

There’s a line from an English mystic, Julian of Norwich *All will be well, all will be well, and all manner of things will be well*. Now that is really comforting and in the context in which she says it, it’s comforting.

There’s also a line from T S Elliott. “I’m moved by fancies that are curled around these images, and cling, the notion of some infinitely gentle infinitely suffering thing.” Now I find that that’s a wonderful description of God, and I find myself quoting that and Julian of Norwich, and there’s something, there’s something good at the heart of this world that I can’t comprehend and which seems to have incredible justice and fairness which alleviates suffering. Now people might say well you’re crazy, you’re crazy to believe that but I do believe it, and I suppose if I believe it, I need to be able to believe it in the midst, in the very midst of meaninglessness, of pain, of whatever.

From the time he had entered the Society, Richard had experienced an internal conflict. Richard’s relationship with his mother was such that he had felt it his responsibility and duty to tend to her needs to the extent that he would try to anticipate what it was that she wanted. Accordingly, Richard entered the Society because he believed it was something his mother desired.

With his mother’s death came a freeing up of some of the constraints which delineated and bounded their relationship. This enabled Richard to review and reflect on particular aspects of his life up to that moment in time. Four years after her death Richard made the life-altering and difficult decision to leave the Society of which he had been a Jesuit priest for eighteen years.

While this decision was for Richard, “a form of death” and one which caused much anguish, he felt that during this difficult period he was sustained by what his mother had communicated to him four years earlier when she had come to him across death’s
divide, gently, softly, and in a non-intrusive way to offer encouragement and reassurance, *it’ll be alright.*

It was something like, it was there and I think that that’s, that presence or that experience sustained me through the process of leaving, which was a form of death because it was the same sort of thing as a divorce because your whole life is tied and has been tied to that way of being. So that disengaging is a really, is a very difficult process and so to be able to do that was not easy, it’s not easy. I mean it wasn’t easy in a sense of painful, but it was more in terms of, “this is right” and getting to the position of I knew I wanted to go. But I hadn’t shifted. I had to shift, I had to know, I had to *know* it was right.

... There’s a big difference between trust and fear. I think that that [communiqué] gave me faith, it increased my capacity for trust, trust in the right process.

**Therese: Breath of the soul**

Therese and I undertook two interviews. During our first interview Therese spoke at length about her relationship with her father who had died in 2003, describing the bond between them as, “soul like” and whom she referred to as her, “soul mate”. So deep was the love and affection between them, which had grown and strengthened from the time she was a small child, that she felt her father was a constituent of her very soul. Therese described her father as someone who was not only, “a very hard working, very honest person, he’d give you the shirt off his back if you needed it” but also as someone who was, “very religious, very spiritual, believed in doing the right thing by people”.

On the evening prior to her father’s death Therese had been overcome by a sudden sharp pain in her chest. “I remember saying to myself, there’s something happening with dad, I can feel it, I know.” Simultaneously, curtains in the room in which she was sitting moved of their own accord. Therese described this event as a “premonition” of her father’s death which occurred the
following day. This premonition had also been accompanied by additional spiritual phenomena. Two days earlier, when Therese and her mother were readying a room for guests, the light switched off by itself, with the loud “click” of the switch audible to both.

Therese’s first communiqué with her father occurred a few days after his death and took place in the bathroom. Despite the emotional numbness consuming her at the time, the communiqué evoked a feeling within her of comfort and relaxation. The gesture Therese related, the sensation of her hair being stroked, was something her father would do when she was a little girl and although she could not see him visually, she was positive as to whom it was, “yeah, yeah, yeah, I’m positive, I just, I just, it’s just a knowing, an inner knowing”:

I was in the bathroom and, of all funny places, I felt like someone was stroking my hair. Very soft and gentle, I could feel it, I could feel it. I knew something was happening, I could feel it, I wasn’t, it wasn’t me doing it to myself. And I remember looking out the bathroom window, thinking, oh this is just wonderful, I feel absolutely fantastic, like on a summer balmy day, it was just, oh, so relaxing.

Summer, wonderful, it was just great. It only lasted for a few minutes and I looked out the window and outside our bathroom window we have a small passage way and then there’s my neighbour’s fence, and there’s a humungous horrible palm tree, it’s huge. And when I looked out the window, I didn’t see that palm tree, I saw other things, I saw other trees, gorgeous looking trees. As I was looking out the window thinking, oh this just feels so wonderful, that touch, it was just fantastic. And then when this, feeling, this, what it was, stopped, I shook my head and I thought, wow. And then I looked out the window and I saw that horrible ugly-looking palm tree.

The second communiqué that occurred between Therese and her father took place in the garden, again shortly after his death.
Therese’s father had loved the garden, having spent many long and contented hours pottering around the back yard. On this particular occasion, Therese had taken the granddaughter of a family friend into the garden to play:

And we were walking down the pathway to the back of the garden, and there was no wind that day, it was relatively calm, nice and sunny, and as I was walking down the path I heard, like a footstep [clapped hands together] and dead leaves, dead … cause she heard it as well, cause the little girl was in front of me and I was behind her in case she fell or something, I was just watching her, and we both heard it because she turned and then I turned. But there was no-one there, there was nothing there. It could have been a bird, I don’t know, but we didn’t see anything.

In addition to this communiqué Therese also experienced, again shortly after her father’s death, two olfactory communiqué during which she smelt a particular scent directly associated with her father. These encounters were brief, lasting no more than one or two minutes, and when ended left no residual odour:

I woke up one morning, it was very early in the morning, four, five o’clock … and I smelt cigarette smoke. Dad was a smoker for many, many years … then he stopped. It was sickening, it was so strong it made me sick. I thought I was dreaming but when I came out of the dream, I had my eyes closed and I thought where’s the smoke coming from? I could smell it, it was right up my nose and I could taste it … I could taste it and I reckon that was my father.

And another occasion, dad, my father, used to go absolutely nuts for this particular dish. It’s onions, potatoes and capsicums, and eggplant, it’s like a stir fry, like I don’t know, ratatouille or something. Dad used to go nuts for that. And dad used to make a real mean ratatouille. I think that’s what you call it. And we always used to joke about this thing. And one morning, again, early hours of the morning, that’s what I could smell, in my bedroom.
Therese relayed another communiqué which occurred some five months after these initial experiences, and which involved both herself and her niece who had decided to stay over. Although this communiqué was a little, “unusual” Therese felt, “comforted” and was convinced that they evidenced the fact that her father was still very much a part of the family, “dad’s still with us, he’s still here, he’s still looking after us”. The circumstances which brought this about were such that Therese, her niece and her mother had all decided to sleep in the one room, and while Therese’s mother enjoyed an undisturbed night, Therese and her niece did not:

And I’d gone to bed, and I was awake, and I know she [niece] was still awake, and I felt like someone was blowing in my ear. I kept my eyes closed and I felt like someone was blowing in my ear and I thought it was my niece playing games. During the course of the night, I felt again this blowing in my ear and I thought, oh, I wish Erlinda would stop, I need to go to sleep. But she heard something during the night, cause we were all, a couple of days later, we were all telling each other this, and my niece didn’t know what I knew, and I didn’t know what she knew until that particular date.

So that night she said she heard footsteps in the corridor and she was very frightened cause they came to the door of the bedroom where we were and she was absolutely terrified. I didn’t hear them, my mum didn’t hear them, only she did. But then she didn’t get the blowing in her ear, I did. And she said the footsteps were coming out of granddads room.

But she said, she said, I heard them coming from grand-dad, granddads room, and then they stopped. And then we started thinking maybe it was dad’s soul.

Therese was reassured by these experiences stating that she had been, “deeply” and, “very symbolically” touched by them. “I know that I have some of my own there waiting for me.”
In addition to the communiqué she experienced with her father, Therese also discussed a communiqué that had occurred between herself and her uncle whom she affectionately referred to as, “the tomato in the salad”, which had taken place about a month or so after his death. At the time Therese had been alone in the family home, feeling very sad and thinking about how much she was missing her uncle. The communiqué was heralded by the sound of creaking chairs, the sense that someone was physically present, and what could only be described as, “a gush of wind, like a breeze”:

I looked up and thought, who’s here, I’m here by myself, what’s going on. And then I went like this [made a, “looking to see” movement]. From where I was sitting I could look into the family room and there was a dresser with glass in the doors ... and I looked up and I saw, I literally saw my Uncle Joe on an angle ... smiling at me like that [smiled], literally smiling at me. He was beaming, because I remember saying to myself, I hope Uncle Joe’s happy, I hope he’s happy with what we’ve done because when he died he wanted to go back home. He was getting ready to take a trip back to Italy, that was it. Then he was going to stay there and he had a little bit of money left over so we paid for the funeral expenses and we paid for his ticket to go back, because that’s what he wanted, so we did the best we could. All these thoughts. And here was my Uncle Joe smiling at me, and I thought I was, I thought I was hallucinating, I thought I was nuts.

In reflecting on the communiqué, Therese felt that the reason for Uncle Joe’s visit was, “to reassure me that he was fine, that he was okay I guess”. After her initial shock at seeing her uncle had subsided, and she had had time to come to her own understanding of the event, Therese saw the communiqué from a different perspective. “I thought, oh wow, I’ve been privileged, I’ve been privileged to see this, Uncle Joe is close by.”

During our second interview Therese spoke in detail about a, “very special” communiqué which had taken place between her
father and her eleven year old nephew. The two had shared a very close relationship prior to his death which made the communiqué, which had occurred the day after her father died all the more poignant. Therese had no doubt of the veracity of the communiqué, nor did she doubt the truthfulness of her nephew and niece in describing what had taken place, “that made it even more authentic, these kids don’t lie, these are good kids, they wouldn’t lie”:

Some time before my father died he said to me, and it was just the two of us in the room at the time, the family room. He had said that when he dies he’s going to go to my nephew, my eldest nephew, and be his guardian angel, because my father had a very strong bond with Simon, that’s my nephew.

And I have no idea whether my father actually shared this thought with my nephew or not. That particular time it was just the two of us. And this is in fact what did happen. The evening when my father died, when we left the hospital, because he died in hospital, we went to my brother’s house to pick up a few things and then to mum’s house, and the whole family slept over and in the morning when my nephew got up he was very dazed.

And he said I think I’ve just had a dream with grandad. And in the dream, grandad said to me that he had seen the gates of heaven, that he had seen his father. And then my nephew went on to describe the clothes that my father was wearing, and they were his house clothes. So we went to the wardrobe and Simon identified the clothes. Then, ah, that’s as much as I can remember him saying but it was very special because I know in my head what dad had said so that verified it to me. If I was not a believer, that would have convinced me without a question of a doubt.

And then, as he started to wake up he started to forget, and some time later when we asked him, he couldn’t remember. About maybe half an hour later, no more than that, my niece got up. She would have been nine or ten and she said the same thing, I’ve just had a dream about grandad and he was wearing these particular kinds of
clothes, which was what Simon had described … and I, looking back now I can’t remember what else she said, but something similar. So she then went to my father’s wardrobe and identified the same clothes.

**Jayne: Heart, mind and soul, memories from the evermore**

Jayne, a trained psychologist and grief specialist and Founder and Director of Clinical Services for Wombat’s Wish, a specialised community-based support service for parentally bereaved children and their families, told me her communiqué with her husband Robert occurred between three to six months after his death in 1981. She had been dreaming of him and had awoken acutely distressed, crying and in an anxious state of mind. Also realising she needed to visit the bathroom she, “made a dash for the ensuite” and as there was some urgency to the situation, did not stop or hesitate to switch on the light:

> Didn’t turn the light on, made a dash for the ensuite, um, and ran slam bam into him, and cause of his height I mean I hit his chest and um … I literally, well I did. He was physically, like I said, he was a big man, six foot six, not fat, but a big strong … and if you hit a big strong six foot six man you know you’ve stopped. And so I certainly stopped. I couldn’t get beyond, he was standing in the doorway of the ensuite.

Although Jayne was in a, “state of agitation” this unexpected meeting with her husband turned that agitation, “to joy again”. She told me that this quickly turned to despair however when she switched on the light to discover, “he was gone”. I questioned Jayne about this seeking confirmation that in her mind there was no doubt that the person she had, “run into” was indeed her husband. Her response was immediate:

> Well as I said I knew that chest fairly well, and the shoulder outline and he had a, when he played footy I think it was his left shoulder, we
called it his lumpy shoulder, he’d dislocated it playing football and there’s always that little bit of a bump on it, so that was there.

Jane saw the communiqué as, “something that happened in bereavement” and did not, “give it a great deal of spiritual significance or anything like that”. She also said that it was not an indication of her husband’s intent to, “look after me and the children like that because I guess in a sense I knew that if he could he would”.

There was an acceptance of this communiqué as being part of the normalcy of bereavement. Jayne told me that being a bereavement counsellor and psychologist herself, “lots of clients report it too, so I just thought oh well, that’s part of what it is”. Additionally, being a clinical psychologist she was familiar with references to the phenomena as they were made throughout the *DSM-IV* (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2000). “These weirdo things that happen except in bereavement is in brackets all through the DSM4 … I guess they’re called hallucinations.”

At this moment of our conversation Jayne referred back to her communiqué and told me that she, “had the sense that he was, um, he was reassuring me” and, “you know, just reminding me that he was real at some point”:

Oh just that, nothing specific I don’t think, just that it will all be, perhaps a sense that, look, I haven’t, I think actually it was probably a part of that, you know how, the disbelief that did he exist at all, like I might have been in that stage of my thinking, did he exist, was I ever married to him, when you’re losing him, you know. I think perhaps that’s what it was, he was saying, no, I was real, and I did exist and I’m, you know, you can continue on with a relationship with me even though I’m dead.
In addition to this communiqué, Jayne confided two experiences she defined as, “spooky”. The first occurred six months prior to Robert’s death and involved a client who had been referred to her by his general practitioner after informing him that he was psychic. According to Jayne, approximately forty minutes into the consultation he became agitated and told her he had to leave on account of the fact that he was, “seeing things I don’t want to see”. At the time Jayne wondered what that was and it was only some months after Robert’s death that the realisation dawned:

And it was probably some months after Robert died it suddenly hit me, my God, I wonder what that client was seeing. I wonder if he was seeing Robert’s death. And I concluded that he probably was because he became really distressed and said I can’t, and he was quite specific, he said, I can’t stay with you any longer, and I thought well that must have been what he was seeing. So that was a bit sort of, oh okay.

The second experience was particularly poignant and confirmed for her, “you know there is something other than the material concrete world that we live in”. This had occurred on the day of Robert’s death, which had found Jayne enjoying a day at the beach with her brother, her own children and her nieces and nephews:

And it was low tide. I can tell you exactly where we were on the beach, and the tide had gone out, and it was quite a cold wind blowing even though it was summer, and so we were lying in the little warm pools that had been left behind in the receding tide, you know the sun had warmed the pools and we were all lying in them and I was just lying in one of the pools and I think my niece was in the next pool, little rock pool ... And I was just lying there looking at the clouds and I didn’t see anything, um, but there was a movement from ground to up into the sky and my thought was, oh, someone’s just gone to heaven.
Jayne told me that hours later that day she had been informed of Robert’s death by the police knocking on the door. Later still, after receiving the Coroner’s report, she realised that the time of Robert’s death coincided with the timing of the incident at the beach, “probably within fifteen, twenty minutes”. In returning to the experience at the beach, Jayne reiterated:

... you know I didn’t see anything if you know what I mean, it was like an energy moved, there were no clouds moving or anything but yeah, there was an energy and something travelled through the sky.

Although Jayne knew intuitively that someone had died she had absolutely no idea that that person was in fact her husband. No sense of foreboding or fear relating to her husband’s welfare accompanied her knowing that, “someone’s just gone to heaven”. Jayne’s communiqué experiences also appear to have generated a social-activist response:

I guess it’s the scientist in me wanting to challenge the scientists ... set the cat amongst the pigeons, now come on people, we have to think about these things and um, they’re real and people report them and experience them and telling them they’re hallucinating is really quite insulting, hallucinations being a negative word ... I guess, what am I trying to say? I can’t think of the expression, raising the flag for widows, for young widows, and for bereaved people, yes, give them a voice and um, bereaved people get punished enough ... isolated and so forth, no, enough.

**John: Not the last word**

John told me that he and his wife Dawn had been together for twenty-five years and that her death had occurred in September 2007. John’s first communiqué with Dawn occurred approximately twelve months after her death and although he felt the communiqué physically, his mind had difficulty accepting what was taking place:
I was just lying in bed, and I felt a pair of arms come round and cuddle me … Yeah, and my mind was saying it’s not happening, but it was so real, I could feel her.

I questioned the veracity of the communiqué stating, “you knew it was her, without a shadow of a doubt?” to which he responded, “oh yeah”. He then told me, “you know, I could actually feel the hands around me” and to my question, “could you feel warmth or could you feel pressure?” he responded, “pressure” John told me he did not know why this had occurred, but, “was glad it did” because, “it just makes me marvel … I felt elated”.

John’s second communiqué with Dawn occurred synchronistically with the timing of a conversation he had had with a bereavement counsellor. He had been, “amazed that she brought anything like that [after-death experiences] up “because, “it’s not something that people do talk about freely”. John also told me he was, “floored” when the counsellor had told him that these experiences “happen quite often”. John, like many other individuals I have spoken with about their communiqué felt relieved, “I thought, well, I’m not going mad”. John’s second communiqué was again an experience where he felt skin-on-skin, and in response to my question, “and you felt the pressure, you actually felt her lips” he replied, “yeah”:

Yeah I … [pause] … she was lying in bed with me and she turned around and she kissed me.

Michelle: Acknowledgement of my soul-mate

Michelle and her husband Percy, married in 1988, shared twelve wonderful, creative and happy years together before his death in 1990. Percy’s after-death presence in Michelle’s life was heralded by the first of a range of communiqué phenomena which
commenced the morning following his death, and which involved a metronome that sat on top of a piano in the lounge room:

And I looked at it and I thought gee, the last time Percy used that was two weeks ago when he gave a young girl, even as sick as he was, he gave her a lesson on the saxophone. Anyway, I walked away and all of a sudden I could hear tick, tick, tick, tick, and it was the metronome. It just started ticking backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards ... anyway, I walked out the back and I just, it was like it was right next to my ear when I went down the yard it was so loud. I thought, what is wrong, what is it? So I came in and I put Percy’s cd on and it [the ticking] stopped.

Michelle had thought this particularly odd especially because the metronome could only be activated by being physically wound up, which in itself would only last a short time before having to be wound again. According to Michelle, Percy had used the metronome two weeks ago when giving a piano lesson after which he had let it wind down. In her own thoughts on the matter, she deduced, “there’s something, there’s something, Percy’s spirit? Percy’s here”.

Some months after this occurred, and distraught with grief Michelle had telephoned one of the local hospitals which serviced the area for help. She was told that as her husband had not died at the hospital she could not attend their grief group. She was offered two telephone numbers for alternate organisations. She was told by the first, “look dear, we only cater for people over seventy”. The second organisation was for parents who had experienced the death of a child. She was told, “well, we can’t help you, it’s, you know, you won’t fit in here”. In a daze Michelle found herself walking through Dee Why, a nearby suburb, when the following occurred:
All of a sudden I felt something on my shoulders, like a pressure. And I was pushed across the road, that’s how I can explain it, into this little community, like this little cottage, and it had, “community” and I didn’t know what it was, I’d never really taken that much notice, I didn’t know what went on in there, I didn’t know anything about it ... and, I went inside ... I was pushed inside, and I stood near this desk and I, and I had sunglasses on but my face was just, you know, and I just said, is there anybody I can talk too? And she said, I’ll just be a minute and she went in and she got Richard, and Richard came out and he just took me to this back office. And I sat down, and all I did was cry. I just cried, and cried, I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t do anything.

Prior to this occurring Michelle had thought she was coping reasonably well with Percy’s death, but, “all of a sudden, I don’t know, it’s just ... realisation stepped in”. After their first meeting Michelle visited a bereavement counsellor at the community centre every week until finally she was able to give verbal utterance to her grief. The counsellor, exercising great intuition and sensitivity, was able to support Michelle through this deeply painful and emotionally challenging period of her life. In time, their initial meeting led to the development of a grief group which welcomed all bereaved individuals irrespective of the nature of their loss, and which produced a small publication entitled *Love, Loss and Light* (Dee Why Community Centre, 1987).

Michelle relayed another communiqué, one which left her, “quite shaken”. She told me that on her way to the grief group she had stopped in at a local arcade in Dee Why to purchase some items, when she experienced the following:

And I was walking away and I turned around and I saw Percy ... he was over at the cigarette counter buying cigarettes. And I looked down, in shock, you know, closed my eyes, and opened them again and he was gone. And I know it was him.
Michelle shared this communiqué, as she had done the metronome experience, with her friends at the group:

And I sort of got a lot of head shaking, but you know, I mean everybody to their own [laughter]. But then when I told them I felt hands on my shoulders, or pressure on my shoulders, and being, see Percy would often come into the kitchen when I was doing the washing up, he’d play some music and he’d put his hands on my shoulders. And he’d turn me around and we’d dance [laughter] cause that’s how he was. And, and it felt like the same ...

In addition to these communiqué Michelle also experienced olfactory communiqué and while she initially thought her son might be the source, discovered quite the contrary:

Percy used to love very nice aftershave. He was, I was always commenting and I’d be sitting on the lounge and all of a sudden I’d get a whiff of it. And then I’d smell cigarette smoke and I’d blame Jesse. You’re not smoking cigarettes are you, you’re not ... he said, no mum, he said, you know how much I hate cigarettes, you know how much, I told you, cause I used to smoke as well, and he used to plead with me not to smoke, you know cause he saw how his father was, cause it had gone to his lungs in the end ... and I’d get a whiff of cigarette smoke, or I’d get a whiff of aftershave.

Michelle relayed another instance of communiqué between herself and Percy which she describes as, “the silent voice” and which she now pays close attention to:

Then, one day, when I was struggling, you know this is, when I was struggling to pay for his funeral, right, I was told by him to go and put all the numbers on, like his birthday, my mother’s birthday, the year she was born, the year he was born, on Oz Lotto. And I had it written out and I, for some reason I didn’t put it on, and you know what, all those numbers came out. So that was that, not listening to the silent voice.
When I asked Michelle how she heard Percy’s voice, she responded, “all I can explain is that it’s something that’s telling you in your mind to do something” and, “it’s not me”. I clarified that it was something that happened inside, as opposed to outside oneself, and she responded, “inside, that’s right, yes”. The next time Percy spoke to her, Michelle paid attention:

I play bingo every now and again and I go to Marrickville and this particular day, I, my car was due for rego. I didn’t have enough money, I had to get a couple of things and I felt really sure I’d be going. I thought what I’m going to be spending on bingo is not going to do anything to the car anyway, so I went ... I didn’t win but I got down to five numbers and I thought it was really weird. And I said to the woman next to me, do you think this is strange, I’m getting down to five numbers all ending in three; thirty-three, forty-three, fifty-three, sixty-three and seventy-three. And she said, yeah it is a bit weird. So I said, oh okay, so off I went. I got in my car and all of a sudden I had this silent voice again and it was sort of saying to me, go to the club and put it on Keno. So I did and I won six hundred and forty dollars.

**Lance: Memories and reflections of boyhood and beyond**

Lance experienced a number of bereavements in close proximity. His father-in-law had died in July 2007, followed by his mother-in-law exactly one month after in August 2007 which in turn was followed by the death of his mother, also in August 2007. At that time the annual Variety Club Charity Bash had just commenced, and after only participating for one day Lance flew to Queensland to attend his mother-in-law’s funeral before then travelling back home to Sydney.

Upon arriving home he received a telephone call informing him that his beloved mother Estelle had been taken to hospital after suffering a stroke. When Lance visited Estelle in hospital however, her conversation indicated not only knowledge of her imminent death, but provided strict instructions for what she wanted to follow after that occurred:
Don’t let anyone ever tell you that Jesus doesn’t exist, because last night he nearly took me right up to where the light is. But he sent me back … now, he’s told me to tell you something. You’re going back on the Bash aren’t you? And I went, yeah I am actually, I’ll be back there in a couple of days. She said, okay. Now when you go back on the Bash I’ll go. What, you’ll go back to the nursing home? She said, no, no, I’ll go. He’s going to take me while you’re away doing the wonderful things that you do with the kids, and that’s what he’s telling me, I got a message for you, and don’t you laugh at me, and you do as I say. I went, yeah, right oh Mum. She said, no, be serious. I said, okay, what have I got to do?

She said right, he’s telling me he’ll probably take me in about three days. I said, oh he’s told you this. She said yeah, he’s told me. But, now when he takes me … [pause] … she said, don’t you come home. She said, he knows that you’re very, very good at organising things. I said yeah, right. And she said, he’s going to put you to the test, because he knows where you’ll be when he takes me. I am going to be okay.

She said, now, what you’ve got to do is organise, and this is my mum, when I go you just put me in the fridge until you get back. I said, is that right? She said, yep, you just put me in the fridge till you return from the good work you’re doing for the kids and you know where I’ve got to go. And I did, she’s with her mother, I’ve always known that.

Heeding his mother’s instructions Lance reunited with his fellow Bashers and exactly as his mother had foretold was informed of her death three days later while at Winton in far North Queensland. In accordance with his mother’s instructions, Lance completed the Bash and then returned home to organise his mother’s funeral, which is when, “the events that took place with me all happened the day that I was burying mum”.

Lance told me that during the funeral service he “couldn’t even fathom what he [priest] was saying because I was talking to mum”. The days leading up to the service, and the day of the service itself had been wet. Her voice, which Lance hears “in the
“back of my head” told him quite clearly, “I don’t want anyone at the burial, it’s too muddy, so when we leave here go back to your place and party”. Which is exactly what everyone did. “We had a great afternoon.”

Lance told me that approximately six months prior to his mother’s death her brother had died, a fact she was still unaware of at the time of her own death, but, “she’s with him now, I know that”. Lance describes his communiqué as “visits” which occur “on average now, every fortnight”. His mother is, “normally with me for two to four hours” occasions which are both exhausting and draining. More than once he has told her, “let me go to sleep”. During these visits, she speaks and Lance types their conversation on his laptop.

I was very aware during our time together of Lance’s intent to be completely honest, it was as though he sincerely wanted to tell the truth and that the interview was perhaps an opportunity for him to do just that. I mentioned this and he replied in response, “what you said then, about being very honest has only come into my life since mum passed away”. Lance told me then in more detail about his double-life as a sex-aholic and a love-aholic. He had sought assistance for this on a number of occasions from a psychologist. This had not been successful. “The help never helped it, and if it did it only lasted a week.” He also told me what it was that did help, his mum:

When mum was in the coffin she’s talking to me. And she said, right, listen to me now. Now is the time to do something for the good of your family. And her words were, act on it, stop hurting your family, be honest with yourself, be truthful to those that are around you ... two weeks later my wife actually sat up in bed, three o’clock in the morning, and woke me up, and she said, are you having another affair? And I said, yeah I am. But I didn’t consider it an affair. And she said, okay what are you going to do about it this time? And I said, Colleen, I’ve got to go. I’ve got to go.
Lance made a number of dramatic life changes including ending his twenty-year marriage, becoming debt-free, and living honestly for the first time in years. Lance also commenced a new relationship which has brought with it a deep contentment and an abiding love with his new partner who he describes as “my angel”. He told me, “she’s the only person I have ever been able to be totally honest and open with in regards to anything, absolutely anything”.

I asked Lance if his mother ever asked him to do things with regard to his family. “Oh yeah, yeah” so much so that the family while “originally they thought, yeah right, now they listen to me” as illustrated by the following:

Mum came to me with this frail woman, and said, tell Michelle she’s okay. And I could visualise this woman. Frail, grey cardigan, lemon-coloured top, big knitting needles and a big old armchair, you know, the big old heavy cloth lounges?

It appeared that the message was for Michelle, Lance’s “angel” however after discussing the communiqué and describing the woman Michelle’s response was that a mistake had been made as the description did not fit anyone she knew. Mum revisited, correcting while she did so the mistake from “Michelle” to “Narelle”. Lance immediately sent a text message to Narelle (a cousin), “mum’s with Tom’s mother, [and I still don’t know her name], mum’s with Tom’s mother I’ll ring later”:

So I rang Narelle the next morning and she said, I’ve told Tom that Aunty Stell’s with his mum. He doesn’t believe me. I said put him on the phone. So Tom got on the phone, and I said, mate, I’ve never met your mum. I’m going to tell you what mum showed me. Big old lounge chair, and he went, you’re kidding, big knitting needles, grey cardigan, lemon top. He was crying on the phone. He said Lance, that’s my mum. I said mate, she’s okay. Mum is telling me to tell you
she’s okay. And this was like three days after she passed. He said, mate, are you kidding me? I said Tom, she’s all right. She’s okay.

Lance told me that as a result of his visits from his mother, he has been writing a book about his life experiences and in particular his after-death communications. I asked what might the purpose of such an endeavour be. His response was immediate. “To help me see the kind of person that I was and maybe what I’ve turned into now.” Lance was also very clear regarding the impact on his life of these visits. “Before mum passed I was leading a double-life where, and it’s true, you lie once and you have to have four to cover the first one”. But things are different now. Lance listened to his mother’s post-mortem advice and made enormous changes in his life. As a result, “I’m very, you know what, now I’m at ease with myself”.

Jennifer: Grace revealed

Jennifer had had a warm and loving relationship with her grandmother from the time she was a child, describing her as a “safe harbour”. Their relationship became richer and more fulfilling as the years passed, to the point where although they both lived in different states Jennifer would take any opportunity to visit. In March 2008 at the age of ninety-two, Jennifer’s beloved grandmother died in her arms. “We said everything that needed to be said.”

From that time however, rather than their relationship diminishing it has been even more enriched because of “messages” her grandmother sends through a variety of means. Jennifer told me that communiqué between her and her grandmother began “a few months after nan’s passing”. Jennifer’s first birthday without her grandmother was a difficult time for her professionally and emotionally, “so I go to bed sobbing my eyes out”. From that moment in time however “is
when it all really started”. Jennifer felt her grandmother had “given me a talking to in my sleep” and told me that she had woken the next morning determined to take charge of her professional life:

I woke up and the messages were that if I want to be happy I’ve got to be true to myself, that my self is actually more than enough to parlay into success, ah, that I’ve got stuff that other people want and can pay and that I’m smart enough to leverage that and I’ve watched a million idiots take credit for my ideas and run with them and dah, dah, dah, dah and it was like this key message in my head was, I told you, you’re a clever girl, what are you doing? I was going to start my own company, make money for myself, not other people.

A host of interconnecting synchronicities followed, many involving her grandmother’s name, which ranged from securing legal advice and finance, obtaining office furniture and locating the perfect office space for her new business. Jennifer had told me that her grandmother was “very resourceful” in always finding “creative” ways to communicate with her, one of which was through Jennifer’s godchild, Sara. For example, just prior to seeking legal advice with regard to the establishment of her company, Jennifer told me, “I have doubts that night, and I’m thinking you know, can I really do it, do I want to be taking this huge responsibility on”.

On the morning of her meeting with the lawyer, a very special communiqué took place. Jennifer found that Sara had placed a card from the Mr Men series of children’s books in her letterbox, which for Jennifer was particularly significant:

And, it was Mr Clever, and she’d taken a highlighter and highlighted the words on it that were smart, clever, um, I can’t even remember. I meant to actually put it in my pocket and bring it and show you. And she’d circled all these words and it was waiting in the letterbox for me
as I was on my way to the meeting with the lawyer as I say, having doubts.

And to me as I say, like nanna wants to tell me, no, you're smart, you can do it, you can do it, you're smart. And it did say you know, smart, clever, it was Mr Clever, like I say, I can't remember all the other words but whatever words ... and she'd actually highlighted all the words and written Sara on it.

Jennifer had told me that when her grandmother was dying she had said to her mother who was also present, “Jennifer’s a really clever girl”. In reflecting on her grandmother’s words and on the card from Sara, Jennifer’s doubt concerning her new venture vanished. In its place was the reassurance that her decision to move in this direction was the right one.

At one point, Jennifer questioned herself with regard to the communiqué she was experiencing. Was what was taking place perhaps no more than a kind of wishful thinking? Was she reading more into this than what was there? What was really going on?:

... and I’m thinking to myself, as they’re taking my stuff in, I’m questioning whether I’m going mad, whether I’m just looking for signs everywhere and finding them because I need them so much to give me confirmation that nanna lives on [voice breaking] in spirit, that she is still with me, that I will see her again on the other side, whatever, that she did make it to heaven, that she’s happy, that she’s not in purgatory.

These questions were occupying her thoughts as she supervised removalists who were moving furniture into her newly acquired office space. Jennifer told me that as the last item was being removed “a holy card drops out of the van onto the ground at my feet”. This was deeply symbolic for Jennifer, especially as her grandmother had been a devout Catholic, frequently praying
to St Jude for Jennifer's welfare and wellbeing. The card had fallen at her feet at the precise moment that she had been thinking the very thoughts. “As I think the thought it falls at my feet.” Although she could not recall exactly what the psalm on the card was, “it was something like; he who believes in me will have eternal life”. She knew irrevocably that she had received confirmation that the communiqué taking place between herself and her grandmother was not beyond the realm of possibility.

**Gary: Safely home**

Gary had had two experiences of communiqué, both of which involved his wife Yvonne. The first occurred in December 1983, while the second followed twenty-four years later in December 2007. As I listened to Gary’s life with Yvonne unfold before me, it became apparent that their relationship has been one of mutual love, tenderness, respect and devotion:

I could feel her in the bed for five years. But I don't now. I don't feel her in the bed. But I do make the sign of the cross on her forehead every day. So it's beautiful, everything's beautiful. I'm going to be seeing her, right, and whatever I, whatever I'm meant to suffer, if that's what's meant for my departure ... Michele, she's like a beacon to me, she suffered a terrible agony on earth …

Gary told me his first communiqué with Yvonne occurred a few months after her death. He had taken a trip to Ireland, something they had both always wanted to do as they have family connections there. However this was a trip Gary was making alone, or so he thought. Gary had hired a car and was driving from Galway to Cavan, the County of his grandfather’s birth, when he experienced his first communiqué with Yvonne:

So driving between Galway and Cavan I felt her presence in the motor car and I smelt her Estee Lauder Youth Dew perfume. She didn’t
speak, I didn't see her, I just knew she was there, I just felt her and there was a buzz in the air in the car like electricity or something.

Although Gary could not physically see Yvonne nor hear her voice, her presence had somehow charged the atmosphere, “yes, it was like a TV that suddenly goes off station and goes zzzzzzz, you know, it just felt like that”. Gary told me the communiqué was brief, lasting thirty to forty seconds at most and although completely unexpected, did not cause him, “to run off the road”. However when he returned home from his travels, “I went straight to see my General Practitioner and said what do you think about this? [he responded] It’s not unusual, this does happen to people”.

Gary’s second communiqué with Yvonne occurred twenty-two years later, in December 2007. Gary had travelled to Stradbroke Island to attend the wedding of one of Yvonne’s nieces. The following day he left, planning to travel through to Brisbane and on to Moree to visit with Yvonne’s mother the day after. It was while he was driving to Moree that Gary experienced his second communiqué with Yvonne:

And she came again, it came again. I got the same pixilating feeling, zzzzzzzz, this buzz, I didn’t, she didn’t speak, I didn’t see her, the sun didn’t dance, the earth didn’t shake, I just felt her again, strongly. Just so strong it was unmistakeable. And that on top of it, like twenty-two years ago, it was exactly the same [emphasised words] feeling.

Gary told me that he believed the communiqué which occurred in 1985 and 2007 were “affirmations” from Yvonne to him that “we’ll be seeing each other, I’m waiting for you, I’m here, I’m real”. Knowing Yvonne was there waiting was enormously reassuring for Gary, and although the communiqué “was a real
shock” told me, “I’m just so comfortable with it, I’m so comfortable with her, with her being there for me”.

Yvonne’s second communiqué saw him again scheduling an appointment with his General Practitioner, who according to Gary was accepting and open to his experience:

He asked me quite a number of things like you are right, how I felt, but in the finish he accepted what happened and he more or less congratulated me that I was fortunate to have experienced it. But he said there are people Gary, that have the facility to go beyond what normal people, like what you’ve explained Michele. He said there are people that can do that. He said some to a lesser or greater degree than others. He wasn’t a disbeliever; he’s a believer Doctor Bob.

Gary knew beyond all doubt that Yvonne’s coming to him in this way was “an affirmation of love from my wife”. I had the impression that Gary was excited and looking forward to the prospect of meeting Yvonne again, to which he replied “yes, yes, yes, yes!” Gary told me that he thanks God for his “beautiful fortunate life” and that the beautiful part of it was “twenty-five years with Yvonne”. Despite Gary’s present circumstances, he gains hope in knowing that Yvonne is waiting for him to come home to her:

So I’ve got minor life expectations and I’m content with my life as it is and the career that I’ve had and the associations and the relationships I’ve had … There’s a sureness now that Yvonne will meet me at the gate, so to speak, so that’s where I’m at … Some days are diamonds, … but most days are stone really. I’m not on a high the whole time. I’m not, you know, I’m not presenting you with, “I’m so focused and contented” and marching off, you know … It’s more down than up a lot of the time and I feel lonely a lot of the time … and that’s to keep me going, to keep me going till my time, whenever that is, comes, and I feel stronger about my time coming now. Stronger about my time coming now, because nobody looks forward to death, none of us, I
mean life's precious for everybody. So I think she's sort of saying to me, look it's okay, I'll be here, I'll be at the gate when you get here.

**James: Crossing distances- rationality beyond rationality**

James's experienced communiqué with his maternal and paternal grandmothers, both of whom had died in 2007 and 2005 respectively.

James spoke first about his paternal grandmother, describing her as a woman “ahead of her generation”. Holding a PhD in Education, she was a highly respected academic within her university in the Philippines and had been a formative influence on James’s intellectual and academic development. “She always instilled in me the desire to learn more and she inspired me to make sure that I put the right effort into my studies to do well.”

James’s maternal grandmother also holds a very special place in his heart. Describing her as a “very spiritual person” who was a devout Catholic, she had cared for James and his mother during the early years of his parent’s marriage. It was during this period that “she instilled in us that faith” which James has lived all his life. In addition to caring for her family, she also supported the community, “she’s a very selfless person, and she would go out to rural areas to help out the poor”.

James’s first communiqué with his paternal grandmother took place after her death which had occurred in the Philippines. James had visited his family a few months prior to her death, and due to financial constraints had decided not to return to the Philippines to attend his grandmother’s funeral. However, on this particular evening he had been woken from sleep by his grandmother who not only knew of his decision, she wanted him to change it:
And so she passed away and that evening when I was sleeping she was just there standing and so I was saying, well why are you here, not in a physical way but just saying it in my mind ... yeah. So, why are you here? And she said, well because you don’t have plans of coming home to attend my funeral.

James did not acquiesce to his grandmother’s wish at that time, telling her instead that he would “think about it”. The following day however, he was overwhelmed with sadness and grief and so decided to return home to attend the funeral. Since that time James’s communiqué with his grandmother has consisted of dream engagements, with the messages he has received “normally around she’s been encouraging to study”.

James’s communiqué with his maternal grandmother have been “more recurring and its very specific”. James and his family had visited his grandmother in the United States in January 2007, who at the time was enjoying good health. Notwithstanding that, James told me that he had had a “feeling” that he would not see his grandmother alive in the flesh again. “I saw her with my grandfather in the background and the sunset was there and when she waved her hand I knew that it was the last time I would see her alive. I knew.”

In the following July, just six months after his visit, James’s beloved grandmother suffered a stroke. He told me he “already knew when she fell ill that she was going to pass away” because he could “hear her thoughts”:

She would be calling out to everyone in the family because she was in a coma. She would be calling out to everyone in the family. It’s almost like I could hear what was going on in her mind and I lost sleep that whole week. And everyone else was still hoping that she would get better but I knew and I told my mum, mum she’s going to pass away, and I know, I can tell because I could hear her thoughts every day. So she passed away.
After her death, James’s grandmother would visit him in his dreams. These were both opportunities for her to convey messages to him and for James to talk with her. “She would appear and she would tell me things, I would talk to her, why did you leave, why did you suddenly leave, what do I do now, what do we do now?” One dream however, was particularly significant:

So what happened was I went to this place. It was a huge house and there was a smaller house. Going to the big house I had to pass through the smaller house and in the small house I saw my aunties and uncles who had passed away and they were just cleaning up the place and working. So I then walked to the main house and then when I rang the bell she opened the door, my grandmother opened the door.

I was surprised to find her. I said, hi it’s good that you’re here, and we started catching up. I asked her how she was and she said, oh I’m quite happy here, I’m actually preparing this house for everyone to stay in some day. I said, oh okay that’s good, so who’s joining you soon? And she said, well your grandfather will follow quite soon. But he’s still alive, okay, he’s still alive now. But this was just in probably April/May this year.

And I said, oh really that soon? Yeah it’s quite soon, it’s not going to be far off but you know he’ll join me here, and I said, yeah but your other kids who are, I don’t know, who have passed away before you are cleaning the house over there, why is that the case? And she said, oh they’re not yet ready to join me, they’re not yet ready to join, they’re still going through something. They need to clean some things up.

And I said, that’s strange, and so I said, will I be able to join you? And she said, well yes but these are the things that you need to do. So she said, you may have to make sure that your, you have two sisters, because they are both divorced, will have their lives fixed, and once you’ve done that you’re ready to go.
James had asked his grandmother how she was. Her response, “I’m very happy and fulfilled here, you don’t have to worry about me, tell everyone I’m fine” was one that filled James with a sense of quiet awe:

And it’s almost like she’s consumed with the sense of love that is beyond words and she can just radiate it, like radiate to everyone else but it’s almost like it fills her being.

**Mayumi: A meeting of two worlds**

Mayumi experienced varying communiqué with her husband Patrick, who died in 2003. Her first communiqué experience, which commenced shortly after his death, manifested as an ongoing sense-of-presence in the family home. This was followed by additional communiqué experiences which continued after she had sold the family home and relocated. Patrick’s presence was palpable to the degree that Mayumi would bid him farewell as she left the house, and would greet him on her return:

Because before that for about three or four times every time I go to work I say, I’m going, because I knew he was there. I said, I’m going, and then coming home I’d say, I’m home, and I think my son thought, mum, you’re going, “woo”. I said, maybe I am.

After she sold up and moved in 2004, Mayumi began to experience additional communiqué in the form of engagement dreams and olfactory experiences, not just with Patrick but also with her mother who had died over forty years ago.

Mayumi told me she experienced a series of what she described as dreams with Patrick, which it seemed had not only left her feeling initially confused but questioning exactly what was real and what was not. She had mentioned that prior to these experiences, and one in particular which occurred at the
moment of Patrick’s death, she had “never experienced it, the spirit itself, before, until this happened”:

And the dreams that I had was not a dream, it was like am I awake? I know what the dream is, all fuzzy and all that sort of thing but sometimes you feel, gosh was it him, he was here talking to me or somebody is sitting at the corner, or touching me, and I thought, I must be drunk. So I go to sleep.

Not long after Mayumi moved into her new home she experienced another communiqué with Patrick. While sleeping she had been roused by the sound of her neighbour’s dogs barking. In a somewhat disorientated half-asleep half-awake state she told me “I saw my husband come through the wall”:

Like he just came through stopping the dog. Like my dog was, I said, is that Elsa barking, that’s very strange I said to myself, and then he was behind grabbing the dog. My dog died long before my husband and he was just pulling the dog back to wherever. It was sort of nondescript. I thought he came through the wall. And then I thought, oh, that’s very strange, and then he got me, he grabbed my hand really tightly and pulling and I thought, I’m not coming, and there was that and I woke up.

I asked Mayumi where she thought Patrick wanted to take her. While she was unable to clarify this, she felt that it might have had to do with the fact that in life Patrick had been very close to her, “very protective”, and that this was an expression of his personality in not wanting to be away from her. She also told me that in her early bereavement “he’s actually calling me” however, “I am one of those very rebellious trait in myself. I said how dare you, I’m not coming, you just go”.

It seemed that these dreams had a certain quality about them which made her feel that they were not dreams in the usual sense of the word. Although Mayumi agreed, she could not really
say what they were, other than what they were not. “I don’t know, I really don’t know but I know it wasn’t a dream.”

In addition to her dream engagements, Mayumi also experienced olfactory communiqué involving both Patrick and her mother:

Months and months later you get rid of everything and still sometimes a whiff of aftershave.

And after she [mother] passed away my father sent me a lot of handkerchiefs, handkerchief after handkerchief because we carry handkerchiefs in Japan. So it’s been washed and used and some have got lost, my daughter took some, whatever. And I opened my drawer and there was one handkerchief, a little handkerchief. It had a lot of other stuff in it and I thought, I can smell my mother, and then I thought, oh no, it can’t be, it’s been washed, it’s been used, it’s been washed so many times, but for one second I just felt …

Despite these occurrences, particularly the communiqué with her mother, Mayumi discounted the experience. “Oh no, no way, this is no good, I think this is playing up in your mind.” Although it seemed that Mayumi was somewhat ambivalent about her communiqué, during our conversation she experienced a personal insight. I had said that not everyone who has been bereaved experiences communiqué. She disagreed:

I think they do but they don’t recognise it. That’s what my feeling is. You know what, that’s quite interesting because I haven’t thought about it like that. In fact that’s very interesting because people will often dismiss things, they’ll say, oh that’s just my imagination or me imagining things. I did too. But I thought maybe it has to be a dream … I think in my case it’s not a dream, it wasn’t a dream.

I asked Mayumi how she distinguished between something that was and was not a dream:
Your dreams, even a bad dream, a good dream, it’s sort of fuzzy and all that sort of thing but maybe you’re talking but nobody else is talking in the dream or maybe one person says something and always distinctive one colour, others are all hazy but there’s no beginning or ending, it just suddenly, it’s not like a series of you’re starting opening a door and then he was there, type of thing … and I go, hang on a minute, why is he here? And I start analysing the dream. No wonder I wake up today and I go, no, he was here …

With regard to understanding her communiqué, Mayumi reflected:

Well a lot of things you cannot explain and it’s not black and white but I am a black and white person. I don’t like middle. I’m either extreme right or extreme left, I don’t like wishy washy. So I’ll say, so what, yes or no, tell me yes or no. And then things happen that you can’t actually put it down as a yes and no … so I thought, maybe I should just leave it alone, I shouldn’t actually find out yes or no in this case, just take it as it is.

**Jill: From the worst time of my life – new hope, new perspectives**

The death of Jill’s husband Bob occurred in 2007. Her communiqué experiences occurred some months later at a time when she was struggling to come to terms with his absence from her life. She described her relationship with Bob, whom she had met fourteen years ago as “very special” and “one in a million”. She told me they had waited a long time to find one another and that with Bob, “I learnt what love was really like”.

Jill’s dream engagement communiqué with Bob occurred at a time when, “in my grief I felt so alone and lost and it was like, well part of me had died as well”. She was also wondering where Bob was. Their wrenching apart from one another by death had separated two people who according to Jill were “like two peas in a pod”. She told me that she “figured that people’s souls go somewhere” and that Bob “was around” but she had not “felt that
he was around anywhere”. She also thought that maybe she was imagining “this sort of thing” and wondered “maybe when people die then there is no more”.

Jill told me that she had initially thought her communiqué was a dream, “well what I thought at the time was a dream”. However, the more she thought about it the more un-dreamlike the dream became:

This particular night I had finally gone to sleep and when I woke up in the morning I remembered this dream as if it was in front of me. I could see a stairway and at the top of the stairway was a door, the door was open and a light was shining in the doorway, Bob was sitting on a chair in the doorway, He was just as he was before he was sick. He was even wearing his favourite shorts, blue-grey that he used to wear to the beach most days. He was tanned and healthy again. I couldn’t believe it. He told me that he was ok, everything was ok, that it wasn’t my time and that when it was my time he would be waiting for me.

Jill told me that after this experience she felt “more confident in that I felt that I knew his presence was around”. While her communiqué conveyed that Bob “is okay, he’s on the other side, and he’s well and happy and back to his old self and not in any pain” it also brought with it a deep reassurance with regard to something else:

It felt like he was saying, alright, you can do this, you can get through this. It will be hard but it’s not time for you to be here yet and when it is your time, I’ll be here waiting for you. It will take time but you can do it. I felt that I could see a way out of the dark hole that I was in ... I think he came because he knew that I needed him ...

Before the dream I couldn’t see any way to move forward. I couldn’t see my life without Bob and I didn’t want a life without Bob. I could have willingly curled up into a little ball, into a hole and wished that I was wherever he was. So I think in a way it was saying to me that you can do this, it won’t be easy but you will get through this. It’s not your
time, we have things to do together. Things we didn’t get to do before.
It will be different but he will be there with me.

Jill told me she had never experienced anything like this before, “only vague feelings of déjà vous” and that she would probably classify it as something that was “paranormal”. In seeking further clarification I asked, “So when you’re saying ‘is that a dream’ are you saying that because it was so real, that it was like an actual encounter, or, that it was a dream and something fanciful?” Jill told me that if it had been fanciful “then I wouldn’t be able to see it so clearly now ... and I thought, I can actually see him and it is real”. Despite this a tinge of doubt remained, which was soon put to rest.

According to Jill, Bob had looked like he had in a photo taken some years earlier, which is why she initially thought “it might have been wishful thinking”. However, she realised that she had not been looking at any photos “until some time after the dream”. Additionally, “when I looked at the photo he wasn’t sitting the same way as the photo, the dream was different, he was in the light, sitting on a chair”.

Jill told me that prior to this experience she had “never actually thought about death that much before”. However she now believes that the physical body “is an instrument but your spirit or your essence is around and it goes to the other side or another place and that you actually can watch over people ... and every now and then you can come back just to let those you left behind know that you are still around”. Jill also told me that these feelings have made her feel unafraid of dying or death. I queried, “because in a sense death is a continuation of life?” to which she responded “yes”. Although difficult without Bob, Jill told me that her life “is more positive now” and that life “is to be
lived and you should go with your intuition”. However, “I’d turn it all around to have Bob back”.

**Bob: Sammie’s story**

Bob’s first communiqué experience with his granddaughter Sammie occurred on the evening of her death. Following this, Bob experienced varying communiqué phenomena, as did a number of other members of Sammie’s immediate family, including her mother and paternal grandfather. The relationship between Bob and Sammie was exceptionally close, and had been since she was a young child. Following the breakdown of her parent’s marriage, Bob, in addition to being Sammie’s grandfather, had taken on much more of a fatherly role in his young granddaughter’s life which continued into her adulthood. He told me, “no I wasn’t grandpa in the traditional sense, I always finished up in a more personal relationship”.

Bob told me that on the morning of Sammie’s death, around eleven o’clock, he had had “a funny feeling, something was going to happen” and though at the time had felt compelled to telephone her, had desisted:

It was a foreboding, it was as if I was being told in my mind by someone to ring Samantha now [emphasised word]. As I say, knowing military discipline, knowing the protocols and that sort of thing, my instinct and training said I can’t do it.

That same afternoon around three-thirty another “funny feeling” came to Bob. He felt that Sammie was on her way home and was hurrying. This was accompanied by him suddenly and unexpectedly hearing her voice call out, “grandpa”. There was something about her voice which conveyed “a sense of urgency, a sense of foreboding, a sense of something’s about to happen”. Half an hour later Sammie’s mother telephoned, informing Bob
that she had been involved in a serious accident and was critically injured. Three quarters of an hour later the worst telephone call of all came; Sammie had apparently died instantly in the accident.

It was that same evening, when Bob found himself weeping alone on the veranda that the first of Sammie’s communiqué with her family occurred:

And I was outside having a bit of a weep, I had the wine, and on our back veranda, like a back patio, and I was standing there at the left-hand end and I was standing with my hand on my hip and I was like that, and I was having a weep. And Sammie stood beside me, put her arm through mine and said, it’s alright grandpa, it’s alright grandpa. And I turned around and she disappeared. I remember I had another mouthful of wine and thought, I’m dreaming. I wasn’t dreaming.

In conjunction with communicating with Bob, Sammie also communicated with her German grandfather by her mother’s first marriage who according to Bob “had an almost identical experience”. The one difference in the communiqué was that rather than speaking the word, “grandpa” she had spoken, “uppa” the German word for “grandfather” which is how she referred to him when living.

On the evening prior to Sammie’s funeral service, while Bob was staying with Sammie’s mother in a small granny flat adjacent to the family home, he experienced another communiqué. His attempts at sleep had been disturbed by the sound of voices, “one was a woman and there was a man”. However when he opened the door to investigate nobody could be seen and the voices stopped. After returning inside he was disturbed again. “It was Sammie’s voice saying, grandpa leave the lights on in the workshop so I can find my way home at night.”
The same events occurred the following night, which ceased after he spoke out loud, “it’s alright Sammie”. I asked Bob to whom he thought the male voice belonged. His response “God”, was something he elaborated on more fully during our conversation. In her grief Sammie’s mother Jan had railed at God, “why did it have to be Sammie?”:

And this voice said to her, she’s alright. It was a quiet male voice that said, she’s alright, she knew she was going to die. Jan said did she know she was going to die? And the voice said, yes. Did she have any pain? No. Why? I don’t know what the answer to that one was ... but obviously there was some other conversation and it was a male voice. And she said to me afterwards, um ... [pause] ... it was weird, I felt reassured, [she said] it’s not often you talk to God.

Bob told me that Jan had said “it was very, very clear” and that the voice had spoken to her “kindly” and in a way that was “comforting”:

But she said look, the, she said, I was told, I was talking. She said I was talking to God and He was telling me, and it’s alright. She’s happy, she’s safe, she didn’t suffer any pain, she knew she was going to die ...

**Trudie: Mum and me**

Trudie experienced her first communiqué a few days after the death of her mother, which occurred in 2007. In addition to Trudie experiencing her own after-death encounters with her mother, both her sister and her son also experienced communiqué with their mother/grandmother.

Trudie’s communiqué with her mother began “a few days after she’d gone” and first manifested in Trudie feeling that her mother was guiding her. The circumstances were such that Trudie and her father and sister were deciding on whom to telephone regarding their mother’s death, a task which Trudie
described as not only “harrowing” but “horrific”. However, with her mother’s assistance this emotionally painful and very difficult task was able to be borne:

Because you go through the address book and I said to dad, well Mr and Mrs so and so, and he goes, well we haven’t spoken to them for ages or haven’t been in contact with them. I said, would mum want them there? And he said, I suppose. And you kind of got this feeling of whether she would or she wouldn’t, I don’t know. It was almost like she was sort of guiding us and like she was giving us some kind of inner strength to, and the way that the whole thing then was done with the service and everything else it was how she, you felt like she was happy that day. She was dead and obviously she was being cremated that day, but she was happy that day.

Trudie’s sister also experienced the same communiqué which Trudie summarised as “it was very clear, both my sister and I felt it was very clear she was giving some sort of direction to say, no, I wouldn’t like that”.

In July 2008 Trudie revisited the family home in England. It was her first visit back since returning home from her mother’s funeral the prior October in 2007. Upon entering the house Trudie felt what could only be described as “a weight landing on me, it was like a heaviness, like, she’s here”. This knowing pre-heralded the first of Trudie’s communiqué at that time, which initially occurred when she was by herself unpacking in the upstairs spare bedroom:

Anyway I was upstairs, and it was only me upstairs, and it was, I didn’t, it was like she went past, like she was either going to the bathroom or she was going downstairs but she didn’t say anything. And I thought, that’s really weird, and it was like I had forgotten she’d died and I thought, that’s really odd, mum always stops and has a chat, and I felt really, like, weird.

... every time I was up in that room by myself she would be there, she wouldn’t say anything but it’s the beginning. When I was first
there she didn’t say anything. I felt she was there, she was on the landing ...

In addition to Trudie experiencing communiqués with her mother, her son who was also visiting the family home at the time did as well. This came to light during a conversation on another matter during which he had told his mother “nan’s in the house mum”. Voicing her surprise she had asked “do you feel that?” to which her son had responded, “she’s on the landing”.

As well as feeling his grandmother’s presence on the landing, her son had also felt her presence in the kitchen, “with the big tin”. Trudie told me that her mother had had a tradition which entailed her making a special cake for her sons which was always given to the boys on their leaving:

And he said, I walked into the kitchen and I thought she would be there with the cake tin and then when I got to the kitchen she wasn’t there with the cake tin. But he said, I felt that she was saying, “come downstairs boys I’ve made a cake”. Because quite often she’d say, do you want some cake, because she always liked feeding them.

The impact of this communiqué was different for both Trudie and her son. While her son described the encounters as “really spooky” and that while in the house he had felt “really spooked” Trudie felt comforted in that her mother “was there the whole time, helping me out”. In addition to their grief, Trudie and her family were coping with what was another very challenging family situation. Throughout this period Trudie had the “overpowering feeling” that though the situation was a difficult one, her mother was saying “don’t fall out with your father, just please don’t”.

I asked Trudie if she felt that this might be the impetus for her mother’s communiqué at this time. Her response was definite, “yeah, she was helping me get through that stage”.

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During this period, confused and with a sense of almost desperate despair, Trudie had visited her mother’s gravesite where in acknowledgement of her emotional distress her mother responded:

It was like, I just said, what am I supposed to do, I don’t know what to do, I don’t know what to say, I don’t know what to think, I don’t understand, I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing. And she just said, look it’s okay, you’re not meant to understand it but it’s okay.

Trudie made an interesting distinction concerning the locale and the nature of the communiqué which had taken place between her mother and herself:

I felt she was listening to what I had to say when I went there [cemetery], but at the house she was there. She wasn’t at the cemetery. She was at the house, but when I was at the cemetery and I was just talking because I was by myself and it was like, what on earth am I going to do about this, and she was answering by saying things will be okay but just don’t have an argument with him. At the house she was there, she was there all the time.

I said to Trudie that it seemed to me that her relationship with her mother had certainly changed post-mortem, that somehow it had become richer, more meaningful, and that there was an intent and purpose to the communiqué which occurred between herself and her mother:

I think she knows that I’ve got quite a lot of angst over my father especially, and I think because I’m a long way away, that makes it even harder to communicate and I think she’s saying, I’m going to be your protector, like I’m going to be your angel on your shoulder if you like. I think that’s what she’s doing, I think she is saying, look I’ve been so sick for so long and you were living such a long way away there wasn’t much I could do to ever be there for you but now I can and it won’t be in the sense of what you would consider normal, in the
paranormal then if you like. I think she’s trying desperately hard to get
a message across to me, that I need to know she’s there, and it’s not
something that I would have thought of before.

While acknowledging that her communiqué had made her think “there’s more going on than perhaps is within my power of knowledge” Trudie realised that, “just because they physically
died it doesn’t mean to say that they’re not present in any other
way”. Because a number of other co-researchers had felt they
had been guided in becoming involved with the study, and had
indeed seemingly chanced across the advertisement in ways
which could only be described as coincidental I asked Trudie
whether or not she felt that her mother may have had a hand in
her coming across the advertisement for the study:

Look it was weird ... I remember that particular day picking up the
freebie papers and going through it and then I was kind of, what does
that say, bereavement and something, and I read it again and I
thought I really do need to phone, I think I’ve got something I can say
about that. And I think it was, the same day that the advert, I saw the
advert, I left the message on your phone. So I don't know why really.
It wasn’t because I’m particularly interested in talking to people for
research purposes, it was just very apparent that that was very
connected to where I’m at. And that was even before speaking to you
obviously.

In summarising her thoughts, Trudie described the impact
of the communiqué occurring between herself and her mother
was akin to being on a journey:

So you know that you’re on a journey from now on. That journey has
been affected by the person you’ve lost and it’s been started, and
you’re going to have to go with it I think. And I know it’s not going to
be necessarily that easy and there’s going to be some things coming
up for sure that are going to be pretty difficult. But I feel like you’re on
a track and you’re being guided really, and you can’t predict what it’s going to be.

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**Kevin: Holism and all that**

Kevin experienced communiqué with his close friend Jonathon shortly after his death, which occurred over thirty years ago. In conjunction with his own experience, Kevin’s wife also had a number of communiqué experiences with people close to her who died.

Kevin told me he was twenty-four years of age when his communiqué occurred with his close friend Sam shortly after his death. Like Sam, Kevin had begun a particular spiritual pathway, Eckankar, which had a focus on meditation and dream study. Kevin defined this period of his life as an event whereby, “my dream-state was totally awakened and I would almost, in fact I did learn to travel consciously in the dream-state via lucid dreaming”.

Kevin held Sam’s hand as he “passed over” feeling “nothing but joy and love at that moment of passing”. Preparation for death had comprised the teachings they studied so in a sense both were prepared to some extent for what was involved. Kevin also knew that on account of the close “love-bond” they shared that “we would meet in the dream-state”. Three weeks later they did, which Kevin recounted in graphic detail:

I found myself in a dream inside a hospital ... he was in a state of daze and confusion. He didn’t know where he was and what was going on ... and I walked up to him and I gave him a hug and I said, Sam, how’s it going? ... and I said, but what are you doing here? And for some reason, in this dream I took on a different kind of presence. I was very, very aware of what my job was.

I understood that I was here to help Sam, and not that I knew exactly what was going to transpire but I was very, very prepared to help him out of this position. And I just said, look Sam we’ve got to get out of
here. He goes, what do you mean? I said look you don’t remember what’s happened but we’ve got to move out of this place. So I held his hand and I pulled him out and we walked outside ... I didn’t actually say to him at that point that he had died, I just spoke with him for a bit. And then we got into a car and I started driving down this road with him.

Suddenly the car, in the dream-state as it does, took off into the air and I was flying through the ethers. And I knew that what was taking place was that I was shifting gears, I was moving into another level out of what I understood to be the lower astral realm where people go when they die initially, and I was taking him out of there up into a place where he would be met by his guides and family. Not that I knew that consciously at that point, I was just doing what I was doing, you know, it was all done automatically in a way. I somehow knew what the next step was going to be.

And I kept on driving and then a very interesting thing happened. We went past this place, this level, and there was this really eerie sound, you know eeeeeeeeee, and there was this kind of like weird eeriness energy and sound happening and he goes to me, what’s this, where are we? And I somehow knew, and I said, look this is a level where some souls get stuck and they’re kind of in-between lives but they don’t know how to move to the next place and there’s a lot of suffering here and that sound that you’re hearing is just an emanation of their own suffering. And this whole level vibrated to that energy, so we needed to go past this. So we kept on going and then finally we made it to a place that was, it felt like we were moving upwards you know, and then we finally made it to a place and I stopped, got out the car, and pulled him out. He was a lot more at peace now and I said to him, look Sam what’s happened is that you’ve died but you’re obviously still here, you know we’re here together, we know we’re eternal.

And as soon as I stopped at that point, there was a bit of clarity up ahead, it wasn’t a full on live thing that you hear about, it was just a nice gentle clarity up ahead. And I just remember saying goodbye to him and him walking off into the distance. There were no guides there but I knew that there would be you know, so I just let him go and he just walked off. And that was it.
This after-death encounter was Kevin’s “first real contact with death” which he believed “opened me up to the vastness that’s available to us all”. Kevin also felt he had been enlisted to be a “guide” for Sam not just because of their friendship but because he had a “connection with the vastness that’s available to us all as spirit beings”. I asked him what he felt the vastness was, he replied “the vastness is life itself”. He elaborated further telling me that the vastness “is really the ocean of love that flows through all life” and that as temporal beings “we’re all connected to this”.

Kevin’s wife Josefine, “who comes from a background of being totally open to all this stuff” has also had her own share of communiqué. Kevin recounted two experiences, one with Josefine’s grandmother who had died in Italy and the other with an unknown woman whom she later learnt, with the assistance of a neighbour, had once lived in the same house. Kevin wanted to tell me these accounts, “just to really highlight the fact that this stuff’s just not imagination”.

Although I had some understanding of Kevin’s spiritual belief-system and world-view, I wondered how he viewed the fact that these communiqué had actually occurred:

Look I just see that we’re all churning in an ocean of awakening and that we’re all in this incredible flow toward the source and that the truth is, that no matter what we do, we’re all going to be taken back in through the current that’s bringing us home. And so everybody’s at their own stage or position, and why we have these experiences, well, often to assist in another’s life, you know, we encounter these beings and it’s also for our benefit to awaken a little bit more deeply, and to offer service. You know it’s all just a wonderful, beautiful mix of experiences in this time and space realm to awaken us to the truth that we are ... [pause] ... beyond measure.
I also commented on the fact that many people I had thus far spoken to about their communiqué had found their encounters profoundly confronting because they had been brought face-to-face with their conceptions of what death means, and by default their perceptions of reality. Kevin agreed:

I agree with you. I see it as, you’re right. I think that those moments are awakening points so that we each have an opportunity to take a deeper look but the thing is, what’s reality? Well, anything from the emptiness that is the truth. You know there’s a pole of existence and it depends where you’re sitting on it you know. You can sit on the non-dual eternal vastness or you can sit in the very, very tight form of the human being with its total unconsciousness other than this physical body and that’s real. So it depends which part of this pole of reality you’re sitting on. And you can move in and out and often we do. When we dream we totally have to take into account other states of consciousness.

**Cymantha: The intangible seventh sense**

Cymantha described her relationship with her father as “very close” and as something which “grew stronger as we got older”. She told me, “I’m forty-eight and I call myself daddy’s little girl” and, “when I was with him it was just like I just wanted him to myself”. I had a sense that the bond between them was not just emotional, but almost spiritual. Cymantha agreed, “oh yes!” His death, which occurred suddenly in 2006 left Cymantha not only “stunned” but “robbed” of all the answers to the “many questions I wanted to ask him”.

Shortly afterward she began to experience communiqué, which though initially frequent and could “be anywhere, anytime” gradually tapered off some months later. In addition to enjoying her father’s visits and ongoing affection, she has also experienced communiqué phenomena with other people close to her who have died. She also mentioned that her grandmother had “visited” her before her death, and that all her life she has had events such as
this occur. She believes such occurrences are “intangible” and belong in the realm of “the seventh sense”.

Cymantha told me since her father’s death, although he had been a regular visitor after that time, of late “hasn’t been around that much”. But, “when I do tune in, I feel that he’s here [gesturing to her right], on this side”. She also hears words in her mind such as “hello Sambo”. I asked her how she feels when her father visits:

It’s almost like, you know how he looks, like a, it looks like he’s just going to embrace you. He would sort of rock you ... like Siamese twins. And actually, that outfit that he’s got on [referring to photograph on shelf] is always the one that I ... yeah, that seems to be what I’m getting, because he’s casual. And when he comes like that [embracing herself, and smiling] ... 

During these communiqué, as well as experiencing again the warmth and closeness that once existed between them Cymantha was also reassured by them:

I feel that he is saying to me, face it, you’re going to get through it ... [pause] ... whatever will be will be, but at the other end, it’ll be like, and I think, you know like this dental thing, I have to face it, and my other health issues, I have to face them ... 

Cymantha also told me that her father visits her in her dreams in which, “he always seems to be telling me something”. As well as being a means of communication between Cymantha and her father, I wondered whether Cymantha’s dreams were an indication that there might be something else at work. Her response was instant, “oh yes!” Furthermore, “it’s almost like he’s saying you’ll be right you know”.

Cymantha also shared an experience which had occurred just before the death of her grandmother. She had gone to visit a
sick relative in hospital and was sitting in the lounge when the following occurred:

And I got all that fuzzy, you know like the merry-go-round feeling and I started to think about my grandmother. I thought, I wonder how nanna's going ... Then the next morning I got a phone call from May saying Nanna had died. Now that [merry-go-round feeling] was in the afternoon and she died the following morning. It was like she came to say good bye to me.

As a result of her after-death experiences, Cymantha conceptualises death in the following way:

I think that when you go, first of all you go into this beautiful deep sleep. That's what you have, that's your peace. But then if you want to go further, and this is what I see about death ... You fluctuate between that beautiful place ... And then you will venture out ... But, it seems to work, like it just all works, it's like a machine, a clockwork thing ...

Cymantha’s perception of death suggested an ebb and a flow, and a kind of synchronistic harmony with something beyond itself. Her response, “yes, that’s it” indicated that I had caught the essence of what she was trying to express. She told me she thinks “the living and the dead work together, mentally and physically work together” like “alternative medicine and traditional can work together”.

**Kath: Dreams of the gone**

The sudden death of Kath’s partner Geoff “a very warm, cheeky, sarcastic, funny, smart man” occurred in 2007 when they lived in Melbourne. She told me, “I have always had very strange and prophetic dreams” one of which had occurred eighteen months prior to Geoff’s death. Kath’s father, whom she described as “a brilliant dad” died three months after Geoff. The last time
she saw her father physically alive was when he had flown from Tasmania to Melbourne after Geoff’s death in order to be with her when she identified his body at the Coroners. Three months after that, and following a telephone conversation during which her father had told her, “sweetheart I want you to know this has broken my heart” Kath told me, “he died of the only heart attack he had ever had”.

Although Kath intimated that she had experienced a range of communiqué, she wanted to discuss one type of phenomena in particular, engagement dreams. Geoff’s death brought with it unfinished business for Kath. Through a series of these dreams however, this unfinished business was able to be confronted. Kath told me that in these dreams she did not know where she was, but “it was always going to the same place which was a room in an old terrace house, it was always the same place”. I asked Kath if there was a sense of “other worldliness” about these dreams:

There’s a sense of being in them and being in that place. And there’s also a sense, a sense of being able to be conscious about what you’re doing and where you’re going. Like me searching for him in that place. There’s a sense of being able to control that, whereas in other dreams it’s kind of like a series of random things …

I asked Kath if she felt that the dreams were random or whether she felt they were occurring for a reason:

Yeah … No, not [random] at all, not at all. And because they’re really distinct and they’re not necessarily what you want, you know what I mean. Like if you’re having dreams in that situation you want him to come to you and you want to embrace, you want to know that he’s going to be there when you pass away, you want to know all those reassuring things, and it’s just not that cut and dry … The only thing I can think of is that the person that he probably loved most in the world he hurt incredibly and he has to learn some lessons … And he’s given
up and he’s tried to make that right, and he’s also done it by coming in
and holding me at night, but he hasn’t done that in a really long time,
not since that last dream where I just yelled at him and told him I had
to go.

I shared with Kath that when Ken had died there had also
been a lot of unfinished business between us, and that in the
weeks and months that followed his death I too had experienced a
number of dreams that were more than a dream. These dreams
were evenly spaced events which occurred between the two of us
and which afforded the time and opportunity to come to terms
with the issues, work our way through them and resolve them.

In time I had come to understand that these dreams were a
medium which facilitated resolution of specific issues which the
event of physical death had prevented being resolved when both
parties were living. In that however, I understood them as
“engagement” dreams rather than “visitation” dreams because
two people were engaging with one another in an alternate
reality to the same degree and with the same intensity as they do
in material reality. There as in here, two people had come
together for a specific purpose.

I asked Kath whether her dreams, which she has
experienced for many years, have had any impact on how she
viewed life, or if they had altered her perspective in any way. Her
response was decided. “Well I didn’t want to go there, I did not
want to go there, and have no doubt I do not want to go there.”
However, following her communiqué her attitude has altered:

I’ve done a lot of thinking about my dreams and a lot of the dreams I
kind of struggled with them and thought maybe it’s based on fear of
losing something that you really hold dear or, because I used to have
weird arsed dreams about my ex-husband doing all sorts of really
screwy stuff and it worked out that they were true too and I pushed
them aside to thinking it was some sort of fear or paranoid business
and after Geoff’s death I kind of went, I’ve got to really start to listen to my dreams and I’ve got to start to believe in them instead of just pushing them away.

Kath asked me if I was familiar with the Aboriginal concept of, “being taken dreaming”. In response to my saying no, she explained as follows:

It’s where, often times somebody who, in that community, you have that kind of talent, will lie beside you when you’re asleep and take you dreaming so that they have an ability to take you, often times it’s to go see the old fellas upstairs, and to make sure that everything that you’re doing is okay by them and to take you back down again. So they have, they can sleep beside someone and take someone dreaming.

I shared with Kath an experience which had occurred many years ago when I found myself standing at cross-roads in my life. One night I had a dream in which I interacted with an elderly Aboriginal woman who entrusted a particular item to me. This dream was a turning point in my life which led me to confront, amongst other things, our nation’s black history and the ongoing impact of colonisation on the psychosocial health and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous communities across the nation. Kath also experienced such an engagement dream where she too was entrusted with a particular item by a woman who came to her, “a gift” she termed it.

I also asked Kath if as a result of her now revised attitude toward her dreams and the impact of Geoff and her father’s death, whether she had noticed that she was thinking about things which once she never would have. Her response indicated that it had:
You know what, it has, absolutely, and something that I just remember ... As a kid, and as a teenager, I was kind of weirdly adamant that I wouldn't let anyone close to me, and my parents, I didn't want my parents close to me because they were going to die one day and that was going to really suck and now I'm not afraid of death. I'm not scared of it and while, if two policemen came and walked up to my doorway, I'd probably say, fuck off you've got the wrong house, because I've had enough this year thank you very much, you've got the wrong house. But I'm not terrified of it. I'm not terrified of my own death.

Catrina: Dad, Oliver and me

Catrina told me that the communiqué between her son Oliver, who was eighteen months of age at the time, and her father took place approximately seven months after his death in 2005. The communiqué occurred when Oliver was taking his bath and was pre-heralded by his behaviour. Catrina, as usual, was sitting watching him when she noticed that he had become distracted by something:

Well he was just standing up holding onto the taps and then he turned his head to the doorway. I was sitting on the toilet in the bathroom watching him, and, he wasn’t addressing me, he wasn’t looking at me, he was looking at the doorway and I thought that’s odd no-one’s there, you know, there’s nothing there, why is he staring at the doorway?

Yeah, yeah, clearly something was going on. And I was looking at the doorway thinking, and looking at him, you know, like what was going on, what’s he looking at? And within a couple of seconds I’d sort of realised that it was dad, that dad was there talking to him. And I was trying through that moment of time, trying to ascertain really what was going on and what I saw was an exchange between my son and my dad.

I just went oh my God dad’s here, it was dad, you know, he was talking to Oliver, which as upset as I was, I take joy from that to think that there can actually be a connection to someone even
though they’re not physically present, that there can still be a connection.

Catrina told me she believed that what was taking place was that her father was “saying hi” to Oliver. Although Oliver was too young to engage in conversation with his grandfather, “Poppie Max” his response was nonetheless delightful and convinced Catrina that, “there was definitely something going on at that moment” there was, an *engagement* [emphasised word]:

Oliver was smiling like you know, looking and smiling, and it was as though he was acknowledging what my father was conveying or saying to him was being acknowledged by Oliver ... But during that time they were having this engagement Oliver was smiling and he was acknowledging, I could tell he was acknowledging there was someone there, that he was engaging in a conversation cause it was the same as if I had of been talking to him, it was the same look, it was a look of, oh hi you’re there.

Two days after Catrina’s father had visited his grandson she herself experienced a communiqué from her beloved father. She had lain down for an afternoon nap and was just falling asleep when the following occurred:

And I felt what would have been when you, say, kiss your fingers and then place your fingers on someone. I actually felt like fingers pressing on my forehead and that [emphasised word] is what woke me up, the sensation of actually being touched to the point that I threw myself out of bed and ran out of the room, going, dad where are you? Come back, don’t go.

Catrina told me that just prior to both these communiqué she had visited a homeopath. This had been of great use for her grieving as it facilitated, “a shift” and was something that “took the edge off for me”. Her father’s subsequent communiqué was
not only reassuring for her but validation that “I was going to be okay”:

I believe that he saw me shift from the absolute horror ... And I think he was acknowledging that I had made that shift and he was sort of doing the fatherly sort of gesture, good girl, you've made it this far sort of thing, and that, you will be okay ... Still to this day I know that he was there, and I still remember the actual pressure.

In addition to receiving this reassurance from her father, Catrina believed the communiqué evidenced something even more fundamental, a relationship able to circumvent death's divide:

I mean the last thing I ever said to him was when he was laid out in his coffin still at the funeral home, and I went and saw him there, and I said to him, you know where we live, come and visit whenever you want to. So I believe that he was, um, trying to show me that he was still here in a way and still watching out for us.

Helen: Comings and goings

Helen experienced communiqué with her then partner John, who had died many years ago, shortly after his death. She told me that on the day which eventuated his death she had woken with a sense of foreboding. In addition, she felt that on some level John also had a sense of what was to take place, evidenced primarily by his behaviour. He was being “overly nice” and saying such things as “thanks for a really good time” and “I really enjoyed our time together”. Helen told me that the last time she physically saw John was when he left that morning to visit his parents. As he stood in the doorway though, she saw that a white substance was misting around him, and thought to herself that he “almost looked not real, like he wasn’t really there but he was”.

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Ways of Being
At nine o’clock that same night the police came to Helen’s door. As soon as the door opened, Helen said “something’s happened, he’s dead”. On their coming into the house, she said again, “no, I know, I already know”. Helen was not surprised. After the police left she telephoned John’s mother to convey the awful news. Her response, “I know, I already knew” echoed her feelings that he had died because according to Helen “she just felt it”.

Helen’s communiqué with John occurred six weeks after his death. At the time Helen was in a relationship with Julie, “she was the spiritual one”, who first reported John’s presence. Helen told me that Julie had never seen a photo of John, nor had ever physically met him:

And we were sitting in the lounge room at home and she started laughing. And I said what are you laughing at? She said, who’s that guy standing there? I said, what guy? I knew he was there, I could feel him, I didn’t say anything … She said, the guy who’s standing there, because I had a fireplace and he had his arm resting on it and he used to do that. I said, what does he look like? She said, he’s got black hair, brown eyes and he’s in … I said, what’s he wearing? He’s in a light blue work shirt and a t-shirt and blue pants. That’s what he wore away, when he went away. And she said, he’s saying, he’s laughing, he’s happy. And I said, why can’t I see him and she said, he said that you can’t see him till you die. She said, when you die, you’ll see him, before you die you’ll see him and that means you’re going to die. And I went is that right!

As John’s communiqué continued it became apparent to Helen that Julie “was an actual medium” because she would “be sitting here like that and she’d just go, like that, out like that and he would start talking to me through her”. When John left Julie had no recollection “of him being there inside of her talking to me”. Helen was not comforted by John’s communiqué, rather, “it was really freaky”. After a month or so of these “habitations”
Helen told John “this has got to stop” because, “it’s not very nice doing this to people”. John’s attachment to Helen and his use of Julie as a means of maintaining that attachment came to a head with a confrontation between the two of them:

He said, have you got a problem and I went, no. I knew it was him, different voice and everything. And I said, what’s your problem? I said, you’re the one with the problem not me. And he said, you loved me, and I went, yeah, but you’re not here now. I said, you’re physically not here John. I said, I still think about you but you can’t do this, it’s really bad. I said, you’re using someone who is open to you and it’s not good. I said, you’re not going to be here, you can’t come back. He said, I can come back, and I said, no, you can’t, you have to move on now. I said, that’s what you’ve got to do, you can’t come back. So that night, that was it. I didn’t feel him there for years after that, probably six years, seven years after that.

When John did eventually visit again “he would sometimes just come into the house” he was very different. According to Helen his personality was “a lot better, he wasn’t so aggressive”. Additionally, “he was quite happy understanding that once you pass away you’re not allowed to do that”.

Helen had told me that prior to his death John had not believed in continued existence after physical death and that he had wished he had spoken more with her about it. He had found himself in “a grey place, like nothing, like a dead forest and there was nothing there”. He was “looking to find his way out” and was encouraged by Helen’s support, “you will, you will eventually”. He had told her, “I wish I’d believed you when you said that you just don’t die”.

**Kelly: Piero**

Kelly described the unexpected death of her partner Piero in 2005, as “a shock” and something for which, “there’s no lead up to”. She had been informed of Piero’s accident after receiving a
phone call from his parents who told her that Piero was on life support in St Vincent’s Hospital. After an agonizing night during which there was no improvement in Piero’s condition, Kelly was told that Piero was brain dead and that as his partner she was responsible for making the decision to turn off his life support. Kelly told me she felt like she was, “walking around in a daze, I couldn’t believe that one minute everything is perfect and fine and the next minute this is what’s going on”.

Kelly told me her encounters with Piero began within the month of his death and first occurred when she was undertaking the difficult task of going through his belongings. While Kelly wanted to keep as much as she could, she knew that that was simply impractical. However, deciding just which precious item to keep was made somewhat easier with Piero’s help:

And it was while I was packing his stuff that I just felt his presence and it was like, oh you’ve got to keep that. It wasn’t like I was consciously making decisions myself ... It was kind of like I was touching every item of clothing one by one, everything I went through individually. It was as though he was behind me lying in bed just casually saying, no, you can get rid of that, I don’t need that, oh no, keep that, that’s my favourite shirt, like a commentary.

Kelly found Piero’s guidance at this time very supportive. “It made me feel not so bad about getting rid of stuff, it felt like I was doing something good by giving it to an op shop.” Some months later, when Kelly undertook another sorting process she had the following insight:

And at that time I knew in my heart that getting rid of a t-shirt or a shirt wasn’t diminishing how much we loved each other. It took me that long to realise that I didn’t have to keep all his possessions.
Kelly also confided another aspect to her encounters with Piero. When she was staying with her parents after his death she would often sense him walking into the room. However if there was someone other than herself in the room she would consciously try to stop the communiqué. Her reasoning was such that “it felt like I couldn’t enjoy his presence if someone else was in the room ... if I was alone and it happened I felt like it was really special, just something between the two of us”. I asked Kelly if she thought she might be imagining what was taking place. Her response was decided:

No, because, if it, at times I wanted to think of him but it just hurt too much. So why would I consciously have a conversation with him if it was going to hurt me?

Kelly also told me that initially she had been worried that if the communiqué between herself and Piero were too frequent that “my real memories [might] get mixed up with these ones”. Additionally, while the communiqué all took place within the first six months of Piero’s death, Kelly did wonder if “maybe that was just me coming to terms with the fact that he was gone so suddenly, I don’t know”. She told me she had experienced grief before, having “lost someone close” but had not experienced “anything [communiqué] like this”. At the time of our conversation Kelly told me that her last communiqué with Piero had occurred two years ago when he had walked into the same room she was in at the time.

As our time together came to an end I asked Kelly if there was anything else she felt she would like to talk about or if there was anything she might want to ask me:

No, thank you. I’m just glad I replied to your ad because like I said I don’t understand, I haven’t been able to understand a lot of the things
that I’ve been feeling and it’s probably a time thing and also the fact that I hate counselling but I’m amazed that I’m able to sit here and not cry today and talk about it. It’s a big step for me … it took me a long time to get here. I don’t have any questions. I like being able to talk about Piero. Just because he’s dead doesn’t mean he doesn’t exist.

**Danneil: Messages from Ann F.**

Her mother’s sudden death in July 2006, which had been preceded by that of her father twenty years earlier, effectively rendered Danneil an orphan. In the days following her mother’s death Danneil felt like she was moving in “slow motion” and that, “nothing after that felt normal”. In addition to coming to terms with her mother’s death, she also had to cope with the death of her mother’s beloved three cats. “The first one died six weeks after she died, the second one nine months after she passed and the last one fifteen months after she passed”.

Danneil told me she believed her first communiqué was in the form of an intervention with one of her mother’s cats who had been unwell for a number of weeks following her death. Danneil had taken the cat back to the vet and had received a phone call informing her that she may have to be put down. What transpired afterward however seemed to suggest that Danneil’s mother had offered a helping hand:

She passed in her sleep which the vet had said, that was actually another thing that I attributed to mum because the vet rang me and said, if we’ve got to put her down you’ve got to sign forms. And I didn’t have to put her down, she died, and I put that down to mum because I thought to myself that mum had made the decision for me.

Danneil’s next communiqué has its origin in a pact which she and her mother agreed to prior to her death. They had watched an interview on television whereby two individuals had made an agreement between themselves that after death the
deceased would let the living individual know they were alright by stopping a clock on their birthday. “Mum and I looked at one another and we said, isn’t that interesting and then mum said to me, what if I do that, and I said, alright, stop the clock on 3rd August at three o’clock”:

I didn’t even remember that conversation that we had but what happened was that I was starting to do something and my mother had bought me a little electric clock which I had actually said to her, it’s not working. And she said, bring it over and I’ll take it back to where I bought it, and she did and the place confirmed, it’s broken, it’s not working. So this would have been about six weeks after she had passed. As I said I was doing something and I looked down and this clock was working. It could have very well been working on the 3rd of August but I wasn’t with it so I didn’t pick up on it for another few weeks ... I don’t know how she did it ... conventional wisdom would pooh pooh it ... six weeks after she was gone it was working and it’s still working and she’s been gone for two years, two and a bit years.

I asked Danneil what her interpretation of this communiqué was. There was no hesitation as she stated “that she tried to make good on what we talked about”. Danneil experienced another communiqué after she had visited her parent’s and uncle’s gravesite. As she was driving slowly home she noticed that the last three letters on the number plate of the car in front spelt out ALF. For Danneil this was highly significant because these letters not only corresponded to her mother’s initials, they were an abbreviation of her uncle’s name:

For me it was two things because I put flowers at mum’s and dad’s and then I went to my uncle who was my mother’s brother and his name was Alfred and he got Alf for short. So for me it was mum and my uncle who were saying hi. So that particularly, and that was when I sort of thought to myself, well that was the reason that this guy was dawdling, because they’re up there saying, she hasn’t got it yet, she hasn’t got it yet ... and that was it and then as soon as I realised it I
just zoned in on these letters and that was it for me, it was mum, it was mum and her brother.

Danneil had mentioned that at one time she had seen a psychiatrist to help her cope with the difficult adjustment to her bereavement and depression. I asked her if she had ever mentioned these communiqué during her association either with this individual or with anyone else:

Oh good lord I wouldn't have told him, no … I've only ever let out little snippets of this to friends who are likeminded and I've only been able to ascertain that by listening to what they say.

Danneil also told me that her communiqué with her mother, as well as a number of non-material experiences, complemented how she saw and understood life and death. “I've always had the belief that you go on, you don't end as in your death, you do go on.”

Danneil relayed a final communiqué to me which brought a smile to my face. She told me that for over twenty years she used to have dreams of her father in which he continually criticised her. After her mother died the dreams ceased but then, “I had one more episode” in which unbeknownst as to why, her father repeatedly threw carrots at her. Upon waking she had spoken out loud to her mother, “I had another one of those dreams last night, would you mind asking why he was throwing carrots at me”. Needless to say, that was the end of the carrots.

**Marie: Mother**

Marie told me she and her mother, who had died in 2007 had “a very intense, close relationship from the time I was born due in part to the circumstances of my birth during the war”. But things were not always so good between them, and there were
“periods of years that we didn’t communicate”. That changed when Marie’s mother was diagnosed with dementia and was admitted into a care facility for seven years, “during that time our relationship improved hugely”. Although this “was torture for her” it was nonetheless a positive experience as well because “she actually got to the point of forgiving us all”.

As her mother was dying she had told Marie, “this wouldn’t be so hard if I didn’t love you so much”. Marie’s response evidenced the warmth of their relationship and her belief in continued existence after death which she sees as a transformative event:

And I said, mum, I don’t think you and I are ever going to be very far apart, we’re not going to be separated, and that was for me the most important recognition after she died because there was that continuity ... but it isn’t the loss of the person. I think that’s a distinction I’d like to make ... [I had] a very strong sense of her being metamorphosed by this so that I could actually see her in the corner of my eye ... But I have this image of her in the corner of my eye of being something like a butterfly or a cicada with tremendous enthusiasm and excitement about moving forward. She was poised for flight [laughter]. And I was very happy for her. So I haven’t grieved in that, you know, it seems to me we completed, we went through a stage, we completed that stage together.

Marie relayed a very funny incident which she believed involved both her mother and her father centering on the family car. In accordance with her mother’s wishes, Marie and her husband had taken a car trip to Victoria in order to have her ashes interred in the memorial garden of the parish church of the community in which she had once lived. When driving through Bendigo however, they became lost. Additionally, a squeak in the front wheel of the car, which she had tried unsuccessfully for some time to have repaired, had progressed into something, “distinctly wobbly” and which “was rubbing against the
mudguard”. Eventually they made it safely to the parish church where the car was then towed to Geelong to be fixed:

And I have the very strong sense, I mean I had the strong sense of mum being present and buzzing in the car [laughter] with excitement. But I had a very strong sense that dad had somehow come on board and had coasted us through because he was an engineer, an aeronautical engineer [pause], I mean there’s no proof of any of that. I can’t say I saw him or I, but I was aware of him. And I was telling the story to my psychic therapist [laughter] who said to me, oh yes, he came on board. What did you do, stop at a garage or something? I said, yes [laughter]. That’s when he came on board and he says to you now, I’ve always told you to listen to the car Marie. I’ve always told you to listen to the car. I said, I did [emphasised word] listen to the car! I couldn’t get anybody else to take any notice!

Marie told me that a little while after her mother’s death things suddenly “went quiet”. It was too quiet for Marie, so she asked her mother for a sign of some sort which came on the anniversary of her mother’s death. “I’d actually been saying to her coming up to the anniversary, well, where are you, I haven’t had anything to do with you since the Ocean Grove trip and I think that’s not fair.”

On the day of the anniversary of her mother’s death the household received a telephone call from the nursing home informing them that Dan, for whom she and her husband had become voluntary carers after her mother’s death, had died within two hours of the time of her mother’s death. Marie told me, “I came out of a deep sleep, sat up in bed and said, that was mum”. Marie also felt that her mother had in a sense stepped in to assist. “I had the sense that because we had taken Dan on, she’d taken him on.” Marie not only felt that, “mum had come and got him” but that the proximity of Dan’s death with her mother’s evidenced that the event and its timing was the “sign”
she had been waiting for from her mother, “and this was like a sign as if to say, so you wanted a sign, here’s a sign!”

With regard to the frequency of her communiqué, Marie told me that she has the feeling that her mother is “tapering off in a way”. Irrespective of that, Marie feels “that there is an ongoing connection” and that it is “not important, not necessary” for her to visit a medium in order to contact her, “I don’t need to”. I asked Marie how she thought this type of after-death communication might be possible:

Well, I don’t, except to say what I said earlier that maybe it has to do with an awful lot that we are now speculating about in the realm of physics. I mean I’m very interested in quantum physics and that notion that a photon can be in two places at once. You know, this is not supposed to, according to previous laws of physics, supposed to be possible. But it is possible. We can actually see it’s possible. Now if it’s possible with a photon, we’re all made up out of particles, what does it mean about, I mean certainly the question of parallel universes and multidimensional physical reality come into play, so what about metaphysics? Some of those concepts must apply but nobody applies them because nobody takes that kind of metaphysical reality very seriously. Serious minds are not brought to bear on it, is what I’m saying, not that people don’t take it seriously …

So, in answer to your question, I don’t know. And I’m content to accept mystery. But I’m not content to accept the view that I hear from those around me who dabble in this field that it’s all, you know, you have to kind of conjure up a spooky kind of mystique [laughter], because its part of the ordinary … But I think it’s all perfectly part of the ordinary intercourse of human beings, whether they are in the flesh or not. Whether they are in this universe or some parallel universe.

I asked Marie if any of her communiqué experiences had had an impact on how she felt about death, and about what happens after death. Her response also provided an insight into her personal spiritual beliefs as well:
Yes. I think that death must be like birth really. Frequently painful, not always but frequently traumatic, distressing for all concerned, those who are standing around and those who are enduring it. But once you go through that birth canal, then there’s a whole new life of experience waiting for you.

I’ve always believed that in a way because I was brought up, well I suppose I’ve been a believer, however to define that, is that as long as I can remember I have felt the presence of the infinite, you know, spirit of infinity, the infinite spirit of the universe ... It was God for me. I’m happy to use the word God because I can’t find another.

Exemplary Portraits

The selection of an Exemplary Portrait is based on those elements that exemplify the group of co-researchers as a whole. Accordingly, each of the following four portraits is presented in such a way that “both the phenomenon investigated and the individual persons emerge in a vital and unified manner” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52), and incorporates autobiographical material gathered during preliminary contact, contained in personal documents, or shared during or after interviews.

Moustakas argues that in order to know and understand another’s experience one must, “enter into discourse with the individual in an interpersonal context bounded by openness, trust, connection and empathic understanding of the shared lived experience” (1990, p. 26). A key element which facilitates this discourse is self-disclosure by the researcher to the co-researcher. In heuristic enquiry researcher self-disclosure presents the researcher’s autobiographical connection with the topic of investigation to the co-researcher. Such an endeavour, “sparks a similar call from others” and offers an invitation to, “more fully and freely explore, understand and find meaning in the subject matter at hand” (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 50). Accordingly, the following portraits incorporate instances of the researcher's self-disclosure.
The following four portraits constitute three components: Embodied Context-The Portrait, Disembodied Context-The Internal Frame of Reference, and Embodied Context-Concluding Comments. The Embodied Context-The Portrait presents a biographical sketch of the co-researcher and a reflective account of the initial encounter and interaction between the co-researcher and the researcher. The Disembodied Context-The Internal Frame of Reference presents the internal frame of reference which comprise the communiqué experience occurring between the co-researcher and the person/s close to them who died. The Embodied Context-Concluding Comments presents a reflective summary of the engagement between the co-researcher and the researcher which took place during and after individual co-researcher interviews were conducted.

Bob: Sammie’s story

The Portrait: I had originally been contacted by Bob’s wife who had left a voice message on my office landline. She and her husband had seen the recruitment advertisement for the study in one of the local suburban newspapers and she wondered, because her husband “had a couple of contact experiences from her” whether he might qualify for the study. Her words spoken with a tremulous voice told me that the family had “lost a granddaughter” Sammie, who had been killed in a motor-vehicle accident in 2007.

In returning the call, Sammie’s grandfather Bob answered. Bob talked about their granddaughter with much warmth and deep affection. She was in the Navy and had been on her way home on leave when the accident which killed her occurred. Bob described the accident and his and his wife’s subsequent grief, telling me he was coping better than his wife who was now seeing a psychiatrist as receiving the autopsy report had refreshed her
grief. As we were speaking I saw a young woman, slight of build
with blonde hair, blonde in the sense that it was sun-kissed. I
asked Bob if Sammie had blonde hair. He said she did, but not
like a natural blonde, it was blonde “like when you go in the sun”.

Bob and I met twice as after our first interview had
concluded we realised that we both had not been able to fully
explore all the elements of Sammie’s life and Bob’s communiqué.
At our first interview Bob had brought with him photographs of
Sammie, copies of her funeral service conducted at Tullamoor and
the memorial service at RAAF Wagga, and his personal diary
which he referred to a number of times during both interviews.

Sammie’s presence was very strong during the two occasions
Bob and I met, something I shared with him toward the end of
our second interview in response to his statement, “I feel, I feel
her presence quite often, almost as if she’s just standing beside
me, I feel that”. My response was immediate. “I felt when you
walked in that she was right there next to you, it was really
strong.” As Bob and I settled down together over the first of a
number of cups of tea, I became acquainted with Sammie’s life
through the eyes of her adoring grandfather. “See that, Integrity
[pointing to a naval ship in a photograph] that is that young
woman to a tee, integrity.”

Bob described Sammie as “an absolutely delightful young
lady” who had “her whole life in front of her”. Emulating her
grandfather’s career in the services she had entered the Navy at
the age of nineteen. Although she had been offered Officer Entry
she declined in lieu of completing her trade first. “She knew
exactly what she wanted to do and she had it all planned out ... she
had the personality to go with it, to lead people.” The
relationship between Bob and Sammie was exceptionally close,
and had been since she was a young child. Following the
breakdown of her parent’s marriage, Bob, in addition to being
Sammie’s grandfather, had taken on much more of a fatherly role in his young granddaughter’s life which continued into her adulthood. He told me, “no I wasn’t grandpa in the traditional sense; I always finished up in a more personal relationship”.

Sammie’s untimely and tragic death revealed the influence her short life had borne on those around her, both within the Tullamore community where she lived and professionally in the services. Bob told me that the Chief Petty Officer returned from leave to attend her funeral service, as did two Commanding Officers. Sammie had been born on Anzac Day, an occurrence noted by the Navy Chaplain at her service who had said “she is a true Anzac, being born on Anzac Day”. The editor and editorial staff of the Tullamore Buzz, a monthly community publication dedicated their December/January 2007 issue to Sammie. The editorial paints the portrait of a special young woman who was very much loved:

Sammie had lots of love to give and she gave it freely. She was always willing to help. She touched the hearts of so many people in so many ways even being part of leading someone to Christ. Sammie would want you to think about where you stand with God. She knew where she was going when she died and that was to heaven to be with God, her Lord and Saviour. Where will you go? Think about this question as a favour to Sammie. Sammie loved God, loved people and loved life.

The Internal Frame of Reference: Bob told me that on the morning of Sammie’s death, around eleven o’clock, he had “a funny feeling, something was going to happen” and though at the time had felt compelled to telephone her, had desisted:

It was a foreboding, it was as if I was being told in my mind by someone to ring Samantha now [emphasised word]. As I say, knowing military discipline, knowing the protocols and that sort of thing, my instinct and training said I can’t do it.
That same afternoon around three-thirty another “funny feeling” came to Bob. He felt that Sammie was on her way home and was hurrying. This was accompanied by him suddenly and unexpectedly hearing her voice call out “grandpa”. There was something about her voice which conveyed “a sense of urgency, a sense of foreboding, a sense of something’s about to happen”. Half an hour later Sammie’s mother telephoned, informing Bob that she had been involved in a serious accident and was critically injured. Three quarters of an hour later the worst telephone call of all came; Sammie had died instantly in the accident. It was that same evening, when Bob found himself weeping alone on the veranda that the first of Sammie’s communiqués with her family occurred:

And I was outside having a bit of a weep, I had the wine, and on our back veranda, like a back patio, and I was standing there at the left-hand end and I was standing with my hand on my hip and I was like that, and I was having a weep. And Sammie stood beside me, put her arm through mine and said, it’s alright grandpa, it’s alright grandpa. And I turned around and she disappeared. I remember I had another mouthful of wine and thought, I’m dreaming. I wasn’t dreaming.

In conjunction with communicating with Bob, Sammie also communicated with her German grandfather by her mother’s first marriage who according to Bob “had an almost identical experience”. The one difference in the communiqué was that rather than speaking the word “grandpa” she had spoken, “uppa” the German word for “grandfather” which is how she referred to him when living.

On the evening prior to Sammie’s funeral service, while Bob was staying with Sammie’s mother in a small granny flat adjacent to the family home, he experienced another communiqué. His attempts at sleep had been disturbed by the sound of voices. “One was a woman and there was a man.”
However when he opened the door to investigate nobody could be seen and the voices stopped. After returning inside he was disturbed again. “It was Sammie’s voice saying, grandpa leave the lights on in the workshop so I can find my way home at night.”

The same events occurred the following night, which ceased after he spoke out loud, “it’s alright Sammie”. I asked Bob to whom he thought the male voice belonged. His response, “God” was something he elaborated on more fully during our conversation. In her grief Sammie’s mother Jan had railed at God, “why did it have to be Sammie?”

And this voice said to her, she’s alright. It was a quiet male voice that said, she’s alright, she knew she was going to die. Jan said did she know she was going to die? And the voice said, yes. Did she have any pain? No. Why? I don’t know what the answer to that one was ... but obviously there was some other conversation and it was a male voice. And she said to me afterwards, um ... [pause] ... it was weird, I felt reassured, [she said] it’s not often you talk to God.

Bob told me that Jan had said “it was very, very clear” and that the voice had spoken to her “kindly” and in a way that was “comforting”:

But she said look, the, she said, I was told, I was talking. She said I was talking to God and He was telling me, and it’s alright. She’s happy, she’s safe, she didn’t suffer any pain, she knew she was going to die ...

During our time together Bob reflected on his actions in not telephoning Sammie. “One of the things that always sticks in my mind is if I had of done that then, would it have saved Sammie’s life?” I asked Bob if he had spoken about his thoughts and feelings with Sammie. He told me that a number of times he had
said to her, “I should have made that phone call Sammie, I should have made that phone call, please, I’m sorry, words to that effect”:

That night, the night she was killed, and as I said she came up and she stood beside me and she put her arm through mine and said, it’s alright grandpa, it’s alright grandpa, because, you know, because she was **dead** [emphasised word] and I had as I said to you earlier, I had that feeling that I had to ring her before midday, it was about eleven o’clock or something like that, I have to ring her.

And, it was, I felt, I felt I had to do it but once I had, once I got past a certain time that imperative seemed to disappear, as if that’s the window that I could have changed the future. But I didn’t change, I didn’t...[pause]...I didn’t do what I was told, inverted commas, to do, and I’d gone past that window of opportunity. And the rest, the rest of the future had been, had been already put in place and there was nothing I could do to change it. But up to that time, I could change it.

As Bob shared his thoughts I told him that what kept coming to me was that Sammie understood why he had not made the call, and knowing that he would blame himself hastened to his side to reassure him that he was not responsible for her death. It seemed that two realities were contained within this aspect of the event of Sammie’s death. Bob’s grief and deep remorse at his not averting her death when he believed he had the opportunity, and Sammie’s understanding and instant forgiveness of his actions. Although Bob agreed, he reiterated “**I have to live with it** [emphasised words] that’s the most difficult part”.

The communiqué Sammie’s family have experienced has impacted on them in different ways and to varying degrees. Bob feels “a lot more comfortable”. Uppa, Sammie’s paternal grandfather by her mother’s first marriage not only “needed reassurance that Sammie was alright” which he received, but “is
a changed man as well”. Jan, Sammie’s mother “with her prayers and feeling and being talked to by someone, and she believes it was God, she herself is a lot happier now, a lot more settled”.

Bob told me that his “whole outlook on life” is different, and although he could not quantify exactly how his life was different said “inside I am, I feel different and I do look at things different”. He was able to tell me that he has more “empathy” concerning the needs of others, and that he has a “more conscious approach” and a deeper, more heightened “awareness of the problems” facing others around him.

I asked Bob what he thought the purpose of Sammie’s communiqué might be. His response was immediate:

She wanted to reassure me, that it was, she didn’t blame me for not making the phone call. And just to reassure me that everything was alright, that she’s alright ... the tone of the voice was like I was used to hearing when I’d say roll up to the farm in the car, and she’d come up and just put her arms through mine and put her head on my shoulder and say, she chat away like sixteen to the dozen ... reassuring ...This is the same comment that Jan made to me about uppa. She would, he felt reassured that Sammie was alright where she was. Yes, dead, but she was alright. The same tone of voice. Comforting, I’m okay, I’m here, I’m okay, yes I’m dead but I’m okay.

As our first interview together had come and gone, and our second drawing to a close, I asked Bob how he had found the interview experience itself. Bob told me that although it was early days, he was feeling “a lot more comfortable” and that talking to me about Sammie “has made a difference as well”:

I was just thinking, you know this conversation we’ve had, um, what you say and what you’ve said and how you’ve said it, um ... [pause] ... getting me to draw things out, it’s had an effect.
Concluding Comments: I told Bob after his interview that I had seen Sammie standing to one side as we had been talking, smiling, and that I kept feeling what she was feeling, which was an incredible sense of happiness. Bob’s response was one of gratitude. “I’m glad, because there’s times I feel she’s in a really beautiful place.”

Catrina: Dad, Oliver and me

The Portrait: Catrina telephoned me after seeing the recruitment advertisement for the study in one of the local inner city newspapers in which it had been placed. She told me that when she was the advertisement her initial reaction was “oh my God!” and that she was “ringing out of excitement”. In addition to being somewhat overwhelmed in that I was actually undertaking this research, Catrina was “incredibly excited” about what I was doing “especially because no-one else is doing it”.

In the rich and animated conversation which ensued, Catrina told me that her father had died in 2005. His death, which had occurred only six months after her marriage, had affected her deeply. She had cried continually, felt as though she had “lost hope” and had “no sense of joy”. Adding to her grief at that time was that two weeks after the death of her father she had been told by a family member, “pull yourself together, it’s been two weeks” which had devastated her.

With regard to her participation in the study Catrina forthrightly stated “I feel that I need this to be documented” and during the course of our conversation highlighted a number of issues and questions including, “Where is the love for the dead?”, “How did we lose that link between life and death?”, “What I would like to see changed is acceptance of death.” And “The coffin isolates the dead from the living.” Catrina was a sensitive and intuitive individual who had spent much time reflecting and
pondering the impact of her father’s death and the communiqué which had followed.

She told me again, “I’m really glad you’re doing this” and “you have an understanding of higher order grief”. Catrina was encouraged by our conversation. “You gain strength from the knowledge that other people have experienced this” and, “I feel more empowered now”. She mentioned that she was a sculptress but since the death of her father had been unable to sculpt. I spoke about my own bereavement and how art therapy had been incredibly constructive in helping me cope with the chaos of my emotions at that time, and wondered whether or not she had entertained the idea of sculpting her own grief. She acknowledged that while she had thought about the idea of sculpting death she had not tangibly gone beyond that. As we concluded our conversation, she told me she witnessed a conversation between her father and her son which had taken place after his death, which had utterly amazed her.

*The Internal Frame of Reference:* Catrina told me that the communiqué between her son Oliver, who was eighteen months of age at the time, and her father took place approximately seven months after his death. The communiqué occurred when Oliver was taking his bath and was pre-heralded by his behaviour which caught her attention. Catrina, as usual, was sitting watching him when she noticed that he had become distracted by something:

Well he was just standing up holding onto the taps and then he turned his head to the doorway. I was sitting on the toilet in the bathroom watching him, and, he wasn’t addressing me, he wasn’t looking at me, he was looking at the doorway and I thought that’s odd no-one’s there, you know, there’s nothing there, why is he staring at the doorway? Yeah, yeah, clearly something was going on. And I was looking at the doorway thinking, and looking at him, you know, like what was going on, what’s he looking at? And within a couple of seconds I’d sort of
realised that it was dad, that dad was there talking to him. And I was trying through that moment of time, trying to ascertain really what was going on and what I saw was an exchange between my son and my dad.

I just went oh my God dad’s here, it was dad, you know, he was talking to Oliver, which as upset as I was, I take joy from that to think that there can actually be a connection to someone even though they’re not physically present, that there can still be a connection.

Catrina told me she believed that what was taking place was that her father was “saying hi” to Oliver. So confirmed in this belief was she that she stood up to get a sense of the height of what would have been her father’s physical presence in the door frame had he been standing there. She wanted to determine at what point eye-to-eye contact would have occurred between the two of them if he had been physically present. Although Oliver was too young to engage in conversation with his grandfather “poppie Max”, his response was nonetheless delightful and was one which affirmed for Catrina, “there was definitely something going on at that moment” there was, an engagement [emphasised word]:

Oliver was smiling like you know, looking and smiling, and it was as though he was acknowledging what my father was conveying or saying to him was being acknowledged by Oliver … But during that time they were having this engagement Oliver was smiling and he was acknowledging, I could tell he was acknowledging there was someone there, that he was engaging in a conversation cause it was the same as if I had of been talking to him, it was the same look, it was a look of, oh hi you’re there.

Catrina felt that her father had visited Oliver in order to “reinforce a connection to him”, and that the communiqué between the two of them “was not a closing … but an actual
opportunity to say, I’m poppie Max, and I have to go”. Although she has tried to talk with Oliver about what took place between himself and his grandfather his age precluded that, so “I just have to contain within myself, like within my heart that there was an exchange between the two of them”.

Two days after Catrina’s father had visited his grandson she herself experienced a communiqué from her beloved father. She had lain down for an afternoon nap and was just falling asleep when the following occurred:

And I felt what would have been when you, say, kiss your fingers and then place your fingers on someone. I actually felt like fingers pressing on my forehead and that [emphasised word] is what woke me up, the sensation of actually being touched to the point that I threw myself out of bed and ran out of the room, going, dad where are you? Come back, don’t go.

Catrina told me that just prior to both these communiqués she had visited a homeopath. This had been of great use for her grieving as it facilitated “a shift” and was something that “took the edge off for me”. Her father’s subsequent communiqué was not only reassuring for her but validation that “I was going to be okay”:

I believe that he saw me shift from the absolute horror … And I think he was acknowledging that I had made that shift and he was sort of doing the fatherly sort of gesture, good girl, you’ve made it this far sort of thing, and that, you will be okay … Still to this day I know that he was there, and I still remember the actual pressure.

In addition to receiving this reassurance from her father, Catrina believed the communiqué suggested something even more fundamental, a relationship able to circumvent death’s divide:
I mean the last thing I ever said to him was when he was laid out in his coffin still at the funeral home, and I went and saw him there, and I said to him, you know where we live, come and visit whenever you want to. So I believe that he was, um, trying to show me that he was still here in a way and still watching out for us.

Catrina told me that of all the family only Oliver and herself were not present at her father’s bedside when he died, an occurrence which had produced a deep sense of remorse and the feeling that she had “let him down because I wasn’t there”. The dreaded call had come at three-thirty in the morning. “Mum had had a phone call like that nearly every night for months from the hospital.” Through a bizarre quirk of fate however, Catrina’s mother had taken the spare car keys with her to the hospital, which Catrina frantically discovered when she went to retrieve them. Unable to drive to the hospital with the now thoroughly awakened Oliver, she had telephoned her brother-in-law who told her, “it’s too late, he’s already passed”.

In view of these events, the communiqué between Catrina’s father, herself and her son seemed even more poignant. I suggested to Catrina that perhaps her father’s communiqué eventuated because he had known that they could not be at his bedside, which had come about through no fault of their own. Catrina’s response to this was a resounding, “yes!” I asked Catrina if she had spoken about her experiences with anyone. She responded that she had told both her husband and mother who had not been overly responsive. “Mum just sort of went in her 1950s manner, oh that’s nice dear.”

Catrina told me that her father’s death has reshaped their relationship. “Well, I probably talk to him more now than when he was alive.” Additionally, his death has impacted on how she now sees and experiences life:
A lot’s changed. I know that I’m not the same person that I used to be. I tend not to feel joy, the sense of joy has been sort of extracted. The naivety of life, has in a sense been removed, so that on one hand life is far more serious now. But on the other hand, it’s also shown me that life really isn’t anything, that there is a, that we’re in a state of nothingness, a state of nothingness almost. And yeah, I just feel that there is definitely an energy or something that does go on after life and death.

I suppose what it’s done is essentially show me that death is not the end of the line so to speak. That there is something that goes on, there is something higher, that there is an energy or something that can overcome the physical death of someone, which I suppose in a way has made the thought of death not as scary maybe, to think that there is a possibility of something else.

Although Catrina feels that some form of existence continues beyond the boundary of death, that awareness has come at a price, manifesting in altering family dynamics and relationships, lack of familial closeness, and “there’s just that emptiness, there is a solitude that comes with that death”. Within a twelve month period, Catrina had married, given birth to Oliver, received the diagnosis that both her father and father-in-law were suffering from cancer, and had attended both their funerals:

Because it’s all still associated, it was all too close to them dying, there was too much happiness which was torn away by too much pain within the same twelve month period so I can’t see that happiness and the joy for the loss and the despair that came with that loss.

In coming to the end of our time together Catrina spoke a little about the very special relationship she had shared with her father. She described their relationship as “something quite strong” yet which “was never spoken of”. Perhaps their relationship did not need to be spoken of. Perhaps their
relationship was something that was simply understood between a loved father and a beloved daughter.

Concluding Comments: After our interview was over I stayed a little while talking with Catrina on the footpath in front of her home. Although Catrina and I had spoken at length on the telephone, when I had arrived that morning I saw and felt immediately that she was tense and very anxious. She confided that she was feeling “really anxious” because she “didn’t know what was going to come up”. Additionally, she was afraid of where she “might go”.

Catrina had articulated these feelings during our initial telephone conversation to which I had responded, “I will not let you fall, I will be right beside you, I will be right there”. I reassured her that her feelings were very normal, that at any time we could stop, and that she had complete control of the situation. I utilised what I call “the bus analogy”. The driver of the bus is Catrina, I am a passenger. Being the driver she can stop and start whenever and wherever she wants. If she wants me to get off the bus all she has to do is pull up and ask me to step off. In essence it is Catrina who is in charge of how far she wants to go, not I.

Despite this Catrina was still very anxious and while she had conversed freely during the time leading up to the physical switching on of the micro-cassette recorder, as soon as the recording device came into play she quite literally froze and experienced difficulty in speaking. Despite her fear of “where she might go”, Catrina and I completed our interview, a task possible because she drew on her own internal reservoir of emotional and psychological strength.

As I was taking my leave I told Catrina that it had taken incredible courage for her to pick up the telephone and talk to a complete stranger about her bereavement and communiqué. But
not just that, she had invited that stranger into her home, had extended gracious hospitality, and had quite literally laid herself bare. She in turn told me she felt our meeting was “destined” and that she was “meant” to pick up on the advertisement for the study. And then she looked at me very directly, right into my eyes, and said “you’re not afraid are you?” And I looked right back and said, “no”.

I telephoned Catrina a day or so later. She was on her way out with Oliver; they were shopping for a present for her husband whose birthday happened to be the very day that I had called. She said after our conversation she had felt, “much more of a sense of serenity with the whole dad thing”.

**James: Crossing distances - rationality beyond rationality**

*The Portrait:* James telephoned me after seeing the recruitment advertisement for the study in one of the local inner city newspapers in which it had been placed. He was very interested in the study and although he did not actually elaborate on his experiences, he intimated a great deal more by his continual assent to my statements. I had the distinct impression that he was very familiar with communiqué phenomenon, which I learnt when we met was indeed the case.

When James and I met, I was immediately aware that two disembodied women were accompanying him. There was a very strong familial connection between the three of them, and I knew intuitively that when they had lived life in the flesh the three had had a very close emotional relationship with one another.

As we settled into our chairs to begin the interview, I noticed that the women positioned themselves so that they stood on either side of him and next to his shoulders where they remained quietly and unobtrusively throughout the time we spent together. I had the impression that they were aged when
they died. Their presence was so strong that it was as though they were physically present in the room. I could see that the woman on James’s right was resting her left hand gently on his shoulder and wondered if James was aware of what was taking place. James told me that he wanted to talk about his maternal and paternal grandmothers, both of whom had died in July 2007 and February 2005 respectively.

James spoke first about his paternal grandmother, describing her as a woman, “ahead of her generation”. Holding a PhD in Education, she was a highly respected academic within her university in the Philippines and had been a formative influence on James’s intellectual and academic development. “She always instilled in me the desire to learn more and she inspired me to make sure that I put the right effort into my studies to do well.”

James’s maternal grandmother also holds a very special place in his heart. Describing her as a, “very spiritual person” who was a devout Catholic, she had cared for James and his mother during the early years of his parent’s marriage. It was during this period that “she instilled in us that faith” which James has lived all his life. In addition to caring for her family, she also supported the community, “she’s a very selfless person, and she would go out to rural areas to help out the poor”.

As James spoke about his two grandmothers he wept quietly in front of me. Through his tears, as well as apologising, he told me that he hadn’t properly grieved because, “I just don’t want to talk about it” and that the only way he had been able to cope with his emotional pain was to just, “keep it in”.

I explained to James that how, when and for how long a person grieved was very individualistic. Often people do not want to talk about how they are feeling, whereas at other times they do. Then again, emotions can rise unexpectedly to the surface
irrespective of situation or context. I also told James that everyone who had chosen to participate in the study had been unique and that on a number of occasions there had been a spontaneous resolution of a number of very deep and painful issues related to their grief. Continuing, I said that I felt it was not by accident that he had happened across the advertisement at the time that he did. His response was succinct, “no, it wasn’t”.

As with several other co-researchers, I was somewhat taken aback by a number of synchronicities both James and I shared. The first was our ability to hear and interact with the disembodied. James told me about an incident in which he woke during the night to find a group of individuals standing around his bed, an event reminiscent of my own childhood experiences:

There was an incident years ago when I woke up in the middle of the night, there were twenty of them standing around me. The thing was they were all talking at the same time and it’s interesting because I could understand all of them at the same time but I just said, I don’t want to talk to you please. I can see, I’ll just pray for you but don’t talk to me please.

The one difference with regard to our ability in this respective situation is that I am the only living member of my family who has this ability, whereas James shares his ability with his two sisters and mother. Additionally, we both had had an older sister who had predeceased us at a very young age prior to our birth, we had both been christened into the Catholic/Roman Catholic faith, we both shared the same astrological star sign and we both have a very special connection to St Therese of Lisieux. She has been James’s patron saint since the age of eleven and I was named after her by my mother when born.
As well as discussing his communiqué with his grandmothers, James had questions in his mind to which he sought answers during our time together. He was articulate and sensitive and it was clear these questions were close to his heart and were ones that he had pondered deeply. One related to his best friend Jonathon who had died tragically in 1999, and the other to his sister who had predeceased him when she was an infant.

The Internal Frame of Reference: James’s first communiqué with his paternal grandmother took place after her death which had occurred in the Philippines. James had visited his family a few months prior to her death, and due to financial constraints had decided not to return to the Philippines to attend his grandmother’s funeral. However, on this particular evening he had been woken from sleep by his grandmother who not only knew of his decision, she wanted him to change it:

And so she passed away and that evening when I was sleeping she was just there standing and so I was saying, well why are you here, not in a physical way but just saying it in my mind ... yeah. So, why are you here? And she said, well because you don’t have plans of coming home to attend my funeral.

James did not acquiesce to his grandmother’s wish at that time, telling her instead that he would, “think about it”. The following day however, he was overwhelmed with sadness and grief and so decided to return home to attend the funeral. Since that time James’s communiqué with his grandmother has consisted of dream engagements, with the messages he has received, “normally around she’s been encouraging to study”.

James’s communiqué with his maternal grandmother have been “more recurring and its very specific”. James and his family had visited his grandmother in the United States in
January 2007, who at the time was enjoying good health. Notwithstanding that, James told me that he had had a “feeling” that he would not see his grandmother alive in the flesh again. “I saw her with my grandfather in the background and the sunset was there and when she waved her hand I knew that it was the last time I would see her alive. I knew.”

In the following July, just six months after his visit, James’s beloved grandmother suffered a stroke. He told me he “already knew when she fell ill that she was going to pass away” because he could “hear her thoughts”:

She would be calling out to everyone in the family because she was in a coma. She would be calling out to everyone in the family. It’s almost like I could hear what was going on in her mind and I lost sleep that whole week. And everyone else was still hoping that she would get better but I knew and I told my mum, mum she’s going to pass away, and I know, I can tell because I could hear her thoughts every day. So she passed away.

This was a difficult and frustrating period for them both because his grandmother was trying desperately to communicate with all the family, “she wanted to say thanks to everyone but she couldn’t”. James told me his only comfort during this very difficult time was that his grandmother “because she’s a holy woman” was “praying while it was all happening”.

After her death, James’s grandmother would visit him in his dreams. These were both opportunities for her to convey messages to him and for James to talk with her. “She would appear and she would tell me things, I would talk to her, why did you leave, why did you suddenly leave, what do I do now, what do we do now?” One dream however, was particularly significant:

So what happened was I went to this place. It was a huge house and there was a smaller house. Going to the big house I had to pass
through the smaller house and in the small house I saw my aunties and uncles who had passed away and they were just cleaning up the place and working. So I then walked to the main house and then when I rang the bell she opened the door, my grandmother opened the door.

I was surprised to find her. I said, hi it’s good that you’re here, and we started catching up. I asked her how she was and she said, oh I’m quite happy here, I’m actually preparing this house for everyone to stay in some day. I said, oh okay that’s good, so who’s joining you soon? And she said, well your grandfather will follow quite soon. But he’s still alive, okay, he’s still alive now. But this was just in probably April/May this year.

And I said, oh really that soon? Yeah it’s quite soon, it’s not going to be far off but you know he’ll join me here, and I said, yeah but your other kids who are, I don’t know, who have passed away before you are cleaning the house over there, why is that the case? And she said, oh they’re not yet ready to join me, they’re not yet ready to join, they’re still going through something. They need to clean some things up.

And I said, that’s strange, and so I said, will I be able to join you? And she said, well yes but these are the things that you need to do. So she said, you may have to make sure that your, you have two sisters, because they are both divorced, will have their lives fixed, and once you’ve done that you’re ready to go.

James had asked his grandmother how she was. Her response, “I’m very happy and fulfilled here, you don’t have to worry about me, tell everyone I’m fine” was one that filled James with a sense of quiet awe:

And it’s almost like she’s consumed with the sense of love that is beyond words and she can just radiate it, like radiate to everyone else but it’s almost like it fills her being.
James told me that he shared this dream with his mother in what was an emotional encounter for them both and although both were unsure of the meaning James had said to his mother, “I don’t know but she just said to me that once I’ve done this and this, and I don’t know how long it will take ... you’re done, you can go ... but I think she was saying to me specifically, once you’ve done that your mission is done”.

As well as being charged with additional familial responsibility, the communiqué has had a profound impact on how James now views life, in particular, “her death has taught me to look at life in a simpler way”:

So the first impact that it had is I don’t worry so much anymore about things. Maybe I’ve become more mature as an individual but I think I worry less about things of this world ... I have stronger faith. I’m a devout Catholic, I pray the rosary and my grandmother is a very devout Catholic as well ... I’ve come to judge people less and just, in some ways I’ve learned to just be more, I don’t want to say that it’s selfish but I want to be more close to my thoughts.

... things are more temporary in this world. I will do things that will make me happy and I will always grab each opportunity to say thank you. Yeah, you begin to question what’s important and what’s not.

As our time together progressed, my intuition told me that it was appropriate to acknowledge and talk about the two women who were accompanying James. I mentioned the hand on the shoulder and he told me, “it’s been occurring to me since I sat here that someone is standing behind me” and, “I felt that [the hand] since I sat down ... yeah, I could feel it and I could see it”:

I think it’s my maternal grandmother because I always refer to her, I could have said my paternal grandmother but my instinct tells me my paternal grandmother is here and my maternal grandmother is here, I don’t know why.
I asked James whether or not his grandmother’s had indicated in any way their thoughts or feelings about what was taking place. He responded, “the overarching feeling or message I get in my mind is I could trust you”. This feeling of trust fuelled his certainty and conviction to participate in the study:

Yeah and so they, it’s almost like I should come here, like this is when I called when you talked, okay, let’s do it immediately, I don’t want to wait ... but there was no questions, like I definitely didn’t doubt you.

At one point as James was talking the image of a set of blue rosary beads impressed itself into my mind. The image was very clear and very strong, as was the insistence from James’s [maternal] grandmother to talk about this. I told James I did not want our interview to become a medium session but there was something very specific taking place, and obviously it needed to be spoken about. James told me that his grandmother would make rosaries from individual rosary beads he and the family would post to her when she lived in the United States. She would then sell the rosaries for one dollar so she could give the money to prisoners in jail. As James continued to talk about his grandmother, the connection with the blue rosary beads became apparent:

There was this pack of things that she [maternal grandmother] asked me to bring with me around the world and my mum said, make sure that your grandmother gets these rosary beads. I said, oh there’s so much. I have to stop, I have to buy some things that I need like a new suit and stuff. And she said, no, better make sure you bring this to your grandmother, you don’t know when your grandmother will pass away but she always wants her rosaries. So I think blue was one of the colours that she was building when I was there.

I asked James how death had reshaped his relationship with his grandmothers. He replied that as they are not, “bound by
physical reality” their ability to provide him with assistance is greater than it was before because, “their ability to help was limited [before] by their physical bodies”:

So with the other [paternal] grandmother for rational decisions that need to be made, because she’s smart, I tell her, help me out here, and it’s like having access to help all the time. It’s like I can say, oh I need help with this. If I’m going to meeting I say, you know what, this particular corporate person is a bully, can you massage his ego a bit before I’m there so they’re all ready to receive me. And chances are, whether you call it the guardian angel or whatever, it works.

With my other [maternal] grandmother, the holy one, I know that she will be with me whenever I start praying the rosary or whenever I ask for her help. She knows my thoughts, she knows my weaknesses as a person, and part of being closer to them is to be myself and admit where you’re not good at, where you’re weak at, what your bad points are.
And it’s an ongoing discussion that I find myself having with them. And I find no shame in all these things because at the end of the day they also have their own struggles and these are things that I would never know, and maybe I’ll never know when I’m here, maybe I’ll find out some day. I find it easier to connect to them now than before …

As we were coming to the end of our time together, I asked James how he felt about his participation in the study. He was appreciative saying, “it has helped me in the grieving process”:

But to actually have the chance to shed some tears has been cathartic almost for me because I’ve never really, even during the funeral I did not cry. I just stood my ground and made sure I delivered the, I was a bit emotional during the eulogy but I was … Yeah, so I had to hold myself because it’s being delivered in front of everyone else. The St Therese connection is also very interesting, for you to be named Michele Therese and for that other gentlemen who had a connection with her, you rarely find people, see it’s almost like it validates St Teresa’s presence in her [maternal grandmother] life.
James's communiqué and additional experiences of non-material reality did not interfere with or contradict his own understanding and expression of the Catholic faith and his belief in life after death:

So it's been an experience for me but it's good to find people. Because sometimes Catholic faith or other religions, they're a bit closed minded about these things. But to me, even if I'm Catholic I believe in these things because I live it and I don't care what the Priests will say, what the Bishop will say, what the Pope will say. Because to me Catholic is just one of the conduits to reaching that next life.

Just prior to our time together ending, I asked James if there was anything he would like to ask me. He told me that one of his best friends Jonathon, who had died tragically in 1999 was with him and that he had been, “urging me to talk about this and I don't know why”. I told James that Jonathon misses him very much, and that he had an aura of sadness around him. Shortly after his death, James had awoken to find Jonathon standing close to his bed:

But that evening it was so clear, I was sleeping in bed and he stood by, he was there and I woke up and I said to him, hey why the hell did you leave me? Why did you die, why did you pass away, I mean why and he said, time's up, what can I do, time's up, that's it. And I said, so what about the things, the plans and everything that we've been talking about, and he said, time's up James, I mean you can't do much anymore, you can't do much anymore. Now whenever I go back to the Philippines to visit my grandfather's crypt in the cemetery I make it a point to always go by his thing as well. And I don't know it's just …

Both James and I could feel that there was something Jonathon wanted James to do, but it was impossible to determine what that was because the sadness around him was so thick that
it was impenetrable. I could not hear him and what he wanted us to know could not be known because the sadness which was a palpable energy was preventing our knowing from being able to occur. It was like a thick mass around him and appeared attached to or caused by a particular life event which had occurred when Jonathon was embodied. I suggested that James visualise love as an energy seeping into the sadness which would soften and weaken it. I did tell James that I kept seeing the image of a little girl who obviously had some relevance to Jonathon, but neither of us could be really sure of the connection.

When Jonathon stepped forward James’s grandmother who stood at his left shoulder had stepped back. And then after Jonathon had stepped forward, both James and I gradually became aware that a group of people had gathered around us. James typified both our experience in this regard, “I know they will come, yes, the moment you start”.

As we finally came to the end of our time together James told me, “it’s been a very good experience for me” and, “I feel almost ... a sense of release”. It seemed to me that James felt comforted as well, “I’ve almost been given a reassurance that I’m headed in the right direction”:

> It crystallises, what this had taught me, it crystallises things that you have been thinking of as a human being and it’s almost like it teaches you how to prepare when you move on. To be honest this chat that we had today has made me look at life at a different level again.

As I was clearing the table and tidying the room after James had left, I reflected on his statement of, “heading in the right direction” and thought to myself that if he was not journeying as he ought, his beloved grandmothers would certainly see to it that he would.
Concluding Comments: After our interview I rang James and left a voice message saying that I would telephone him later in the week. Unfortunately I was moving that week and was not able to get back in touch with him as I had indicated I would. When I was able to connect with him, as was my experience, he was bright and quick to give his assent to my statements. He said that after our interview he had “done a lot of thinking” and that last week “was a bit bumpy”. He had carried out a lot of personal reflection, asking himself such questions as, “Did I do enough” and “Was there anything else I could have done”.

I made sure to mention that I was aware of the fact that there well might have been emotions that may come to the surface, particularly as the nature of our discussion was so personal and of such a profound nature. He agreed with everything I said and we ended our conversation on the note that he was now back on an, “even keel”.

Jennifer: Grace revealed

The Portrait: Jennifer telephoned me after she had seen the recruitment advertisement for the study in one of the local inner city newspapers in which it had been placed. As I was out of my office at the time of her call, she left the following message on my work landline:

Hello my name’s Jennifer. I’m calling in response to the advertisement on the study for research, grief and post-death contact. Your requirement is pretty much exactly what I’m experiencing at the moment which is quite frankly, freaking me out. Um, however not only would I be prepared to be interviewed about my experiences, I hope that it may actually help me deal with my bereavement and grief, to put it in some kind of structure and context. So my name is Jennifer, and I hope to hear from you soon or I shall try the mobile number in the ad if I don’t.
I returned Jennifer's call that afternoon. She was collecting her friend’s children from day care and could not talk for very long, so we only chatted very briefly. She said that it was her maternal grandmother who had died eight months ago in January 2008 with whom she was experiencing communiqué. Even to point, according to Jennifer, that she had randomly opened the newspaper, which she has never read in her life before, to the very page that listed the advertisement for the study. She told me that she believed her grandmother had guided her to me.

As Jennifer spoke about her grandmother her voice broke and I felt her grief, fresh and raw, spill over. To my words of comfort she kept responding “I’m alright, I’m alright”. It was evident that Jennifer not only had had a very close and meaningful relationship with her grandmother but that she was an intensely private person as well. She alluded to the fact that she was a celebrity of sorts and did not want to be able to be identified in any way. I assured her that no names, other than a nominated pseudonym, would be recorded in the study without permission, and that questions were primarily concerned with the communiqué itself.

As our time was brief she told me she was willing to participate and would like to receive further information. A few days after posting the material I telephoned Jennifer to confirm our interview details. Again we chatted briefly, during which she told me that she was a “hobbyist biochemist” and that she had “an interest in the paranormal on a rational scientific level”. I found her comments intriguing because they were suggestive of an enquiring mind not prone to flights of fancy, which when I met Jennifer, who was an extremely forthright individual, was indeed the case.
Jennifer told me she had had a number of “psychic” experiences in her life, and was told some years ago by a palmist that she had “advanced psychic ability, heightened sensitivity”. Her grandmother had been a member of the Spiritualist Church in Melbourne, “that side of the family’s Welsh and really quite spiritual in that way you know”. She herself has lived in a number of houses that had attached non-material phenomena, “strange phenomenon, unexplainable events”.

At one point during our conversation I smiled to myself as Jennifer told me quite blithely about George. “Every ghost that has ever inhabited our lives has been called George, I don’t know why.” Jennifer was quite matter-of-fact about these spiritual phenomena in that it was “a very small part” of her life. “I don’t want it to seem that I have an undue interest.” Notwithstanding that, Jennifer also told me she has a spirit guide, “you know I can give you countless instances of where I feel that I’ve had direct and uncanny guidance from my spirit guide”.

Her outlook on life was such that she believed the universe to be, “an incredibly dynamic thing” and that “anything we could ever want is out there”. For Jennifer, the events that occurred and the things that came to her were not due to luck “chance favours a prepared mind”, but rather to an engagement with something beyond herself, something which was willing to provide once asked.

Jennifer had had a warm and loving relationship with her grandmother from the time she was a child, and described her to me as a “safe harbour”. Their relationship became richer and more fulfilling as the years passed, to the point where although they both lived in different states Jennifer would take any opportunity to visit. In March 2008 at the age of ninety-two, Jennifer’s beloved grandmother died in her arms, “we said everything that needed to be said”.
From that time however, rather than their relationship diminishing it has been even more enriched because of “messages” her grandmother sends through a variety of means. “She finds, you know, she finds so many ways of doing it and that is part of our repartee I guess.” Jennifer told me, “if I voice something out loud, right, I can, if I choose to, nan will creatively help me out, you know” and if Jennifer’s communiqué with her grandmother is anything to go by, that is certainly the case.

The Internal Frame of Reference: Jennifer told me that communiqué between her and her grandmother began “a few months after nan’s passing”. Jennifer’s first birthday without her grandmother was a difficult time for her professionally and emotionally, “so I go to bed sobbing my eyes out”. From that moment in time however “is when it all really started”. Jennifer felt her grandmother had “given me a talking to in my sleep” and told me that she had woken the next morning determined to take charge of her professional life:

I woke up and the messages were that if I want to be happy I’ve got to be true to myself, that my self is actually more than enough to parlay into success, ah, that I’ve got stuff that other people want and can pay and that I’m smart enough to leverage that and I’ve watched a million idiots take credit for my ideas and run with them and dah, dah, dah, dah and it was like this key message in my head was, I told you, you’re a clever girl, what are you doing? I was going to start my own company, make money for myself, not other people.

A host of interconnecting synchronicities followed, many involving her grandmother’s name, which ranged from securing legal advice and finance, obtaining office furniture and locating the perfect office space for her new business. Jennifer had told me that her grandmother was “very resourceful” in always finding “creative” ways to communicate with her, one of which was through Jennifer’s godchild, Sara. For example, just prior to
seeking legal advice with regard to the establishment of her company, Jennifer told me, “I have doubts that night, and I’m thinking you know, can I really do it, do I want to be taking this huge responsibility on”.

On the morning of her meeting with the lawyer, a very special communiqué took place. Jennifer found that Sara had placed a card from the Mr Men series of children’s books in her letterbox, which for Jennifer was particularly significant:

And, it was Mr Clever, and she’d taken a highlighter and highlighted the words on it that were *smart, clever*, um, I can’t even remember. I meant to actually put it in my pocket and bring it and show you. And she’d circled all these words and it was waiting in the letterbox for me as I was on my way to the meeting with the lawyer as I say, having doubts.

And to me as I say, like nanna wants to tell me, no, you’re smart, you can do it, you can do it, you’re smart. And it did say you know, smart, clever, it was Mr Clever, like I say, I can’t remember all the other words but whatever words ... and she’d actually highlighted all the words and written Sara on it.

Jennifer had told me that when her grandmother was dying she had said to her mother who was also present, “Jennifer’s a really clever girl”. In reflecting on her grandmother’s words and on the card from Sara, Jennifer’s doubt concerning her new venture vanished. In its place was the reassurance that her decision to move in this direction was the right one.

At one point, Jennifer questioned herself with regard to the communiqué she was experiencing. Was what was taking place perhaps no more than a kind of wishful thinking? Was she reading more into this than what was there? What was really going on?:

Ways of Being
... and I’m thinking to myself, as they’re taking my stuff in, I’m questioning whether I’m going mad, whether I’m just looking for signs everywhere and finding them because I need them so much to give me confirmation that nanna lives on [voice breaking] in spirit, that she is still with me, that I will see her again on the other side, whatever, that she did make it to heaven, that she’s happy, that she’s not in purgatory.

These questions were occupying her thoughts as she supervised removalists who were moving furniture into her newly acquired office space. Jennifer told me that as the last item was being removed, “a holy card drops out of the van onto the ground at my feet”. This was deeply symbolic for Jennifer, especially as her grandmother had been a devout Catholic, frequently praying to St Jude for Jennifer’s welfare and wellbeing. The card had fallen at her feet at the precise moment that she had been thinking the very thoughts, “As I think the thought it falls at my feet.” Although she could not recall exactly what the psalm on the card was, “it was something like; he who believes in me will have eternal life”, she knew irrevocably that she had received confirmation that the communiqué taking place between herself and her grandmother was not beyond the realm of possibility.

I asked Jennifer how she saw her life now as compared to before her grandmother’s death. She told me “I feel like I’m realising my potential, I really do”. In response to my querying whether she felt her grandmother was instrumental in that, she replied “absolutely, absolutely, she is just sitting on my shoulder all day long”. She then spoke a little about what was occurring for her when she had first telephoned me regarding her participation in the study:

Like even you know, the day that I called you, it was, I had voiced aloud [voice breaking], nan, I’m really struggling with coping [gentle tears] with your passing, really struggling, and I know I should be
happy for you and I know you’re giving me the messages that you’re there and you made it and you’re happy and safe and with loved ones and you can help me but, it doesn’t help me, I’m still ...

I said, I know you’re sending me messages that you’re still there and it’s all cool and you’ve found heaven [voice breaking] and you can help me but I miss you nan [tearful voice] and I can’t cope with this grief [gentle tears]. And I just spoke to mum that day and I’m like mum I’m missing nan so much, when is it going to get better, I can’t cope with this grief, it’s killing me.

I understood that Jennifer saw circumstances as opportunities and could see how at a time when she most needed support that “the universe” had provided it. Was it a coincidence that Jennifer was at a particularly low point emotionally at this precise moment in time? Was it a coincidence that I was conducting a research study exploring this phenomenon at this precise moment in time? And was it a coincidence that the very morning that Jennifer had reached out to her grandmother for help, she had also randomly opened a newspaper she never reads to the very page of the study advertisement?

Her grandmother’s death, “she exploded from that husk” enabled her to become part of the universe. “She is now a force of nature” who is, “showing me paths, she’s giving me the tools to make an informed choice”. While this may be the case Jennifer also stressed her independence. “I mean a lot of it’s still up to me, it’s not as if I’m just sitting there and I’m the puppet and she’s pulling the strings.”

Knowing Jennifer to be a deep thinking individual with a strong spiritual, social and moral conscience, I wondered what her response to my question, “do you think life is defined by our physicality or that our existence is defined by our physicality?” would be. I need not have, as her response was clear and
succinct, “to be honest, no”. I asked Jennifer if she had shared her experiences with anyone else:

A little bit to my mum in as much as you know I said to her, cause she’s struggling as well, only child, really close to her mother, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, dah. Um, a little bit, but not to the degree, I just say, I say to mum that I console myself with the thought that I still feel that she’s around and that she’s interested, involved, in my life and helping me to the best of her ability where she is ... there’s one other friend who is interested in these matters, who’s a very close friend whom I have told.

Jennifer told me that the impact of her communiqué with her grandmother had been, “massively life altering” which not only confirmed her, “self-belief” about her own capability, but which had given her the “power of choice”. Furthermore, “anyone that I don’t want to deal with ... I can choose to not contract them or deal with them or whatever, and it’s awesome and it’s power and nan’s giving me power”. She also told me that she often feels like “life is beginning now” a statement evidencing the profound changes her grandmother’s death and communiqué have wrought.

When Jennifer said that I reflected briefly on my own bereavement. I delineate between the time before and the time after my bereavement and know irrevocably that the deaths of my husband and mother pre-heralded the death of my world as I knew it to be up to that moment in time. In the death throes was born another world which is so utterly different to that which went before it that I am still learning to navigate its terrain. Jennifer also told me that she had a definite sense that the second half of her life was going to be very different to the first, another statement I must admit I found much sympathy with.

Since her grandmother’s death, additional insight and understanding has come to Jennifer:
One is that, and in terms of helping me with my grief [tearful voice], some sense of eternity ... what I realise now is that five, ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty years, fifty years in between now and me being reunited with her, it's not even a blink of an eye ... now I have a sense that I'm sort of being pushed and helped and assisted and my eyes are being opened and it's stuff that I've had sense of and an understanding of earlier, but this now is really much clearer to me.

As our time together was coming to an end, Jennifer told me that she now feels “my most small day-to-day actions are potentially meaningful in a bigger picture” the purpose of which she feels is still unfolding. I asked her if there were any questions she would like to ask me. Her response, matter-of-fact as I had come to associate with her, was “no, not really, it’s all clear and I know what you’re doing and I know you can’t tell me the answers any more than you know, but you’re working on it”.

Concluding Comments: Midway through our interview Jennifer became so distressed by her grief that I felt it would be compromising to her to have our conversation recorded, so I made the decision to switch off the micro-cassette recorder. What she told me revealed a twenty-year burden relating to the death of her grandfather which had occurred when she was twenty-six years of age. Her grandfather was terribly ill and had undergone appalling suffering as a result. Through her tears she told me that she spoke to her spirit guide, imploring him to send someone “to accompany him, to take him across”.

Fifteen minutes after Jennifer had reached out to her spirit guide for help in sending someone to help her grandfather she received a telephone call informing her that her grandfather had died at precisely the time at which she had addressed her guide. The burden of guilt she carried was such that she believed she had explicitly caused her grandfather's death, that she had murdered him even though her actions had been motivated by the
best of intent. She believed that on some level the hand of a dark power within her had been at work.

I explained that she had not caused his death but that rather she had played an important role in preparing the way for her grandfather’s exit from his physical body and his entry into non-material reality. After much reflective exploration and conversation, Jennifer was able to see the nature of her actions at that time from a completely different perspective. As this element of our discussion came to a close, Jennifer was convinced her involvement with not only me but also the study was part of a greater orchestration contrived by her grandmother whom she believed had been instrumental in helping her find resolution to the terrible burden she had silently carried for so long.

As we had been talking I suddenly noticed that the wind had picked up. Jennifer had mentioned not long after our interview commenced that she had become aware that when the wind blew her spiritual perception was acute and that it was at this time that “things happened”. According to Jennifer this was when communiqué took place. There appeared to be a synchronistic relationship between the wind and the communiqué she experienced, and at the time that we were discussing this deeply painful issue relating to the death of her grandfather, the wind was quite literally blowing a gale.

Prior to that moment it had been calm and completely still. As soon as we began talking about her grandfather however, the wind came up. As Jennifer’s emotions became stronger the wind whipped into a frenzy. Looking through the windows I could see trees bent at a ninety-degree angle, and the sound itself was deafening. The wind had come from nowhere, it was quite simply astonishing. After resolution had been found, just as suddenly as the wind had come up it completely calmed, and although there
was a light breeze outside, it certainly did not equate to the gale force we had both been witness too only a little while ago.

Jennifer was deeply grieving the loss of her grandmother, and while she had wept throughout our time together, my feeling was that she had left the interview with a more informed understanding. I had a strong sense that at long last she had attained peace of mind regarding her actions concerning her grandfather. She herself was firmly convinced that part of the reason she had been guided to the study, and me in particular, was because of that.

My own thoughts on the matter concur with Jennifer. I believe the disembodied, those who live in non-material reality, know our secret thoughts as they do our wishes and yearnings and wants. I was taught many years ago when a student in the Sufi school I attended that those in this reality can, “pull strings” for us. They can help us enormously in the struggle of our daily lives, which can so often be incredibly challenging. I have experienced this intervention myself on many occasions, and know it to be true.

I telephoned Jennifer the next morning and left a message saying I just wanted to check in, particularly as it had been a big day yesterday with a lot to digest. I also said that I was available if she needed me in any way. That afternoon at 4.43 pm, I received the following text message on my mobile telephone:

Hi Michele – thanks for checking in, gave myself rest of yesterday off and am fine today. Very busy catching up but wanted to let you know I’m okay, thanks again.

Illumination of Themes

The process of Illumination during which data analysis was conducted revealed a thematic cluster of eight themes. These eight themes revealed patterns; groupings and frequencies of
distinctive elements of communiqué as experienced across the group as a whole. Each element is unique yet when gathered together, like the warp and weft threads of a piece of fabric, weave a patterned tapestry of intersubjective experience between the experient and the event. This tapestry reflects the multidimensional nature of communiqué as it occurs within the context of bereavement, and its interconnected systems-relationship with the individual and the metaphorical worlds they inhabit. Following the discussion of each theme, a concluding paragraph summarising pattern-related observations is presented.

**Theme 1: Communiqué manifesting as a discreet type**

Co-researchers reported varying communiqué phenomena and while most experienced just one of those collectively reported, a small number did not. In total, co-researchers experienced and discussed thirteen discrete types of communiqué phenomena: Inner hearing; Perceived utilisation of embodied individuals; Dream visitation engagements; Physical contact; Sense of presence; Sighting the disembodied; Manifestation of the disembodied; Sound; Non-living material items; Scent/Odour; Animals; Post-mortem actualisation of pre-mortem pacts, and Synchronicity.

**Type 1: Inner hearing**

An awareness in the mind of the experient of the thoughts or intentions believed to be those of the deceased, conceptualised as inner hearing, was reported by six co-researchers.

During his communiqué with his mother, Richard reported that his mother’s words to him were not something he heard auditorally. “I didn’t hear them in that sense ... but I had this sense that there was being communicated to me, that it would be okay, was being communicated to me.” Lance hears his mother’s
thoughts “in the back of my head” during her fortnightly visits so clearly that he is able to record, verbatim, their conversations on his laptop. Michelle has named her husband Percy’s voice “the silent voice” which she says is something “that’s telling you in your mind to do something”. She describes this silent voice as something which she hears “inside” rather than as something “outside” which is auditory.

Trudie reported first being aware of her mother’s thoughts at her viewing which came in response to her shocked reaction at seeing her mother’s body in her coffin. “What did you expect, I’m not there anyway, that’s my physical self”, was her mother’s matter-of-fact comment which Trudie reasoned made sense. “And afterwards I’ve kind of thought, well she’s actually right, she’s not there anymore.” There were additional instances where Trudie reached out to her mother for guidance regarding a particularly difficult family situation. The advice from her mother “keep with it”, encouraged Trudie to maintain a semblance of family peace and calm during this most challenging period.

James reported experiences of hearing both his paternal and maternal grandmother’s thoughts within his mind. As his maternal grandmother lay in a coma for a week after experiencing a debilitating stroke he “lost sleep that whole week”. James reported that he knew his grandmother was going to die because he “could hear what was going on in her mind”. When encountering his paternal grandmother after her death, James engaged in a non-verbal dialogue “through my mind”. Kelly heard her partner Piero’s voice and felt his presence when she was going through the painful process of sorting through his belongings. Aware that she was not making conscious decisions to retain one item over and above another, she reports that his direction on what and what not to keep was “like a commentary”.
Type 2: Perceived utilisation of embodied individuals

Perceived utilisation of embodied individuals by the deceased was reported by two co-researchers.

Jennifer relayed that her grandmother communicates with her through her godchild Sara, that she is “very resourceful” and that if someone is available whom “she can use as a medium” she does. Helen on the other hand was initially alerted to her partner John’s presence by her new partner whom John would use to spontaneously, “come through”.

Type 3: Dream visitation engagements

Dream visitation engagements featuring the deceased were reported by eight co-researchers. These dreams all had distinct elements which co-researcher’s reported made them different to other dreams they usually experienced.

Kath experienced a number of dream visitation engagements with her partner Geoff during which she was able to confront and work toward resolving a painful issue which had come to light after his death. In addition to engaging with Geoff, Kath was also reunited with her father (whose death had followed six weeks after Geoff) during which he provided much needed advice. Kath describes these dreams in terms of “there’s a sense of being in them and being in that place” and “there’s a sense of being able to be conscious about what you’re doing and where you’re going”.

Danneil’s dream visitation engagement also appeared to be one of resolution. Having experienced disturbing and distressing dreams for many years featuring her deceased father, Danneil experienced yet another dream during which he threw carrots at her. Upon waking and being particularly perturbed by his behaviour, she spoke out loud to her mother requesting clarification for the carrot episode, and possible intervention. “I
said out loud ... would you mind asking why he was throwing carrots at me.” She believed the intervention worked because, “it never happened again”.

Jill reported her first dream visitation engagement with her husband Bob as something which she “remembered as if it was in front of me”. Jill heard Bob say to her “I’m okay and it’s okay and it’s not your time but I’m here waiting”. Jill has experienced subsequent dream visitation engagements where her interaction with Bob has been less direct and relatively more subtle. In these dreamscapes Bob always appears to be hovering quietly as a silent presence in one of the corners of the bedroom.

Therese’s dream visitation engagements with her father, which occurred during a period of extreme professional and personal stress and anguish, provided welcome support and encouragement. During this very difficult period Therese came to the conclusion, “that dad was working for me to help me with this situation”. Cymantha relayed that she had had many dream visitation engagements with her father who “always seems to be telling me something”. As for Therese, Cymantha’s dream encounters convey positive messages of assurance. “It’s almost like he’s saying you’ll be right you know.”

Mayumi experienced a number of dream visitation engagements with her husband Patrick, not all of them pleasant, while Jennifer reported that after experiencing a crisis of meaning and direction, she had woken from sleep with the feeling that her grandmother had “given me a talking too in my sleep and said, look love, here’s what you’ve got to do”. This experience provided meaningful direction for Jennifer, who realised if she wanted to be happy had to “be true to myself”. Kevin’s dream visitation engagement with his close friend Sam involved a long journey during which he acted as a guide, while for James, his dream engagement with one of his grandmothers provided the
opportunity for specific instructions to be conveyed concerning familial responsibilities.

**Type 4: Physical contact**

Physical contact or touch believed to be from the deceased was reported by four co-researchers. Some of these gestures were infinitely gentle, emotionally tender and very private. All of them revealed a depth of sentiment, love and affection which death could not diminish. Some, manifested in the form of a “helping hand”, as in Michelle’s interaction with her husband Percy.

Michelle, feeling desperate and in need of emotional support and understanding had been wandering aimlessly through her local suburban shopping centre when she was guided to the very person who was able to provide that help. “Anyway all of a sudden I felt something on my shoulders, like a pressure, and I was pushed across the road, that’s how I can explain it, into this little community, like this little cottage … I went inside, went inside, I was pushed inside [emphasised words] and I stood near this desk … and I just said, is there anybody I can talk too. And she said ‘I’ll just be a minute’ and she went in and she got Richard.”

Catrina felt her father’s fingers on her forehead just as she was falling asleep one afternoon. “And I felt … what would have been when you say kiss your fingers and then place your fingers on someone, I actually felt [emphasised word] like fingers pressing on my forehead and that [emphasised word] is what woke me up, the sensation of actually being touched.”

Therese had two experiences of being touched. The first experience occurred in the bathroom, evoking within her a feeling of comfort and relaxation. “I felt like someone was stroking my hair very soft and gentle, I could feel it, I could feel it, I knew
something was happening, I could feel it ... it wasn’t me doing it to myself.” Therese told me that this was a gesture her father would do when she was a young child.

Her second experience occurred when she had retired for the evening and was one which she thought was initially attributable to her niece who was visiting her at the time. “I felt like someone blowing in my ear. I kept my eyes closed and I felt like someone was blowing in my ear and I thought it was my niece playing games ... During the course of the night, I felt again this blowing in my ear and I thought, I wish Erlinda would stop, I need to go to sleep”. However it was not her niece Erlinda who was keeping her awake as it was later determined that she had been asleep at the time.

John’s two experiences of being touched by his wife Dawn are a touching account of their pre and post-mortem intimacy. “I was just laying in bed, and I felt a pair of arms come round and cuddle me ... You know I could actually feel the hands around me”. John’s second experience of being touched by Dawn was as poignantly tender as the first. “She was laying in bed with me and she turned around and she kissed me.”

**Type 5: Sense of presence**

Experiencing a sense of presence believed to be the deceased was reported by four co-researchers.

Trudie’s sense of presence experience with her mother was so palpable that “it was like I had forgotten she’d died”. Having returned to the family home for her mother’s funeral service, Trudie reported that every time she was in her room by herself “she [mother] would be there”. Irrespective that her mother did not speak to her, nor that she heard her mother’s thoughts she “felt she was there ... on the landing”. Marie, reports that “I have the sense of her being around when I really need her”, and
Cymantha reported at the time of her interview that although her father “hasn’t been around that much” when she sensitises herself or “tunes in” she feels, “he’s here, on this side” [gesturing to her right]. His presence is accompanied by the inner hearing “of words like, hello Sambo”.

Garry experienced two sense of presence communiqué experiences with his wife Yvonne, the first of which also encompassed an olfactory element. “I felt her presence in the motor car and I smelt her Estee Lauder Youth Dew perfume.” Both experiences occurred while he was alone and travelling in a motor vehicle and both experiences, other than the olfactory element were identical. “And she came again, it came again ... I didn’t see her ... I just felt her again, strongly ... and that on top of it, like twenty-two years ago, it was exactly the same [emphasised words] feeling.”

**Type 6: Sighting the disembodied**

Sightings believed to be of the deceased were reported by five co-researchers.

Mayumi was woken from sleep by the sound of a dog barking in the morning and saw “my husband come through the wall”. James, when deciding whether or not to attend his maternal grandmother’s funeral service was confronted by her after taking a shower. “I went out of the room and she was standing there ... just standing there smiling.” Therese was disturbed from a silent reverie by her Uncle Joe’s reflection in mirrored glass. “And I looked up and I saw, I literally saw my Uncle Joe on an angle smiling at me like that [smiled], literally smiling at me, he was beaming.”

Although Richard was unsure as to whether his communiqué involved him sensing the presence of his mother behind him, or whether he actually saw her face in the shaving
mirror, Michelle on the other hand knew categorically that she had seen her husband Percy in their local shopping mall purchasing cigarettes. “And as I was walking away and I turned around and I saw Percy ... and I know it was him.”

**Type 7: Material manifestation of the disembodied**

Material manifestation believed to be the deceased was reported by two co-researchers.

Jayne’s encounter with her husband Robert was both startling and unexpected. Waking from sleep, and as she was making her way to the ensuite she was quite literally stopped in her tracks by his physical presence. “I certainly stopped, I couldn’t get beyond, he was standing in the doorway to the ensuite.” Jayne was unshakeable in her conviction that she had encountered her husband “I knew that chest fairly well, and the shoulder outline and he had a, when he played footy I think it was his left shoulder, we called it his lumpy shoulder, he’d dislocated it playing football and there’s always that little bit of a bump on it, so that was there.”

On the evening of the day that his granddaughter Sammie was killed and in need of solitude, Bob found himself standing on the back veranda. Bob was very specific in describing his communiqué with Sammie, which also included him hearing her auditorally. As Bob was standing with his hand resting on his hip, “Sammie stood beside me, put her arm through mine and said *it’s alright grandpa, it’s alright grandpa*” [emphasised words].

**Type 8: Sound**

A variety of sounds which were attributed to the deceased were reported by two co-researchers.

Therese was in the backyard garden, an area of the family home particularly favoured by her father, with the
granddaughter of a family friend when they were both startled by
the sound of a footstep crunching on dead leaves which occurred
behind them. When they both turned to see who was present,
“there was no-one there, there was nothing there”.

Bob reported hearing Sammie’s voice in conversation two
nights running. On the evening of the funeral service he was
roused from his bed by the sounds of a female and male voice
talking outside the door on the porch. Upon opening the door he
was greeted with silence and no visible persons present. After
returning inside he was disturbed again by the voices, however
on this occasion the identity of the voices was revealed. “It was
Sammie’s voice saying, \textit{grandpa leave the lights on in the
workshop so I can find my way home at night}[emphasised
words]. With regard to the male voice he could hear, “God? I’m
not being stupid, I’ve got good reason for this too.” Bob was able
to reassure Sammie the following evening when again he heard
voices in conversation by speaking directly to his granddaughter,
“It’s alright Sammie” after which the voices stopped.

**Type 9: Non-living material items**

Perceived utilisation of non-living material items attributed
to the deceased were reported by four co-researchers.

In Michelle’s household and shortly after her husband
Percy’s death, a metronome which had wound down two weeks
before he died suddenly began to tick of its own volition,
“backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards”. Drawn
inside by the sound, which she had heard when in the back yard,
her surprise was compounded when upon playing Percy’s cd, the
metronome stopped ticking. Michelle also relayed that upon my
arrival at her home to conduct her interview, the radio, as had
the metronome, autonomously switched on and began to play.
Therese relayed an incident involving a photograph of her father’s brother, who coincidentally had died on the same date as her father. As she entered the room in which the picture was displayed her attention was caught because, “it’s as though that picture was alive”. This was so intense that she felt, “the picture was talking to me, he was talking to me” and that this phenomenon confirmed that her father was with his brother, who had predeceased him some years earlier.

Cymantha, who reportedly is “very austere with my money” believed that a malfunction of her electric blanket, and the necessity of having to purchase a replacement was an event orchestrated by her father to teach her some financial flexibility, while Marie, who experienced quite drastic engine trouble when travelling in the family car with her mother’s ashes to Geelong, Victoria, was of the firm opinion that both her deceased parents had come to her and her husband’s aid. “I had the strong sense of mum being present and buzzing in the car with excitement. But I had a very strong sense that dad had somehow come on board and had coasted us through.”

**Type 10: Scent/Odour**

A variety of scents or odours believed to be associated with the deceased were reported by four co-researchers. Although the duration of these communiqué were brief and lasted no more than a few seconds or minutes at most, these odours frequently displayed another characteristic; they were bounded in that they only occurred in specific locations and appeared to have a specific “spread”.

Jill reported smelling “this burst of scent” which was her husband Bob’s aftershave. Although she used to spray her pillows with it after his death, she had not done so for a long time so was particularly surprised when this would spontaneously
occur, “mostly in the bedroom”. Like Jill, Michelle also experienced encounters with her husband’s aftershave. “All of a sudden I’d get a whiff of it.” In addition, and in keeping with Percy’s habits prior to his death, she would also “get a whiff of cigarette smoke” and this despite that neither she nor their son smoke.

Therese has also had an experience with cigarette smoke that she attributed to her father who had been a smoker for many years, which occurred in her bedroom. This was another intense experience that roused her from sleep. “It was sickening, it was so strong it made me sick … it was so, so strong, it woke me up.” However a more pleasant culinary olfactory experience followed not long afterward. Her father’s favourite dish was a ratatouille, and sure enough one morning, “that’s what I could smell, in my bedroom”.

Jennifer experienced the “very floral” scent of her grandmother’s favourite flower, violets, while walking down Parramatta Road, a busy and often congested vehicular thoroughfare. “I’m enveloped in a scent, for one nano second, and it’s like, okay, thanks, that’s how I explain the scent.” Similarly with Jill and Michelle, Mayumi also encountered her husband Patrick’s aftershave. “Months and months later you get rid of everything and still sometimes a whiff of aftershave.” Mayumi also encountered a scent associated with her mother when handling one of her handkerchiefs, who had died well over thirty years ago. “So it’s been washed and used … and I opened my drawer and there was one handkerchief … and I thought, I can smell my mother … it’s been used, it’s been washed so many times, but one second I just felt …”
Type 11: Animals

The perceived utilisation of animals by the deceased was reported by one co-researcher and involved the death of a beloved family cat which followed six weeks after the death of the owner. The cherished cat which had belonged to Danneil’s mother had been unwell, and despite repeated visits to the local vet no identifying clue had been able to provide the cause of ill-health. After yet another visit Danneil was informed of the perilous situation which necessitated the cat having to be humanely euthanized. However, Danneil did not have to provide consent or sign relevant documentation as the little cat died in her sleep during the day. According to Danneil, “I put that down to mum because I thought to myself that mum had made the decision for me”.

Type 12: Actualisation of pre-mortem pacts/agreements

The perceived post-mortem actualisation of pre-mortem pacts/agreements between themselves and the deceased was reported by three co-researchers. After being informed by his mother, “don’t let anyone ever tell you that Jesus doesn’t exist because last night he nearly took me right up to where the light is, but he sent me back” Lance was told, “he’ll probably take me in about three days … but now when he takes me, don’t you come home”.

Lance was due to commence the Variety Charity Bash, a fund raising annual car rally. Listening to his mother somewhat sceptically, Lance was then told, “he’s going to put you to the test, because he knows where you’ll be when he takes me. I’m going to be okay”. He was then told, “when I go you just put me in the fridge until you get back … yep, you just put me in the fridge till you return from the good work you’re doing for the kids and you know where I’ve got to go”. Three days to the day Lance’s mother
died and true to his word he ensured that she was “fridged” until his return after which he organised the funeral service.

Therese relayed a poignant pre-mortem pact which involved her father and his nephew, who had told her that upon his death, “He’s going to go to my nephew, my eldest nephew, and be his guardian angel.” The morning after the day of her father’s death, her nephew woke from sleep and informed the family, “I think I’ve just had a dream with grandad, and in the dream grandad said to me that he had seen the gates of heaven, that he had seen his father”. According to Therese, “I know in my head what dad had said so that verified it to me”.

The pre-mortem pact between Danneil and her mother was stimulated after their watching a television interview which discussed this very issue. Between them they agreed that Danneil’s mother would stop the clock on Danneil’s birthday, August 3, at 3 pm. The clock in question was a small electric clock which was actually broken; however, what actually happened was that the clock began to tick. “Six weeks after she was gone it was working and it’s still working and she’s been gone for two years.” Danneil believed that her mother, “tried to make good on what we talked about”.

**Type 13: Synchronicity**

Instances of synchronicity believed to be associated with the deceased were reported by four co-researchers. These synchronicities appeared intensely meaningful for the experient emotionally and psychologically, as they were perceived as messages or verification that the person/s close to them who had died still had their embodied loved ones in their thoughts.

Jayne, on the day of her husband Robert’s death experienced a synchronicity that confirmed for her that, “there is something other than the material concrete world that we live in”. Lying in
a rock pool and watching the clouds above her she experienced what she described as “a movement from the ground up to the sky” which she defined as “an energy”. This movement was accompanied by an inner knowing that, “someone’s just gone to heaven”. After receiving the Coroner’s report she realised that the time of Robert’ death had coincided “within fifteen, twenty minutes” with the timing of the incident that had occurred at the beach.

Driving home after visiting the gravesite of her parents and uncle, Danneil received what she felt was a synchronistic message from both of them. The number plate of the car travelling slowly in front of her spelt out “ALF”. For Danneil this was highly significant because the letters not only corresponded to her mother’s initials, they were an abbreviation of her uncle’s name. “So for me it was mum and my uncle who were saying hi ... and that was it and then as soon as I realised it I just zoned in on these letters and that was it for me, it was mum, it was mum and her brother”.

Trudie reported a number of instances of synchronicity between herself and her mother. Shortly after moving from Singapore to Australia her and her family were ensconced in a serviced apartment. Eventually locating a home to rent, they were told by the realtor that the moving date was to be 2 September. This was highly significant for Trudie. “That’s mum’s birthday, now why would he have picked the second of September? I just thought that was really odd.”

Jennifer, while acknowledging her communiqué also at one point experienced a crisis of meaning which resulted in her questioning her belief and acceptance of them. Was it, “wishful thinking”? Was she, “just looking for signs everywhere and finding them”? This questioning was fuelled by a number of concerns, including not knowing whether or not her grandmother
who was a devout Catholic was in purgatory, the hope that “she
did make it to heaven” and if so whether or not “she’s happy” and
whether “she is still with me”.

These anxious thoughts were put to rest however when
during an office relocation Jennifer experienced an astonishing
synchronicity which at the precise moment that she was
“questioning whether I’m going mad” a holy card fell from the
removalist van at her feet. As her grandmother was a devout
Catholic, Jennifer’s doubt vanished, replaced instead by calming
reassurance and the certainty that the communiqué she was
experiencing with her grandmother was not “wishful thinking”.

Theme 1 Pattern-related observations

Co-researchers reported 13 discreet types of communiqué
phenomena which manifested as; Inner hearing; Perceived
utilisation of embodied individuals; Dream visitation
engagements; Physical contact; Sense of presence; Sighting the
disembodied; Manifestation of the disembodied; Sound; Non-
living material items; Scent/Odour; Animals; Actualisation of pre-
mortem pacts, and Synchronicity.

These diverse communiqué phenomena, indeed the event
itself as it occurred in the life of the experient acted as a means of
communication between the bereaved and the deceased. In all
instances the communication was initiated by the deceased, was
unsought by the bereaved, and occurred unexpectedly in their
lives. Although for most co-researchers what was communicated
appeared to be exactly what the experient needed at that moment
in time, for a small number the event was experienced as initially
alarming or perceived as ‘spooky’.

What was communicated via each type of phenomena
differed according to the individual needs of the experient at the
time. For some, guidance and reassurance was given, for others
encouragement and support. Some felt they were being taught or instructed in some way by the deceased. What is suggested by all encounters however is that the psychosocial bonds that conjoin embodied individuals in relationship networks can continue after the death of one of those individuals. What is also suggested by all encounters is that death is not an impermeable barrier between individuals because they can live in two worlds simultaneously, and that the deceased have options for how they communicate and when.

What was apparent in every instance, was that although the event of physical death had altered how individuals communicate and relate to one another, and by what means they do that, it did not diminish that relationship; as reported by co-researchers, in many ways it made the relationship richer and more meaningful because it sustained them in ways they had not thought possible or even imagined. Thus, as a result of their communiqué, the relationship each co-researcher experienced with the deceased were both confirmed and/or transformed.

Theme 2: Additional experiencing persons

Co-researchers reported that in addition to their own experience of communiqué phenomena, additional immediate family members did as well. Of the twenty-one co-researchers, five had family members who experienced communiqué directly related to the deceased.

Bob relayed that his granddaughter Sammie not only visited him but also her grandfather by her mother’s first marriage “Uppa”. On both occasions Sammie conveyed “everything was all right, that she was all right”. According to Bob, Uppa “is a changed man as well”. Despite her unexpected death Sammie suffered no ill-effect, rather she was alive and well, albeit in different form. “Yes, dead, but she was all right.” Knowing that
Sammie was not in distress eased their anxiety and concern for her wellbeing.

Trudie, who had returned to her family home in London at the death of her mother relayed that her son knew his grandmother was in the house because he could feel her presence. This was raised by him in conversation, during which he told his mother that not only was his grandmother, “on the landing” she was also in the kitchen “with the big tin”. Both Trudie and her son responded differently to their communiqué. Although Trudie felt a sense of emotional closeness with her mother and was comforted knowing her mother was close by, her son was unnerved by the encounter describing it as “spooky”. During the difficult process of organising the funeral service, Trudie’s sister also experienced communiqué with their mother, which Trudie summarised, “it was very clear, both my sister and I felt it was very clear she was giving some sort of direction to say, no, I wouldn’t like that”.

In Therese’s family, it was her eleven year old nephew and nine year old niece who experienced communiqué with their grandfather, Therese’s father. Both grandchildren experienced communiqué manifesting as a dream engagement which occurred simultaneously for both of them the morning of the day after their grandfather had died. In addition, five months after this communiqué occurred, Therese’s niece experienced another communiqué when she heard footsteps walking from her grandfather’s bedroom, leading up the corridor and coming to a halt outside the door of the room in which she was sleeping at the time.

On the morning following her grandmother’s death, Jennifer’s “sceptic” father told her, “your nan visited me here”. Apparently on the evening of the day of her death her father had seen her walking through the house while he was sitting outside
in the garden. In describing the clothes she was wearing, Jennifer's mother revealed the very garment hanging in a closet, which was the dress she had worn on the day of Jennifer's parent's marriage.

Catrina reported that it was her eighteen-month old son Oliver who in addition to herself experienced communiqué with her father. According to Catrina, this was demonstrated by his unmistakable response to a non-material presence. “Yeah, yeah, clearly [emphasised word] something was going on.” Catrina stated categorically that what she witnessed, as demonstrated by the behaviour of her son was “an exchange between my son and my dad”.

**Theme 2 Pattern-related observations**

Co-researchers reported that in addition to their own experience of communiqué phenomena, additional immediate family members did as well. Of the twenty-one co-researchers, five had family members who experienced communiqué directly related to the deceased. These family members all experienced, again, a diverse range of communiqué phenomena initiated by the deceased which revealed an ongoing non-material psychosocial relationship which addressed particular needs of the experienc at that moment in time. As for Theme 1, as a result of their communiqué, relationships between the embodied and the disembodied were both confirmed and/or transformed.

**Theme 3: Occurrences of communiqué in bereavement**

The occurrences of communiqué in bereavement, including its proximity to bereavement and its duration and frequency appears to vary. Co-researcher’s reported that their communiqué generally occurred either very close to the death, sometimes within minutes or hours, or alternatively days, weeks, months or years later. Sometimes co-researcher’s experienced their
communiqué only once, while for others there was a spate of instances occurring over either a few days or weeks, and sometimes months or years. Although there does appear to be a tapering off over time of occurring phenomena, this should not be perceived as its general nature, as suggested by Garry who experienced two instances of communiqué with his wife Yvonne, the first occurring a few months after her death and the second approximately twenty-two years later. In addition to Garry, since her death in 2007, Lance’s mother visits (as at the time of his interview in September 2009), “on average now, every fortnight”.

With regard to communiqué proximity to bereavement, Bob experienced his granddaughter Sammie’s presence “that same night” of the day of death. For Catrina it was “six, seven months” after her father’s death had occurred. Kath, “three weeks later” was the time when she first encountered her partner Geoff in a visitation dream. “Four months after he passed” Jill encountered her husband Bob in a visitation dream, while for Trudie, “from a few days after she’d gone”.

Therese who experienced communiqué with her father and uncle reported instances “a couple of days” after her father died, and with her uncle, “it was four days after he died”. Danneil’s mother made good on their pre-mortem pact. “Six weeks after she was gone”, while for Jennifer “a few months” after her death was when her grandmother visited. Although it’s “faded a bit”, Cymantha’s father visited “all the time, more or less” after his death, while Helen’s recalcitrant partner John first made his presence known six weeks after his death.

John’s wife Dawn first came to him “twelve months” afterward, while for both Richard and Jayne their singularly occurring communiqué occurred between three to six months post-bereavement; Richard’s “within three or four months” closely mirrored Jayne’s, “between three and six months”. Kevin knew
his close friend Sam would turn up in one of his dreams. “Twenty-one days almost to the day”, he did. Kelly’s communiqué with her partner Piero occurred “probably within that month” while for Mayumi it was “probably three years” after the death of her husband Patrick that she experienced communiqué. Michelle’s husband Percy first communicated with her “on the morning following his death”, while James’ who experienced communiqué with his maternal and paternal grandmother’s had a slightly different experience.

James’s paternal grandmother, obviously put out that her grandson would not be returning to the Philippines for her funeral decided to pay him a visit “shortly after her death” which subsequently ensured his attendance. With regard to his maternal grandmother who lay in a coma after experiencing a debilitating stroke, their communiqué was such that he knew she was going to die because he could “hear her thoughts”. Marie’s mother made her presence known during a trip to Geelong, Victoria, her mother’s home town, shortly after her cremation, while another communiqué occurred twelve months later on the anniversary of her death. Finally, Lance’s mother made her presence felt on the day of her funeral service when she initiated a conversation with him which he heard in his mind.

The duration of the communiqué experiences reported by co-researchers, especially those constituting olfactory, sense of presence of the deceased, material manifestation of the deceased and physical touch are brief, lasting no more than perhaps a few seconds or minutes. Those communiqué involving hearing the thoughts of the deceased, the utilisation of other or alternate embodied individuals, animals or material objects to communicate, and visitation dreams, appear to extend for longer periods. For example, when Lance’s mother visits she is “normally with me for two to four hours” communicating
throughout the entire period while he types their discourse on his laptop.

**Theme 3 Pattern-related observations**

The timing of communiqué relative to bereavement suggests that there is no timing as such. It seems to occur almost without rhyme or reason, however what is apparent is that it always appears to occur at a time when needed most by the experient. Sometimes this is not recognised as such by the experient, but then later the event seems to find its place in their life and the meaning of the event is then clearer.

Although there is generally a tapering off of phenomena after what appears to be an internal psychospiritual shift or period of healing (which is synonymous with growth) in the experient, in some instances communiqué can occur on a regular basis and after a hiatus of some time. This suggests that all individuals are conjoined in some way at a non-material level and in a non-material relationship, and that despite physical death they remain connected to one another in that relationship which exists outside of material space and time. Thus relationships are both confirmed and transformed post-death irrespective of the timing of the communiqué in the life of the experient albeit the fact that when communiqué does occur, it is always at the time that is right for the experient.

**Theme 4: Conceptualised understandings of communiqué**

Although co-researchers reported diverse conceptualised understandings of their communiqué, there appeared to be an underlying almost providential element present in all of their experiences. This providential element manifested such that all experiences conveyed or eventuated in something positive, reassuring and affirming. The majority of co-researchers believed that their after-death encounters with the deceased was directly
relevant to a difficulty or concern they were experiencing at the time their communiqué occurred.

Bob was very clear regarding what he felt to be the purpose for his communiqué with his granddaughter Sammie. Bob had ignored, for valid reasons “a feeling that I had to ring her before midday” that same morning. If he had telephoned her when he felt compelled to do so, when he had what he termed, “that window of opportunity” could he have “changed the future”? Could that telephone call have given her a few minutes of valuable time which would have influenced her proximity to the water tanker travelling in the opposite direction? Could those few minutes have delayed her journey enough to place her on an alternate stretch of road which could have prevented her from being in the time and place at which the accident that claimed her life occurred?

Bob blamed himself for Sammie’s death and was experiencing deep anguish and torment as he wrestled with his thoughts, feelings and emotions. “I think that had a lot to do with it because yes I was upset ... it kept on coming back and back and back. Why didn’t I? Why didn't I do it?” At precisely that moment Sammie came to him, put her arm through his and spoke the words, “it’s alright grandpa, it’s alright grandpa”. Sammie’s actions in hastening to her beloved grandfather’s side in his hour of need on the day of her death suggest that she knew he would hold himself responsible. Consequently she wanted to reassure him that he was not to blame, and that she understood why he had not made the telephone call.

Catrina, although lovingly in attendance to her father throughout his illness had been by a bizarre quirk of fate unable to be at his bedside when he died, and had only arrived after the rest of the family. Unable to “say goodbye” or be present at the time she felt her father needed her most had caused her deep
emotional pain and the feeling that she had failed him in some way. Seven months later when Poppie Max “had a conversation” with her young son Oliver, Catrina believed the engagement between them was “not a closing” but rather an opportunity whereby her father was, “trying to reinforce a connection” with his grandson. And when her father came to her two days later, she felt that it was in acknowledgment of “a shift from the absolute horror to a point where I think he could see that I was going to be okay”.

Catrina felt her father was reassuring her that, “he was still here in a way and still watching out for us”. No other members of Catrina’s family experienced communiqué with her father, and no other members, apart from Catrina and Oliver, were absent from her father’s bedside when he died. Catrina felt that her father had come to both her and Oliver because he knew of their absence and the resulting distress it had caused her.

Kath felt that the dream engagements between herself and her partner Geoff were not random and that they were occurring for a reason, one of which was to provide a forum which would facilitate the “unfinished business” standing between them. Kath feels that Geoff “has to learn some lessons”, and that “these dreams are somewhat of a process of him trying [to do] that”.

The purpose Jill found in her dream engagement with her husband Bob left her feeling reassured on a number of counts. “I think he came because he knew that I needed him, and that I needed to know that he was alright.” After his death there were times Jill wondered if there was more she could have done to ease the distress Bob’s illness caused him. However, after her communiqué her perspective altered. “I think he knew that I was in a place where I needed him to tell me that it was all okay and he was okay now ... he was saying, no, I was real, and I did exist
and you can continue on with a relationship with me even though I’m dead.”

Michelle’s communiqué with her husband Percy has led her to see their after-death encounters as constituents of “a learning process” that is that she is being educated about spirituality, about existence, about love and about how to live until such time that she knows all she needs too. Trudie questioned the purpose of her communiqué. “Like you say, it’s not, you don’t seek it, it seems to come to you. Why does it come to you? By doing that are people you’ve lost trying to tell you something?” Trudie conceded that her mother’s continual presence in her life may not be ongoing, however at this moment and at a time when she most needs her, her mother is with her. “I think, maybe that’s why in some ways she’s back, because she’s kind of saying, look I didn’t say that stuff but I’m here now and I really care and I want you to be strong. I think that’s what she’s saying.”

Although Danneil feels “a bit slow on the uptake” regarding the purpose for her communiqué, she did speculate whether those who experience such events comprise those individuals utilising more of their brain than that stipulated by “general theory” which, “is supposed to be that we only use ten percent of our brain”. Irrespective of whether such a causal relationship exists, Danneil did articulate, “the most that we can sort of get is that, I’m still here”. Jennifer feels that her communiqué with her grandmother are one aspect of a bigger, more complex universality which is enabling her to “realise my potential as a human being”.

John, in feeling that his communiqué with his wife Dawn was conveying “she’s still looking after us, and she’s still here”, mirrored Kelly’s feelings that her communiqué with her partner Piero provided her with emotional support and inner strength. Therese feels “dad’s still with us, he’s still here, he’s still looking
after us”, while Garry who is also comforted, feels his communiqué with his beloved wife Yvonne are “affirmations” of their eventual reunion which will occur after his own death.

Lance, like Bob, was very clear regarding what he believed the purpose of his communiqué with his mother was which was to be more honest with himself and those around him. “When mum was in the coffin she’s talking to me ... act on it, stop hurting your family, be honest with yourself, be truthful to those that are around you.” Lance did just that. Mayumi did not ponder overly much as to the why’s and wherefore’s of her communiqué with her husband Patrick, choosing instead to accept them as something that had happened between them. “I have no answer, honestly I have no answer. I tend not to question things. I just take it as it comes.”

Kevin’s communiqué with his close friend Sam was quite specific, such that he felt he had been enlisted as “a guide” to assist Sam in “the vastness that informs” and that his dream engagement with Sam was the means whereby this was possible. When he awoke from this dream Kevin, “just had a very clear understanding that I had a job to do”. In addition to “offering service” Kevin feels that experiences such as these are “also for our benefit to awaken a little bit more deeply” and like Michelle, sees them as informing the individual about life and granting them the opportunity, “to take a deeper look”.

Jayne, who “ran into” her husband Robert was, like Mayumi, somewhat pragmatic regarding her communiqué, which she saw as “something that happened in bereavement”. Richard felt that the purpose of the communiqué between himself and his mother really came into play four years after it had occurred. While coming to the difficult decision to leave the Society of which he had been a Jesuit priest for eighteen years, Richard felt sustained by what his mother had communicated four years
earlier, “it’ll be alright”. Richard defined the process of leaving “as a form of death” likening it to a divorce. “Your whole life is tied and has been tied to that way of being so that disengaging is a really difficult process.” Richard made the difficult and painful transition from one life to another in resonance with the assuring words of support his mother had conveyed when she visited him after her death.

Cymantha, in communion with a number of other co-researchers felt there was a definite purpose in the communiqué between herself and her father, which she believed was to offer emotional support and encouragement. It seems that Helen’s communiqué with her partner John was similar to Kevin’s with Sam, in that it provided the opportunity for assistance to be provided. John not only needed to learn appropriate behavioural etiquette between the embodied and the disembodied, but also needed the reassurance that though he found himself “in a grey place”, would find his way out. Encouraged by Helen’s support, “you will, you will eventually”, he did.

Jennifer felt that one purpose for her communiqué was to bring her to the study and myself. Deeply grieving her grandmother’s death, and carrying a twenty-year burden relating to the death of her grandfather, she had reached out to her grandmother when suffering pain and anguish for help and had synchronistically encountered the study advertisement. For James, like Jennifer, the interview context provided a forum in which attendant grief issues were able to be explored with clarification and resolution the result. Although James received guidance and instruction from his grandmothers, perhaps the purpose of his communiqué was a means to an end in that it brought him to the study and to someone whose life experience could be of use to him. Marie’s communiqué experiences paralleled to some degree those of Jennifer and others in that
they revealed a richness and continuity of post-mortem social relationships.

**Theme 4 Pattern-related observations**

All co-researchers understood their communiqué in effect to be a means to an end in that it was an event in their lives that benefited them in some way. This benefit was experienced not only as emotional, psychological and spiritual, it was also intellectual as well specifically because many felt they were being educated about death, about life, about what it means to be spiritual, about themselves as human beings, and about life after death. Thus it was perceived as being educational in that it informed the understanding of the experient with regard to what it means to be ‘human’ and what it means to be ‘spiritual’, as uniquely defined and understood by them.

**Theme 5: Conceptualised understandings of relationships**

All co-researchers reported that the impact of their communiqué altered the nature of the emotional, psychological and social relationships they experienced in that it either confirmed them or transformed them in some way. This included the emotional, psychological and social relationship they experienced with the deceased, the emotional and psychological relationship they experienced with themselves (including their attitudes, values, meanings and understanding of pre and post-mortem existence, death, and of the sacred or infinite), and the emotional, psychological and social relationships they experienced with others in their social environments (including immediate family members, friends, and those in the wider community).

These resultantly altered relationships appeared to be related to a number of co-researchers carrying out a “life review” or “relationship review” in which they not only examined their
relationship with the deceased, they determined to some extent both the nature of their continuing relationship and how they would maintain the relationship (Horacek, 1995, p. 26). A core impetus for this review was the communiqué event.

For Lance, the communiqué which followed his mother’s death “brought us closer together”. Rather than death ending their relationship the opposite occurred via his communiqué whereby his mother is now not only an ongoing, albeit non-material, presence in his life, but with her continual after-death visits, guidance and direction, a very active one as well, “mum’s very much active”.

Lance’s attitude, understanding and relationship with himself also underwent a significant examination and re-evaluation following his communiqué, which manifested as, “a very big change in my personal life”. His attitude toward and relationship with death altered as well, in that he now understands death from an experiential perspective. “When people say well you’re up there probably with your brother or whatever ... I’m convinced that they are.” Lance’s relationship with his family post-communiqué, who were initially somewhat incredulous regarding his mother’s visits has also altered, “now they listen to me”.

Following her communiqué, Kath conceptualises her relationship with her partner Geoff and her father as being “severely reshaped” because death, “brings it back to its very essence”. There is a reorientation of values and meanings of what was once important and what now is not. “That essence is just so important.” Juxtapositioned with her relationship with life, which she conceptualises as “an opportunity” and “a really wonderful way of making a difference in the world”, is her now altered relationship with death. “As a kid, and as a teenager, I was kind of weirdly adamant that I wouldn’t let anyone close to
me ... because they were going to die one day and that was going to really suck and now I’m not afraid of death ... I’m not terrified of it, I’m not terrified of my own death.”

After her mother’s death and in particular her communiqué, Trudie gained “a greater appreciation of what she was all about” because she understood her and their relationship from an alternate perspective through now different eyes. As a result of her communiqué, Trudie feels that her mother is still very present and still very much a part of the family, “I think so, I would have said so”. Trudie also understands that her death has not prevented them from both maintaining an ongoing relationship with one another, nor that it denies her mother’s post-mortem existence. “Just because they physically died it doesn’t mean to say that they’re not present in any other way.”

Following his communiqué with his wife Dawn, John underwent a reorientation of values after realising what, “in the scheme of things” was and was not worth worrying about. While her death effectively removed her physicality from his life, John realised that her after-death contact enabled him to have an ongoing emotional commitment with her. “See I’m still wearing the wedding ring, can’t bear to take it off.”

Additionally, following his communiqué John, who “always had a belief in the afterlife” and had “always believed in God” now understands physical death and the separation it causes to be an event which is almost temporary, a hiatus until an eventual reunion “Death’s not the end of it.”

Following the communiqué Richard experienced with his mother found him re-evaluating not just his emotional and psychological relationship with her “because I’m no longer part of that time-space continuum” but with “lots of other significant people and particularly women” as well. Richard’s ongoing emotional and psychological relationship with his mother is not
only one “that is continuing to be worked out”, it is one that is enabling him to examine and authenticate himself, “you know I’m not a little boy trying to please any more”. His mother’s after-death contact has also brought him face-to-face with his perceptions about and relationship with post-mortem existence, for which there is “no empirical proof”. Does the individual who died, “actually cease to exist because their physicality is gone?”

Marie, through her own ruminations regarding her relationship with her mother post-communiqué, whose death she now understands to be a “metamorphosis” is such that, “I don’t think of her as my mother per se any more”. While she acknowledges that her relationship with her mother is “a continuing process” she feels that it is “too soon” to know and understand exactly the nature of their now altered relationship, and concedes, “I probably won’t know the answer until I’m dead”.

Following her communiqué with her father has seen Catrina spatially relocate him from an individual who lived outside herself to one who now lives metaphorically within her, in her heart. As a result of her communiqué Catrina, like John and other co-researchers, has come to understand that “death is not the end of the line” and that “there is an energy or something that can overcome the physical death of someone”. Post-communiqué her relationship with death is such that now death is “not as scary maybe” because her father’s presence suggests “a possibility of something else”.

Following her communiqué, Jill’s husband Bob, similarly to Catrina’s father now resides metaphorically within rather than without. “He’s still and always will be in my heart and he lives there now.” For Jill, the feelings that constituted their pre-mortem relationship are “just as strong, if not stronger than they were”. Jill’s relationship with herself appears to have also undergone a shift. “I feel, well, totally different, I’m a different
me now than I was before.” She is aware of being “more independent and outgoing” and also of “a feeling of calmness or a feeling of peace” concerning the understanding “that he’s not coming back”.

Post-communiqué Jill has “re-evaluated my life and the way I think about things now” and has come to understand that “life is to be lived” because “life’s too short” not to. Her relationship with death has also altered and whereas once death “used to scare me”, she now understands death to be “just a word”. While she had “never actually thought about death that much before” she now believes that the physical body “is an instrument but your spirit or your essence is around and it goes to the other side or another place and that you can actually watch over people ... and every now and then you can come back just to let those you left behind know that you are still around”.

Michelle’s communiqué with her husband Percy has not only confirmed their relationship, it has strengthened it. “I am still in love with him, I’ll always be in love with him, and hopefully we’ll be together, wherever, some time again.” Regarding her attitudes now toward pre and post-mortem existence and her relationship with life, Michelle perceives the body as not just “a suit of clothes” but as something which houses “our soul, our feelings, our spirit, our being, and that doesn’t die”.

Following her communiqué with her father, Therese now engages with life, “differently”. This difference is coupled with the re-evaluated awareness “that there are other things in life that are far more important”. Therese was comforted and relieved by her communiqué with her father because in her words her father, “had gone straight to heaven”. Furthermore, “it pleased me, it made me happy, reassured, he was fine”. It also reaffirmed for her that though her father had left this earthly life and the flesh he inhabited while he lived it, he was still very
much present and very much a part of the family. As Therese articulated, “he’s still with us”.

Therese’s relationship with her faith has also been enriched following her communiqué. “Based on all the things that have happened to me, if I didn’t believe, I am now a believer.” And regarding post-mortem existence, “I believe that this place, it’s called heaven, is another world and that our souls, our spirit our energy our life-force has a better life in this place” and “We are not as we are here ... we don’t die because we’ve already died.”

Despite her grandmother’s death, Jennifer feels that their relationship has become richer because of the after-death “messages” her grandmother sends to her. Additionally, her communiqué has demonstrated to her that her grandmother “… is now a force of nature” who is “showing me paths, she’s giving me the tools to make an informed choice”. “She is just sitting on my shoulder all day long.” With regard to her post-communiqué relationship with herself, she feels like, “I’m realising my potential” and concerning whether or not she feels an individual and their existence is defined by their physicality, “to be honest, no”. Jennifer’s value-system has also altered following her communiqué to the extent that she now feels “my most small day-to-day actions are potentially meaningful in a bigger picture”.

Cymantha’s relationship with her father both pre and post-communiqué is one she describes as “spiritual”. While his death and physical absence left her anguished and feeling that she had been “robbed” of all the answers to the “many questions I wanted to ask him,” her ongoing after-death relationship with him provides an emotional closeness that is comforting and reassuring. In the face of a number of health issues, Cymantha knows she needs to be strong and encouraged by her father’s support, finds the inner will to be just that. She also feels that “the living and the dead work together”, a perspective suggesting
that while death alters existence it does not preclude post-mortem relationships between material and non-material individuals.

Although the death of Jayne’s husband Robert “rearranged things” in that it redefined and clarified “what’s important and what isn’t” it did not “shatter” or “change her world”. However, following her communiqué she confirmed for herself that “something’s going on” and that there is “another world or a heaven or a something over our material concrete world”. Jayne also reported that her communiqué with Robert had positively influenced her work with clients who report similar experiences, “I think I’m probably very much more, um, empathic ... it certainly allows me to be quite calm and relaxed and to reassure the clients”.

Kevin’s communiqué with his close friend Sam, have confirmed his existing spiritual belief-system such that death enabled Sam to return to and reunite with, “the vastness that informs”. His relationship with life, of which after-death contact experiences are a component, is akin to that of student to teacher, which also incorporates an element of self-development. “We’re all churning in an ocean of awakening and [that] we’re all in this incredible flow toward the source and that the truth is, that no matter what we do, we’re all going to be taken back in through the current that’s bringing us home.”

In spite of her communiqué Mayumi, “for which I have no answer honestly I have no answer, I tend not to question things, I just take it as it comes” underwent a re-evaluation and redefining, as for other co-researchers, of what is and what is not important, “nothing worries me now”. Her relationship with death is pragmatic. “Well everybody is going to die sooner or later ... you just have to get up and think what you’re going to do today.” It was difficult to ascertain whether her relationship was
so pragmatic as a result of her communiqué because it demonstrated life after death or because it was in spite of it.

Following his communiqué with his wife Yvonne, Garry describes their relationship “as if she were at home cooking the tea tonight”. He now views his eventual death which he acknowledges as an event “nobody looks forward to”, as an upcoming reunion. “She’s sort of saying to me, look its okay, I’ll be here, and I’ll be at the gate when you get here.” His relationship with life post-communiqué is that “it’s a sort of evolutionary thing” and while he has “minor life expectations” is “content with my life as it is” that is, with the relationship he has established with it since Yvonne’s death.

Following her communiqué with Piero, and while the impact of the death and physical absence of her partner is one she is still coming to terms with, Kelly now typifies her relationship with him as “just because he’s dead doesn’t mean he doesn’t exist”. Her relationship with life post-communiqué is such that she “doesn’t take things for granted anymore”, having learnt how with the least warning or indication something precious can suddenly and unexpectedly stop being a part of it. As a direct result of her communiqué, her relationship with death which her understanding tells her is “final” is now “not something I fear”.

Following his communiqué with his two grandmothers, James’s relationship with them has become richer and more vital. James feels that because his grandmothers are not “bound by physical reality” their ability to provide him with after-death assistance is now greater than when they were material. As a result, he not only engages in “ongoing discussion” with them, but finds it “easier to connect to them now than before”. It appears that with the occurrence of their deaths, though emotionally painful for James, a barrier has been removed so indirectly creating an opportunity for all of them to engage with one
another more profoundly. Following his communiqué James re-evaluated his relationship with life in that “her death has taught me to look at life in a simpler way” and that he “worries less about things of this world”.

Helen, like James, has possessed the ability to engage with the disembodied since a child so her relationship with death, non-material phenomena and after-death contact is one of familiarity and for her, as for James, her communiqué has confirmed a number of her existing beliefs and attitudes. For Helen, relationships with others, on account of her life experiences, can be unsatisfying and somewhat limited because of the difficulty in meeting, “those of like mind”. Although her communiqué experiences have enriched her life they have also highlighted how alone she is because “there’s no one to talk to who understands”.

Danneil’s communiqué has complemented and confirmed her existing relationship with life and death. “I’ve always had the belief that you go on, you don’t end as in your death, you do go on.” Death, “doesn’t frighten me at all” a realisation which actually contrasted with her earlier feelings of fear toward it when younger. Now, and as other co-researchers have also expressed, following their communiqué they know and understand that death affords the opportunity of reuniting with those already dead, “well, I’m going to see all these people that I loved and I don’t see any more”.

Following his communiqué with his granddaughter Sammie, Bob finds that his “whole outlook on life” is now different, and although he cannot quantify exactly how his relationship with himself and life is different, it is something he feels internally. “Inside I am, I feel different and I do look at things different.” This apparent internal change has manifested in altered relationships with those around him. Bob reports that he feels more “empathy” concerning the needs of others and that he has a
“more conscious approach” and a deeper and heightened “awareness of the problems” being confronted by those around him.

**Theme 5 Pattern-related observations**

As a result of their communiqué, all co-researchers without exception believed that their after-death contact experiences had altered their understanding of the emotional, psychological and social relationships they experienced with themselves, the deceased and the visible social and cultural world in which they lived.

Although the nature of this understanding differed for each co-researcher, what was apparent for all experiënts was that the communiqué event was the impetus for fundamental change in the understanding of the individual whereby this function expanded and grew in new directions.

**Theme 6: Conceptualised understandings of being**

All co-researchers reported that following their communiqué how they perceived their being changed. Emotional, psychological and behavioural responses of co-researchers toward their communiqué with the deceased, while displaying some holistic parallels, were all individually conceptualised and unique on account.

All co-researchers were unconditional in the verification of their communiqué between themselves and the deceased. A number of co-researchers felt or wondered whether they had been guided to the study by the deceased. Although most co-researchers were generally comforted by their after-death experiences, reactions and responses varied from expectation, surprise, familiarity, confusion, doubt and a sense of bewilderment, fear and anxiety, reassurance, excitement, joy, awe, wonder and hope. The follow-on systems-impact of
communiqué on the being of the experient are identified and discussed below as follows: Initial reactions; Veracity of communiqué; Disclosure versus non-disclosure; Motivation for study self-selection, and World-view impact.

**Initial reactions**

When Kevin first encountered his close friend Sam in a dream it was an occurrence he was expecting on account of “the close love-bond” they shared prior to his death. Kevin knew intuitively he was participating in the dream because he was to act as a “guide” for Sam who was at the time “in a state of daze and confusion”. Kevin believed he had been enlisted for this role not only because of his close friendship with Sam, but because he has a connection to “the vastness of life itself”. Thus his dream engagement “was just a very natural phenomena that I just expected”.

The reality of Jill’s dream engagement with her husband Bob was one which she initially doubted, attributing it to her imagination, however, “the more I thought about the dream ... I thought that it must be real”. Jill experienced a number of reactions to her dream engagement. While she was reassured that Bob’s death had not signalled the end of his existence, and that he was alive, pain-free and well “on the other side”, it brought with it the deeper reassurance that she would be able to live a life without Bob’s physical presence. “Before the dream I couldn’t see any way to move forward ... I didn’t want a life without Bob.” After the dream however, Jill felt as though Bob’s post-mortem existence was conveying to her that life does indeed continue after death, that he was still very much alive, albeit in a different form, and that he was encouraging and supporting her through the “dark hole” which was her grief.
Kath, who has “always had very strange and prophetic dreams” experienced a change in attitude toward them after encountering her partner Geoff and her father in separate dreams shortly after their deaths. She relayed emphatically that prior to experiencing these she was somewhat dismissive toward them, “I didn’t want to go there, and have no doubt I do not want to go there”. However, after her experiences with Geoff and her father she admitted to having “done a lot of thinking” about her dreams and that perhaps it was time to “really start to listen to my dreams and I’ve got to start to believe in them instead of just pushing them away”.

Therese in encountering her father in a dream was comforted, and upon learning of the details of her nephew’s dream engagement was both pleased and relieved. For her it confirmed that her father “had gone straight to heaven” something which, “pleased me, it made me happy, reassured, he was fine”. However, encountering her Uncle Joe who had predeceased her father by some years had been “a humungous shock” which left her momentarily “absolutely terrified” and feeling like “all my blood had gone down to my feet”. Therese attributed this reaction to both the unexpectedness of the occurrence and the contradiction and initial confusion of knowing her uncle was deceased, because she had seen him in his coffin, yet seeing him “alive and smiling” at her. “I'm seeing a dead person here that I saw in a coffin, and there he was smiling and happy at me, reassuring me.”

In summarising all her experiences Therese relayed that she felt “privileged” to have had them, that they take “her breath away” and that she feels “blessed to be able to have, to receive these”. She also relayed that she feels “deeply” and “very symbolically” touched by them and that she knows “that I have some of my own there waiting for me”.


Cymantha, like Therese, felt a sense of encouragement and reassurance after encountering her father. “It’s almost like he’s saying, “You’ll be all right, you know.”” In the face of confronting and having to manage a number of health issues, and as a result of the visitations from her father, Cymantha takes heart and experiences a calm inner knowing that she will “get through it”.

James, who has had the ability to engage with the disembodied since “a child”, was not overly shocked or taken aback by his communiqué with his grandmothers and close friend Jonathon. Rather, it seemed as though it was the natural order of things, the norm. While it was reassuring to receive familial advice and direction from his two grandmothers, it was deeper and more emotional in that the experience of being materially separated from his beloved grandmothers was ameliorated by the emotional warmth of the “ongoing connection” their continued presence in his life evoked within him.

Mayumi, unlike her other co-researchers who drew comfort, guidance and at times found resolution within their dream visitation engagements, experienced initial feelings of confusion and wondered what was real and what was not. She attributed this to the realisation that prior to such experiences she had “never experienced it, the spirit itself, before, until this happened”. Mayumi discounted the olfactory communiqué she experienced with both her husband and her mother. “Oh no, no way, this is no good, I think this is playing up in your mind.”

Although she appeared somewhat ambivalent toward her communiqué her attitude toward them changed after her exploration of them during her interview. In response to my questions, “what is that (communiqué) telling us, what is life trying to demonstrate?” she had replied, “well a lot of things you cannot explain and it’s not black and white ... and then things happen that you can’t actually put it down as a yes and no ... so I
thought, maybe I should just leave it alone, I shouldn’t actually find out yes or no in this case, just take it as it is.” It seemed that she had a sense of resolution about her experiences, indicated in her response to how she feels when they occur, “it’s not sad, not sad at all”.

In talking about her feelings regarding her communiqué with her mother, Danneil replied unflinchingly, “yeah, I mean nice is an understatement, it doesn’t cover it, it’s just special, I mean that you’re able to communicate in this way”. Richard was equally succinct, and while hearing his mother’s words, though not a, “world-shattering experience” was, “certainly comforting” and an experience from which, he, like Cymantha, drew heart and encouragement.

Helen was not comforted nor did she take strength from her communiqué with her partner John which she described as “really freaky” although as a direct result of their engagement, resolution, leading to a “happy ending” was the outcome. Helen, like James, has been able to engage with the disembodied from an early age, so experiencing communiqué with John was not an unusual event. However, it was the means by which she experienced it which was disconcerting, as he would come through or inhabit her new partner without her consent. It seemed that John was not only annoyed by Helen’s new relationship, he was also experiencing difficulty in coming to terms with his altered post-mortem existence. After a confrontation between the two of them during which Helen asserted herself, his personality was “a lot better, he wasn’t so aggressive” and he was more understanding of the social etiquette of the non-material reality in which he now existed.

John’s first communiqué with his wife Dawn initially evoked feelings of confusion and bewilderment. Although he experienced the communiqué as the physical sensation of being touched, his
mind had difficulty accepting what was taking place. “My mind was saying it’s not happening, but it was so real, I could feel her.” His second communiqué with Dawn which occurred synchronistically with his participation in the study also involved being touched, but was not met with the same initial confusion. John experienced a sense of wonder and hope as a result of his communiqué with Dawn. He also came to the understanding that “death [is] not the end of it” and his experiences as something which, “it just makes me marvel ... I feel elated”.

Although Michelle was not generally unnerved by her communiqué “it doesn’t unnerve me, it never unnerved me”, she admitted to being “quite shaken” when she was unexpectedly confronted by the sight of her husband Percy purchasing cigarettes in their local shopping centre. Jayne, perhaps because of her profession as a practising psychologist and bereavement counsellor was not in the least “spooked” by her communiqué experiences with her husband Robert, rather she was matter-of-fact in her acceptance of them. “I just thought oh well, that’s a part of what it is.” However, toward the end of her interview she revealed unexpectedly “both of those experiences I found really peaceful and reassuring ... calming ... rather than being scary, quite the opposite in fact”.

Kelly, in undertaking the difficult process of sorting through Piero’s belongings felt reassured and “not so bad about getting rid of stuff” after receiving his direction. Another aspect of her communiqué reported by Kelly was their very private nature which if they began to occur with others present, as for example when she would sense him walking into the room, would consciously try to prevent the experience. Her reasoning was “it felt like I couldn’t enjoy his presence if someone else was in the room ... if I was alone and it happened I felt like it was really special, just something between the two of us”.

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Kelly also made the distinction that though she had been bereaved once before, where she “lost someone close to me”, she “didn’t experience anything like this”. Kelly did at one time experience some self-doubt regarding her communiqué with Piero. Was the situation actually a case of “just me coming to terms with the fact that he was gone so suddenly, I don’t know?”

Trudie and her sister, when having to make decisions regarding attendance at their mother’s funeral service were thankful for both the direction and inner strength her communiqué with them provided. Trudie felt her mother was pleased with the funeral service “she was dead and obviously she was being cremated that day but she was happy that day”. Furthermore, she felt encouraged and drew strength from her mother’s help and direction. “It was almost like she was sort of guiding us and like she was giving us some kind of inner strength.”

Bob’s reaction when his granddaughter Sammie appeared was such that he thought he was, “dreaming”. This changed to a sense of relief in knowing that Sammie was alright, “I’m okay, I’m here, I’m okay, yes I’m dead but I’m okay”. Catrina’s response to her son Oliver’s communiqué with his grandfather, her father, was a mixture of excitement, wonder and paradoxically, disbelief. “I went oh my God, dad’s here, it was dad” [emphasised word]. When she herself was roused from sleep however, initial excitement turned again to sorrow as she knew the engagement could only ever be achingly brief. Marie seemed to take her communiqué with her mother quite in her stride. This appeared related to her understanding death as “not the loss of the person” but rather as an event which “metamorphosed” her leaving her, “poised for flight”. For Marie, her mother’s death had not extinguished her existence, only transformed it.
Garry’s response to his communiqué with his wife Yvonne, which took place over twenty-two years ago was such that he visited his General Practitioner, an action that was reassuring as he was told “it’s not unusual, this does happen to people”. Garry’s second communiqué with Yvonne, which occurred in 2007 and though “a real shock” was also reassuring, “I’m just so comfortable with it, I’m so comfortable with her, with her being there for me.” As in the first instance, Garry again visited his General Practitioner who, “more or less congratulated me that I was fortunate to have experienced it”. And Garry himself, also as a result of his communiqué was excited and looking forward to the prospect of being reunited with his beloved wife after his own death, “yes, yes, yes!”

Like James, who took his communiqué experiences somewhat in his stride primarily because he was already familiar with a range of non-material phenomena, so too did Cymantha, Jennifer, Kevin, Helen and Lance as well. If anything, the experience just seemed part of their life, part of the normality of what their life is and how they live that life.

**Veracity of communiqué**

Although reactions and responses to communiqué varied, with regard to the veracity of their communiqué all co-researchers without exception knew categorically and with unquestionable conviction that the person with whom the communiqué involved was not only the person/s close to them who had died, but that something significant or meaningful had occurred between them and during the encounter itself.

When Bob experienced his communiqué with his granddaughter Sammie as he stood in solitude on the back veranda, he knew irrevocably she was there with him. “She was there [emphasised word] I felt her! She was there alright.”
Regarding the encounter that occurred between eighteen-month-old Oliver and his grandfather Poppie Max, his mother Catrina knew he was engaging in conversation because “it was the same as if I had of been talking to him”. For Catrina this was not just an encounter which had occurred, it was more fundamental, more profound. “There was an engagement [emphasised word].” And when her father came to her himself, gently touching her forehead, “still to this day I know that he was there” and this so palpably that, “I threw myself out of bed and ran out of the room, going, dad where are you? Come back, don’t go”.

When Jill encountered her husband Bob in a dream engagement, after initially attributing it to her imagination she differentiated between that and her usual dreams on the basis that it had a certain quality about it that set it apart from the way she usually dreamt. “I can actually see him and it is real … the dream was different, he was in the light sitting on a chair.” This dream was experiential for Jill; she knew that something tangible had occurred between her and Bob.

Like Jill, Kath highlights this experiential and qualitative difference as “there’s a sense of being in them and being in that place … a sense of being able to be conscious about what you’re doing and where you’re going”. Mayumi, despite her inability to clarify what her dream visitation engagements were, other than what they were not, was nonetheless adamant that “I know it wasn’t a dream … I think in my case, it’s not a dream, it wasn’t a dream”.

When Kelly heard her partner Piero’s voice she was knew it was him. After his death, there were times when it was just too emotionally painful for her to even think about Piero, so “why would I consciously have a conversation with him if it was going to hurt me”. Trudie also was adamant that the guidance she and her sister received while attending to their mother’s funeral
service was something that was “very clear” and that both of them were being given “some sort of direction”. Therese was positive that the hand that stroked her hair was her fathers. “Yeah, yeah, yeah I’m positive ... it’s just an inner knowing.” And again, after hearing her father’s footfall behind her when in the garden, “you’re aware that there is someone there”. Soadamant was she about the reality of her experiences that “I’d be prepared to take a lie test as well ... I know what I saw”.

When Richard experienced his communiqué with his mother his evaluation of the experience was thoughtfully framed. “I think I can almost say I have no doubt that it was real.” When Jayne collided with her husband Robert there was no doubt in her mind that it was him. “He’s six foot six, you can’t mistake him ... and the body, just the whole body, it couldn’t have been anybody else.” And John experiencing being hugged and kissed by his wife Dawn felt “the pressure of hands around me” and her lips on his skin. Quietly spoken, John asserted, “I didn’t imagine it, it was actually, happened, you know”.

Although Marie did not experience physical contact with her mother while in the car travelling to Geelong, she too was possessed of that same inner certainty, “I genuinely think she was there”. Additionally, when the anniversary of her mother’s death was approaching, Marie asked her mother for a, “sign”. “Well where are you? I haven’t had anything to do with you since the Ocean Grove trip, and I think that’s not fair. We were supposed to be close and I haven’t heard anything.” Two hours short of the exact time of her mother’s death, a resident of the same care facility her mother had resided in, and whom Marie and her husband had been looking after, died. As far as Marie was concerned, “this was like a sign as if to say, so you wanted a sign, here’s a sign!” And Garry, who like Marie experienced his communiqué experiences with his wife Yvonne while driving, “felt
her again so strongly, just so strong it was unmistakeable ... she didn’t speak, I didn’t see her, I just knew she was there, I just felt her”.

**Disclosure versus non-disclosure**

Klass and Goss note that grief occurs in what they term, “nested narratives” which are positioned within a layered social system of existing individual, family, community, sub-culture narratives and cultural meta-narratives (2003, p. 789). In addition to the complexity constituting this layered social system is that a narrative at any one level is constrained by those in the levels above it. Communiqué as a nested narrative and bereavement sub-culture existing within this stratified layering highlights this constraint, and was reflected in co-researcher’s motivations regarding whether or not to disclose their communiqué to others and when they did so, the response that disclosure provoked.

Co-researchers reported various responses to the disclosure of their communiqué which can be broadly grouped as either positive or negative. Co-researchers also reported why they chose not to disclose their communiqué. This included the need for privacy and that communiqué was considered special because it represented something unique and meaningful between both individuals, concern that their communiqué would not be considered real, and self-doubt concerning their stability of mind which they feared might be confirmed after disclosure.

Lance’s family originally thought his communiqué with his mother was “a joke” however, “now they listen to me”. Catrina told her mother and husband about her and her son Oliver’s communiqué with her father, and was dismayed by their reaction. “Mum just sort of went in her 1950s manner, oh that’s nice dear” while her husband was noncommittal.
Kath not only “had a hard time talking to my counsellor about it” she was reluctant to share her communiqué with family and friends. Her communiqué with her partner Geoff was very private and specifically related to an aspect of their relationship. Kath felt that if this became public knowledge, the revelation could distress others. Kath carries the responsibility of this knowledge and in her words, “you kind of become this kind of protector of secrets for them”.

Jill initially discussed her dream engagement with her husband Bob while she was attending a bereavement support program. Her disclosure was met with wonder, awe, excitement, acceptance and unconditional support. In addition, Jill also discussed her experience with Bob’s son Craig who “was not surprised that this had happened”, as she did afterward with two work colleagues. “She didn’t think I was weird either and she understood because she had had a similar situation with her mother.” Her other colleague “also believes that there is another side and that my dream was real”.

Michelle discussed her communiqué experiences between herself and her husband Percy at the grief group she was attending at the time. The response was mixed. “And I sort of got a lot of head shaking.” Undaunted by their reaction Michelle thought, “everybody to their own”. There was one member however, who upon hearing Michelle’s disclosure relayed what she believed to be a communiqué experience between herself and her husband which had occurred in most unusual circumstances. Michelle reasoned, “there must be lots and lots of people out there who have these experiences but won’t dare to come forward because of being ridiculed”.

Kelly, “didn’t know who to talk to” about her communiqué with her partner Piero. Additionally, while she knew that her family and friends were worried about her, she “didn’t want to
give them further reason to worry about me” so like Kath, “I thought it would be better for them if I kept it to myself”. She also felt however that on account of their private nature and meaning she wanted to keep them to herself.

For Therese and her family, the occurrence of non-material phenomena is part of their way of life which is openly discussed and accepted. Although Uncle Joe’s communiqué was initially a shock which left her feeling terrified, confused and bewildered, in time both she and her family, “came to finally understand that it actually happened” as they did the significance of the event. With regard to all other instances, it is something about which conversation is kept largely within the family itself. “I don’t talk a lot about it with a lot of people because it’s something so special.” However, this was not the only reason. “I’m scared that they might think I’m lying or carrying on, I’m being silly, but I know what I know.” James’ family and Cecelia’s family, like Therese’s, openly discuss and are openly accepting of the full diversity of their communiqué.

Danneil’s response “oh good Lord I wouldn’t have told him [psychiatrist] no”, was in reference to my questioning the disclosure of her communiqué experiences with her mother. In clarifying her response, she is cautious about what she says and to whom. “I’ve only ever let out little snippets of this to friends who are likeminded and I’ve only been able to ascertain that by listening to what they say.” Jennifer relayed that she had only spoken “a little bit to my mum” regarding her communiqué with her grandmother, and “not to the degree” that she had during her interview, while Cymantha revealed, “my ex-counsellor is quite fascinated about these”.

Helen feels in general that, “a lot of people don’t want to talk about it” because when the topic comes up in conversation, “they just get really freaked out about it.” John, who until a friend
raised the issue with him prior to his involvement with the study, did not even know that communiqué were experienced by the bereaved. Prior to that he “hadn’t discussed it with anyone” and was of the opinion that, “it’s not something that people do talk about”. John has also realised that unless the person with whom communiqué is being discussed actually has a frame of reference for it discussion concerning it, “just becomes dead air”.

Richard has discussed his experience with others, particularly when reported by clients in a bereavement counselling and support context, however “not to the depth” that he had during his interview. Jayne, like Richard has also discussed her communiqué with clients in the counselling context. At the time of their occurrence she largely felt “you know it’s all part of what the unconscious mind does”. Richard and Jayne both report that clients are reassured and relieved by their disclosure, by their normalising of it.

Kevin reported that while generally he will discuss his experience/s with “whoever’s open to it”, he has experienced negative reactions. “People just want you to shut up because they’re too frightened to hear the stuff.” Mayumi had a chat about her communiqué with a girlfriend and was surprised to discover, “my girlfriend did and we talked a little bit about it and she said, yeah, that happened too”.

Trudie felt encouraged by my understanding of her communiqué however reported a different reaction toward her friends. “I have tried on a couple of occasions with good friends of mine who are very open-minded ... but you don’t know where to start with them.” Bob’s immediate family openly discussed their communiqué with Sammie with one another, as did Marie with her husband and psychic counsellor.

Although Garry discussed the first and second communiqué that had taken place between himself and his wife Yvonne
his General Practitioner, who was accepting of them and saw them from a positive perspective, two of their three children, with whom he discussed the second communiqué, “were unresponsive”. He did confess to some reluctance regarding disclosing his communiqué, especially his first experience. “I didn’t think I could tell the children ... it also just seemed a bit bizarre to be telling people, you know ‘that’, I don’t think I told anybody, maybe I told my sister, maybe.” Garry has since discussed his second communiqué with a close friend who was deeply touched by his disclosure. “When I told her about the encounter with Yvonne she cried.”

**Motivation for study self-selection**

Co-researchers reported various motivating factors contributing to why they self-selected to participate in the study. These included timing, support for the aims of the study, the desire to understand their communiqué and perhaps to seek clarification of issues related to their grieving, and the desire to share their experiences with like-minded individuals who would not judge them in any way.

Lance’s participation was primarily motivated by the “life-changing” impact of the communiqué between himself and his mother which has been ongoing since her death. “And I feel now, because of my honesty, I’m happy to sit down and talk to anyone about anything.” Kath, who has “a family full of academics”, was curious as to how research of this nature could be conducted “in an academic context”. Coincidently, it was Kath’s mother, herself an academic at a neighbouring Sydney university who alerted Kath to the study also felt, “maybe I’m meant to talk to you because you’re saying that they come back again”.

Michelle sought the reassurance and communion of understanding that can only come from a like-minded individual.
“I feel I need to talk to people, or to somebody that thinks a lot the way I do actually, and maybe experienced the same things that I did.” There was however another element motivating Michelle, the need to belong. “I’d like to know that there are other people out there that have had the same things happen to them, that I’m not just an isolated case.” It was the need to understand her grief which drew Kelly to the study. “I don’t understand what I’ve been going through ... I can’t explain sometimes everything that I’m feeling ... I don’t understand what grief is even though I’ve been through it.”

On the other hand, Therese was “excited” by the prospect of at long last being able to share her experiences and to have her experiences “recognised” as was Cymantha, who in addition to also being, “excited”, had “no qualms” concerning her participation because she knew she would be conversing with someone who would not think her experiences “fanciful”.

Jennifer felt her participation in the study had been orchestrated by her grandmother for two reasons. The first was to provide support during the grieving of her grandmother’s death. The second related to a private burden she had carried for many years regarding the death of her grandfather. In deep distress and wondering “when is it going to get better I can’t cope with this grief it’s killing me”, she had called out to her grandmother for help. That very morning as she had reached out emotionally to her grandmother, she had also randomly opened a newspaper in a local hotel, one which she sees frequently but rarely if ever reads, to the very page of the study advertisement. Jennifer also hoped that participating “may actually help me deal with my bereavement and grief, to put it in some kind of structure and context”. The interview process did indeed become a forum not just for the sharing of experience, but a context for resolution, self-forgiveness and new understanding.
Trudie felt that participation was not only “important” to her but that, “there’s something else, some force” which was actually driving her participation. This force was difficult to define and had a sense of the intangible about it which she articulated, “you feel something is going on but you don’t know why or what the end result of that [is]”. Trudie also wondered whether she may have been guided to the study by her mother which she had come across after flicking through one of the, “freebie papers” which like Jennifer, she rarely reads. “Like could my mum, in some bizarre way have made me read that advert or brought my attention to it? Why would I have picked a free paper?” Encountering the advertisement, “I read it again and I thought I really do need to phone, I think I’ve got something I can say about that”. Even though her husband questioned her decision to participate Trudie felt, “I just felt it was something that I needed to do”. Trudie, like Mayumi who is not “particularly interested in talking to people for research purposes” nonetheless felt, “it was just very apparent that that [the study] was very connected to where I’m at”. She also wondered, “was I supposed to come because my mum knew that you have an interest and you understand it and you’re learning about it too?”

Richard’s motivation was connected to his own internal pondering on eternal existence and whether or not his belief in post-mortem existence was an act of faith or whether it was something that he felt he had to believe. “Being part of this process or this project is clarifying for me what I believe and in an area where professionally I keep coming across it, people telling me stories like my one.” Ever thoughtful, Richard stressed that while he did not want to make, “outlandish claims” on the other hand he did not want to, “pathologise” or, “rationalise” his experience to something that was, “sort of psychological” either.
Although his involvement is personal, Richard sees the study itself as having wider application to the field of bereavement and grief and while he feels that the phenomena is “fascinating” it is also “an important area of grief” which is “important to explore”.

Jayne’s involvement was motivated by what she saw the study challenging, confronting and advocating for. “I guess it’s the scientist in me wanting to challenge the scientists ... telling them [the bereaved] they’re hallucinating is really quite insulting, hallucinations being a negative word.” And with regard to the bereaved “who get punished enough” by being “marginalised, or labelled or pathologised”, the study is “raising the flag for widows, for young widows, and for bereaved people”.

Kevin was drawn to participate both by the subject matter, about which he felt he had “something to share” and by another consideration as well. “Your enthusiasm, just your energy and sincerity, I felt that it was a beautiful place.” Mayumi was “just grabbed” when she saw the advertisement, which was somewhat unusual because, “bereavement and things like that never ever interested me”. Additionally she is neither an advocate of “therapy” nor does she subscribe to attending bereavement support groups. In truth she was not really sure why she agreed. “I don’t know, I really don’t know to be quite honest with you.” She conceded, “maybe I’m ready, I was ready, I don’t know”.

James attributed his participation to two factors. The first was an “overarching feeling or message I get in my mind is I could trust you”. The second seems to suggest support and understanding from his paternal grandmother, “who is saying that because she’s a PhD and she knows how difficult it is to go through that”. James concluded, “it’s almost like I should come here” and “there was no questions, like I definitely didn’t doubt you”. James also experienced a “sense of peace” after meeting me and undertaking his interview, his participation of which he
attributed to both grandmothers. “Like they were just saying, go, just go.”

Garry, like Mayumi who was “just grabbed” when she encountered the advertisement relayed, “the logo just jumped out at me”. Curious, “what are these people on about” Garry knew he simply had to not only learn more, but become a part of the study itself. It was Bob’s wife who had initially seen the advertisement before bringing it to his attention. She had left a message on my office landline, and in a tremulous voice had said that her husband “had a couple of contact experiences” with their granddaughter and was wondering whether he might “qualify for the study”.

Marie, Helen and Danneil in encountering the advertisement felt they all had something to share, as did Jill. Catrina contacted me after encountering the advertisement “out of excitement” and because, “I feel that I need this to be documented”. She was “really glad you’re doing this” because “no-one else is doing it”. Catrina was encouraged by the knowing that others had also experienced communiqué. “You gain strength from the knowledge that other people have experienced this.” John and Michelle were referred to the study by others who thought their experiences were directly relevant, while John wondered, “would it help me to sort of talk about it rather than keep it to myself?”

World-view Impact

Although it impacted them all differently, those already familiar with non-material phenomena including Kevin, Cymantha, Therese, James, Michelle, Lance, Kath, Helen, Danneil, Jennifer and Marie accommodated their communiqué within their existent world-view and for some, their spiritual belief-system. For the remaining co-researchers, Garry, Bob,
Richard, Catrina, John, Jayne, Jill, Kelly, Mayumi and Trudie who have never experienced non-material phenomena, the situation was otherwise.

The impact of Lance’s communiqué has been profoundly life-altering for himself and for those close to him. After being spoken to by his mother at her funeral who told him “now is the time to do something for the good of your family ... act on it, stop hurting your family, be honest with yourself, be truthful to those that are around you”, Lance did just that. He faced himself and confronted his double-life as a sex-aholic and love-aholic. This entailed him ending his twenty-year marriage, becoming debt-free and living honestly for the first time in many years. “Before mum passed I was leading a double-life where, and it’s true, you lie once and you have to have four to cover the first one.”

Lance is now also aware of a sense of inner contentment and peace. “You know what, now I’m at ease with myself.” As his value-system changed, “I was always chasing money” and “being very honest has only come into my life since mum passed away”, so too has his life in general, becoming simpler and less complicated. “Where I’ve gone back to now is where mum was. Mum was happy with what she had.” And regarding non-material existence, “when people say well you’re up there probably with your brother and whatever, [and] I’m convinced that they are”.

Prior to his granddaughter Sammie’s death, death for Bob was something “which hasn’t affected me as much” because “it wasn’t personal”. Their communiqué captured his attention and engaged him not only with Sammie but with himself as well. Bob’s grief at Sammie’s death was compounded by deep feelings of remorse, which eased considerably after her reassurance. He also feels “a lot more comfortable” about death because his communiqué has shifted his theoretical Christian appreciation of
life-after-death to a known tangible reality. “They’re real, yes” and while “this body disappears ... something lives on.” Bob feels irrefutably, “I believe she’s with God, I honestly do”.

In addition to his understanding changing, Bob’s “whole outlook on life is different” to the degree that, “I have matured”. While he admits to having more empathy for the suffering of others, he also knows categorically that he has changed, although he cannot quite find words to describe that change. “Yes I know I’ve changed ... oh gosh yes I feel it.”

Catrina feels that her communiqué with her father have shown her “that death is not the end of the line”. She describes this as “something that goes on, [that] there is something higher, that there is an energy or something that can overcome the physical death of someone”. She also feels that her communiqué suggest something even more fundamental, a relationship able to circumvent death’s divide. “I believe that he was trying to show me that he was still here in a way and still watching out for us.”

Kath feels that her communiqué with Geoff are an opportunity for the two of them to still engage with one another, to still be with one another. “I think it’s something that becomes almost treasured, like it’s a treasured place within one, it’s very private and it’s very personal.” For Kath, this is a place “where we can meet emotionally and spiritually” and as with Catrina who feels she is participating in an ongoing post-mortem relationship with her father, Kath knows “that you’re [Geoff] with me and I feel the connection that transcends this material existence”. This non-material reality is a place in which Kath feels, “I can meet you there, and that’s okay. I don’t have to meet you there all the time but I know that I can meet you there when I need to”.

Her communiqué have prompted her to, “step back” and reflect on the meaning of interconnectedness between people.
“You really start to look at how parts of them are a part of yourself and how their legacy lives on in you ... it’s so much more important, the legacy that you leave in that way, than awards and trophies and bank balances and all that sort of stuff.”

At the time her communiqué occurred Jill was deeply grieving Bob’s death. “I couldn’t see any way to move forward, I couldn’t see my life without Bob and I didn’t want a life without Bob.” The communiqué brought with it emotional support and deep reassurance. “It felt like he was saying, alright, you can do this, you can get through this ... I felt that I could see a way out of the dark hole that I was in ... I think he came because he knew I needed him.”

Prior to her communiqué with Bob, and apart from “vague feelings of déjà vu”, Jill had never experienced non-material phenomena nor had she “thought about death that much before”. Consequently, Jill’s communiqué was multi-dimensional, impacting her understanding, her world-view and her spiritual belief-system. Jill had wondered if physical death was indeed the cessation of existence however now understands, “that your physical body is an instrument but your spirit, or your essence is around and it goes to the other side or another place and that you actually can watch over people”. Jill also understands that death is a continuation of life, but in “another form” and is now “not afraid of dying or death”. She has also come to understand that a person’s physicality does not define their reality or their existence.

As a result of her communiqué Jill relayed, “it’s made me re-evaluate my life and the way I think about things now” accordingly her engagement with life is “totally different”. Her life is “not scary” and “more positive” and “I seem to know what is important and what is not”. She has also come to understand that “what makes you feel good or feel happy or contented is not
material things”, and appears to have undergone an internal reorientation or shift. “Sometimes it feels like I am looking in from the outside at life.”

Michelle experienced a number of communiqué experiences with her husband Percy, one of which was particularly significant because it occurred at a time when “realisation stepped in”. Deeply grieving, she felt the pressure of unseen hands on her shoulders which guided her to walk into a community centre where she found the support she needed. “Percy would often come into the kitchen when I was doing the washing up, he’d play some music and he’d put his hands on my shoulders ... and it felt like the same pressure.”

Michelle interprets all her communiqué from the understanding that relationships between two people who love one another continue post-mortem and that their communiqué occur because of that love which is a non-material bond between the two individuals. The body being “a suit of clothes” does not define the individual because “there’s more to it, there’s our soul, our feelings, our spirit, our being, and that doesn’t die” and that it is those non-material elements of the individual which are freed at death and which continue to exist beyond it. Having developed an interest in Buddhism in her late teens, and “never ever really want[ing] to belong to any religious sect”, her communiqué fit comfortably into her existing world-view and spiritual belief-system. Her communiqué has generated both an interest in learning more and the realisation that “I’m just touching base at the moment” because, “there’s a whole lot far beyond my comprehension yet to know”.

Prior to her partner Piero’s death, Kelly did not entertain thoughts of post-mortem existence, “I’ve never thought about it much”. After her communiqué which provided emotional support in the months following her bereavement, she did “question a lot”
with regard to her Catholic faith tradition because she was “conflicted about God”. Irrespective of the challenge to her spiritual belief-system Kelly feels that her communiqué have changed her, “yeah, hopefully I’m more understanding”. Nor does she “take things for granted” anymore, and “I’m trying to learn tolerance”. Concerning death itself, although it is something she has not “thought about” for Kelly, “it’s final but it’s not something that I fear”.

Trudie, like Jill, has not experienced non-material phenomena prior to her communiqué with her mother, which also had a multi-dimensional impact. Her thoughts of post-mortem existence were such that “when you die I don’t think necessarily that’s the end of it really”. After her communiqué which “made me think that there’s more going on than perhaps is within my power of knowledge”, her thinking and understanding altered. “I think there’s physical death and then I think there’s something else beyond that and I think that depends on the person who’s died and the people who are left behind, and I think maybe if people feel they’ve got more to do, like in my mum’s case ... she feels that she’s just got to be around in some other form.” Trudie understands her post-mortem relationship with her mother to be one that is not bounded by material existence; rather it transcends that. “Just because they physically died it doesn’t mean to say that they’re not present in any other way.”

Therese who believes “there is a next life” on account “of my faith”, now knows the experiential reality of that next life. “I believe that there is based on what I have seen and experienced.” Therese feels that her communiqué have informed her “a lot, a lot” about life. “I live my life differently, completely differently now ... and I think it’s incredibly and utterly important, imperative, essential to live a really, really good life ... I mean by really keeping that spirituality in your life every day.”
Therese is also reassured by her post-mortem relationships with those close to her who died whom she relies on for assistance and emotional support. “I start talking to Uncle Joe, and dad, and to Uncle Nick ... show me what to do, give me the strength, and I don’t feel alone, I really don’t, because I have people of my own that are on the other side ... they’re there somehow and it makes me feel less afraid of those thoughts.” Her communiqué have convinced her that “we enjoy eternal life, we don’t die because we’ve already died”.

Jennifer’s communiqué with her grandmother, which she describes as, “massively life-altering” portrays a “dynamic relationship” to such an extent that she knows her grandmother has been instrumental in assisting her “to realise my potential”. Jennifer’s world-view and spiritual belief-system has been enriched by her communiqué and new understandings. “I have a greater sense, as I say, of my most trivial action actually being meaningful somewhere down the line in the bigger picture of contextual synchronicity.” Because of her grandmother’s assistance, which appears to occur in direct response to her needs, Jennifer understands that her own actions are “part of the domino effect, a chain of events”. She also feels a sense of “being pushed and helped and assisted and my eyes are being opened ... and I always feel like life is beginning now”. Additionally Jennifer also has a greater appreciation or perspective on this life and the next. “I don’t think, you know, our corporeal self is the be-all and end-all.”

Cymantha believes that “the living and dead work together, mentally and physically work together”, an understanding which has resulted from her communiqué with her father. These visits provide her with welcomed emotional support, make her feel “special” and educate and inform her, “and I think we’re all sent to this earth for a reason, and I’m learning about [that]”.
Helen, like a number of her fellow co-researchers feels that the living, “receive help from the other side” and believes that her deceased father is currently “working on a particularly stressful family situation”. Helen highlighted another aspect of her communiqué, as have other co-researchers, their socially isolating impact. Although there appear to be a number of positive outcomes of communiqué, their occurrence can also make the individual feel removed from others, distanced, unable to relate, different, and when trying to converse with those who have not experienced such non-material phenomena, alone and misunderstood.

John’s communiqué with his wife Dawn brought him face-to-face with his understanding of death and post-mortem existence, which up until that time he had “not thought about much at all”. His communiqué demonstrate that death is not a barrier between people, that it is permeable, and that his wife can somehow find a way “of getting through”. And meaningfully for John, “you’ve got a chance of joining them” because, “death’s not the end of it”.

Richard felt that his communiqué with his mother, which sustained him through the difficult and life-altering process of leaving the Society of which he had been a Jesuit priest for eighteen years, also demonstrated that something ineffable was at work, something over and above this material world with its suffering and anguish, something fundamentally good. For Richard this was God.

Jayne’s communiqué with her husband Robert, while rendering her “very much more empathic” seemed to confirm her thoughts on two counts. The first confirmation was that she had always thought “well, I think something’s going on”. Her communiqué suggested there was. The second was that they appeared to confirm the existence of a non-material world that co-exists with “the material concrete world that we live in”. Kevin’s
communiqué with his close friend Sam was “a very natural phenomena” which he had expected and which “opened” him, a metaphor for enriching his understanding regarding the non-material “vastness that’s available to us all which as temporal beings we’re all connected to”.

Marie’s communiqué with her mother “made me less apprehensive” about her own mortality. In addition, she feels “as though I’m on the brink of something” in that “this world is opening to me in a way that I hadn’t ever foreseen”. The impact of Mayumi’s communiqué with her husband Patrick was such that it was unexplainable, that it was “one of those things you cannot explain”. She was comfortable in her decision. “Maybe I should just leave it alone, I shouldn’t actually find out yes or no in this case, just take it as it is.”

Because of his communiqué with his grandmothers, James feels “I’m just here in transit essentially” and that death is “the actual journey”. James value-system has changed in accordance with his understanding of himself. “I have a better perception of myself and I don’t get scared of what people think about me anymore or what people say.” James understands now that he cannot live his life according to the values of others, he must live his life in accordance with his own values. “I’ve never found the time to look after what I really want to do.” He also finds that he worries less “about things of this world” that his faith has been enriched and that he has begun to “question what’s important and what’s not”.

Garry’s communiqué with his wife Yvonne has given him “assuredness” that when he dies Yvonne will “meet me at the gate”. Garry feels deeply reassured and “stronger about my time coming now” and is looking forward to their eventual reunion. Danneil, who has “always had the belief that you go on, you don’t end as in your death, you do go on”, was comforted and reassured
by her communiqué with her mother. For Danneil, “death doesn’t frighten me at all now”. Additionally, in already having a belief in spiritualism her communiqué with her mother affirm the tenets of this spiritual belief-system which is that life continues post-mortem, and that communication and relationships between the living and the deceased is possible and that it does occur.

**Theme 6 Pattern-related observations**

All co-researchers without exception reported that how they conceptualised their own being was either changed or transformed as a result of their communiqué. It was as though their humanity, as a metaphor for what they perceived themselves to be and how they lived in the world, grew or changed and became something that it was not before; it became different to what it was before. Value-systems changed, as did spiritual belief-systems and world-views. Co-researchers became more compassionate, more understanding, less fearful, better informed about death and generally more courageous in choosing how they wanted to live their lives. As a result of the impact of communiqué on their being, all co-researchers became “more human” in the true spirit of the word.

**Theme 7: Conceptualised understandings of death**

Co-researcher’s conceptualised understandings of death following their communiqué appeared to encompass diverse causal factors which were either confirmed or transformed by their after-death contact. These included their existent world-view and spiritual belief-system, their subjective life experiences, the nature of the relationship between themselves and the deceased, and the time since the death event. There were three additional factors contributing to how co-researchers understood death and how that understanding did or did not change following their communiqué; their own intersubjective reflexivity
concerning death and communiqué, their interaction with others, and their involvement with the study and the researcher conducting the study.

Following her communiqué experiences, Marie’s conceptualisation of death was confirmed. For her, death is a form of birth. “Frequently painful, not always but frequently traumatic, distressing for all concerned, those who are standing around and those who are enduring it.” However, following her communiqué Marie now understands time as “a spiral” which allows the future and the past to intersect. Death represents another aspect of the future with those passing through it still “part of the same ball of wool”.

Marie now conceptualises her mother’s death as a transformative process in that her mother was transfigured or “metamorphosed” from one state of being and existence into another, and rather than grieving their physical separation was, “very happy for her”. This transfiguration from material existence to non-material existence was alluded to by Marie as being “in the presence of the infinite”. For Marie this is something to look forward too. “Once you go through that birth canal, then there’s a whole new life of experience waiting for you.” Her communiqué confirmed for her that death was not an event that diminished her and her mother’s relationship, rather it affords a sense of emotional continuity, a sense of continuance of connection between them because “it [death] isn’t the loss of the person”.

Jennifer’s communiqué experiences have confirmed and expanded her conceptualisations of death. She sees her grandmother’s death as an event akin to a form of release whereby “she exploded from that husk [her body]”. Having been aware of and exposed to non-material phenomena since a young child, Jennifer also understood her grandmother’s death to be an
event that encompassed transformation and transfiguration. Understanding the universe to be an “incredibly dynamic thing”, she feels that her grandmother’s death has enabled her to now meld with or become a part of that dynamism. In addition to now being non-material, her grandmother also exists in a non-material world whereby “she is a force of nature”.

Post-communiqué Jennifer thinks that death has not diminished her relationship with her grandmother, rather their relationship has been enriched because of the “messages” her grandmother constantly communicates and the emotional closeness she experiences as a result. Despite there being times when life is incredibly emotionally difficult for Jennifer without the physical presence of her grandmother, she knows that will cease when she reunites with her after her own death.

Garry’s communiqué with Yvonne did not confirm or transform his views relating to the lived experience of her death, which he conceptualised as “a catastrophe”, during which “she suffered hell on earth” but it has completely transformed how he now conceptualises his own death as “I’m just so comfortable with it, I’m so comfortable with her, with her being there for me”.

Following his communiqué with Sam, Kevin’s pre-existing conceptualisations of death as a reunion or a return to the source were confirmed. The spiritual belief-system he and his close friend who died shared, and his own personal experience and familiarity with non-material phenomena, had prepared him emotionally and psychologically for Sam’s death, at which he felt “nothing but joy and love at the moment of his passing”. The event of death for Kevin signals the opportunity to return to “the vastness that’s available to us all as spirit beings”. Kevin understands the vastness to be “the ocean of love that flows through all life” which “as temporal beings we’re all connected to”, and to which “we all return”.

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Ways of Being
Jayne's communiqué with her husband Robert did not transform her perceptions of death; rather it confirmed them simply because she saw after-death contact as “something that happened in bereavement”. Her being a bereavement counsellor and psychologist had created a theoretical frame of reference for understanding her communiqué which facilitated her conceptualising her bereavement and grief as “part of what it is” and as something which overall, “I don’t think impacted on me very much at all”.

Kelly conceptualises the unexpected death of her partner Piero as an occurrence which was deeply destabilising. The suddenness of it was so jarring and difficult to comprehend that she felt like she was “walking around in a daze” and “I couldn’t believe that one minute everything is perfect and fine and the next minute this is what’s going on”. While her communiqué demonstrated to her that her relationship with Piero was not defined or bound by materiality so profound was the impact of his dying that after it occurred, “nothing felt normal” and Kelly still wonders, “when am I going to be normal, when am I going to feel normal again?”

For James, who has grown up experiencing non-material phenomena and being able to communicate with the disembodied, the deaths of his two grandmothers and close friend Jonathon though deeply emotionally painful, was eased somewhat by the confirmation provided by his communiqué with them.

James conceptualises death as a pathway from pre to post-mortem existence which is not diminished in any way. Death has accentuated his grandmother’s existence because they are no longer “bound by physical reality”. Death has also revealed that material reality can be an impediment of sorts because when physical death occurs it reveals alternate possibilities when the conditions of existence change, which unless death occurs, remain
unchanged. A removal of what appears to be the constraint of materiality, and an enabling of the now non-material or disembodied individual to live more fully in non-material reality is one realised possibility.

Helen, who has had similar life experiences regarding non-material phenomena and the disembodied to James, took her partner John’s death somewhat in her stride as well particularly because her views were confirmed by her communiqué. Non-material phenomena, which is very much a social norm for her, provides the frame of reference and context enabling her to conceptualise death from a number of perspectives.

For those in pain death is “a release” from its vicissitudes. Those now disembodied who collectively constitute, “the other side”, can “work on” and assist the living with the problems they experience in their day-to-day lives. Death also incorporates a teaching or educational element. “Is it going to teach them anything ... maybe you have to suffer that then to know what they feel?” Helen also alluded to a sense of unfairness regarding death, where for some “it’s a release” while for others it seems that they “sail through life and nod off in their sleep and never feel anything”.

The sudden and unexpected death of Kath’s partner Geoff was such a shock that she recalls it as, “surreal” and as for Kelly, an event which left her stunned and unable to comprehend the abrupt and seemingly efficient removal of his physical presence from her life, “your brain hasn’t caught up”. Kath, like James and Helen also conceptualises death as transformative which though it alters existence by transfiguring the once material individual into non-material form, does not prevent them from still being able to exert an influence in the lives and affairs of those still embodied, the living. Thus for Kath, her communiqué experiences confirmed her pre-existing views. Kath not only feels
that “they can protect” but “they can intervene” as well. Kath also believes that though the disembodied are non-material, not only are they still alive but, “there’s no doubt they continue to grow spiritually”. For Kath, her communiqué has confirmed her conceptualisation that death is an event which enables continuing non-material existence of the now transfigured individual.

Cymantha conceptualises death as an ebb and a flow with a kind of synchronistic harmony occurring between the disembodied individual and the non-material reality in which they now exist. “You fluctuate between that beautiful place ... and then you will venture out ... but it seems to work, like it all just works, it’s like a machine, a clockwork thing.” Being quite comfortable with non-material phenomena, her communiqué have confirmed for her that “the living and the dead work together, mentally and physically work together” and that death does not nor cannot prevent such a partnership from occurring.

Until experiencing the death of her husband Patrick and their communiqué, Mayumi had not “really thought too much about it”. His death which she describes as “the last ugliness of the world” brought her pragmatically face-to-face with thoughts regarding her own mortality, “well everybody is going to die sooner or later”. Mayumi’s views of death were neither transformed nor changed following her communiqué. Although her communiqué was her first experience of “the spirit itself” she preferred to “... just leave it alone, I shouldn’t actually find out yes or no in this case, just take it as it is”.

The death of John’s wife Dawn has left him tender and emotionally raw and something that up until the time it occurred was something he “had not really thought about a whole lot”. Although he concurs that death can have a huge impact on an individual’s life, following his communiqué he now conceptualises
it as “just a word” which highlights the rhetoric and reality of death. The rhetoric is such that death brings with it anguish at the removal of the physical presence, yes, this is grief, however the reality is such that death is, “just a word” because it does not extinguish the individual or their existence, it simply changes them and it.

Richards’s communiqué did not so much confirm or transform his pre-existing views about death and life after death; rather it highlighted his own ambiguity concerning it. Although he conceptualises death as “a whole part of you that ceases, in a way, that ceases to be” and that death creates a space, “a vacuum”, which becomes filled with “either distress or by realisation or new understanding” he is not sure that life continues post-mortem.

Following her communiqué, death for Therese though a painful and traumatic emotional event was conceptualised as a gateway to “another world”, a world entered through the portal of the death event. Those who live in this world are “not as we are here” because what lives on in this realm is “our souls, our spirit our energy our life-force” which “has a better life”. This is the world or realm of eternity where, “we enjoy eternal life”.

Therese now understands death from the perspective that, “we don’t die because we’ve already died” an understanding further enriched by her and her family’s communiqué experiences. Additionally, she also now conceptualises death as an opportunity for reunion with those already deceased.

Following her communiqué Trudie conceptualises death as the commencement of a journey. This metaphor highlights the unexpected nature constituting journeys in general; one never quite knows what will occur or what will be encountered at any given time. “You can’t predict what it’s going to be.” Also, there is a sense of discovery, a sense of learning something new, a sense
of being exposed to phenomena and phenomenon hitherto unknown which, it could be argued, are intrinsic elements of any journey, but especially so when one is journeying within the self. “The journey has been affected by the person you’ve lost and it’s been started, and you’re going to have to go with it I think.”

In conceptualising the death event as a journey, Trudie is realistic in acknowledging the emotional challenge undertaking such a journey of the self confronts the traveller with. “... and I know it’s not going to be necessarily that easy, and there’s going to be some things coming up for sure that are going to be pretty difficult.”

So decisive was Jill’s husband Bob’s death that she felt “part of me had died as well”. His death was so final and so utterly complete that she conceptualises its occurrence as an irreversible act which wrenched apart two people who, “were like two peas in a pod”. Having “never actually thought about death that much before”, her grief at their separation was compounded at the time by her not knowing where Bob was. While she “figured that people’s souls go somewhere”, she didn’t actually know where or even if they really did. Her communiqué confirmed for her that the “soul” lives on, that it does “go somewhere” and that existence continues post-mortem.

Prior to her communiqué, Catrina conceptualised death as something that had taken away her sense of joy, her naivety, and left her with a feeling of emptiness and a sense of melancholic sobriety. She attributed her “less passionate” involvement with life to, “deep sorrow, the sadness, that despair that someone dying can impact on your life so deeply”. Death introduced her to a world she hitherto did not know both within herself, by altering her understanding and engagement of and with life, and outside herself, manifesting in altered family dynamics and lack of familial closeness.
Following her communiqué however, Catrina now knows that “there is an energy or something that does go on after life and death”. She believes that her communiqué has shown her that “death is not the end of the line” and that there is “something that can overcome the physical death of someone”. Her communiqué has also done something else, taken away her fear of death “... in a way [communiqué] has made the thought of death not as scary maybe, to think that there is a possibility of something else”.

Danneil, in parallel with a number of her fellow co-researchers, conceptualises death as a profoundly life-altering event such that “nothing after that felt normal”. Like Marie, Danneil also perceives her mother’s death as an event which though emotionally painful to her facilitated a reunion with her father who had died twenty years earlier which she thought, “quite wonderful for him”. Her understanding of her emotional responses to her mother’s death and her bereavement in general, co-exists with her belief in post-mortem existence, “you don’t end as in your death, you do go on” which were confirmed for her following her communiqué experiences.

Michelle had an experience similar to Trudie in that initially she was distracted by a number of responsibilities following her husband’s death and was “taken up with what I had to do”. However, “all of a sudden ... realisation stepped in” and her grief literally spilled over, the force of it rendering her quite literally incapable of speech. “All I did was cry, I just cried and cried, I couldn’t talk, I couldn’t do anything.” Michelle’s communiqué as for some of her co-researchers, confirmed death as an event which does not end existence, rather it frees up or releases the non-material parts of oneself which then live or exist in a non-material reality. For Michelle, the body is “a suit of clothes” which covers “our soul, our feelings, our spirit, our being” which
“doesn’t die”. Death releases this body-within-a-body because it
removes the constraints of the material encasement enclosing the
non-material elements of the individual.

Bob, whose granddaughter Sammie was killed while
travelling home on leave, and in companionship with a number of
his fellow co-researchers, conceptualises death not only as a self-
changing event “inside I am, I feel different” but as something
“life-changing” which has altered his “whole outlook on life”. Bob
also alluded to an educational element of death in questioning
whether Sammie’s death was “another one of the experiences I
had to have before I depart?” and following his communiqué now
conceptualises death as something which “reshapes” not just life,
but how life is lived.

Theme 7 Pattern-related observations

Following their communiqué, all co-researcher’s perceptions
of death were either confirmed or transformed. For those whom
already had an understanding that death does not extinguish life,
and that the event of death serves as a metaphorical door
through which the disembodied pass from a world of materiality
to a world of immateriality, communiqué confirmed their pre-
existing knowledge and understanding. For those whom had
never really thought much about death, irrespective of why, their
perception of death was completely transformed following their
communiqué, which was the impetus for a profound change in
their understanding and how they began to live their life
following their changed circumstances.

Theme 8: Intersubjective nature of the interview process

In addition to co-researchers reporting generally positive
responses to their participation in the study and in particular to
the interview process, they also reported that by doing so their
understanding of their bereavement as a personal narrative of
loss altered. The construction of this personal narrative of loss appeared to be intersubjective with their participation, and suggested that such narratives are pliable and change over time in accordance with or in response to certain conditions or influences.

Cymantha felt comfortable and at ease during pre-interview telephone discussions. “I’ve connected with you, you sound like a beautiful person” and, “I trust you and feel like I’m in safe hands”. She was looking forward to her interview. “I feel really good about doing this” and felt, “I think this will really help me”. Post-interview she relayed that she had “really enjoyed” her conversation and felt “more positive”. For Jennifer, her involvement with the study was an event she believed to be part of a greater orchestration contrived by her grandmother in response to her grieving. Marie, who has been interviewed many times with respect to her writing, enjoyed her participation, irrespective that she was interviewed twice because of technical difficulties that rendered the audio-tape recording of her first interview useless.

Therese and I conducted two interviews. Following the first she relayed she was emotionally, “on a huge high” because the interview “took me back to really good memories”. The second interview affected her differently because it had “generated new lines of thought” had “triggered long-forgotten memories” and “because of the study I’m remembering things”. Jill enjoyed her interview, sounding upbeat and positive when commenting on her experience a few days afterward. “It’s been good. I feel that I like telling people about my experiences”. And with regard to understanding her communiqué “it’s nothing scary, you are not being possessed by anything or anything bizarre like that, it’s just normal”.

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Richard, as Jill had done, enjoyed the interview process. “Oh yes, I did, I did” because, “within the context of research one can discuss one’s personal stuff”. Because of his participation Richard has “discovered things in our conversation that I had not been aware of before” and furthermore “has continued to think about our conversation and am aware of the ‘permeable barrier’ between death and life, or, better, the living and the dead”.

Catrina was encouraged during pre-interview conversations. “I’m really glad you’re doing this” and “you have an understanding of higher order grief”. Despite these initial positive thoughts and feeling that our meeting “was destined” and that she was, “meant to pick up on the study advertisement” Catrina found the interview emotionally challenging and difficult to undertake. She attributed these to her fear of “where she might go”. Notwithstanding these very tangible concerns, post-interview she reported feeling, “much more of a sense of serenity with the whole dad thing”.

Bob felt comfortable both during and after his interview. “Look I can talk to you, I can relax, I feel comfortable with you, talking with you. It’s not as if you’re trying to force me into a corner ... I can relax and I can try and get my own thoughts together.” Although it was “early days” for Bob, he was feeling “a lot more comfortable” and found that discussing Sammie’s death “has made a difference as well”.

Michelle found her interview “quite emotional in parts, especially when I recalled Percy and the hospital and all that”. Despite that however, she was pleased to have been contacted regarding her participation in the study, as she was to know “there’s someone else there thinking along the same lines as me and I know I can say anything to you and not get ridiculed for it”. Helen, similarly to Michelle enjoyed the interview process with nothing untoward occurring post-interview. She also found a
sense of companionship in discoursing with someone “of like mind”.

In addition to having the opportunity to “talk about Piero” Kelly was also “amazed that I’m able to sit here and not cry today and talk about it”. This was “a big step” for her and one that had involved “a long time to get here”. Kelly not only felt a sense of accomplishment as a result of being able to participate in her interview, it seemed that she had achieved an emotional milestone as well.

During a pre-interview conversation Garry relayed, “I just knew you and I were going to be able to talk. I just knew it. I felt it straight away in my heart”. Discussing his communiqué during his interview had “been a relief” and, “a privilege”. Post-interview Garry relayed, “I feel light-hearted I suppose that I can leave here and know that someone believes me and yes, I am going to see her and you believe I’m going to see her and you know that I’m going to see her”.

Mayumi like Garry was comfortable during her interview, “I really don’t feel any strangeness here, I love people, I love meeting people, I have this animalistic sense that I don’t like her at all, [or] I don’t like him at all.” Post-interview, although she did not elaborate on the nature of the experiences, she relayed “regarding ‘post-death contact’ I had a couple of more recently, was it because I received the transcript from you, was my mind playing up again?” Kath similarly to Mayumi was direct and to the point regarding her interview. “I think I’ll come away from here better than when I walked in to be honest.” And Lance whom, “eleven months ago probably wouldn’t have left my unit to come here” found his interview “good!” It was a relief for Lance to discuss his communiqué and the context of its life altering impact. “I don’t have to hide anything.”
Kevin enjoyed the interview process and like Marie, was already familiar with the interview context. Although it was emotionally difficult for John to discuss his experiences, he found doing just that was “beneficial”. Additionally, “I’m feeling better about it and I’m sure after I’ve had time to think about it, I’ll feel a lot better”. His participation has also resulted in the realisation that he “has to sit back and think about that sort of thing” as once he “didn’t give it a thought” however, “now I will”. Danneil relayed post-interview that participating in the study was “the best thing that I’ve done”. Additionally, “the fact that someone has actually given me a reason as to why grief has had such an impact on my life, you understood what I had to say” has rendered her, “forever grateful”.

Regarding her experience, Jayne relayed post-interview “absolutely, I’ve enjoyed it.” She also felt a sense of personal satisfaction which arose from her contributing toward a project that would, “set the cat amongst the pigeons”. Trudie initially had wondered whether participating might have a negative impact, “I did sort of think was it all too soon, was it too raw and could I get it across in a way that wasn’t too, with trauma involved, with too much emotion in it”. Post-interview however, she felt positive regarding her participation, “yeah, no, it’s been really interesting”. Additionally, she had found it, “quite thought provoking”. Trudie was also appreciative in knowing about my experiences of bereavement and communiqué because then she had found it easier to talk about her own.

James, who has not cried at all at the deaths of his grandmothers relayed post-interview that he had found it, “cathartic” to, “have the chance to shed some tears” during his interview. His participation was emotionally and psychologically beneficial because it, “has helped me in the grieving process” and overall, “it’s been a very good experience for me”. James also
relayed, “I believe as we close this session I feel almost like a burden has been lifted, a sense of release. Two, that I’ve almost given a reassurance that I’m headed in the right direction”. James also reported that the interview “has made me look at life at a different level again ... and it’s almost like I have hope”. James, as Trudie had done, felt reassured by my life experiences. “It’s good to find people like you, because sometimes Catholic faith or other religions, they’re a bit closed-minded about these things.”

Theme 8 Pattern-related observations

As a result of their interview participation, all co-researchers without exception reported that their personal narratives of loss altered. This was a result of the reflective context in which their interviews occurred and the intersubjective nature of the interview process itself which included researcher self-disclosure. This highlighted the pliable nature of narratives which are fed by the understanding of the individual. As the understanding changes, so too does the narrative, changing shape and form in direct response to the encountering of new ideas and new ways of seeing things.

The Composite Depiction: The experience of communiqué

The Composite Depiction does not just reflect the experiences of individual co-researchers; it presents the qualities that permeate the group as a whole which emerged during the process of Explication. These qualities reveal themselves as a result of the process of immersion into, and the study and concentration of, the experiences of the phenomenon as presented by each co-researcher. As Moustakas notes, “at some point in this process the qualities, core themes, and essences that permeate the experience of the entire group of co-researchers are understood and a universal depiction is constructed” (1990, p. 68).
This universal depiction is the metaphorical embodiment or representation of the diversity of voice. It is an overarching term for the multiplicity of perspective and understanding which can be present in any event. Thus voice describes the event; it does not determine it because it is the composition of many perspectives which then becomes a composite. The following Composite Depiction, *The Experience of Communiqué*, is presented in prose format and illustrates the natures and meanings of the experience of communiqué.

*The Experience of Communiqué*

*It is an event which occurs unexpectedly, randomly, with little warning and which often takes one by surprise. It appears to occur spontaneously and sometimes as if by coincidence in response to the emotional and psychological needs of the experient at the time. It can happen when sleeping or awake. For those who have never experienced non-material phenomena the event is transformative, while for those who have, the event is confirmative. It can take a variety of forms, but whichever form it takes, it is uniquely personal to the individual because it involves the person close to them who has died. It is something that is done to them, and not by them.*

*When it is experienced, it is an event which amongst other purposes serves not only to educate and inform the experient regarding two forms of existence, one material and one non-material, it offers an invitation to understand life and one’s place in the universe from alternate perspectives. A cacophony of Feelings arise in response to this reaching out from the dead to the living and the mind turns inward in a concurrent effort to*
understand what it is that has taken place. Sometimes it is initially confusing because the mind struggles to conceptualise what that is in terms of what is already known. At other times it is a confirmation of what is already known. The experience causes an internal shift which has a rippling effect in the life of the experient as it does in the visible social and cultural world. The individual acts differently because they think differently. It can lead to psychospiritual change resulting from the removal of illusory veils of understanding which hitherto blocked or distorted the individual’s perception regarding the nature of some aspects of reality.

*Every* time it happens, it seems that life is offering an invitation to the individual to consider what they are, as opposed to who they are. Some individuals experience a sense of communion or conjunction with the sacred, as understood by them, while others feel a sense of awe and wonder, and feel blessed by the experience. While for others, there are no words just feelings that cannot be put into words ...

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from the study in four sections. *Internal Frame of Reference, Exemplary Portraits, Illumination of Themes* and *The Composite Depiction*. The *Internal Frame of Reference* introduced all co-researchers who participated in the study and presented their communiqué experiences. *Exemplary Portraits* presented individual depictions of four co-researcher’s which though unique to the individuals themselves generally characterised the experiences of the group as a whole. *Illumination of Themes* presented eight themes
which emerged during the Illumination phase of data analysis. The themes revealed groupings and frequencies across the group as a whole distinctly representative of communiqué phenomena. *The Composite Depiction* universally illustrated the natures and meanings of communiqué which permeate the experience of the co-researchers as a collective and was presented in prose format. A discussion of the findings is presented in *Chapter Seven: Discussion*. 
Chapter Seven: Discussion

The providence of chaos, cosmology, and meaning

Now is the point in history at which it becomes possible for man to adopt consciously as his own purpose the purpose which is already inherent in his own nature.

John Macmurray, Man and God: passages chosen and arranged to express a mood about the human and divine, 1951, p. 49

In all chaos there is a cosmos, in all disorder a secret order.

Carl Gustav Jung, The archetypes of the collective unconscious, 1968, p. 32
Chapter Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings from the heuristic analysis and interpretation of data presented in Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings. The findings are discussed with reference to the research question that guided the study and social science and bereavement literature relevant to communiqué. Implications of the findings and recommendations for further research are also discussed.

Introduction

Communiqué is defined in the study as after-death encounters occurring between the bereaved individual and the person/s close to them who died, the deceased. This engagement occurs when the now disembodied and non-material person/s after their physical death spontaneously and without assistance or provocation from any embodied individual, engage and interact with the bereaved individual in a manner deemed by that individual to be significant or meaningful.

The nature and impact of communiqué reported by co-researchers reveal a complex multi-layered and multi-dimensional phenomenon that impacted them in unique and diverse ways. Findings suggest that communiqué has both the potential to be and can be a transformative psychospiritual event for the bereaved experient and for the other. Findings indicate that the phenomenon itself occurs cross-culturally with a similar psychospiritual impact on the individual’s being.

Although co-researchers reported diverse conceptualisations of the purpose or reasons why they felt their communiqué had occurred, their discourse indicated that there appeared to be a sense of providence underlying their experiences. The end-effect of this perceived sense of providence was such that all
communiqué eventuated in individualised growth-outcomes for the experients.

Co-researchers reported thirteen discrete types of communiqué phenomena, which suggest that the disembodied have options for how they communicate or alternatively, that choice is available. As to why each disembodied individual utilised their particular means of communication is unknown and beyond the scope of the study. A discussion of these types has been presented in the previous chapter, Chapter Six: Presentation of Findings.

Co-researchers discourse indicate that communiqué experienced within the context of bereavement can be a deeply profound, emotionally, psychologically and for some a spiritually intense intersubjective experience between the individual and the event. In addition to possessing the capacity to disrupt the emotional and psychological equilibrium of the individual, the phenomenon has the potential to alter, realign and reorientate the hitherto existent order of a once known and familiar assumptive world in diverse ways.

For example, the experience can inform, challenge and recontextualise the understanding of the experient. This changed understanding directly impacts the being of the individual, either confirming existing attitudes or alternatively, seeding new and perhaps previously unconsidered ideas and trains of thought in the mind. Findings are consistent with Balk’s observations that not only is bereavement “a dangerous opportunity which produces extreme psychological imbalance”, it is an event which presents a “spiritual challenge” which can result in “new efforts to construe meaning” (1999, p. 488).

Findings are consistent with humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow’s conception of knowledge gained in what he describes as “peak experiences”: insights, revelations or mystical
illuminations (1964, p. 19). In such instances both the event and the experiencing of it are the revelation of a truth. Findings of the study build upon and extend Maslow’s conception of truth. Findings indicate that communiqué is the revelation of a, not the, truth-in-action which is a dynamic, vibrant and living manifestation of a higher order principle manifesting in the life of the experient and in the visible social and cultural world. Findings accord with Maslow’s interpretation regarding the potentiality and intensity of what is defined as a peak experience, that is communiqué, on the experient:

My feeling is that if it were never to happen again, the power of the experience could permanently affect the attitude toward life. A single glimpse of heaven is enough to confirm its existence even if it is never experienced again. (1964, p. 75)

The Transpersonal Context of Communiqué

The occurrence of communiqué was an unexpected and unsought component of bereavement which became another constituent of the multi-dimensionality of the death event. The impact of the death for most co-researchers, regardless of its nature, was traumatic and difficult enough to have to come to terms with without the added complexity of communiqué occurring between themselves and the deceased. Wright notes that while dealing with death can be shattering, dealing with survival of the spirit after death is a learning experience which not only lifts the individual, it challenges them to “rethink and perhaps to reshape their life” (2002, p. 211). These observations by Wright were reflected in the construction of communiqué narratives which differed for all co-researchers irrespective of whether they were familiar or unfamiliar with non-material phenomena.
A unique aspect of communiqué is that it appears to be instigated by the disembodied, spontaneously and without conscious provocation from the bereaved. Communiqué also appears to have a synchronistic relationship with the internal psychological and emotional states of mind and being of the bereaved individual because it appears to manifest in conjunction with their occurrence.

Co-researchers reported that in general their communiqué had a beneficent emotional, psychological, and for some spiritual effect on their lives. For example, those who were unsure of post-mortem existence gained the experiential knowledge and understanding that physical death did not end nor define a person’s existence, and that death itself was a permeable barrier between material and non-material reality. In addition, they believed those now disembodied would be waiting for them because it was understood they were still alive, albeit in different form. Death did not make post-mortem reunion unattainable; rather, it provided an assurance of the certainty not only of post-mortem reunion and to some degree post-mortem happiness, but of post-mortem existence and continuity of life and relationships between individuals.

In addition to the disembodied offering emotional support, reassurance and comfort to their embodied loved ones, there were also specific outcomes that were engendered by the after-death contact which occurred between them. For example, a number of co-researchers found reassurance in knowing that those who had died were now “in a better place”, that they “no longer suffered pain”, were “happy” or “at peace” and that they themselves were “still being looked after” by them. Some felt that they were being “guided” by their loved ones, that even though they no longer existed in a material sense, in a non-material sense they were
very much alive, still “a part of the family”, and that they still had the concerns of family members at heart.

For those co-researchers who had a sense of an alternate non-material reality existing “over and above” material reality as they perceived it, communiqué with the deceased provided them with tangible experience that such a non-material reality existed. This non-material reality was positioned within a spiritual context by co-researchers and variously defined by them as “God”, “being in the presence of the infinite”, “the universe” (as a metaphor for a living or higher intelligence), “heaven”, “the vastness that’s available to us all as spirit beings”, “the Gates of St Peter”, “the other side”, “a place where individuals are no longer bound by physical reality”, “something”, “that beautiful place”, and “a place where we live on [where] our souls, our spirit, our energy our life-force enjoys eternal life”.

For those who had had previous experience of non-material phenomena, their communiqués were comfortably accommodated in their existing world-view and spiritual belief-system. For those who had no previous experience, their communiqués generated new trains of thought in the mind and an alternate way of considering the world and the meaning of their existence within it. Findings of the study suggest that communiqué occurring within a context of bereavement can be psychospiritually transformative. It is transformative for those in direct relationship to them who continue existence as embodied beings because communiqué can result in transformation of the being and inner life of the experient.

Comments from a number of co-researchers suggested they had not considered themselves as anything other than material or corporeal beings. After their communiqué however, they realised their perception and understanding of what they were was incorrect because they knew experientially that they were
other than their material selves, and that the deceased were other than their material selves. As a result, how they defined and understood themselves as human beings, and existence itself, changed.

Co-researchers’ engagement with their communiqué indicates that an individual’s understanding and their relationship with a death event is cyclical and appears to evolve in conjunction with internal psychological and emotional states of mind and being as they occur. It is an evolution which appears metaphorically interconnected with their intersubjective engagement with the non-material components of their inner life; their thoughts, feelings, emotions, intuitions and sensings. Experiencing the presence of the deceased challenged co-researchers to consider and explore their own understanding of what it means to exist when living in the material reality of the visible social world, and what it might mean to exist when living in non-material reality.

The Transpersonal Context of Bereavement

The impact of their being bereaved differed for all co-researchers. The one unifying element however, was that all co-researchers, as Balk notes, strove to find meaning in and a sense of purpose from their experiences (Balk, 1999). Tedeschi and Calhoun identify five broad outcome-clusters which can result from this effort: the experience of the emergence of new possibilities, changes in interpersonal relationships, an increased sense of personal strength, a greater appreciation for life, and changes in existential and spiritual orientations (2008, p. 32).

These outcome-clusters were reflected in co-researchers discourse which revealed that their thoughts, attitudes, understanding and narratives of their bereavement and communiqué existed in a dynamic state of intersubjective flux.
internally within themselves and externally with the other. Additionally, their own privately conducted ruminations provided the time, space and opportunity for them to be in the presence of themselves, however painful. Whether or not it was perceived or comprehended as such, these ruminations contributed toward a growing and deepening understanding of both the event and impact of communiqué in their lives.

With regard to conceptualising their bereavement, co-researchers described the event in terms of being “severed” from the deceased, being “cut off from others” and feeling “disjointed” as they struggled to come to terms with the impact of the death, and although a number reported experiencing a premonition or inner sense of the impending death they still nonetheless grieved their loss intensely. There was an obvious anguish in the experiential emotional reality of the loss which co-existed with the intellectual knowing that, yes, death occurs and it is comprehended that it is going to occur, but nobody told me it would feel like this.

Co-researchers discourse revealed that what one thought intellectually about death was alternate to what one felt emotionally or within their being when they actually experienced what it was like to have someone close to them die. Indeed, it was as though these parts of the individual co-existed with one another yet metaphorically spoke different languages. This internal dissonance highlighted for the individual a demarcation between the rhetoric or knowing of something in an abstract or merely intellectual manner, and the reality or subjective experience of it. How does the individual now live in the face of this altered reality, especially when one’s thoughts or beliefs about an event are so sharply contradicted by the actual experiencing of the event?
The finding of internal dissonance is consistent with Attig’s observations regarding the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge, and the challenge in knowing how to apply that practical knowledge to oneself in order “to be what the world now challenges us to do and become” (2002, p. 65).

We can learn all that there is to know in books, lectures or workshops or from counselors about the full range of practical challenges we confront when our loved ones have died and about means of addressing them ... But such theoretical knowledge is simply different from the practical knowledge we require to actually come to terms with loss of assumptive worlds ... There is still the matter of learning how to do it, acquiring and effectively using the sensibilities, abilities and dispositions that will reorientate and enable us to feel once again at home in the world. (Attig, 2002, p. 65)

Co-researchers lives post-bereavement were initially accompanied by periods of confusion and bewilderment which for a number encompassed a profound crisis and internal search for meaning. In turning inward, individuals questioned their purpose in life, as they questioned life itself. With their self-examination came self-understanding and self-transformation. Values changed, meanings changed, relationships with the self and others, with life and the sacred or spiritual changed. One’s world-view was fundamentally and profoundly impacted upon, one’s inner being and sense of self, one’s very identity was liquefied, nullified, and then gradually reformed or reconstituted until a different set of eyes looked out into the world. Nothing would be as it was before. Nothing would ever be the same again because their lives had been turned inside out.

Some co-researchers conceptualised death as a return to a “universal vastness” from which human beings had initially come forth, or as a “setting free” or escape from an ailing body that had
held its occupant captive through illness, infirmity or disease. For others, death was an abrupt interruption to life and a denial of access. This included access to emotional support, companionship, love, knowledge, and a hitherto anticipated shared life and future. Some conceptualised death as a means or process of transformation for both themselves and the deceased in that existence in one way of life was replaced by that of another. This particular conceptualisation was influenced by an existent world-view and/or spiritual belief-system, while for others the realisation and understanding came after personal and private introspection.

Co-researchers discussed familial, social and community responses to their bereavement and communiqué in terms of lack of understanding, marginalisation, isolation and loneliness, and difficulty in meeting and connecting with “those of like-mind” with whom they could feel understood. Their grief responses were diverse, something which commonly went unappreciated by those around them and which were further compounded by the pressure of social expectations of grieving.

These social expectations reflect what Klass and Goss term, nested grief narratives, which co-exist with those already present in contemporary layered social systems of alternate grief narratives (Klass & Goss, 2003). For example, one co-researcher pre-interview reported her response to being told she needed to move on. “Move on from what, and to where?” Another expressed anger at the expectation that she work toward “closure”. “Closure, closure of what!” she demanded angrily and with obvious emotional pain. “This will be a part of me forever, this has defined me.” And another, “get over it, I will never get over, it”.
The Desolation of Loss

Grief, the complex multi-layered and multi-dimensional internal emotional and psychological, and external behavioural response to death was depicted by co-researchers in graphic emotional terms. These terms portrayed images of psychological, emotional and spiritual desolation, terror and fear, numbing loneliness, and the crippling anguish and utter confusion of both witnessing and participating in the chaotic disintegration of one assumptive world and the painful birth of another.

Grief was conceptualised as something that “had a life of its own” as something which, “changes you from the inside out” and as “a bomb going off inside you”. Some individuals found themselves hurled inward, driven there by the force and intensity of their grief which erupted from within in a manner that they found frightening, unfamiliar and difficult to comprehend. Life was described in terms of “before” and “after” their being bereaved, of how they would “never be the same” or “normal” again, and of how the death was “a catastrophe”. On occasion, some questioned their sanity as they did their ability to cope.

Co-researchers discussed behavioural changes evoked by their grief. For a time some became semi-reclusive, lacking the will, energy and heart to face the world outside the one in which they now found themselves. Some fell into black suffocating pits of choking despair, while others threw themselves into work, hoping the distraction would provide the breathing space required to get through the minutes, then the hours, then the days. But when they came home in the evening, or when they faced the emptiness of the weekend, or when those around them demonstrated their lack of understanding toward them, then the aching reality of their loss was starkly evident. A terrible bleakness now pervaded life, and it was as though the heart was held fast by an unseen yet powerful force. This was their grief,
and for some it was a battleground upon which the choice to-live or not-to-live was played out in dramatic form.

Sleep was disturbed, appetite was disturbed, weeping was unpredictable, at times uncontrollable and occurred with the least provocation. Thoughts, images and flashbacks of the death, nightmares and psychological and emotional unpredictability, disorientation and confusion were the norm. Internal emotional states were not only unfamiliar, they were chaotic in nature and appeared to follow no pattern, other than complete randomness. Co-researchers described themselves as mechanically “going through the motions” in trying to get through the day. For some, a sense of unreality accompanied their early grieving as they struggled to comprehend and come to terms with the profound impact of their loss. The effect of their grief on their lives was catastrophic and an assault on the only reality many of them had ever known.

Grief responses to a death event manifest as internal psychological and emotional states of mind and being within the bereaved individual, as such it is inwardly acting because it has an internal spread. Grief also evokes a response from others, therefore it is externally acting because it has an external spread into the visible social world. The bereaved individual intersubjectively redefines who and what they are in response to what is occurring within them, and in response to the response of others to their grief.

Communiqué is not unlike grief in that it too has a rippling effect within the experient and within the visible social world. It can reinforce and reaffirm the world-view and spiritual belief-system of the experient. It can invite, challenge and educate the understanding regarding what it is that constitutes or defines material and non-material reality, what it is that constitutes or defines existence, the meaning of life, the meaning of a death
event, and the meaning of post-mortem existence. This accords with Klass and Goss’s stance that a relationship between the bereaved and the deceased can “offer a critique of the values on which consumer capitalism is based” (1999, p. 362).

The Dark Night of the Soul

The almost overwhelming despair and anguish which for a period darkened the days and nights of the majority of co-researchers appears to parallel what St. John of the Cross, a 16th Century Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic monk termed the dark night of the soul. This was a period of emotional, psychological and spiritual disorientation and destabilisation which was often accompanied by intense internal anguish and a profound sense of loss or despair. The dark night of the soul is correlated with a profound period of inner purification and spiritual growth of the individual. During this period external life is barely tolerable because of the profound internal crisis of meaning such a period evokes.

The afflictions of this dark night of the spirit are many. One feels helpless as though imprisoned in a dark dungeon, bound hands and feet, and able to neither move, nor see, nor feel any favour from heaven or earth … When one feels safest, and least expects it, the darkness returns in a degree more severe than before … (St John of the Cross, cited in Campbell, 1989, p. 35, p. 57)

However devastating the dark night of the soul was for the individual, it appears to have also served a purpose because it made way for the ingression into the individual of something of a higher nature. As a result, the individual can emerge transformed because their understanding of themselves and of certain aspects of reality has been transformed. The individual is not what they were before; they are different because their
perception and understanding of that which constitutes reality or
the assumptive world is different.

A number of co-researchers talked about the impact of their
bereavement in terms of “evolving” into another type of person
who they now needed to become acquainted with. It was as
though they could observe themselves and in so doing could
compare and contrast how they were before being bereaved to
how they were afterward. The way they thought had changed, as
had what they now thought about. This thinking changed their
behaviour toward themselves, others and the sacred or spiritually
infinite. It appeared to make them metaphorically more human
because it sublimated objurgating elements of the personality. It
changed what they were and how they were; they grew into a
different type of human being who lived a different type of life
because their value-system and understanding had changed.

The Assumptive World

The painful and difficult re-entry into a now altered life
accords with Parkes’ notion of psychosocial change and/or growth
resulting from the impact of bereavement on the assumptive
world of the bereaved individual (1971, 1988). The notion of the
assumptive world is such that it is a constant internal construct
that delineates and incorporates all those elements that
constitute the individual’s world-view and spiritual belief-system.
It is their beliefs, assumptions, knowings, perceptions, insights;
all those things held in the mind and psyche of the individual
that for them constitutes reality. It is an ideological structure for
how the individual understands the world, and for how they
conceptualise their existence in the world:

The assumptive world is the only world we know and it includes
everything we know or think we know. It includes our interpretations
of the past and our expectations of the future, our plans and our
prejudices. Any or all of these may need to change as a result of changes in the life space. (Parkes, 1971, p. 102)

Any impression or impact from an event to the constancy of an assumptive world engenders an internal reaction which manifests as a reaction and/or response toward the impression from the individual. The nature of the impression or event and the internal depth of impact and the resulting reaction and/or response can vary. This was reflected in co-researchers’ discourse, which though differing in intensity and nature for each, appeared broadly inter-related with the individualism of their bereavement, their communiqué, their relationship with the deceased, access to familial, social and community support and understanding, and the personal traits and qualities of character of the individual themselves.

Although the knowledge and understanding of the assumptive world as an internal construct was unknown to co-researchers, they nonetheless reflected its existence in their articulations of the impact of their bereavement and communiqué in terms of how they lived their lives after its advent as “the time before” and “the time after”. There was a clear demarcation between how their world once was, and now, how their world is or is becoming.

Notwithstanding the difficulties experienced in accordance with their particular personal circumstances, all co-researchers made the emotional and psychological transition from loving in presence to loving in absence. Additionally, all co-researchers were able to re-engage with life which they now experienced in different ways, which for some was profound, with adequate every-day functioning. Attig terms this process relearning one’s way in the world. This relearning constitutes a rich and meaningful intersubjective relationship between the individual,
the internal constructs of their assumptive world and the material reality in which they live. Attig defines this intersubjectivity as a multifaceted transitional process which by its very nature is organic):

As we grieve, we appropriate new understandings of the world and ourselves within it. We also become different in the light of the loss as we assume a new orientation to the world. As we relearn, we adjust emotional and other psychological responses and postures. We transform habits, motivations and behaviours. We find new ways to meet biological needs. We reshape our interactions and connections with others. And we change understanding and interpretations and alter spiritual perspectives. Relearning is thus holistic. Our grieving is organic and we experience it organically. (1996, pp. 107-108)

Constructing Connections and Living from an Idea

Study findings indicate that communiqué has a psychospiritual systems-relationship with the experiент and the other. It does not exist in isolation; it has a spread. Rather than reducing the bereaved individual to their grief and compartmentalising them, it provides a stimulus and means by which the individual can establish within them a sense of internal wholeness. Contextualised thus, communiqué creates bonds. Its impact spreads internally within the individual before moving out from them into the visible social world where it manifests as changed behaviours toward others, shared narrative constructions, shared discourse with others and as the dissemination of an idea.

Ideas are powerful influences in the lives of human beings. Their ingression into human minds can have dramatic consequences, both at an individual and social level especially if after receiving the idea the individual thinks from it and then acts from it. In so doing a connection between the idea and the individual is constructed. An idea can change one individual, or
many. Indeed it can be argued that humanity’s history is a sequential timeline of ideas in application. Paradigms are formulated, science advances, nations are founded, revolutions and wars fought, theories proved, disproved or argued over and debated about, all because of an idea which after coming into a mind was thought from and then acted upon.

Ideas can generally be classified into two very broad categories, those which are material and those which are spiritual. Material ideas relate to such things as for example the material body or the material universe, whereas spiritual ideas relate to that which is non-material; God, wisdom, truth, love, consciousness, the mind (as opposed to the brain), non-material reality, the soul, the notion of self-transformation and existence as a non-material being in a non-material reality. Communiqué is a metaphorical spiritual idea, the idea being that, *communiqué can bring about change of being of the experient*. If thought from, the application of the idea will construct a connection between the inner life of the individual and its outward expression.

Within an end-of-life context, the notion of spirituality is well recognised as an important consideration for many individuals. Notwithstanding this, theorists and researchers have not only lamented the dearth of well-designed and theoretically based studies which have examined the construct of spirituality and its relationship with bereavement they have called for redress (Benore & Park, 2004; Boston et al., 2001; Mahoney & Graci, 1999; McCain et al., 2003; Simmonds, 2004; Sinclair et al., 2006; Wolfelt, 2006).

The response to this is acknowledged by a plethora of interdisciplinary literature exploring the holistic relationship between bereavement, spirituality, and/or spiritual transformation and wholeness (Balk, 1999; Bergen & Payne, 1992; Coyte, Gilbert & Nicholls, 2007; Doka, 1993; Kauffman,
2002; Klass, 1995; Marrone, 1997; Swinton, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). Accompanying this response, and more specifically, is the development of meaning reconstruction theory (Attig, 1996, 2000; Neimeyer, 2001; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002) and a growing awareness of the significance of meaning in the life of the bereaved individual. This has played a significant role in highlighting the role of spirituality, and as a means of providing redress (Attig, 2002; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999; Cobb, 2001; Goss & Klass, 2005; Oldnall, 1995; Richards, 2001; Swinton, 2006). Study findings contribute to this literature because they extend understanding and knowledge of the transpersonal nature of communiqué and its relationship with the psychospiritual growth of the experient.

A Systems-view: The intersubjective relationship of communiqué with the transpersonal

Bereavement has been defined as an inescapable aspect of the human condition that not only touches each person’s “unique existential situation” (Kessler, 1987, p. 229), but as an event heralding “a major existential challenge” in the life of the individual (Thompson, 2007, p. 70). This existential challenge not only highlights the tensions between understandings and notions of spirituality and religion, it reveals their multiplicity. Although co-researchers’ discourse revealed that the communiqué they experienced impacted them in various ways and to varying degrees, a significant impact was on their spirituality, which reflects Kessler’s unique existential situation and Thompson’s major existential challenge. The study acknowledges that definitions and understandings of spirituality are individualistic, pluralistic and meaning-changing (Cait, 2004; Calhoun, Tedeschi & Lincourt, 1992; Pargament, Desai & McConnell, 2006; Stroebe & Schut, 1999).
For example, Stoll notes “descriptions of the spiritual dimension are diverse ... with little universal consensus” (1989, p. 5), while Swinton observes that within Western culture and societies “spirituality has become a slippery concept” (2001, p. 13). Macmurray observes that religion “which is about action” cannot be separated from spirituality. “A religion which is concerned only with the ‘spiritual life’ is a religion which leaves action out, and in which spiritual activity has no practical reference” (1995, p. 65). Elkins et al., define spirituality as “a way of being and experiencing that comes through awareness of a transcendental dimension” which is characterised by, “certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life and whatever one considers to be ultimate” (1988, p. 8).

It could be argued that spirituality is merely another internal construct which is a constituent of the assumptive world of the individual. Yes, but to do so would be an act of reductionism which would render it lifeless. Study findings demonstrate that for co-researchers spirituality is deeper and more profound than that because it enables the individual to live from a different level of being. Indeed, it could be hypothesised that spirituality and religion are functions of the soul which itself is the very core of that which defines a human being. “More and more people seem to be realizing that true spirituality is based on personal experience and is an extremely important and vital dimension of life” (Grof & Grof, 1989, p. xiii).

Irrespective of any conjecturing, study findings demonstrate that spirituality enables the individual to form what is for some a personal and loving relationship with that which is perceived by them to be the ultimate reality. In a sense the individual lives from the inside out, and from a place which is beyond the brain; it is not thought, it is felt. They are motivated by their commitment and adherence to maintaining this internal relationship with
something other than themselves, with something that cannot always be seen or known in a material sense but which can be felt in the internal depths of one’s being. This value-system is profoundly meaningful to the individual. It provides a framework for how they relate to those around them, to the world in which they live, and to the sacred or spiritually infinite. It may be positioned within a specific religious system or faith tradition, or it may not. Klass captures a perspective of the expansiveness of the spiritual as follows:

At some point during the spiritual experience, “the person feels his or her life is more authentic, more meaningful, the person’s thinking is ‘set straight’ or true, and his or her actions toward others are right and true”. (1995, p. 244)

This sense of spiritual diversity is reflected in the findings. A number of co-researchers positioned their communiqué within alternate spiritual contexts, reflecting its multiplicity, and in acknowledging their communiqué perceived or hypothesised that “something higher”, something “over and above this material world”, something “intangible yet tangible” and that something that was “a force of nature”, was at work. The outcome of this engagement was that it reshaped their understanding of their spirituality as they knew it. Some were challenged, some found confirmation, some found new depths and a richness that had hitherto eluded them. This finding accords with Tedeschi and Calhoun:

Bereavement can make salient the spiritual dimensions of the worldview, because these are times that can bring to the fore one’s beliefs about the afterlife, and whether there is, or is not, a transcendent hand in determining people’s fate. Bereavement can also raise questions about one’s own mortality, the degree to which one is living well or one is maintaining the right priorities, using a
precious lifetime well, or living in such a way as to be preparing well for an encounter with God. (2006, p. 107)

Co-researchers reported the ability to be more compassionate, loving and understanding toward others and a reduction or removal of their own death anxiety. It was almost as though the experience of their communiqué was such that it revealed aspects of life previously unknown, that it had peeled away existing attitudes while simultaneously introducing new trains of thought which not only informed the understanding but which reshaped it. This vivified understanding appeared to be the impetus for perhaps a more transpersonal orientation of the individual that manifested as a contemplative search for meaning, an examining or re-evaluation of one’s purpose or one’s place in life, an examining or re-evaluation of how one defines or understands oneself, an examining or re-evaluation of oneself in relation to and with others, an examining or re-evaluation of one’s perception or understanding of what life is, and a reconnection with or an affirmation of a sense of the sacred or the spiritually infinite.

Findings accord with Tedeschi and Calhoun’s observations that the degree to which individuals experience spiritual growth resulting from their bereavement can be influenced by the degree of social acceptance or constraint in response to their self-disclosure (2006, p. 110). During pre-interview, interview, and post-interview conversations, co-researchers revealed their difficulties in conversing with others about their communiqué experiences. Some felt protective of their experiences, while others felt they would be ridiculed. Some felt that their experiences would be dismissed as fancy, imagination, or worse, be considered a pathology.
All co-researchers were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss their communiqué, as they were relieved to be able to explore the nature of their experiences during their interview, which for some was a catalyst for profound understanding and meaning-making. One co-researcher who was feeling particularly socially constrained by her experiences expressed the desire to form a group so as to deflect her sense of social isolation and because she wanted to combat the general lack of understanding and connection she experienced from those around her. Findings reflect Swinton’s observation that spirituality has shifted its location:

Religious spirituality is something that a person learns and discovers through interaction with specific others over a sustained period of time, normally within some form of a faith-community ... it is given to individuals and communities from outside themselves rather than something they engender from within themselves ... The wider understanding of spirituality is dependant primarily on individual choices focused on unique individuals ... Spirituality is considered a personal possession, a commodity which people individually seek to develop in order that they can find personal meaning, hope, purpose, happiness, comfort and so forth. (2007, p. 300)

This shift in locale was reflected in co-researchers’ discourse and can be linked back to Tedeschi and Calhoun’s observation of the inter-relationship between communiqué and social acceptance of it. That is because co-researchers did experience varying degrees of social acceptance regarding their communiqué, they were impelled in a way to turn inward and in so doing simply had to think about what had transpired. They could not deny to themselves, even though others may have, that their communiqué had occurred nor could they ignore what it meant to them. They became reflective and in some instances contemplative.
A number of co-researchers, although exposed to a particular religious-tradition in childhood, had moved away from associated external practices of that tradition in order to establish a more meaningful internal relationship with the sacred or the spiritually infinite that they had defined for themselves. Others, while accepting certain tenets of their religious-tradition rejected others. Some defined themselves as Christian and “believing in God”, while others who also defined themselves as Christian did not attend faith-denominational church services, nor belong to a religious-community.

Balk notes that while grief presents a spiritual challenge, not all bereavements trigger spiritual change (1999, p. 487). Findings of the study indicate that there was a sub-relational variant which appeared to suggest that for all co-researchers their bereavement did trigger spiritual change. That sub-relational variant was their understanding of their meaning of themselves, life, and for some God, the spiritually infinite or the universe.

Of the twenty-one co-researchers who participated in the study, and prior to their communiqué occurring, eleven had previously experienced non-material phenomena and ten had not. Those who had experienced non-material phenomena comfortably accommodated their communiqué within their existing assumptive world because such events were already structured psychospiritual constituents of their world-view and spiritual belief-system. Communiqué supported their understanding of themselves as human beings as it did the meaning of their existence both pre and post-mortem.

Additionally, and irrespective that communiqué constituted for them what was a spiritual and by default a social norm, the impact was such that it enriched their understanding of their spirituality, as understood and articulated by them, as it did their
relationship with the sacred or the spiritually infinite. It did this because it deepened it, making it more personal in the process; their spirituality grew, and they expanded as human beings. This expansion finds metaphorical representation in poet William Wordworth’s (1770-1850) lament following the death of his brother, John Wordsworth. These words, forever immortalised in his *Elegiac Stanzas*, capture the profound depth within one’s being that grief can reach, as they do its potential and ability to change and spiritualise that being. “A deep distress has humanized my soul” (cited in Gill, 1984, p. 327).

For the ten co-researchers who prior to their communiqué occurring had never experienced non-material phenomena, the impact on their assumptive world was profound. Communiqué phenomena as a nested narrative and grief sub-culture propelled these individuals into other than familiar realms of non-material experience, thought and consideration which until that moment in time had never occupied their attention, curiosity or interest. Balk notes, “a singular disclosure of spiritual change is an unfolding consciousness concerning the meaning of human existence” (1999, p. 487). This was discernible in particular with these ten co-researchers whose discourse reflected dramatic shifts in attitude toward how they defined and understood themselves as human beings, how they related to the other, and how they related to the sacred or the spiritually infinite.

**A Systems-view: The intersubjective relationship of communiqué with inner life**

Findings highlight the intersubjective relationship between knowledge, being and understanding and illuminate Swinton’s observations regarding the complexity of human existence and the inner life of the individual:
The complexity and uniqueness of human existence cannot be captured by statistical norms and universal generalities. Human beings exist in a meaningful, relational world that is filled with a richness which transcends the limits of human language and stretches beyond the boundaries of narrow scientific explanation. (2007, p. 51)

Findings also reflect Attig’s observations. “Our involvement in living has a momentum all its own beneath the surface of reflection, self-consciousness, explicitly held belief, and deliberation” (2002, p. 64). Attig alludes to what the study has identified as the inner life of the individual.

The inner life is that world within a world that constitutes the being of an individual. It is an internal spiritual core which identifies them as a spiritual being living within a material body, and which gives rise to the notion that human beings carry within them a vast reservoir of untapped capabilities, potentials and possibilities. It can be posited that this inner life is by its very nature spiritual because it enables the individual to meaningfully relate themselves to what Attig terms “the greater scheme of things” (2002, p. 67), and to what the study refers to as the sacred or the spiritually infinite.

The study defines this spiritual relationship between the inner life of the individual and the sacred or the spiritually infinite as one involving conjunction with a non-temporal and ever-present reality that exists outside the space-time world. The space-time world, or material reality, is delineated by flowing linear time and is revealed for example by growth and decay, rise and fall of epochs, birth and death. Although the experience of flowing time is such that it seems to pass from the present to the future, fluxes can and do occur. These fluxes manifest as spiritual experiences, generally because they are non-material, and are not unlike Maslow’s description of the peak experience (1964). These fluxes, suggested by for example the occurrence of
communiqué, introduce something into the being of the experient by way of creating an opening in conscious awareness.

At that moment in time, metaphorically speaking, the individual turns toward that which for them is real and true and in the process gains understanding. This movement orientates them to something beyond themselves; the presence of that which is spiritual. Thus the individual advances toward what Maslow defines as the fullest humanness, and what is revealed is that “there are different ways of gaining knowledge in addition to intellect and reason” (Hume, 2007, p. 6).

Attig highlights an important distinction between external theoretical knowledge and internal practical wisdom which frames a sense of appreciation for this non-cognitive and non-material dimension of the individual:

Most practical assumptions are not propositional in character at all. That is, they are not matters of knowing or believing that the world is or should be one way as opposed to another … These matters of practical repertoire are most often very difficult, even impossible, to put into words … This knowing how eludes introspection … we do not carry it within us as conscious constructs, internal models or schemata checked against reality, or beliefs explicit or implicit … it comprises ways of doing and being that we hold in our bodies and characters. It is because these orienting practical assumptions are noncognitive in character to begin with that they elude our introspective grasp: We are looking in the wrong place if we are looking for beliefs. (2002, p. 65)

Findings from the study have provided the context for the following conceptualisation of this growth-relationship between knowledge, being, understanding and the inner life of the individual as follows:

Knowledge + Being = Understanding, Understanding + Knowledge = Being
Knowledge can be defined as a potential which is contained in the occurrence of phenomena or a phenomenon and as an outcome which results from the experiencing of phenomena or a phenomenon. The interaction of the individual with this potential is that it facilitates understanding. Understanding is beyond intellectual knowing; it is the perceived and felt reality of a truth-in-action, and a knowing within oneself that one has seen a hitherto unknown aspect of reality. This understanding nourishes the being of the individual and feeds the mind enabling it to grow. This being-growth is intersubjective with on-going understanding, which is intersubjective with knowledge-growth within the individual, which is dependent on both availability of and access to knowledge as a potential within phenomena and as an outcome.

Thus it can be suggested that understanding is a psychospiritual function that operates within the psyche of the individual, which accords with Attig’s non-cognitive sensibilities.

Understanding appears in action like a kaleidoscope. It exists in a highly interactional internal state of flux within the mind and being of the individual. It is constantly changing its dimensions because of its fluid nature and organic intersubjectivity with the very phenomena that informs it. It is something that is not only non-static and non-linear; it stands outside of flowing time. It can be hypothesised that an individual is their understanding because it is their understanding that informs and gives rise to their world-view or their spiritual belief-system, and that it is their understanding which becomes the lens through which they metaphorically perceive and find meaning in the world.

On this premise it can be posited that as an individual’s understanding grows so too does the individual. New trains of thought are established in the mind and new ways of knowing the
world are experienced. As a result the individual thinks differently, and based on the premise that thought prefaces action, the individual behaves or acts differently. The individual is not as they were before. The individual has changed because their understanding has changed. They have undergone an exponential growth of being which even if it cannot be defined, can be felt. The individual, “feels different” the individual feels as though they “have evolved into a different type of human being” the individual, “knows” they are different even if they cannot quantify exactly how.

Seeing the Same Different

The construction and evolution of theories of bereavement and models of grief and grieving can be charted from Freud, who emphasised emotional and psychological detachment from the deceased, to more recent theoretical sanctioning of ongoing relationships between the bereaved and the deceased conceptualised as Continuing Bonds, and the relationship between bereavement as adversity with positive emotional and psychological growth-outcomes.

Continuing Bonds generally refers to an ongoing relationship between the bereaved individual and the deceased (Field, Gal-Oz & Bonanno, 2003; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Rubin, 1985; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). This relationship is contextualised internally by the bereaved individual and is considered by grief researchers and theorists to be an adaptive outcome of grief that facilitates adjustment to the death. In their attempts to understand grief and its impact on the bereaved, grief researchers and theorists now propose that one of the tasks of grieving is for the individual to construct a durable biography between themselves and the deceased (Attig, 1996; Neimeyer,
Findings from the study suggest that the occurrence of communiqué in bereavement appears to comply or align with the Continuing Bonds theory of grief, which sanctions ongoing emotional and psychological relationships between the bereaved and the deceased (Klass & Walter, 2001; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Neimeyer et al., 2006; Schut et al., 2006). However, findings from the study also indicate that communiqué has applicability to the psychospiritual growth of the individual. This appears to result from communiqué’s transformative impact on the being and inner life of the experient, its relationship with the meaning of human existence (Balk, 1999) and with the development of what Maslow terms “one’s fullest humanness” (1993, pp. 28-40).

The understanding of psychospiritual growth as utilised in the study extends Maslow’s concept of fullest humanness, which he defines as the human being in their psychological, psychosocial, philosophical and spiritual entirety. This fullest humanness is characterised by Maslow as constituting a number of intrinsic elements alluding to the notion that human beings are spiritual beings living within a material body:

... the ability to abstract, to have a grammatical language, to be able to love, to have values of a particular kind, to transcend the self ... (1993, p. 29)

The spiritual life is then part of the human essence. It is a defining characteristic of human nature, without which human nature is not full human nature. It is part of the Real Self, of one’s identity, of one’s inner core, of one’s specieshood, of full humanness. (1993, p. 325)

These elements coalesce in the experience of communiqué which indicates that something profound is not only occurring but
being communicated as well. Communique is an experiential allegory of potential psychospiritual growth and development which can be utilised by the experient to re-evaluate the meaning of their existence as a human being, the meaning of life, and the meaning of their relationship with the sacred or the spiritually infinite. It invites the individual to consider life and one's participation in life from a transpersonal perspective.

For those previously unaware of or unexposed to non-material phenomena, communique offers the invitation to know the dimensionless non-material reality which stands beyond yet which can interpenetrate that which is material. For those acquainted with non-material phenomena, communique deepens the understanding and nourishes the being. Communique is a flux which occurs in the midst of flowing time. Its occurrence opens the individual to something that is both non-material and which is something that exists outside of flowing time.

In view of the psychospiritual implications of communique, caution is advised against classifying the phenomenon in what could be construed as a narrow and reductionist appreciation of its symbiotic growth-relationship with bereavement: adaptive outcomes of maintaining a continuing bond with the deceased. To do so carries with it the possibility and risk of making invisible or denying the psychospiritual potential of the phenomenon in relegating it as something that only has a psychological or perhaps emotional benefit for the experient. Here, the maxim of “seeing the same different” comes into play (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26).

Communique can be a deeply profound event. The implications of its occurrence extend beyond mere fascination at its occurrence in the visible social world. Its occurrence in the life of the experient and the impact of the event on the human system reveal that communique has the ability to initiate an organic
change-reaction within the inner life of the experient, which then, and in accordance with general Systems Theory which contextualises how complex systems behave in terms of relationships and integration (Capra, 1984, p. 139), produces a variation in how that system, that is the individual, subsequently interacts with other human systems which comprise its visible social and cultural world.

The impact of communiqué has applicability not just to the self-knowledge, self-understanding and self-transformation of the experient, but also to the other. Communiqué extends an invitation to those directly engaging with it as it does to those who indirectly engage with it, as for example through the reading of narrative constructions or by participation in relevant discourse.

The possibilities of accepting the invitation to “see the same different” (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26) are thought-provoking, and could lead to the generating of what Maslow terms, “the serious people” (1964, p. 56). These are those whom he defines as “the earnest ones, the seeking, questioning, probing ones, the ones who are not sure, the ones with a ‘tragic sense of life’, the explorers of the depths and of the heights” (p. 56). Hence, the humanising of the individual and their spiritual growth is philosophically contextualised, as is the educational aspect of communiqué as reported by the findings, which again find communion with Maslow:

An education which leaves untouched the entire region of transcendental thought is an education which has nothing important to say about the meaning of human life. (1963, p. 3)

**Much Ado about Nothing**

There appears to be a tendency to either sensationalise or simplify communiqué phenomena, which may be reflective of a
narrow or limited appreciation or understanding of its multi-layered complexity. The advent of both popular fictional and non-fictional contemporary media, including national and international mainstream and cable television, dedicated internet web sites and a plethora of books on the topic, “makes private experience authoritative in a way that it is not in the public sphere” (Klass & Goss, 1999, p. 563).

Yes, but there is a corollary to this. Although these media raise awareness of the phenomenon and educate the other, it could also be argued that to some extent they over-dramatise the event such that the individual’s attention remains identified at the level of their emotional and psychological reactions to it. Findings indicate that communiqué appears to serve a number of purposes including comforting, educating and consoling the experient. But there is more embedded in the experience; there are additional and potent layers of meaning waiting to be synthesised. In this respect, communiqué appears to bear some kinship or resemblance to Sufi (amongst those of other faith traditions such as for example Christian, Muslim, Jewish or Hindu) teaching stories or parables, which convey moral, ethical or spiritual values and truths not immediately discernible (King, 2005; Shah, 1967, 1983). One must look in order to see.

Irrespective that communiqué has been contextually termed by some researchers as “extraordinary” or “exceptional” (LaGrand, 2006; Palmer & Braud, 2002; Parker, 2005; White, 1997), co-researchers consistently reported that in addition to providing comfort and reassurance and easing anxiety, their communiqué constituted what they considered to be a part of the normalcy of daily life. For some co-researchers, while the fact their communiqué had occurred was astonishing, there was also something ordinary about the occurrence as well. This appeared to be supported by the general locale in which their communiqué
occurred to both themselves and close family members, which in the main was in the midst of their every day family routines, tasks and activities, and more often than not, within the family home. This finding highlights the “private sphere” of the phenomena identified by Klass and Goss (1999, p. 564).

However, caution is again advised in order for communiqué phenomena not to be simplified either, which carries the same risk as sensationalising the phenomena; not recognising its multi-layered complexity pregnant with potential. Rhea White, one of the first researchers who focussed on qualitatively exploring the phenomenon, notes that communiqué phenomena has the potential to be devalued if it is treated as “curious, transient experiences or flukes of functioning to be explained away” (1997, p. 89). White was of the opinion that if the phenomenon was honoured by the individual, it could bring about transformative changes within the experient.

Communiqué occurring within the context of bereavement suggests that something other than material reality is both at work and being revealed because there is an intersection occurring between two realities; material reality and non-material reality. In essence, it is not so much that communiqué exists, it is that it occurs. Acknowledging and accepting its existence is one matter, but truly understanding the conditions which bring about its occurrence is another.

Engagement and ritual with the sacred or spiritually infinite and relationships between the living and the deceased, between the embodied and the disembodied and material and non-material reality is an established practice recognised in both Western and non-Western, industrial and non-industrial cultures and societies. This relationship is well documented in historical and contemporary anthropological, sociological, philosophical, religious and spiritual literature (Durkheim, 1995 orig. pub.)
Communiqué occurring within a context of bereavement is a constituent of this history. It constitutes a transpersonal paradigm of bereavement and is as much a component of the subjective experience of death as it is a social construction of the psychospiritual growth of the human being experiencing it.

**Implications of the Findings: Spirituality and systems**

Findings accord with Brown’s observation that communiqué has the potential to “bring about a new way of being in the world” (2000, p. 103). This new way of being in the world brings with it the hope that the transformed individual will find acceptance in a world whose citizens will value and acknowledge the uniqueness of such an event in the life of the experiencer.

Although this sounds altruistic, the reality is such that the global population of humanity is socially, culturally, spiritually, politically, linguistically and religiously complex and diverse. Within a context of bereavement, how then is this new way of being in the world accommodated, which is both the question and the challenge for the bereaved individual and for those whom they may come into contact with.

To ignore issues of spirituality and side step questions of meaning, purpose, happiness and what it means to be human, is to risk developing understandings and forms of practice that ignore the essence of what it means to be human and to live humanely. (Swinton, 2006, p. 53)

Swinton captures the subjective experience of communiqué and its potential to “humanise” the individual. Although writing from a spiritual perspective within a mental health as opposed to
a bereavement context, there is a parallel between the study findings and Swinton’s sentiments regarding the importance of spirituality to the individual’s health and wellbeing. Findings suggest that the recognition, understanding and living of a spiritual way of life, however defined by the individual, is intersubjective with what it means for that person to exist as a human being and to live in the world.

This notion of what it means to be human and the importance of that to the inner life of the individual appear to be gaining increasing ground in the contemporary West. For example, a number of researchers and writers have proposed that Western culture is undergoing a paradigm shift (Beck & Lau, 2005; Capra, 1983; Davie, 1984; Davie & Cobb, 1998; Grof, 1998; Rich, 1979; Swinton, 2006; Tart, 2009, Walter, 2001). This shift away from a world-view constituting a focus on the scientific method, empiricism, reductionism, materialism, linear trajectories and a mechanistic and lifeless view of the universe has made way for, “a recognition of the fundamental wholeness and interconnectedness of human beings, and indeed of the whole of creation” (Swinton, 2006, p. 62). Capra notes:

In contrast to the mechanistic Cartesian view of the world, the world view emerging from modern physics can be characterized by words like organic, holistic, and ecological. It might also be called a systems view, in the sense of general systems theory. The universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as a pattern of a cosmic process. (1983, p. 66)

Capra’s conception of the universe as a web of non-linear interconnecting organic relationships and a systems-view of human beings and all living organisms finds resonance with Goss and Klass’s sentiment, “simple observation allows us to see the
reality of healthy lives that include experiences that cannot be reduced to physical scientific reality” (2005, p. 290). Walter notes that in addition to the psychology of the individual himself or herself, bereavement has relevance to group history (2001). If it is assumed that Walter is including past history, present history and future history, what then are the social and cultural implications of communiqué?

Findings suggest that communiqué is an experiential allegory of potential psychospiritual growth that can be utilised by the experient to re-evaluate the meaning of their existence as a human being, the meaning of life, and the meaning of their relationship with the sacred or the spiritually infinite. If communiqué occurs in bereavement, and if bereavement has relevance to group history, it is well within reason to hypothesise that communiqué can influence group history by, for example, its introduction to the individual as an idea, the idea being, communiqué can bring about change of being of the experient.

Groups are comprised of complex organic human systems. In accordance with general Systems Theory and Chaos Theory, what impacts one system individually will affect other systems in the group, say for example a family group because the initial impact evokes a response which can change how the individual system behaves toward and with other individual systems within that group. The group as a systems-collective symbiotically interacts with other individual or group collectives comprised of individual human systems, and so it continues rippling outward through social relationships.

Chaos Theory is a scientific paradigm for explaining how complex systems behave. The nature of systems is such that they engage in intersubjective relationships with one another. Human beings singularly and collectively comprise systems. According to Chaos Theory, human beings are not homogenous because they
are complex, non-linear, non-predictable, multi-dimensional individual systems which respond to and interact with other systems co-existing within their environments (Lorenz, 2001).

This intricate and complex symbiotic behavioural network includes for example group/family systems, societal systems, cultural and political systems, religious or spiritual systems, biological, geographical and cosmological systems, and what is in essence the ecological system of human development (Addison, 1992). Chaos Theory and general Systems Theory provides an alternate framework with which to explore and understand communiqué, the behaviour of the visible world and the organisms and processes that both exist and inhabit it (Barker, 1996; Copnell, 1998; Coppa, 1993; Pediani, 1996; Phillips, 1991).

The “butterfly effect” is a metaphor coined by mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz (1972) which embodies the concept of “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” (Tritton, 1994, p. 28). What this translates to is that because all systems engage in intersubjective relationships with one another, a small difference in the state or existing condition of a system can produce large variations in the behaviour of the system itself, which because it interacts with other systems impacts them as well. These variations result in demonstrable behaviour by the systems which are non-linear, unpredictable and dynamically responsive to the phenomena that initially made contact with it.

When an infinitely small variation in the present state may bring about a finite difference in the state of the system in a finite time, the condition of the system is said to be unstable ... [and] renders impossible the prediction of future events ... (Scottish theoretical physicist and mathematician, James Clerk Maxwell, 1995, p. 819)
Chaos Theory and general Systems Theory parallel Aristotle’s notion that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (1957) and Schrodinger’s notion of connectedness (1964). Thus communiqué as a discreet phenomenon impacts the human system in its entirety, which encompasses mind, body and spirit, and engages it in a dynamic symbiotic intersubjective relationship. The context of the human being as a dynamic system challenges the notion of hegemony. Additionally, if all human systems co-exist with other human systems in a social and cultural context, what is the social and cultural spread of communiqué from the individual system to other systems who also exist in the same social and cultural environment?

Human beings however, are more than mere systems. They are bundles of possibilities who contain within them rich depths harbouring seeds of potentiality. What it means to be human and what it means to live as a human being has its roots in these depths. How can these buried potentials be awakened? How can this soil of the spirit be nurtured in order for the individual to grow to their full human potential?

The idea of communiqué as a potential for psychospiritual growth which can bring about change of being of the experient is like a stone thrown into a pond. The impact from the contact between the stone and the water creates a rippling effect on the surface, which as it disperses touches all sides of the pond itself. And here is Lorenz’s butterfly effect in motion. The stone is the idea, and the rippling effect corresponds to the ingression of that idea into receptive minds of at first individual and then collective human systems.

As linear time progresses, these ideas are disseminated into the visible social and cultural world and manifest as new trends, developments and advances in, for example, philosophy, religion, science, education and popular culture. As the ideas are
communicated, they continually ripple outward through the collective body of humanity in an ongoing attempt to seek further ingress into receptive minds. And so group history can be generated, developed or nurtured from the inception of a single idea finding its way into a receptive mind, which when disseminated to other receptive minds draws them together into a mass which when it gains momentum creates Walter’s group history, and which eventually manifests as a timeline of events delineated by the movement of linear time.

Communiqué occurring in bereavement is neither unknown nor unreported in bereavement literature (Daggett, 2002; Devers, 1994; Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Kalish & Reynolds, 1973; Parker, 2004; Parkes & Weiss, 1983), nor unknown or unreported within a cross-cultural context. For example, research exploring the phenomenon has been conducted in Australia (Barbato, 2002; Breen, 2009; Irwin, 2002, Zammit, 2006), Canada (Nowatzki & Kalischuk, 2009), Iceland (Haraldsson, 1988), Japan (Yakamoto et al., 1969), Norway (Lindstrom, 1995), Sweden (Grimby, 1993), the United Kingdom (Murray & Wooffit, 2010), the United States, Arizona (Balk, 1983), the United States, Los Angeles (Kalish & Reynolds, 1973), the United States/India (Osis & Haraldsson, 1986) and Wales (Rees, 1971).

This cross-cultural spread and prevalence of the phenomenon is diagnostic, and supports the notion of a transpersonal systems-paradigm with which to contextualise communiqué occurring within bereavement. The prevalence of the phenomenon results in a sense of solidarity between the individuals who experience it. In a sociological sense, they become a bereavement sub-culture, delineated by the union of their shared discourse, narrative constructions of bereavement and spirituality, and interaction with the other. This cross-
cultural spread suggests that the phenomenon is not culture-specific, rather it is human-specific.

Kellehear, in his review of cross-cultural near-death experiences, a contextual term which includes amongst other reported phenomena encounters with deceased relatives or friends (1996, p. 3), observes that in each of the cultures reviewed (China, India, Guam, Western New Britain, Native America, Aboriginal Australia, Maori New Zealand), deceased or supernatural beings are encountered. Additionally, these deceased or supernatural beings are encountered in another realm which is socially not dissimilar to that of the experiinent. Kellehear concludes, “clearly, the consistency of these reports from highly diverse cultures suggests that at least these two features of the NDE are indeed cross-cultural” (1990, p. 33)

But there is something else going on here. If communiqué is contextualised as an idea of spiritual growth which can manifest as change of being, then this cross-cultural spread takes on greater significance because the idea, which is the metaphor for the experience, is being seeded into the mind and life of those who experience it as it is into the visible social world. The subjective experience of one individual becomes interconnected with the subjective experience of another. If one individual grows spiritually, then in accordance with general Systems Theory which defines systems as organic processes of intersubjective engagement with one another, all individuals will potentially grow spiritually because the conditions of existence have changed.

The implications of communiqué occurring in bereavement are thought-provoking because the phenomenon supports the notion that human beings are spiritual beings living within a material body which at death is put off. Its occurrence coincides with the emotional, psychological and spiritual reactions and
responses to death in a manner such that it appears to be a response to them. Its impact can be profound for the experient, the deceased and the other.

Communiqué occurring in an individual’s life can result in change of being for the experient which can lead to alternate ways of being in the world and alternate ways of knowing the world. It can reduce death anxiety as it can inspire hope. It can construct bonds that span space and time because they exist outside of them. As such, communiqué can be conceptualised as a transpersonal paradigm and a valid construct with which to understand its occurrence within bereavement. It holistically supports a systems-view of the individual and the visible social and cultural world in which the experient exists, as it does the subjective experience of the intersection of material and non-material reality.

Implications of the Findings: The challenge of the other

The other is defined in this study as those with whom the bereaved come into contact after they have become bereaved. Bereavement is a cross-sectorial phenomenon. As such, the bereaved individual may encounter any number of interdisciplinary practitioners from the human services workforce including those from medical, health and allied health services, social/welfare/community services, voluntary services, the armed/enforcement forces, legal services, religious services and spiritual services. Practitioners could comprise hospice staff, nurses, doctors, social workers, community and/or welfare workers, coroner and morgue staff, researchers and academics, sociologists, anthropologists, historians, clergy, chaplains and pastoral/spiritual care practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, funeral directors and funeral home staff and solicitors/attorneys.
Ongoing emotional, psychological and social relationships between the bereaved and the deceased are not pathogenic. How can the other support the bereaved and understand and acknowledge their communiqué experiences and the interconnectedness of that communiqué with psychospiritual growth-outcomes? Boisen’s notion of the “living human document” (Boisen, 1936, p. 10) comes into play here, as does VanKatwyck’s “seeing the same different” (VanKatwyk, 2006, p. 26).

The challenge of the presence of the human services practitioner in the space created by the intersection of the practitioner with the bereaved individual is, how can their interaction be “humanised” so each/all are honoured and how can they assist in normalising such experiences? How can “the same be seen different” and how can the practitioner facilitate that interaction and themselves be supported in doing so?

Additionally, how can the practice of research and the dissemination of research findings assist that process? In other words, how can research be of use to the bereaved and to practitioners in the interdisciplinary human services workforce, and what is the best way to achieve that? Human services practitioners, especially those working in the field of bereavement and spirituality can benefit in a number of ways from research because it has the potential to add new and positive dimensions to their work. It can certainly inform and improve their professional practice. Finally, human service practitioners need to continue to be alert to both social and cultural diversity within their client population and be careful not to assume that all the bereaved experience communiqué and that not all experiences take the same form or have the same meaning for the experient.

In his research regarding the spiritual lives of bereaved parents, Dennis Klass, professor of psychology of religion at
Webster University, Missouri, offers some insight into how all people can be what he terms “spiritual helpers” when encountering the bereaved (1999, pp. 172-202). Although Klass is speaking to the context of bereaved parents who have had a child die, his suggestions are applicable to bereavement in general. Klass argues that spirituality does not exist outside of the everyday reality in which people live, and though there is cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary diversity represented amongst the human services workforce, there is a “shared common ground” as well (1999, p. 173). Therefore, because “spirituality is woven into the fabric of our world” all practitioners can be spiritual helpers irrespective of their profession (1999, p. 172).

Spiritual helping is within what each professional already does, no matter our profession. I have no special techniques or tasks to be accomplished that I label, “spiritual” as opposed to the techniques that I use in the mundane, everyday world. Every relationship I enter has the possibility of becoming an I-Thou that will reveal, to me and to the other, the Eternal Thou. The world of suffering and the world of liberation are the same. (Klass, 1999, p. 202)

The study’s finding of the growth-relationship between knowledge, being, understanding and the inner life of the individual also reflect philosopher and thanatologist Thomas Attig’s observation that cognitive therapies are limited and perhaps unable to reach, “the far broader range of practical assumptions that operate within us beneath the surface of our self-conscious awareness” (2002, p. 65). Attig’s notion of practical assumptions hints at the suggestion that psychology, though beneficial in enabling the individual to fit comfortably into society and to function within societal norms and in a day-to-day capacity is only addressing one layer of the complexity of the human system.
Findings of the study suggest that the individual has additional layers. The individual is also spiritual, possessing an inner life constituting dimensions and depths which can enable them to understand where they fit in Attig’s, “greater scheme of themes”. The finding of the growth-relationship between knowledge, being, understanding and the inner life of the individual supports Attig’s call for practical teaching which can acknowledge these internal dimensions of the individual and facilitate understanding of them:

We also need practical teaching that will support us in the ongoing struggle to find our bearings and to assume viable postures within a greater scheme of things pervaded with the mysteries of impermanence, change, uncertainty, fallibility, life, love, suffering, and death. We need wise counsel that enables us to learn to live with these mysteries rather than attempt to fully understand or master them. We need teaching that supports our changing in response to them rather than trying futilely to change them. We need wise counsel that helps us to learn how to live with the realization that our grasp on reality through beliefs and faiths is tenuous and that our postures before mysteries are temporary at best. (2002, p. 67)

For example, in order to increase the current capacity of the bereavement counselling profession to better support the bereaved who report communiqué, thanatologists, bereavement counsellors and researchers Jane Bissler and Lisa Heiser have devised what they term a new approach to grief therapy. In so doing however, they both caution and call to task their colleagues:

We urge you not to unnecessarily label or otherwise, “pathologize” your clients, and not to suggest medication for your clients because of their spiritual experiences. We recommend that you consider how you might utilize the value of these loving connections to promote healing and help your clients move forward in their lives. And we are suggesting that you consider the use of respected mediums and intuitives as an adjunct to your counselling when your clients might
Bissler and Heiser draw directly from their client’s experiences and life journeys in contextualising their new approach, noting, “many health service professionals are not presently trained to recognize the healing value that such ongoing, loving connections can bring to those struggling with loss and grief” (2008, p. xiii). In identifying the following strategies, which they term “loving connections”, Bissler and Heiser note their beneficent impact which portrays a holistic approach:

- Help the client prepare for the possibility of ongoing connection;
- Use caution in assessment;
- Respect the ongoing connections your clients report;
- Utilize loving connections to promote healing and help your clients move forward;
- Relate loving connections to prior spiritual experiences;
- Facilitate the client’s evolving spiritual beliefs;
- Become familiar with faith traditions different from your own;
- Work on other tasks of mourning;
- Support the whole person, including health, social and occupational functioning;
- Use mediums as an adjunct to therapy, and
- Use bibliotherapy as an adjunct to therapy. (2008, pp. 152-163)

Bissler and Heiser are confident that in time those in the human services workforce will change their orientation of current
therapeutic practices so as to include alternates. Notwithstanding that however, they are realistic in acknowledging the challenge such a reorientation involves. “What we have found to be helpful is often not what counsellors and other mental health providers have been taught to do with their grieving clients” (2008, p. 167).

Paralleling Bissler and Heiser’s suggestions are those of researchers Nadine Nowatzki and Ruth Kalischuk. In their study exploring after-death communication they report that an understanding of such encounters may well be beneficial in assisting human service professionals to develop “a supporting and understanding atmosphere for the bereaved” (2009, p. 106). Quoting from Berger (1995) they note:

Widowed people would be glad ... to be informed by caregivers that their experiences are normal, shared by others who have lost dear ones and that they are not alone. It would allow them to face their experiences and talk about them without being afraid that they are hallucinating or suffering from some mental aberration. (p. 2)

There is an alignment between Bissler and Heiser’s new approach and Nowatzki and Kalischuk encouragement with Attig’s proposition to “try what we have not tried before”, such as for example imagining alternate approaches and strategies, anticipating possible consequences and envisioning successful outcomes (2002, p. 66). Such an approach, which Attig terms “relearning” (2002, pp. 63-67), can assist the bereaved to find a sense of internal equilibrium in the midst of living a life “pervaded with their [deceased] absence, and to love them in new ways” (2002, p. 63). Findings from the study support this more holistic means of being present to the needs of the bereaved and to the deceased.

As a final corollary, and with regard to the relationship between spirituality, bereavement and the interdisciplinary
human services workforce, Klass encourages practitioners to consider faith-traditions and spiritual and philosophical systems outside their own in order to more adequately support bereaved individuals. Although speaking to the context of the spiritual lives of bereaved parents, Klass’s comments can be applied to the impact of bereavement in general, which the study findings reflect:

Bereaved parents may not know about the many great minds and spirits before them who have explored and charted the territory into which they have been dropped ... Philosophers, East and West, have blazed trails that bereaved parents might be following, but we will not be able to help them follow those trail markers if we have not explored them ourselves ... These spiritual trails through the valley of the shadow of death are less travelled. Often they lead through frightening and uncomfortable terrain ... These are, however, the spiritual paths that take those who follow them through, as James said, the deepest and most profound possibilities of the human experience. (1999, p. 201)

Implications of the Findings: Research collaborations

The complexity of bereavement is reflected in its theoretical diversification. “No one disciplinary or theoretical paradigm is currently dominant in bereavement and grief research” (Centre for the Advancement of Health, 2003, p. 9). This raises a number of considerations. How do the bereaved fare being at the lower end of the food chain of this theoretical diversification? What does this mean for them and for how their bereavement, especially their communiqué, is understood by them and by others? And, how can collaborative research between academics and “those in the trenches” (Wolfe & Jordan, 2000, p. 569), practitioners from the interdisciplinary human services workforce, assist in providing insight into these considerations and enhance or improve current understandings and/or practices of and toward communiqué phenomena?
An important consideration regarding the interdisciplinary context in which bereavement is positioned is its potential to “deepen the divide between the domains of research and application” (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 609). This divide both creates and perpetuates the creation of discipline-specific approaches toward scholarship and practice. Neimeyer suggests that in order to breach the gap caused by the divide, integrative training within professions be provided, and integrative frameworks for understanding bereavement, such as grieving as a process of meaning reconstruction, be considered. “Thus, concepts centering on meaning reconstruction offer a partial ‘common language’ for communicating across the research-practice divide” (2000, p. 609).

Jordan notes that “clinical practice and good research are grounded in dynamically evolving theory” (2000, p. 459). The current study suggests that the application of Chaos Theory and general Systems Theory to communiqué occurring in bereavement can provide a holistic framework for contextualising an organic systems-perspective of the individual's experience. Additionally, application of this framework may provide rich social and cultural understandings of the phenomenon, in particular, meaning-making and the construction of bereavement narratives so contributing to Niemeyer’s, “common language” (2000, p. 609) and which itself is subject to change in order to encompass, reflect and acknowledge diversity.

These understandings represent a move away from Descartes’ Cartesian mind-body dualism (Baker & Morris, 2002) which compartmentalises the individual, to one of holism where the individual is understood as a complex, dynamic and organic system engaging intersubjectively with other systems in an intricate symbiotic behavioural network of relationships. This is particularly applicable to the after-death encounters occurring
between the bereaved and the deceased, because their continued existence constitutes their being a system, albeit a non-material system. Any interaction between the two systems results in reaction and response.

In a discussion regarding what research might have applicability for clinicians working in an end-of-life context, Wolfe and Jordan highlight the need to understand meaning-making as a central aspect of the process of mourning (2000, p. 579). The study acknowledges and responds to this because it not only explores the nature of communiqués occurring in bereavement, but what the phenomena means to the individual/s experiencing it and how that meaning contributes to the construction of individual bereavement narratives.

The authors also note their preference for a greater investment in the possibility of testing interventions that not only facilitate mourning but which enhance their potential for psychological growth after loss (2000, p. 580). The study acknowledges and responds to this as well. Co-researchers discourse, and analysis of data, indicate that the following interventions utilised by the researcher listening, being present, understanding, empathy, pre-existent knowledge of communiqué and extensive exposure to non-material phenomena did contribute toward the growth-relationship between co-researchers’ understanding of their communiqué and its impact on their assumptive world and inner life.

There is another element comprising the context of collaborative research. Research can only do so much. And the dissemination of research findings through professional forums, public lectures, seminars, workshops and scholarly literature can only do so much. What is suggested by the researcher conducting the study is that the individual human services practitioner assumes some responsibility and accountability for their own
knowledge-generation. They themselves must want to evaluate their current understanding, knowledge and professional practice against the fresh insights that are being reported from interdisciplinary research. Conversely, they could also combine clinical practice with their own research activities. Braud fleshes out this concept by positioning it within the transpersonal research paradigm:

In the transpersonal paradigm, research and clinical practice are more similar than they are different. Because of the changes in topics studied, methods used, and investigator stance, it no longer makes sense to think of research, clinical practice, and the investigator’s psychospiritual development as three distinct areas separated from one another by firm boundaries. These boundaries dissolve and melt away. A research session remains that, but also becomes an opportunity for clinical application and for transformation of the researcher. It is a clinical application because meaningful and highly relevant issues may be chosen as research topics and because qualitative methods ... can provide research participants with opportunities to work on personal issues and tell their stories, allowing opportunities for assimilating new understandings and new ways of know, doing, and being. (no date)

Qualitative research methodologies in particular contribute rich theoretical understandings of the subjective aspects of death and grief (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001). The study addresses this point by Neimeyer and Hogan because heuristic analysis of data has yielded significant insights into the meaning of communiqué occurring within adult bereavement in contemporary Australia. The study has also yielded significant insight into what appears to be a strong association between communiqué and psychospiritual growth-outcomes.

For want of a better term, the core business of all interdisciplinary human service practitioners who work with the bereaved in some capacity is to provide appropriate support in
conjunction with a best-practice approach. Findings encourage practitioners to be more open to the possibility of accessing alternate practices and knowledge from outside their discipline. These alternate practices and knowledge could complement their existing knowledge and skill-base and expand their capacity not only to further support the bereaved, but to gain deeper insight and understanding into what it means to be bereaved.

If change in practice in clinical settings is enacted at the level of the individual practitioner (Stake, 1986, p. 91), what collaborative strategies can better align bereavement research and support, and how can practitioners in any field or discipline be supported in this endeavour? A start-point may be the notion of the self-reflective practitioner, illustrated by Schon as “reflection-in-action” (1987, p.4). It is beyond the scope of the study to provide an in-depth socio-historical analysis of reflexivity, which includes use of the practice in the social sciences (Marcus, 1994), anthropology, (Rosaldo, 1993) and the human service professions (Fook, 1996; Fook, Ryan & Hawkins, 2000; Taylor & White, 2000), but benefits of the practice have been noted by bereavement researchers (Balk, 2005; Silverman, 2000). Indeed, “critical self-awareness is the best tool we have” (Klass, 1999, p. 202).

**Implications of the Findings: Further research**

The need for ongoing interdisciplinary bereavement research has been well articulated (Bridging Work Group, 2003; Jordan, 2000; Kessler, 1987; Niemeyer, 2000). The Centre for the Advancement of Health Report, *Bereavement and Grief Research* notes, “improving care through the alignment of research and practice is an issue of critical concern in relation to bereavement care” (2003, p. 16). Wolfe and Jordan highlight the potential beneficent working relationship between research and
bereavement in highlighting that information resulting from such a collaboration can contribute toward “effective psychosocial services for the dying and the bereaved” (2000, p. 582).

To be able to think in terms of past, present, and future, to love and to grieve is part of the human existential plight and dignity. Grief may add meaning and perspective to one’s life just as shadows give depth to a landscape. (Lindstrom, 2002, p. 20)

Findings indicate that just as grief adds meaning and perspective to one’s life, so too does the occurrence of communiqué because it can result in psychospiritual growth-outcomes of the experient. This finding reflects that reported by Kessler who explored the subjective meaning of bereavement:

These [existential] themes suggest that bereavement can enlarge awareness of the human condition. Thus they are useful and meaningful dimensions along which further inquiry can be made about human existence. (1987, p. 242)

With reference to her work with what she terms sensitive or vulnerable populations, researcher Pranee Liamputtong notes, “we are privileged to have an opportunity to work with people who are normally made silent by oppressive social structures” (2007, p. 190). Yes it is a privilege and one is sufficiently humbled and so on and so forth but surely interdisciplinary research needs to be of use, surely it needs to contribute toward social and cultural understandings of society as it must identify salient issues and suggest appropriate measures. Surely it needs to provide insight into what phenomena means so all are educated and informed by the findings, as it must contribute toward providing a basis for interdisciplinary evidence-based practice. This interconnecting relationship between the self and the other was hinted at by Physicist Albert Einstein who
highlighted the potentiality of individual action to initiate social and cultural change:

Only the individual can think, and thereby create new values for society – nay, even set up new moral standards to which the life of the community conforms. Without creative, independently thinking and judging personalities the upward development of society is as unthinkable as the development of the individual without the nourishing soil of the community. The health of society thus depends quite as much on the independence of the individuals composing it as on their close political cohesion. (1984, p. 9)

Findings indicate that communiqué occurring in the context of adult bereavement alters the conditions of existence and can result in psychospiritual growth-outcomes of the experient. Findings also indicate that the interrelationship between communiqué and psychospiritual growth can be life-changing. Although the study provides a rich snap-shot of the impact of the experience in a single moment in time, longitudinal research could reveal even deeper insights through exploring the meaning of the long-term impact of communiqué for the experient and of its intersubjective relationship with the other.

A number of co-researchers reported post-interview that they had experienced additional occurrences of communiqué. These had occurred some weeks after their interview had been conducted, and appeared to demonstrate similar characteristics such as being spontaneous in nature, engendering comfort and hope, and reinforcing or confirming particular spiritual beliefs and world-views. Further research could explore these phenomena. Did they occur because of the study participation? Would they have occurred regardless? How did the subsequent occurrence/s affect the thoughts and feelings initiated by their initial experiences of communiqué? And, what do co-researchers feel this means for them? Has it added to, or detracted from,
their existing bereavement narratives or has it had no or little impact?

Research exploring the impact of bereaved individuals reporting communiqué on human services practitioners would also provide further insight into both the prevalence of the experience and the disclosure of it, how comfortable practitioners felt in supporting the disclosure, and the nature of their professional and personal responses to the disclosure. What did their client’s disclosure mean for them professionally and personally?

Findings highlight the importance of education and service delivery issues for human services practitioners, the bereaved and the community in general. Future research conducted in collaboration with human service practitioners could identify possible gaps in service provision and highlight education, support and training requirements for practitioners themselves.

Analysis of data indicates that the application of what Braud and Anderson (1998) term transpersonal research methodologies have the potential not only to yield rich insights into a topic of investigation, they can reveal a systems-interconnectedness. The study explores the nature and meaning of communiqué occurring in the context of adult bereavement. The utilisation of heuristic research design and methodology, which is considered one of the new qualitative transpersonal research methods termed by Braud and Anderson “Integral Inquiry” (1998, pp. 35-68), has resulted in findings which may well contribute to the momentum of a Western cultural paradigm shift away from a mechanistic and lifeless view of the universe to one which ecologically acknowledges dynamic interconnectedness and relationships between material and non-material reality (Beck & Lau, 2005; Capra, 1983; Davie, 1984; Davie & Cobb,
Based on the study findings, it can be argued that if future research exploring bereavement and spirituality is to contribute to this growing momentum of a cultural paradigm shift regarding the totality of the human being and their relationships to one another and to the sacred or spiritually infinite, then researchers themselves, and also human services practitioners, must move beyond “the assumptions in which we are drenched” (Rich, 1979, p. 35). In having the courage to challenge ourselves, in challenging how we know and experience the world, especially as researchers undertaking their research, new insights and understandings into those things that are non-cognitive, those things that belong in the realm of the transpersonal dimensions of the human spirit can be revealed and better known, understood and shared with others.

Reflective Thoughts from the Trenches

Over a five year period from 2001 to 2006 I experienced the deaths of my best friend by suicide and my father, husband and mother by cancer. As a result of the social response to my bereavement and communiqué I became a social activist. Drawing on the subjective experiences of my bereavement I developed a support program for bereaved adults. I underwent extensive professional development and training in bereavement and grief, embarked upon a Doctor of Philosophy degree, and a Master of Arts in Chaplaincy degree, spoke at national and international conferences, conducted workshops and wrote articles. I read a voluminous amount of thanotology literature, familiarised myself with theoretical constructs of bereavement, and engaged in what can only be described as oftimes most lively discourse with others regarding why I had devoted myself to
death. I have accessed bereavement support services as a client, and have been a service provider delivering bereavement support to clients. I have the understanding of what it means to be othered because of the social response to my bereavement, as I do the memories of my own dark night of the soul.

During this period I encountered all manner of experts. I do not like experts. I do not like experts because there is the risk they may be constrained by the confines of their own discipline. They profess a wisdom that I have come to be wary of. Before my best friend committed suicide, she made a number of unsuccessful attempts. She was sectioned, and when I visited her in the psychiatric wing of the local hospital, she told me that she had been given anti-psychotic medication. She told me that the medication had not stopped the voices she heard nor the visions she saw. Her family came to me for help, being her closest friend they felt I may have some insight into what might be a way through the situation for her. Then her psychiatrist requested a meeting with me.

He stared at me when I met him, as I did him, and it seemed to me that he really did want to help her, that he was genuinely concerned for her wellbeing but was puzzled as to why his treatment of her was unsuccessful. He asked me to tell him about her, about how she experienced life. Where does one start with such a question? I have never professed to know another's life, but I did know that she was deeply spiritual and that what she was experiencing was spiritual in origin and cause, that it was not bio-medical.

And so I talked about how her spirituality, as she understood it to be and as I knew it to be, provided the framework for how she saw the world and for how she lived in the world. He listened thoughtfully to everything I said. And then I asked him if he knew why the anti-psychotic medication was not
working. He shook his head. I told him that she was experiencing a profound spiritual crisis. I told him that what she required was a Shaman because her “problem” was not medical, which is why the medication was not working, it was spiritual. I remember begging him not to let her out of the hospital. I remember pleading with him to save her life. I remember the look on his face as I did so. Everything rested with him; I knew whatever his decision would be, that it was inextricably entwined with her destiny.

Two weeks after being released from hospital she killed herself. I cannot put words to what I felt at that time. There was a lot tut-tutting, as there were statements such as, “she had always had a troubled life”, “she was ‘different’”, “she was never like her brothers and sisters” and my personal favourite, “how could she be so selfish?” She had suffered intolerable anguish during this period of her life, and it seemed that even in her death she must still endure cruelty and misunderstanding from those around her.

The only difference between her life and mine, between her own dark night of the soul and mine was that she spoke openly about her experiences whereas I never did. The intuition I first became aware of as a child which had instructed me to keep silent regarding how I lived in the world and how I experienced life had kept me safe from situations like this and from people whose ignorance had the potential, and depending on their position in society, the power to harm. I understood her world because it was not that dissimilar to my own. In her desperation she had reached out to others for help, but as most of these individuals possessed scant knowledge of spiritual verities they could not provide what she needed. They had no frame of reference. In comparison to them she spoke a different language, one they could neither understand nor comprehend.
Our friendship and my involvement with her life was another event that demonstrated the importance of spirituality or spiritual concerns that become paramount during profound crises of meaning. I remember vividly the depth of the grief she experienced prior to her death. She felt abandoned by God, she believed herself unworthy, and unlovable. She felt her life had neither meaning nor purpose. She was despondent because she felt she would always be alone. Her spirit was burdened by these thoughts and feelings and because she thought from them she acted from them.

What could have helped her move away from this sense of isolation and fragmentation toward a sense of unity and wholeness? What could have helped her find once again that sense of connectedness with her understanding and knowing of her spirituality? What could have assisted her to understand more fully the spiritual processes that were the cause of her voices and visions? Well, it seemed to me that it was not anti-psychotic medication.

Wilson Van Dusen (1983), chief clinical psychologist at Mendicino State Hospital in Eureaka California for seventeen years, made extensive use of existential phenomenology and eastern religions in his work with mental health patients. Influenced by the religious psychology of Father Raymond Shevenell, Van Dusen explored the voices and hallucinations reported to him by patients, drawing a striking parallel between these accounts and the findings of Emmanuel Swedenborg’s hierarchy of spirits existing in the spiritual universe:

What are the real implications of this? I’m inclined to speculate that Swedenborg’s unconscious interaction of man with hierarchical kingdoms of heaven and hell, and the modern theories of the unconscious, are dealing with the same matter. One then wonders whether his spirits are merely pieces of the unconscious or is the
unconscious simply a reflection of this interaction with spirits? That is, which is the more substantive reality – the unconscious or the world of spirits? (1983, pp. 29-30)

Would that the psychiatrist who had the care of my friend had been familiar with an alternate spiritual paradigm such as for example Zen techniques or Shamanism. Would that he had been familiar with Van Dusen’s existential phenomenology as a means of understanding the spiritual context for patient’s voices and visions. Would that he had been familiar with sociologist and theologian Professor Reverend Hans Mol’s social and theoretical paradigm *Sacralization of Identity* (1976). Would that he had been not quite so much the expert. Would that he had not failed, would that I had not failed, and would that the system had not failed all three of us.

Klass alludes to the evident tensions in this layered situation in speaking to the context of the spiritual lives of bereaved parents in that professionals must examine the assumptions within their traditions. The risk is if they do not then they are less than capable of assisting individuals from alternate spiritual or faith-traditions. Citing the American civil religion as an example, Klass notes:

> If professionals themselves accept the spiritual teachings of the American civil religion uncritically, they will be unable to help parents who take the more difficult, yet more profound spiritual paths through their grief, because by denying that evil and suffering are at the essential core of the human experience, they will be unable to help those who find differently. (1999, p. 200)

Klass’s entreaty is not so different from mine. Drawing from our respective experiences in the trenches, our voices in a sense unite because the language is the same. Notions and understandings of spirituality and the transpersonal in the
twenty-first century are diverse and changing. Individuals, in the West and in particular in contemporary Australian society, are challenging existing faith allegiances and traditions so as to forge new and more meaningful connections and relationships with the sacred or the spiritually infinite on their own terms. Driven by a sense of dissatisfaction they strive in their searching to achieve a sense of connectedness and a sense of oneness and wholeness with not so much that which can be seen, but with that which can be felt.

I learnt when a child that there was a God outside the institutional church and that a wisdom no mortal could ever command lovingly maintained all that I knew and all that I experienced as material and non-material reality. Now I encounter people around me undergoing their own process of understanding as they renegotiate their relationship with their spirituality as defined by them, and who are living their lives from that understanding.

As practitioners in the interdisciplinary human services workforce supporting the bereaved, we simply must keep abreast of this dynamic milieu in which we live. In reporting results from a pilot study examining spirituality amongst health care professionals, Adams and Csiernik note that not only is spirituality complex and personal, but that it is subject to the pressures of globalisation. Their findings reflect this contemporary milieu:

As we face another millennium, ties to organized religions are weakening due to the infiltration of the media into homes, a multitude of leisure activities, and seven-day-work-week commercialism. Likewise, the role of spirituality is also being questioned. Ever increasing technological change, along with managed health care and its equivalents, are placing increasing emphasis upon expediency and a cost-benefit utilitarian business mentality in all facets of caring and healing ... These new demands clash with our training, experience,
knowledge, and skills as well as the personal principles we derive from our spirituality. (2002, pp. 39-40)

As a practitioner myself, my professional practice has always been informed by life experience, research, reflexivity, and my own sense of connectedness and communion with the sacred. This systems-relationship is ongoing. How can we relate to others if we do not know our own depths? How can we as interdisciplinary practitioners comprising the human services workforce be of use to others if we have not been of use to ourselves first?

In concluding these reflective thoughts from the trenches regarding the relevance of respecting different ways of understanding and different ways of knowing and self-reflexivity as informing professional practice, a cautionary or perhaps encouraging note is advised by Everitt et al.:

Different ways of knowing and understanding of the world make different assumptions about the individual and society, and about their interrelationships. Unless these assumptions are teased out, they may be adopted unknowingly and uncritically by practitioners. And yet these assumptions have implications for practice. (1992, p. 45)

These assumptions do indeed have implications for practitioners in the interdisciplinary human services workforce, as they do for their clients. Although Everitt et al., are perhaps cautioning practitioners, there is something else being suggested here; the need to find common ground in the interaction. How can both practitioner and client step away from their assumptions and meet in a space in which two human beings exist? What is the common ground? That is both the challenge and the invitation for us all.
Conclusion

The aim of the study is to explore the subjective experience of communiqué occurring within the context of adult bereavement in contemporary Australian society. The study, which is exploratory and non-experimental in design, utilises a qualitative heuristic strategy of inquiry, methodology and interpretative approach to data analysis.

Findings of this study will extend social and cultural understandings of communiqué by highlighting its systems-relationship with bereavement. They will also promote interdisciplinary and pluralistic understandings of bereavement, communiqué and spirituality for the human services workforce. Notions and understandings of spirituality and the transpersonal are complex, diverse and changing. Findings reflect this diversity and meaning multiplicity, as they do the interconnected relationship between the individual and their spiritual belief-system, as defined by them. Findings also reflect a shift away from what Swinton identifies as, “self-centred individualism” and a move toward a recognition of “the fundamental wholeness and interconnectedness of human beings” (2006, p. 62).

Communiqué appears to have the potential of being a psychospiritually and psychosocially transformative event in the life of the experient. Occurring generally though not always at a time when the bereaved were in despair or suffering anguish at the death and absence of the deceased, communiqué provides comfort and hope for the experient, reorientates value-systems, reorientates the mind and informs and enriches the understanding regarding pre and post-mortem existence. In addition, communiqué brings something else as well. It brings with it an invitation to consider the meaning of life and the self with all their vagaries and mysteries from an alternate
transpersonal perspective; the challenge to know and understand that which it is that enables communiqué to occur.

Although there have been instances reported where bereaved individuals have experienced associated fears or that the experience in general was in some way distressing, in comparison to the more widely reported beneficent impact of communiqué they are relatively few (Greyson & Bush, 1996; Hastings, 1983; Kennedy et al., 1994; Kramer, 1989; Milton, 1992; Rommer, 2000; Tart & LaBore, 1986). Findings from the study reflect the conclusion drawn by Ross and Joshi in their study exploring what they term paranormal/extrasensory experiences. Researching the phenomenon as it occurred in the general population of Winnipeg, Canada, they report that such experiences are “not pathological but a part of the normal grieving process occurring in psychologically healthy, high-functioning individuals” (1992, p. 360).

Communiqué occurring within the context of adult bereavement is not uncommon, nor is the beneficial impact such encounters assume in adaptive grief outcomes unreported (Barbato, 2002; Bennett & Bennett, 2000; Drewry, 2003; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1996; Klugman, 2006; LaGrand, 1999; Lindstrom, 1995; Parker, 2005). A feature of many studies which have reported the phenomenon in their findings is that they have done so in terms of it being one of the elements of the general experience of bereavement. The study has focussed exclusively on the natures and meanings of communiqué in contemporary Australian society. As such findings of the study contribute toward existing literature by extending understandings of communiqué.

Study findings of the beneficial impact of communiqué on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the experient accord with those reported from previous research. However, the study’s
findings also suggest that in addition to being a complex multi-
layered, multi-dimensional transpersonal phenomenon, 
communiqué is a metaphorical doorway to a non-material reality 
and the conveyance of a truth-in-action. Indeed, communiqué 
illuminates the intrinsic spiritual core of the human system, that 
Boisen defines as “the living human document” (1936, p. 10). It 
does this because it portrays its intersubjective systems-nature 
with material and non-material reality.

Communiqué does something else as well. Communiqué 
brings hope. The hope is that life is not meaningless after all. 
The hope is that there is something fundamentally good at work 
in people’s lives of an uplifting nature. And the hope is that 
human beings can grow beyond what they are at a given moment 
in time.

The research question the study answered was: What are the 
natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults 
and the person/s close to them who died? The process of 
answering the research question has revealed that communiqué 
is a psychospiritual engagement between embodied and 
disembodied individuals. This engagement is not only 
subjectively experienced by the individual, it is seeded into the 
mind as an idea, the idea being, communiqué can bring about 
change of being of the experi ent.

Are human beings more than their body? Communiqué 
suggests they are. Is there a non-material reality beyond that 
which is known and experienced through the physical senses? 
Communiqué suggests there is. Does existence continue in this 
non-material reality, albeit in different form? Communiqué 
suggests it does. And are those in this non-material reality able 
to positively influence the lives of those in the material world in 
which they live as embodied beings? Communiqué suggests they 
can. Does cessation of the physical functioning resulting in death
of the material body enable that which constitutes the now non-material individual to exist as a disembodied being in an alternate non-material reality? Communiqué suggests it does. Is the event of death merely a biomedical phenomenon for the individual (Cobb, 2001; Nicassio & Smith, 1995; Steinhauser, Clipp, et al., 2000) or is it something more meaningful? Communiqué suggests it is.

Spretnak asked the question, “How can we come to realize that we live in a participatory universe – that each of us, each minute part of us, is a node within a vast network of creative dynamics – unless we engage in practices that awaken our minds to the realities of such participation?” (1991, p. 22). In the process of addressing the research question, the study has answered Spretnak’s question. It has achieved this because it entered into the “subjugating aspect” of the phenomenon of communiqué (Tapp & Wright, 1996, p. 232).

The social relevance of the study findings are significant because they highlight the potential of communiqué to initiate a spiritual and philosophical paradigm shift, not just at the individual level, but at the social and cultural level as well. The phenomenon has this potential because it challenges notions and definitions of reality. Communiqué as an idea extends an invitation to consider life and one’s participation in life from an alternate transpersonal perspective and understanding.

In making public the findings as reported in this study, they serve as a platform for extending this invitation to the visible social world. Significantly, they position that invitation within the public domain. In so doing the study acts as a medium through which the idea, communiqué can bring about change of being of the experient, is disseminated into receptive minds, and is thus a contributing factor influence the potentiality of the
possibility of the psychospiritual growth and development of the collective system of humanity; mankind.

With regard to fully comprehending the profundity of the study’s findings, perhaps it is suffice to echo the words of St. Thomas Aquinas from his *Summa Theologica*. “The mode of knowledge follows the nature of the knower” (1945, p. 91), which echoes Heidegger’s argument that human beings co-create their world-view in accordance with their interaction with their environment (1962). Then again, perhaps Jung also offers some insight for further consideration:

> There are very few beings yet capable of making a difference between mental image and the thing itself. This primitivity is poisoning our human world and is so dense a mist that very few people have discovered its existence. (1975, p. 578)

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a discussion of the findings from the heuristic analysis of data. These findings have been discussed with reference to the research question which guided the study, and to relevant bereavement, social science and communiqué research literature. Implications for the helping professions and further research have also been discussed. The sixth and final phase of the heuristic research design which concludes the study, and which framed research activities, is presented in the following chapter, *Chapter Eight: The Creative Synthesis*. 

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*Ways of Being*
Chapter Eight: The Creative Synthesis

by Me all is pervaded

In heuristics, an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is within me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness. It is I the person living in a world with others, alone yet inseparable from the community of others. I who see and understand something, freshly, as if for the first time. I who come to know essential meanings inherent in my experience. I stand out within my experiences and in the entire domain of my interest and concern ... as a researcher I am the person who is challenged to apprehend the meaning of things and to give these meanings ongoing life. I provide the light that guides the explication of something and knowledge of it. When I illuminate a question, it comes to life. When I understand its constituents, it emerges as something solid and real.

Chapter Overview

This chapter concludes the study in presenting the Creative Synthesis. The Creative Synthesis is rendered in prose form, and in accordance with heuristic research design presents a comprehensive expression of the realisation of the natures and meanings of communiqué. The Creative Synthesis, entitled *by Me all is pervaded*, constitutes the cumulative end-effect of the exploration and answering of the research question: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?*

Introduction

The process of heuristic research is delineated by six phases that comprise the general strategy of inquiry. These include Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication and Creative Synthesis (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-32). The Creative Synthesis is the sixth and final component of the phases of heuristic research. “The major concepts that underlie a creative synthesis are the tacit dimension, intuition, and self-searching” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). The Creative Synthesis is the cumulative end-effect of the process of engagement with the topic or theme that has captured and ignited the researcher’s passion to know.

During the Creative Synthesis phase there is in a sense a type of transcendence that occurs. There is both a foray into the visible social world governing the research question, and a deliberate retreat away from it. The researcher has consciously and actively engaged with the question, then just as actively disengaged from it. There have been periods of intense solitude, reflection, meditation and pondering which have resulted in a deeply intimate emotional, psychological, behavioural and spiritual relationship between the researcher and the question.
The Creative Synthesis is the realisation of the natures and meanings of the research question, as it is of the phenomena the question is attached to and to which it inwardly resonates. This realisation can be rendered by the researcher in the form of a poem, story, drawing or alternate creative form.

The power of heuristics is in its recognition of the significance of self-searching and the value of personal knowledge as essential requirements for the understanding of common human experiences. There is no substitute for direct comprehensive, accurate first-person accounts of experience, for the importance of self-inquiry and self-dialogue in discovering the nature and meaning of one’s own experiences and that of others. As the distinctiveness of experience is explicated into its unique qualities and themes and depicted through description, example, literary expression, narrative and artwork, the researcher has gathered what is required to construct the universal portrayal or essence. The researcher intuitively and reflectively sees in all the depictions the qualities or characteristic meanings that make the experience what it is and not something else – what enables one to know anger as anger, tranquillity as tranquillity, fear as fear, and courage as courage. The creative synthesis is the peak moment when the researcher recognizes the universal nature of what something is and means, and at the same time grows in self-understanding and as a self. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 90)

The Creative Synthesis is presented in prose format and is entitled, by Me all is pervaded. When formulating the Creative Synthesis, the researcher “must move beyond any confined or constricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life of the question to grow” and this to the extent that, “a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32). The process of engagement required to realise this inward life of the question is written in the first person (see Turning Within in this chapter). It describes the subjective interconnectedness between the researcher and the topic of investigation.
Prior to constructing the prose, I pondered intensely on the phenomenon of communiqué for a number of weeks. I closed my eyes at night, aware that my final conscious thoughts often played around it, and as the dawn slowly crept into my darkened bedroom would wake with my attention already focused. As a result of this pondering, I watched three questions take form in my mind. It was like hearing music coming from far away until eventually I could discern the melody because I recognised the composer:

1. What has the phenomenon revealed of itself to me?
2. What is this phenomenon revealing about itself to me?
3. What is this phenomenon telling me about itself to me?

I recalled Evelyn Underhill’s words, “we know a thing only by uniting with it, by assimilating it, by interpenetration of it and ourselves” (1913, p. 4), as I did those of ecophilosopher Henryk Skolimowski, “the universe reveals nothing to the unprepared mind, when the mind is prepared, through its strange magic, it co-creates with the universe” (1994, p. 82). I have lived and breathed communiqué since the time of my husband’s death in 2004. It oozes out of my pores such that wherever I go, or whatever I touch, or whomever I speak with, something of it is left behind, a footprint. It has become me, as I have become it. It has brought me to the brink of anguished yearning yet when I stepped into that place I did not plummet into its depths, I passed through them.

After the three questions revealed themselves, I set aside a time in order to enter a state of deep meditation. I took the questions into this place within myself where all is still, where all is becoming. My heart rate slowed, as did my breathing, until I
barely drew air. A blinding flash of light erupted in my mind and it seemed that I had seen the birth of a thousand stars, and then I saw and then I knew and then I understood the natures and meanings of what I thought I had researched, but which in truth had researched me.

I saw that the event of communiqué was an outreach of God to humanity. I saw the utter profundity as I did the miracle that such a thing was possible, and I was in awe. And then a sense of deep reverence came over me, and I felt my entire being pierced by a profound love so intense that I felt as though every cell in my body, down to its sub-atomic molecular structure had merged with this love and had become one with it, the universe, and with every living thing. I felt a sense of connectedness with that which is life. I felt my being dissolve into this substance of life. I felt my husband and my mother. I felt their being, their life-force, their very souls pass through mine as indeed I felt the life-force of all the souls who now compose the living spiritual universe. All are one when they enter the One, all are one within the One, all are indivisible.

It was as Skolimowski said, “the universe reveals nothing to the unprepared mind, when the mind is prepared, through its strange magic, it co-creates with the universe” (1994, p. 82). One of the unique aspects of applying what Braud and Anderson term transpersonal approaches to research is the potential for such approaches to initiate what may be a radical transformation for the researcher (1994, p. x). Heuristic research privileges pluralistic dimensions of non-material subjective experience, including for example meditation, mystical experiences, holotropic breathwork and alternate ways of knowing. In addition to potentially transforming the individual, such activities in themselves can become acts of self-realisation:
In following these techniques and procedures, the encounter with the transcendent dimension of the topic of inquiry not only can inform but also can change the researcher, sometimes radically. Transpersonal researchers learn about the topic and themselves ... self-realization, is, after all, a risky business. Ultimately it is the source for initiating and realizing authentic change in our world. (1994, p. x)

My narrative reflects Braud and Anderson’s potentiality for transformation in vivid detail. I felt that my being had grown because of this experience, and that in so doing it had made the universe grow a little too; it seemed to me that we had both expanded. What occurred within me impacted that which was outside me. The transformation was holistically intersubjective because it had made a contribution to my being and spiritual growth as it had contributed something to the spiritual reality in which I live. It seemed to me that humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow was correct when he observed, “there is no substitute for experience, none at all” (1966, p. 45).

I was also reminded of a principle that I had been taught when a student studying Sufism; Trogoautoegocrat. Trogoautoegocrat, which translates to “I feed and maintain myself”, refers to the concept of the universe as a living system comprised of gradations of energy (personal communication, P.W. Groves, 24 May 1998). In order to maintain itself, the universe generates energy which undergoes a series of cyclic transformations. These cyclic transformations sublimate the energy which is then cycled back into itself, so maintaining the entire system. I had experienced this truth-in-action. It was as though the quality of my being had changed, and that because it had changed it consequently made a difference in some way to the universe. What my being is, as it grows and what it grows into symbiotically and organically affects the universe. I understood that as my understanding of myself was transformed,
so too was my understanding of reality in that multiplicity of meaning was revealed.

I saw that I was joined to this flowing substance of eternity in similar fashion as the unborn child is joined to its mother by its umbilical cord. I saw how I was maintained by life, that in a sense I was not alive, though yet I live. I am maintained by life. There is a profound difference between life, and being alive. And then I understood that the being of every individual who has ever existed on our planet has also symbiotically and organically affected, and at times infected, this flowing substance of eternity, this vast and immeasurable non-material spiritual universe to which all return when at death the material body is put off.

The Creative Synthesis is entitled, *by Me all is pervaded*. Although written in the first person, it tells the story of the coming together of the embodied and the disembodied. This is the experience of communiqué, which manifests as the intersection of two realities, one material, and one non-material. This coming together creates a metaphorical world within a world which is the subjective experience itself. The Creative Synthesis thus rendered presents the answer to the research question explored by the study: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?*
The Creative Synthesis

*by Me all is pervaded*

There is a place, a place traversed within, a place known yet unknown, a place where the silence folds in upon itself. It is in the world and not, near yet far, real, yet not real. It is a place where souls commune with one another, where souls blend until they are indivisible, it is a place within a place, it is here and yet it is not here.

It exists within the universe and outside it. It is a time with no time. It is here that the dead walk. Here the divide is breached. Here two worlds converge in alchemical fusion. Here the dead and the living breathe.

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Softly, softly, stealing through time,
softly, softly, do hearts entwine.
softly, softly, across time and space,
softly, softly, two hearts embrace.
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One is in commune with this place, for it composes one’s being. One is in commune with this place, for it is that which we are. All is connected, all are indivisible, all are particles of the one element, all are of the One. Past, present and future transform to become now. It is the birth of the universe, as it is its non-birth. It is the experience of eternity seeping into non-eternity, it is the experience of eternity making itself known to non-eternity.

This is God’s outreach to man. It is love made manifest in mercy and compassion. It is hope when there is no hope. It is life when there is only death. It is the Supreme, the One, the Unnameable,
it is the All and the Everything. It rises above all men, yet permeates mankind. It diffuses through the universe, yet it is the universe. It is of no man, yet it is every man. It is the filtered sunlight in the forest glade, as it is the sunlight’s shadow. It is the dark as it is the light, yet it is neither. It is that which has no name, it is that which it is. It is endlessly present and never has not been. It is forever, and will never not be. It is.

I hear you, I know you, I feel you.
I am an outreach of myself unto myself.
By me, all things are pervaded,
By me, all things are possible,
By me, I cross the divide of death.
By me, I cross temporal existence.
By me, I reveal myself unto you.
Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the sixth and final phase of the heuristic research design, the Creative Synthesis. The presentation of the Creative Synthesis entitled, *by Me all is pervaded*, concludes the study. In accordance with heuristic research design, the Creative Synthesis has rendered in prose form a comprehensive expression of the realisation of the natures and meanings of communiqué, and has answered the research question: *What are the natures and meanings of communiqué between bereaved adults and the person/s close to them who died?*
Epilogue

*The Ship*

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and watch her until at length she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come down to meet and mingle with each other. Then someone at my side says “There, she is gone!”

“Gone where?”

Gone from my sight, that is all.

She is just as large in the mast and hull and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of her destination. Her diminished size is in me, and not in her.

And just at the moment, when someone at my side says “There! She’s gone!” there are other eyes that are watching for her coming and other voices ready to take up the glad shout:

“There she comes!”

... and that is dying.

Henry van Dyke, *The Ship*, 1904, p. 349
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Appendices
Appendix 1: Ethical Approval
18 June 2008

Dr L Napier
Faculty of Education and Social Work
Room 339, Education Building – A35
The University of Sydney

Dear Dr Napier

I am pleased to inform you that the Executive Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2008 approved your protocol entitled "Mum came to me today" Ways of being: the alchemy of bereavement, grief and post-death contact".

Details of the approval are as follows:

Ref No.: 06-2008/10683
Approval Period: June 2008 to June 2009
Authorised Personnel:
Dr L Napier
Dr Z Weber
Ms M Knight

The HREC is a fully constituted Ethics Committee in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans-March 2007 under Section 5.1.29

The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans. We draw to your attention the requirement that a report on this research must be submitted every 12 months from the date of the approval or on completion of the project, whichever occurs first. Failure to submit reports will result in withdrawal of consent for the project to proceed.

Chief Investigator / Supervisor’s responsibilities to ensure that:

(1) All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.

(2) All unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should be reported to the HREC as soon as possible.
(3) The HREC must be notified as soon as possible of any changes to the protocol. All changes must be approved by the HREC before continuation of the research project. These include:

- If any of the investigators change or leave the University.
- Any changes to the Participant Information Statement and/or Consent Form.

(4) All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Statement and Consent Form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee. The Participant Information Statement and Consent Form are to be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee and the following statement must appear on the bottom of the Participant Information Statement. Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Senior Ethics Officer, University of Sydney, on (02) 9351 4811 (Telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (Facsimile) or obriody@usyd.edu.au (Email).

(5) Copies of all signed Consent Forms must be retained and made available to the HREC on request.

(6) It is your responsibility to provide a copy of this letter to any internal/external granting agencies if requested.

(7) The HREC approval is valid for four (4) years from the Approval Period stated in this letter. Investigators are requested to submit a progress report annually.

(8) A report and a copy of any published material should be provided at the completion of the Project.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Professor D I Cook
Chairman
Human Research Ethics Committee

Cc: Ms Michele Knight, Room 413, Old Teachers College – A22, The University of Sydney

Encl. Copy of Approved Participant Consent Form
Copy of Approved Press Release
Copy of Participant Information Statement
Appendix 2: Participant Information Statement
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

The current study, *Bereavement, grief and post-death contact* explores the natures and meanings of post-death contact experienced by bereaved adults 18 years of age or older. The purpose of the study is to examine the natures and meanings of this contact between bereaved adults and someone close to them who has died. This study is being conducted by Michele Knight, doctoral candidate, in order to meet the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work, under the supervision of Dr. Lindsey Napier, Chief Investigator, the Faculty of Education and Social Work, the University of Sydney. Michele Knight is also the Bereavement Support Program Coordinator for North Ryde Community Aid & Information Centre.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview which will take approximately between one to two hours which, with your permission, will be audio taped on a micro-cassette recorder. This taped material will be analysed by the researcher in order to identify what post-death contact means for you. There will be no risk of you being identified because only the researcher will have access to this taped material and at no time during the interview will you be asked to disclose any information which may identify you. The location for the interview is *North Ryde Community Aid & Information Centre*, 3 Cutler Parade, North Ryde. The interview will be conducted at a time most suitable to you. You will be asked to talk about post-death contact which has taken place between yourself and the person close to you who died.

Any information you supply will be strictly confidential, and only the researcher will have access to the data collected. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report. The interview will be audio taped, transcribed into text, analysed by the researcher and stored in a safe place for seven years, based on the University of Sydney's Human Research Ethics Committee requirements.

Talking about your experiences may be emotionally painful. You may also experience an indirect benefit of positive feelings of well-being due to the fact that disclosure of these experiences can be beneficial. The researcher has profound personal and professional understanding of death, grief and post-death contact and brings this understanding and empathy to the research process. Should you feel that you need professional support and comfort you will have access to a professionally trained bereavement and grief counsellor. You are very welcome to discuss the study with other people.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are in no way obliged to participate and if you do decide to take part, you can withdraw at any time, without penalty or prejudice. If you wish to receive results of the study, a plain English summary of the project shall be forwarded to you upon completion of the project.

When you have read this information, Michele Knight (0425 203 271) will discuss it with you further and answer any questions that you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Dr. Lindsey Napier, Chief Investigator on (02) 9351 4168.

If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of this research project then please contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (facsimile) or qbriody@usyd.edu.au (e-mail).

This information sheet is for you to keep.
Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, ........................................................., give consent to my participation in the research project:
Name (please print)

TITLE: Bereavement, grief and post-death contact

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. I have read the Participant Information Statement and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s.

3. I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary; that I am not obliged to participate, and if I do participate, I can withdraw at any time without prejudice or penalty.

4. I understand that my involvement in this study is strictly confidential and no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

5. I understand that I will participate in an interview which may take between one and two hours.

6. I understand that I can choose to deny permission for my interview to be audio-taped.

Signed: ........................................................................................................................................

Name: .........................................................................................................................................

Date: ...........................................................................................................................................

If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of this research project then please contact the Senior Ethics Officer, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811 (telephone); (02) 9351 6706 (facsimile) or qbriody@usyd.edu.au (e-mail).
Prompt Question Schedule

Exploring post-death-contact between bereaved adults and the person close to them who has died

Suggested Prompt Questions

1. Can you tell me about the person close to you who died?

2. How did you experience their presence?

3. What do you think this experience means?

4. Have you shared this/these experiences with anyone else?

5. What was their response?

6. What did you make of that?

7. Have you noticed any feelings or thoughts that have been generated by your experiences, for example, have these experiences influenced your views of life, death, spirituality, your own mortality?

8. Have these feelings and thoughts resulted in different behaviours or alterations to your usual routines or schedules?

9. Do you know anything about these phenomena?

10. Do you have any thoughts about why these experiences have occurred?
11. Is there anything else you feel you would like to mention about your experience?

12. If I were to ask you to comment on how you experience life now, what would you say?
Appendix 5: Press Release
Press Release

Research Study: Bereavement, grief and post-death contact

* Have you experienced the death of someone close to you?
* Have you been bereaved for six months or longer?
* Have you since experienced contact, in some way shape or form with the person close to you who died?
* Are you 18 years of age or older?
* Would you be prepared to be interviewed about your experiences?

If so, then you are invited to join a new research study exploring the natures and meanings of post-death contact between bereaved adults and the person close to them who died. This contact may include visitation dreams, sensing the person’s presence, hearing their voice either verbally or in some other way, smelling an odour associated with the person or being touched in some way by the person.

Participating in this research would require that you be 18 years of age or older, have been bereaved for longer than six months, have access to transport and that you agree to take part in an interview with University of Sydney researcher, Michele Knight, who is also a Community Development Worker delivering a bereavement support program to bereaved adults in the community. You can participate in this interview as freely as you wish and/or you may be asked some questions relating to your experiences by the researcher. This research has been approved by the University of Sydney Ethics Committee (Ref. No. 10683).

To find out more, please contact Michele Knight (Mon-Fri) on 9036 9648 or 0425 203 271 who will discuss it with you further and answer any questions that you may have.