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# **Ongoing Relationships: Recounting a Lost Parent's Life as a Means to Re-member**

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Running heading: Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

Only those who took up the lyre  
even among shadows  
can render unending praise  
out of a sense of foreboding.

Only those who partook of the poppy  
sharing their meal with the dead  
will never lose  
the softest sound.

However much the mirror reflection in the lake  
may blur and dissolve us,  
*thou knowest the image.*

Only in the twilight zone  
do the voices become  
eternal and mild<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Poem by R. M. Rilke. From "Sonnets to Orpheus" IX. Translated from German by Susan Kitron.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

The publication of Klass et al.'s *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief* (1996) marked a decisive shift in 20th century grief literature. Where Freud (1917) and other psychoanalytically-oriented theorists had emphasized the importance of relinquishing the strong affective bond with the deceased person, it has recently been held that the very continuation of the bond facilitates adjustment (Klass & Walter, 2001). "Continuing bonds" is generally understood in the scientific community as denoting the presence of an ongoing inner relationship with the deceased person by the bereaved individual (cf. Field, Gal-Oz, & Bonanno, 2003; Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). In recent years, grief researchers have shown that there are indeed different kinds of "continuing bonds" within various groups of bereaved but it is still a moot point whether these bonds are necessarily healthier for the individual (Stroebe & Schut, 2005). Whether or not such bonds are to be regarded as beneficial for the grieving process, they may still be central in the lives of certain grieving individuals and may have great importance for their self understanding and identity formation.

In this chapter I will present four narratives of individuals who lost a parent at an early age (9-15) and were interviewed by me about ten years after their loss. My main aim is to examine the various ways in which these individuals narrate the story of their parents as well as the impact of these narrations on their own self-defining life stories. I argue that within this process, one can observe and learn about the continuation of the bond with the deceased. I shall describe how reinterpretations of the parents' stories enabled the children to widen the inner representation of the parent and, at the same time, how they struggle to define the way it fit or did not fit in with their own self-narrative. Through this description I will use and expand the concept of Re-remembering (Meyrhoff, 1982). From this discussion I hope to draw the conclusion that the way people re-member their lost loved ones may change over time

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

according to their changing psychological needs and that grieving individuals in general may strive for a 'right' balance between continuing the bond and letting it go.

### **Continuing Bonds with a Lost Parent**

The basic thesis in Klass et al.s' (1996) book, was that: "... the resolution of grief involves continuing bonds that survivors maintain with the deceased ... these continuing bonds can be a healthy part of the survivor's ongoing life" (Silverman & Klass, 1996, p. 22). Evidence for parts of this claim was drawn from a variety of sources, including studies on the retaining of ties in other cultures (Stroebe et al., 1992; Klass, 1996). Klass (1996), for example, described ancestor worship in Japan, whereby an elaborate set of rituals enable the living to maintain emotional bonds with their deceased loved ones. Ancestor worship, seen within the context of Buddhist beliefs and practices, was understood to be "...an expression of the human community that cannot be separated by death ... the rituals provide a vehicle by which resolution of grief is accomplished" (Klass, 1996, p. 59).

Continuing bonds have also been observed within Western culture (Stroebe et al., 1992). For example, the *Harvard Child Bereavement Study*, analyzed by Silverman and Worden (1992) studied a non-clinical sample of children between the ages of six and seventeen who lost a parent. These children devoted considerable energy to maintaining a connection to the deceased parent. They did this through dreams, by talking to the deceased, by feeling that the dead parent was watching them, by keeping things that belonged to the dead parent, by visiting the grave, and by frequently thinking about him or her. The authors stressed that in previous clinical studies such behaviors had been labeled "preoccupation with the deceased" which implied a symptomatic behavior that should end. However, most of those studies were based on clinical observations (Volkan, 1981; Dietrich & Shabad, 1989) and did not deal with a non-clinical population. Therefore, the authors concluded: "The parent may be dead, but the

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

relationship did not die" (p. 315). In the long run, they claimed, accepting the reality of death may mean finding a way for the dead parent to live in some way within the child's life (Silverman & Worden, 1992; Rubin, 1985; Worden, 1991). Silverman and Nickman (1996) interviewed children at similar ages as well as their surviving parent, and found that children retained ties to their deceased parent by experiencing the deceased as a disciplinarian, keeping a belonging of the deceased parent, or reminiscing about the joint past.

An early psychoanalytic contribution to the understanding of the Continuing Bonds phenomena in children is Schafer's (1968) thesis that in psychic reality the object (parental inner image) is immortal. Therefore, he argued, it makes more sense to speak of the various fates of the immortal object than to speak of object loss pure and simple. From the subject's standpoint, there can be no thoroughgoing object loss. Only the higher levels of function, those more or less dominated by the secondary process, recognize "No", death, and loss. What is more, he claimed that there are fundamental, indissoluble links between the child's self and parental object representation, and between the child's attachments to both; consequently, he stated, the child can no more "give up" or "lose" an object entirely than he can entirely "give up" or "lose" his subjective self. Thus, the parental object is ever-present, ever-available, and indestructible. According to Schafer, the way in which the object is "ever-present, ever-available" is through the process of identification, in which the object is moved from the external world into the child's inner world (Schafer, 1968).

Stroebe and Schut (2005) have recently published a review of research on the continuing-breaking bonds controversy. They concluded that it is not possible to determine with any certainty whether the continuation or the relinquishment of the bond is generally helpful and that researchers need to work toward understanding *how and for whom* continuing or relinquishing bonds furthers adjustment (Stroebe & Schut, 2005).

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

It is important for me to note my own personal journey through this work. Being a grieving child myself after losing my father to cancer when I was 13, I started this study with an absolutely dichotomous and unbalanced view: on one side – the side I favored - stood "continuing bonds" theorists and practitioners who encourage the continuation of the relationship and emphasize its positive contributions. On the other side were "letting go/saying goodbye" theorists who emphasize the importance of relinquishing the tie and moving on to form new relationships. What I discovered was that "letting go" as well as "continuing bonds" narratives were presented as a dialectic in the interviewees' subjective experience. What I could gather from my interviewees as well as from reflections on my own experiences, both seemed crucial to the preferred development of the self-narrative. Therefore the end point for my journey is a more balanced view in which both acknowledging the reality of the death and the parent's absence and at the same time the experience of an ongoing relationship exist side by side. Through the conceptualizations and the analysis of the narratives to come, I hope to show how mourners may strive to find the right balance between the two.

### **"Re-membering" and the Two Modes of Experience**

A continuing relationship with a lost loved one, especially with a lost parent, may thus be formed internally, through the process of identification (Schafer, 1968), or externally, through the felt presence of the deceased (Silverman & Worden, 1992). There still remains a question of how the tie with the lost parent, which may partly be unconscious, is experienced consciously? How do various subject-object relationship patterns, which may form part of an inner reality, become manifest in the outer reality of life? If various parts of the parental object were internalized through the process of identification, what parts manifest themselves

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

in the mourner's life and when? Finally, how and when does a grieving child actively bring the parent's image or their relationship pattern into a self-narrative?

### **Re-membering**

Barbara Meyrhoff (1982), who studied elderly Jews in a secular senior citizen center observed a specific type of recollection in the members' struggle to retain the past. She suggested the term "re-membering<sup>2</sup>" to signify recollection which stresses the active nature in which the members brought images and stories about the deceased closer to their current lives. According to her, re-membering calls attention to the re-aggregation of members, the figures who belong to one's life story, one's own prior selves, as well as significant others who are part of the story. It was termed: "a purposive, significant unification, quite different from the passive, continuous fragmentary flickering of images and feelings that accompany other activities in the normal flow of consciousness" (p.110).

Meyrhoff's emphasis in the phenomenon she observed was on the "incorporation into the present" and on the active restoration of lost members into the mourners' lives. She also claimed that the process of re-membering is part of the "full recovery" from mourning. However, her conceptualization can be used in general to define any process of bringing a relationship pattern, or image of the deceased, from a sub-conscious to a conscious level of experience. These special moments of recollection may pertain to joint experiences or to stories that stress the unique knowledge the parent had of certain aspects of the child's self (White, 1997). In the context of the interviewees' current lives, a re-membered sense of their

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<sup>2</sup> This concept has been re-addressed in the work of narrative therapist Michael White (1997) and recently elaborated upon in the book *Re-membering Lives: Conversations with the Dying and the Bereaved* by Lorraine Hedtke and John Winslade (2004).

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

lost parent may connect with certain aspects of the children's self-presentation, character traits and current relationship patterns.

White (1997) suggested the metaphor of a 'club' – a club of life – to describe significant relationships and affiliations in a person's life. According to him, this 'club of life' is composed of members who have played a significant part in his/her life story; in this 'club', each member has a 'membership' or 'membership status', which may change in the course of time. Following Meyrhoff's (1982) conceptualization, he invites his clients to engage in "re-membering practices", a process in which they revise the memberships of their club of life. White (1997) claimed that this invitation allows his clients to have a greater say about the status of particular memberships, suspend or elevate, revoke or privilege, and downgrade or upgrade specific memberships of their lives (White, 1997). Hedtke & Winslade (2004) described "Re-membering conversations" they conducted within families, in which the therapist invites each person's stories which constitute the living legacy of a loved one who, though physically absent, remains very much a "member" of his or her life (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004).

Such revisions of membership status may occur naturally throughout life, without any therapeutic intervention. Going back to Schafer's (1968) definition of identification, the 'club of life' metaphor can be viewed as different object representations that have been incorporated into various aspects of the self-representation. It is important to note, though, that conceptually Meyrhoff and Schafer regard the term 'incorporation' differently. According to Schafer (1968), when an object is incorporated or fully identified with, it gets absorbed into the self and loses its object-ness. Thus, as I will demonstrate, if one "becomes" one's mother, the mother as a distinct being disappears. In contrast, the 'club of life' metaphor (White, 1997) and the incorporation of lost members into the present (Meyrhoff, 1982) may keep the image

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

of the person separate and alive. Throughout the four narratives to be presented I will quite broadly use the concept of re-membering to point to any active process of bringing (or choosing not to bring) the deceased parent's image or story closer to the interviewee's consciousness.

### **Two Modes of Experience: Separateness and Oneness**

The conceptualization of re-membering and the notion of the 'club of life' members have a common denominator: The ongoing relationship with the parent, even if it reflects and influences the subjective self, still stems from a differentiation between self and other. This means that the subject may try to be *like* the object (Schafer, 1968) but clearly recognizes his separateness from him or her. Yet, a subjective feeling of a total identification or *merger* between child and parent might be reported as well. In this process the parental object was incorporated or identified with fully. Thus, absorbed into the self, it loses its object-ness.

Erlich (2003) offers an understanding of experience as stemming from the operation of two contiguous, ongoing modalities of processing internal and external input, and reflecting two polarities of the subject-object experience - one of *separateness*, and another of *oneness*. In the first modality, subject and object are experienced as separate from each other, as two distinct, interactive entities. The experience is then one of 'having' or 'not having' the object which may give rise to a range of feelings that one needs the object and is motivated or moved towards it, feelings of loss, longing, missing, wishful desire, a need to test the object's durability and realness and so on. In the second experiential mode subject and object are not experienced as separate and distinct from each other. On the contrary, Erlich claims that the fundamental experiential quality in this mode is their merger, identity and fusion. Boundaries cannot and do not play the crucial role they occupy in the first one. In this mode, experience has little or nothing to do with manipulating, affecting or being affected by the other.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

Likewise, it is not based upon or generative of desire, as the 'object' is not experienced as an other 'to be had' for some purpose (Erlich, 2003).

Although Erlich offers his understanding of the general modes of experiencing and does not consider the experience of a lost object in particular, his conceptualization may contribute to the analysis of the material. His claim that the experiential modes operate constantly and are always parallel with each other may illuminate the subjective experience that the parental object exists in two dimensions and that in both modes it is felt differently. In two of the analyses to be presented, I will try to reconstruct how both modes of experience are narrated. I will also explore whether a dominant mode of experience of the lost object can be shown within the participants' narratives and how this connects to the conceptualization of remembering.

### **Recounting the Parent's Life Story and the Self-Narrative**

The way I intended to investigate the continuation of the bond with a lost parent was through the narration of the parent's life story by the child. Attig (1996) has said: "As we come to know and love others, we come to know and cherish the stories of the lives they live....Our knowledge and love of the stories remain after the loss of the presence of the deceased..." (pp. 179-180). Attig further noted that reinterpretation of stories is always possible and can yield new insights into the lives of our loved ones. Such new insights are especially likely to occur as we age and encounter changing life circumstances - circumstances that enable us to consider the deceased from a different vantage point (Attig, 1996; Rando, 1993).

Similarly, Rosenblatt and Elde (1990) and Walter (1996, 1999) have hypothesized that one significant way in which the dead may become a valued part of the survivor's biography, is through talking to others who knew the deceased and asking them about his/her life story.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

This may be particularly important in certain relationships in which large parts of the dead person's life are unknown to the mourner (Klass & Walter, 2001).

One cause for the gaps in the mourner's knowledge is the fragmentation of modern life, particularly the split between home and work: it is typical of many cases of bereavement that significant parts of the deceased's life are unknown to the mourner (Klass & Walter, 2001).

Another explanation may be the veil of silence drawn over the period between the onset of the parent's fatal illness and its final outcome, especially when children are involved. Davidman (2000), for example, has claimed that her respondents' ability to re-construct narratives about their lost mothers was hampered by the silence surrounding this event. Yet a third explanation is that some parts of the parent's life story may be chosen to be left 'unknown' because they contradict or in some way threaten the self development of the child.

Within this dynamic of "knowing" or "not knowing" the parent's story, it is important to stress that even "known" facts may be re-interpreted and re-understood during different stages of the survivor's life. Thus, the recounting of the parent's life story, without the actual presence of the parent to negotiate these understandings, can serve as a lens through which to view the ongoing relationship with the parent's image. It can also be examined in relation to the mourner's *self-narrative* (Neimeyer, 2004)

Neimeyer (2005) claimed that in narrative terms, significant losses challenge the self-narratives of survivors, both in terms of their personal sense of autobiographical continuity and the social construction of their post-loss identity. He further argued that the central role of meaning reconstruction by the survivor in response to the loss (Neimeyer, 2001) shows increases in his narrative complexity. For example he showed that after their loss, widowed persons were left with a self-narrative that was more complex, more sophisticated, but not necessarily more unambivalently positive than that which preceded the loss (Neimeyer, 2005).

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

I think that part of the post-loss challenges to the self-narrative that Neimeyer mentions are related to the way survivors may understand and recount the life of the person who died. The comparison to their own self-narrative may inevitably bear similarities as well as differences and thus, in time, contribute to its complexity. Therefore, I would like to find out to what extent the parent's story evolves or is regarded as static in the course of time. How will participants engage in a revision of the story as they grow older and encounter changing life circumstances? To what extent does his/her story merge with or diverge from that of the parent? Finally, in what ways does this re-construction of the story shed light on the modalities (separateness/oneness) in which the lost object is experienced?

### **Participants, Method and Chapter Overview**

Eight individuals, from a non-clinical population, in their early to late twenties, who lost a parent when they were children (age 9-15), were interviewed in the narrative-research tradition<sup>3</sup>. Interviewees were invited to volunteer to participate in the study by an ad posted in different areas of the university campus. The people who answered the ad were asked to answer a few general questions over the phone, concerning relevant facts regarding their gender, current age, the age when the parent died, cause of death and number of siblings. I chose the persons to be interviewed according to the questions listed above, in order to put together a group which would reflect some of variance which exists in the larger society of bereaved children. I interviewed the participants either at the university or at the participants' homes for, on average, an hour and a half.

In all interviews, the general question of "how relationships with a lost parent evolve over the years?" was introduced, followed by a set of more specific questions. Then I introduced the topic: *"I'm interested in learning more about how and when you envision your father/mother -*

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These persons were interviewed for an MA thesis submitted to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Israel<sup>3</sup>

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

*when do you think about him/her today or over the years - how do you imagine him/her? I'm also interested in finding out how you think about who he/she was, what you understand about his/her life story and how these images or memories may have influenced you. So I'd really like you to begin with any of these questions and tell me how you think about your father/mother as part of your own life story."* During the interviews I tried to be very flexible and allow the conversation to flow. Additionally, more specific questions were introduced during the course of the interview only when they seemed to elaborate the story that was told. All interviews were conducted in Hebrew, recorded and then transcribed by a professional transcriber. The materials were then analyzed in a concept-directed content analysis in light of the concepts that were discussed above. This means that essentially I conducted multiple readings, during which I was assessing how the relationships were described, what the nature of the parent-child bond was, and whether it had changed over the years. Another focus in my readings was the nature of the parent's representation as it was depicted in his/her life story and how it reflected on the child's self-narrative. During the analyses I also tried to find clues for the way these individuals re-membered their parents and in what modes of experience the parental object was experienced over the years.

The mode of my readings was mainly in a *holistic-content* approach (Lieblich et al., 1998) in which each story was taken as a whole, and sections of the text were integrated in the context of other parts of the narrative. This analysis approach seemed appropriate since I sought the special meaning each bereaved young adult gave to the connection with the late parent (Neimeyer, 2001). However, I also used a *categorical-content* approach (Lieblich et al., 1998) in which the original story was dissected, and sections belonging to a defined category were collected from the several texts belonging to a number of narrators. This helped me bring out the general themes underlying the phenomenon of continuing bonds with a lost parent and

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

give a fuller description of the concept of re-membering and the two modes of experience as it appeared across narratives.

In order to ensure trustworthiness (Merrick, 1999) and further enhance the analyses a discussion of findings and processes was organized with a narrative research study group who also read and commented on the interviews.

As mentioned above, in this chapter I will focus on the narratives of four interviewees. First I will describe Danny's narrative in which persistent feeling of "missing out" in his relationship with his late father, set forth a dynamic of "knowing" and "not knowing" his father's life story. Through Danny's story I aim to show how in the process of recounting a parent's life story parallels can be drawn with the self-narrative, which may become a central part in the ongoing relationship. Sharon's story will further exemplify this idea. Her ongoing relationship with her late mother evolved around three ways in which she re-membered her. I shall argue that these three different forms of re-membering are connected with the gradual formation of Sharon's identity. Both Danny and Sharon's narrations led me to the conclusion that a mourner may make use of his/her parent's story to satisfy a current psychological need. Through the comparison to Maya's story, I would like to strengthen this point. Although displaying a completely different and static form of an ongoing relationship with her late mother, what Maya re-membered still reflected what she needed from her mother even years after her death. Sharon and Maya's stories will also form the base for a discussion about the concept of re-membering in light of the two mode of experience. Finally, I will present the analysis of Niebal's interview which will show that a certain form of re-membering does not always fit in with one's current stage in life. Thus, a mourner may choose not to re-member. This analysis will take me back to discuss the general idea of ongoing relationships and the continuing vs. relinquishing bonds debate and some of the questions it may raise.

**Danny - the Deceased Father's Life Story and the Theme of Missing Out**

Danny is a 25 year old student who lives together with his mother and younger brother. He lost his father when he was 14 after long months in which his father struggled with cancer. Danny said that following his father's death he was "lost for a long period of high school". His relationship with his brother deteriorated and he felt depressed. During the end of high school and the beginning of his army service there came a turning point in his life, in which "this issue [of the father's death] didn't occupy me any more". From then on he started to make "a sort of new acquaintance" with his father and gradually realized the complexity of his father's life and character.

The theme that accompanies Danny's story is the theme of missed opportunities. "Missing" runs like a fine thread through the story beginning with his father's premature death, which left Danny with a memory of an old father: "from another generation...more like a grandfather than a father", a father with whom he found it hard to communicate when he was alive. He "missed out" on the opportunity to enjoy things his father could have shared with him in adulthood such as literature, history and politics, which Danny started to appreciate only when he grew older. The missing out is also revealed in the life story of the father himself, and exists as a "threat" to Danny's life story – he is currently dissatisfied with what he is studying and with the direction he has sought out in his life.

Danny recounts his father's life story in a way that showed how the life story of a deceased parent can, on the one hand, be intriguing, and draw the child to investigate and burrow into it, but on the other hand, also present a kind of threat: "Because at first I wanted to know as much as possible, but then I arrived at the conclusion that it could also only harm the way I remember him". This statement, which recurred throughout the interview, made me wonder why "knowledge" of Danny's father had turned into a threat that could have dire consequences.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

Further analysis revealed that the threat was against the positive memory of the father, but at the same time against Danny's self development. From his story it is apparent that the parent's story may turn to have adverse effects when it is treated, consciously or unconsciously, as a prophecy, not necessarily positive, regarding the offspring's fate.

Danny described how he went about investigating his father's history: "And because I am by nature a curious person, I went straight ahead to investigate his entire life, its unfolding, and I discovered all sorts of amazing things." He interviewed family members, posed questions to his aunt and read the letters the father had left behind. He recounted that his father was born in Italy and raised in Tunis; he immigrated to Israel to fight as a volunteer in the 1948 War of Independence and then returned to Europe to pursue higher studies. Living and studying around the world probably created a very educated person, "an erudite... who knew seven or eight languages", who translated and edited books for several publishing houses for a living. Yet, in spite of his father's erudition, Danny described a person who could not utilize his many talents and could not support his family honorably. This is the theme of missing out, interwoven in the father's life story.

In contrast to his desire to learn about his father's studies and education and listen to heroic stories from the war, Danny often refrained from further probing into the father's past, because knowledge might become harmful. Thus, when he got to a description of something that was missed out or had not been completed in his father's life, he stopped: "... and he did not complete his doctorate, and all kinds of things, that is to say, there is a hole as far as I am concerned, I don't know everything, I also don't know how much more I would like to know, in addition to what I know." Again and again, throughout the interview, Danny resumed the story, and then stopped when an issue such as this came up. To the story Danny constructed through the years about his father, unflattering, frustrating details were added, and Danny

faced them as if facing an eternal truth. Thus, a tension could be felt between his quest to deepen and reinterpret the story, and between his acknowledgment that certain unpalatable facts will never change.

### **The Father's Story and the Self-Narrative**

The ambivalent attitude toward knowledge of his father's life was paralleled by Danny's ambivalent attitude to what he would like to take, reconstruct, or see as part of his own life: "And I also felt like being a little like him, study languages, experience his life in some way, consciously or unconsciously, because he was a humanist by nature so I learned these fields..." This statement presents the part of him that wants to be similar to the father and follow in his footsteps. But when continuing that sentence he said: "But I am not particularly satisfied." Danny feels that when the story is directly connected with his own life story – there is a fear that he will re-live the narrative of missing out. If he repeats the "same follies" that his father committed, he will also be leading his own narrative to a similar ending: "... I feel, I don't really think that I can be really like him. I also try to avoid the follies, the mistakes and the stupidities he was guilty of in life, unsuccessfully so far."

The interesting thing here is the mechanism, which is half-consciously selective. Danny knows that from a certain point onwards he does not want to obtain further knowledge of his father's life, because he might find the story to bear unfavorable similarities to his own story. Therefore, at these points in time, he activates the "selection" mechanism and chooses not to ask further questions, chooses not to know. In other words, he actively re-members only certain aspects from his father's story into his own self-narrative.

For example, he chooses to connect his academic choices and ambitions with his father's humanistic inclinations. Yet he is constantly afraid of any sign of uncertainty or hesitancy in

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

himself: "Now that I am at an age of a grown up person, (I hope...), I see similar patterns [to my father's], and it sometimes scares me, sort of complicated, hesitant, indecisive [patterns]..." These similarities apparently scare Danny and thus he adds: "of course, on the whole, we are two different characters, and we were also brought up in different times and in a different atmosphere and different history..." I think that with this differentiation, Danny may make an astute sociological/historical observation, but nevertheless this observation may convey part of his will to shape his life independently of his father.

He later adds: "His entire life story is something that is truly fascinating, and it could have been a great pride to be with a person that no longer exists today, and I assume that on many occasions I would see things the same way he would have seen them, if I only had that chance." Danny emphasized that part of what made his story different from his father's, was the different "times" in which they grew up. This may point again to being a child of an older father, but also to the missed opportunity of bringing their stories closer, as he becomes older. To summarize, the theme of "missing out" that may underlay Danny's father's life story, may have given rise to a dynamic between "knowing" and "not knowing" his father's story. Knowing his father's life story may have served Danny's curiosity about his father's character and his need to re-member or re-connect with him. Not knowing or not wanting to know may have appeared when parts of the father's story posed a threat to the development of his self. Danny may consciously as well as unconsciously use a selective mechanism to discriminate between parts of his father's story that he would or wouldn't like to be exposed to. The very similarities between their stories both inspired and frightened him. They served as a role model but also as a warning not to repeat the mistakes his father had made in his life.

I think that the main point to be made here is that recounting the parent's life story may be a central part of the way an ongoing relationship with a lost parent can be conducted. The

possibility of gaining new information, the ability to reinterpret and to be in a dialogue with that story is a way to be in a dialogue with the lost parent. As I showed, this dialogue may sometimes be complicated as the stories show similarities as well as differences compared to the mourner's self-narrative. Nevertheless, the possibility of the parent's narrative to be reconstructed as we age may enable us to feel the relationship as dynamic, which some of the interviewees said they were so much striving for. If one believes that our self-narrative is being re-authored as we age and that through this re-authoring we can experience self-growth and change (White, 1997), one may need to be attuned to the life stories that shaped that self-narrative.

The next two stories, Sharon and Maya's will further exemplify this idea. I hope it will become clearer how the interpretations of the life stories of their deceased mothers has had an important impact on the way these women experienced an ongoing relationship with them as well as on their self-narrative. Besides, I would like to stress how the different relationship patterns that emerged from the analyses show that the nature of the continuing bond with a lost parent might be a function of a developmental need. Both girls kept alive a complex representation of their mothers but drew on only those aspects which they needed at their current psychological stage.

### **Sharon's Story – Three Forms of Re-Membering**

Sharon is the second among four siblings. Her mother, an elementary school teacher, died in a car accident when she was 13. Sharon, who was in the car along with her two older sisters and younger brother said: "A strange fact about the way she died is that there was no visible harm to her body. There were no scratches, bruises or blood..." She further said: "She died in her wholeness...Her body, as part of her whole soul, went up to heaven in its wholeness, in a beautiful way, without suffering". The mother apparently died from internal injuries but all

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

her children survived the crash. Sharon believed that God wants and takes "the best", and that the mother was "too good to be in this life".

The last two remarks, which are of a strongly religious nature, apparently reflect the religious atmosphere in the Jewish religious house she was brought up in. The birth of her brother, the mother's "first male child", for whom she "had been waiting for many years", had a very strong religious effect on her. As part of that transformation, she started to cover her hair and decided, for the first time, to spend the holidays at home observing all the religious customs. However, during the years that have passed since their mother's death, all the children have turned away from religion, and only the father has remained an observant Jew. At the age of 25, Sharon is currently studying communication and sociology at the university and lives with her boyfriend, her father and younger brother.

From reading Sharon's interview it is very much apparent that there is a lively ongoing relationship or dialogue with her lost mother – even though 12 years have passed. When I tried to capture the underlying dynamics of this ongoing relationship, two main categories were formed: "being like the mother and turning against the mother". Each "side" of the dynamics is represented by two "plots" in Sharon's narrative: "being like" is expressed by the story of the upbringing of Sharon's younger brother. "Turning against" is manifest through the story of turning away from religion. These contradictory features of the relationship seemed to coincide with contradictory characteristics of the mother's inner representation and life story.

"She was a very-very unique combination. All in all, she was a simple moshav<sup>4</sup> girl, but no, she really broke through all the normative boundaries of a family of Yemenite origin; a daughter should be at home and raise children; as for education? – high school at most. She

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<sup>4</sup> An Israeli cooperative settlement consisting of small separate farms.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

very much broke this, went to the university, started on a teaching career, traveled the world...and on the other hand she was very classy, very refined... although [what she had done] was very rebellious...My grandfather, this is how my grandmother tells it, did not get angry with her because she did it in such a diplomatic way".

So, in Sharon's mind, the mother was an individualist, and did things her own way, but still conformed to her family, displaying a softer, diplomatic side. She managed to break away from what her family might have destined for her, but still stay part of the broader family and feel connected to it. The mother thus resembled "a very-very unique combination" of a conformist and an individualist. "...So this is something that we [the sisters] tried to internalize. That is, to incorporate that thing of pushing forward, to move on for your own right...because she really pushed us toward education and academic achievements and all that, but, like, to do all you want, and stand up for yourself but still keep that diplomacy..."

In this quote, I think Sharon tells us that she is constantly moving between two poles: At one pole, which coincides with the mother's characteristic of being a conformist, she wants to be "like" her and follow in her footsteps to make an academic career. Even if in the context of Sharon's mother's family, this development might have been considered rebellious, Sharon actually conforms to the norm her mother laid down. But at the other pole, to be like the mother is also to rebel, to be an individualist and to act differently. For Sharon, this means to turn against the norms and against the mother herself. I suspect that turning away from religion might reflect this side in her. In contrast, the story of the upbringing of her younger brother might fit in with the first, conformist, side.

Sharon said: "and we three girls - we simply took the motherly role in the house and brought up my little brother...and my brother is the crowning glory (laughs); he is the jewel in the crown of this family and part of the reason for this is that my mother really loved him." The

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

girls "strictly kept the house exactly as [their] mother liked it, in the way we cleaned and in the way we behaved". The brother was the reason to keep things static, routine: "he wouldn't allow anything different...he would not do without the traditional Yemenite food for even one Saturday". Sharon repeatedly uses the word "protect" when she refers to her brother and said the girls "wrapped cotton wool around him". Presumably, through the upbringing of the brother, the daughters kept alive that part of their mother that was protective and caring, thus actively re-membering the soft and motherly role. By re-membering her mother's motherly role, Sharon conformed to the conformist side of her mother.

In contrast, the story of turning away from religion stands out in its individualistic and rebellious nature. The "religious revolution" that happened in the family after the mother's death is very much connected with her death. It is hard to tell whether the way the mother died eventually made her children stop believing, or whether the mother's absence, took the 'vitality' out of religious observance. However, by turning away from religion, even if considered as a form of re-membering the mother's individualistic side, Sharon may feel inwardly torn.

Therefore, there seems to be an inner conflict, between the two sides of her mother's inner representation, as displayed in her own self-narrative. It was thus interesting to discover, that there was yet a third way in which Sharon re-membered her mother specifically when struggling with identity issues and loneliness. This was her mother's encouragement of her artistic side when she was a child and the way Sharon developed it at certain times in life after her mother had passed on.

Sharon's favorite childhood memories of her mother were presented as followed: "She [the mother] was a teacher of fifth and sixth graders. And when I was about that age, she used to take me to all sorts of evenings in which an organ player was needed...or when she started to

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

decorate the class before the beginning of the school year, so I have an artistic touch, so she always promoted this and loved this..." Along with the music and decorations, another memory Sharon presented was that of joint visits to the market and of cooking together. She remembered all the colors and the smells from these special days.

Part of the reason these memories of shared creativity have become cherished, is because they represented something different and unique. For one, in them, Sharon is differentiated from her sisters for having a certain quality that her mother had recognized and encouraged. Secondly, all these memories are very sensory by nature. However, what is mostly interesting is the way Sharon turned to these memories and re-membered this special; "good" part of the mother-daughter bond at certain times in her life.

She said that at the time that her family was torn apart after her father remarried, she actively developed her creative talents. At other hard moments of loneliness and longing she experienced during high school, she developed her musical skills. It seems that during these times, the 'membership' of the mother, or more specifically, the part of their creative bond, was 'upgraded'. It was given a special privileged place, in contrast with what was happening with Sharon's other 'club of life members' (White, 1997). After his second marriage, her father drifted away to form a new relationship, physically and emotionally. In contrast to his 'downgraded' membership, Sharon 're-membered' her unique and cherished bond with her mother. In a similar way, during the high schools years Sharon felt lonely and jealous of the other girls. Again, she turned and actively re-membered her mother's encouragement of her creative side and developed it: "[these creative] things that were at the beginning [at the time she was alive], I really-really fostered them".

To summarize, Sharon stressed the contradicting features of her relationship with her mother before as well as after her death. The three aspects of their ongoing relationship, of being like

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

(conforming), turning against (individualizing), and of the creative aspect, all point to her own identity formation process. It is quite apparent in her story how much she needed her mother's help in her quest for her preferred identity, her prime psychological need at the time the interview took place. The mother's image and story were being re-visited in order to better understand who she was and what she wanted in life.

The tension between two contradicting sides in the parent's story was also depicted by Danny. However while Danny chose "not to know" one side of his father's life story, Sharon tried to develop a third side that she re-membered from the mother-daughter bond. This third, "preferred" or "good" part of the mother-daughter bond may exemplify how "re-membering practices" may lessen the sense of isolation and give strength and courage to mourners at difficult times (White, 1997). It may also exemplify what Hedtke and Winslade (2004) try to foster when engaging in "re-membering conversations" with bereaved families.

In contrast to Sharon, Maya re-tells her relationship with her mother in a way that solely centers on her self-image of a cherished and loving daughter. In the way she actively re-membered the protection and care of her mother at different moments in her life, she actually kept their relationship pattern completely static.

### **Maya's story – "A Child of Diamonds"**

While Sharon lost her mother at the age of 13, Maya lost her mother at the younger age of nine. Her mother died of cancer after three years of illness. In contrast to the lively and dynamic nature of the life story of Sharon's mother, as recounted by her daughter, Maya portrayed a minimalist story of a brief biography that stated major facts and life events. Maya's mother's life story revolved around her wish to bring children to the world. She told her story as if the mother's life preceding that pregnancy had been empty, and giving birth to Maya was what improved it. The most detailed part of Maya's narration centered on the theme

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

"a child of diamonds", a term that Maya's mother coined. When interviewed for a radio talk show during her pregnancy she said she would call the child to be born "a child of diamonds". And so, accordingly, they changed the name of the radio program to this name. It is this "child of diamonds" (Maya was one of the first test-tube babies in Israel), that I have found the most significant theme in Maya's story.

Maya has recently gotten married and works in a day-care center with children who were taken out of their homes. In this context she said: "Every person that takes a meaningful place in my life, I immediately tell him about what happened to me with my mother and about my mother, because it's like, I feel it is **a part of me**. And as long as he doesn't know it, he, in a sense does not know me." I think that in this statement Maya emphasized the ongoing presence of the mother as a crucial part of her feeling complete, secure and whole. Her conception story captures Maya's feeling of being the mother's diamond. The feeling is that the mother waited so long for her arrival and that when she was born - it was an amazing thing that happened to her. In this story, Maya narrated her feeling of being loved and cherished but also of "her side" of the relationship, in which she enabled the mother to bestow these feelings on her.

Similarly, the main point of view through which Maya described her relationship with her mother, before and after her death, is the exclusiveness of that relationship. By exclusiveness I mean that besides being unique and special to the mother, she was also the first and foremost guardian of the mother's memory. The exclusiveness of the mother's memories appeared very strongly when she talked about her younger brother, who turned to her for the memories of the mother. Referring to her father she said: "...I always **am** his memory [of her]" which means that she is the main representative of her dead mother in his life, too. She mentioned that many people say that they look alike; she also resembles her mother in her laugh, her

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

smile and her joy of life. In those instances, the distinction between the mother and herself has been eliminated.

Maya gave an example of this - a story about a job interview she had, in which she competed with other candidates: "When I asked the interviewer why she had picked me and not the other women, she said that I had been smiling all the time; during the entire interview I was smiling and laughing...and so I always connect it with my mother." In her understanding, it was the joyful qualities she has (or shared) with her mother that enabled her to win the job and generally succeed in life.

Maya's story also offers an extraordinary example of a reinterpretation of a parent's life story. When she was 16 Maya had a big fight with her step-mother – S', after which she went to consult a rabbi. The rabbi told her that every man has a partner who is fated to be his mate. He told her that her father's fated partner was in fact S'. The problem was that S' was infertile, and because of that, Maya's mother's purpose in life had been to give children to her father and leave at some point, because she was not his match. Maya adopted this story, which gave a new meaning to her mother's life purpose, again emphasizing her own uniqueness to her mother. This story also gave her the legitimization to find new ways of relating to S', and maybe even to forgive her father for marrying again.

I think that the most extreme expression of the mother-daughter fusion is the reversal of the basic feature of the mother-child relationship, the first giving birth to the second. In Maya's experience, the mother stayed alive for another three years because she wanted to be with her: "It seemed like a bear hug that will not leave us and will not let us be alone..." Apparently through the "bear hug" there was a mutual nurturing between mother and daughter and an illusion of one unit, in which the mother and children give life to each other reciprocally. Therefore, their relationship was mainly characterized by mutuality – Maya gave her mother a

reason to live while her mother's mission in life had been to give life to Maya. According to what can be understood from Maya's stories, we can see this pattern continued in their relationship today: Maya referred to her mother as a live person, kept alive through her own existence and through the similarities between them.

### **Sharon and Maya – a Comparison**

A comparison between these two so different stories demonstrates that an ongoing relationship can be experienced as dynamic and ever changing (as in the case of Sharon) or as static – frozen in time (as in the case of Maya). This does not mean that in a "dynamic" relationship pattern the felt presence or significance of the parent is necessarily greater in the mourner's life. Rather, the pattern of the relationship represents the dynamic or static quality of the inner representation of the parent and may indicate what the child "needs" from the parent at the current stage in life. For Maya, the most basic need for love and protection from her mother persisted throughout life, and thus their relationship pattern did not change from the way it was experienced in childhood. In contrast, for Sharon, it seems that her "goal" in their ongoing relationship was to first understand the mother, separately from herself and then re-incorporate this knowledge into her understanding of her self. This goal entailed a dynamic and changing quality for their ongoing relationship. Nevertheless, for these two women as well as for other grieving children, this relationship remained central in life.

Another way to understand the differences between these relationship patterns is through the conceptualization of separateness and oneness of subject and object (Erllich, 2003). As I showed, Maya's most basic mode of experience of her ongoing relationship with her mother is that of oneness. In contrast, it can be claimed that Sharon's most basic mode of experience of her ongoing relationship with her mother is that of separateness. While for Maya a fusion

exists between herself and her mother's image and story, Sharon portrayed her mother as a separate and distinct being.

### **Re-membering: Separateness or Oneness?**

Both concepts, taken together, illuminate the narratives of Sharon and Maya. It seems to me that for the whole process of re-membrance to occur, both modes of experience are needed. As an example, for Sharon, re-membering the creative aspects that her mother acknowledged and encouraged in her called for experiencing her mother as a separate "member" in her life. In this there was an object (the mother) that identified and encouraged these aspects in the subject (herself). However, in order to feel these aspects as part of her life today, there was a need for the experience of oneness. These talents were no longer only external knowledge that came from the outside, but part of her own being. Sharon's evocation of childhood memories, and their incorporation into her present life, may thus call for experiencing the mother-daughter relationship in both realms of separateness (retrieving the memory) and oneness (the sense that these parts of her mother are parts of her self). In the way Maya re-membered her mother's protection and care, even in her present life, she may feel a fusion, an experience of oneness with the mother. However, the feeling of fusion still rests on childhood memories in which the mother is experienced as distinct from her and thus a constant unconscious shift to the separateness modality must be happening as well.

In these last three stories, I have shown various ways in which individuals narrate the story of their parents as well as the impact of these narrations on their own self-defining life stories. In all of them the children actively re-membered parts of the parent's image or of the child-parent bond and I suggested how this functioned as part of their self development. In Niebal's story, I would like to show that a certain form of re-membering does not always fit in with

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

one's current stage in life. This example may hint that sometimes, for the sake of the preferred development of the self, one may actually choose "not to re-member" or distance oneself from the image of the deceased and thus relinquish part of the bond.

### **Niebal's Story**

Niebal's story may serve as a negative instance for the thesis that the very continuation of the bond facilitates adjustment (Klass & Walter, 2001). She chose to relinquish the tie with her late father and moved on in her life. In terms of her self-narrative, I'd like to suggest that not keeping her father's image or memory close to her may have made it easier for her to seek her own way to growth and independence. In other words, a certain way in which she may have re-membered her father, did not fit in with her development at this stage of her life.

Niebal comes from a relatively large Islamic family residing in one of the mixed Arab-Jewish cities in the north of Israel. She is 21, the youngest daughter of seven, with four older sisters and two older brothers. Her father died of a heart attack when she was nine. During our interview, she repeatedly said that she "does not remember too much". This gave me the feeling that somehow she was afraid she fell short of my expectations by failing to give a full account of who the father was and how she kept his memory alive. "I've never felt that there is something that is really, really missing...In almost everything I have chosen to disengage and move on" were her words when describing the years after his death. She attributed this feeling either to the fact that she "was too young [when he died]" or that she had gotten "used to it".

Niebal's story seemed to exemplify the pattern of 'successful grieving' as it is presented in traditional grief literature. That is, her father had been metabolized in some way in her and not resembled a living presence for her. Similar to Maya, her memories of him are of being a prized child who was the youngest, in need of care, protection and pampering. However, this self-image of being protected and cared for, given her current developmental stage, was one

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

that she may now try to transcend. Furthermore, her father may still be a strong presence in her family and to some extent, some of his parental style, being conservative and strict, jeopardized her wishes for leaving the traditional way of life.

One of the most striking facts about Niebal's story was that, throughout the interview she constructed her father's image as well as her relationship with him through the stories and reminiscences of others in her family. Her own knowledge about her father was repeatedly being questioned, and in various ways she said that she does not know or remember: "Mother always tells me how he was helping me with homework and things, but I don't remember anything - really anything".

This failure to remember gave rise to a feeling of guilt. She apologized to me, the interviewer, for not being able to present a fuller account of her memories, and of who her father was. Likewise, she mislaid two significant mementos - symbolic presences of her father. One was his last video tape from her sister's wedding and the second, a key chain with a small photo of her father: "All of us have a key chain with a photo of my father and I can't find where it is; I need to look for it". I think that these last two examples, exemplify the underlying theme in Niebal's story about her father: "distancing the memory".

When I reflected on the range of feeling that I had experienced when listening and reading Niebal's interview, I found that I too, have been feeling a tension between bringing my father's memory closer to my current life, and between distancing it. I lost my father when I was 13 and throughout the years that have passed I realized that indeed I tried to re-member him into my life in various ways, but at other times, I have also found that I was better off when distancing his memory. So I tried to understand why at the current stage in her life, it was better for Niebal, not to experience her father as a dominant member in her 'club of life'. This question may be answered through an examination of her own self-narrative, in

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

comparison with the father's image in her family and his relationship with her when she was a child.

Niebal is the youngest daughter in her family, born when her father was relatively old. Her most cherished and memorable events from the time that the father was alive were about accompanying him on house calls he made to people's homes, fixing washing machines and other devices at their houses. In contrast to portraying the father's memory as constructed by others, discussed earlier, the "house visits" memories were told in a very personal and emotional way: "the guests there always loved me and gave me all kinds of chocolates... [and] he always bragged 'I have a small daughter' and I really enjoyed every minute... This is my clearest memory". Niebal's clearest memory, so different from other blurred memories of her father, was of being together with him, loved and admired for being his youngest.

However, she said that today she was still treated as "the youngest" and "the fragile" one at home: "...and even today, when I am 21 and a half, they still treat me as 'the youngest', the one to be looked after, and to be sent food to and all sorts of things like that." This may conflict with the way she wishes to see her self today. Niebal has chosen to move away from her home town and family and make the courageous effort to come and study in Jerusalem: "...and I deliberately chose to come and study in Jerusalem only for this reason, like, not to be dependent upon my family..."

It may be that Niebal's father's presence in her life, not only in the physical sense, but also in a re-membered sense, may have made it more difficult for her to develop in the direction she chose: "and I don't think that if my father were with us, I don't think he would allow me to come to Jerusalem". Thus, this certain way of re-membering her father and her childhood interactions with him, may put her "back" to the position of being her father's youngest, with its implication of her self-image being small and fragile.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

Apart from the pattern of the relationship with her father as his youngest, the father's parental style, as being strict and conservative on family matters or women's place in society, may have additionally been in conflict with Niebal's developing self: "I don't really remember this, but I know from my sisters that my father was strict. Not too strict. He was conservative, so yes, I don't think he would have allowed me to come [to Jerusalem]. And my sister always reminds me and says that if my father were still with us he wouldn't approve". It seems that "knowing" or "remembering" her father a conservative and strict person may have again endangered her striving for growth and independence. Leaving his character to an outsider's knowledge, that of her mother or her sister, may ease the sensed conflict between her father's wishes and her chosen way of life.

A good example of this conflict between what her father would have wanted for her, and what she herself wants, is her story about wanting to get a tattoo: "I first consulted my mother and she, of course, categorically refused...according to our tradition this is really not done; so she [the mother] used the argument of 'customs' and said that according to our [Islamic] religion it is forbidden, and in the Koraa'n it is written that it's forbidden...(sigh) then the issue of my father was brought up and she [the mother] also told me, that my father wouldn't even have considered...saying 'yes', and also my sister said [the same], but I think I intentionally chose not to listen because in this way it is easier". Eventually, Niebal did choose "not to listen", went ahead and got the tattoo.

Thus, this certain way of re-membering her father may call upon parts of Niebal's self that are connected with being small, fragile and his "youngest". Secondly, her father's image as a strict or conservative person portray him as disapproving of her moves away from home or of her modern life style in Jerusalem. Thus, for Niebal, keeping a lively ongoing relationship with her father in this particular way may lead to a felt conflict between the preferred independent

development of her self, and the feeling of an "over-sensitive" and fragile little daughter. Apparently, by distancing herself from her memory of the father or, even, by choosing to ignore what her father might have wanted to tell her she succeeded in fulfilling her dream of studying in the university and seeking to find her own preferred identity.

### **Niebal, Maya, Sharon, Danny and Others**

Niebal's choice "not to re-member" may remind us of Danny who chose "not to know" certain aspects of his father's story. I'd like to suggest that they both described this happening because of a sensed conflict that had arisen with the development of their self. Sharon was similarly trying to foster a part of her relationship with her mother that was conflict free in order to cope with contradicting features in her mother's image. Maya re-interpreted her mother's life story in a way that would fit in with the dominant way she wanted to go on remembering her. I think all these stories show that the way people re-member their lost loved ones may change over time according to their changing psychological needs. Sometimes their need is actually not to re-member or partly to relinquish the bond. Therefore I think that the continuing bond phenomenon, at least in children, may be a function of a developmental need. Survivors may keep alive, through recounting the deceased's life story, complex representations of the deceased. From these representations they may choose what to draw or not draw on at different stages in their lives. This is how I also understand the dialectic between "letting go" and "continuing bonds" in the interviewees' subjective experience.

Therefore, I would like to suggest that when listening to stories of bereaved individuals, one may need to be attuned not only to what a mourner may wish to re-member but also to what aspects and why he chooses not to re-member. I think that the four stories above show that this process may only be understood within the context of the ongoing relationship and in light of the current psychological need of the survivor.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

Recent decades have witnessed a revolution in bereavement theory, calling into question time-honored formulations of grief predicated on presumably universal symptoms or stages (Neimeyer, 2005). Joining leading grief theorists who are now emphasizing that there is no one universal way to grieve, I'd like to add that there is no one way to re-member. Indeed, there may be a certain dominant way in which a deceased might be re-membered and this dominant way may fit or may not fit in with a certain stage in the mourner's life. However, I believe that these last four narratives demonstrate that life is indeed multi-storied (White, 1997) and that there always exists a new way to re-member.

### **Concluding Remarks**

"Ongoing relationships", as a framework of listening and thinking about mourners, even years after their actual loss, is quite different from the still dominant Western view of "saying goodbye" as it is portrayed in popular psychology textbooks and social conventions (Stroebe et al., 1992). Taking the perspective of an ongoing relationships helped me describe how these individuals feel their parents' presence at different periods or events in their life and their manifold reactions to what they imagine their parents' attitude might have been.

Stroebe and Schut (2005) reviewing the continuing-breaking bonds controversy, concluded that it was not possible to determine whether the continuation or the relinquishment of the bond was generally helpful. I did not try to determine which furthered adjustment more but I do argue that grieving individuals in general may always strive for a 'right' balance between the two. I also hold the view that even if a continued sense of the deceased implies some sort of inner denial of his absence, this need not be regarded as a pathological grief reaction. The 'club of life' metaphor and the notion that lost others can be re-membered into the life of the mourner, can enrich the mourner's self-narrative and enhance his self perception. I suggested that when listening to survivors we have to be very sensitive to the various ways in which a

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

lost other is re-membered and ask ourselves whether this fits in with the survivor's development at the current stage of his or her life.

If one chooses to regard relationships with deceased members as possessing the qualities of a 'real' relationship, one has to be aware of the manifold forms that this relationship may take. A relationship with the deceased can be invigorating and meaningful, but at the same time frustrating and confusing. Both possibilities were shown within the analyses of the ongoing relationships in this chapter. Given the fact that the lost member was a parent, it was not always simple to define where the inner representation of the parent ends, and the self perception of the child begins. Thus, within this certain sub-group, the implication of continued relationships as presenting an inner dialogue between different aspects of the child's self, is highly important. I referred to this duality as experiences of separateness from and oneness with the parental object.

The ongoing relationship was intimately linked to the mourner's self-narrative (Neimeyer, 2004) and the current stage of the development of his or her self. It also seemed that these post-loss self-narratives showed high complexity and displayed multiple representations of self and other. It would have been interesting to investigate if the task of meaning reconstruction in response to the loss actually contributed to this narrative complexity (Neimeyer, 2005). In addition, the different relationship patterns that had arisen from my analysis clearly had links to the attachment histories of these individuals (Bowlby, 1980). A great deal of work has been done in recent years linking attachment theory and continuing bonds following bereavement (e.g. Stroebe & Schut, 2005). It would be interesting to find out whether these individuals' attachment histories shed light on the way they recounted their parents' life stories and on what they chose to re-member from their stories.

## Ongoing Relationships with a Lost Parent

As I came closer to these people's losses, I also came to gain a better understanding of my own personal grief. Through a process of finding new reference points and identification, I came to acknowledge my own ongoing relationship with my late father and to deconstruct previous assumptions about my own story. I found that this was both an educational and a healing experience for me. Looking at the harsh reality of our daily life, which unfortunately is fraught by death and loss, I hope that learning about the different ways in which people conduct an ongoing relationship with a lost loved one can serve others. This may help broaden the academic discussion about ongoing relationships but can also serve as a guideline, especially for therapists, in their journey to help their clients find new ways to re-member their lost loved ones and strike the right balance between continuing the bond and letting it go.

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