

CHILDREN'S VOICES ON BEREAVEMENT AND LOSS

by

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ABSTRACT

In South Africa the death of a significant caregiver is a haunting possibility. Violence, crime, road accidents, HIV/AIDS, cancer, diabetes and substance abuse are household words that describe some of the causes of "untimely deaths" of parents who still have young, school-going children. These children carry their bereavement with them to school. The challenge of standing with them lies not only with their caregivers, but also with staff and children in our school community. In co-authoring conversations with children in our school who have experienced bereavement and loss, this qualitative study used research as co-search to uncover children's preferred knowledges and spiritualities about coping, hope, care and communities of concern. This study used therapy-as-research and participatory action research-as-therapy in what developed into a network of caring communities for the participants, caregivers and therapist.

KEY TERMS

Bereavement and loss; Children's voices; Narrative pastoral therapy; Co-author; Co-search; Co-create; Story books; Children's preferred knowledges and spiritualities; Therapy-as-research; Participatory action research-as-therapy; Co-creating communities of care

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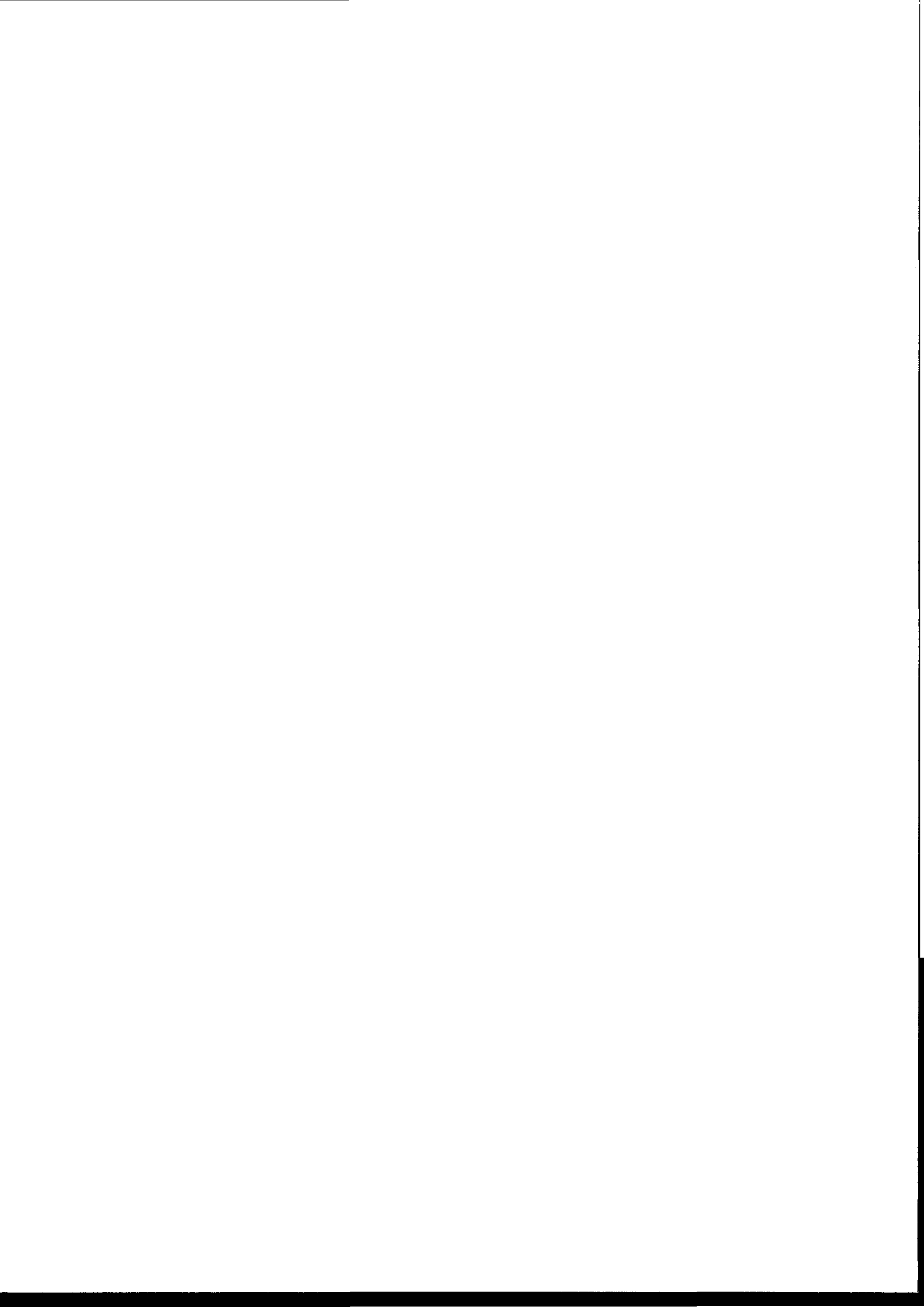
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CHAPTER ONE

THE RESEARCH

As background to this study, I drew on my experiences as mother, educator and counsellor in a small private school community in a South African city. I have found the feminist stance of "the personal is the political" (Wilma Jakobsen 1994:151) applicable in this regard. Being an educator in South Africa in the year 2002 has involved, among many other challenging things, having to face the reality of working with children of all ages, who have suffered bereavement and loss of significant people in their lives.

1.1 Inspiration to the study

Prior to giving this topic much thought, I would probably have told you that, until a few years ago, my experience with bereavement and loss had followed a fairly limited path in terms of my personal life. However, in writing up this research, I have come to realise that bereavement and loss have been present in my immediate family since shortly before my birth. Just before my mother conceived me, she gave birth to a sister who was born at six months, and who died shortly after her birth. As a child, I recall my father talking of the tiny coffin in which she was buried. Apart from that, there was no inclusion of her short life in our family tradition. When I was about eight, my paternal grandfather died. I recall few of the details surrounding this, other than a sense of my own excitement to be able to have some interesting "news" to tell to my schoolmates the following day during news ring. I did not attend the funeral and little was kept of his memory, other than that he had suffered from some form of mysterious "illness" which had caused him to behave in a remote and unconnected way. My beloved maternal grandfather died when I was in my late teens. I recall a lot of sadness surrounding his death, but as he had been a "heart-sufferer", there was a sense of acceptance of his death. He was seventy-five and his passing was made easier by the fact that he was regarded to have lived a "full life". His memory lived on in the minds of the Graaff-Reinet community where he had spent his life. My grandmother still referred to herself as "Mrs John Brodie" for the twenty years that she remained in Graaff-Reinet following his death. My paternal grandmother died a few years later. Her eighty-seven years allowed for a sad, but somewhat joyous funeral. She too, had lived a "full life" and there were many warm anecdotes to keep her memory with us. My father died two years ago, following a sickly final five years of his life. Although his death came swiftly and unexpectedly three days after Christmas most of the remaining family considered that he had had the opportunity for a "full life": he was seventy-one years old at the time of his death. His relationship with alcohol and his resultant diabetes had led to a separation of his life from the rest of the family for a number of years. It had also meant that he had not been in good health during his final years. There was a greater sense of acceptance of his death in this light. In remembering him, there has been a tendency to speak more of the times when he was actively involved with the rest of the family and with society. These preferred memories reconnect me with the time before my parents' divorce and his final eight years of life. My young sons

paid tribute to him by performing a puppet show for him after he had died. Their memory of my father is of a kind, gentle old man, who would graciously sit through an hour of amateur puppeteering and who would smile warmly at their jokes. I choose to hold on to this memory of his life too, as it helps me to remember him in a way that I now prefer. A year ago, my beloved maternal grandmother died at the age of ninety-five. Her life had been filled with many friendships, love, laughter and joy. Many people, both young and old, travelled great distances across our country to attend her funeral. It was marked by the presence of some people from Othered racial groups in the old apartheid government, paying tribute to the stand she took to acknowledge all people as being people, despite the political persuasions of the time. My own sadness and longing for my wonderful grandmother I had managed, thankfully, to address in a letter that I wrote in her memory about a year before her death. In this letter, I acknowledged the meaning that she had brought to my life. Although she was no longer able to communicate her response at the time, I felt comforted in having sent the words to her and in the knowledge that the words had been carefully read to her by her caregiver in the retirement home. The deaths of all these people, save that of my infant sister, were deaths that Walsh and McGoldrick (1991:31) would refer to as "timely losses".

Three years before starting this research, my head teacher, colleague and friend, died suddenly. She was in her early 40's. Her "untimely death" (Welch 1990:127; McGoldrick & Walsh 1991:31) caused multiple shockwaves, some of which continue to this day. It was the effect of Jenny Mallett's death and, as became more evident to me over time, the effect of her life on my life, that was possibly the single most significant reason that brought me to the point of proposing research on *Children's Voices on Bereavement and Loss*. When Jenny Mallett died on a Saturday morning, following a scuba diving course, the rest of the school community was catapulted into a new world: an unthinkable life without Jenny Mallett. All Sunday, staff from our Prep School arrived at my home, just for the sense of being together. We sat, largely speechless, shedding no tears - a candle burned throughout. When we returned to school on the Monday morning, there was evidence of a school in shock and in deep mourning. The staff gathered earlier than usual. We were officially told who would be taking over her duties. We were numb. Children walked into the school grounds, bearing bunches of flowers and candles. Counsellors from her faithful Life Line group were available to help us with the process of informing the children and with counselling the staff where necessary. There was advice available as to how to speak with the children: speak to them in small class groups, rather than "en masse" in the school hall. I recall a decision being made by head teachers that we should only meet in small groups for fear of "mass hysteria" if we spoke to the children in too large a group. In the group that I joined for the task of speaking to the children, an eight year old said: "We in Grade 3 are so lucky. We, at least, have had the chance of knowing Miss Mallett." It was at that point that I connected for the first time with what has become, for me, a series of connections: the enormity of the life and meaning of this one person's life in the lives of

others. Rather like the enormous photograph of her gentle face that remained in our foyer amidst masses of flowers, candles and letters from children - the person of Jenny Mallett has almost refused to be forgotten.

Looking back at that time, I also remembered that there were various ceremonies to celebrate her life and for open or public grieving. I wondered, however, how many of those ceremonies offered the children sufficient opportunity to grieve in their own ways. It was almost as if it was assumed that, once the ceremonies were over, that we should move on with our lives as quickly as possible. New "management" was put in place quickly, but the sweeping clean of memories felt jarring to me. However, being able to find my own way of remembering her and being offered many opportunities for conversations with people about the effects of her death on their lives, possibly helped me, more than many others, to learn to live with the enormous gap left by Jenny's death. There are children, now in the senior part of the school, who still attribute as the most meaningful part of their school lives their experience of knowing Miss Mallett.

In the past, discourses around "expert knowledge" and "professional counsellors and therapists" had had the effect of making me query whether I was someone with sufficient "expert knowledge" about matters surrounding death, dying, loss and bereavement. As I understand it, many of my colleagues encountered similar misgivings. In a school system such as ours, the general (unwritten) understanding had always been that matters of this nature should be the responsibility of the families of the children concerned. There was (and still is) no official position for a school counsellor at our school. Any counselling that had happened to date had been undertaken by teachers who had had more interest in participating in conversations of this nature. Jenny's own interest in, and dedication to, Life Line resulted in her being unofficially appointed as the school's counsellor. However, her sudden death allowed neither the time nor the infrastructure to send every affected person to an "outside professional" for specialised counselling. Jenny's love for swimming could be used in an ironic analogy here. It was almost as if, in her sudden and untimely death, she was saying to all would-be counsellors (like myself): "Now you must sink...or swim!" I chose to try to keep afloat - a choice which became more and more necessary as people, who would usually have knocked on Jenny's door for conversation and counselling, started to trust me with the difficult things in their lives. I thus attribute the first steps I took toward my current studies to become a Narrative Pastoral Therapist to Jenny's death.

Other "untimely losses" have happened in our school community over the five years that I have taught there. These deaths include the deaths of parents, of close family members and of friends of children at our school. Lives have been lost to murders, car accidents, other accidents and devastating illnesses. Through witnessing the effects of these deaths on family structures, particularly in terms of who took up the care of the children and families who remained, I began to question how our school community could support these families in

their lives and in their grief. I took the position that it was our responsibility as a school community to stand with all of the members of this community in facing the effects of the deaths of significant people in our lives. I also took the position that in looking for "outside professional expertise" only, we were denying our children and our school community the opportunity of standing together in community against the isolation and silencing effects of bereavement and loss.

Last year, during my practical casework for this degree, I participated in two situations of journeying with children who were deeply affected by the sadness brought by the deaths of their respective grandmothers. I was referred by my supervisor to the chapter written by Jane Waldegrave (1999:173-192) entitled *Towards 'settled stories': Working with children when a child or parent dies in a family*. This profoundly moving piece of work stood with me, making me bold enough to take my first steps in participating with children who were experiencing grief. I took Waldegrave's (1999:177) words with me as I gingerly started co-authoring stories and letters that I hoped would help towards their experiencing "something starting to settle within." In co-authoring these more "settled stories" with these children, I became aware of ways of helping them in "finding ways to live with the death" rather than expecting to help them in "getting over the death", or even "coming to terms with the death" (1999:179).

Michael White (1998:7-11) uses the "saying hullo" metaphor in work with Mary and with John, as captured in his article entitled *Saying hullo again: The incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief*. White (1998:7) started to explore the "saying hullo" metaphor as an alternative metaphor to "saying goodbye", a metaphor regularly used in "treatments that have been oriented by the 'normative' and taken-for-granted model of the grief process." In meeting with people referred to him for further "grief work", he met people who had not managed to "say goodbye" and who had thus been "diagnosed elsewhere as suffering from delayed grief or pathological mourning (: 7). White (1998:8) thus explored the alternative of posing questions that could:

[M]ore effectively assist persons in the repositioning of themselves in relation to the death of a loved one, a repositioning that would bring the relief so strongly desired.

White has applied the "saying hullo" metaphor to a variety of situations and includes a number of different types of questions. The "experience of experience" questions are designed to help clients to:

[I]nvite a recounting of what they perceive to be the deceased person's positive experience of them....In this recounting, a re-experience of past selves was triggered off. Various lost or forgotten knowledges of self seemed to become available for persons to express...the success of this task provides us with a sense of continuity and meaning in our lives.

(White 1998:9)

This letter is an example of a "saying hullo" letter that Kaylin and I co-authored. It is written to her granny, who was her primary caregiver at the time of her death. I have included some of my case notes written to my supervisor, which provide some context.

To my supervisor:

Dear Elize

Kaylin is about eleven years old. Her maternal granny and acting mother (primary caregiver) died three years ago. Kaylin is new to the school, having left her previous school "because the teachers were hitting us." She has a biological mother (Venetia) who lives in Paris (France!), whose husband seems to be supporting Kaylin's schooling at a private school. The rest of her family lives in Cape Town. She is under the guardianship of her mother's brother and sister (Caroline and Walter), who seem to be in their 20's. I would think that coming to our school has been quite an adjustment for her on many levels, particularly from the point of view that she has, until now, been living in a socio-economically deprived area. However, she seems to be managing well and is well liked by the teachers and children. She is such a dear, gentle child and my heart goes out to her as she handles herself, her grief and adapting to our school so graciously. I suspect that she has inherited some of her granny's special qualities...as you will read.

She seems to have found this process very comforting and keeps this letter for re-reading when she needs it. She has chosen to share it with her uncle and aunt, who have said that it is "a very nice letter." I have suggested to her that they too might want to write a letter to their mommy (her granny) for her to keep in a special place. I am not sure what she will do with that idea.

I invited her to do a letter to her gran when I discovered her crying at school, and found out from her that she was feeling upset as it was nearing Mother's Day, and her granny had died on 11 May (the day before Mother's Day.)

To Kaylin's granny:

Dear Hilda Margaret Smit

I have been thinking about you such a lot this month, especially because you died this month. It is three years since you died. You died on the 11th of May 1998. It is the same day as Jason's crown birthday. You were in hospital before Mother's Day, because you came home the day before Mother's Day. You died at 7o'clock, but you did not want anyone to come with you to the hospital. You told Caroline and Walter to stay at home. They didn't know why you said that, but I think that you didn't want anyone to see you die, because that would make it even sadder for them.

At first I used to think that you would come back, but now I just wish that you could come back. I know that when I die I will go to you. That helps me to feel less sad. You left all the children something. You left Jason and Jordan R500 each. You left Jane two butterfly earrings and a chain. You left Andrea a rosary chain with Mary on it and a pin that you put in your jacket. You left Kitty a brooch with pink stones that sparkle in the sun and earrings. For me you left a dolphin brooch and two pairs of green earrings and a green chain. They will fit with Venetia's green engagement ring. Venetia is keeping all the things safe for me for when I am big. All of the things you left me are with Venetia in a safe place in France.

Last night I had a dream about you. I woke up feeling sad and upset. Later in the day I thought about what you would be telling me to do. I knew that you would tell me to go into the class to do my work. You said I must BECOME SOMETHING GOOD IN LIFE. I remembered that and that I want to become a nuclear physicist. I thought that I must work hard to become a nuclear physicist, because I would like to travel a lot. I thought that an accountant travels, but my aunt told me that no, an accountant doesn't travel, but my step-daddy, Pierre, is a nuclear physicist and he travels to Abu Dhabi and America and Asia and Israel. He travels around the world and I think that to travel like that is fun.

You have taught me to be good and not nasty. You have taught me everything good.

I love you and I always will.

*From
Kaylin*

A different approach to the "saying hullo" metaphor is illustrated in the books co-authored (see 1.7.5.3) with Matthew, entitled "Nana – A collection of favourite memories..." and "Antidotes to Sadness – Prescribed by the Sadness Doctors", respectively (see Chapter 4). Although not as a result of our conversations, Matthew's family had participated in the last days of his granny's life by spending time with her at her bedside, talking with her, reading to her and being with her. She lived in the same home as Matthew, his mum, dad, brother and sister. Matthew and his cousins were given time to spend at home with the adults in the family during these days approaching her death. On the days that Matthew came to school during this time and continuing after her death, he and I worked at producing a memory book as a record of some of his favourite memories of his granny's life and the meaning that her life held for him. Contrary to what might be expected in bereavement counselling, it was a time for much laughter, fun and joy. Although deep sadness was there too, I had a sense that Matthew's family legacy of a joy for living is attributed to the memory of this very special grandmother. I have included his final page, a tribute to his granny, which he dictates, using me as the scribe:

Special thanks go to Dorothy May Head, who died recently. She taught me, Matthew Thomas Davies, how to keep good memories of her. She showed me that it is very very important to have a good laugh and to be brave and full of fun and naughty stories and songs. I want to say THANK YOU to my Nana...I am very very very very very very very and a million verys more proud of you.

*Love
Matthew*

And closer to home - grandsons and grandfathers in relationship:

Both grandfathers of my two sons (now aged eight and nine), have died in the past three years. When my own father died, my children were very upset on the Wednesday evening that he would usually have visited our home. It was their tradition to do a puppet show for him. Being elderly and fairly frail, he did not seem to mind sitting through the intricacies of a story concocted by five and six year old boys, as they were then. When he arrived, we would be called to their bedroom and they would ascend the staircase and, from their

“stage”, would launch into a long show. After a while, the other adults would make excuses to leave the room, but my father would sit there from beginning to end – a gentle glint of appreciation in his eyes. When my father died, the children insisted on holding a puppet show for him in any case. They were convinced that he would still be able to appreciate it, as his spirit was in heaven and so he could still watch. They held the puppet show and the adults in the home sat and watched and sometimes participated. It was a joyous celebration with much laughter and tears and a fitting farewell.

When my father-in-law died recently. Only my husband attended his funeral, as it was far away. My younger son became quite desperate at the thought and kept insisting that he had to attend the funeral. After realising that this would not be possible, he then begged us to have the funeral video-taped (as would usually be the practice at weddings and more joyful ceremonies). When it occurred to me to ask him what was upsetting him, he said: “I want to get to the funeral before his soul goes to heaven.”

1.2 Need for and significance of the study

In our South African society, with the ever-increasing possibility of untimely deaths owing to crime, accidents, HIV-Aids related illnesses, poverty and stress, I believe that the more we understand about what helps children to reach “settled stories”, the more we may equip ourselves to offer meaningful opportunities for healing and hope, so as to take a stand against the challenges of our times. Anderson and Johnson (1994:99) say that:

Our children are looking for a reason to hope. They wait expectantly to see evidence of hope in the adults who care for them. It is important for the sake of children that communities remain hopeful without denying their struggles to survive or be safe.

If we consult children on what brings hope during times of bereavement and loss, their voices may in turn offer support to their adult caregivers and other people (adults and children) in their communities. This may effectively help people to hold onto hope and even, as David Epston (Workshop: Putting the narrative into narrative therapy, Cape Town, 16 & 17 August 2002) put it, to develop a “Theology of Hope”. In a recent workshop held in Cape Town, Epston spoke of searching for the “guardians” or the “safekeepers of the hoping”. This research topic was chosen in this spirit: to “co-search” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:10) with children for the “safekeepers of their hoping” (Epston 2002) during times of bereavement and loss.

It had been my experience based on the schools I had attended and where I had taught (ten in total), that most did not employ specialist counsellors who dealt with matters surrounding bereavement and loss. Most of these schools relied on teachers who were bold enough to venture into roles of being lay-psychologists, or,

if families were able to pay, on the expertise of **adult** "outside professionals". It was my hope that, by finding out from children more about what moved them towards "settledness" (Waldegrave 1999:177) and away from feeling "unsettled and troubled" (: 176), our school community - *teachers, parents and children* - would feel better equipped to venture on our own journeys of standing with people who have to deal with the effects of death, bereavement and loss on their lives.

Robert Coles (1990:xvi), psychiatrist and Harvard professor, in his book, *The Spiritual Lives of Children*, describes "children as seekers, as young pilgrims well aware that life is a finite journey and as anxious to make sense of it as those of us who are farther along in the time allotted us." His extensive research into the spiritual lives of children stretches across the world from America to Africa (even South Africa) to Europe and the Middle East. His research includes the voices of children from Christian, Islamic, Jewish and secular backgrounds. In all of this he finds wisdoms of children which stretch us beyond "our notions of what a child is able to understand" (: 23) to the conclusion that:

[W]e connect with one another, move in and out of one another's lives, teach and heal and affirm one another, across space and time – all of us wanderers, explorers, adventurers, stragglers and rambler, sometimes tramps or vagabonds, even fugitives, but now and then pilgrims: as children, as parents, as old ones about to take that final step, to enter that territory whose character none of us here ever knows. Yet how young we are when we start wondering about it all, the nature of the journey and of the final destination.

(Coles 1990:335)

In the study that follows, it was my hope that through the conversations with these children from South Africa who face the reality that even the "not-so-old ones" may have to "take that final step", we might strengthen and broaden the community of care. This study would hopefully open possibilities in such a way as to encourage children, teachers and caregivers that it is possible *for everyone* to "do pastoral care" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7).

This study hoped to open up the conversations to include children's voices in such a way as to work towards "a participatory way of doing spirituality" (2001:6) in our school community. I agree with Kotzé and Kotzé (: 7) that there is a need to move "towards care as a social practice where care is socially constructed by caregivers as well as care receivers" and that we need to "go beyond the luxury of merely **thinking** commitments, to **doing** commitments" (Kotzé & Kotzé: 5).

1.3 Research curiosity

I was curious about new possibilities for adults to learn from children with regard to "children's solution

knowledges" (White 2000:21) in coping with bereavement and loss. I undertook to answer the following questions:

- **Can adults learn anything hopeful from children about coping with the troubled times of bereavement and loss?**
- **How does children's spirituality contribute to their coping with bereavement and loss?**

1.4 Preliminary ideas

By opening up the conversation to children, I hoped to offer adults the opportunity listen to what children had to say. By doing so, I hoped to suggest that adults can learn from children if they listen to them. I tried to use all available opportunities:

- to explore socially and culturally constructed *discourses* about bereavement and loss and how these might or might not influence children's meaning making.
- to explore the *metaphors and stories* influencing children's relationships with bereavement and loss.
- to explore the personal *spiritual beliefs* of the children as regards their relationship with their loved ones after death.

1.5 Purpose of the study

I wanted to invite the *children, parents and teachers* in the school community to question the idea that there is a single "right way" in which to approach bereavement and loss. Jane Waldegrave's experience tells us that:

Ideas and metaphors of 'detachment' encourage children and families who are 'grieving' to move through particular stages (i.e., disbelief, anger, depression, sadness, acceptance) in order to get to a point where their grief is 'resolved' and they have accepted that the relationship is gone. To 'resolve' their grief they are encouraged to say 'good-bye' to the one who has died; to break the connection; to reach closure; to sever the bond; and to disengage from the dead person. They are invited to re-invest that connection or love in someone or something else. These notions of detachment are pervasive. They may also, as in my own experience, be extremely painful and even impossible.

(Waldegrave 1999:179)

The perspective that Waldegrave challenges is very much influenced by the western secular psychological approaches to bereavement and loss counselling. I hoped that in deconstructing the dominant discourses surrounding bereavement and loss, *new opportunities for developing a sense of community and mutual care* might emerge. The study - encouraged by Waldegrave's approach of working "Towards 'settled stories'" rather than "acceptance that the relationship is gone" would hopefully open opportunities for giving voice to children's understandings of what helps and works when having to face "unsettled and troubled" times.

This, I hoped, might also have the effect of helping adults to reach more “settled stories” with regard to helping the children in their care, both now and in the future. It would be my greatest wish that as many people in our school community as possible had access to “children’s solution knowledges” (White 2000:21) about what helps when facing the trying times involved in bereavement and loss. Michael White (2000:21) explains that:

Breaking from the narratives of human nature and from the associated developmental theories can open possibilities for children to be consulted about how their own solution knowledges might be applied to the events of their lives that are of a concern to their parents/caretakers.

I considered an overriding importance of this study to be one in which a greater sense of community, mutual support and care was woven into the fabric of our school community. The aim was to approach the study by co-constructing with participants their “preferred” (: 140) ways of grieving and remembering. I hoped that, by documenting stories of resistance, care, and other ways of living with bereavement and loss, there would be possibilities to make more visible the “knowledgeableness” (White 2000:141) of the children I consulted. In doing so, I hoped to challenge the frequent privileging and “imposition of global and unitary accounts of life” (: 141) and to open instead possibilities for the understanding of children’s voices. It was my hope to investigate the possibilities for using such a narrative approach to bereavement counselling in our school community.

1.6 Discursive positioning – theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

We are committed to research that will not only contribute to the transformation of our society through care with the marginalized and disadvantaged, but also address cultural discourses and societal practices that promote injustices.

(Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:viii)

Although children at traditional private schools in our country are not usually considered to be “disadvantaged” or even “marginalized”, I believe that our country, whilst having the most widely acclaimed and up to date constitution in the world, does not yet address the “hidden curriculum” as experienced in many school communities. In my current context, this “hidden curriculum” still supports the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) assumption that that which is Christian, White and of Western thinking, is ultimately the truth, the best reality, the ideal way of being. Thus, whilst the constitution of the school in written word promotes inclusivity and the equality of all families and children who attend, the beliefs and subsequent actions of many people in the community remain entrenched in discourses that still promote the superiority of the Western Christian White perspectives, or, as Gordon Mitchell of ICRSA (1993:1) puts it:

Christianity had been delivered in a **European package**. Consequently, Africans had been made to feel that their cultural and religious traditions were inferior.

I believe that the bulk of children who come from historically Othered communities, are still faced with such "cultural discourses and societal practices that promote injustices" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:viii), albeit that such injustices are subtly hidden in so-called "good intentions". In relation to the topic of bereavement and loss, such "good intentions" sometimes include applying current western discourse about "appropriate treatment for" bereavement and loss. This often amounts to what Denise Ackermann (2000:168) calls "assimilation"- the implied expectation that by coming to a traditionally White Anglican school, the children will learn to behave in a traditionally Western White Anglican way, despite the fact that many children are not from White Anglican backgrounds. Or, what is worse, that because of the awkwardness of not knowing what to say or to do, those uncomfortable-in-our-differences situations are just ignored altogether and many people live together in school communities as virtual strangers to each others' lives. Njongonkulu Ndungane (1994:193) suggests:

The quest for lasting peace in South Africa has been a major driving force behind the demand for a Bill of Rights to be enshrined in a new, democratic constitution. The history of South Africa has been a very tragic one. It has been characterised by oppression, exploitation and a denial of human rights to the vast majority of its inhabitants. In the transition from apartheid to democracy, it has become necessary to have a Bill of Rights which enshrines fundamental human rights, to enable a nation that has been torn apart to move towards greater justice.

As Ndungane (: 193) points out, however:

The effectiveness of any Bill of Rights depends largely on the existence of an independent judiciary that is capable of interpreting not only the letter but also **the spirit of the law**.

In my context, the Bill of Rights is reflected in what is known as the School Code (2002). For example, under the heading of My Rights, there is the following statement:

I have the right to be treated with respect and fairness, irrespective of my race, creed, intelligence, gender, physical prowess, language, shape, size or whether I may be in any way different from the majority.

Whilst this statement might appear to be in keeping with current ideas on children's rights in institutions like ours, it is the **spirit of the law** - the lived daily realities of children - to which I turned my focus in this research adventure. Contributing to transformation of this "hidden curriculum" is, I believe, the joint responsibility of the parents, the staff and the children who make up the school community. By researching the faith practices of children within our school community, I hoped to mobilize a new challenge – a challenge to take note not only of whether we accept and accommodate The Other in relation to what is held as some idea of norm or "the majority", but also to look at how our daily praxis could be refreshed, renewed and

enriched by challenging the very notion of “the majority” or the norm.

For example, Nokuzola Mndende (1993:27) talks of how the “descriptions and explanations of African Religion have...been largely from the vantage point of outsiders.” I would take this point further. When children from historically Othered religious and cultural groups experience bereavement and loss, I suggest that it is all too easy for outsiders (educators from Judeo-Christian and secular backgrounds) to make generalizations in terms of what is expected behaviour and meaning-making in times of bereavement and loss. In other words, when referring back to the quotation from the school code, the expectation of certain behaviour would be the privileging of the ideas of “the majority”, who are what Mndende would refer to as “outsiders”. Mndende (1993:27) says that it is “very important to balance these (descriptions and explanations of African Religion) by considering insiders’ perceptions and explanations.”

Feminist theologian, Elaine Graham (1998:138) speaks of “kitchen table theology”. Similarly, Narrative Pastoral Therapist, Nevi Basson (2001:82), speaks of “school desk theology” as a way of acknowledging that it is with local experience that feminist practical theology should start. Elaine Graham (1998:141) says that:

[C]ritical and reconstructive practical theology starts with experience, attempts to place an individual story in a social or collective context, locates the personal story in relation to the stories of faith (both historical and contemporary) and finally encourages new models of practice to blossom which embody and enact renewed visions of faith.

My practice as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist is largely informed by the writings of **feminist and contextual** theologians. From this position:

- I see the world through **feminist lenses**: “by seeking [for the children and their caregivers], healing praxis [which is] truly restorative...collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion” (Ackermann 1998:83).
- I see the world through **contextual lenses**: “by locating [my] pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities” (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1992:17).
- I see the world through **practical lenses**: by starting with experience; by having a commitment to *do* theology; by looking for opportunities to participate in all forms of care from pastoral therapy to mutual care; by caring *with* people, not for them; and by regarding children as being people who are worthy of the same respect.

I adopt and share in feminist theologian Wilma Jakobsen's (1994:157) dream of a

[T]ransformed future in which women and men [and, of course, children] live together in mutuality and interdependent partnership and community, despite the realities of the differences in race, class and gender [and, of course, age]; a future in which individuals and society work together to attain this goal; a future dream of a world of celebration, justice and equality, shared pains and burdens, mutuality and interdependence.

I therefore take a stance in line with what Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:8) refer to as

[A] participatory process in which therapists collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and negotiating ways of living in an ethical and ecologically accountable way.

Such an approach to *research as care* (see Chapter 2) is encouraged by the words of Pamela Couture (2000:47) who speaks of a "shared responsibility" in relation to children who suffer "economic poverty" and "children who are tenuously connected". In my interpretation of her words, children who are dealing with bereavement and loss might well fit both of these descriptions:

...shared responsibility means doing what we can to create better conditions for the flourishing of all children, particularly those in greatest need....In particular, we are responsible for theologically specific ways of promoting the resilience of children and children's caretakers as they seek children's flourishing, especially when children live in economic poverty and...the poverty of being tenuously connected.

(Couture 2000:47)

It is from this sense of responsibility for "theologically specific ways of promoting the resilience of children **and** children's caretakers (parents, teachers, peers) as they seek children's flourishing" that I approached this research adventure as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist. The kind of relationship described by Couture below, reflects the discursive positioning regarding power/knowledge relations that it was my intention to uphold:

Caring for godchildren, entering into their experience is the deepest kind of friendship that is possible, one that invites the mutuality of power rearrangement and is inextricably bound to our experience of God.

(Couture 2000:70)

It is my position that there are as many possible realities as there are children that I meet. One person's reality does not have to negate the reality of another's. I agree wholeheartedly with Couture's description of pastoral care, as "a one-on-one relationship with children based on respect for a child as equally worthy in the sight of God" (Couture 2000:49).

Heshusius (1994:17) adds further depth when she speaks of “a participatory consciousness” in the development of a “self-other” relationship. In meeting in the sacred place of another person’s reality, this “self-other” relationship would be “a relationship that requires an attitude of openness and receptivity to create a greater wholeness” (: 17). Such “self-other” relationships can develop during the research process, thereby making possible what Heshusius describes as a “participatory consciousness”. I understood this to indicate the occurrence of the more respectful *co-searching with* children as opposed to taking the position of the adult-expert researcher *doing research on* children.

In approaching research entitled **Children’s Voices on Bereavement and Loss**, I was mindful of what participating in these children’s lives could imply and of the responsibility I had regarding the relationship of the research to the wider community of the school and the family:

A basic concept in pastoral care suggests that one cares better for an individual when one also cares for others in the individual’s environment, including family and institutional staff. [I]t is important to express genuinely friendly care and concern towards children’s caregivers. (Couture 2000:49)

The therapeutic involvement with Matthew, King, and Amina in particular, invited the involvement of their caregivers and became a process of reciprocity and mutual care,- child to adult and adult to child. This was something that enriched and encouraged the research process and took it out to the wider community of both family and school. I believe that doing research in such a way has opened new possibilities with regard to *research as care*.

1.7 Research Approach

1.7.1 General description and motivation of research approach

The research approach that best suited this research enquiry was a qualitative research design, for, according to Valerie Janesick (1994:211):

[Q]ualitative researchers design a study with real individuals in mind, and with the intent of living in that social setting over time. They study a social setting to understand the meaning of participants’ lives in the participants’ own terms.

I chose to enrich the above description of the research approach by using Reinharz’s (1992:197) description of Feminist Multiple Methods Research as the closest description of the research approach that would follow:

Multiple methods enable feminist researchers to link past and present, “data gathering” and action, and individual behaviour with social frameworks. In addition, feminist researchers use multiple methods because of changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration. Feminists describe such long projects as “journeys.”

I replaced the word "journey" with the word "adventure", for it is my experience that it is more of an adventure when journeying with children:

Sometimes multiple methods reflect the desire to be responsive to the people studied. By combining methods, feminist researchers are particularly able to illuminate previously unexamined or misunderstood experiences.

(Reinharz 1992:197)

1.7.2 Where were we headed?

The research adventure the children and I embarked on was guided by questions related to *discovering the dominant discourses* surrounding bereavement and loss, and *seeking the influences which these discourses may/may not have had* on the way children and families were encouraged to grieve. We made special note of *metaphors and stories* that were used to explain and support understandings around bereavement and loss. Care was taken to search for the *effects* of these metaphors and stories *on people's meaning making* in their lives. In this way, pastoral therapy became "co-research with people in search of alternatives" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9). In keeping with Kotzé & Kotzé (2001:8) that *research is a "participatory process"*, I sought opportunities for deconstructing or coming to a mutually closer understanding of the dominant discourses surrounding bereavement and loss, as well as searching for the personal stories of the children. I believed that these were the stories that would show alternative paths: stories that resisted the totalising effects of dominant discourses on bereavement and loss. As is the nature of participatory action research, the route of the research was expected to change along the way as the co-researchers discovered unexpected meanderings on the metaphorical adventure map. In Reinhartz's (1992:212) words:

Feminist researchers who write about research in a "journey" format, as a process of discovery of which the product is a part, demystify discoveries. As projects proceed, new experiences are interwoven and new voices heard. The work process of the research becomes an integral component of the issues studied. The process becomes part of the product. This approach is humble since "findings" are housed in the project's specific features, rather than claimed as disembodied truth.

1.7.3 Ethical Equipment in Preparing for the adventure – a way of being for the feminist researcher

Janesick (1994:212-213) signposts some characteristics of a qualitative feminist researcher. These served as pointers that I was still on the intended route. Based on her insights, I included the following questions for myself to revisit many times along the way:

- Was I referring to what she calls "*the personal, the face-to face, and immediate*" and in so doing avoiding the temptation to make grand generalisations based on local knowledge(s)?
- Was I focussing on "*understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions about that*

setting"?

- Was I planning sufficiently to ensure that I could "*stay in the setting over time*"?
- Was I active in acknowledging that "*research is ideologically driven*" and that "*there is no value-free or bias-free design*"?

Participatory action research is not merely about doing research, reflecting on the research and then taking action. Robert Stake (1994:244) reminds us that as researchers, we are "guests in the private spaces of the world". It was therefore my understanding that as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist conducting a qualitative research project with children, I should be even more alert to the potential power imbalances and risks of exposure and embarrassment for these young co-searchers. As Michael White (1995a: 167) states:

Although there are many steps that we can take to render the therapeutic interaction more egalitarian, if we believe that we can arrive at some point at which we can interact with those people who seek our help in a way that is totally outside of any power relation, then we are treading on dangerous ground. Such a belief would enable us to avoid the moral and ethical responsibilities that we have to those people who seek our help, and that they don't have to us. And I don't think that we can ever afford to lose sight of that. To do so would serve to open up possibilities for the abuse and exploitation of those people who seek our help. So some acknowledgement of this power differential is essential for this reason.

In Chapter 6 I discuss how I collaborated with the children to acknowledge and address the power differential in ethical practices that aimed to achieve a "bottom-up accountability" (White 1997:204). White (1995b: 53) says that we overlook "children's meanings" in our schools and in our professional disciplines:

Even in those disciplines that make the world of children the object of study, children are routinely excluded from the interpretation of the actions and the events of their own lives.

I kept White's words in mind, I suspected that, what he refers to as "pervasive ageism" (1995b: 54), at times might well have tempted the research towards adult-honouring ideas. In particular, I needed to be wary of the idea - which he refers to as "myth" (: 54) - "that it can be detrimental to consult children about their lives" (: 54). To counter this idea, I kept in mind the following words:

But when we get in touch with how active children are in routinely consulting each other, and what this means to them, we see this myth dismantled. When children have not had the opportunity to learn the facts of development, it appears that they seize upon opportunities to consult with each other a great deal. And it also appears that this works very well for them.

(Michael White 1995b: 54)

To further elaborate on this position of children having something worthwhile to tell adults, I found the ideas of

Harlene Anderson and Harold Goolishian (1992:26) most helpful. They refer to "humans" as "meaning-generating beings." They say that "people live, and understand their living, through socially constructed narrative realities that give meaning and organization to their experience" (: 26). This understanding required me not only to be willing to enter into conversation with children, but to be committed to a genuine "position of not-knowing" and a sincere "curiosity to learn"(: 38). It is my ethical position that children are as worthy as adults of being respected as "meaning-generating beings" (Anderson and Goolishian 1992:26).

1.7.4 Selection of participants and a meeting site

My intention in this study was to focus on interviewing children from our school community who had experienced bereavement and loss of significant people in their lives. This was to include children who had lost people to death or to separation. In the past year I have interviewed and spent time in conversation with over ten children. Some of these children were very excited at the opportunity of participating in conversations in my room; some of these children could barely bring themselves to participate at all. Some of these children participated before, during and after the deaths of their loved ones. Some participated immediately on having heard the news, and some have had years of living with their losses. Some are in conversation with me now, who are not sure if they have an immediate loss to face or not. I have also had conversations with children who have lost contact with loved ones owing to their imprisonment or to their going to live far away, in other countries, with little or no contact. For the purposes of this study significant people have included parents, grandparents, primary caregivers, siblings and close friends. I have also had conversations with children about the deaths or loss of their pets.

In a small thesis such as this one, it is not possible to write about each child's participation and the many gifts we have shared in this process: gifts of warmth, smiles, memories, laughter, creativity and hope that come along with the deepest kind of sadness and loss. I have thus chosen only some to write about – those that best seem to give some answers to my initial research questions. In the capturing of their words whilst writing up this thesis, I have re-experienced the deep sense of connectedness that I felt with these children as they entrusted their thoughts and understandings to me. The research took place in the Support Room where I teach and hold counselling sessions.

1.7.5 Collecting stories following a Feminist Multiple Methods Research Approach

In feminist participatory research, the distinction between the researcher(s) and those on whom the research is done disappears. To achieve an egalitarian relation, the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness, reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risk. Differences in social status and background give way as shared decision-making and self-disclosure develop.

(Reinharz 1992:181)

1.7.5.1 Story-collecting conversations in the co-creation of hope

I held **conversations** with children following a "narrative therapy" (Morgan 2000:v) approach. During such conversations, I typically *recorded the words* (see 1.7.5.3) of the participants (co-searchers) as the stories unfolded. In Chapter 2 (see 2.6.1) I have selected and described how I have used some of the principles of conducting such conversations by following some of the following narrative practices:

- Externalising conversations
- Deconstruction
- Agency
- Power
- Co-authorship/collaboration
- Meaning
- Questioning towards a dual landscape: action and meaning
- Re-membering conversations
- Therapeutic documents
- Definitional ceremony
- Reflecting teams

What Reinhartz (1992:231) here refers to as the "conversation" is a close description of how this story-collecting occurred:

The conversation format nicely illustrates how knowledge is socially constructed, tentative, and emergent. A conversation is different from an interview with its division of labour between the party who asks questions, and the other who answers.

(Reinhartz 1992:231)

In conversations with children, it was sometimes quite a challenge to keep the interaction going in such a way as to ensure that there was any conversation at all. I found that I could not rely on a conversations-only programme when co-searching. Whilst there were many hours of wonderfully rich and mutually encouraging conversations during this research, I had to learn that for some children and also during some sessions, a "conversation format" (Reinhartz 1992:231) could sometimes inhibit responses in words, leading to situations where the power-relations became almost silencing. I had to learn that some children do not always talk directly and freely when in conversation with an unfamiliar (or even a familiar) adult. I had to learn that this did not mean that they were not the "meaning-generating beings" which Anderson and Goolishian (1992:26) speak of. I also had to learn to remind Self Doubt that this did not speak of my incompetence as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist. Rather, it required of me to be creative and to find other possibilities for offering the children the opportunity to share their meaning making and to find alternative ways to help them to co-create their stories with me.

1.7.5.2 Kaleidoscope – many ways of documenting stories of hope

Robin McTaggart (1997:34) refers to the process of participatory action research as the “self-reflective spiral: a spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and then re-planning”. Some of the practices that follow illustrate how “self-reflective spirals” were employed to this end. The different approaches I used to facilitate conversations with children are illustrated below. To me they show that the “self-reflective spiral” was probably more three-dimensional, more like a multi-faceted patterning in a kaleidoscope. In no one case was the cycle reproduced in the same way or taken in the same direction or format, or taken to a stationary or predictable or even final ending. As in the captivating shifting of the tiny glass beads in a kaleidoscope, there was an ever-present sense of the possibilities of new movement, of new formations, the directions and patterns of which were always still to be discovered:

In participatory projects, the researcher invites members of the setting to join her in creating the study.

(Reinharz 1992:184)

Principles for documenting these stories were guided by the narrative understanding that the *clients are the experts in their own lives*. Some of the following practices were employed to this end: co-creation of notes, computer-generated storybooks, letters, rituals and “definitional ceremonies” (Morgan 2000:121), taped interviews and artworks:

- **Note taking** - I usually scribed session notes, but they were checked, edited and added to by the co-searchers. At times the co-searchers chose to act as scribes or as co-scribes. I preferred to write on large sheets of A3 sized paper. This allowed for the whole conversation to remain visible while the conversations took place.
- **Storybooks** - We co-authored on site and refined at follow-up sessions. The storybooks were co-authored on our “talking computer”. The process was one in which I acted as the “typist”. As I am able to type fairly quickly, this allowed me to keep abreast of the conversation. The computer has a voice that “reads” the text at the press of a button. This allowed for the story to come alive almost immediately. Once the text was satisfactory, I took the text to a computer at home and decorated it using a special graphics package. Of course, this could also be done as a team effort, but might be time-consuming unless the co-searcher was adept at computer skills.
- **Letters** - These were sometimes co-authored on site and sometimes written in reflection based on the notes taken during the sessions. In some instances, letters were co-authored on the classroom computer during sessions. In others, the reflecting process was achieved by using session notes to help me to write letters to children after conversations we shared.

- **Definitional ceremonies and other rituals** - These were planned in joint-planning sessions. In the therapeutic story of Chapter 3, the documenting of knowledges took various forms over the period of the research. We participated in rituals and a variety of "definitional ceremonies" (Morgan: 2000), such as co-authoring songs over the e-mail; participating in "reflecting team" sessions with classmates as co-consultants; and King giving an informative oral presentation to the class to keep them up-to-date with the research proceedings. These were all ways that we marked the progress and documented the special knowledges we discovered. There was also a very moving ceremony of handing out certificates of meaning to King's parents at a special ceremony of acknowledgement.
- **Taped interviews** - In what David Epston (2002) referred to as "afterthoughts", and where I still was not satisfied that I had given sufficient voice to the children on their ideas and understandings, I re-interviewed them on their experiences of our conversations and asked further questions about their experiences of spirituality. I also wanted to know how much the earlier conversations had assisted them in feeling more hopeful about their lives. I audiotaped the interviews and transcribed them afterwards. Some of the transcriptions of these interviews have been included in unedited form, as the children's voices speak more clearly than any interpretation I could offer on their behalf.
- **Artworks** - These were co-constructed during sessions. Where words and stories were too hard to find, we co-designed beautiful coloured glass-beaded bracelets of kindness and love. King, whom you will meet in Chapter 3, chose brightly painted wooden beads, a golden medallion and a shiny red heart to make a necklace to keep close and safe the special values his parents held for his life. In some, instances, we co-created special boxes encrusted with exciting colours, shiny sequins and other jewels to hold precious bits of information painted, written or crafted in rich symbolism.
- **Self-reflexive reporting in journal** - Although I intended to keep a journal for the time allocated to the research adventure, this did not transpire. There were many conversations that I did not have time to document in this way. I thus decided to focus on the conversations with King and the Three Wise men. This did not have a special format, but merely served as another form of story-capturing. It also helped me to reflect on the conversations and to "honestly assess what [I had] learned about [myself]" (Reinharz 1992:196):

In my view, the emerging norm of self-reflexive reporting of the interview process and the experiments in exact reproduction of people's speech are steps in this direction.
(Reinharz 1992:45)

These are some of the ways of co-creating carriers and "safekeepers"(Epston 2002) of hope, of personhood, of friendships, of love. These are co-created artefacts which both symbolise and make visible the co-creation of hope that happens when people spend time in co-creative "participatory consciousness" - the deepest kind

of friendship. Viewed this way, research becomes “a relational activity” and “a process in which all participants have a constitutive input” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9).

1.7.5.3 Doing hope: Multiple conversations in story-capturing

When a conversation leads to the need for further conversations, Reinharz (1992:19) (following Bellinky) refers to this as an “intensive interview case/study approach.” I would prefer the description of the narrative approach I used to be referred to as “multiple conversations in story-capturing.” Participating in multiple conversations assisted me in writing the research report/narrative, as far as is possible, as a joint-effort. This kept the story-capturing alive and made it possible to negotiate and re-negotiate meaning with my young co-searchers. This allowed us the opportunity of capturing the “children’s solution knowledges” (White 2000:21) as well as “richly describing them in the context of therapeutic conversations” (: 21). This gave the opportunity to address the “power imbalances” (: 21) present in our adult/child relationship each time the story was re-negotiated or retold. In co-authoring texts for us to e-mail to Australian songwriter Judy Small, we were very careful to choose our words in such a way that Judy, who had never met us, would understand what it was that we were hoping to achieve. This e-mail relationship continues, and reminds me that re-authoring these stories can be an adventure that need never end. I felt that it was central to the process of challenging “power imbalances” (White 2000: 21) to include the children’s voices in every letter. Taking this position supported me both in terms of checking the validity (closeness to the meaning of the conversation) of my note taking and in terms of deciding what would be included in reports or narratives. This also helped us to challenge “the social science convention of seeking generalizations by looking instead for specificity, exceptions, and completeness” (Reinharz 1992:174). This is important, as story-capturing takes a political stance against the silencing and invisible-making effects of more positivist research approaches. Story-capturing in this way allowed individual voices of children to be heard. This poses a direct challenge to the silence-creating ideas embedded in hegemonic developmental and stage theories, such as ideas that there are normal stages through which “the bereaved” must travel in times of bereavement and loss (see 1.5). As Reinharz (1992:174) points out, “some feminist researchers have found that social science’s emphasis on generalizations has obscured phenomena important to particular groups.” In the case of children, I believe that these ideas can have the effect of closing down conversations by encouraging labelling practices instead of opening up conversations, and listening for what children really think. It was in this spirit that I participated with my young co-searchers in these story-capturing conversations. By co-searching for these children’s “solution knowledges” (White 2000:21), we were “doing hope” (Weingarten 2000: 402).

1.8 Outline of the study

Chapter 2 discusses the various terms and concepts that have come to influence the thinking in this research, both historically and currently. In particular, there is discussion of how modernist discourses have influenced thinking in school communities and how the Narrative Approach to Pastoral Therapy is a way to challenge and loosen the grip of structuralist and other ideas about children and bereavement.

In **Chapter 3**, the many conversations in a steadily expanding community of care, tell the adventure of the Three Wise Men and how they mobilize their voices, reclaiming their hope for a world free of guns and violence.

Chapter 4 serves to introduce the stories of Matthew and Amina. These children have used re-membering conversations to keep the preferred memories of their deceased loved ones in their community of care.

Chapter 5 is a story about the fear of dying and then finding spirituality.

In **Chapter 6**, I interview my research about what it taught me – this self-reflection offers my new awareness about research, co-search and care.

CHAPTER TWO

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

2.1 *Postmodern paradigm*

2.1.1 *Research as gathering a collage of thinking fragments*

Kalei'do\scope (-li'd-) n. Tube through which are seen symmetrical figures, produced by reflections of pieces of coloured glass etc., and varied by rotation of the tube; (fig.) constantly changing group of bright or interesting objects; hence ~sco'pic(AL) adjs. [f. Gk kalos beautiful + eidos form + -SCOPE]

THE OXFORD CONCISE DICTIONARY (1982:588)

The metaphor of the kaleidoscope reminds me of the postmodern world in which I am situated, where there are no fixed patterns that can be generalised to one form of understanding. In this research, I found a kaleidoscope of stories, filled with shining bits of hope. Each story has its own pattern collecting and forming in its own particular way - sometimes incorporating some of the other patterns sometimes not - but no one pattern being exactly the same as the other. Reinharz (1992:229) refers to feminist research as gathering "a collage of thinking fragments that form a kaleidoscopic whole."

As a Narrative Pastoral Therapist and Support Teacher in a city school in South Africa, my decision to take a *postmodern, feminist and contextual* position in my research required questioning the many fundamental assumptions or *dominant discourses* grounded in the rule-governed ways of modernist thinking in schooling. These ideas or "dominant truths" (White & Epston 1990:120) are regarding how children *should* develop and what their normal development *should* look like. Modernist thinking of this nature permeates every fibre of the school structure.

2.1.2 *Postmodern discourse: seeing past hidden structures and ultimate truth*

Postmodernism as an intellectual movement has its centre of gravity not in the social sciences but in art and architecture, literature and cultural studies. It represents a questioning and rejection of the fundamental assumptions of modernism, the intellectual movement which preceded it.

(Burr 1995:12)

An assumption of modernism that is questioned and rejected by postmodern thinking is the central idea that there is some kind of "true nature of reality" (Burr 1995:12). This assumption about how the world should be understood, although having arisen only one hundred and fifty years ago, has had a profound effect on much of the thinking of the 20th century. It is supported by ideas that this "truth" can be found "through the

application of reason and rationality" (: 12). These ideas around reason and rationality, having been used as part of the basic scaffolding of the giant skyscrapers of modernity, are in turn reinforced and supported by theories that contain and explain the "rules and structures underlying the surface features of the world" (: 12). This structuralist thought is held together by one of what the French philosopher, Lyotard, called the "grand narratives" (Powell 1998:29) of modernism: the belief that there is a "right" way of doing things which could be discovered" (Burr 1995:12). I wonder, when picturing the twin-towers on September 11, 2001, whether the image of the gigantic modern buildings crumbling is not possibly also symbolic of the inflexibility of modernist thinking? Is there only one correct way? What is the cost of one point of view refusing to even remotely entertain the point of view of another?

Postmodernism is a rejection of both the idea that there can be an ultimate truth and of structuralism, the idea that the world as we see it is the result of hidden structures.
(Burr 1995:13)

2.1.3 The orderliness of things in children's development

Structuralism and modernism are well established in the daily running of school systems. The lenses through which problems at a school are generally viewed are influenced by the ideas regarding psychological development that have been part of basic teacher training. In conversations with children around their experiences of bereavement and loss, I hoped to understand better the meaning-making supplied by the *dominant discourses* as well as to search for local (and often lesser-known) knowledges surrounding bereavement and loss.

2.1.3.1 Developmental theories – modernist lenses

An institution such as a school has specific ideas about what so-called "healthy or normal development" should be. Thus the:

[P]ower of normalization imposes homogeneity...and establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them.
(Foucault 1977:184).

The ideas of developmental theorists such as Jean Piaget (cognitive development), Erikson (social development), Kohlberg (moral development) and Freud have introduced the understanding that development can be seen as a "series of steps" (Atkinson et al 1990:72) or "stages" which are "organized around a dominant theme." Each stage is "qualitatively different" from the previous stage, but "all children go through the same stages in the same order" (Atkinson et al 1990:73). What possibly gives credibility and reinforcement to these stage theories - which clearly hold much value for understanding "the whole child" within the school system - is the medical equivalent of stage theories: the idea that there are "critical periods

in human development" (Atkinson et al 1990:76) which are "crucial time periods during a person's life during which specific events must occur for development to proceed normally" (Atkinson et al 1990:76).

2.1.3.2 Structuralist thinking

Co-habiting the same space as these developmental theories are structuralist ideas that postulate that there is an "underlying psychic structure to account for psychological phenomena" (Burr 1995:13). Foote and Frank (1999:165) refer to Prior to echo that in line with developmental thinking:

Grief is expected to be an ordered, limited process that moves by identifiable steps toward 'recovery': restored happiness, adaptation to the absence of the deceased, re-established engagement with the everyday world.

Amongst teaching staff, the five-stages of grief/bereavement put forward by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's book *On death and dying* (1969:34-122) are possibly the most well known in our local school culture. It has almost become a "pop-psychology" for people to tell me that so-and-so is "in denial", or "bargaining with God" or "very angry" or "has reached acceptance." Without doing any wider research as to the availability of these ideas, I know that before embarking on this research topic, the only person I (as school teacher) could quote in reference to death and dying was Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.

2.1.3.3 Dominant stories – the social construction of bereavement, grief, loss, separation in co-creating the finality of death

In firm support of these developmental ideas are the ideas that our aim in educating children is to teach them to learn to be "independent and self-sufficient" people who can "stand on their own feet" so that they can survive in "the real world." A sign that someone has "resolved" their grief and has learnt to "move on" beyond that stage would thus be that that person no longer needs to "lean on" other people. As social worker, Michael White (1995:16) writes:

There is a dominant story about what it means to be a person of moral worth in our culture. This is a story that emphasises self-possession, self-containment, self-actualisation, and so on. From the position that we've been discussing here, these notions are seen to be specifying or prescribing of a way of being and of thinking that shapes what is often referred to as "individuality". This individuality is a way of being that is actually a culturally preferred way of being.

What is implied, but not directly stated, by this set of cultural preferences or "truths" is that anyone who struggles to fulfil these requirements should be considered to have a problem or to be "abnormal" or "at risk" of not developing in the "normal" way.

2.2 Social construction discourse – tinting the lenses

Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:1) refer to what they term “social construction discourse” as “a postmodern approach that provides meaningful epistemology for therapies using conversation as a means to help people.” What Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:1) refer to as “social construction discourse”, Kenneth Gergen (1985:271) here refers to as “social constructionism”:

Professional agreements become suspect; normalized beliefs become targets of demystification; “the truth” about mental life is rendered curious...contemporary views of the profession on matters of cognition, motivation, perception, information processing, and the like become candidates for historical and cross-cultural comparison. From the constructionist perspective, they often constitute a form of ethnopsychology, historically and culturally situated, institutionally useful, normatively sustained and subject to deterioration and decay as social history unfolds.

The following broad ideas regarding a social construction discourse are taken from Gergen:

- “What we take to be experience of the world does not in itself dictate the terms by which the world is understood” (Gergen 1985:266). Gergen invites us into “radical doubt of the taken-for-granted world” (: 266). Social construction discourse encourages the challenging of assumptions of what appear to be “truths” about the “nature of the world” (: 266). This implies that we should constantly query that which we take for granted. In conversations with children around bereavement and loss, I was therefore alerted to listening for the taken-for-granted and “truths” that entered the conversations. These were places where I questioned further to understand better the relevance and usefulness these “truths” had in their lives in terms of their preferred storying of their lives.
- “The terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen 1985:267). Social construction discourse reminds us that our understandings of the world are specific to our culture and to our history. This implies that there are many possible perceptions to every given situation, just as there are many cultures and many histories. In conversations with children it was important to listen especially carefully for the specific background or history to the “social artefacts” that each child carried with them in their meaning making. Within a Christian tradition, for example, I learnt that there were understandings concerning bereavement and loss that were specific not only to that culture and history, but specific to that family, and even to that child.
- “The degree to which a given form of understanding prevails or is sustained across time is not fundamentally dependent on the empirical validity of the perspective in question, but on the vicissitudes of social processes (e.g. communication, negotiation, conflict, rhetoric)” (Gergen 1985:268). Social

- construction discourse encourages the awareness that the understanding that we have of the world is not owing to some “objective” and immutable “truth”, but has merely been given that appearance by being actively negotiated and maintained through social interaction between people over time. This implies that we should be wary of claims of empirical and fixed or objective truths, which tend to close down opportunities for understanding the meaning that these truths have in people’s lives. Rather than allowing myself to be closed down by these “given forms of understanding” in conversations with children, I used these “given forms” as opportunities to find out more about the prevailing understanding and meaning making of the child (and often, therefore, in the family) with respect to bereavement and loss.
- “Forms of negotiated understanding are of critical significance in social life, as they are integrally connected with many other activities in which people engage.... [They thus] “serve to sustain and support certain patterns to the exclusion of others” (Gergen 1985:268). Social construction discourse encourages the awareness that what people do in their lives is directly the result of what they believe about themselves and the meaning they make of their lives. From this perspective, therefore, researching what children believe about how to cope in times of bereavement and loss was not merely a passive process of collecting stories. Rather, in negotiating with children regarding their understanding of what helps and what brings hope in times of bereavement and loss I actively engaged in a re-authoring of preferred stories. I believe that this “negotiated understanding” has had “critical significance” in these children’s lives in that these times of co-search renewed and strengthened their understandings of what they had done to bring hope and coping to their lives. This allowed for research to “serve to sustain and support” their understandings of themselves: they were “guardians” (Epston 2002) of hope, actively bringing hope and ways of coping not only to themselves, but also to others. This transformed the research from merely story-capturing, to a more active and sustaining process – that of *re-search as care*.

2.3 Discourses/ beliefs that tint the lenses of the school as society

2.3.1 Discourses about bereavement and loss that reflect tints of psychological and medical theory and other adult perspectives

A psychologist’s words that a child in our school community “had some difficulty dealing with his loss, choosing not to talk about it at all” reflects the common idea or belief that *we need to talk through our problems* and, in such a way *deal with them*, so that we can then *move beyond that point and get on with our lives*. A paediatrician’s comment reflected a similar idea, suggesting an air of disbelief on the child’s part, possibly suggesting that he *was not being realistic enough*, by saying that “he seemed to need help in

coming to terms with the death of his father." These ideas reflect the stage-theory approach to bereavement. This stage-theory approach to the understanding of "the bereavement process" is echoed in works such as those of DEACSA (Death Education and Counselling South Africa), where bereavement is described as "a process that one needs to experience by going through it alone, at one's own pace." While some leeway is given as to the idea that..."each person is unique", it is advised that "you can expect to go through some of the following experiences which are considered normal when in bereavement." These experiences are listed as: "unreality, disbelief, panic, hostility, depression, bargaining, guilt, physical distress, tears, intellectualising, integration." (DEACSA 1998:8-9) They strongly echo the stages given by Kübler-Ross and, although there are many useful and encouraging ideas offered in these books, there is the underlying implication of a "normal" or "healthy" time span for grief. This idea is reinforced by the statement:

Professional help should be sought if these [experiences] persist for long periods without relief and prevent you from living your everyday life.

(DEACSA 1998:8)

The implication here is that bereavement is something that has a shelf life and anything continuing beyond the allotted time period or shelf life should be regarded as an abnormal response to bereavement. Rebecca Abrams (1992:77), sociologist and specialist in Oral History and Women's Studies at Essex University, offers something of a more flexible stance when she states:

[O]nce bereaved, always bereaved. A parent's death is not a fence to be climbed over or a stile to be crossed. It is an event which shapes your life from this moment on, just as, when still alive, your parent played a huge part in shaping your life.

Abrams (1992) is reflecting on her own loss of her father and how, ten years, later she finds that she had not yet managed to "get over" his death. In her reflection on the advice of a friend at the time of his death she says:

The most helpful piece of advice I was given when Dad died was by a friend of the family whose own father had died when he was a teenager. "Don't expect to get over this," he said, "you won't. You just get used to it." It was good advice. Not waiting for a magical day when full recovery would arrive was very important. 'Getting used to it' is a far more realistic and reachable goal.

(Abrams 1992:77)

Michel Foucault (1980:131) said of discourse that it is discourses that determine what people believe to be truth in their lives. If certain discourses are accepted, then it is those discourses that will help people to determine what is to be considered true and what is to be considered untrue or false:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

(Michel Foucault 1980:131)

It is "these normalizing 'truths' that shape our lives and relationships" (White & Epston 1990:19). These "truths" serve to determine what is considered to be the best way to approach bereavement and loss in the case of children. The compatible and mutually supportive structuralists' ideas about "stages" and "underlying psychic structures" in psychological theory and "crucial time periods" in medical theory, are reflected in the ways that many children, their families and other people in the school community speak of many of the problems that challenge their lives. The following examples suggest some of the discourses related to bereavement and loss that are circulating in our school:

- Discourse: *The individual person or family is responsible for her/his/their own development and growth, choices and "self-actualisation".*

Problems related to bereavement and loss are frequently handed over to individual children or families for ownership. This practice of "Individualization" (Foote & Frank 1999:165) of people experiencing loss and grief is possibly exacerbated in a western capitalist school environment, for the idea is that certain problems are to be "referred out" to a private therapist for therapy. One of the children I had a conversation with told me very clearly that bereavement is a private matter: "We [in our family] do not like to talk about it very much."

- Discourse: *When there is something wrong, sufficiently wrong as to require therapy, the individual must be prepared to work hard to get back to "normal".*

It is considered "appropriate" for children to be sent for some "grief-work" (Foote & Frank 1999:167) when they take "too long" to "get back to normal". The description suggests that individuals have **work** that they need to do, that therapy *is* work, and that in doing this work bereaved people display themselves as "doing what society expects of its members" (Foote & Frank 1999:167). After a child and I had had a conversation about the influence of The Negative (see externalised language in 2.6.1 below) and his brother's death on his life, his mother greeted us at the end of our conversation with "Well done, Daniel. You've worked hard!" I made the assumption that Daniel's mother is conversant with the discourse that therapy is work, possibly from her own experiences of being in some form of therapy.

- Discourse: *Children do not have the same experiences of grieving as adults do; their needs are more basic and concrete.*

As Kaylin's mom, Venetia said: "There's nothing wrong with Kaylin. She has everything she needs". I told her that I also did not think that there was anything "wrong" with Kaylin, but that in my experience sometimes children just get sad again, even years later.

- Discourse: *You should get beyond your grief and carry on with living life normally.*

People's attempts to challenge the problems in their lives are often not noticed. Instead, once the "appropriate mourning time is over", then people are expected to come to a stage of "acceptance" (Kübler-Ross 1969:99). Very often we impose our own control over our grief, by forcing ourselves to behave in the way that society expects. I asked Kaylin's mom how she, Venetia, managed living so far away and having lost her own mother (the granny that Kaylin has been grieving for), who was clearly loved by the family. Venetia is only in her late twenties. She said: "I must just get on with my life... what else can I do? It's no use crying – she's dead. I must just accept it." This is what I understand Foucault to mean when he speaks of the "normalizing gaze" (Foucault 1977:184) where we learn to police ourselves to behave in a way that the societal discourses consider to be acceptable or "the norm" (: 184).

- Discourse: *There is a set pattern of observable behaviour that should be evident when a child is grieving or facing loss.*

At times, children have been identified as not behaving "appropriately" in their grieving. Nerina's teacher thought that she was showing "too little reaction"; King's lively behaviour was described at times as "acting out"; Peter's therapist was worried that he "does not speak about" his father's death; Zelda's family friend described Zelda as "over-coping" with her father's death. This resonates with Foote and Frank's (1999:164) comment regarding mourning:

In sum, complicated mourning either lasts too long (prolonged or chronic) or not long enough (abbreviated). It is either expressed too demonstrably (exaggerated, distorted, conflicted) or not demonstrably enough (absent, inhibited, delayed). What is left over – as normal or "uncomplicated" mourning – becomes difficult to imagine.

- Discourse: *Once you have been to therapy, you should be fixed.*

Upon speaking to William and Steven as to whether they had received any counselling at the time when their mom died three years ago, they told me that they had. They said that it had helped them then, so when I asked them whether they thought that they might want to return to the counsellor for a few more conversations, I was surprised when Steven replied: "No, we don't need more. It's not necessary." This, in spite of his brother weeping in a way that reminded me of that very raw

sadness that we sometimes experience in our lives. This understanding of William's reminds me of Harlene Anderson's suggestion that modernism approaches counselling through the metaphor: "the human is a machine and the therapist is the technician who fixes it" (Anderson 1997:31). I had the feeling that William and Steven had gone to the "therapist's workshop" to be "fixed" and that possibly they were "fixed" for a while. Maybe William and Steven are right, however. Maybe they need less "fixing" and more connecting with other people in their community at school and at home?

These "normalizing 'truths'" (White & Epston 1990:19) do not only determine what are considered to be the best ways to approach bereavement and loss when dealing with children. If one looks at what children themselves had to say about their beloved Jenny Mallett after she died, it is evident that certain religious "truths" serve to determine what types of religious discourse our school society "accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault 1980:131). The following examples show the social construction of some of the religious discourses related to bereavement and loss that are circulating in our school:

2.3.2 *Children's writings and statements about Jenny Mallett, our late head teacher who had an "untimely death": tints of religious and spiritual beliefs surrounding death and dying*

As part of the response to the sudden death of this significant person in our school society, some of the teachers encouraged children to write letters to Miss Mallett. These letters were displayed in the school foyer for a while, and later were included in a book written in her memory (Cannon & Gardener 2001:79-80). These letters reflect the socially and culturally constructed religious discourses and beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife.

- Belief: *There is a place called heaven that people go to after they have died. There they meet other people who have died. There are special beings who take care of people on earth, they are called angels.*
Dear Miss Mallett, Please say hello to my grandpa in heaven and please will you be my angel...
- Belief: *Death is a journey or a moving on to another place.*
Dear Miss Mallett, I wish you didn't go as you still have to help me in squash...
Dear Miss Mallett, I hope you arrived safely.
- Belief: *Death is final.*
Dear Miss Mallett, I feel sad and angry at the same time, sad because I will never see you again, and angry because I probably won't get my maths mark from the last test...

I believe that these "regimes of truth" (Foucault 1980:27) are reinforced in these seemingly everyday ways in schools. These are the "technologies of power" (Foucault 1980:126) that serve to maintain the popular

thinking of "the majority" referred to in our school code. The following beliefs were not selected or even written down. I have subsequently wondered if they form part of marginalized discourses surrounding death and dying. I have also wondered what other discourses suffer the same kind of marginalization?

- Belief: *The soul or spirit of a person stays around, somewhere close, looking after you, or, possibly longing to rejoin you.*

Some of the children told me that Miss Mallet was over on the field: one of the Egyptian Geese that lives on the field seems to be particularly interested in the goings-on of the children on the playground. (My personal favourite!)

- Belief: *The person who has died has a ghost that will continue to remain in the building of the school. At times noises, such as familiar footsteps are heard.*

Some children are afraid of the ghost, some are comforted by the idea that the ghost is a friendly ghost who merely watches over and sees that the school continues to run smoothly.

My hope as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist is to approach practical theology from a position that aims at "respecting the spiritual and religious values and ethics of a person" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:vii) in such a way as to come to a closer understanding of their preferred stories. This also requires a willingness and openness to "deconstruct[ing] dominant discourses in society to assist people to live their preferred ethical stories"(: vii).

2.4 Practical theology from a feminist and a contextual perspective

Practical theology reaches into our souls to engage our intellect and our bodies, our being and our doing. Pastoral care, as one practice of theology, draws on the methods and insights of science, but, in the end, is a creative act of imagination. It is an artistic practice which simultaneously engages human gifts, meets human need, and witnesses to a vision of life in which care for persons, for creation, and for God is central.

(Couture 1998:27)

In approaching practical theology "from a perspective of care" (Theron 1999:18), it is necessary that, as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist in a school, I am open to respond to "the varying forms that care would assume in different circumstances" (: 20). I see a Narrative approach to therapy as fulfilling the functions of pastoral work, by opening up and co-creating with the community of the school possibilities for "healing, guiding, supporting, and reconciling" (: 20). De Jongh van Arkel (1999:119) distinguishes between "four types of pastoral action", namely mutual care, pastoral care, pastoral counselling and pastoral therapy. I view my position to be one in which I see each of these as categories within which I can practice, and regard them as a challenge to make sure that I am ready to *do* care in which ever form care is required. This always implies

caring *with* not caring *for* (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:viii) the children and thus is a reciprocal, creative and active process informed by an approach that stresses "caring rather than ruling" (de Jongh van Arkel 1999:127). This research becomes "co-research with people in search of alternatives" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9) in such a way as to make audible the voices that have not yet been heard. This I often experience as a co-creative or "artistic practice" (Couture 1997:27):

Care, needless to say, is not exclusively a Christian activity. It is a human phenomenon. ...Care is what makes a human being human. If we do not care, we lose our humanity. Caring is more than what we feel or think of doing. As a constitutive element of our being, it is simply what we are.

(de Jongh van Arkel 1999:112)

My view of practical theology is from a feminist and contextual perspective. In taking a feminist and contextual position in my research, I am:

[C]ommitted to research that will not only contribute to the transformation of our society through care with the marginalized and disadvantaged, but will also address cultural discourses and societal practices that promote injustices.

(Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:viii)

2.4.1 A feminist perspective

In my context as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist working in a school, pastoral care often starts with the child. Feminist practical theologian, Riet Bons-Storm (1998:21) makes the connection between the child and other marginalized people by saying that "the child represents all those who do not have a voice of their own and who are marginalized and excluded from the dialogue of faith." I add to her words, the faiths *of all* in our school community – whether these be formal religious practices or other forms of spirituality. Reverend Michael Mc Coy (1987:58) writes similarly that the Child-Centred church:

[H]as a special message for a world in which the non-recognition of children is but one facet of a general oppression of the weak, the poor and the marginal. By restoring the child to our midst we can become more authentic bearers of good news to all the oppressed.

In my understanding of a Child-Centred Pastoral Therapy, it is by employing the narrative practices as described in this research, in the spirit expressed by Mc Coy, that we might restore the child to our midst. We might invite children's voices to co-create "good news" and to take it back to those of us who traditionally have held the power and felt the responsibility to do all the caring. Pamela Couture (2000:49) says that "one cares better for an individual when one also cares for others in the individual's environment." It has been my hope that as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist, I have been able to co-construct possible ways for people in my

community to open the windows to "a vision of life in which care for persons, for creation, and for God is central" (Couture 1998:27). I understand that the path to hope is one that looks for ways of connecting children with families, families with teachers, teachers with pupils by focussing on the spiritual, the social and the scholastic – never losing sight of the importance of all of these in developing our healthy participation in our common humanity. This requires taking a position of "caring solidarity" (Sevenhuijsen 1998:147). I understand this to mean standing with children in the face of hegemonic practices that might serve to force children to accommodate their beliefs or to "assimilate" (Ackermann 2000:168) to the perceived norm of what is considered acceptable behaviour in terms of bereavement and loss. This is in line with the position taken by Kotzé and Kotzé who promote the concept of "doing spirituality" (2001:1) where

['S]pirituality' is...inclusive, focussing on any of our experiences including theological ideas and narratives about the Other whom some call Friend/God/Goddess/Divine and so forth

and where the focus on doing is in line with what Bosch says, that "doing is more [important than knowing or] than speaking" (Bosch 1991:424). This is in keeping with a position that believes in the "relationality and connectedness of all things, as well as the integration of the personal and political, body and mind, reason and emotion" (Jakobsen 1994:157).

2.4.2 A contextual perspective

In a school situation, I am placed frequently in an on-the-spot situation or what Cochrane, de Gruchy and Peterson speak of as a "moment of insertion"(1991:18). This explains the position from which a contextual theologian would do theology. There are continual and frequent opportunities for doing theology in context. Our school setting reflects a South African society that faces many challenges on a daily basis:

The moment of insertion locates our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities. What people are feeling, what they are undergoing, how they perceive this, how they are responding – these are the experiences that constitute the primary data of the context.

(Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17)

2.5 Religious discourses surrounding death, dying and bereavement

inclusivity and religious pluralism

Psychologist, Melissa Griffith (1995:123) writes in her article *Opening Therapy to Conversations with a Personal God* that "it is therapists' certainty that oppresses and constrains opportunities to hear the story as the client experiences it." This understanding has encouraged me to seek to come to a closer way of learning to know the personal, spiritual lives of the children and their caregivers. Griffith's (1995)

approach to what she calls “changing certainties to wonder and creativity” has stood with me in this research. I have been alerted to the constraints that certainty about The Other might have had on closing down conversations and limiting the possibilities to come to a closer understanding of the very personal relationships people have with their own spiritualities.

Melissa Griffith (1995:123) highlights two possible constraints on clients being able to speak about their spiritual lives. These are:

- *Proscriptive constraints* – that this God-talk is not spoken of here
- *Prescriptive constraints* – that God can and should be spoken of here, but
only in a certain way

It is with this in mind that I briefly refer here to some formalised, spoken discourses and descriptions of religious practices touched on in this thesis. I believe that discourses can frequently serve as the certainties that close down, rather than open up conversation. I have therefore only started to read the formal literature after having interviewed and adventured from a position of ‘not knowing’. After the interviews and only at the stage of writing this chapter, did I seek some general guidelines as to the specific religious rituals and practices surrounding death, burial and the afterlife as related to Islam, African Tradition and Christianity. Where to start and how much depth to go into, became a real dilemma for me. I have found some comfort (and thus have selected) from a book *Clued up on Culture – a practical guide for all South Africans* by Barbara Elion and Mercia Strieman (2001:49) which is written, not as an academic text, but as “a beginner’s reference for individuals with an interest in comparative religion.” I think I’ll always remain a beginner in this regard, but that is probably best if I wish to adhere to participating in conversations from a position of ‘not knowing’. I have taken some suggestions from the sections entitled **Writing a letter of condolence** as the starting point. I would, however, refer the reader to the full text, which I found to be useful. Seeing as I am rather in the business of deconstructing discourses, I do not feel equipped or willing to write up the expert position on any of the religious discourses below. I therefore quote directly from their text.

2.5.1 Writing a letter of condolence to an African mourner

- *It is greatly appreciated if one includes oneself amongst those who are grieving. One should refer to the deceased as having left “us”.*
- *One uses the euphemism of “leaving” rather than using forms of the word “dying”.*
- *Xhosa and Zulu phrases for death suggest that the deceased has been “taken home” or “taken to the fathers.” It is therefore appropriate to indicate one’s awareness that life continues in the non-material world, with phrases such as: “...I (we) hope that he (she) will be welcomed by his (her) forefathers and that his (her) spiritual presence continues to give you comfort...”*
- *One concludes by offering practical help as well as emotional support to the grieving family*
(: 49)

Some other points of interest:

- The traditional belief is that the dead continue to live but remain unseen by the living.
- The general word for death, (isiXhosa = ukufa, isiZulu = ukushona) is not applied to people – but to other forms of life.
- In many cases, a service to mark the putting up of the headstone takes place soon after the burial.
- This is paralleled in the traditional approach by the ukubuyisa ceremony, held to reintegrate the spirit of the deceased into the family (: 48).
- The diviner, as in the case of other spirit mediums, is the mouthpiece of the ancestors among the living.
- According to African traditional belief, the dead become ancestral spirits (through various stages of ritual) with the responsibility of protecting and disciplining their descendants.
- One's place in the spirit world is determined by how one has conducted oneself in this world.
- The ancestral spirits oversee the continuation of traditional life as well as ensure there are harmonious relations between people. Ancestors look after one's family, give one guidance, bring one luck, judge wrong-doers and look after the crops.
- The ritual of animal sacrifice (of goats/sheep or cattle) is carried out:
 1. To mark special events: birth, initiation, weddings and funerals
 2. To mark the change in status of the departed spirit, approximately 2 years after the funeral. For this ritual, an ox is slaughtered. After this ritual (akubuyisa), the spirit of the deceased changes status from that of an izithunzi (lit. a "shadow") to an amadhlozi.
- Appeasing the spirits of the ancestors involves animal sacrifice. Many people, whether in business or in blue-collar positions, privately believe in the concept of the "Shades" (izithunzi) and the ancestral spirits (amadhlozi), consulting Sangomas to ascertain the wishes of the spirit world (: 39).

2.5.2 Writing a letter of condolence to a Christian mourner

- One should begin a letter/note of condolence by stating how upset/sorrowful/shocked/dismayed/saddened (or similar) you feel to learn about the death of the deceased.
- One should then go on to praise the deceased by referring to particular qualities that distinguished the individual in your eyes.
- If one can, one should mention the bond/relationship between the mourner/s and the deceased, and express the hope that he/she is "at eternal rest" or "with Jesus."
- Finally, one should indicate that one's thoughts will be with the mourner/s and then make a concrete offer to be of help (: 65).

2.5.3 Writing a letter of condolence to a Muslim mourner

- One should begin a letter/note of condolence by empathising with the mourner and his/her family on their great loss.
- One should then go on to praise the finer qualities of the individual, and if possible, to make reference to his/her good deeds.
- One could express the hope (or prayer) that "his/her soul will be fairly judged, soon to be in Paradise (Jannah)".
- Finally, one should offer words of comfort and support as well as extend the offer of practical help where possible.

Some other points of interest

- *Muslims do not cremate their dead.*
- *Family and friends prepare the body for burial.*
- *Male mourners attend a service at the mosque, where the deceased is taken.*
- *Usually, only male mourners are allowed to attend the burial at the cemetery.*
- *The deceased is buried in a white shroud – without a coffin.*
- *The grave faces the direction of Mecca.*
- *Women and men may go to the home of the mourners, where they will have to sit separately and recite verses from the Qur'an. (2001:116-117)*

In Chapter 3, we explored Christianity and African Traditional Theology through the voices of the children. I invited the understandings of adults to help me to deconstruct the culturally constructed discourses regarding spirituality and the afterlife. In Chapter 4, the children and I explored some of the socially constructed religious discourses regarding death and afterlife. We looked at Christianity, Islam and Atheism. In discussing the children's personal spiritualities, we deconstructed the voices of formalised religion. When the children mentioned beliefs in concepts such as heaven, hell, the ancestors, and prayer, I tried to come to a closer understanding (by deconstructing) of their particular understanding in using those words. However, this is not either/or, but rather both/and. In the conversations with the children their culturally constructed religious beliefs emerged as part of their meaning making. It has also been useful, therefore, to have access to people such as Tatum'kulu, Professor Kwenda, Bibi and my own Christian background, for accessing other (religion-based) perspectives on the voices of these children.

2.6 The narrative metaphor

The narrative metaphor proposes that persons live their lives by stories – that these stories are shaping of life, and that they have real, not imagined, effects – and that these stories provide the structure of life.

(White 1991:28)

There are a variety of uses of the term "narrative therapy". Some describe the current trend of regarding it as important *to be able to tell your story*. But the notion of simply *telling your story* dilutes the specificity of the narrative practices and approaches to therapy associated with the work of Michael White (Australia) and David Epston (New Zealand). Michael White (1998:3) has written prolifically about how "it is the stories that we have about our lives that actually shape or constitute our lives".

In the introduction to his essay entitled *Children, children's culture and therapy*, Michael White (2000:1) says:

I have particularly appreciated this opportunity to write on the subject of children, children's culture and therapy. This is because it provides me with occasion to put together an account of the contribution of children to the many therapeutic adventures that have been a source of joy to my life, and to the development of a range of therapeutic practices. A good part of what I know as narrative therapy has its roots in consultations with young children and their families.

The rich environment of the school campus makes children's culture available to us, the adults in their lives. This happens only if we are able to keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to listen, to ask, to co-construct, to shape, to constitute and re-constitute until we come to a place that is:

[I]dentifying of, elevating of, and more richly describing of some of the alternative knowledges and practices of person's lives.

(White 1997: 53)

For me, this is the "source of joy" and the place of opportunity for "the development of a range of therapeutic practices" that White (2000:1) speaks of. This understanding of the narrative metaphor opens up possibilities for the invitation of the preferred reality - the co-authoring of the preferred story by which people might live their lives. In keeping with postmodern and social construction discourse, the narrative metaphor invites all possibilities into the conversation in ways that in certain circumstances "the ordinary becomes extraordinary" (David Epston 2002). I believe that the stories of Nana, the letters to Kaylin's granny, and the book about a Fantastic Daddy are just some examples of our changing the ordinary into the extraordinary. The narrative metaphor, therefore, does not refer to a passive re-telling. It invites a re-storying that implies the verb, the "doing word" (to practise), rather than simply the noun (practice) or description of the story. A school community is a rich and fertile soil in which to plough, to plant, to weed, to reap and re-plant - to practise the preferred plans and memories we have for our lives. In "Catching up with David Epston", Epston (1998:132) selects some key narrative ideas for the therapeutic context of a narrative conversation. I used these ideas as scaffolding for the construction of my own practices by:

- Privileging the person's lived experience so as to uphold the conviction that children are the experts on their own lives.
- Encouraging a perception that change is always possible in such a way as to "engender hopefulness in situations of hopelessness" (David Epston Workshop: Putting the narrative into narrative therapy, Cape Town, 16 & 17 August 2002).
- Encouraging multiple perspectives and acting to make visible claims of "expert knowledge" or what White and Epston (1990:19) refer to as "normalizing 'truths'" assumed to be held by psychologists, parents, teachers, religious institutions and other professionals on the subject of bereavement and loss.

- Co-constructing preferred stories and finding ways to breathe life into these stories by selecting people in the community who will witness, encourage and collaborate.
- Acknowledging that stories are co-produced and endeavouring to make the children the privileged authors of their own experiences.
- Believing that persons are multi-storied, and that there are “many possible theologies according to many different circumstances” (Epston 2002).

Epston (Workshop: Putting the narrative into narrative therapy, Cape Town, 16 & 17 August 2002) suggests that the narrative metaphor “invites a reflexive posture and demands that therapists be accountable for their therapeutic stance.” This idea supports the chosen practices that will be illustrated in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. By “reflexive posture” I understand him to mean that:

- we always consult with children and then with the people whom they choose from the adult community, in such a way as to be sure that the story is their preferred story, and not ours or that of an imposed set of ideologies.
- we make sure that, when working with children, we do not fall into the popular discourses upheld as the only truths, such as illustrated above (2.1.3.1) in developmental and stage theories around bereavement and loss. Instead, we actively and consciously make available a smorgasbord - a host of possibilities from which children can select their preferred “dietary” needs.

2.6.1 Some narrative practices, terms and concepts used in this thesis

For the purposes of this thesis, I have selected only some of the terms and concepts that have supported my research adventure as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist. I will introduce briefly:

- Externalising conversations
- Deconstruction
- Agency
- Power
- Co-authorship/collaboration
- Meaning
- Questioning towards a dual landscape: action and meaning
- Re-membering conversations
- Therapeutic documents
- Definitional ceremony
- Outsider-witness groups

- **Externalising conversations**

[E]xternalising conversations have made it possible for people to separate their sense of identity from problem-saturated or deficit-centred accounts of who they are, and this has provided a basis for them to join with others in the rich description of alternative accounts of their lives, of their relationships, and of their identities.

(Michael White 2000:4)

In following the narrative practices and understandings that the problem does not constitute the person, the practice of externalisation invites “speaking about the problem in ways that situate it separately from the person and their identity” (Morgan 2000:17). This practice of externalisation is not necessary in every narrative conversation, but is useful when there is a strong connection with the problem in a way that allows the problem to be seen as being part of the person’s makeup. By helping people to see problems as separate from themselves, “externalising conversations allow for explorations of the relationship *between* the person and the problem” (Morgan 2000:28). The use of “The Negative” in the example of Daniel above (2.3.1) is an illustration of this practice, as opposed to speaking of “his negativity” and “his depression”.

- **Deconstruction**

[D]econstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called “truths” that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of persons’ lives.

(Michael White 1992:109)

In trying to come to a closer understanding of what children really think and what meaning they have made of the events in their lives, this research sought to reflect the kind of approach that questions the ‘taken-for-granted’ in such a way that makes it visible again. I understand Chirevo Kwenda (Interview with Dr Chirevo Kwenda, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town, August 2002) to be speaking of deconstructing culture when he speaks of “surrendering what is taken for granted.” I concur with Elaine Graham’s (1996:21) interpretation of the philosopher Derrida’s term *différance*:

A text is never unitary or stable, because in the margins and between the lines, lie the echoes of the meanings which were repressed and negated in the process of establishing closure, as well as the related associations, to which the surface text is constantly alluding.

In attempting to use “procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices” (White 1992:109), the aim of deconstruction in the Derridian sense would be to come to a closer understanding of the meanings to which the “surface text is constantly alluding” or has made obscure owing to *différance* (Graham 1996:21). In this sense, deconstruction is thus not used to destroy, but to come to a closer understanding.

- **Agency**

Those therapeutic practices that I refer to as “deconstructive”, assist in establishing, with persons, a sense of “agency”. This sense is derived from the experience of escaping “passengerhood” in life, and from the sense of being able to play an active role in the shaping of one’s own life – of possessing the capacity to influence developments in one’s life according to one’s purposes and to the extent of bringing about preferred outcomes.

(White 1992: 145)

In working with children, this journeying towards establishing a sense of agency is subverting of discourses that support the ideas that what is thought by adult, bigger, older, more powerful people is a greater truth. This links directly to the ideas that are held about power, discussed below.

- **Power**

One cannot visit a school context and not talk of power. Power is central to how schooling systems and we adults engage in the process of education, of upbringing, of normalizing and systematising children. Foucault (1980:93) links knowledge and power by saying: “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth.” Thus power and knowledge, according to Foucault, are inseparable. In certain knowledges gaining power, other knowledges become “subjugated knowledges” (1980:81). In the school context, these would refer to the knowledges that:

[H]ave been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity...a particular, local, regional knowledge.

(Foucault 1980:82)

Thus certain knowledges gain value and power and are then viewed to be truer/ more scientific/ more qualified/ more professional than others. Michael White (1995:19) speaks of the “preoccupation with the reproduction of the dominant culture in counselling/therapy.” Encouraging the culture of normalisation and measurement of children in schools then further supports this dominant culture of structuralist thinking. By supporting “them and us” ideas in the hidden curriculum and promoting ideas of ‘normal’, of “majority” and of “standardisation”, children are required to learn to “fit in with a dominant culture.” White (1995:19) explains that currently there are new developments in the field of therapy, (theory, practice and research) and that:

There has been a general challenge to some of the practices of power that have incited persons to measure their lives, relationships, families, and so on, against some notion of how they should be, and some challenges over the extent to which therapists have gone about trying to fashion persons and relationships to fit with the “ideal” frames that support these notions.

Although ideas such as these seem radical and subversive of beliefs around the respect for the scientific discourses of the day, White (1995:19) says that:

These developments encourage us to acknowledge and to question the politics of therapy, to reject therapy as a form of the government of persons, and to consider some of the power issues that are part of all therapeutic interactions.

Foucault says that hegemonic power can be resisted by making visible "these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges" (1980:82). Thus by a research process that aimed to make visible these local knowledges, it was hoped that the power/knowledge (1980:77) interplay would allow more space for the voicing of previously subjugated knowledges of children too.

- ***Co-authorship or collaboration***

In a Narrative Approach to therapy, the clients are centred as "the experts in their own lives," (Morgan 2000:2) and it is understood that people have "many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities" (: 2) that will help them to take a stand against the problems that challenge their lives.

In the approach to therapy that I took with children, co-authorship involved conversations, interviews, drawing, editing, negotiating and re-negotiating the information until the desired result of an agreed upon understanding was reached. The word "co-authorship" implies that the power-imbalances implicit in an adult-child and a therapist-child relationship were constantly being challenged by the therapist, as well as by the practice of co-authoring.

- ***Meaning***

According to Michael White (1991:28), "it is through the narratives or the stories that persons have about their own lives and the lives of others that they make sense of their experience." The effect of one meaning attached to events in a person's life may become problematic and exclude other possible meanings or interpretations of events. Narrative practices invite the meanings that clients bring into conversations so that clients can investigate the effects of those meanings on their lives, or life stories. In re-constructing of the meaning-making, we interpret this practice as a practice of doing hope. By shaping our lives with preferred (and hope-filled) meanings for the stories we live by, we are able to "constitute our lives" (White 1998:3) in a manner that brings hopefulness to our meaning making.

This is done by using Landscape of Action and Landscape of Identity questions (White 1991:28):

- **Questioning towards a dual landscape: action and meaning**

Following on from Bruner's ideas that "stories are composed of dual landscapes", White (1991:28) makes the distinction between the Landscape of Action and the Landscape of Identity. White explains that the Landscape of Action questions look at events linked together in particular sequences, through time, and according to a plot or theme. Landscape of Identity questions trace the meaning of these actions in people's lives. These questions are employed to find out about what effect the actions have had on people's lives in terms of their (and others') desires, wants, preferences, motives, hopes, values, beliefs, commitments and so on. The Narrative Approach to therapy investigates these dual landscapes, by moving between the two.

David Epston (Workshop: Putting the narrative into narrative therapy, Cape Town, 16 & 17 August 2002) says of his work with young children that if children do not have the language, he keeps looking for ways in which to connect with them in language. He puts it this way: "I will ask you questions *until* you can answer them." Many "experts" in the social sciences would say that therapists who work in this way are asking "leading questions." However, I agree wholeheartedly with Epston's approach: through the questions we ask, we allow children to pick and choose from an assortment of ideas, words and metaphors until they can select those that are most comfortable and the best possible fit for them.

- **Re-membering conversations**

Michael White (1997:22) uses Barbara Myerhoff's metaphor of "a club of life" (: 22) made up of members, some of whom we might choose to have in our "club of life", whereas others might not be so welcome. Taking this idea further in the context of re-membering conversations, people can then choose who will be members in their "club of life". White says:

This notion of re-membering, and the club metaphor, suggests possibilities for persons to engage in a revision of the membership of their club of life...this notion of re-membering also suggests possibilities and provides opportunities for persons to more directly acknowledge the important and valued contributions that others have made to their lives...such acts of acknowledgement can also have persons re-activating dormant memberships through re-engaging with some of the figures in their history. In these acts, a person experiences the stories of their lives linked to the stories of the lives of others around particular themes and shared values and commitments.

(White 1997:23)

- ***Therapeutic documents***

Practices of the written word, which have for a long time been a theme of narrative therapy, contribute significantly to the visibility, substantiation, and endurance of the sparkling events that are identified in narrative conversations – these practices of the written word document the more sparkling events of people’s lives and in so doing contribute to ‘rescuing the said from the saying of it’, the ‘told from the telling of it’. This documentation can take many forms, including certificates, letters, announcements, position statements, verse, song, and transcripts of therapeutic conversations.

(White 2000:6)

There is a close association between the writing of documents and narrative therapy. Epston (1998:95) discusses how he uses the opportunity for “expanding the conversation” by the “practice of letter writing.” According to Epston, this enables the therapist and client to take the therapeutic conversation further by picking up on what was discussed in the session, writing further thoughts, questions and in so doing “expanding the conversation”:

[T]he words in the letter don’t fade and disappear the way conversation does, they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the work of therapy and immortalising it.

(Epston 1998:95)

In chapter 1 there is a description of some of the variations of therapeutic documents that I used (See 1.7.5.3 – Kaleidoscope).

- ***Definitional ceremony***

Sometimes, narrative therapists create processes in which audience members act as witnesses, in very particular ways, to the conversations between the therapist and those coming to therapy.

(Morgan 2000:121)

A way of helping people to create and hold new and/or preferred beliefs and claims about their identities (or the identities of people who may no longer be living), is by participating in “social verification practices” that acknowledge the claims being made about their lives:

These practices of acknowledgement invariably engage an audience of outsider-witnesses in the retelling of the stories that are associated with people’s alternative identity claims, retellings that extend on the boundaries of the original tellings, retellings in which the stories of people’s lives become joined around shared themes, purposes, values and, at times, commitments.

(White 2000:8)

I found the concept of “definitional ceremony” central to the acknowledgement and making visible of contributions made by people (living and no longer living) to the lives of the children interviewed. This

sometimes served as what is referred to in narrative practice as “taking it back practices” as well as to reinforce and make stronger the preferred realities the children choose to live by.

- ***Outsider-witness groups: children as outsider witnesses and conversation partners***

In this research adventure, peers of the children I have met with have asked for friends to be included in the conversation. These children are invited in, first to listen to an interview, and later to be interviewed themselves about what they have learnt from listening to their friends' stories. Working with children's friends as conversation partners was a way of encouraging and enriching the possibilities in the therapeutic setting. I often found that encouraging children to invite their friends to join us as conversation partners (outsider witnesses), was one of the ways in which to equalise the adult-child power imbalances that occurred in therapy. Epston and White (1992:17) suggest that:

When persons are established as consultants to themselves, to others, and to the therapist, they experience themselves as more of an authority on their own lives, their problems, and the solution to these problems.

It is a process in which everybody benefits, and everybody is changed through the co-construction of new knowledges. It is a process which brings hope and benefit to the therapist as well as to the people we consult:

The gift of therapy is balanced by the gift of consultancy. We consider this reciprocity to be of vital importance in reducing the risk of indebtedness and replacing it by a sense of fair exchange.

(Epston & White 1992:17)

2.7 In conclusion:

By taking a *postmodern, feminist and contextual* position in my research, I took a position of journeying *with* my young co-searchers rather than taking the lead or journeying on their behalf. This offered the opportunity of adventure without certainty – where every conversation sought to open up new possibilities for caring and for hoping. A narrative approach to pastoral therapy has been the guide that has allowed me to co-search in ways that seek to stand against modernist certainty – *with* an attitude of care, hope and possibility.

In Chapter Three, I tell the story of a young boy whose life has been challenged by the effects of the violent and sudden deaths of both parents. His story is one of hope and the co-creation of community – a community where the Three Wise Young Men take a stand with others against guns and violence.

CHAPTER THREE
THE THREE WISE YOUNG MEN FROM CAPE TOWN
RESEARCH AS CO-SEARCH: A NETWORK OF HOPE, COURAGE AND CARE

Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world.
(Stake 1994:244)

In the chapter that follows, I have chosen to tell this collection of stories with the understanding that there is much to be told in the retelling. Robert Stake (1994:237) suggests: "A case study is both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning." This chapter shows how the process of collecting stories has value, both in terms of making the story of King visible, as well as showing how adults can learn from children. Stake (1994) distinguishes between:

- the intrinsic case study where the case itself is "interesting" – focuses on the intrinsic interest of the particular case, the importance of the detail/the particular without any emphasis on generalisation and
- the instrumental case study which is "a case study into an issue or refinement of theory" – the case is of secondary interest and it plays a supportive role in the understanding of something else.

Although King's story served some instrumental "purposes", it was more about the intrinsic value and learning for which this story was identified as a "case study". Stake (1994:239) quotes Carter (1993) and Coles (1989) that "it is not uncommon for the qualitative case researcher to call for letting the case 'tell its own story.'" Likewise, this chapter allows the case to 'tell its own story': it is a story of research as co-search, a work in progress, and a journey without end.

"Rites of passage" is a metaphor used by various writers to describe the "rituals accompanying change from one place, state, social position or age to another" (Griffith & Griffith 2002:169). This metaphor is adopted from the writings of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (Griffith & Griffith 2002:169), who described "the stages of separation, liminality and reincorporation" (Epston & White 1992:12) as the three processes involved in transition or change. Epston and White (1992:13) use this metaphor in therapy as it "provides a useful map for orienting therapists to the process of therapy, and for assisting those persons who seek therapy in transiting from problematic statuses to unproblematic statuses." In the work that follows there is evidence of this process of change - both in terms of my personal journey as therapist/co-searcher, as well as change in terms of the lives of the children who joined me as participants in co-searching for evidence of hope, courage, community and care.

According to Epston and White (1992:13), the rites of passage metaphor allows for stages of change to be

recognised in therapy. Their use of this metaphor is applicable to this story in the following ways:

- The “*separation*” from dominant discourses is evident in the writings about the dominant, fear-filled stories and other discourses that have often influenced my thinking and the thinking of many in my school community. These change-restricting ideas are described and then challenged in the early parts of the chapter that follows.
- The “*liminal space*” is the time of “*communitas*” (Epston & White 1992:13) where there is a strong sense of community between all participants. It is a time characterised by “separation...from familiar...taken-for-granted ways of going about life” (1992:12) and is the space which is “betwixt and between known worlds” (1992:12). It is described as a time of “disorganization...exploration, and...a heightened sense of possibility” (1992:12). This heightened sense of possibility (and at times, uncertainty) is evident in the excerpts of conversations held with the Three Wise Young Men, as well as the rituals and other ways of making connection and of finding community that we devise together.
- The “*reincorporation*” brings the research “to its conclusion” (Epston and White 1992:14). In this stage, the “alternative knowledges that have been resurrected and/or generated become authenticated”(1992:14). The definitional ceremonies, the permission given to Elmarie to present their story to others in New Zealand, the public receipt of letters from New Zealand in a ceremony in front of their classmates, my court appearance as witness for the children’s lawyer, new contacts via e-mail from Resource Teachers and children in New Zealand and the awaited celebration of their ideas on Judy Small’s CD, all help to authenticate the “alternative knowledges” and to bring these new knowledges into a daily lived reality. The “reincorporation” is the incorporation an ever-widening community of care.

The “rites of passage” metaphor is a framework I have imposed for the purposes of this retelling (see 3.2). However, learning with people as the story develops is “neither pedagogically nor epistemologically neat”(Stake 1994:241). For this reason, I have not changed the order of events to suit the re-telling. I have tried to honour the children’s voices by telling the story as it happened. This challenges the fact that, at the end of the day, “[T]he researcher does have the power to choose what to tell” (Stake 1994: 240).

3.1 The separation from old stories

3.1.1 Fear-filled stories – the social construction of fear

I was raised on fear of “the other”. Born into the world in 1961 in the Eastern Cape city of Grahamstown, I was classified as a white female on my birth certificate. 1961 was the year that South Africa became a Republic and the year after The Sharpeville Massacre. This was a demonstration against South Africa’s pass-laws, which forced black people to carry “reference books”. These books contained identity papers and served to control the movement and employment of black people. A crowd of people gathered outside the

Sharpeville police station, some burning their books in protest. As police started to panic, they opened fire on the crowd. Sixty nine people were killed and more than one hundred and eighty were injured. This was a watershed moment in our country's history. Many white South Africans emigrated from our country in fear of the perceived danger of black retaliation - often referred to in local communities as "die swart gevaar" (the black danger):

The uproar among South African blacks was immediate, and the following week saw demonstrations, protest marches, strikes and riots around the country. On March 30, 1960, the government declared a state of emergency, detaining more than 18 000 people. The ANC and the PAC were banned and forced to go underground or into exile. Thereafter, both movements abandoned the traditional strategy of non-violent protest and turned increasingly to armed struggle.

(<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/refarticle.aspx?refid=...> 2002/10/20 pg 2 of 3)

I was born into a life where anyone who was not of my racial group was socially constructed as "other": different, inferior and inherently dangerous. My family and my parents did not do this to me; this was part of being constructed as a social being in a whites-only community, following the implementation of a government policy of Apartheid in creating an unjust and contaminating society.

This is one of the many stories that helped me to build a bridge to the "other". This story also assisted me to ask forgiveness from the "other" by *doing research as care*. Since the election of the new democratic government in our country in 1994, South Africans have looked forward to a just and fair society. The aftermath of the violence done to our people against our common humanity is that with which we grapple today. Our current struggle in 2002 is against the violence resulting from the cycle of crime and violence – "*almal se gevaar*":

We are also grappling with the legacies of apartheid. Violence and criminality are placing the lives of many South Africans in a straitjacket of fear and uncertainty. According to the World Health Organization, the incidence of violent death in South Africa – 57 per 100,000 people – is now the highest in the world (Cape Times, 13 May, 1996.)

(Ackermann 1998: 76)

3.1.2 The aftermath of violence

King (aged ten) lost both his parents in one of those "high-profile murders" four years ago when he was in Grade 1. His parents were gunned down in their home in Guguletu, a township in Cape Town. The two little boys (the older one is King) were asleep in their bedrooms and apparently did not wake up at the time. They awoke the next morning in a strange house, having been taken there in the middle of the night by relatives. After school the following day, they were returned to their home where they were witness to the devastation, the evidence of their parents' violent deaths. Being a Xhosa and Christian home, there was a traditional

African funeral and mourning period. Some of our teaching staff attended the funeral. I did not go.

3.1.3 Discourses of 'the other' returned to feed fear

I remember King asking me a few months later: "Why didn't you come to my mother's funeral?" I could not tell him that I was *too afraid* to go, and that I was relieved that other people on our staff were more duty-bound to attend. The *fear of townships* I held was because as a white middle-class woman in my early 20's I once "lost my nerve" in the townships (see Chapter 5). In my head I held the image of once again being one of a small handful of white people amongst "*the masses*" of *black people* – people who did not know me, and who had every reason not to trust or like me. I could not tell King of the fear that I was raised on - that *black townships are places of danger for white women*. I could not describe to him the panic that gripped my throat when I last "went in" to a township and how that fear was fed by not knowing where I was, or how I could "escape", and not even being able to ask for help because I could not speak the language. He would not have understood. I regretted my decision not to attend that funeral, as I have regretted many similar decisions before. I wished that I had had more courage to go to my places of risk...

3.1.4 Discourses of adults' rights over the lives of children

Subsequent to the funeral of King's parents, an acrimonious relationship developed among adult relatives who laid claim to these orphans:

In most African societies, ancestry is traced through the *father's bloodline*. The brother of one's father is referred to as one's "father", and his children would then be referred to as one's brothers or sisters. The brother of one's mother is referred to as one's "uncle".

(Elion & Strieman 2001:40)

Some of King's family members are contesting these traditions. The children have been affected by legislative decisions about who may have access to them, to their home and to their possessions. These are decisions that continue to impact on their living of their lives.

3.2 Approaching the liminal space

Michael White (1995:99) uses the also uses the metaphor of a "migration of identity" to describe the "range of experiences" people go through when journeying from one way of being to new and preferred ones. White (1995:100) speaks of the "liminal" or "betwixt and between space" where people undergoing these migratory journeys "experience confusion and disorientation" as part of these journeys. The story that follows illustrates what Epston and White (1992:13) and White (1995:99) refer to as the "liminal" space of "betwixt and between" in my journey as a narrative pastoral therapist.

3.2.1 Standing on the threshold between vulnerability and responsibility

We are vulnerable creatures; that is what we share as humans. Being free to wander, hope, and love does not mean denying our vulnerability; rather it means embracing it. Only when we act in full knowledge of our vulnerability do we learn to discriminate. This does not mean simply choosing to wander here rather than there, hoping for this and not that, loving one rather than another. It means finding at the core of each activity an affirmation of living that goes beyond the particular choices of where, what, and whom.

(Frank 1991:20)

Judith, one of the parents at our school, and I sat in her home in Newlands, drinking tea and enjoying the rare opportunity to sit and casually chat about life, about mothering, about our school where both of us are parents (and I, also a teacher). Judith asked me how things were going with King and his brother. She also asked *if the two boys had had any "therapy"*. Part of being at a small school means that the two children who were orphaned four years ago are somehow "common concern". Her question, therefore, did not surprise me, but it did make me feel a bit uncomfortable, because I did not really know how to answer. Her question made me remember again the devastating news of the murder and that the children were sent straight back to school the morning after the murder.

I particularly remember King calling out to me as he walked past in single-file to the school hall: "Mrs van Duuren, do you know that my mommy and my daddy are dead?" I remember answering: "Yes, I know my darling." I did not know what else to say. He was in Grade 1 at the time. I also remember that Jenny Mallett had "the task" of speaking to the little boys and telling them that day that their parents had been murdered. I remember her, an experienced counsellor, telling me that it was one of the hardest things she had ever had to do. It was also one of the last things she ever had to do, for she died soon after. I also remember that our school community was in a state of collective shock, but that *no arrangements were made to support the community of teachers in caring for these children*. The Grade 1 teacher wept frequently. After a while it became a source of irritation for other staff, who felt that she needed to "*pull herself together and move on.*" One of the staff also felt quite strongly that the teacher was using the "incident" as an "*excuse to deal with her own issues.*" We got *the help of the Trauma Centre* to "provide some counselling", and we especially requested the *assistance of a black counsellor* (preferably Xhosa-speaking), as there was the idea that a black person would understand better the traditions and approach to bereavement of a Xhosa community. To my knowledge this counselling was fairly short in duration. Jenny Mallett's own death plunged our school community into a new state of shock, which *overshadowed and virtually obliterated King's story*.

3.2.2 Betwixt and between

Situated as we are between an old, unexamined world and a new world voiced in the text, located in the moment of subversion where we are quite unsure, we are betwixt and

between....It is a moment of deep ambiguity that must be hosted with respect, awe, and patience, not rushed, not precluded, not pre-empted. It is that precious moment of liminality that makes serious change possible.

(Brueggemann 1993:91)

As a student of narrative pastoral therapy, Judith's question plunged me into uncertainty. I had embarked on a process of discovery, one that sought to uphold Feminist theologian, Denise Ackermann's (1994 -1996) words, and to approach my practice "by seeking justice, love, freedom, equality, wholeness, peace and healing" for the children and their caregivers in the context of our school community. However, four years previously I had not seen myself as being "qualified" for counselling children who had suffered bereavement and loss. *I did not feel I had a right to give an "expert opinion"* on how "things were going" with children whose tragedy I had tried harder to avoid than to embrace. My discomfort was also to do with the very successful way in which I had washed my hands and left King and Prince's story to the lawyers, the Trauma Centre counsellors, the social worker - the "outside professionals", allowing others to "take responsibility" for King and Prince's well-being. How could I, after all, a white middle class woman, have anything more to offer these young black children by way of comfort and therapy? How could I overcome fear and my entrenched sense of being endangered as a white woman? I could not imagine:

[I]n our desperate, fearful society, most people have few occasions for such liminality, for hosting ambiguity where God's newness is given.

(Brueggemann 1993:91)

I believe now that I was given an occasion for moving in and beyond such liminality in the story that follows - a moment of possibility that arose in a Grade 4 classroom on an ordinary day during an ordinary week. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity that the occasion provided in challenging me to host my fears.

3.2.3 The moment of insertion

King was busy in class a few days after the slightly uncomfortable conversation I had had with Judith. I had gone into the class to fetch one of my support pupils, and noticed that the teacher was talking about different kinds of families. She had prepared her lesson around the different kinds of families there are, having taken care to deconstruct the idea of the nuclear family by asking children for examples of the different families they knew of and to describe their own family arrangements. I happened to walk into the classroom at the moment that King was desperately trying to tell his teacher about his parents. The problem was, however, that *he was trying to talk about his parents who had already died*. The teacher was clearly awkward about the turn of the conversation and was *trying to keep it steered towards living families*. She studiously avoided following his line of conversation by smiling and saying: "Yes", but then immediately taking a different child's contribution and following that story as a preferred alternative. King tenaciously kept putting up his hand and bringing more

and more details of his parent's murder into the room: the dog being shot, the blood, the bullet marks etc. I asked the teacher if I could join King's group for a bit, as I felt that by inviting him to tell me more clearly what it was that he was wanting to talk about, I might, after all, have something to offer. I asked King then if he wanted to tell the class about his parents? He said: "Yes." I asked him which parents did he want to tell about? Was it his parents whom he lives with now, or his parents who had already died? He told me that he wanted to tell them about his parents who had already died. I then asked him if he liked to talk of them as his real parents, or his parents who have already died, or Lucky and Lovey, or something else? He said: "My real parents." He said that I should tell the class a little bit about his "real parents". He also accepted the invitation I then made, that he might want to come to my room later in the day to talk a bit more about his real parents. That is how I "got involved" and started co-journeying with him in "remembering conversations" (White 1997:22) which helped to bring the memories and meaning of his "real parents" lives back to his living reality or his "club of life" (: 22)(see Chapter 2).

3.2.4 Lived experience

Cochrane, de Gruchy and Peterson (1991:17) talk of "the moment of insertion" as being the position from which a contextual theologian does theology: "The moment of insertion locates our pastoral responses in the lived experience of individuals and communities"(1991:17). This "moment of insertion" had arrived. I have come to understand that this was a moment that has had, and will continue to have, a profound effect on my life as a white South African woman, as a mother and as a Narrative Pastoral Therapist – someone who is in the process of becoming. What follows invites you to witness the conversations, wisdoms and network of care, courage and hope that this moment of insertion afforded.

3.2.5 Children's voices

This tale will not tell anyone how to cope, but it does bear witness to what goes into coping.
That witness, I believe, is enough.

(Frank 1991:5)

King was very excited to start talking about Lovey and Lucky, his "real parents". In our first conversation, he explained very carefully who was looking after him now and exactly how the weeks and weekends had been organised in terms of visiting grandparents and his new parents. He said that his "real parents" were killed four years ago and in the morning he woke up in his cousins' house. He did not remember being taken there, but he must have been taken there while he was sleeping, because he went to sleep in his parents' house. He said that he was taken back to his house later and he saw the blood and bullet marks in the lounge and that they (the killers) also shot his white fluffy dog. He explained that he now lived in his parents' house with his

father's oldest brother, whom he calls Tatam'kulu, Tatam'kulu's wife, whom he calls Mama and his little brother Prince.

3.2.5.1 Restoring the story – co-creating a Landscape of Action

Michael White (1991:28) (see 2.6.1) explains that the Landscape of Action questions look at events linked together in particular sequences, through time, and according to a plot or theme. In King's response to my initial questions he recollected memories of his parents four years earlier. His memories were fairly sparse and he seemed, at the outset, to have fairly "thin" descriptions of his parents' lives. Most of the section that follows shows events or actions that he remembered. After describing to me his daily ritual of visiting his parents' photographs, he started to remember more about his mother's actions. The "saying hullo" metaphor (White 1988:7-11) (see 1:1) helped me to explore questions that could "invite...lost or forgotten knowledges of self" (: 9) and a "re-experience of past selves" (: 9). This "recounting of what [he] perceive[d] to be [his parents'] positive experience of [him]" (White 1988:9), worked out in such a way as to help King to find "a sense of continuity and meaning" in his life and in his experience of the lives of his loved ones.

Patton (1993:27), a practical theologian following a communal contextual paradigm for pastoral care, writes about how care and community are related to each other "but it is memory that brings them fully into relationship." Patton (1993:28) explains how community is lost knowledge that must be "remembered and recovered. Remembered means to re-member. It means to put the body back together" and because we remember, we can care. The opposite of re-member is to be 'dis-membered" (Patton 1993:28). When talking to King we "re-membered" his father and mother. This created a context for community and care to take place.

- ***A memory of a father***

I asked King what he could remember of his life before his parents were killed. He said that his father (Lucky) *used to buy him things*, such as the remote controlled car that he still has. He also had a model car, a Dodge, but he couldn't find it. He thought he would look for it in the garage when he got home.

I asked if he could remember his mother and what she was like. He answered that he couldn't remember very much and that he had been forgetting. I asked if there were photographs. He then became quite talkative and said that he had photographs in his bedroom and in the lounge. *I asked if he ever looked at the photographs*, and he said that *he did so every day*. To look at the photos made him feel happy. I then wondered how it was that the photos made him feel happy. He said that the photos bring back memories and remind him that they are smiling at him, and that he can feel their love and that they are looking after him. He spoke of his puppy, Fluffy, who was soft and cuddly. He remembered that Fluffy would roll around and catch butterflies.

- **A memory of a mother**

King started to speak of his mother, Lovey: *"She would read to me, stories in Xhosa or English. She put pepper in my mouth for swearing and hitting. She gave me ice blocks in water to cool me down, and she said I could not ride my bicycle for a whole week when my father's friend wanted to spank me with a belt."* I was quite startled at receiving this information and I was at a loss for words. I had not been expecting negative memories.

3.2.5.2 Re-storying the story – co-creating a Landscape of Identity

In searching further for King's "solution knowledges" (White 2000:21) in coping with bereavement and loss, I used Landscape of Identity questions (White 1991:28) to find out more about the meaning the actions of his parents held in his life. I was particularly interested in exploring with King the "desires, wants, preferences, motives, hopes, values, beliefs, commitments and so on" (: 28) he thought Lucky and Lovey had held for their young sons.

- In hearing the re-telling of what had been a "high-profile" tragedy, I wanted to make sure that King would have something more tangible, descriptive and meaningful of his parents' memories. I also wanted to help him to explore the "meaning and purpose" (Griffith & Griffith 2002:8) for his life in recalling his memories of his deceased parents. I tried to find the meanings that Lucky and Lovey's parenting actions held for King. To do so, I asked him the following Landscape of Identity questions:
- "What do you think your mother was trying to tell you when she put pepper into your mouth? What do you think she wished for you for your life? What was she saying to you?" To my surprise, his reply was instantaneous. *"King, remember do not swear."*
- I inquired about the meaning of her giving him ice blocks to suck on hot weather days. He said: *"Be kind to everyone."*
- I asked him why she had banned him from riding his bicycle. He told me that his punishment was given after he had broken road-safety rules and gone to the shop alone. I asked him what he thought his mother was trying to say. He answered: *"Remember, you must tell your mother if you are going out to play on your bicycle. I want you to be safe."*
- I asked him about his father's wishes for his life. He said that his father's actions of buying him model cars and other things were actions that said: *"I want you to be happy."* He also said that his father was saying with his actions: *"I care about you, because you must get lots of attention."* I asked what kind of attention his father wished for him and he answered: *"Loving and caring attention."* I asked him how he knew that and he said: *"He fetched me when I was sick. He picked me up with his big strong hands, like giants hands, and Thembani took my bag to the car."* He said his father would have said: *"King, I want you to*

always be happy and safe whatever you do."

3.2.5.3 Strengthening the meaning and co-creating the preferred story

King was very excited to see me for his second session. He had had to wait for a week to see me again. During the week he had come to me and said: "I have lots of things that I am needing to tell you, but I have forgotten a lot of them." I had said I was sure he would remember once we started talking. He was happy to continue from where we had left off in the previous session. He had gone to the garage to find the model car, but found his old BMX bicycle instead and had been practising riding it all week. We recapped on what values Lovey and Lucky had had for his life. I wondered how he might like to keep the very special values of his parents with him. Tentatively I checked if their names might give further ideas as to values that they might have stood for. He immediately responded with "*Yes, Lovey is for love...I must get a lot of love and be loving, and Lucky is for good luck,...I must have good luck and be safe.*" I asked him how we could keep those wishes with him, maybe write a book or make something. He said he would like to make a medal: the ribbon representing love and the medallion representing luck. He would like the medallion to hang in such a way as to keep their wishes very close to his heart.

3.2.5.4 Recruiting witnesses to the story

King asked if he might take the notes of the session (written on a large piece of A2 sized paper) back to class. He said he would like to get the children to draw on his piece of paper or to write something so that he could make a kind of book. I asked if he would like a second piece of paper so that there was enough space for the drawings and writing. This was agreed upon. I realised from King's request that he wanted to include other people in the retelling of the story. I realised then, as I was to be reminded again and again, how important his peer group was to him. He did not want to keep this story within the confines of our one-to-one relationship. This was a story that **he wanted to share**, which reminded me of Frank (1991:5): "We all have to find our own way, but we do not necessarily have to be alone."

A day or two later I went into King's Grade 4 classroom. I noticed a display of our notes as well as a fresh sheet of paper on the board. I learnt that King had presented his story and memories of Lovey and Lucky to the class. Some of the children had responded by writing him a small note, joke or song. His teacher (Miss Oliver) had said that the notes could stay on display and as people felt fit to do so, they could write a note to King. She had decided to do this in consultation with King and without any briefing from me. I was really excited by the tangible space afforded him for bringing his parents' memories and values for his life to such a prominent position. I was beginning to see how important public recognition of his peer group was to him. The following notes were on the large sheet of paper:

Dear King, I am sorry about your parents even tho your parents are dead they will still be waching over you
from Raymond W

Dear King, So sorry about your parents.
And if you ever wont anyone to talk to, you can count on me.
From Matthew D

Dear King, I am so very sorry about your parents.
Lots of luck for any future hopes.
From Chris

Dear King, You must always remember to be kind to everyone.
From Cholo

Dear King, I feel very sorry of you and I want you to be happy and do not be a bad boy for life.
From Fatima

Dear King, I feel very sorry for you. You should always be happy and think happy thoughts.
From Steffi

Dear King, I feel very sorry for you and I hop you will have a happy live from Tahir

Dear King, I feel sory fo you and I hop you will be a good boy and rimember yor perens woch over you:
From Tahir

King King, Super star. If you follow your dremms you will go far
Them bani

Dear King,
Are you praying at night because you now that it is the right thing to do and you must always do right things
Them bani

Jokes to King:

There was a boy that went to school his teacher said "by tomorrow you must have 10 words. The boy goes home he asks his sister she says "shut up"; he asks his brother he says "in the bin". Then he turns on the T.V. to watch Superman. He comes back to school.

Teacher:, Have you got the words?

Boy: Shut up

Teacher: Where's your manners?

Boy: In the bin

Teacher: Who do you think you are?

Boy: Superman.

I have left the letters written by children in unedited form. This is in keeping with the ideas followed by Kotzé

and Morkel (2002:9) who promote “the use of children’s language in research and therapy” which enables the “story-texts...to stay as close as possible to the spoken words” (2002:10). This allows one to stick to the closest possible intended meaning of the children when they write and “to preserve the experience being shared” (2002:10). This also prevented me from imposing an adult-centred analysis of what is an appropriate or inappropriate response to bereavement and loss.

3.2.5.5 Rumours try to hijack his story, but land up in the bin.

One of the classmates brought the news to school that Lucky and Lovey were killed in a drug-related murder. King was very upset. The Grade 2 teacher (Mrs Senekal) went into the class and told the children to not pass on hearsay information, especially information that could hurt other people’s feelings. When I heard about it, I asked King if he was upset about what the girl had said. He said he had been upset, but that he was OK now. I asked him if what she had said was something he had been told before and if it was true for him. He said no to both questions. He said that the reason his parents were killed was because their house is on the corner of two streets and therefore it is easy for robbers to escape. I then asked where we usually throw things that have no use for us, such as used things and other bits of rubbish. We agreed it was in the bin. King and I went and “threw” the useless information into the bin, and put on the lid.

3.2.5.6 Recruiting important adults to join the story

The role of the curious stranger who can conduct a dialogue from a not-knowing position can be a unique and valuable one.

(Griffith & Griffith 2002:18)

I saw Tatam’kulu at the gala. I plucked up the courage to ask him if he was happy for me to be speaking with King. He said it was “OK”, but that I must understand that King is fine. I said that that made me wonder what it was that Tatam’kulu and Mama had managed to do to include King and Prince in such a way that their lives have settled and that they really do seem to be doing well. I asked if he would be interested in my interviewing him at some stage about what he has done to make the transition work for King and Prince. We spoke a bit of Lucky’s values for raising his sons, and what Tatam’kulu is carrying through. He said that they both believed that children are best raised on a lot of love, but that he, Tatam’kulu, is a lot stricter with the boys than Lucky was. He felt that strict and loving was the kind of combination that he was most comfortable with. He said that Lucky had been very indulgent, so that he could not continue exactly on his late brother’s path. He also explained how by the evening it is too late to reprimand a child for what they have done in the morning. It is better to speak to them in the evening, but to punish would not be appropriate after such a long interval.

3.2.5.7 Finding other ways to co-create story – beads of hope

Kaethe Weingarten (2000:402) rejects the “idea of hope as a feeling that individuals either do or do not

have." She says: "hope is something we do with others" because "Hope is too important – its effects on body and soul too significant – to be left to individuals alone" (: 402). The next time I saw King, he did not feel like talking. We got a bit more conversation going when I asked him why his parents had chosen his name for him. He said it means "our king". We then went on with the designing of the necklace-medal. This was our way of *doing* hope (Weingarten 2000: 402). We agreed to use a bead to represent each of the different values (wishes) that Lovey has brought to King's life for him to live by. He chose the following:

- Blue bead – to keep myself safe
- Yellow bead – to be happy
- Red bead – to be a polite person
- Green bead – know that I love you always
- Orange bead – have fun in your life

He did not want to go on to talking about Lucky, and we agreed to do other things. I asked King if Tatam'kulu was managing to keep the wishes that Lovey and Lucky had for his life. He told me about Tatam'kulu's way of *doing hope*. He said: "Tatam'kulu cares about me. Everywhere I go he looks after me. He wants me to be safe too. He buys me stuff, like 4X4 cars. He gives me soft smacks – never hard. He tells me that my mother looks over me wherever I go if I am at school or at outings. Once I saved myself from falling into the snake pit. "Tatam'kulu always says TGIF (Thank God it's Friday!) He takes me to games at N1 City, Ratanga and Century City. He buys me hamburgers and pizza."

3.2.5.8 Threading hope and teaching friends about the hope

I brought beads, string, gold medallions, a glass heart and other equipment to the session. King and I sat together, with previous notes for reference and made the necklace. We did not talk much, and focussed on the words that had described the values/wishes as he was threading the beads onto the string. He then put his necklace on and asked if he could go to class. He was to be seen showing his class and explaining to his friends and teaching them what the necklace meant. He was very pleased.

3.2.5.9 Inviting friends as outsider witnesses to hope, courage and care

I asked King if he thought that I might interview him about the things in his life that have helped him to live his life after his parents' death. I explained that I thought that it might help other people who lose their parents and also give adults ideas of how to behave with children. King agreed, but said that he would like Thembani to be there. I immediately agreed to this, as I knew that Michael White (2000:77) had used children in outsider-witness groups. This is a process where "audience members act as witnesses, in very particular ways, to the conversations between the therapist and those coming to therapy" (Morgan 2000:121) (also see Ch 2). This use of children as people who could join the conversation as well as "play a part in authentication of the preferred claims" (White 1995:26) was an exciting development for me. I had already realised that King wanted

his peers involved in his re-storying process. White (1995:26) says:

[R]egardless as to whether I am meeting with an individual, a couple, or a family, I am thinking about possible audiences to the unfolding developments of therapy, and thinking about how this audience might be invited to play a part in the authentication of the preferred claims that are emerging in the process of the therapy.

What follows shows children in conversation as outsider witnesses to King's story of hope, courage and care. Initially they listen to the questions I ask King and to the answers that he gives. Following that, they are invited to talk about what they have heard. In the first part of the conversation we learn about the things that helped him most:

- ***Good friends who care about me***

King's strong sense of community with these friends interested me. I wondered what qualities he saw in them that made him want to include them in special conversations:

- Linda: King, maybe you can start by telling me why you have chosen Thembanani and Raymond to be here today?
- King: They keep secrets well. I can trust them and they care about me.
- Linda: Oh, is it important for you that your friends keep secrets?
- King: Yes, some secrets.
- Linda: Well, maybe we will talk about some things today that you would like to keep private. Would you like them to keep what you have to say today private?
- King: Yes, some of it.

I learnt in this conversation from King that it has been important to him that his lifestyle has remained very similar to the one he shared with his birth parents.

- Linda: King, tell me a bit about what your life was like before your parents were killed.
- King: We had nice times. We would go out to café's, movies and to Thembanani's house. They would buy me stuff.
- Linda: And now, after their death?
- King: Things haven't changed so much.
- Linda: Is that a good thing or not such a good thing?
- King: A good thing.
- Linda: So what has stayed the same?
- King: My father's friends and my mother's friends are the same. We still go out and go to Thembanani's house. My mother and father were friends with Thembanani's mother and father. We used to go there every weekend. Now we don't go every weekend, but we still go there often.
- Linda: Were Tatam'kulu and Mama friends with Thembanani's parents before?
- King: No, not so much.
- Linda: So now they have made new friends.
- King: Yes and now I see Tatam'kulu and Mama every day, because they have moved into my parents' room.
- Linda: What else is the same?
- King: Same house and bedroom. The lounge and kitchen stayed the same.

- ***My parents look down on me from above***

King had told me that his parents watched over him. I was not sure if he was referring to the Christian belief in heaven or if he was referring to African Traditional belief in ancestors. I also wondered how much his spiritual beliefs stood with him in helping him to live his life without his birth parents. His answers in this conversation are not very full and reflect a fairly stereotypical image of the Western Christian idea of heaven as illustrated in children's bibles. I raised this topic with him again later and got a clearer picture of his spiritual connectedness with his deceased parents:

- Linda: We have talked about your memories of your parents and we have made your necklace. You have also talked about the photographs that help you to remember your parents. You have also said that your parents are watching over you. Where are they watching from?
- King: They look down on me from above.
- Linda: Oh, where from?
- King: In heaven!
- Linda: What do you think it's like in heaven?
- King: White clouds and things.
- Linda: Do you go to church?
- King: To Nokululeko, next to NY5.
- Linda: When do you go?
- King: On Saturday and Sunday.
- Linda: What do you do at church?
- King: We pray, ask God for things...to help us...to look out for what we do...we pray for miracles. We also go if there's a funeral.
- Linda: Do you visit the graves of your parents?
- King: Yes.
- Linda: What is it like?
- King: Two books next to each other. [Referring to the tombstones]
- Linda: Do you go often?
- King: When we want to.
- Linda: If we imagined now that Tatham'kulu and Mama and Lucky and Lovey...if all four of them were in the room now and you could talk to them all, what would you tell them are the things that have helped you through this difficult time in your life?
- King: Love, kindness, happiness and safety from trouble...and being hurt.

Frequently, when in conversation with children, it is necessary to shift the focus after fairly short intervals. At this stage of the conversation, I felt that it was time to include the children who had been invited to witness King's story in a more active, participatory way.

3.2.5.10 Children's witness

- ***The children heard the pain and the injustice***

In the second part of this interview I learned from these outsider witnesses that children are able to listen and to hear what other children have to say. The problem-saturated story of violence was about to overwhelm the conversation. I sought a way to take action by inviting protest against the violence.

Linda: Now if it's OK, I'd like to ask the reflecting team some questions. How are you? What about the conversation would you like to talk about?

Raymond: I feel sad. It's not right that small children should have their parents killed.

Linda: It seems unfair, hey?

Raymond: Yes. People shouldn't have guns without licenses.

Linda: Do you think people shouldn't have guns without licences or people shouldn't have guns at all?

Raymond: People shouldn't have guns without licences.

Them bani: No guns. If nobody was allowed to have guns then people could not shoot each other.

Linda: Do you think we should have a petition or something? Write a letter of protest to the newspaper?

- ***The children noticed the adults' caring actions***

We spoke about the meaningful actions of King's caregivers and how these kept a family tradition of caring alive. We also pictured how these caring actions would translate into King's life as an adult one day.

Linda: What have you noticed about how Tatam'kulu and Mama have been with King?

Them bani: They take care of him and try to treat him the same. They do basically the same as his parents used to do.

Linda: If we could imagine King as a parent one day, I don't know if he will want to be a parent, but if we just imagined him as a parent...what kind of a parent do you think he would be?

Them bani: (giggle) He would have fun, teach them wrong and right, keep them safe, be kind and give them love.

Linda: That sounds to me like a bit of a tradition. Do you think it is a Malibeni Family Tradition to be good parents?

Them bani: Yes!

Linda: King, would you like us to write here on the paper: "Malibeni family tradition: Be Good Parents"?

King: Yes.

3.2.5.11 A new outsider witness – to hope, risk, struggle, prayer and real friends

Outsider witnesses do not have to physically be in the same room as the person whose preferred story they witness. Letters have been described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994: 423) as valuable research and field text. The letter that follows is the first step towards inviting new people into King's community of care. The e-mail allows these conversations to be responded to almost immediately, keeping a fairly quick pace of correspondence and thus maintaining the children's interest and directly including them in the process. David Epston (1991:182) speaks of "a storied therapy, (in which) the letters are a version of that co-constructed reality called therapy and become the shared property of all the parties to it."

I called King, Them bani and Raymond to listen to the letter from Elmarie (my supervisor):

Dear Linda and King, Them bani & Raymond
Thank you for sending me the transcript of what happened during your session you had with King's friends Them bani and Raymond. I have to say the term the "Three Wise Men" or the "Three Wise Young Men" came to mind as I heard your voices on the paper. I cried a little, laughed a little and was so grateful for the

wisdom of parents, family as well as young people. I have to say that they gave me courage to keep working as a psychologist sometimes consulting with people who have been through life's difficulties.

I was really touched by the way King chose his friends because "they could keep secrets" and he could trust them. I understand that the secrets that King is talking about, are not the ones that could hurt children, but are the sacred ones that we can only tell a few people to look into our hearts. I would like to say thank you to King's friends Thembani and Raymond for teaching me what a "real" friend looks like and behaves like when one friend is in need of some support. I would have liked to have friends like Thembani and Raymond to talk to or invite to a session with a counsellor. I think the adult-world can learn from them how to trust some people and also how to care for friends. My heart is very sad when I hear that King lost both his parents. My parents died twelve years ago but I was then already an adult with two children. I remember how I cried and sometimes I still remember my father working because I sit at the desk that belonged to him while I am writing this letter. I wonder if the three of them have ideas about losing parents as an adult as opposed to losing parents when you are a child - could it be easier if we are somewhat older?

If someday I could have a picture of the necklace that King made, I would treasure it here in Pretoria and if I may I can explain to other people who have also lost people through violence about the three young people in Cape Town who stand against this kind of behaviour. I thought about my "dream" that I have for South Africa, when I read about them talking about guns, licenses and not hurting anybody. I started to have this dream when I heard Judy Small's song UNTIL

*Until the swords turn into ploughshares
Until the children eat their fill
Until the mansions admit the lowly
We have no cause for standing still*

Judy Small is a lawyer in Sydney Australia - and I was wondering if we would be able to write to her and tell her the story of the "Three Wise Young Men" (my words) in Cape Town. I was wondering if they think it will help them to know that a lawyer who is also a singer of non-violence knows about their ideas? Wise young men in the Cape who can be best friends and help to heal the pain of violence to one of them as well as their own ideas about guns and violence. Take care.

e

They were very impressed to receive a letter from Pretoria, and nodded gravely about being friends who could trust each other. They were very quiet as I read the letter, especially the second paragraph, where Elmarie thanked them for teaching her "what a 'real' friend looks like and behaves like when one friend is in need of support." Raymond, in particular, responded by nodding to the idea that "losing a parent as an adult" is different from "losing a parent when you are a child." King agreed to let Elmarie have a picture of his necklace in Pretoria. They smiled at the idea of being called the Three Wise Young Men from Cape Town. They listened to the lyrics of the song, but did not seem to understand what Judy Small meant. They liked Elmarie's dream of having a South Africa where there is no hatred and people don't hurt anybody. And they agreed to her idea that King is doing the Malibeni Family Tradition. This letter served as the first witness of their position as a "team" against violence and injustice. In this letter, Elmarie constructs the idea - an idea that gains more substance each time they have opportunity to see other people witnessing them as taking an anti-violence

position.

This is an example of the power of the social construction of new realities. The use of letter writing has been a strong voice in helping to co-construct preferred identities with these children. The three wise men have to date not yet met Elmarie, but in this letter she initiates a relationship with them and is to become a very important member of their cyber-community of care.

3.2.5.12 Children do hope: ...and the Three Wise Young Men go into cyberspace

I played Judy Small's song on the CD player. The children were really excited to hear her voice sing the words they had seen in their letter. They liked the music, but said that they did not understand exactly what the words meant. I happened to have a picture of "Traditional Weapons" on my wall - a pickaxe, a spade, a garden fork and a watering can. Thembani immediately responded by explaining how each implement could be used as a weapon. I explained that perhaps the weapons against people being hungry are things that would help them to grow food. I wondered whether what Judy was singing about was similar. They humoured me with the idea, but were keener to write to Judy Small on the "talking computer". I took the risk of writing to someone we did not know personally – if she did not reply, I would have to face disappointed children:

Dear Judy Small

Today we listened to your song called UNTIL on your CD Never Turning Back. We hear from Elmarie that you are a lawyer in Sydney Australia. We want to introduce ourselves to you as the Three Wise Young Men from Cape Town, South Africa. We have got together about a very sad thing. One of us, King, has lost two parents, because of guns. The other two of us, Thembani and Raymond, are his best friends. We have been chosen as best friends because we can keep secrets about each other, we don't hurt each other and we stick together. We have been talking to our teacher about what happened four years ago. Thembani and Raymond think it is quite amazing how King manages and gets on with his life. King still remembers his parents and that they wanted him to be safe, to be happy, to be a polite person, to know that they always love him and for him to have fun in his life.

While we were talking about these important things that he knows about what his parents wanted for his life, Raymond said that it was not fair that children's parents get killed. Raymond thought that children should not have to suffer because of other people and because people use guns. Thembani thought that we should not have guns at all, because if there were not guns, nobody would have been shot. King says that he is one of the lucky children, because he and his brother are looked after by loving and caring adults who know how to care for children, just as if they are their own children. These caring adults do have two children of their own, but they have four children now.

We wondered if you would make a song for us about guns and why there should be no guns in our country and in other countries too?

We like your music and it has a nice flow and rhythm. We like rhythm!

Greetings from King, Thembani and Raymond and Linda.

(The Three Wise Young Men and their friend.)

P.S. (from Linda)

The children wanted to send a copy of this letter to Judy Small and to Mandela. (As Thembani explained

when the other two said, No, to Thabo M'beki: "No man! Mandela lives just up the road from me, and besides, I'll ask my brother to give him the letter, because my brother TC knows him." And that, settled that! The children also talked about how it was unfair that the camera people were there. They said: "The whole world doesn't need to know...we think it's rude...we don't take cameras to other people's houses." Thembani has also made a song, but says his singing isn't too good, and maybe you would like to use some of the song.

Thembani's song:

*In the earth and up above
There's a thing people must learn...and that is to love!*

3.2.5.13 A reply from "Down Under"

By this stage of the research adventure, I was beginning to realise the powerful possibilities that lay in creating community by inviting people to respond on e-mail. It is possible that Judy's response is an exceptional one, but somehow this research has gone on to show that there is hope and community in the greater world. We might not always get such a warm and encouraging response as we did from Judy, but the e-mail opens multiple possibilities for creating a wide and intimate community of concern.

Dear Linda

*First let me say how delighted I was to receive your message and the letter from King, Thembani and Raymond. Just knowing that there are programs like yours which allow young men like them to explore and fully realise their human potential is an inspiration. I can only imagine the nightmare that these children have lived through, and it is a pure privilege to know that my music has been a small part of their recovery and growth. I'm attaching a letter to the Three Wise Young Men, and I hope they and you will keep me informed about them and their journey. Thank you so much for letting me into their lives, both musically and personally through their letter - it truly was a very special message to receive. Warmest regards,
Judy Small*

Judy Small wrote the following acknowledging letter to the three boys. They were visibly delighted to receive it. The detail with which she describes her setting and her life helped us all to picture this person with whom we were entrusting their story:

Dear King, Thembani and Raymond

Thank you so much for writing to me – it was a real joy to receive your letter. First let me say how sorry I was to hear about King's parents. It is a tragedy that any young person should lose his parents, but even worse that it should happen by violence. King, I am so pleased that you have people in your life who can help you both to remember your parents and to be the kind of young man that they would be proud of. It is terrible that you have lost them, but wonderful that you have friends like Thembani and Raymond and Linda to show you that the world can be a place of love as well as horror. And Thembani and Raymond, you must be exceptional young men to be able to help King when you probably have problems of your own. If everyone had friends like you three, the world would be a much better place. It was wonderful to hear about the Three Wise Young Men of Cape Town. I am very glad that you like my music – I think music is the way human beings communicate their feelings best. I can often say something in a song that I find hard to say in everyday ways. I have written many songs about the need for people to see the things we have in common with each other, rather than just the things that are different about us. Even if we have different religious beliefs, or different skin colour or different ways of talking, we are all really the same underneath. We all feel scared sometimes; even the biggest toughest people, and we all need friends and love in our lives.

man's face on it can be one of your most prized possessions...I think that King is that child!

*We have discovered that song writing is not for the faint-hearted...and so we send, with pride, our first attempts to meet with you in song. I have attached their thoughts, entitled, "Solutions"...as well as some other notes that might describe other thoughts we didn't include in the main attempt. I hope you have as much fun working with it, as I did in gathering it. Looking forward to more contact...Warm wishes and be well,
Linda van Duuren*

3.2.5.15 A spider web of care: from Guguletu to Newlands to Athlone to Mowbray to Pretoria to Melbourne to Constantia...

Caring has nothing to do with categories; it shows the person that her [his] life is valued because it recognizes what makes her [his] experience particular.

(Frank 1991:48)

In accepting the invitation to these conversations, I have learned about caring *with* children in a way that helps me to understand that care is not about *doing for* the child or the family. Care is about finding out how to connect children with people in the community of humankind; people who will continue to spin the network of care. This web of care cannot be strong if we choose *for* children what we think is best for them. Only the spider knows what thread to use for spinning her web. We can merely open up possibilities for people and places of connection. It is only in consulting children in their knowledgeableness (Epston 1991:86) that we can aim to participate in a practice that is a "collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion" (Ackermann1998: 83).

3.3 Reincorporation into a life that has begun anew

3.3.1 A ceremony of acknowledgement and definition of meaning

[R]ituals are a rebirth; afterward life can begin anew.

(Frank 1991: 129)

This family has been challenged not only by what lies on these pages, but by many other stories which might never receive the same witness as this particular one. There are aspects even to this story that King has not given me permission to share. His discernment is fully respected in the writing of these pages. As a marking of the coming to an end of the conversations we have shared, and as a way of acknowledging in front of witnesses what part Tatam'kulu and Mama have played in this, King's story, we held a simple ceremony of acknowledgement one morning at school. King's little brother, Prince, Themani, Raymond and I were witness to King handing these certificates to his parents, Tatam'kulu and Mama. King designed the certificates on the computer. He also chose the words in his precise and inimitable way. There were few words spoken. It was one of those moments that will be ever etched in my memory and for which there are still not words: just a

deep knowledge of our connectedness in that room. Tom Andersen speaks of “nonverbal exchanges” (1987:420) which also inform, but are not necessarily spoken. These were there in Mama’s tears, the way we sat, the way Prince went to press his little body up close to Mama, Tatam’kulu sat very still and in the general comfort and ease I felt in my body, despite the fact that this was a very different moment from anything that had been done between us before.

3.3.2 *Shining the torch on tradition and spirituality, amongst other things*

A dialogue is a qualified conversation, where people meet one another in a respectful manner to try and grasp what divides and what unites them and above all, to understand what inspires them. The basis of dialogue is the conviction that the one and only Truth cannot be known, because everybody is limited by her/his own context, position, viewpoint and interests. In dialogue these limitations can be reduced, viewpoints can be broadened and, eventually, interests shared. Perhaps one person’s vision of hope can touch the other’s vision of hope. Belief in the possibilities of the ‘other’ is the breeding ground of dialogue.

(Bons-Storm 1998:17)

Once the ceremony was over, the children asked to go back to class. There was much activity at school that day, and their job in my room was done. Tatam’kulu, Mama and I remained and spent an hour and a half in deep conversation. I took notes, but the conversation was so rich and multi layered, that no amount of memory could do full justice. As far as possible I have made no change to the words recorded on the large display of notes. Every word that was recorded on that piece of paper was co-recorded, in that I checked each time that I wrote something down that I had got the words exactly as they were intended when spoken. In order to do that I used what is referred to as a “flipchart”, which was on display throughout. A useful aspect of this form of recording is that it slows the interview down, makes every word hold the weight that it transmits when spoken, and gives the agency (White 1992:45) back to the participant in terms of how their words will be recorded.

Tatam’kulu and Mama’s vision of hope -

On raising these children:

- Do not show pity for them. Even if you feel pity for them, do not show it.
- Children must respect their parents even if they are dead.
- Keep the traditions – do not change things.
- Give them the same love as *they had before*. Don’t spoil them.
- Be straight with the children. Don’t promise what you can’t fulfil. *If you break promises* you are hurting them and they will lose trust.
- What you must build is trust between you and your children. They must trust you.
- A child must trust himself, be sure of himself and have confidence.
- *They must know...* don’t listen to your friends. You can listen, but think for yourself.

On spirituality, culture, customs, death:

- We need to make children understand our culture and customs (of the) Amagqwashu clan, and about carrying our culture and customs from the forefathers. You pass it to your children.
- Christianity is something else...different from our culture and customs. The cultural practice is not instead of Christianity. The family practices Christianity as well as the practices and customs of the Amagqwashu clan.
- Our security depends on Izinyanya, the ancestors.
- Izinyanya (ancestors) are with us everywhere. They look to see what we are doing. They are here in this room and everywhere. They can come in through the keyhole and move in and out of the room.
- By doing practical rituals, you practice what you preach. For example, if there is a new baby. The ancestors know there is a new baby, but we slaughter an animal to tell them (to acknowledge) that it is so.
- You do not just tell the children the customs and rituals, children learn by seeing you practice what you preach.
- By the act of doing practical rituals, it gives you what you are. You become proud of yourself and sure of yourself (as a member of the Amagqwashu clan.)
- Telling children about death is very important.
- It (death) is not only a curse.
- They must understand that everybody is going to die one day. There are a lot of different ways of dying.
- They must understand that they are going to die also. Dying hasn't got a date – Only God knows when you're gonna die.
- They must know that everybody on earth is a creation of God and by dying they are going back to God.
- It depends – if you were a bad person, you are not going to see God – if you were a good person you will see God...that is our belief...of the Christians...bad things will send you to Satan...good things will send you to God.
- What is finished is the flesh, but spiritually the person is still alive. You just can't see with your own eyes.

3.4 Talking to myself

"Case studies often deal with matters of public interest but for which there is neither public nor scholarly 'right to know'. Funding or scholarly intent..." does not constitute licence to invade the privacy of others'.

(Stake 1994:244)

In choosing to write this collection of stories in this way, I have run the risk of being invasive of the privacy of King and his family's life. In a letter from Judy Small, she asked me a similar question about the ethics of telling King's story in the song. She wrote, "Do you think that if I mentioned the boys' names and told King's story, that would be just another person exploiting his experience and his pain? Or would he think that was OK? I'm just not sure about that and I'd really appreciate your opinion." I replied in the following letter:

Hi Judy

I've thought a bit about your question...and think that if you'd be exploiting his pain/experience...then I guess, so would I be, as I am using his story in my research for my academic ends. My answer to you is therefore, that if, by the work I am doing with him, I have managed to help him to source a network of caring people, then I do feel that this has not been for my gain alone. Further to that, this story might invite other people to work with other children, to bring hope and connection and possibility to their lives and to the lives of their caregivers. You and I may never know how our work stands with others and encourages them to Keep on Walking Forward...at the risk of my sounding big-headed...but I do know that **your** singing

stands with a lot of the people who are currently being trained to do my kind of work in RSA...my lecturers play your music to inspire people to think about all the issues you raise...so maybe, the most suitable answer to your query is a question: What would exploitation look like, and what would solidarity look like?

I think that it would be **great** for the three of them if they are part of the bigger picture you have...their resilience and strength is something that has offered support and sustenance back to the adults who have cared for them. We have had really warming ceremonies of acknowledgement as a result of this work, where we have been able to thank the adults who have stood with King through this time - adults who will be in for the long haul too. If you would like, I can send the chapter I am busy with (if King says its OK, of course)...so that you have a fuller picture of the details (I think that that is what I have understood you to be asking for?) I think that merely being in touch with you has made his story more visible...and that it is in the warm responses you have sent to him and his two friends that he has felt cared for and supported. I shall explain to them that they are part of the community of the world's children...so that they can see that they stand with the many other children in the world in your song...I think that they will eventually come to appreciate just how wonderful it is for them to be part of the Judy Small Network of Songs for Peace and Justice...I'll log them onto your website, just to let them know exactly how cool and up-to-the-minute you are!! (They have made sure that they will get the song delivered by hand to Mandela, because they have organised their "direct links" via their "contacts"...so who needs us adults after all??!!) I'll be quite straight with you, however, if they are not happy about it...but I think that once we've discussed it, they'll understand that the song will not only be about them and not only contain their ideas in it. Thanks Judy for all of this care and time...it is really special for us. Be well

Linda

3.4.1 My own reflections on discourses, stories and metaphors that had stood in the way of taking risks and doing care.

In the social construction of bereavement as "a process", people in our school community hold particular beliefs about how this "process" should be managed in order for people to move on. Some of the beliefs that follow served as barriers to teachers wanting to take any steps of care. These are beliefs that have subsequently been revisited and frequently challenged by the therapeutic conversations I have had with people referred to in this chapter.

- *People who have been subjected to trauma should have therapy, which will help them to get over the trauma.*
- *Therapy is something that one fetches from a professional person (i.e. psychologist, social worker, counsellor) in therapy sessions. Therapy sessions are usually in "rooms" separate from the classroom and the home.*
- *Only the immediately bereaved are affected by death. Other people, such as teachers and pupils do not qualify for assistance, as they are not bereaved.*
- *Teachers who show sorrow and who do not control their outer displays of emotion have deep-seated problems and should seek assistance of therapists so that they can learn to leave their problems behind when they come to school. Their public displays of upset are upsetting for others. Such behaviour is unprofessional.*
- *White people are not able to offer appropriate counselling to black people, as black people understand each other better.*
- *Bereavement has a shelf life. When it reaches the expiry date, it is necessary to leave the sense of loss and get on with one's life.*

3.4.2 What I have learnt about hope - grieving with a community of love and care

King initiated the idea of grieving *with* a community of caring friends. He had not ever heard of Michael White's practice of using outsider witness groups or of Tom Andersen's reflecting teams, yet he asked if he could invite his friends to witness his interview. His friends, although saddened and upset by his story, were willing to participate out of love, care and concern for him. Whenever there was some tangible outcome to our sessions, he would find children to witness that which had been spoken of, written or made. He was very excited at the idea of eventually having a song to show to the school community. King has not given permission for me to talk here of some of the more recent sadnesses in his life. He mostly wanted to share with his classmates and his teacher his story of the loss of his parents and the values that their lives still hold for him. It would seem, therefore, that his *community of concern* would represent the "hope". This would include his friends, his parents (both living and no longer living), his extended family, his teacher, his counsellor, Elmarie, Judy Small...and whoever might be invited to join him next. This sense of relatedness to others linked closely for me to later conversations about spirituality. Their sense of relatedness strengthened my sense of connectedness, and thus, my connection to my own spirituality.

An emphasis on relatedness is a prominent feature of nearly every spirituality we have examined. A definition of spirituality centered on relatedness thus has wide applicability in clinical settings. It provides a position from which a therapist can start addressing particularities of a spirituality as it has taken form in the life of a specific individual or within the breadth of a culture.

(Griffith & Griffith 2002:16)

As a mother to young sons, King's main lesson to me is that if I were to die suddenly, the single most important thing I should have made arrangements for is that my sons would have, as far as possible, the same routines as they have now. These would include the same daily rituals, the same adult friendship circles, the same cultural practices, and the continuation of "the taken for granted" (Kwenda, August 2002). When King explained that Tatam'kulu and Mama had kept their lives the same, their home the same and even their friends and weekend activities the same, I understood that the single fact - that "things haven't changed so much" - had been "a good thing" in his life.

3.4.3 Children's voices on hope and spirituality

Investigating religious/spiritual/cultural support in their meaning making was less clear for me. When talking to the children, King's views seemed to have followed the Christian belief of the parents' souls being in heaven in the "white clouds". He did not directly refer to his ancestors, but had mentioned that he was saved from falling into the snake-pit. Although I did not realise this at the time, he was probably referring to the African Traditional belief that his ancestors are physically with him and caring for him. My own understanding of being

cared for/watched over from heaven (the Christian view) temporarily blinded me to the possibility of deconstructing (coming to a closer understanding) of what he was meaning. After talking with Tatam'kulu and Mama I remembered the earlier conversation with King where he had said of Tatam'kulu: "He tells me that my mother looks over me wherever I go if I am at school or at outings. Once I saved myself from falling into the snake pit." I gathered then that he had been referring to his mother (ancestor) taking care of him and keeping him safe from harm. I believe now that Tatam'kulu is doing care by keeping King's spiritual, cultural and religious world alive and relevant. In hoping to bring further clarity to the research, I invited Raymond and some of the other children to a conversation where I asked questions relating specifically to hope and spirituality. I learnt about God, heaven, ancestors and rituals, prayer, people who keep hope and happiness alive, and the value of therapeutic conversations:

- ***God wants peace in the world and children to help one another***

Linda: How does God help you, King?
 King: He takes care of you and when you...
 Thembani: God created the world...and he said there must be peace. And now there's no peace and there's violence and those stuff.
 Linda: And so, when God sees violence, what does God think?
 Thembani: I don't know.
 Raymond: He thinks it's bad and he tries to stop it, but he doesn't know how to.
 Linda: Does God have a special role for children?
 Raymond: Yes...
 Linda: What do you think God's role is for children?
 King: To help one another and all the people.
 Linda: How can children help?
 Raymond: By being heard...
 Thembani: By not following the people who have done bad...
 Linda: Okay...say that in a different way for me? By not copying, do you mean?
 Thembani: Ja, by not copying the people that have done bad things...

- ***Our ancestors are always around to protect us***

Linda: Where are your parents now, King?
 King: They're in heaven...and they're sitting with God and they look after you...
 Linda: Okay...as your ancestors?
 King: Ja.
 Linda: And where are your ancestors? Are they up in heaven?
 King: ...and in your heart.
 Linda: ...and in your heart? ...and around you?
 King: Ja.
 Linda: Tell me more about that, King? Are they around in the room sometimes?
 King: Ja.
 Thembani: Yes.
 Linda: Is that how you understand it, Thembani?
 Thembani: Yes...
 Linda: Tell me about the ancestors for you...
 Thembani: Every time we are ...what's its name...we celebrate on this specific day, my family...I don't

know about King's family...
 Linda: Okay, speak for your family...
 Them bani: ...and there's all these speech...and they talk about our ancestors...and they pour this water on us...sort of this water...
 Linda: Yes, and what is this water...is it a symbolic thing?
 Them bani: No...if you taste it, it will really make a bad taste...I've tasted it and its...
 Linda: So you're not meant to taste the water?
 Them bani: No...
 Linda: And what does the water symbolise? Is it a symbol? Am I getting that right?
 Them bani: Yes, it's just a...
 Linda: What does it remind you or tell you....
 Them bani: ...about your ancestors.
 Linda: ...and what does it remind you?
 Them bani: That they always there around you...
 Linda: ...and what do they do?
 King: Protect you.
 Linda: Uh huh. So that's their main job?
 Them bani: Yes.

• **Parents/caregivers who care can keep hope and happiness alive**

Linda: Are there particular people in your life, that you would say have helped you the most to keep hope and happiness alive after you have been through such sad things?
 Them bani: They're really important, they're my parents.
 Linda: How do they help you?
 Them bani: I talk about...we talk about...I wonder how it would be if they were still here...and then they tell me, it would still be the same as it is now.
 Linda: And King...who are the people who have kept hope alive for you?
 King: My grandfather...and his wife.
 Linda: Tatom'kulu and his wife...you would say that they are the main people who have kept your hope alive?
 King: Ja.

3.4.5 Children take over the conversation and take it further.

The children had not heard from Judy for a while and were concerned that the song was taking longer than they had anticipated. One morning they came to my room and said that I shouldn't worry about helping them to write, they would just do it by themselves at break time on my computer. And so they did.

Hi Judy

I do hope that you are well. I have been asked by the Three Wise Men to forward their letter to you...they did it all by themselves as I have been too busy to give them individual time lately...I was so chuffed to see how they just said, "Never mind, Linda. We can write it by ourselves." And then did exactly that. So, I hand over the "therapy" to you and to them...and I stand back and enjoy the obvious trust they give to you, as well as their certainty that adults may also be able to (and need to) receive help from children!!! Please don't feel that they (we) are pressurising you,...I just could not imagine that you would want to miss this kind of encouragement?! Warm greetings, Linda

I attached the following letter, which was written by the Three Wise Men:

Dear Judy

We are wondering how the song is going. we want to know when the song will be published. we have not heard from you in a long time and we want to know how you are doing with the song. Are you coping with the song because if you are not we are willing to help you with the song from the three wise men.

Judy promptly replied:

Dear King, Raymond and Thembani

Thank you so much for writing to me again. Please be assured that I have not forgotten you and I have been working on our song. Sometimes, though, songs are a bit like babies and you just have to wait until they're ready to be born!

Here are the words of the chorus of the song. I know it's hard to "hear" what it should sound like because a song is so much more than just the words, but I can tell you that you will be able to dance to this tune! I've underlined the words that are emphasised in the rhythm of the song, so maybe you can get some idea of what it will sound like – it's almost like a reggae rhythm.

We'll never lose hope that one day
We'll live in a world where children play
Without the fear of guns and bombs
Tearing their families apart
We know that there will come a time
When the bells of peace and justice chime
And we'll work towards that day
With joy and hope in our hearts

I hope to be recording a new album in January and I certainly hope that this song will be on it, so I'm trying very hard to finish it by then. I'm so glad you've offered to help again because I am having a little bit of trouble with the rest of the song. It would really help me to know more about your lives, so if you want to tell me more that would be great. I'll look forward to hearing from you again. Warmest wishes
Judy Small

3.4.6 The conversations carry on further and spread the web of community

- **Elmarie takes their story to New Zealand.**

My supervisor, Elmarie, was invited to be a guest presenter at a Conference for RTLB (Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour) in Dunedin, New Zealand recently. She wanted to demonstrate how it is possible to build communities if these are not available. She asked the Three Wise Men if they would permit her to tell their story. They agreed:

We give permission to you, because:

1. *We think that people might stop and think before they do something bad.*
2. *We think that working with Linda is great, because she helped us to move forward and she helped King to find friends and freedom in his heart.*
3. *We want to encourage teachers that it is important for children to have conversations when they are sad. We have even started our own Conversation Club to help other children in need of support in our school...and now Judy Small is helping us to help children all over the world.*

- **New Zealand responds**

Soon after Elmarie's return the children received a parcel from New Zealand, containing letters of thanks and encouragement. One of the Resource Teachers had been so touched by King's story that she sent him the gift of greenstone or pounamu. As Elmarie explained, this was of great significance: Maori tradition dictates that although tourists can buy pounamu, one needs to be given it. This taonga (treasure) had been given to this woman by her own mother. In her letter to King and the Three Wise Men, she explained that: "It carries special power and gentle loving messages." On request of the Three Wise Young Men we held a special ceremony to receive these letters and other gifts in front of the whole class and their teacher. They continue to respond to their collective identity and solidarity with great pride.

- **Research takes a child's voice to the law courts**

There has been much legal battling amongst their relatives about rights to adoption ever since the tragedy four years ago. The children have had their lives interrupted not only by the deaths of their parents, but also by the change of their caregivers, the fighting among the adults in their lives, as well as the frequent involvement with social workers and lawyers. At the outset of this research, I was approached to be a witness on behalf of the children's attorney as regards the custody case. I asked to be excluded from this, as I felt that I would jeopardise the relationship I was developing with King. The Legal Aid lawyers involved respected this request. However, recently there was a need for a teacher to act as witness for the case and none of the other teachers were available. I decided to go. I knew by this time that the position that I take as a narrative pastoral therapist only allows me to speak from the point of view of the client, and with his express permission that I may speak on his behalf. I thus explained to King that I had been asked to go to court and checked with him as to what contents of our conversations I was allowed to divulge if necessary. There was one small area that he would not give permission for. "You can tell them about everything," he said, "but just not that." It was most comforting to realise when I got there that I was being interviewed by a lawyer who has dedicated her professional life to children's law in the children's court. I wrote to her to thank her for the positive and transforming experience it had been for me:

The part I want to thank you for is speaking to me beforehand. Those few minutes just contextualised for me what I was doing there and reassured me that every question you asked was in the best interest of the little boy I have come to know and love. I therefore went into the courtroom with calm and peace on my side, knowing that every question was one that I would be able to answer. I especially valued the respectful way that you spoke of the families, as it helped me to feel respectful when answering the cross-questioning. This was my first time in court, and it could have been a difficult day for me. (I really did have visions of LA law etc.) However, I went away feeling quite uplifted to know that despite the obviously overwhelmingly difficult task that faces you every day, you are a person who genuinely thinks of children first. This is something that makes me feel a whole lot safer in a world where there seems to be so little safety for our children.

- ***A new community of care – lawyer and therapist meet around the kitchen table***

Through these two “cases” – the case-study and the court-case - two people who work in very different ways for children’s justice have been connected. Realising that the lawyer’s life-work and my life-work go hand in hand, I wondered how we could offer mutual support and care to each other. I suggested to her that we should meet for coffee at my kitchen table every so often – to share our struggles and to support each other in finding possibilities in a world where guns and violence speak so loudly. So, from the singing support of a lawyer from Melbourne to the legal support of a lawyer from Athlone, we join our hands and our hearts in hope. And so...

*We'll never lose hope that one day
We'll live in a world where children play
Without the fear of guns and bombs
Tearing their families apart
We know that there will come a time
When the bells of peace and justice chime
And we'll work towards that day
With joy and hope in our hearts*

Judy Small and the Three Wise Men (2002)

3.5 In conclusion

As one of the adults in their lives, I have learnt much that is hopeful about coping with troubled times from the Three Wise Young Men: the importance of peers, of keeping memories, of spirituality and of a community of concern *doing* care and hope *with* these children.

In Chapter Four, I introduce the stories of Matthew and Amina. These children have both experienced the deep loss that comes with the death of significant caregivers; their stories have shown me how they have made it possible to continue to live in relationship with the care and nurture they experience(d) from these loved ones.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH AS SOCIAL PRACTICE:

LISTENING FOR STORIES OF HOPE TURNS RESEARCH INTO CARE FOR ALL

Hope-filled stories

This study opened opportunities for highlighting children's understandings of what helped and worked for them when having to face "unsettled and troubled" (Waldegrave 1999:176) times of bereavement and loss. In the collection and re-authoring of stories here, I had conversations with children who practise different world religions and hold differing spiritual beliefs. I listened carefully for ways that children's spirituality contributed to their coping and have collated some of their words. In hearing their answers, I noticed that specific socially and culturally constructed discourses stood with some of their meaning making. But I also found that, when I explored further, there were very specific spiritual beliefs that children held. These beliefs seemed to run alongside formalised religious discourses which were supported in their respective families as well as being in conversation with the predominantly Christian discourses promoted in our school. This made me think of what I have been told about how marathon runners manage to complete a marathon. In order to complete the marathon, the runner has to rely on the resources of seconders to encourage and to supply water when needed. Only the runner knows when the time is right to take sips of the life-sustaining liquid contained in the water bottle. In listening to the children, I have developed a sense that this is how children use available religious discourse to encourage and replenish themselves when they need to boost their supply of spiritual energy. They remain in contact and in conversation with their cultural and familial teachings on religion, but seem to interpret these according to their specific needs along the way. Michael White (2000:21) says of children that:

Children have a know-how that is relevant to the negotiation of many of the complexities that they face in the different contexts of their own lives.

In setting out on this research adventure I asked children what they knew about coping in the hope that their words might offer support to their adult caregivers and other people (adults and children) in the school community. One of the things that I have experienced from these children is that, as an adult, I *can learn* much from children about *how to hope and how to cope*. However, I must be ready to listen to what it is that they have to tell me.

4.1 I saw hope...in a family taking time to do love

4.1.1 A beloved grandmother

Matthew's grandmother lived in the same home as Matthew, his siblings and his parents. This living arrangement stands in contrast to the many nuclear family arrangements that we have in middle class

homes in South Africa. Matthew's granny was someone who was included in family life and her death clearly came as a shock, even though she was already a very old woman. This letter to my supervisor describes the situation:

Dear Elize

Matthew is one of my Support Pupils whose beloved granny has just had a stroke. The family have elected to bring her home and not to leave her in the hospital. They do not expect her to recover, as this is the 4th stroke over the past few years. The granny, Nana, is 92. Matthew adores her. He is the "laatlammietjie" in the family and a wonderfully talented, deep and gentle soul. I phoned the mum and asked if I could talk with him during his usual reading session. She was very happy to allow this, and Matthew and I had a very enjoyable and fruitful time together. We plan to make a book to honour Nana, which will be full of all of her rather naughty humorous habits... The family kept Matthew at home all of last week, as they have decided to spend time with her in the process of saying goodbye. They have been singing to her, talking to her, reading to her etc... and including Matthew and his two older siblings in the activities. Matthew's views are that he doesn't believe that there is heaven, and he DEFINITELY DOES NOT BELIEVE IN HELL...he believes that people just stay around...not in a spooky, scary way, he says, but just that they stay around and keep an eye over things. Elize, this little boy is something else!! I'll keep you informed.

Linda

Following our conversation about his Nana and our preparations for our further meetings, I wrote the following letter to Matthew to recap on our ideas. This was a way of *doing* hope by collecting the hopefulness that we had re-storied in the therapeutic conversation and strengthening it by sending it back to Matthew in this letter:

Dear Matthew

Thank you for spending some of your day talking to me about your beloved Nana. I think that if your Nana could have overheard what you were saying this morning, she would have been extremely satisfied that you had it just right...the way you have learnt from her. You told me some of the things that your Nana has given to you that you think are things you can always keep with you, no matter what. We laughed so much when you shared her funny stories and silly songs...and talked about her beautiful brown eyes (...that see everything!) You talked about her maths calculator head and that she has always been a very wise granny.

When I asked you what she would be telling you to do right now, you said that she would be telling you:

"Don't worry!" and "Laugh at least once a day!"

You also said that your granny was always happy to read to you...and now you have been able to do some reading to her. She must be very proud and grateful to have you, such a kind and thoughtful person, for her grandchild.

We will do the book together...and we will make it beautiful...just like your Nana.

Lots of love

Linda

Matthew and I co-authored two books after this letter. (See Nana and Antidotes for Sadness in the Appendix)

4.1.2 What I have learnt about hope - doing is more than speaking

I always understood in my interactions with Matthew and his mother, that it was *not required* that I helped Matthew *to get over Nana's death*, but rather that I journeyed alongside him through what was a difficult time for him. They saw his needs as being equal to those of the adults. This made a profound impression on me: frequently, in my experience, children have been excluded. They included the children in the family preparation for her death and in the acts of showing caring and connection even when she was no longer responding. This helped me to understand better the meaning of her life to her family. It made me think of celebration: by their acts of care, they were telling her how much she had cared for them. These caring acts resonate for me with Bosch's (1991:424) words that "doing is more than speaking." This is something I take with me into my life and the strong connection that my children have in their relationship with my mother. The experience of having been a witness to this family's caring actions of inclusion of children in the saying goodbye rituals has challenged my own ideas that children should be protected (thus excluded) from the sad and difficult activities before, during and after death. I have realised, with regret, that it would have been more helpful to my children (then aged six and seven), if we had allowed them to attend my father's funeral two years ago and to be more a part of the rituals of burial. At that stage, I felt that *they were not yet old enough*: I sent them to a babysitter to save them from attending the funeral and the possibility of seeing me upset. However, they seemed to find it hard to settle to the idea that my father had indeed died until we *had the memorial service and the ritual of scattering the ashes* some months later.

4.1.3 Discourses, stories and metaphors that appeared along the way

It was considered quite unusual for a child at our school to be kept at home to be with his granny who was expected to die soon. This *choice was unfamiliar* to many in the school community who subscribe to a discourse that it is *the role of adults to deal with dying and death*. Matthew's teacher felt that he should spend time at school *"to keep his mind off things."* However, his family kept him out of school for a number of days, so that he **could spend time** in the family home and be near to his Nana. By including Matthew in the preparation for Nana's death, this family challenged a number of discourses that support the marginalization and exclusion of children. These discourses about childhood support beliefs that:

- *children are less able to cope with death and dying than adults*
- *children should not be included in activities that put them near to people who are dying, because death and dying is adult business*
- *children do not really understand what is happening and should be protected from difficult truths about death*

Matthew's family replaced these discourses with practices of inclusion by seeing Matthew as a co-participant in the family's actions of *doing* care. Moreover, they included Matthew's friends in a gathering after her funeral, allowing his peer community to participate in the *activities* surrounding death as well. This challenges the social construction of childhood that has recruited people into beliefs that children are separate beings who must be kept separate from the adult world.

4.1.4 Children's voices on hope and spirituality

From my conversations with Matthew I was able to identify the following themes regarding hope and spirituality:

- ***Rituals***
- ***Comforting relationships***
- ***Research as social construction of new possibilities***
- ***Talking to others makes it "not so lonely"***
- ***Wisecracks and humour***
- ***Prayer***
- ***God***
- ***Ancestors, memories and heaven***
- ***Therapy***

To bring further clarity to the research, I invited Matthew and some of the other children to a conversation where I asked questions relating specifically to hope and spirituality. These pieces of conversation illustrate for me how clearly ten and eleven year old boys are able to communicate with us. It also confirms for me that we have much to learn from children's voices. It is up to us as adults to learn to participate with them and to value what they have to say. This conversation took place about a year after Nana's death. In the following few pages, I asked these children about their "own solution knowledges" (White 2000:21). In their answers, I discovered spiritual "solution knowledges" that spoke of a community of care (consisting of people living and no longer living) in each of these children's lives. These snippets of hope record selected bits of our actual conversations and stand in contrast to ageist and ableist discourses about children being less able to cope with bereavement and loss.

- ***Rituals for keeping the memories and for "when we miss her"***

Rituals embodied the symbolic meaning (Griffith & Griffith 2002:166) of keeping Matthew's memories of his beloved grandmother alive. Griffith and Griffith (2002:167) accentuate the special role of rituals in human life as rituals "provide a way for humans to address that which existentially must remain ambiguous, uncertain, or

inchoate," such as the death of a loved one. Matthew explained to me how his Antidotes for Sadness had become part of a way of "keeping a check of memories" of his grandmother. He had included his sister and they had developed a way of standing together in times of sadness. The way Matthew and his sister (who is considerably older than him) were able to stand together resonates with *communitas*:

[C]ommunitas describes the pervasive spirit of unity among those who participate together in the performance of a ritual, when the awareness of connection with the other is so strong that any sense of differentness according to wealth, social status, power, race, or culture evaporates.

(Griffith & Griffith 2002:168)

Through ritual, Matthew and his sister were able to transcend their age gap and connect with each other and mutually care for each other. This is an example of children's "know-how" (White 2000:21) being converted into mutual care. Their ritual of care challenges ideas that children are less able beings than adults:

- Linda: ...your Antidotes for Sadness and the letters that I wrote to you at the time, ...*do you feel that they helped you?*
- Matthew: Ja, they did.
- Linda: Did they? Why did they help you, Matthew?
- Matthew: My sister read them also.
- Linda: They helped your sister?
- Matthew: Ja, they did. Because keeping a check of memories...
- Linda: Keeping a check of her memories? Was that more like not letting her memories fade away?
- Matthew: Ja.
- Linda: Really...do you still read it sometimes?
- Matthew: Ja, I read it a lot, actually.
- Linda: When? When you get sad, or when you just think about her, or...
- Matthew: We've made this table for her, and this scrap stuff of her, pictures of her in this file. And we put Antidotes for Sadness there. And when we're sad and we miss her, then we read it.
- Linda: Then you read that... and the Nana part, with her songs? The Nana book?
- Matthew: Ja, I like that book.
- Linda: So, you've actually made a table for your gran.
- Matthew: Ja.
- Linda: Where is the table kept?
- Matthew: You know my lounge...
- Linda: Uh huh.
- Matthew: You walk in, and then at the corner...
- Linda: The left-hand corner?
- Matthew: Ja...in that corner, there's a table, with candles and stuff like that.
- Linda: Do you light the candles sometimes?
- Matthew: Ja, we do.
- Linda: Every night?
- Matthew: No, not every night, because they would wear out.
- Linda: Okay.
- Matthew: A lot, we do light them. We light them on special occasions to remember

Nana...we light them, and ...on her...on the anniversary of her death we lit them...and on her birthday, we lit them....

- **Comforting relationships**

I asked Matthew about hopefulness and found out that hope is carried in the close relationship with another human being – a parent you can talk to and a special sister who can tell you everything:

Linda: Have you found that there has been any hopefulness, or any sort of ... feeling a bit better, less sad at certain times? What (else) do you think has helped you? Has it been certain people who have helped you in your family, maybe? Or...
Matthew: My mother, my father, my sister, my...not my brother so much.
Linda: How have your mother and your father and your sister helped you?
Matthew: Well, just being nice to me. They comfort me and they like...just...
Linda: How do they comfort you?
Matthew: We like talk and stuff. My sister and I have a really close relationship.

- **Research as social construction of new possibilities**

In wondering how it was that ten-year-old Matthew had become his seventeen-year-old sister's confidante, I tried to connect the possibility of the continued influence of Nana's way of being in their lives. In the following section I questioned Matthew about this and discovered that care between Matthew and his much older sister was reciprocal:

Matthew: She tells me everything, before she tells my parents.
Linda: Really?
Matthew: Ja...
Linda: Was that something she used to do with Nana?
Matthew: Ja...
Linda: Really? Do you remind her of Nana sometimes?
Matthew: Remind my sister?
Linda: Ja...
Matthew: I...don't know...
Linda: I'm just wondering why she chooses you to talk to? Have you thought of that?
Matthew: ...'cos I'm the younger sibling...ja! Maybe I do remind her of Nana a bit...
Linda: Maybe you could ask her.
Matthew: Ja...I can...OK...
Linda: Okay. Do you talk about Nana a lot together?
Matthew: Ja...well, she tells me...we miss her, and we go and look for Antidotes to Sadness and look at the file and stuff, and then we...we like, remember the nice things about her and we sometimes...I miss her whenever I walk into the lounge basically. We have this chair, this comfortable chair on the far end...she (Nana) always used to sit up there, with the curtains open and look out onto the road and see people walking past...
Linda: Why did she do it?
Matthew: Because it's fun...to see what's happening outside.

- **Talking to others makes it "not so lonely"**

I wanted to find out more about the effects of talking to his family so as to come to a closer understanding of

how it had contributed to his sense of feeling "comforted". In working with children, as the example shows, I actively offer choices to help them access the most comfortable words to communicate their thoughts and feelings:

Linda: So, do you think talking to your parents and talking to your sister brings you hope sometimes?
Matthew: Ja.
Linda: Would you call it hope, or would you call it something else?
Matthew: I don't actually know what I would call it.
Linda: Better feelings?
Matthew: Ja.
Linda: Feeling of belonging?
Matthew: Ja.
Linda: Feeling of being connected to other people? Not so lonely?
Matthew: Ja, not so lonely.

• ***Wise-cracks and humour***

On another occasion I asked Matthew a similar question about hope and discovered that encouragement and humour stand with the creation of hope.

Linda: Matthew, we haven't asked you that ...who's made your life more hopeful?
Matthew: My sister...because she's constantly saying, "Well, if you want to do it, go and do it! You're good at it!" My mother also has the same attitude...and my father...he's quite good, he cracks wisecracks...

• ***Prayers to a friendly God***

In order to open dialogue about religion or spirituality, questions sometimes need to be directed specifically to the interaction between the person and his/her God (Griffith & Griffith 2002:118). I knew that Matthew came from a secular home, but having heard Matthew's words that: "People just stay around...not in a spooky, scary way... and keep an eye over things", I explored his sense of spirituality further by specifically asking him about prayers (see Murphy 1996: 185) to God:

Linda: ...do you ever say prayers, believe in God?
Matthew: Well, I do and I say prayers when I go to choir and stuff.
Linda: Really?
Matthew: But my mother never...(laughs)...because she's a hard atheist.
Linda: Huh?
Matthew: She's a hard atheist.
Linda: Your mom's a hard atheist? Does she say so?
Matthew: Well, ja.
Linda: Does she mind that you say prayers?
Matthew: No.
Linda: Where do you get your ideas about prayer from?
Matthew: Well, I always say, "Thank you for keeping my gran safe...and thank you for this week, and...if my dad's flown back, to keep him safe while he's flying and stuff..."
Linda: And who do you say prayers to, Matthew?
Matthew: God.
Linda: And, how do you see God?

Matthew: Well, I see him as a friendly man that's always there to listen to what you say.
 Linda: Okay...do you think God's good at listening to children?
 Matthew: Ja.
 Linda: Does God answer prayers?
 All: Yes.
 Matthew: A lot.
 Linda: Really...you say "a lot", Matthew. Tell me about that?
 Matthew: Well, quite a few times, I've prayed that my dad will have a safe journey...and I think God answered them and he had a very safe journey. And then I also pray that he's keeping my gran safe...but then I think again, I KNOW that he's keeping my gran safe.
 Linda: How do you know that?
 Matthew: Just...because He's very nice...

Griffith and Griffith (2002:119) claim that opening dialogue about religion could entail "[a] fresh response to God, an expansion of conversation with God, or a broadening of the conversation to include other trusted people." In the conversations about God with Matthew a "fresh response to God" ensued.

• ***When God "comes in a form that you can understand"***

Brueggemann (1993:18) argues that "our knowing is essentially imaginative, that is, an act of organizing social reality around dominant, authoritative images." However, what Brueggemann (1993:17) further argues for is an acknowledgement that all claims of reality are to be fully negotiated. This negotiation of reality should be an ongoing, creative, constitutive task in which imagination plays a crucial role. Feminist theologians who argue for inclusive language have emphasised "that what is said of God is by way of analogy and metaphor and is not reality itself" (Pratt 1996:108). In the conversation I was hearing a lot of references to God in the male gender. I wondered about the social construction of God as a male being and how fixed such construction was in the thoughts of these children:

Linda: Is God a boy?
 Onke: I don't know.
 Matthew: I don't know.
 Onke: I don't know, because none of us are actually...okay...speaking for me...me truly, I have not seen God...so I do not know if he's a boy or a girl...you might be amazed...he might be a girl.
 Matthew: I don't even know. My mother and my father said that many people believe that God doesn't have one appearance, he has many...and he changes his appearance to help people...and, um, he's infinite...he doesn't ever stop...so I think he might, like, since he has infinity faces, half of them will be...most...a few...half of them will be boy and half of them will be girl.
 Linda: So, God comes in different forms? Is that what you understand?
 Matthew: Ja...Ja.
 Linda: Some people I've heard say that God comes in a form that you can understand Him best...
 Matthew: Ja.

Reflecting back on the conversation I had with the children about God, their construction of God reflects some of the imagination and metaphors needed in attempts to understand God.

- **Ancestors, memories, and heaven**

According to Griffith and Griffith (2002:59, 201) a spiritual community that is constituted by both human and spiritual beings such as God and ancestors, can provide a continuous source of meaning, for example, amidst the chaos of the loss of a loved one. I had been talking to the two Xhosa children (see inserts in Chapter 3) about their knowledge of ancestors. Matthew's understanding of ancestors resulted in him knowing that his grandmother has not left him and is still watching over him and helping him in making good decisions. Matthew replied to a question I had asked of the others: "Ja, well that's how I believe..." I was surprised to have his answer, as I had assumed that he would not relate to this part of the conversation personally. I therefore started deconstructing in the following way to come to a closer understanding of his belief:

- Linda: Do you also believe in ancestors, Matthew?
Matthew: Ancestors, in my book, are just your family that have died and they live in your memories and stuff and they also live in heaven. But you can only see them in your memories, not in heaven...because you can't see heaven.
Linda: You told me that you felt like your gran was around...
Matthew: I do!
Linda: Yep? Tell us a bit about that?
Matthew: I believe she's constantly around us, and she's watching over us...watching all the stuff we do, making us have good decisions and stuff.
Linda: So, when people die, is this like they don't leave us completely alone?
Matthew: They don't leave us...
Linda: They don't leave us?
Matthew: Well, ...well...
Linda: They don't dump us?
Matthew: They don't dump us, they're constantly watching us, they sometimes go up to heaven...they don't have mini TV screens, but from the way they constantly watch us, it's basically like they have this thing in front of them...they can constantly see us...
Linda: Or they're with us?
Matthew: Ja...except when they...have to go up to heaven, or something....

- **Therapy encourages care for others**

We also discussed the usefulness of therapeutic conversation in their lives. I had noticed in the letters from the children who wrote to Athie (see Chapter 3) that Matthew offered to be Athie's counsellor by writing: "*if you ever wont anyone to talk to, you can count on me.*" In the following piece of conversation we talk about his way of spreading care amongst his peers:

- Linda: Has therapy with me helped you at all?
Matthew: Yeah...a lot.
Linda: How has it helped?
Matthew: ...it's just ...calming down, as Onke said, and helping me to store memories, as Athie said...and also helped me in being friendly towards others when they also have, like, losses in their life...
Linda: Did it help you to feel that you should talk to others when they have their losses?
Matthew: Ja...

Linda: So do you think people should be quiet, or should talk to others when...
 Matthew: Talk.
 Linda: Really...so talking helps?
 Matthew: A lot!
 Linda: Really...does it feel weird to be asked these questions?
 Matthew: Well, no...it's actually nice to know that there is someone who is actually hearing you...and that's why I ask people what's wrong with them...because I know it feels nice for me, so...why not make them feel nice also?
 Linda: So do you think that giving people the opportunity to be listened to is something that you've learned from going to therapy?
 Matthew: Ja...
 Linda: I noticed that you offered to listen to Athie in that note that you wrote to him...you said: "Any time that you might need to talk..." ...you might not remember?
 Matthew: Oh now, I do remember!
 Linda: I noticed that...and I wondered about that. I wondered where you had learnt that that was an important thing...
 Matthew: (grins)...well, you know **now**, don't you!
 Linda: Ja...(laughs)...I do know now! Thank you. And maybe there was someone who listened to me when I was your age...and maybe that made me realise that young people like to be talked to.... But there was someone who shouted at me this morning when I asked them if they would like to come into this research.
 Matthew: Who?
 Linda: Someone who was very upset with me...and felt that I was sticking my nose into their business...
 Matthew: Yeah...that's also what's happened quite a few times, but I still persevere.
 Linda: Is it...? Really..? Thinking that you're sticking your nose in?
 Matthew: Yeah...
 Linda: Well I think that sometimes it is too sore...to talk...

This last section is an example of how therapeutic conversations also offer care and encouragement to the therapist. As I have understood it, rituals, comforting relationships, humour, prayer, God, ancestors, memories, and belief about heaven are all part of the self-care, mutual care, co-therapeutic and spiritual practices these children engage in. These were hope-filled conversations – conversations that I experienced to be enormously healing of the deep sadnesses I had felt at times in listening and co-journeying with these children. This was a journeying into a common consciousness and an awareness of a greater consciousness...a consciousness described in the mutual journeying into sacred spaces.

4.2 I saw hope ...in the continued "personhood" of a fantastic daddy

In response to a question from Michael White, David Epston (1992:31) speaks of "testamentary practices" in relation to the drawing up of a will:

Your question leads me to a consideration of testamentary practices – for example those that relate to the writing of a will. A will usually has to do with the dispersal of property. Now, on drawing a distinction around material property and personal virtues, or, as some might prefer, spiritual property, the will becomes a cultural prototype for the dispersal of

personhood. We know that a person's personhood is not extinguished by physical death. We know that this personhood can and does live on in the lives of those who were significant to them – lives on as it always did in the same community of persons in which it was negotiated in the first place. And we know that this personhood can be very enriching of the lives of others in that community.

(Epston in White 1992:31)

This 'personhood' of a little girl's father seemed to be very much with her in all the conversations that we held. This section offers you my witness to a child's introduction of the personhood of her father. Amina's father was someone whom I did not have the opportunity to meet, but through these conversations I developed a picture of a *living contextual theologian*. In Amina's retelling the story of her relationship with her father, I pictured a man who took the important things in life seriously enough to **do** care – for the marginalized, for community, for the ecology and for justice. I have wondered from these conversations what a world would look like if more fathers **parented care** in the manner that this man did in his short life of thirty years? That personhood as experienced by me in my conversations with Amina has germinated seeds of new influence in my life as a parent.

4.2.1 My daddy's grave

Amina is seven years old and as seven year olds do, she had to write her news for the teacher one Monday morning. I happened to go into the classroom just after her teacher had marked her work. Her teacher said that I should have a look at her piece of writing and the picture on the drawing page. Her writing started with "On Saturday we went to visit my daddy's grave." On the opposite page, the drawing page was a picture of the grave and some flowers. Her father had been killed in a motor vehicle accident seven months previously when she was at the end of her Grade 1 year. I remember her standing in the school foyer at the time and saying to me: "My father's memorial service is this afternoon at St George's Cathedral. You are most welcome to attend." I was not able to attend, but I remember feeling confused about a Christian memorial service, as I had understood Amina to be a Muslim child. Amina and her sister attended some grief counselling sessions with a psychologist shortly after their father's death. I remember noticing that she seemed, to me, to be very "contained" and "grown-up" about things. She certainly was not the sort of child who took to being gushed over and babied.

- **Storied therapy**

When, in the Grade 2 classroom, Amina started telling me about her news and the picture she had drawn, I did not have the usual pen and notebook at the ready. I also did not expect to need one. However, by the time this conversation had ended, I realised that there was a rich and fertile story being shared with me. David Epston (1992:182) uses letter writing as a way of recapturing conversations that he has had with his clients.

His preference when working with younger children is to use letters that he talks onto tape, calling these "storied tapes". I like to write letters, because in my context I can write them, deliver them by hand and read them with the child at school, without having to wait for the next therapy session. Reading the letter together gives us the opportunity to stop and discuss the contents along the way. The idea behind letter writing is to capture that which went on in the conversation and, in such a way, to extend the original conversation:

In a storied therapy, the letters are a version of that co-constructed reality called therapy and become the shared property of all the parties to it.

(White & Epston 1989 in Epston & White 1992:182)

I wrote the following letter to Amina the same evening, while the conversation was still moving about my mind. Letters as valuable research and field text have been described by Clandinin and Connelly (1994: 423) and I use letter writing as a practice to summarize the sessions (Morgan 2000:101). I also use letter writing to check that I have come to the closest possible understanding of what the client has told me and wanted me to know. (see 2.6.1) The following day I took the letter to Amina and read it with her, checking all along the way that I had got the information in the way that she had meant it. She nodded and edited as we went along. Not every child that I have met has the ability to engage in such a verbally expressive way. This and the conversation that followed, both lent themselves to letter writing or "storied therapy", particularly as there was so much detail to capture and so much for me to think about and to try to digest.

Dear Amina

Thank you for showing me your news today. As Mrs Sennie says, you really do write very well indeed. I liked the way that you noticed the details of your weekend, because it made your weekend easier to picture, and the special little details in your drawing of your daddy's grave helped me to imagine it very clearly in my mind. You had written all the special words written on the gravestone, even although they are in Arabic, and that made me wonder if you visit his grave often? You told me that you visit it every second week and that you put flowers and incense sticks on the grave. You told me that you put rose and lavender-smelling incense sticks onto the four corners of the grave, you light them and say prayers for your father. That made me think of Watheeqah telling me just last Friday about "Rampies" and how they help people to send prayers to God. You said that your daddy loved incense and that your incense sticks made prayers to your daddy. You also explained to me how incense or the nice smells from Rampies help you to calm down and to concentrate on your prayers. You even said that you like it when Mrs Sennie burns incense in class, because it helps you to feel calm and then you find that you concentrate even better on your work. I asked you if, when you smell the incense in class, it reminds you of your dad. You said that sometimes it does, but not always.

I am trying to remember how we got to talk about your favourite little insect, the praying mantis? I think that when you told me that you are glad that there is a tree that gives shade over the grave, that you started to tell me about how important it is to look after nature. You

said that you put water on the flowers at the grave and you water the tree. You prefer not to pick nature's flowers, but rather to water them so that they can grow. You told me that you love trees and the way that the leaves rustle. You said that your father also loved nature and that he taught you lots of things, like not being scared of the praying mantis, and how to read and write. Now you are teaching your sister to read and write. Can you remember how we got to that?

I was quite fascinated to listen to your story of the mantis that lives in your plants. You said that your daddy also used to love the praying mantis. You had such great detail to tell me about how the praying mantis pounces on its food, that it eats other insects, that it licks its mouth when it has finished eating, and how you like to protect it from being harmed by your cousin. It seems that you took a firm stand against insect-abuse when you told your cousin that you did not approve of her act of squashing the praying mantis in her book. You also told me about how you love nature and how we must look after nature...I wondered if your dad had also wanted to look after nature, like you seem to be doing.

As I said to you at the end of our talk, Amina, I wonder what kind of world we would be living in, if there were more children who stood up for what they believed in, more people who took care of the earth and its creatures and who said prayers to God for peace in the world. That is why I wanted to thank you for talking to me, because you reminded me that there are different ways to pray – and that wonderful fragrances can help you to concentrate, to be calm and to send your prayers out to God. You also reminded me that it is so very important to teach people about looking after the environment and not to kill creatures, such as little insects, just for the fun of it. You also reminded me how important it is to care. I must say that when you told me about the fire near to your granny's house and of your grandfather and how having eaten too many of the dried apricots stopped him from getting to safety, you reminded me also of how much fun it is to laugh together. Thank you for your gentle reminders about living our lives in kind ways to animals, insects, plants and people.

Love

Linda van Duuren

By the time we had finished going through this letter, the next letter needed to be written, for there was so much more to add. Michael White (2000:35) writes of "the absent but implicit" when explaining that "many of the practices of narrative therapy provide people with options for a re-engagement with their own histories." In offering Amina this opportunity to revisit her actions (see chapter 2 for Questioning towards a dual landscape: action and meaning), I started to uncover the Landscape of Identity (White 2001:28) or the meaning-making implied in her actions. This practice of letter writing offered opportunity for a revisiting of our "re-engagement with history" (White 2000:36) in our conversation by committing it to paper. This "re-engagement with history" helped Amina to expand on her "narrative resources"(White 2000:36) and to "re-engage with [her] personal history on new terms"(White 2000:36). In the later use of these letters, when we invited Amina's mother into the conversation, the letters served to help Bibi to "re-engage" with Amina's history "through [our] identification and rich description of that which is absent but implicit"(White 2000:36). In doing so we opened opportunities for the story to move from a single re-storying of the past to rather

contribute to "multi-storied conversations" (White 2000:41). This offered new opportunity for Bibi to "speak of the effects of...[her] marginalization"(:41) from knowledge of her child's original therapy. It also offered Amina the opportunity to "step into alternative identity conclusions...and to explore some of the knowledges and skills of living that [were] associated with these alternative identity conclusions" (: 41).

Dear Amina

What a special conversation we had again today. It seems that we have a lot to talk about, and I have learnt so much about why you appreciate having a home that shares the Muslim and the Christian religious traditions. You said to me that it is nice to have Muslim and Christian people in your family, because you "get to learn about all of these things." You also explained to me that the Muslim and the Christian people have the same God, because, as you said, "God made us all. God put the world together. God put us in the world by making us this teeny little sperm...he knows us even better than our mothers and dads do..."

You said to me that you know that your daddy will be safe, because he has a good spirit...and that everybody has a good spirit. You explained to me that "sometimes people do bad things and don't realize that they are not supposed to do that...but everything is a creature of God, so we should be caring for every creature." When you remembered about telling me about the praying mantis being squashed, you told me that when that happened, "some tears came out of my face." I wonder how it would be if more people found themselves feeling sad and shedding some tears when our fellow creatures are hurt and killed? Do you think it might help to change the way that people look after our precious earth?

You had so many wise things to tell me, that I forgot quite often that you are only eight years old. For someone who is eight to be reading the Qur'an and the Bible because, as you explained to me "Then I'll know more about what I am supposed to be doing and what I am not supposed to be doing." I asked you what you thought it was that you are supposed to be doing and you told me that you already know a few things:

- *You know you must take your life seriously...because you never know when your life is going to end.*
- *You know you must listen to people you trust... "ones who won't harm me, people like Mrs Senekal, she is one of the best teachers in the world."*
- *You know you must be kind and try to help people.*
- *Don't think that you've got a screwed up life, because then one day you may have a screwed-up life.*

Amina, it was so great to hear that you would like all people to think good things about themselves. I certainly think that you have shown me many ways of thinking that I had not thought of before. That has helped me, for starters, to think good things about myself.

Lots of love

Linda van Duuren

- **Storied therapy offers care and invites a parent in**

Elize Morkel, one of my lecturers, reassured our anxious class early on in our course: "Do not worry about

finding the research...the research will find you." At the outset of this research, I had not approached Amina, as I had had reservations about whether I would be *opening up old wounds*, retraumatizing the little girl, retraumatizing her mother...and, after all, what if I, in *my ignorance*, *offended* her Muslim faith? As I already had interviewed more than enough children for the purposes of my research, I thought that I would leave it at that. However, Amina's story was brought to me in the school classroom. In response to our conversation, I wrote these letters as an act of care. However, this act of care needed to be taken further and I felt at that stage that it would be unethical for me to have written these two letters to Amina and not to *include her mother* in the knowledge that we were having conversations. Any further book-making or pre-planned activities I felt I would have to ask for permission to do.

I therefore asked Amina if she would like to share the letters with her mom. This she agreed to do. We invited her mother to meet with us. Amina, her little sister Ashleigh, her mother and I gathered in my Support Room while I read the letters aloud. Amina's mother spoke of some of the things that had captured her attention. She said that she had not been aware that Amina had thought as much about the issues reflected in the letters. This had become evident to her on listening to the letters. It was a source of comfort to her, she said:

- to realize how connected Amina remained to her memories of her dad and what they did together
- to be reminded of how very close Amina and her dad had been and of the many times they had spent talking together

Although she did not say it at the time, I noticed the nods and smiles of recognition and agreement as she remembered the details of her husband as seen through her daughter's eyes. At some stage of this conversation, my own self-doubt and anxiety was calmed by the sense of connectedness in that room. Ashleigh played in the background, every now and again, coming to "look over" the proceedings. Amina sat upright in her chair, watching her mother's face very carefully. What had started out as something of an acknowledging ceremony, turned into a mutual conversation between the two adult women about societal discourses. Bibi asked me what I thought of the fact that people kept telling her that Amina was in the "anger stage" of bereavement (see Kübler-Ross 1969). I said I wasn't always sure what people meant when they asked that, but I wondered how her own experiences of bereavement related to this kind of "bereavement-has-certain-stages" type of thinking when she thought of it in relation to her own life. I asked her how useful it had been to her to know of these stage-theory ideas. She said: that she had not experienced it like that herself (anger), but that she had experienced other forms of grief. We left it at that.

In a subsequent conversation, Bibi told me that initially Amina had started to take on the role of "father" in the home as she became controlling and bossy towards her little sister. It seems that the therapist at the time

helped Bibi by recognising this as something that needed to be attended to. She suggested that Bibi found ways to remind Amina that she was still a child who needed to be looked after, and that she was not a daddy who needed to be doing the looking after. Bibi also told me that after those therapy sessions, Amina would not share with her what she had spoken about to the therapist. She would say: "Ask her yourself." Bibi felt that that left her very much out of the conversation at the time. She said she now felt included and relieved by being witness to Amina and my conversation via the letters.

- **Storybook therapy**

Bibi gave me permission to spend some time with Amina, so that we could capture her memories of her father's relationship with her in a computer book. *A fantastic daddy* is what has resulted. David Epston's (1992:177) words resonate for me when I re-read the story that we co-authored:

A reading of children's stories can equip you with your own collection, which should indicate to young persons that you are willing to enter their life-world rather than their being required to explicate themselves according to the adult world.

Entering into Amina's "life-world" in this way has challenged my own spirituality, as it has also challenged me to enter into the spiritualities of all children as they make meaning of their experiences in relation to bereavement and loss.

A fantastic daddy. (See appendix)

Told by: Amina Adams

Co-authored with: Linda van Duuren

My daddy died on the 7th of October, when I was 7 years old. That means that I had seven years to get to know my dad. These are the important things that I learnt from him.

1. He taught me not to harm nature. If ever I was scared of a spider and I squished it with my shoe, he would say:

"Amina! Why did you do that? How would you like it if he had to squash you? That wouldn't be quite nice." I know that my daddy taught me not to harm nature, because we talked about abusing God's creatures and he said it's not a very nice thing, because we are also God's creatures.

2. My daddy taught me not to be afraid of nature, like insects and bigger beasts. He told me: "Amina, you shouldn't be afraid of the praying mantis and other insects like hairy caterpillars. They won't do anything to you if you leave them alone. The hairy caterpillar will just give you a little sickness...the praying mantis will only give you a little peck with its pincers." I know that my daddy taught me not to be afraid of anything, because if you are scared then the thing that you are scared of will follow you in your imagination or even in your dreams.

3. My daddy also believed in super nature like aliens and flying T.P.s. He also believed that deep in the ocean were aliens that were triangle-shaped in different sizes. My dad even used to believe that there were alien fish! You also get alien mussels now, they are bigger than normal mussels. They are about the size of my foot (size 11) and they have got much more meat in them.

4. *The most important thing that my daddy taught me, was not to be afraid of monsters. He said: "Amina, if you scream out, then the monsters will also scream out very loud. Monsters are actually scared of humans. Sometimes they scream even louder than normally and run away. They think that we are dangerous and we think that they are dangerous." He told me that monsters would be quite scared of you if they were still alive. They are not alive any more, you only get them invented into toys and robots on the videos to scare people.*

I am glad my daddy is in a very very safe place in heaven with God. If I had to be in Mark Shuttleworth's audience one day, I would ask him: "How is it up there in heaven? Is my dad doing OK up there?" I am sure that space is very very close to heaven. I know that my daddy's soul is in heaven, because when everybody dies their souls go to heaven. The body stays in the grave, but the soul goes up to heaven. When somebody dies, God's heart fetches the soul and takes it heaven to rest in peace. When somebody dies they don't get older, you only get older on earth. That's how people will recognise him when they go to heaven too.

4.2.2 My own reflections on discourses, stories and metaphors

When thinking about this re-storying process, I realised that there were strong discourses that tried to prevent me from having these conversations with Amina and her family. These discourses supported beliefs that

- *People are traumatised by talking about their loved ones who are no longer living*
- *I don't know your faith, therefore I might not understand you well enough*
- *Christianity and Islam are on opposite sides of the fence*
- *If you don't go through certain stages of bereavement, you are not doing it properly*
- *Therapy is a private matter and we shouldn't really speak about it outside the walls of the therapy room*

It was something of a relief to have a small child who had been brought up in both religions announce that the Muslim and Christian people have the same God. This was not the first time that I had had this said to me by a Muslim child, as Watheeqah, mentioned in the letter to Amina, had told me exactly the same thing. Watheeqah had even taught me how to pray to God by using scented prayer parcels, called "rampies", to help me to focus my prayer. (I also checked with Watheeqah's mother, who assured me that it is true that we have the same God). For me this story stands up against the separating, pluralist ideas that Christian/Western beliefs and Muslim/Eastern beliefs cannot live together. This story also speaks of the existence of "communitas" (Griffith & Griffith 2002:169) amongst people in our school community of different ages and backgrounds. This "communitas" is present in their reassurances to me that we have the same God, as it illustrates how it is possible that "the awareness of connection with the other is so strong that any sense of differentness according to...[religious upbringing and] culture evaporates" (Griffith & Griffith 2002:169). I have, however, in some of my class discussions previously had Christian children expressing that they think that their God is different from Allah. Some such beliefs reflect the strong influence of dominant discourses on the inclination to focus on "otherness" (Welch 1990:135). Amina and Watheeqah's voices stood with me against feeling *othered*

by the sense of being an outsider, Their matter-of-factness about our shared God has helped me to understand what Sharon Welch (1990:135) means by her words:

When mutual transformation occurs, there is the power of empathy and compassion, of delight in otherness, and strength in the solidarity of listening to others, bearing together stories of pain and resistance.

4.2.3 What I have learnt about hope – connecting strands of care, strength in solidarity

I have learnt that doing hope in community is *doing* care and *connecting* strands of care. This makes **webs of care**. By connecting the little threads of hope and moving, like spiders spinning a web, Amina and I went to places in her life – to her classroom, to her memories of her father's personhood, to my support room computer, to her storybook, to her classmates, to her home, and to her spiritual life. I understood from her that her spirituality gave her the replenishment she needed to continue her journey. I have been reminded that the social construction of otherness can be resisted by the "solidarity of listening to others" (Welch 1990: 135). Listening to children's voices has brought to me a sense of our "bearing together" their "stories of pain and resistance" (: 135).

4.2.4 A child's voice on hope and spirituality

During my conversations with Amina the following themes were identified regarding hope and spirituality:

- **What helps when the sadness comes**
- **The garden makes me feel safe**
- **The connection with nature**
- **Amina's personal God**
- **Prayer**
- **A re-connection**

In hoping to bring clarity to some questions that were not yet answered, I recently invited Amina back to an interview/conversation where I asked further questions related to hope and spirituality.

- ***What helps when the sadness comes***

I had understood from Amina that there were times when an enormous sadness overwhelmed her. I had also noticed that she seemed to have strong powers of recuperation from the sad times. I wondered what resources she drew on:

Linda: What's helped you the most with the sadness...when the sadness comes?
Amina: What helped me the most...

Linda: To get out of sadness, and to feel more hopeful...you were talking about watering the garden...

Amina: Ja...

Linda: What helps you? Or seeing your granny, or...what things helped you the most.

Amina: Uh...looking at pictures of my dad...and stuff like that...drawing pictures of my dad.

Linda: Have you got a picture of your dad?

Amina: I've got a lot of pictures of my dad...and Miss Sennie's got three pictures of my dad in the class.

• ***The garden makes me feel safe***

During conversations with Amina she often referred to how her father taught her to care for nature. Being in nature, however, also helped Amina to feel close and connected to her father. Amina's experience of connection with her father through caring for nature reminded me of an ecological spirituality. Ecological spirituality includes the reciprocal dimensions of being nurtured by nature and nurturing nature (Clinebell 1996:7; Brinkman 1998:204). Clinebell (1996:112) remarks that 'numerous experiences have confirmed that being nurtured by nature often helps grief sufferers handle agonizing losses by generating earth-rooted spiritual healing.' Amina's conversation with me reflects some of Clinebell's observations:

Linda: Drawing pictures helps you against the sadness...what else has helped you against the sadness?

Amina: Uh... what else...uh...the garden helps me a lot. Well, it doesn't help me, but it reminds me of my dad, and it makes me feel safe and stuff like that...
Because my dad always used to work in the garden with me...and it was always...sometimes, when my dad was still alive, then we used to take the watering cans and we used to splash one another, and sometimes we used to help one another...and another reason I feel quite safe in the garden, is because my dad taught me about nature and I feel very safe with all the insects around me and the flowers and stuff.

Linda: Really...

Amina: That makes me feel quite safe.

Linda: What do you mean by safe, Amina?

Amina: Uh...what I mean by safe? Like...it reminds me of my dad and it's like my dad's with me...

Linda: Yes...you're touching your heart when you talk to me now...is that where your dad is with you?

Amina: Ja...

Linda: Is that why you're touching your heart now?

Amina: Uh huh!

Linda: So, when you're in the garden, then you feel safe, because your dad is with you in your heart? Is that what you're telling me?

Amina: Ja.

Linda: And you feel safe when you can feel that your dad is close.

Amina: Ja.

Linda: And what would your dad be telling you in the garden?

Amina: He used to tell me what flowers...that I should ...which flowers I should water, and stuff like that. And we also used to plant seeds and stuff...we used to plant them in one place or another...and sometimes we used to make the front garden look all nice and stuff like that. And we used to move the stuff around for special occasions...

Linda: Why was the garden important to your dad, do you think?
Amina: Because he loved nature...and quite a bit...and he also liked animals and stuff like that as well...and we still get a few chameleons in our garden...and my dad used to play with the chameleons all the time...

Through being connected with nature, Amina was nurtured and cared for in times when her heart ached for her father. "Some grieving or depressed people discover healing-in-nature spontaneously" (Clinebell 1996:111). The reciprocal nature of ecological spirituality is extended through Amina's commitment to make herself and others aware of caring/nurturing for nature and all its creatures. "Feeling a loving connection with nature can energize motivation to respond by nurturing the earth more caringly" (Clinebell 1996:9).

- **Amina's personal God**

Griffith (1995:123) claims that within the space of the therapeutic conversation clients' talk of their experiences with a personal God could be limited by both "*proscriptive constraints*" – that this God-talk is not to be spoken of here, and by "*prescriptive constraints*" – that God can and should be spoken of here, but only in a certain way.' (See 2.5) During my conversations with Amina, I attempted to steer away from both prescriptive and proscriptive constraints by inviting her to tell me about 'Who is God to you?' I asked questions about her personal God in an attempt to find a richer description of how her spirituality sustains her during this time of bereavement and loss:

Linda: Who is God to you, Amina? What is God like...or...who is God like?
Amina: Um...God is like a helpful person...and I believe that if God didn't help all of us, then we wouldn't actually be breathing right now...we would, I mean,...if God wasn't here and if God didn't help us, then we wouldn't even be here...there wouldn't even be anything on the earth...just nothing...just ground...nothing else!
Linda: How does God help us?
Amina: Well, in lots of ways...he helps us to feel better, sometimes, he helps us to feel like a special person somewhere...inside...and God also helps us by teaching us more, and making us feel confident...
Linda: So does God kind of help with your "self-talk"?
Amina: Ja...Ja!
Linda: Do you pray to God?
Amina: Mmm...ja!

- **Prayer**

I wondered about what I sensed to be her deep relationship with her spirituality and how it translated in prayer. Initially the constraints imposed by the word "prayer" seemed about to limit the scope of her answer. By being offered other possibilities in languaging her spiritual practices, Amina showed her creative relationship with prayer:

Linda: How do you pray?
Amina: Well, the only prayers I know to say are in Arabic. Because I always have...I only learn to do

prayers in Arabic... I'm still learning three more prayers.
Linda: And do you talk to God,...when you're not praying?
Amina: Ja.
Linda: Or do you think to God...
Amina: I think to God...and sometimes I say prayers in my head...
Linda: In English?
Amina: Ja...most of the time!
Linda: Okay...so you do actually know how to pray in English as well.
Amina: Ja.
Linda: Maybe?
Amina: Maybe...maybe...I don't know!
Linda: Maybe they're not learnt prayers, maybe they're your own prayers that you...
Amina: Sometimes I make up little prayers and sometimes I make up little songs in my head...about my dad!
Linda: Really...what would a song be like?
Amina: mmm...well...like...well....something like...even though I can't see him...he's here... he's everywhere...everywhere!
Linda: Really...
Amina: Ja...
Linda: And does that make you feel more hopeful...and not so alone as you were feeling last week.
Amina: Ja...makes me feel a bit better...

• **A re-connection**

The section that follows is the result of Amina spontaneously telling me about her sister's experience of seeing her father. My response was to steer the conversation towards Amina's personal experiences. I was interested to know if she connected with this kind of experience of what some might call a "vision" or a "visitation". Her answer was given in a simple, but deeply connected way:

Amina: The other night my sister said, my sister just got up, she like...she woke me up and said, "Amina! Daddy was standing right there!! Daddy was standing right there in front of me!"
Linda: Really...
Has daddy ever done that...that you've seen him?
Amina: No...no...not really...only once....Ashleigh's seen him like three, four times...
Linda: Really...why do you think that is?
Amina: I don't know, because it's only happened to me once...
Linda: What happened when that happened?
Amina: He was like standing, talking to me.
Linda: What was he saying?
Amina: Um...he was saying...he loves me a lot, and I asked him where...but he actually answered me when I spoke to him...and he was wearing this white t-shirt and a white pants...
Linda: Your dad was?
Amina: Ja.
Linda: ...and he said that he loves you a lot...
Amina: Yes! And I asked him, like..."where are you going to be...I mean, I might not see you for a long time, like I'm seeing you now"...and I'm like, "Where will you be?" And he said, "Well, I'm everywhere."

4.3 I saw hope in the social construction of research as care.

In this research, seemingly unrelated stories became connected under the common theme of hope, care and mutual support, Matthew's mother wrote to me after the Nana book joined their family treasures. She said, "Your support during my mother's dying and after her death was extraordinary and meant a great deal to all of us." Matthew's own experience of therapeutic conversation encouraged him to become a carer to his peers and to his sister. In his words: "it's actually nice to know that there is someone who is actually hearing you," Matthew also encouraged me to continue my search for children's voices. His words confirmed for me that he had experienced the *research as care*. Amina's letters offered comfort to her mother, by inviting her to share in some of her child's experience, whereas she had previously felt marginalized by ideas of therapy being a private affair between the child and the psychologist. The conversations with Amina also helped Amina to reconnect with the memories of her father and their special relationship. Amina's sister also wanted to make a book and we are currently co-creating her book. These conversations and excerpts show how the research has offered adults an opportunity to hear what their children have to say. Also, in the "tellings and re-tellings" (White 2000:64) of their stories in notes, in letters, in storybooks and in artworks, we have collaboratively strengthened their preferred stories by documenting them and sharing them with caregivers and other important people in their lives. In doing so, we have co-created more hope and a stronger sense of community. This is research that operates by strengthening community – a connecting of people, which allows the research to become *research as care*.

4.4 A last word: talking to myself about re-entering the world of hope...and imagination

Pamela Couture (2000:70) describes so beautifully her experience of encountering children:

Caring for godchildren, entering into their experience is the deepest kind of friendship that is possible, one that invites the mutuality of power rearrangement and is inextricably bound to our experience of God.

I have been deeply moved and almost re-arranged by these conversations, and others that I have not put into print here. If God does, as Matthew says, have "infinity faces", then I strongly believe that I have met some of God's faces in this yearlong adventure.

In Chapter Five, I write a letter to my young sons, explaining my personal journey as it relates to my hopes for their lives.

CHAPTER FIVE
A LETTER TO MY SONS –
ABOUT FEAR OF DYING AND FINDING SPIRITUALITY
...from my point of view

[W]e will each tell the aspects of our own stories that shaped and tinted the lens through which we see spirituality, community, and culture.

(Griffith & Griffith 2002:6)

Mary Gergen (2001:42-46) introduces five themes that she considers typical of “social constructionist/feminist psychology” work under the heading “Powerful/Playful Feminist Practices” (2001:42):

- *Critique as Scientific Activity* refers to social constructionists’ critique of the taken-for-granted “realities” which “limit us in our ways of knowing the world” (2001:42). In the letter that follows, I reflect on the powerful beliefs that arose in me and around me as a result of living in a taken-for-granted world.
- *Value Statements Are Integrated Into Scientific Work – The Personal Is Political* refers to the aspect of social constructionist work that “allows one to integrate one’s value orientation and political philosophy into various forms of action” (2001:42). In my letter to my sons, I describe my struggles and my victories in the hope that they will understand my journey from the point of view of what I now value in life.
- *The Limits of Language Are the Limits of Our Worlds* reflects social constructionist understanding that language creates the world we know. This thought invites feminist constructionists into “experimenting with linguistic forms, including writing with multiple voices, exploring various narrative forms, and creating new writing styles for presenting research practices” (2001:43). Throughout this research paper, I have used different linguistic forms and genres. The personal style of the letter that I write to my sons is in keeping with feminist constructionist thinking.
- *Reflexivity* invites the voice of the researcher/writer to be ever-present in social constructionist research. This form of research “allows for drawing attention to the choices made, the limits inherent in the formulation of the project, and what might have been otherwise” (2001:45). This is the sense of the letter, which describes my journey and my relationship with fear. It also explains how it is that I have come to focus on fear within a topic of Children’s Voices on Bereavement and Loss, but does not claim to have all the answers.
- *Going Beyond Text Into the Performative* invites the use of “modes of expression from the dramatic arts, visual arts, music, and other media”, a practice which “promotes the mingling of the scientific with the secular and the spiritual” (2001:45). This has been a feature of the Narrative Pastoral approach to therapy that I have described throughout this paper. The writing of the short poem (a first for me), was inspired by this freedom of expression accepted in feminist practices.

The letter that follows playfully and boldly experiments within the themes outlined above. In approaching this research from both a feminist and social constructionist perspective, what happened to me when I listened to the children's voices throughout this research adventure was an added bonus for me. A number of months into the research I became overwhelmed by deep sense of sadness at the stories of children who had to continue living without the tangibility of their loved ones. I also became overwhelmed by the return of my fear of living in a country that is in relationship daily with real and violent deaths. Immersion in the context of my work, challenged my own theology. I needed to **search for a personal meaning** in relation to what I was learning from children in terms of their losses, their strengths and their hopes for their lives. As the reference to "Powerful/Playful Feminist Practices" (Gergen 2001:42) indicates, much feminist research allows for a personal relationship with the research.

Reinharz (1992:263) encourages the feminist researcher to be transparent about the connection between the "researcher's experience and the research project." The letter that follows is written to my sons, who, as young white South African boys, are having to learn to live in a country where crime and violence are daily occurrences. This awareness meets us in our living room via the television and has, on occasion, met us at our school that we all attend.

My research topic was closely linked to my personal questions about my choice to be a mother in a country plagued by violence and "untimely deaths". My difficulties throughout the research were intimately bound up with my fears for my own beloved children and their well being in the face of my possible "untimely death". As the letter will illustrate, I had much opportunity as a young child to have a close relationship with nature. I learnt from my parents and from my grandparents before them that "we are part of the natural processes, that we are kindred to other animals" (Clinebell 1996:36). At some point in this therapeutic adventure, "I began to let go of the fear [of untimely death] by beginning to own and [reconnect with and] gradually enjoy the wildness [of fearlessness] in the deep recesses of my earthly being" (Clinebell 1996: 34). This reawakening of my spirituality invited me to revisit the deep sense of connectedness I had felt with nature as a young child growing up in the Eastern Cape rural areas of Addo and Graaff-Reinet. Howard Clinebell (1996:63) says that "enabling people to deepen their sense of connectedness with nature may also help them overcome other dimensions of alienation in their lives." The reawakening of my spirituality was also closely related to seeing the world through the eyes, ears, and souls of my young sons. Reinharz' (1992:263) says:

I, for one, feel most satisfied by a stance that acknowledges the researcher's position right up front, and that does not think of objectivity and subjectivity as warring with each other, but rather as serving each other. I have feminist distrust for research reports that include no statement about the researcher's experience. Reading such reports, I feel that the

researcher is hiding from me or does not know how important personal experience is. Such reports seem woefully incomplete and even dishonest.

(Reinharz 1992:263)

I was challenged by Reinharz to make this link between the personal and the professional (White & Hales 1997:vii). I was also inspired by Denise Ackermann's personal letter to her grandchildren, entitled *A letter to my Granddaughters on matters of the heart* (2002: 161-173). I have therefore opted to answer Reinharz's challenging statement by writing a very personal letter to my sons.

This letter explains to my sons the journey of my life, often in close relationship with fear. The letter tells my sons how I have regained my spirituality and how I have come to realise that I have had choice in my relationship with fear. This letter is the result of how the voices of children on bereavement and loss have moved me and have changed me by reconnecting me with the knowledges and spiritual wisdoms I have been gathering since my youth.

Dear Matthew and James

The flightless dung beetle lives in the Addo National Elephant Park. It is a rare and endangered species of dung beetle, found only in this area of the Eastern Cape. The flightless dung beetle collects the elephant dung, rolls it into a ball, and slowly moves it to the place where it will dig its nest. Its route is hot, dusty, difficult and dangerous, but it tirelessly pushes the dung over the bumpy dirt roadway and into the veld. It then buries the dung and injects its eggs into the nutritious stuff. The dung keeps the eggs protected until they hatch. When they hatch, the beetle larvae use the dung for food.

*ADDO ELEPHANT PARK
The flightless dung beetle
Spends day after day
Gathering rich elephant dung
And rolling it along
Backwards...
It comes from the foot of my childhood mountains
The Zuurberge
And it cannot fly to safer places
Out of reach of the elephant's foot
Which can trample it
Flat
But which seldom does
I wonder if it knows how closely
It lives with
Death
And that by living closely with Death
It chooses Life.*

Linda van Duuren

I write this letter to you now, while you are still young, so that you will never NOT KNOW...how closely we all, like the little flightless dung beetle, live with Death...and how the history of our country continues to affect us all.

I also write this letter to tell you that I have met again in recent months, another side to Fear and to Death...a side that has brought me joy, hope and possibility...and a reconnection with the spirituality that I felt so intimately part of when I was your age. A reconnection with the belief I held as a little girl, that I could work things out for myself.

I have been exploring for some time now the capability of young people to produce their own knowledges in relation to their concerns. Accordingly, my task is to assist them to produce their knowledges and, moreover, to know their knowledgeableness. For those adults committed to the view that children's problems are best resolved by the transfer of adult 'expert' knowledge, the notion that young people can generate their own solutions often seems strange.

(Epston 1991:186)

This discovery has given me the opportunity to feel thankful for the winding journeys during my Life...and thankful too, for your lives, for my life, for the lives of my parents and grandparents, of my sisters (both living and no longer living), of my brothers, and of my friends...and thankful for having been born in South Africa in 1961 as a white girl child. I have also, eventually, come to a place where I can be thankful for the many people who have taken me on dusty and challenging paths, to difficult places. People who, by presenting me with these challenges - some of them very hard challenges - have taken me to situations where I have sometimes thought that there can be no possible solution, no hope. Those no hope situations have opened the opportunity for me to learn that there is always a little bit of possibility lying somewhere on that dusty road. I am thankful, because the hope that I now hold is that you will also find your own ways of living your lives in hope, possibility and joy, even after I am no longer living.

If you watch that little dung beetle carefully, as it rolls the dung away, it is moving backwards. It cannot see so clearly where it is going, but when it comes to a difficult place, maybe a stone in the road or a big hump, it doesn't give up. It moves on, finding a different route. It may seem like a lonely soul, but it lives in harmony with the dirt, the dust, the dung, the relentlessly hot sun and the great African elephant.

I, like the dung beetle, have found that there are usually alternative routes to take in times of great difficulty and that by living a life with this faith, rather than being paralysed by fear, one can enjoy a life that is worthwhile, rich and meaningful. There have been people in my life who have taken the trouble to help me to find different ways to move obstacles from the path. Along the way there have been people who have

have chosen to encourage me to get up and to keep going when the path has been too dusty, hot or impossible. These people have believed in me and seen value in me long before I could see that kind of thing for myself. It is these people whom I carry with me...in my head and in my heart...as I continue on the dusty, bumpy pathway of living. These are the people who give me the courage to take more risks in my life and to welcome the challenges in life as being opportunities to make a difference. By their taking such action, they have shown me that doing and receiving care is totally cool. I, like the flightless dung beetle, have spent my life looking for rich and important bits of nutrition in experiences and experimenting with different relationships. I have not always known where I've been going. At times I have really struggled, at times I have been very close to being trampled by huge crushing problems and fears. However, I have collected enough rich experience and have been nurtured by special (spiritual) relationships with people in my life. These help me to provide a nest for my children to survive and flourish long after I have gone.

The flightless dung beetle is only found in this part of the country - this hot and dusty part of my childhood world. It relies on the great big Addo elephant for the dung, and it is by living alongside these gigantic animals, that the flightless dung beetle manages to ensure that it continues to survive.

One of the most crushing and ever-present fears in my life has been the fear of dying...and, once I became your mother, that fear of dying became the fear of dying before you were grown up. One night at dinner table a few months ago, we were talking about my studies at the university. You said that it is scary, but important, to talk about and plan a bit for what must be done if I die before you are big enough to take care of yourselves. You said you had heard on Oprah that a mother once left a tape of her voice for the children to listen to, because she knew that she was going to die. She had a bit of time to prepare them for her death. You thought that I should leave a tape of my voice so that you can remember my voice and listen to it, if I ever die before you do. Living in South Africa means that we live very close to the great big elephant's foot. This means that we live side-by-side with many dangers, but it also makes our lives here very rich and rewarding. Some people might think that we are being a bit silly to make plans for if I die before you are big, but it does also seem important to me that I leave my voice with you for you to remember...just in case. In this letter, I will write a bit about what is important to me in my understanding of Life, so that you will also remember the things that have made me the kind of mom I am. (In a way, it is another way of giving you my voice when I write a letter on this paper.)

The dung beetle never knows when the elephant's foot may hurt or crush it, but it carries on living its life by doing what it was born to do. If it knew how closely it lived to danger, do you think it would go out to roll dung at all?

I have learnt in my forty years of living, that there are times in the world when people are taken to the edge of despair, that there are some people who are taken to these places more often than are others, and that there is no way of knowing when the elephant's foot will get dangerously close. There are rich people, poor people, kind people, mean people, old people and young people in the world. Through your eyes, I have also become more aware that there are hundreds of different animals, birds, plants, insects and their environments that are in the world. All of these beings are given Life...that Life can be taken away, suddenly. One can therefore choose to live in Fear of dying or to live, like the dung beetle does, in celebration of Life. Some wise person once said that our children come into our world as our teachers. I do not know who that person was, but I do know that that is so for me. It is because of becoming a mother, your mother, that I have had to walk away from the Fear to become more like that fearless beetle...working towards gathering nutritious protection for you...as well as answering your many questions about God, the angels and surviving the uncertainty of life. It is your precious lives and your wanting to hear comforting answers to scary questions that have made me take a stand against the many fears that used to take the celebration of living out of my own life. By being someone who spent a lot of my time worrying when I was a younger person, I think that I avoided many of my chances to do the things that I really wanted to do. I wanted very much to be someone who helped other people and made a difference in their lives...I think that I am only becoming brave enough to take such big steps now that I am older and have a better picture of where I have been. (Maybe by pushing the dung backwards, the dung beetle gets to look at the path where it has been...what has worked and what might have been avoided...and so develops more skill to move forward over time?)

The elephant's foot - crushing fears that took rule over my life:

Stories we tell ourselves about what is happening to us are dangerous because they are powerful. Stories come to us from many sources; some we seek, many happen without our notice, others impose themselves on our lives. We have to choose carefully which stories to live with, which to use to answer the question of what is happening to us.

(Frank 1991: 81)

Fear of The Dark -

Since I was a very young girl, I can remember being scared of the dark. I remember waking up your aunty Sue in the middle of the night to go with me down the dark farmhouse passage to the loo. One morning, at breakfast, she announced this scared-of-the-dark habit of mine to the family. That should not seem too weird - many children have been known to be scared of the dark - but, because Sue is four years younger than me, the adults thought it was very funny when they found out that my five-year-old sister was keeping

me safe. I remember knowing then that the adults really did not understand any more what it was like to feel scared in the dark in the middle of the night.

Fear of Strange Noises -

I also remember lying frozen with fear in my bed one night as I listened to a softly scratching sound on the mosquito gauze of the farmhouse windows. That was the kind of time that I would be told by my grandmother, your Lella, that I had a "fertile imagination". My richly fertile imagination was really productive that night, because I imagined all kinds of horrible things to do with what that noise was. I lay awake in my bed, as stiff as a poker, for what seemed like hours and hours of the darkest night. Of course, when the daylight came, and we discovered enormous moths on the window frame gauze, it was a big relief. But I remember wishing then that I was a braver person and that if I could have been brave enough just to turn my head slightly enough to get a peep at the source of the noise, I might have been able to see that there was a great big majestic moth just on the other side of the Fear. I have always held a great admiration for my little sister, Sue, for taking risks. Although she was my little sister, she was known for being "fearless" and "determined to succeed."

Fear of Dying -

There are many stories that I can find that will show that Fear of dying has been very strong at times in my life. In fact, I would say that for most of my forty years of life on earth, I have been nagged and bullied by the Fear of dying. Sometimes that fear has got me to behave quite weirdly and it has on more than a few occasions taken all the fun and enjoyment out of life. Your Grandpa Lyall loved to travel all over the countryside on holidays. That sounds like fun, but I would get so worried about being killed in a car accident, that I would look out of the back window, and say a prayer of thanks for every car that had gone safely past us. In all the years of travelling with Grandpa Lyall, I was never once involved in a crash, but the Fear of being killed took away much of the fun of travelling on holiday. Your grandpa loved travelling and taking us on adventurous journeys to little-known parts of our country. I, however, spent most of my trip worrying and being afraid of dying along the way. In fact, I was so good at worrying about people being hurt or lost or dying that my reputation of being "a worrier" was very very strong. My parents used to say: "Nobody needs to worry in this family, because Linda does all the worrying for everybody."

Fear of Black People -

As I grew older, the things I worried about changed a bit. However, the worrying about being killed did not go away. I remember, when I was at my all white girls' boarding school, we often heard on the radio that "there had been trouble in the townships." We heard that the black people were rioting and that people were

being shot and put in jail. That was a moment when I became aware of feeling afraid of a group of people who I learnt might hurt my people. I also realised that I was not the only one who was afraid. I remember that that was the first time that I learnt to be scared of black people and, after that, there was a lot of propaganda about the dangerous black people who wanted to change our country and "take over."

I also knew black people in a different way to what the propaganda was trying to teach me, mostly because there were always black people who worked in our home: women helping Granny with the housework and men working in the garden. My father employed some black families on the farm and so the black children that I knew were my friends. We played netball together and "di-sen-di-se", that game where you bounce the ball under and over your leg. We also sang the "tamatie-sau-sau-sau-sau-sauce" song and I learnt to pick up cow dung and how to spread it over the walls and floors of their houses to make their houses clean and warm for the winter. The mothers of these children looked after me and taught me many things that I still do today. One woman, Evelina, was an old granny about as old as your granny is now. She taught me a lot about cooking.

I went to boarding school in 1974. Before I went to boarding school, I lived a very carefree life (other than when the Fear of the dark and dying tried to spoil it for me). By the time I left school, however, at the end of 1978, there had been much to convince me that the world I lived in was definitely not a safe place. Most of the white people were doing their best to stop the black people in South Africa from being treated like proper human beings. The white people were in power and black people were not even allowed to vote. The people had for many years started a resistance movement, later referred to as The Struggle. Although many of the people who were the adults in our white community would not admit it, our country was in civil war by the time I was at boarding school. Civil war is a terrible, terrible thing, because it makes people hate each other when they actually could be growing up as brothers and sisters of the same country. People born in the same country are fighting, instead of looking after each other and making sure that we all have enough food to eat, a good health system, a proper school to go to and a safe home to sleep in at night. Civil war encourages people to do terrible, cruel and dangerous things to other people. Sometimes that means that children get hurt or killed, fathers and mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends get hurt, go to jail or just disappear. I am sure that telling you this is a very shocking thing, but I did not know very much about it when I was your age of eight or nine. I did not know that there were children who went to bed afraid because they really were not safe enough from the harm of policemen barging into their houses and hurting their parents or worse. I did not know that there were parents who were afraid because their children might not live to see another day. I did not know many, many things, because white children were protected from knowing what was really going on in our country. However, news on the television, which came to our

school when I was in Grade 9, changed a lot of that. Once television came to our country, we started to see little bits of news that showed us that things were not well in our country.

White children went to white schools and learnt about white history. White children were taught to be afraid of black children. By the time I came back from boarding school in 1978, we had moved to a new farm and I had no black friends left. I didn't really want any either. I had become afraid of black people. As time went on, a few white people in our farming community were attacked and some were murdered. Our neighbour was murdered. The divide of Fear between black people and white people became more and more obvious. I remember hearing stories about one of the white Afrikaans shop owners and his brother taking a young black man to the "bush" for a beating...and how he had axle grease pumped into his bottom and how he was forced to drink a bottle of brandy and then left out in the "veld" overnight. I do not remember how I heard that story. I think that the young man probably died, but I would not know that either, for sure. The shopkeeper did not go to jail for doing that. I remember thinking that it was a horrible thing to do to someone and I remember disliking one of the shopkeeper brothers. The other one, however, was quite a friendly person and I don't remember disliking him too much. I couldn't really picture him doing such a thing to someone else, but it didn't bother me enough at the time to make me dislike him. I never did think then about what that night must have been like for the young man, as he was taken out as their prisoner to the isolated farm to be beaten up, tortured and left to die.

Fear of crowds, violence and unfamiliar places -

When I went to university in Cape Town, there was a lot of opportunity for me to join groups of people who did voluntary work "in the townships." I joined SHAWCO in my second year, because I wanted to become involved in helping children who had to live in poverty. I really liked to go to children's centres and be involved in playing and aftercare programmes. However, I never felt safe when I "went in" to the townships. I generally tried to do this voluntary work a few times each year I was at university, but then would find an excuse to stop. The real excuse was that the Fear of black people - of their carefully created reputation (by the propaganda) for bringing trouble and violence to our country - paralysed me from acting out my wish to make a difference to the unfairness of the Group Areas Act and the poverty and lack of educational opportunities it has caused. The fear of being in a country where I could not even speak the Xhosa language of the black people around me, made me feel that I was in danger in black townships and that I might not survive.

There are many other stories that I can tell you of where Fear has come to challenge me and to make me too scared to want to carry on. I tell you these scary things, because Fear seems always, also, to offer opportunities.

Opportunities to regain my spirit...opportunities to recognise spirituality in relationships with other people.

Spirituality is a commitment to choose, as the primary context for understanding and acting, one's relatedness with all that is. With this commitment, one attempts to stay focused on relationships between oneself and other people, the physical environment, one's heritage and traditions, one's body, one's ancestors, saints, Higher Power, or God. It places relationships at the centre of awareness, whether they be interpersonal relationships with the world or other people, or intrapersonal relationships with God or other nonmaterial beings.

(Griffith & Griffith 2002:15-16)

Opportunity knocks –

I had the opportunity when I was twenty four years old, for the first time, to meet and work with many people of different races and religions. I learnt to know these people as people first, and to realise that while we had many differences in our lives and in our histories, we had many similarities in what we enjoyed, laughed about and lived for...we all had a common wish - for peace and equality in our land.

After university I could not find a job as a teacher and I eventually was employed as a First Aid Trainer at the Red Cross Society. This was during 1985 and 1986, a time when the civil war was probably at its scariest and most violent. It was not safe to drive along the highways, because people dropped big stones onto cars to make them crash. People burnt tyres on the roads and very often there would be flames and big stones in the road when you drove to the places you needed to go. I worked in the black areas a lot of the time. I worked more frequently, however, in the coloured areas. I was always more afraid in the black areas, because I could not speak Xhosa. The fieldworkers who went with me to these areas (I was only sent with a partner if I went to a black area), were too scared to go with me. They did not want to travel with a white woman, because they felt that it put their lives in danger to be seen with a white. Our job was to teach people basic first aid skills and to take food and clothing supplies to areas of need. Often, therefore, we would have to go to places that had been ravaged by fighting. One day I was on my way to Sunset Boulevard, where I had to find a little primary school to teach some lessons in First Aid. It was a lovely sunny winter's day and I had been to that school a few times before. There was no real reason for what happened, no rational logical reason why on that day, rather than another day, I should just become too overrun by the Fear of Dying to be able to keep going. I turned my little car around and went back to my boss at the Red Cross Society. I told her that I had lost my nerve. Shortly after that I resigned from my first job.

Opportunity knocks –

I had the opportunity of teaching teenage children from the coloured school in Swellendam when I was twenty six years old. I lived on the white side of the town and worked in the coloured side of town, as the only English speaking white woman in the school. I learnt to know these children as children first, and to realise that while we had many differences in our lives and in our histories, we had many similarities in what we enjoyed, laughed about and lived for: we all had a common wish, for safety and security in our homes and for the right to equality in our education.

When I worked at this school in Swellendam, it was quite a scary time for me, because it was during 1987 to 1989, shortly before Mandela was released from his long stay in prison. It was a time when, in a small town like Swellendam, there was a total divide of people because of their skin colour. The white people lived in one part of the town and sent their children to the white school. For their children it was safe to live in the town, and easy to go to school where they received good teaching and an uninterrupted school day. The coloured and black people had to send their children to the coloured school. Their children were not always very safe on their side of town. It was not always easy to get to school and some had to walk long distances. When they were at school they received interrupted schooling: as lessons were not always taught by the teachers; their lessons were often cancelled because of boycotting and rioting; and there was a headmaster who was a drunk and who did not keep very good watch over how all of the teachers were working with the children. The other white teachers who worked at the school were also frightened to be there when there was boycotting of classes, burning of tyres and children moving around in groups singing protest songs and chanting. I remember feeling frightened to drive to school, but, once I was in the school grounds, I felt safe. The children knew me and would keep me informed about how things were going. While the children were burning tyres and shouting at the police who were parked at the entrance of the school grounds, waiting to shoot, I made the choice that I wanted to support what they were fighting for. I too, wanted to join The Struggle. I remember that one day, about eighteen months after I had been teaching there, one of my coloured colleagues started to call me Linda, instead of Juffrou, for the first time. Something had changed, and it felt really great. I remember that day as being one of the days that I felt as if I belonged in the coloured community, and that that feeling of no longer being regarded as "one of those whites" was a good one. I felt as if I was truly being seen as Linda, and no longer as a white woman oppressor. I remember where I was standing the day that I was first called and invited to a party in the coloured township. It was a great honour to me to be included. When I accepted the invitation to be the only white woman at the party that my black and coloured colleagues were having in the "coloured township" at night, I knew that I was being given a wonderful opportunity for making different choices in my life.

Opportunity knocks –

I had the opportunity of knowing my great aunt, Deedle English. I learnt to know her as someone who could make me laugh and as someone who felt very deeply about taking a stand against injustice. She made little fuss about it, but she worked tirelessly for the Black Sash in Port Elizabeth. This unusual aunt showed me a different path, and although she showed me that path long ago, I am now only really taking my first strides towards following her example. Maybe by writing this letter and by passing on to you her story, you can help me to continue what I now think is a worthwhile thing to claim as a family tradition.

When I was at university, I wanted very much to follow the example of my great aunty Deedle, who worked in the Black Sash. I know that she was an activist who spoke up and acted against bad and evil things that happened in our country. Her photograph in my study shows her holding a protest sign in her hands. She is standing in the street in Port Elizabeth. The sign reads: "GROUP AREAS HURT". She was already a very old lady. I hope that I, too, shall live to be a very old lady. I am grateful that I have come this far...if I have, like aunty Deedle, another forty or fifty odd years to live, I would like to carry on the family tradition that she started. She was a very interested person, who asked many questions, so that she would know exactly what you meant and thought. Ever since I was a young child, I remember that she took my words seriously. She always seemed to find what I had to say interesting and worthwhile and that made me feel worthwhile too. She was very much dedicated to making an effort to put right some of the wrong things that were done to black people in our country. I remember that some of the things that she was involved in were a bit shocking to her family and friends...but she did what she felt was right. I think that she also had a strong relationship with God...and I know that she could be quite fierce at times!

Opportunity knocks again and again

I have taken some of the rough roads of my past and some of the opportunities they have offered, to tell you how it is that I have now, at last, come to understand that living in South Africa at this time can be seen as something that is endangering to our lives (too close to the elephant's foot)...or else can be welcomed as something that is full of countless opportunities for living a life that is rich and nutritious to our spirits...and to the spirits of others (close to the elephant's dung).

You have patiently (well, not always so patiently!) allowed me to spend hours and hours of time studying for this university degree. I have been doing my university studying about what children have to say about how they manage when parents and people close to them die. I have chosen to write this letter to you now, so that you can also benefit from the time I have stolen to spend with other children, when you may have felt that I should have been with you. At least, by sharing this research with you, you will know how some people have learnt to face big challenges in their lives...some even having to learn to live their lives after

their parents die. In facing up to one of the biggest Fears of my life...that of thinking about the possibility that I, like the parents of the children in this book, might die before you are big enough to manage without me - I have been given the opportunity to offer you some of their wisdoms. I have found in that talking to these children and some of the adults who are still with them, there have been unbearably sad things to talk of, but also, unexpectedly, many things that give me hope and courage for your lives...for your future.

Because of these conversations with young children

- *I have found that I have begun to think a lot about people who are from my past, people like my aunty Deedle, like Lella, like Miss Mallett. I have realised that they can still live with us in our minds and hearts, and give us courage and guidance, even though they are no longer living.*
- *I have also found that I have become more aware of people in our present who come forward to guide and encourage us further – Rachel, who shows me how not to fear people of other cultures and languages by taking me with her to a funeral of a little baby from Fikelela in Khayelitsha; Helen, who makes me laugh every day and helps me to calm down and to meditate when I feel overwhelmed; Father Luke, who knows how important it is to make the time to talk to small children about serious things like God, and evolution; Sheilla Malibeni who is kind, helpful and always has enough time to care for children, no matter how busy she is; and Granny who remembers to walk very closely with God, Gentleness and Love.*
- *I have found that by talking to the children who have already had to face living with the death of a loved one, that they are doing OK, if they have found other people who have cared for them, loved them and looked out for them. Having caring people with them does not make it any less sad that they have had to learn to live with the death of a parent or other close person. These caring people just make it possible for children to still find happiness, joy, safety, laughter, friendship and love in their lives after their parents have died.*
- *I have learnt that our spirituality is everywhere – it is in the garden when we are in community with nature and God's creatures; it is in our relationships with our loved ones; it is in our living memories of precious times spent together; it is in our opportunities taken (or not taken) and it is in the meaning we make of our lives.*
- *I have also learnt from you, my own young children, that it is important to talk about God and to discuss what we believe and understand. You have always asked more questions than I have had the answers for...and that has been a wonderful gift to me...because you have taught me not to be afraid of not knowing all the answers for you... you are often the ones who bring answers that feel the most right.*

When I can care for the sunlight...[on the beetle's back]...enough to imagine that it will be there without me, when I have faith in its being there, then my self rests in a world beyond itself and I am no longer afraid to die. When I can see the faces of those I love smiling after I am gone, then I can take pleasure in being here. But I do not have to be here; my pleasure is knowing I can let go.

(Frank 1991: 141)

If I happen to die too soon -

We fail to value life as a frail bit of good luck in a world based on chance.

(Frank 1991: 128)

If you ever have to read this letter because I have died too soon, you must know that I wish for you to seek out and find those people who will help you to have the courage to live your lives in a joyful and fearless way. The people I choose for you now, might or might not be the people whom you still need at that time. So, I hope that you will always have the courage to follow your instincts, like the dung beetle, and to know what will be nourishing for your lives. I have brought you up to decide for your "own-selves"... what it is that you want to do with your lives, who it is that you want to follow and how it is that you want to be treated. This, you will find, is not the easiest legacy. For, rather like the path of the dung beetle, you will not always know where you are going, or if you are headed in the right direction. If, like me, you make some poor choices along your route, I trust that you will always have the faith and creativity to keep trying new and alternative paths. I trust that you will always have the courage to ask for the strongest of the angels to guard over you and to sit on the foot of your bed.

May you, my little dung beetles, always have the Addo sun shining on your backs, the richness of spirit to see the opportunity in the dusty roadway, and the wisdom to recognise the blessing of living alongside the great elephants...

I love you more than all the stars in the sky and more than the whole universe...and I always will.

MOM

A final comment:

Living in such a close relationship with fear has often in the past, marginalized my voice and made me feel paralysed to act against injustice. On becoming a mother, I have regained my relationship with my spirituality and have come to realise how fear has acted as a catalyst for me to take firmer and more faith-filled steps towards caring with children – children who have reminded me that I have been gathering knowledges and spiritual wisdoms from living in community with others, since my youth.

In Chapter Six, Research and I have a conversation about what I have learnt during this research adventure.

CHAPTER SIX

A CONVERSATION WITH RESEARCH

When David Epston (2002) ran a class with the Masters students of the Institute for Therapeutic Development recently, he asked us the following question: "If we asked your research in what ways it surprised you, what would it say?" This example of "Powerful/Playful Feminist Practice(s)" (Gergen 2001:42) gave me the idea for the format of this chapter, as it reminded me of playful feminist practice of "Going Beyond Text Into the Performative" (Gergen 2001:45). I thought the genre of an interview format was a fitting one to illustrate the constant inner dialogue that evolved between the research and the researcher.

Answering Epston's question, challenged me to look at Research from a new point of view – one that created a fresh perspective on the research adventure. This fits with social construction discourse in the understanding that language creates the world we know. In keeping with feminist practice of "creating new writing styles for presenting research practices" (Gergen 2001:43), I have used White and Epston's (1990) idea of externalising conversations to externalise Research. Research then joins me in the conversation as it interviews me (one of the co-searchers) about what I have learned during this research adventure:

Research: *You stated that the most important part of this journey for you was your "commitment to search for ethical ways to participate with people" (Kotzé, Myburg, Roux 2002:ix) when embarking on this research project. Did you manage to do this and what did you learn about "Ethical ways of being" (Kotzé et al 2002) during this research adventure?*

Linda: This question relates to the acknowledgement of the "power differential" (White 1995a: 167) when we embark on collaborative practices with children. I undertook to participate in ethical practices that aimed to achieve a "bottom-up accountability" (White 1997:204). This I did in collaboration with the children in the following ways:

- I undertook *to explain my research curiosities* to the children I consulted as well as to find out if they also felt that this information might be useful to other children in similar positions then or in the future.
- I was *careful to be transparent* about the possibilities for power imbalances. I asked them to be vigilant to the possibility that I was forcing them into agreeing with me. I did not want to emerge as "the expert" in the conversations, or to seduce the children into "right/wrong" thinking and other inequities that follow from power/knowledge imbalances.
- I *incorporated opportunities for discussions* with friends in the school and checked whether such conversations would be in keeping with their "purposes, wants and goals" (White 1995a: 170) for their lives.

- I undertook *to check at frequent intervals* during each session “how the conversation is [was] going for them”, “how they see [saw] its direction fitting or not fitting with the overall project” and “about how it is [was] affecting them emotionally and otherwise” (White 1995a: 169).
- I *invited some conversation* at the beginning of each new session, *asking for the children’s understandings regarding the usefulness* of their previous conversation(s) with respect to their lives and relationships over the intervening week.
- I *kept a visible written record of the conversations*, offering the co-searcher the same writing equipment for participation in co-authoring and illustration when, if and as they wished. The records remained the official property of the child, and were taken home, back to class or kept in a personal file in the Support Room, depending on mutual agreement. However, for the purposes of this research, I also requested permission for a copy of the records to be made and kept in my files. I asked for permission to share any of the information recorded or spoken, when and if I needed to.
- I *made a serious attempt to convey the exact purposes and form of any such sharing of information*. When this permission was denied, I honoured that choice. This permission was requested at the outset of the study, but also frequently during the study and again prior to any written reports for the purpose of communicating the findings of the study to other people, as well as prior to being a witness at court for King’s voice. (I was particularly aware that children might choose to change their minds or that they might not immediately understand the full implications of sharing their stories and understandings with others.)
- Where possible, I undertook *to employ a system of co-authoring longer texts*, such as letters and books so as to offer the opportunity for the child(ren) and the adult(s) to participate in co-research *with* each other. This was to prevent myself from being tempted into doing research on the younger participant and to take over the conversation in such a way as to marginalize their participation.
- I undertook *to suggest forms that recording of the information could take and ask for other possible or preferred ways of doing this*. Some suggested ideas included writing letters, making computer books, making hand-made books, drawing, painting, designing and making jewellery, writing emails and co-authoring songs.
- I *gave the children the right to choose their communities of concern* (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8), *to include or exclude caregivers, facilitators and classmates* in the discussions, at any time they so wished.
- I took care *not to re-traumatise the children* by making them participate in graphic retellings of the circumstances surrounding the deaths and thus forcing them to remain in problem-saturated stories.
- I was *alert to the danger posed by “the entrapment of knowing”* (Melissa Griffith 1995:125) what death and loss mean to children in terms of their theology. Griffith (1995:126) says that “if ‘I think I know’ the

basic story of someone's experience with God, I am probably beginning to close off therapeutic possibilities." In keeping these ideas with me as I asked questions, I remembered Griffith's caution that the words people use to describe their theology are only the beginning of the conversation. When the children used words that I had heard before (such as God, heaven, ancestors) I tried to stay with "a position of not-knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian 1992:37) and to remember that these words "are more like a door, and [that although] the doors to different persons' hearts may look the same, the insides are wonderfully different" (Griffith 1995:129). In doing this I was invited into the children's differing personal and spiritual worlds.

- I learnt that the "healing praxis" (Ackermann 1998:83) of feminist theology "is concrete, [and] rooted in the understanding that daily living is not separate from the life of faith (1998:83). I also realised that "healing praxis" is only ethical when co-constructed in collaboration with children, whilst keeping *their* hopes, desires, values and dreams at the centre of the conversation. This required of me "to be 'ethically imaginative'" (1998:89) if I was to participate in "acts of imagination [that were] ethically accountable to the common desire for justice and healing" (1998:89) in the lives of these children and in the greater network of their communities. I discovered a concrete healing praxis that flourished when negotiated with (and by) children in the context of their chosen community – peers, caregivers (living and no longer living) as well as the community of concern that was opened up and will continue to grow by e-mail, by song, by books and by letters.

Research: *In all of the research you seem to have made much of the work visible to the caregivers of the children. This practice of creating community seems to challenge ideas of confidentiality?*

Linda: We have concentrated on finding and making visible actions that speak of hope and care. All of the sharing of our conversations has been collaborative. There have been things that children have chosen not to share, and it has been my ethical position to honour the children's voices at all times. This is what Michael White (1995a:170) means when he says that we need to

[C]onsult even very young children about their lives in ways that help them to articulate more clearly their own preferred purposes and goals, although in our culture, this sort of consultation is far from routine.

(White 1995a:170)

Furthermore, the work presented in this research report is also chosen for its richness and for the way it has answered the research questions. As Robert Stake (1994:240) says:

"More [was] pursued than was volunteered. Less [was] reported than what was learned." This is the situation, because the co-searchers kept their "power to choose what to tell" (Stake 1994:240) for the purposes of this

research presentation.

Research: *What were the hopeful things that you learnt from the children?*

Linda: I learnt that children have much to teach adults, provided that adults take the trouble to listen to children. There is much that the children have taught not only me, but also their caregivers about the meaning that *actions of care* have in the children's lives. It seems that the caregiving adults in these stories have really had some deeper insights into the lives of their children, by being invited to hear what these children have had to say about what is meaningful in their lives. Maybe this is not so much that which they did not know already, but it seems that *making it so visible* in the ceremonies, certificates and books has managed to help the children to *offer support and encouragement to their caregivers*. It was a process in which there was a gift for all participants to share in:

The gift of therapy is balanced by the gift of consultancy. We consider this reciprocity to be of vital importance in reducing the risk of indebtedness and replacing it by a sense of fair exchange.

(Epston & White 1992:17)

I have learnt about the wonderful *gift that children can offer in co-constructing webs of care* that benefit their peers as well as the special adults in their lives. Tatom'kulu, Mama, Judith and Bibi all acknowledged how their children's actions enriched their sense of belonging and understanding of their children's spiritual and daily needs. They also acknowledged how they had benefited from being exposed to their children's current understandings of the world in terms of what stands with them in times of sadness and loss. In short, I have learnt that children can make suitable therapists to adults too, if one keeps to co-searching for preferred action and meaning in their lives.

Usher and Edwards (1994:80) explain how teachers [and in this research study all adults and caregivers] are culturally constructed as "ones who know" - as those who will fill a lack and thereby lead students from ignorance to knowledge. In this study adult caregivers of children have learnt that we (adults and children) can all learn how to be learners.

Gergen (2001:42) speaks of "the taken-for-granted realities" that "limit us in our ways of knowing the world." The "taken-for-granted" ideas that bereavement and loss are best left to adults ("the ones who know"), as well as the "taken-for-granted" developmentally-based ideas that children have limited/ naive spiritual knowledge, are deconstructed by the spiritual knowledges of the children in the stories in this research. I have come to realise that the children in these stories have their own theologies that they developed regarding bereavement and loss. These stories of children's spiritual knowledges are examples of what feminist theologian, Elaine

Graham (1998:138) refers to as 'kitchen table theology' (see 1.6). Graham uses this term to acknowledge theology that "is discussed and practised in contexts which extend well beyond the confines of the academy" (Graham 1998:138). Narrative pastoral therapist, Nevi Basson (2001:82), describes her experience of children's personal spiritual knowledges as "school desk theology". Elaine Graham (1998:141) says "the personal story in relation to the stories of faith...encourages new models of practice to blossom which embody and enact renewed visions of faith." I have come to understand that children have much to offer adults in the way of "solution knowledges" (White 2000:21) when they are able to share their spiritual knowledges of living with bereavement and loss.

Research: *What religious, spiritual and cultural support did you find in children's meaning - making?*

Linda: I learnt an enormous amount about my own spirituality through being introduced to the deep spiritualities of children I interviewed. This seems to have been a strong factor throughout the research - the ease with which the conversations with the children allowed the topic of spirituality to be invited in. Having been allowed to go to the sacred places of these children's lives, I have also become aware of the strength that some children have tapped from ritualised practice. I have learnt about the place that ritualised practice holds in children's theology from the following rituals/ spiritual practices: Amina's *practice of gardening* when she is sad, which reconnects her with the rituals of earth-care or eco-spirituality that her father taught her; Matthew's *practice of remembering* his Nana by co-creating a special table of memory which is kept in a visible place in the home; Matthew and his sister's *practice of sitting together and talking* about Nana when they miss her; King's *practice of looking at his parents' smiling faces* in the photographs; Thembani's *practice of nightly prayer* gave King the advice that "you must pray to God every night."

These and other bits of conversation have reminded me that children learn and create their knowledges regarding the spiritual by doing and by practising rituals that give meaning to their experiences. The creation of tradition and ritual is something that I have now begun to take more seriously into my life with my own children because of how I have witnessed children holding onto and further developing these rituals.

Research: *Please tell me what the children taught you about facing your own fears.*

Linda: I chose a topic of bereavement and loss that took me to one of my own deepest fears: that of picturing the possibility of losing my life and leaving my young children to grow up without their mother. By going to my places of fear in this way, I found places of warmth, strength, resilience, laughter and care. I also experienced opportunities of powerful hopefulness. The conversations highlighted for me that children often manage best when there is a network of reliable and regular care. This I noticed in the form of people *doing* care, (rather than merely saying the words of care). It was a great comfort to my own relationship with fear, to be made

more tangibly aware that children inevitably seek out and find at least one other person to share that responsibility of caring. This can happen adult to child, child to adult, child to child. Elize Morkel pointed out to me that the community of care does not have to be limited to family members. This critique of my thinking that had limited my "ways of knowing the world" (Gergen 2001:42) was a "sparkling event" (Morgan 2000:52) in the research adventure. It also gave me the opportunity to think wider when seeking the networks of care with the children. Once the possibilities of co-creating networks of care had been opened up in this way, the imaginative leaps were unbounded: care took place in cyberspace, in song, in jokes, in beading, in gardening, in storytelling, in classrooms, in the headmaster's office and even in the children's court.

Research: *What do you make of the feminist saying: "The personal is political"?*

Linda: King's telling of his story did not just politicise the story of violence against innocent people, but also assisted in the transformation of consciousness (hooks 1997:538) for the community of care that started to form around him. The Three Wise Young men also used King's private story to "transform" the pain into a political stand against violence. Children can turn the personal/private stories into "public gain" if and when given the opportunity to do so. Through the e-mails as correspondence and song writing the Three Wise Young men "move[d] beyond self-reflection to an awareness of collective reality" (hooks 1997:532).

The practices of taking the effects of violence into the classroom in an appropriate way - becoming part of the song-writing exercise - can be defined as what Reinharz (1992:220) calls 'consciousness-raising'. This can lead to a new way of thinking, relating, naming or acting for those children and adults who became a community of concern for the children.

Pattison (1994:61-62) emphasises the need for pastoral care to be reorientated "towards socio-political awareness and commitment towards the oppressed." I realised that children who have no choices in a country where violence is a daily part of their lives need "adult advocates". They also need to be given opportunities to speak out against these practices in order to be able to turn the personal into the political.

I am aware of bell hooks' (1997: 534) warning that focusing on the self through affirming and exploring one's own identity can easily be turned into "de-politicisation". However, the children taught me - through their way of dealing with bereavement and loss, creating communities of care, giving and receiving care as well as taking a stand against violence - that pastoral care and counselling can and should also be a socio-political activity.

Research: *Tell me some more about struggling under the burden of listening to sad stories.*

Linda: Sometimes, when the implications of stories became too hard for me to bear, or for practical reasons

were things that I was unable to act upon by myself, I had to take heed of Couture's (1998:48) ideas concerning pastoral care:

A social ecological approach to pastoral care would draw on the whole range of experience and gifts that people bring to one another as they seek to care with one another in the presence of God. Caring would be about selecting and arranging what we have to offer to and receive from one another in a creative, imaginative expression of personal and divine presence – a genuinely artistic practice.

Part of that "artistic practice" is to locate the people who are able to supplement what we have to offer and so in giving we all receive. In this research I have had to learn that if I am to take action after reflection, that action might not be physically rolling up my sleeves and doing something on my own. I might connect the children with other people in the community who also celebrate their spirituality by **doing care**. This understanding - that I could act to connect people as a response to sad stories - was a great source of comfort to me. Patton (1993:27) highlights how care and community are related to each other and how it is "memory that brings them fully into relationship." Patton (1993:27) uses Casey's ideas to connect a community to care through remembering or to re-member someone within the community of care:

Caring...implies remembering, that is to say, keeping the other person...in mind. Thus, it comes as a confirming fact to learn that "memory" is also cognate with the Greek *merimna*, "care," "solicitude," "anxiety," "sorrow." Remembering *is* caring for what we remember - intensified, once more, in commemorating.

Patton (1993:17) uses Heidegger's ideas - understanding care as both the anxiety that we feel about our own lives as well as the solicitude we direct to others - to remind the pastoral carer that care is more than what we feel or think or do. As "constitutive of our being" it is what we in fact are - caring. Patton (1993:28) using Casey and Palmer's ideas about community, care and re-membering states that care is what makes the human being human.

Research: *Can stories become too sad? Can hope become invisible?*

Linda: Research can become too sad. This was my experience in some conversations. In some stories, there were hardly any words available in the room for their experiences. One boy became visibly upset and told me that it was "too sad" to think about his mother at all. Another child, a girl, told me that she "didn't want to talk" about her mother's death. Another boy would only permit the tiniest peep into his world of loss of a parent, following which he put a firm: "No!" to any further attempts to have access to his story. A boy told me that "sometimes I pretend he's there," when explaining what he did when it became very sad. A girl told me that her family: "do not like to talk about it [grieving and loss] together very much," but then pressed a book into my

hand that offered reading on the subject of death and dying and said that she thought I should read it.

These incidents made me think of myself as a child and how I often preferred to read about other children who were in similar situations to me. Another child, a girl, just shrugged her shoulders when asked about the effects of her mother's prolonged illness and the loss of time she could spend with her mother, until we found other ways of talking about loss: we spent long quiet minutes together, threading beautiful beads onto safety pins and making a beaded bracelet to symbolise the gifts of kindness and love which her mother brings to her life.

In these stories, where my initial ideas did not seem to fit the children's wishes, my position as a narrative pastoral therapist working from *within* a school helped me to seek other opportunities of doing hope. Even when hope seemed to become invisible, there was always a little glimmer of possibility somewhere within the community of the school. I have found a strong community of support for *doing* hope (Weingarten 2000:402) in/ with my colleagues. A heartening example is that of a colleague who has taken a position of *doing* care (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001: 7) since becoming aware of one family's sadness. She has also taken an active position of standing up to the injustices of a paucity of emotional and physical care. I have seen a visible change in these children: they are now bound into school, knowing that a deeply caring and sustaining woman is personally interested in their daily care and monitoring their existence on a daily basis. This is where *doing* care has turned into *doing* hope.

Research: *Were there times that you felt stuck?*

Linda: Yes. In situations where I felt stuck, I looked for support from other people to follow up and to do care and hope with these children. I was grateful for the responses of many caring people in the school community who were willing to join me in doing small acts of care. Their responses helped to counteract my feelings of self-doubt as a therapist, where my initial ideas of having therapeutic conversations with these children did not feel very useful to these children at the time. For instance, in one child's case, I felt that further direct conversations about his grief would be cruel on my part. However, having become aware of his deep sadness and pain, I could not merely leave it at that. I needed to take action in response to what he had let me see, so I approached a number of people in the school community to participate in acts of mothering care. This action of taking a proactive stance is what Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:5) refer to as "doing commitments". I have learnt that it is not the sole responsibility of one person to take action alone. Rather, in doing care, a pastoral therapist can engage the help of the whole community, "not to care for but to care with people who are in need of care" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:7) point out that this kind of support:

[M]oves away from a caring response or Christian sense of guilt, away from paternalistic care and undue protection, towards care as a social practice where care is socially constructed by care-givers as well as care receivers.

I think that knowing the participants has been especially helpful when having conversations with children. In my position, many of the children I have seen have known me fairly well, as I am someone who is frequently seen around the school in the passages, on the playground and in the classrooms. Where there were children who were less familiar with me, the conversations were sometimes, although not exclusively, the more challenging ones. I think about the relevance here of Reinharz's (1992) section entitled: "Friend, stranger, neither, both?" She refers to the "necessity of having close relations before the interview takes place" (Reinharz 1992:26). In many of the conversations with children, there was opportunity to develop a relationship akin to the "self-other" Heshusius (1994:17) refers to. At times where children did not allow me into the "the sacred place of [their] reality", I think it was possibly more to do with my trying to go too deep too quickly. This is where I ended up feeling stuck, and more like an outsider taking the position of the adult-expert researcher *doing research on* children. This is where, at times, I have felt that I have been facing hopeless situations. However, in all of these situations where children did not let me in, I tried to connect children with other people who could continue practices of doing care. This connection was made easier by my being in a school community where I could have easy access to other people who could participate in their "community of care" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001: 8) by *doing* hope.

Research: *What unexpected meaning-making effects did the research adventure have on your own life?*

Linda: This research has had a profound effect on me. I set out by assuming that I would be caring with children and their loved ones, whilst researching about an area that I wanted to know more about. I did not expect that by embarking on this project, I would receive so much reassurance and reciprocity of care. I did not expect that the children would be practising mutual care in that they would return care and they would actively increase the range of the web of care. Whenever I took steps towards places that I feared to go, I received in return richness and a strengthening of my own anchor lines – the lines that strengthen and hold the web in place. When I thought that I was embarking on a participatory action research project, I did not know that I would be receiving care and community in the way that I have. I have learnt that outreach is in-reach. I have learnt about the importance of the small things in everyday life:

The small things in ordinary, everyday life are no less sacred than the rituals and observances that define religious practice.

(Unknown)

from Elion and Streiman (2001:10)

Research: *How suitable is the title of the dissertation "Children's Voices on Bereavement and Loss"?*

Linda: At the outset of this research, I envisaged hearing multiple voices commenting on specific themes. This initial idea was one of gathering a variety of discourses, metaphors and stories to represent the collective voices of children. However, I discovered fairly soon that participatory action research asked for research that was more about relationships and community, and less about themes and generalizations. The research then changed in a way that reflected the depth of commitment to discovering hope that was evident in the stories that I have chosen to record. Once I had made the decision to change the direction that the research was taking, the research became less about gathering evidence of discourses, metaphors and stories, and more about personal relationships in community.

Research: *Does this imply that your research aims have also changed?*

Linda: Yes, with participatory action research, the aims of the research are bound to change because power sharing and the participation of co-searchers play an important part. I think that especially when listening carefully to participants, the research started telling a story of its own and taking its own direction. Reflexivity invites the voice of the researcher/writer to be ever-present in social constructionist research (Gergen 2002:45). The question about the suitability of the research title and the changing of goals are important aspects of feminist research practice. Feminist research emphasises the need to make visible the choices made by the co-searchers in the formulation and presentation of the project. I realise that I started out with aims to speak of children's voices on a different scale than what I eventually ended up doing. This was because the research changed my understanding of what would be ethical practice. This changed the approach from that of seeking multiple voices, to that of seeking children's personal and unique understandings - and meaning making.

Research: *How did feminist research practice allow for your changing direction in research?*

Linda: I learnt that after conversations I would often need to return to thinking about what had been said. I started to refer to this as "journaling in my head." This was a comfortable way that I found to revisit the "afterthoughts" (Epston: 2002) that served to flesh out and give greater depth to the interviews. Gergen (2001: 45) says such "reflexivity...allows for drawing attention to the choices made, the limits inherent in the formulation of the project, and what might have been otherwise." I found that this principle of feminist research allowed for the flexibility needed to modify the research in such a way as to keep to the ethical practices of "bottom-up accountability" (White 1997:204) referred to earlier in this chapter. This was particularly important with regard to checking with children as to how the conversations were going for them, and what direction they would like to pursue further.

Research: *Tell me more about your ideas of the ethical practice of research as care when co-searching with children.*

Linda: Social constructionist work "allows one to integrate one's value orientation and political philosophy into various forms of action" (Gergen 2001:42). A very important thing that I learnt is that this research should never be attempted purely for the sake of eliciting information. By my being so ambitious as to want to interview as many children as I thought I could manage, I had underestimated the effect on people's lives of entering into conversations with them. When the children found it very hard to speak, and when I felt that the aims of the research were more about my gathering "good data" in terms of research information and less about co-searching for healing and hope, I found that I did not reach "settled stories" (Waldegrave 1999:177). When I realised that the research was turning towards being more quantitative than qualitative, and that I was looking at trends rather than local specificities, I decided to shelve some of the research stories. I intend to revisit the stories where I feel that the involvement with those children reflected thin and uninvolved research.

Worthwhile research, as I have come to know it, is energizing. It challenged me to think about things in new ways and to examine the "taken-for-granted realities" (Gergen 2001: 42) in my own thinking. I have come to understand and to know that children will allow you many privileges in their lives, provided that you treat them as partners engaging in mutual care and mutual respect. For me, this would typically involve:

- Making sure that questions have not become intrusive, retraumatising, pathologising or imposing of a particular viewpoint.
- Inviting reciprocity in terms of sharing power with children.
- Welcoming and accepting the children's desire to care for you [adult /therapist/ researcher] too.
- Making sure to take every word children offer with the due seriousness it deserves.
- Always linking meaning with action. Never participating in an activity for the sake of finding answers to your own questions, purely for your own ends.
- Laughing and having fun whenever possible.
- Making sure to try to limit the length of time that we will be in dialogue.
- Being as creative as we can and inviting creativity in. This is a place where children and adults can be equals.
- Enjoying the research. If we are not enjoying it, shifting it and reworking it.

Anglican minister, Reverend Michael Mc Coy (1987:39) says that:

All people – whatever their religious background (or lack of it) – construct a faith pattern which gives meaning to their world. This is done in relationship with others, beginning from the first moments of life and continuing until death, as parents, family, friends, and

peers help the person form an image of life, a picture of his ultimate environment.

This research adventure has taught me that it is this relational self that I will meet if I am prepared to wait, to risk and to let children take the lead from the questions I provide. I must take care, however, to not ever assume that I have fully come to know and to understand what the other person means...the best I can get to is a close approximation.

Research: *What aspects of your relationship with the co-searchers have been most useful or important for the participatory research?*

Linda: I have also come to realise that adhering inflexibly to specific aims or goals for the sake of answering the research questions closes down creativity and imagination. There is no such thing as perfect research when it comes to participatory action research. The closest to perfect that you can reach is to enter into the "participatory consciousness", the "self-other" (Heshusius) - that is the sharing of the spirit of our beings. The most important aspect of participatory research is to reach what Kwenda (2002) refers to here as the "crucial level of interaction":

There's a language that all of us speak and understand...and that foundation, that universal language, we see in people's eyes, we hear in people's voices...we feel, we sense it. It is that level, I think, that is the crucial level of interaction.

(Kwenda 2002)

Another important aspect of my relationship with the co-searchers was to constantly seek to hand the agency (White 1992:145) back to these children. I was to learn that when the children were treated as co-searchers, they took the cue. More often than not, I had to hand over the "reins" and take a backseat, whilst the children started to mobilise their own resources and care. For example, in the chapter about the Three Wise Young Men, there are examples of when the children wrote their own e-mails and decided to share their story with the class. On these occasions I learnt to trust their ability to do for themselves, and to act "act as consultants to themselves" (Epston & White 1992:17). I have learnt that even one conversation has the possibility of returning agency to the child who has been challenged by the devastation of losing a loved one to death, illness, prison or divorce:

When persons are established as consultants to themselves, to others, and to the therapist, they experience themselves as more of an authority on their own lives, their problems, and the solution to these problems.

(Epston & White 1992:17)

Research: *What about the African idea that it takes a village to raise a child?*

Linda: I find the idea of community responsibility for our children an appealing one.

It takes more than loving, caring parents and more than family to raise children. It takes a community committed to their well-being. That is the meaning of the African proverb, "***It takes a village to raise a child.***"

(Anderson & Johnson 1994: 91)

This research has taught me that I am part of a community of caring and hoping people. Participating in participatory action research of this kind supports the co-creation of the kind of school community in which I would like to raise my own children. I have learnt that being an African is not so much about *who* I am, but *how* I am. Participatory action research is not only about sitting in libraries looking for important ideas in books. It is also about reaching out to others to participate in the adventure of coming to closer understandings of self, each other, God and the environment – all woven into an intricate web of care.

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¹ bell hooks is the pen name for Gloria Watkins

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Letters of permission

Appendix A

Letters of permission:

To whom it may concern

We, King, Raymond and TC (Them bani) give Linda permission to use our story and our words in her thesis for the university.

We want to spread the word around that there are many children (and families) who have suffered because of family members being lost to violence. (Them bani/ TC)

Talking with Linda and doing things with her have helped me (King) to be happier when I am sad. I think that violence is cruel and when children can speak to a therapist like I have with Linda, then they can make plans to help themselves to feel better.

We also want to send a message to the worlds that violence makes children very sad, especially when their loved ones are lost. (Raymond)

We want to send a message to murderers that what goes around comes around – so rather do good over bad.

Signed:.....

Signed:.....

Signed:.....

Date:.....

To whom it may concern

I,give my permission to Linda to use my words and my storybooks for her thesis for the university.

I give my permission, because talking to Linda helped me very much at the time when my gran was dying and I was very sad. I hope that by reading my words and our ideas, that other people may get some fun ideas of how to deal with sadness.

When people die, I think that children should not be left out, but included. We do, after all, need as much help with coping with our sadness, as adults do.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

To whom it may concern

I,give permission to Linda to use my words and my storybooks in her thesis for her university studies.

I give permission, because I want other people to know about my stories and the things I have done with Linda. I want to help other people who have lost their mom or dad, or their mom or dad is in jail, or if their mom or dad is very sick.

Talking to Linda and making the book has helped me to remember about my dad who died on 7th October 2001. Sometimes I still get sad, but then I think to myself that he can't be gone completely, because just because he's dead, it doesn't mean he is not with me. Talking about him and thinking about the stuff that he has told me, helps me to concentrate and remember him better.

I hope that the people who read my words and stories will realise that children need to be able to keep their memories fresh, because sometimes when you think about those special people, you can feel proud of yourself that you get all the sadness out of your day and even out of your life.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

CONSENT FORM FOR PARENT/CAREGIVER

I have understood the aims of the research project and I have been able to discuss any worries or concerns during and after my child's involvement in this process.

I have been given the opportunity to decline my child's involvement in this project, but I have chosen to give my permission for her/him to participate.

I have also understood that should I decide that I do not wish for the information to be published, I am able to withdraw my permission at any stage.

My child and I have been invited to share in the preferred stories that have been co-authored in this process. This has been done in a manner that has kept me informed and included in the process.

I have the following comments to make about this research process:

.....

.....

.....

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.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

(Signature of parent/caregiver)

Date

Awards and certificates

Kind Mother Award

**This certificate is
awarded to
Mama Malibeni
for being
a loving and helpful
mother to
King and Prince**

Signed by:

Date:

Good Father Award

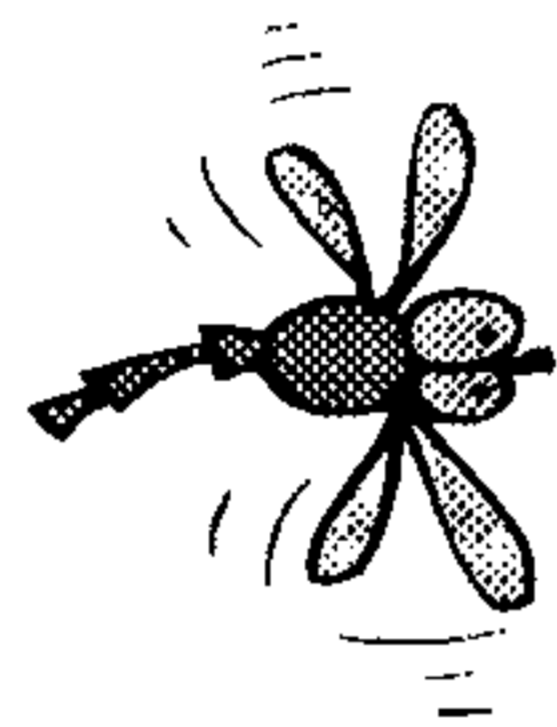
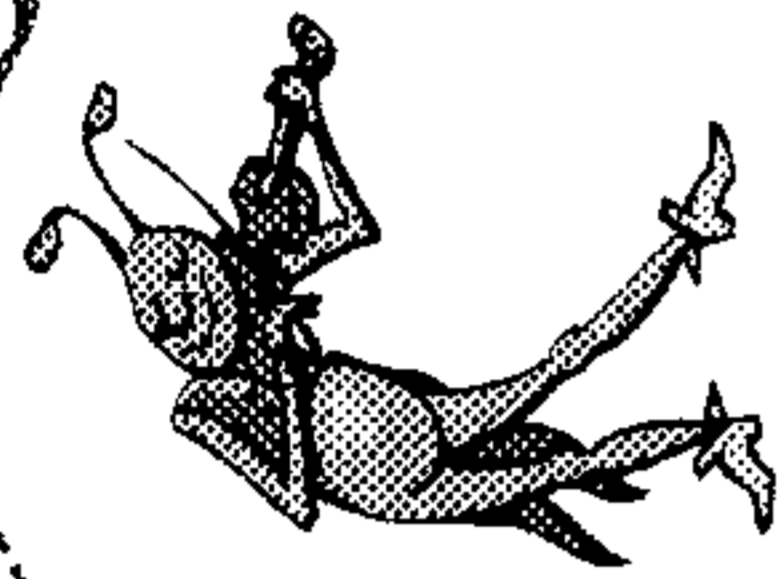
This certificate is
awarded to
Tatam'kulu Malibeni
for being
a kind and helpful
father to
King and Prince

Signed by:

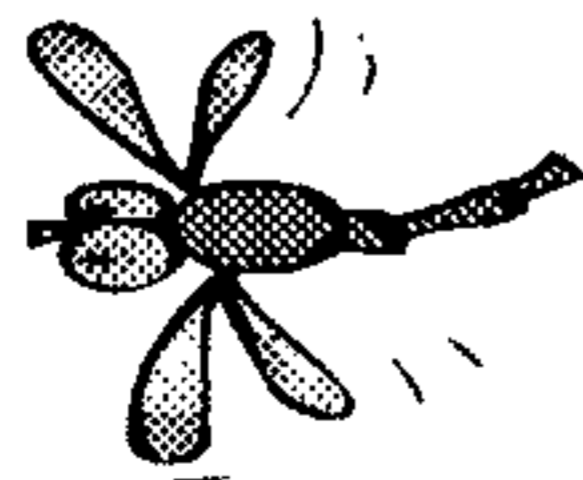
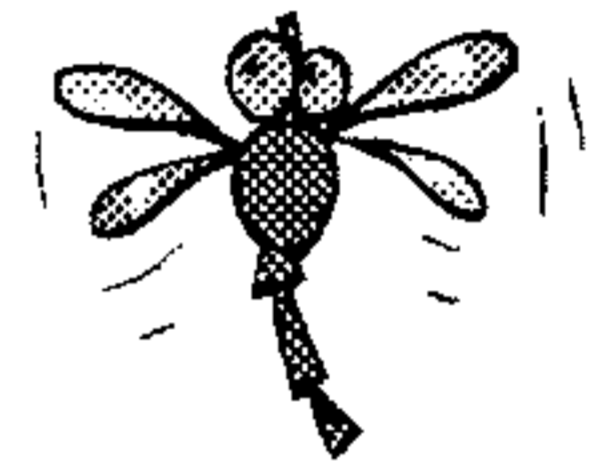
Date:

Story Books

Matthew Books

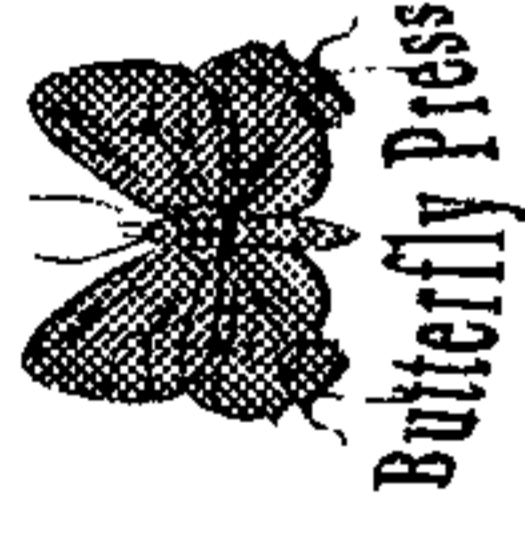


Read



A collection of favourite memories...

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Text: Matthew Davies and Linda van Duuren

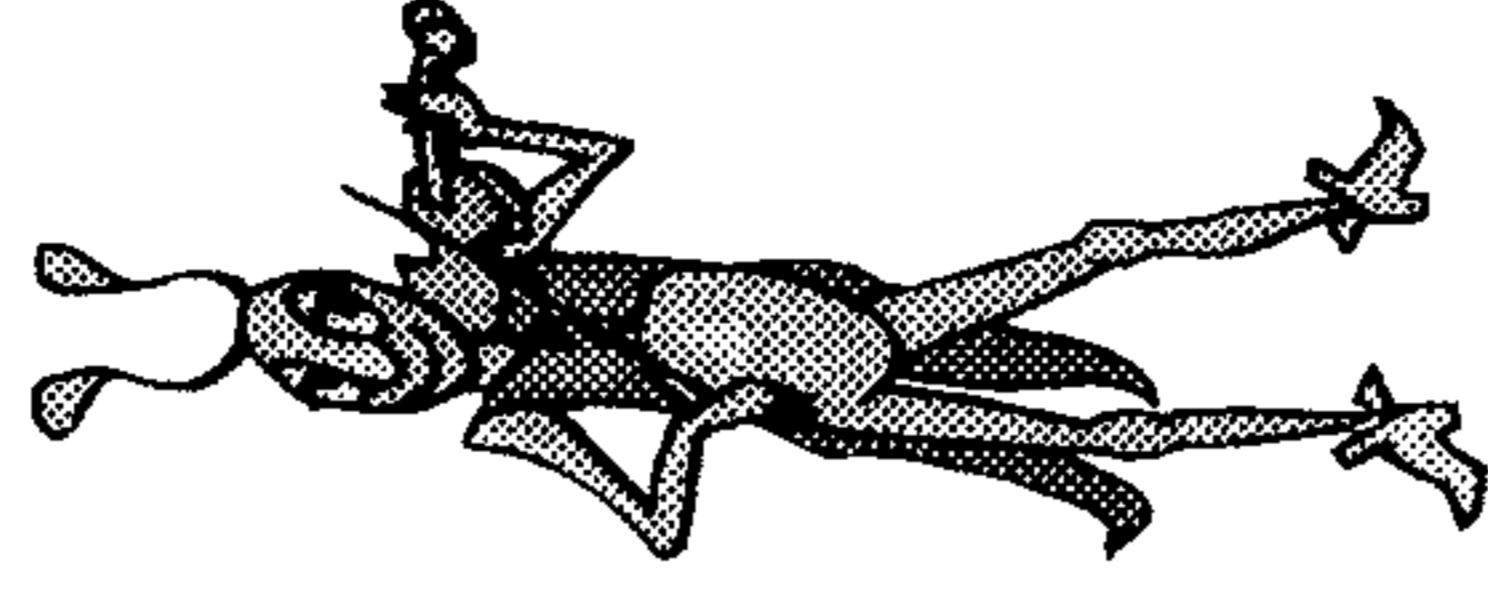
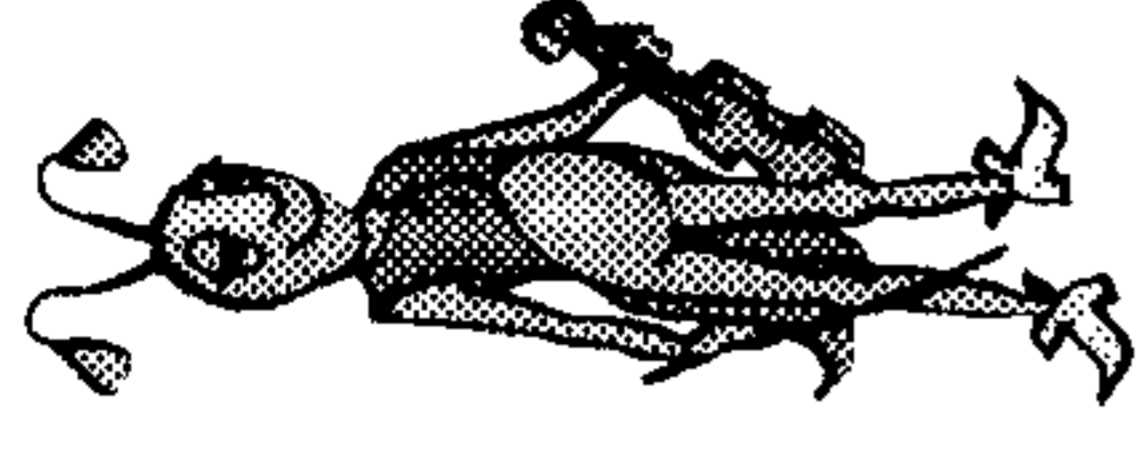
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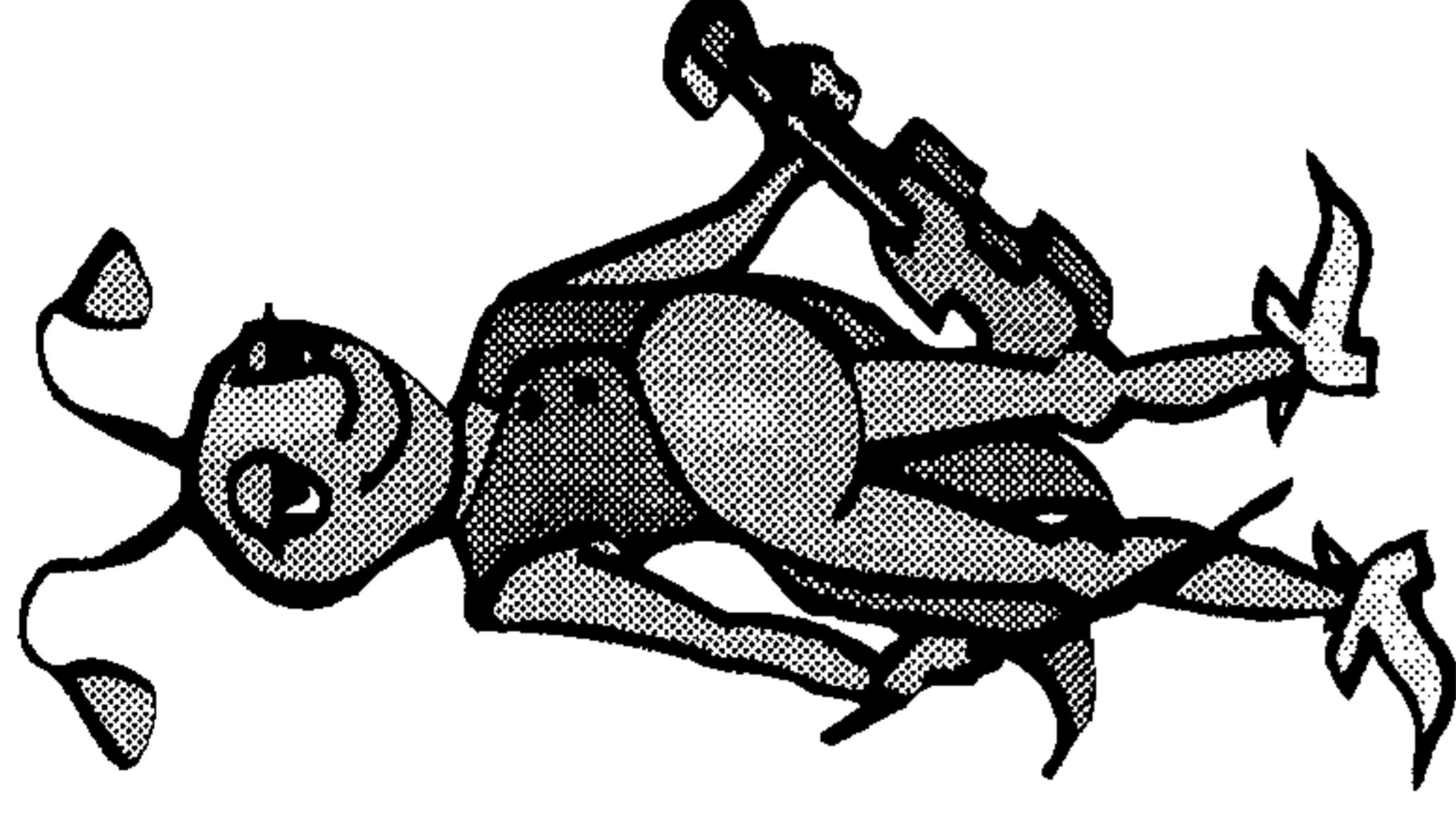
*This work has been crafted with great care.
Please look after that part which you share.*

My family is a family
that likes music and
songs. I think that my
gran gave me her love
for funny songs.

These are two of my
favourites:

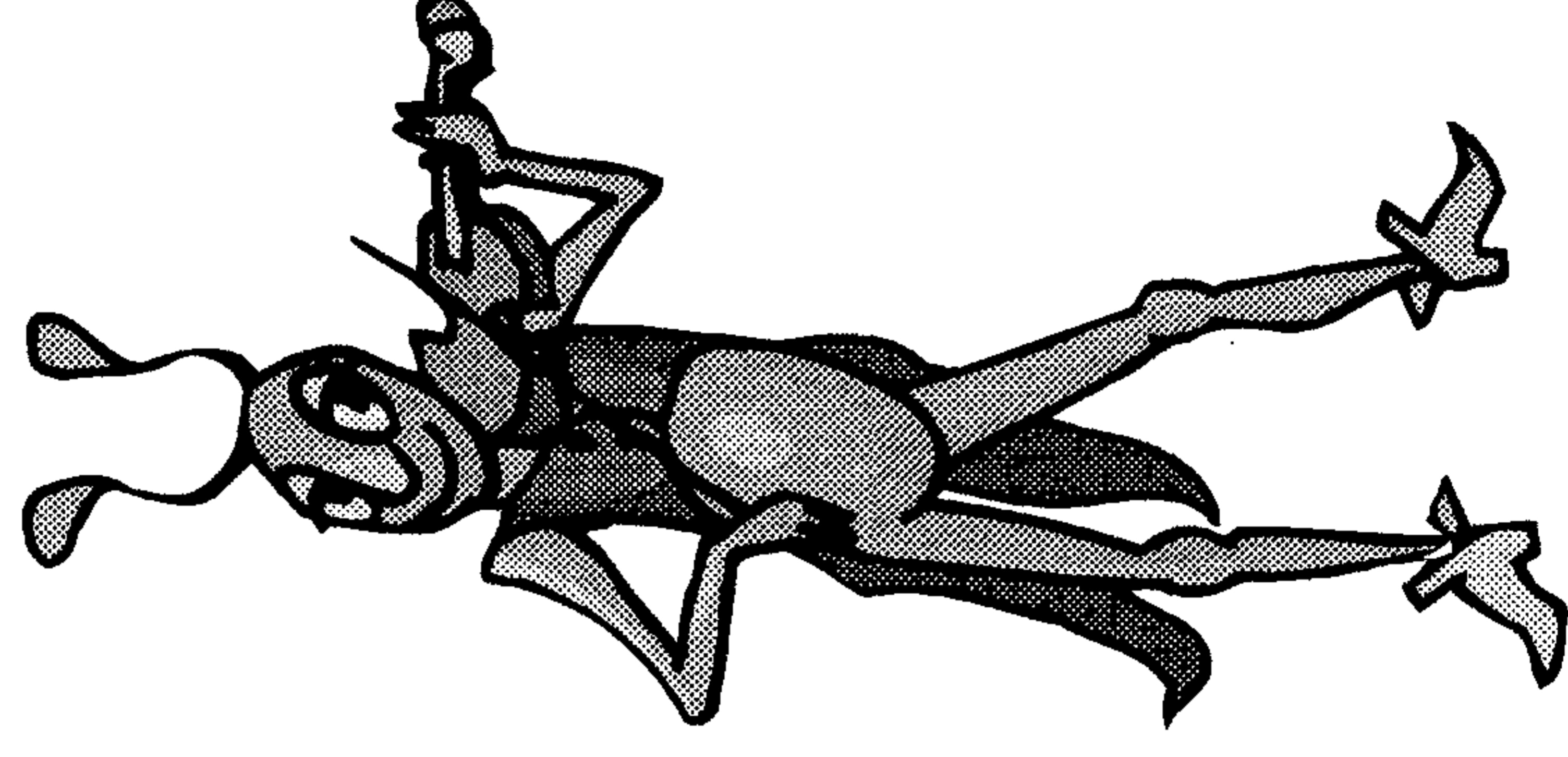


Outside a lunatic asylum one day
I had a job of breaking stones
When up came a lunatic and said to me,
Good Morning, Mr Jones!
How much a week do you get for doing this?
Fifteen Bob, I sighed.
He looked at me and looked away
And this is what he cried:

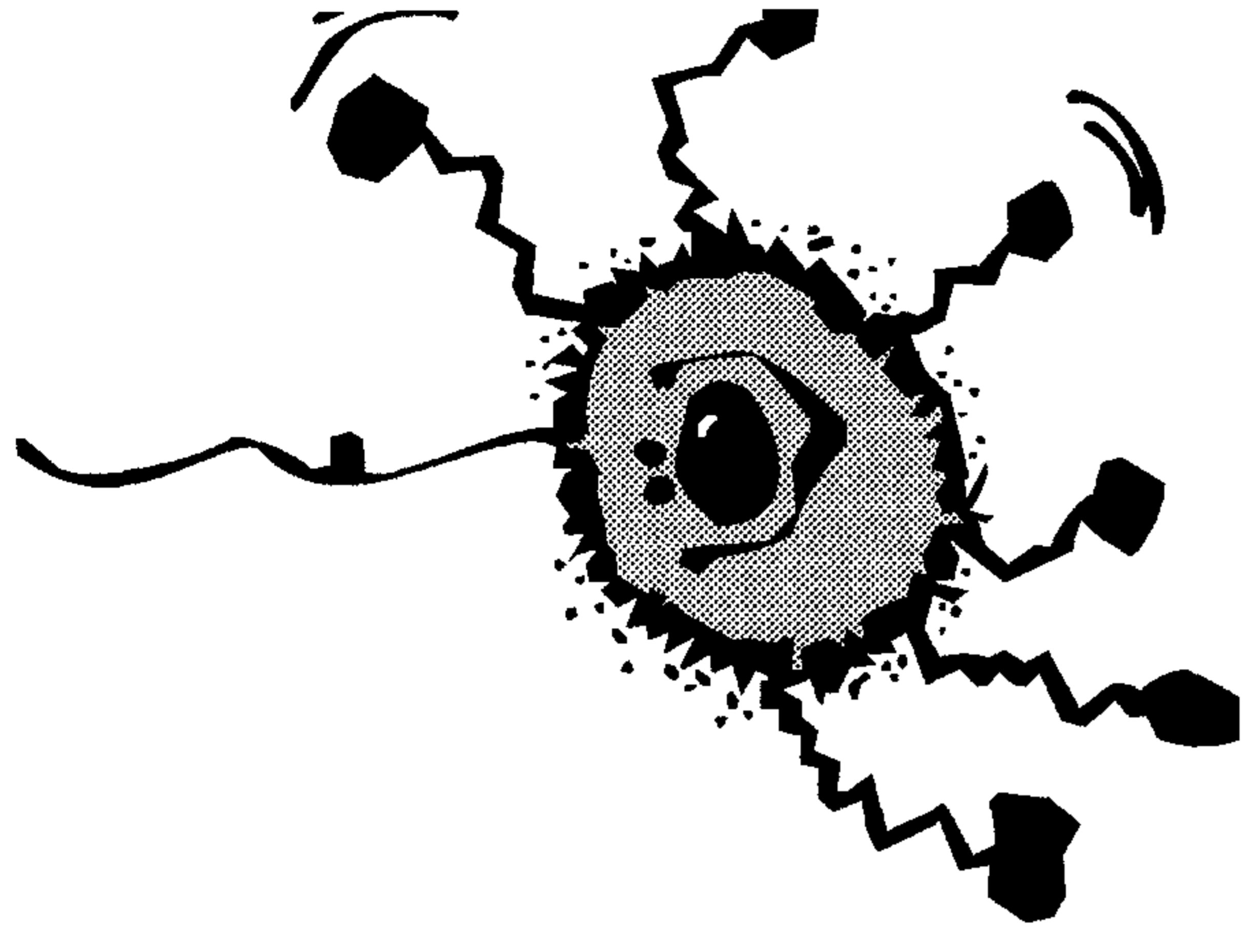


Come inside, you silly bugger
Come inside!
You ought to have a bit more sense.
Working for your living, take my tip...
Act a bit silly and become a lunatic
For you'll get your meals so regular
And two new suits besides
Fifteen Bob a week, a dozen kids to keep
**COME INSIDE YOU SILLY BUGGER,
COME INSIDE!**

I went to a house
And I knocked at the door
The woman said bum bum
You've been here before!
Hallelujah, I'm a bum.
Hallelujah, bum again.
Revolution, give us a hand
up
To revive us again.



My gran taught me
that it isn't always
bad to be sneaky!

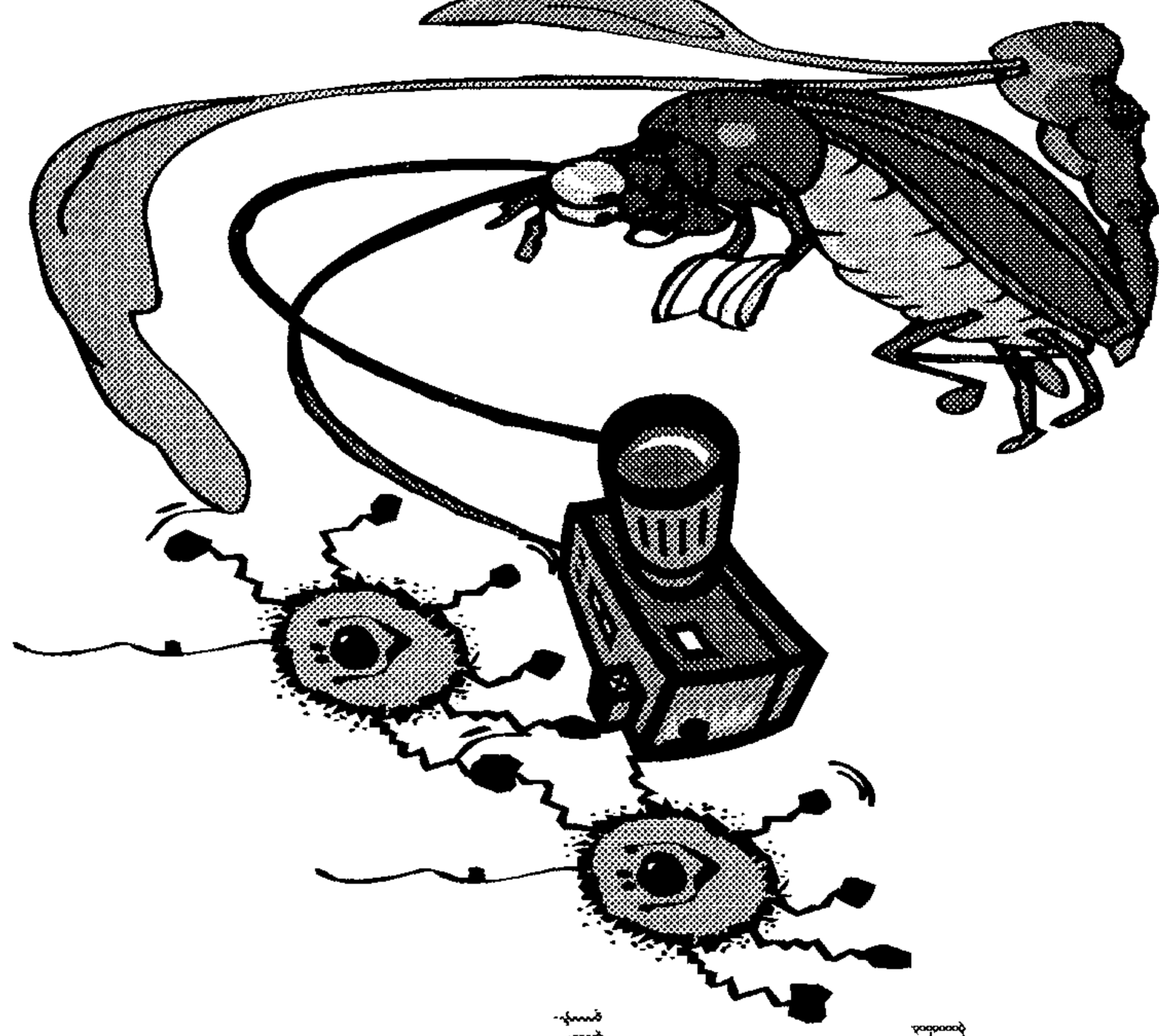


Sometimes you can
have a lot of fun...

Funny tricks to play on children
(A story of being tricked by a mischievous granny.)

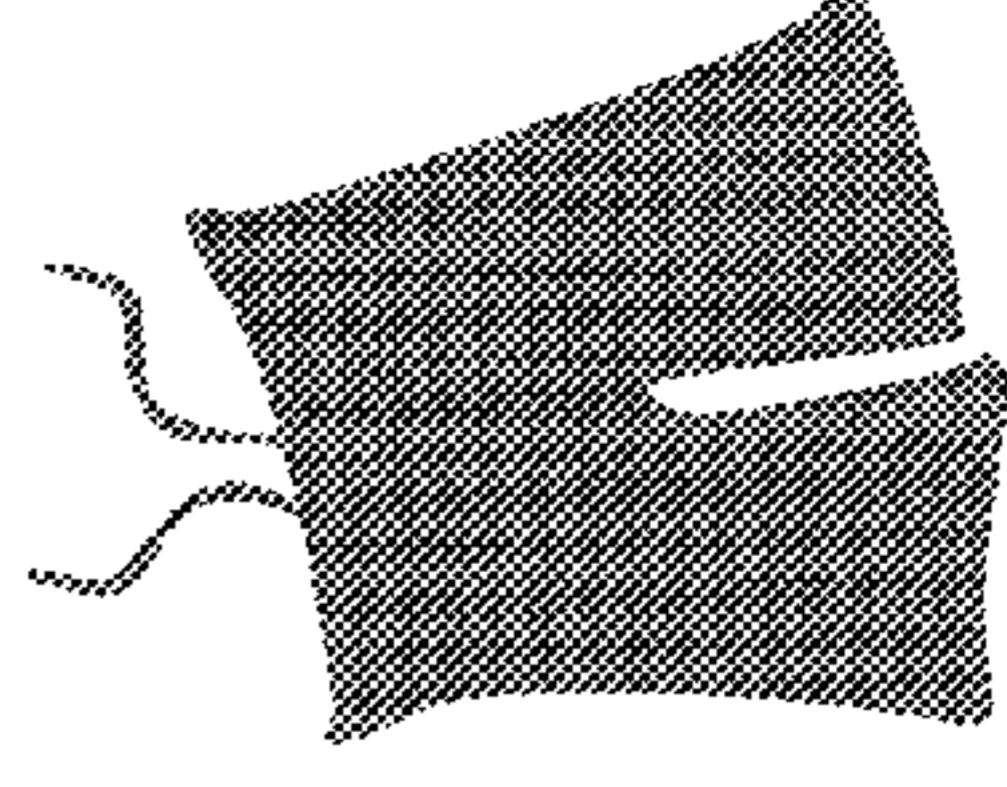
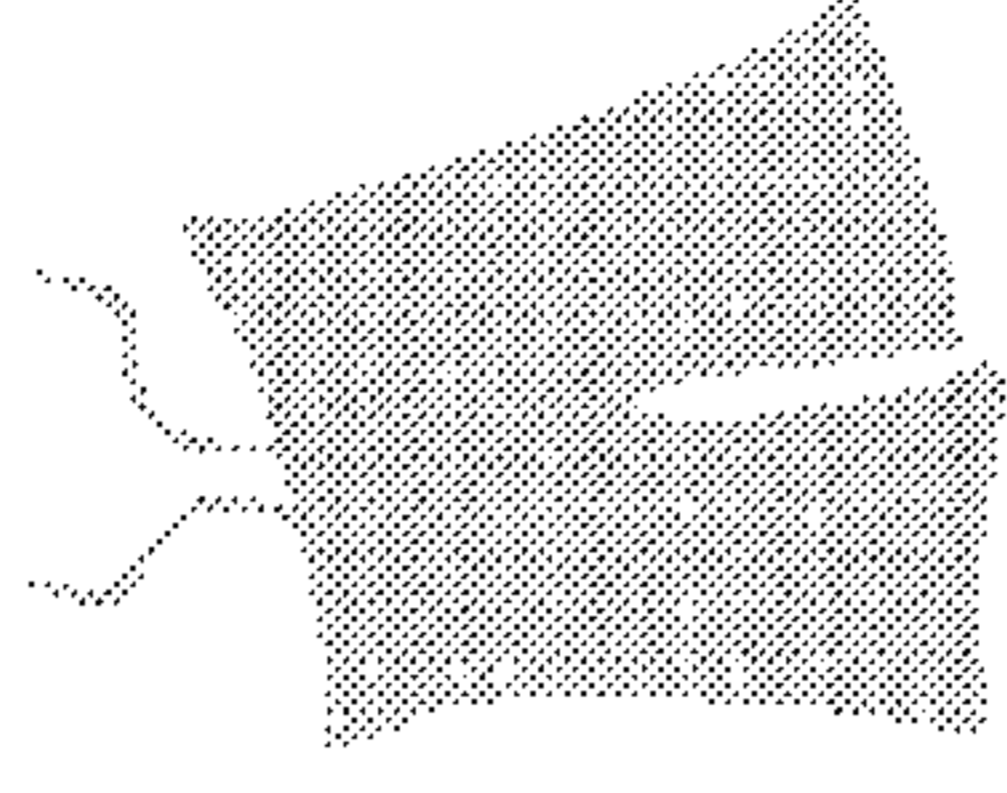
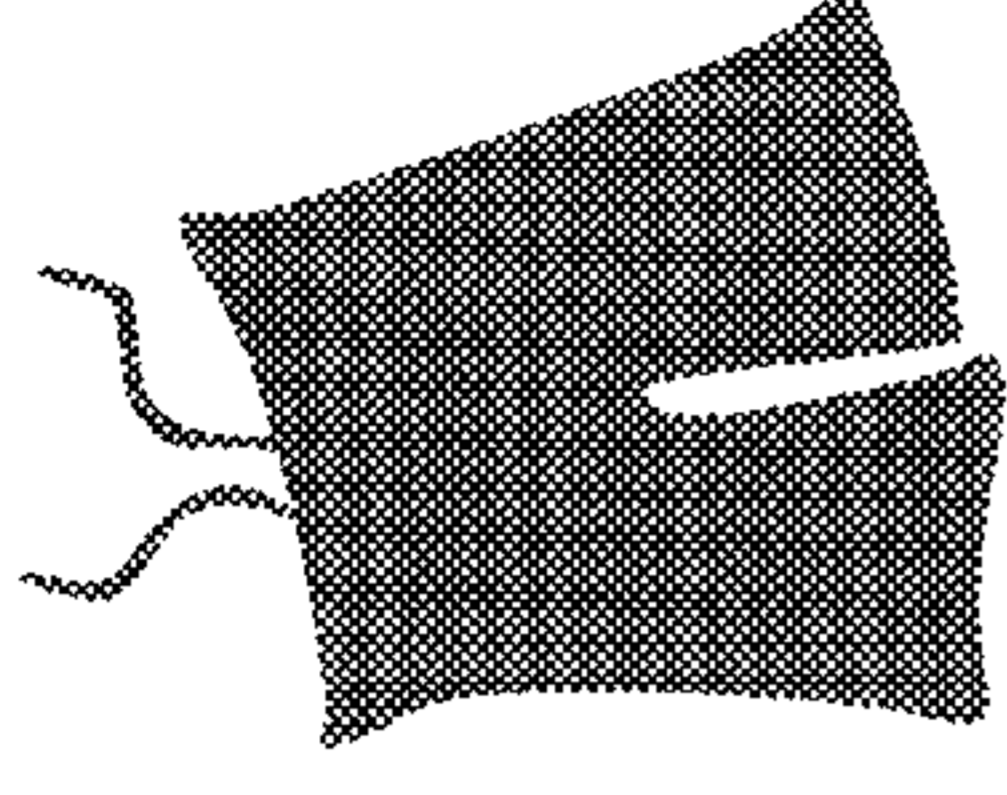
It all started off one day when Alex and I were playing a game. We were pretending to be Paparazi and my gran was pretending to be a movie star. She was a movie star who didn't like much publicity.

Alex and I had this little blanket going over two chairs. It was to cover us up so that my gran couldn't see us. We were trying to sneak up behind her and take shots. The problem was that it worked the opposite way...instead of us taking shots of her, she sneaked up behind us and took shots with a curtain rod at our bottoms! We got such a fright that we jumped up and ran...we did not try to play that game again!!



5p FOR A NICE PAIR OF KNICKERS

Once upon a time in World War II, while the air raids were going on, Nana and Marge and George and George Right were in the Underground at one of the stations. Nanna and Marge went to the loo and asked George to keep their bag. While they were gone, He opened the bag and started to auction a pair of knickers. When they got back he was busy calling out: "5p for a nice pair of knickers...5p to the nice gentleman in the red suit....have we got any rise on 5p? Oh there, a nice lady in a blue dress...going for 10p...going...going...gone...to the nice lady in the blue dress!"

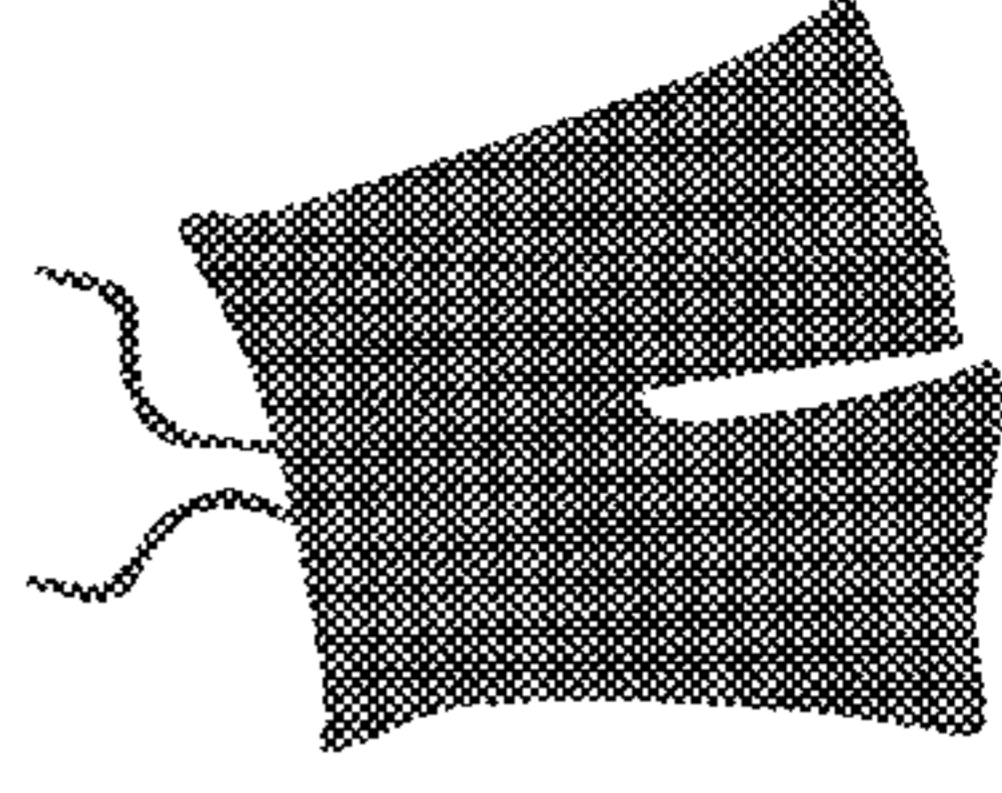


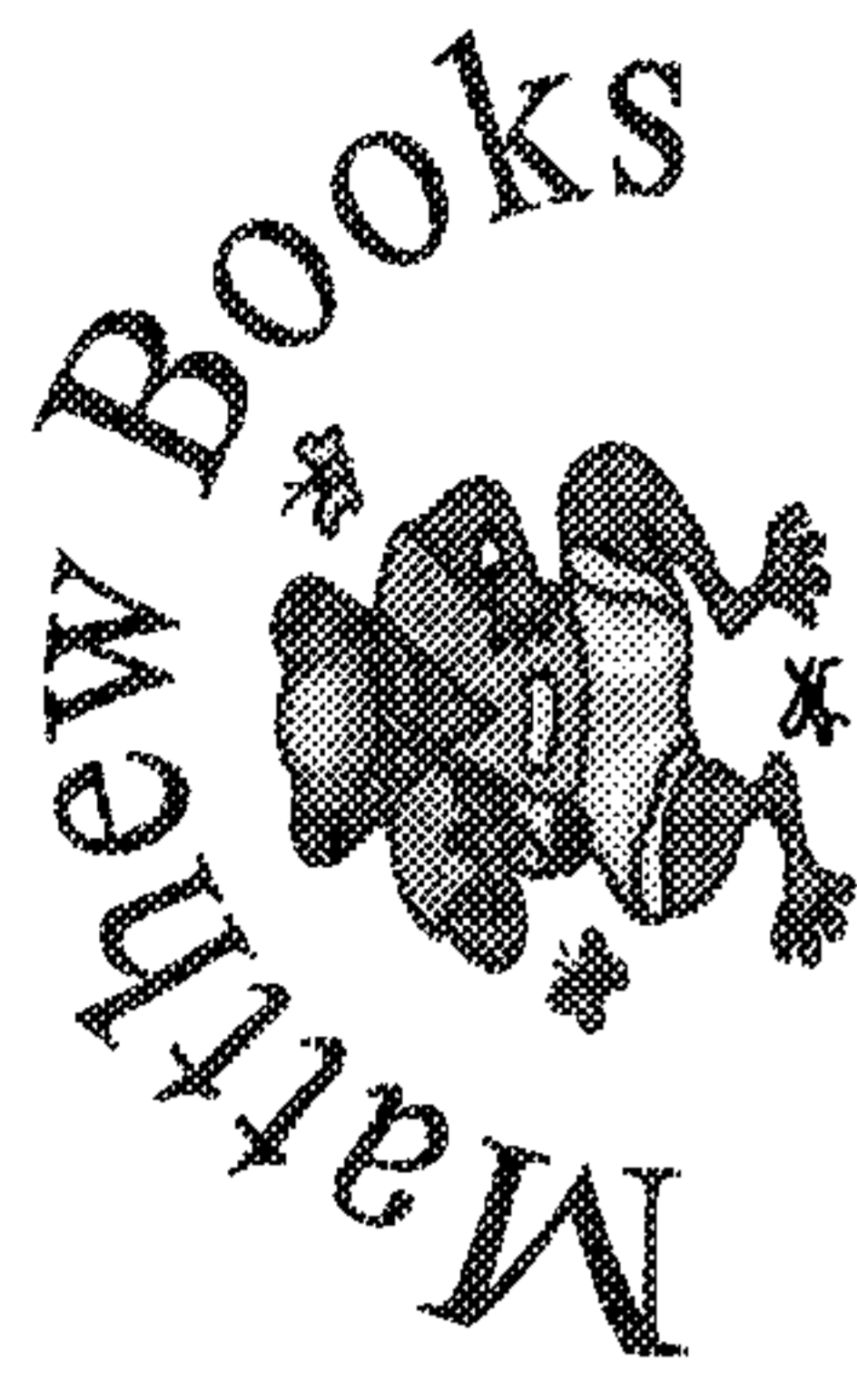
Nana and Marge realised that he was auctioning their clothes. They laughed and raced to him so that they could stop him.

This story helps me to remember that my gran had a very big sense of humour. I think a sense of humour is important to help you to feel better.

My gran always said: "You must have a good laugh!"

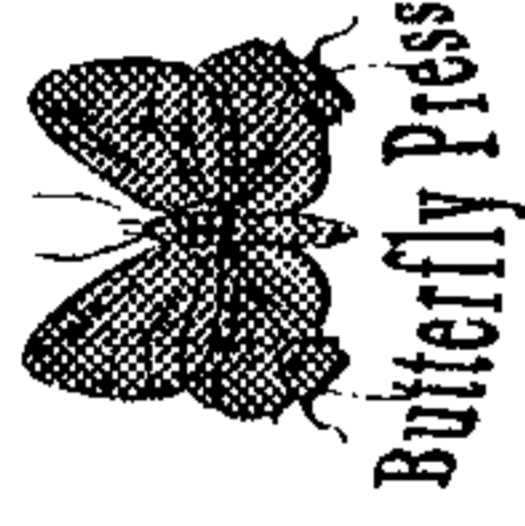
I agree!





*Anti-dotes to Sadness.
Prescribed by the Sadness Doctors -
Matthew Davies and Linda van Duuren*

*Published by Butterfly Press
Mowbray, 7700*



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Text: Matthew Davies and Linda van Duuren

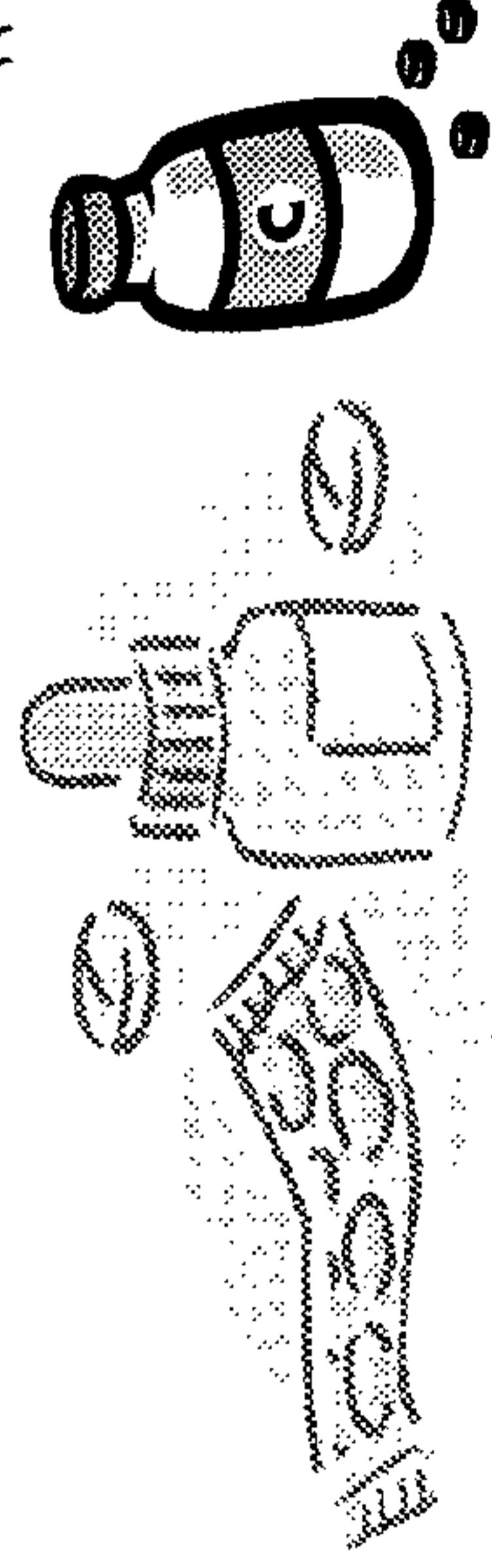
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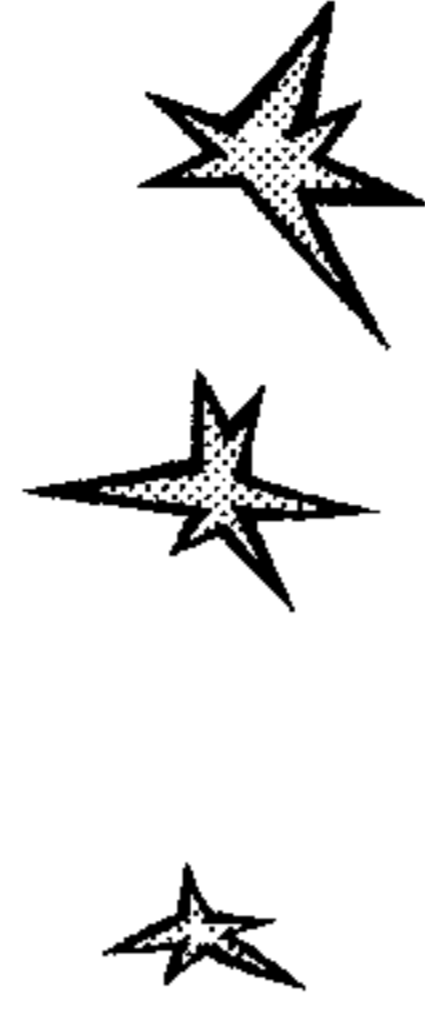
Anybody can find
antidotes for sadness..
We just want to give you
a headstart by

suggesting one or two
ideas.



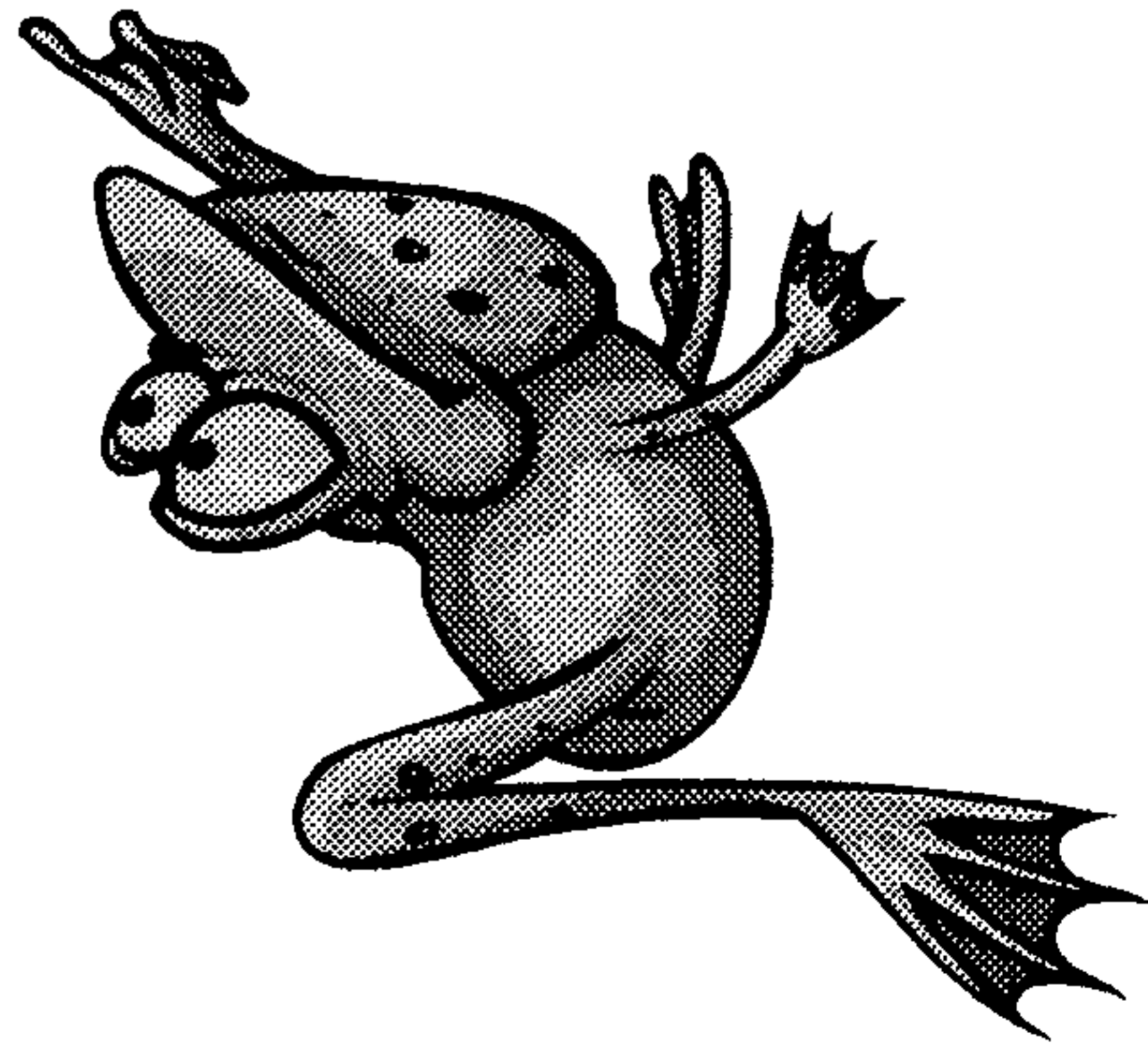
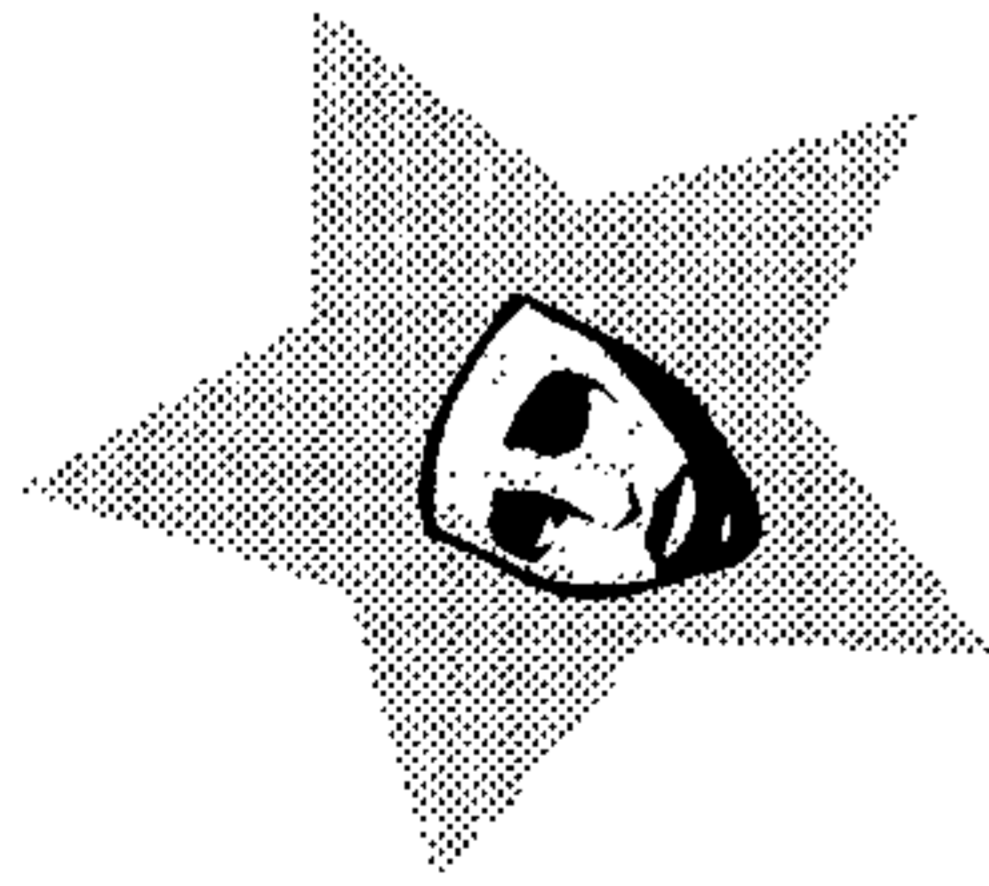
What brings sadness:

Lots of things bring
sadness. It might be a pet
dying, a family member
dying, even if you graze
your knee, when your mom
tells you off...when people
say you can't come and
play.



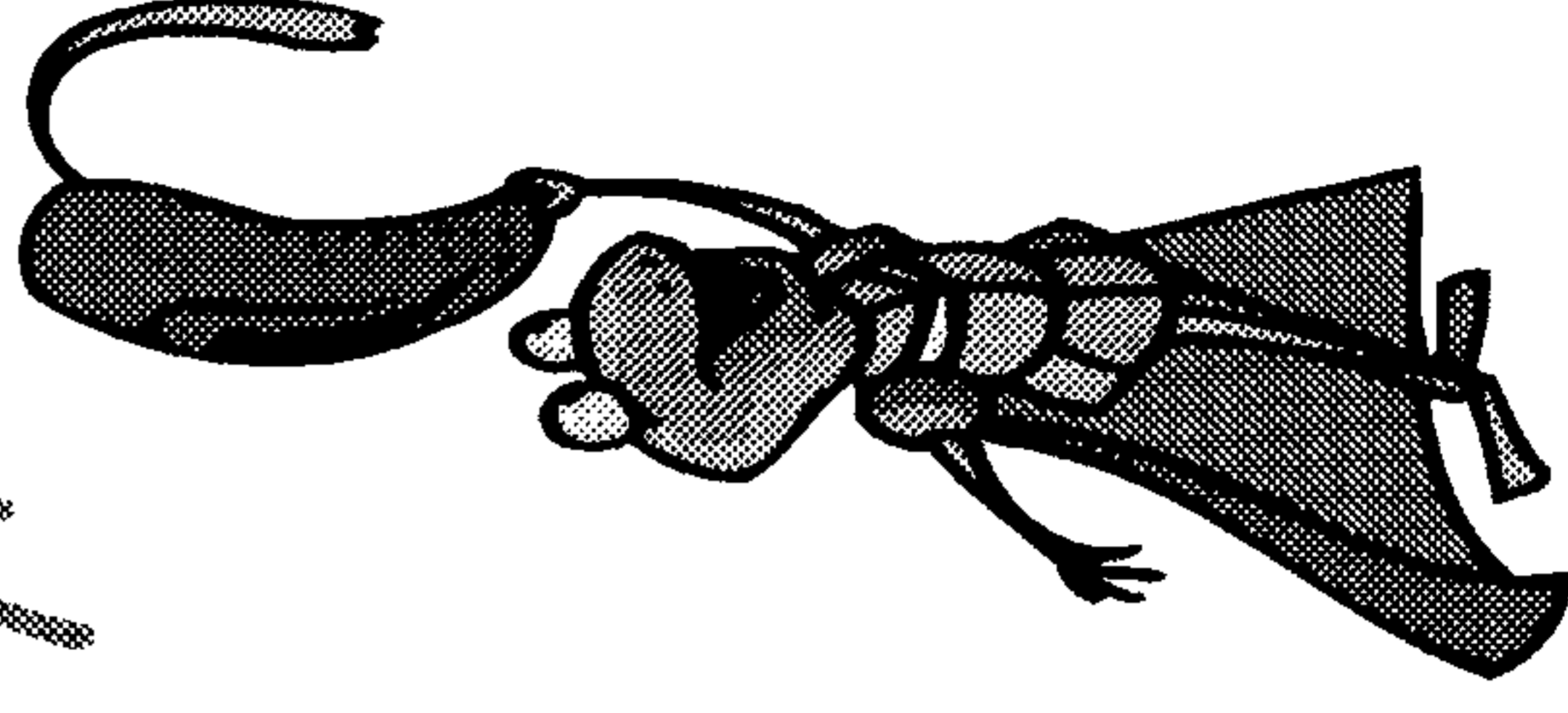
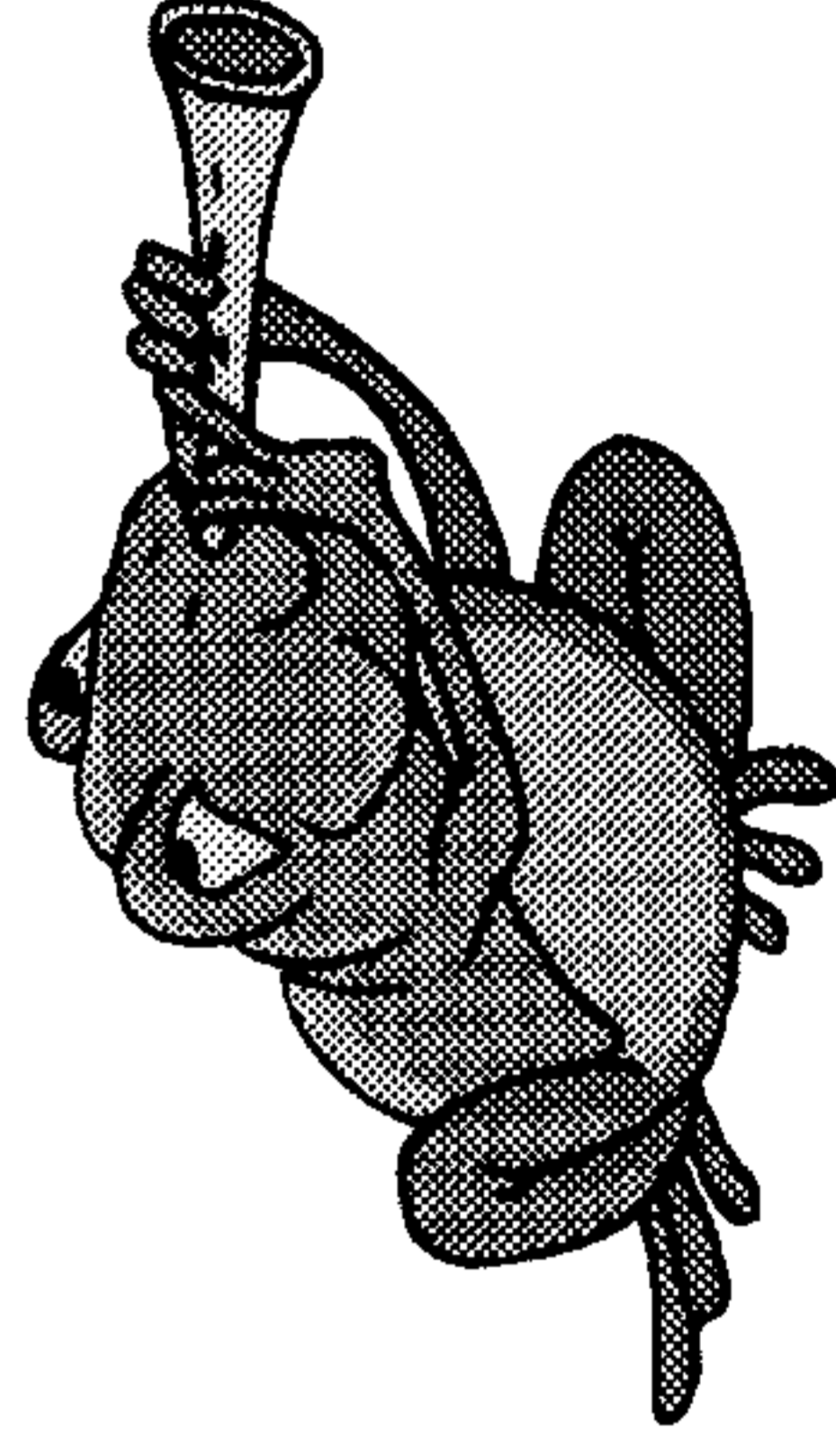
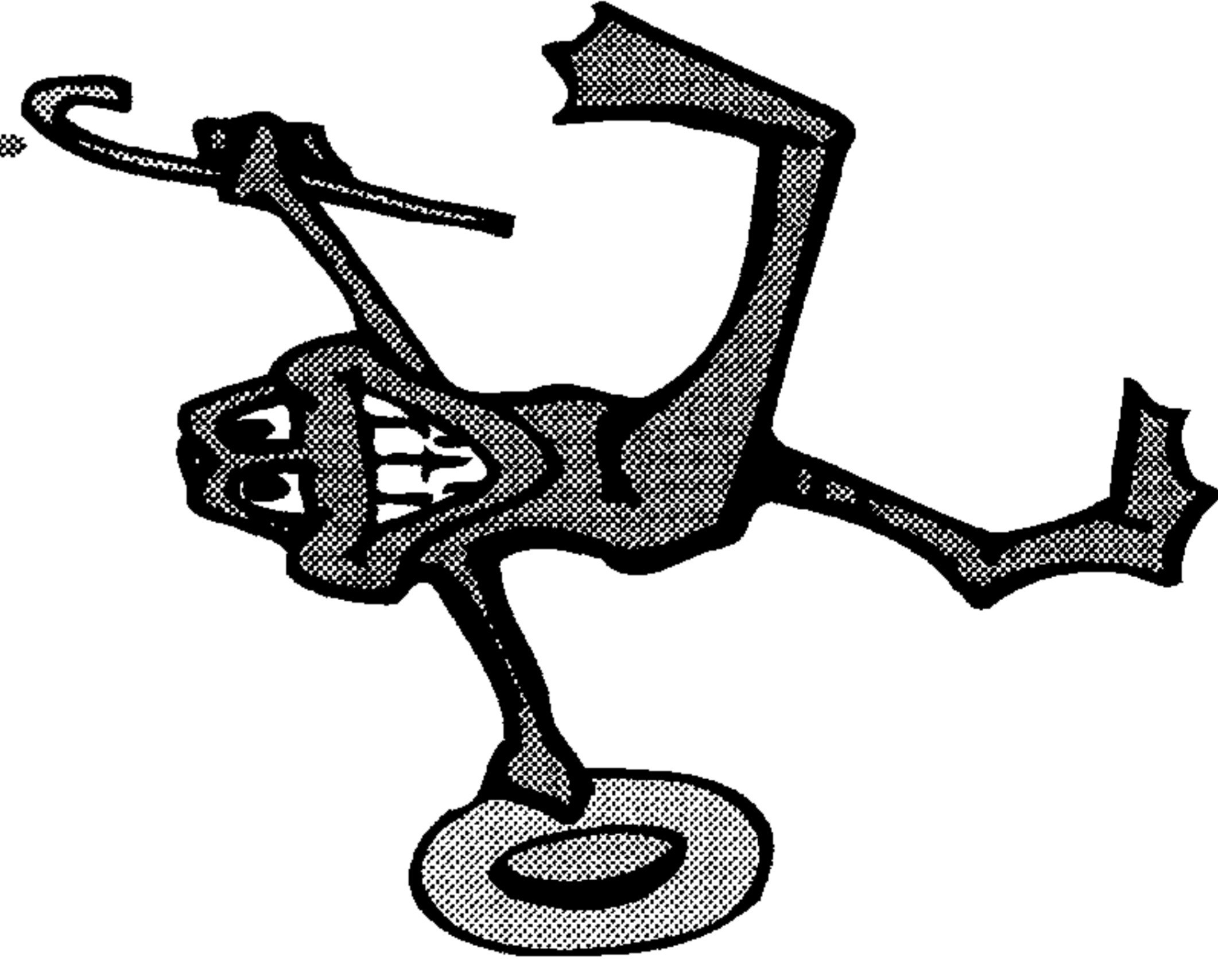


Not all sadnesses last as
long as each other. There
are small sadnesses,
middle-sized sadnesses,
big sadnesses and then
there are huge sadnesses.



We think that these
antidotes can maybe help
for all kinds of sadnesses.

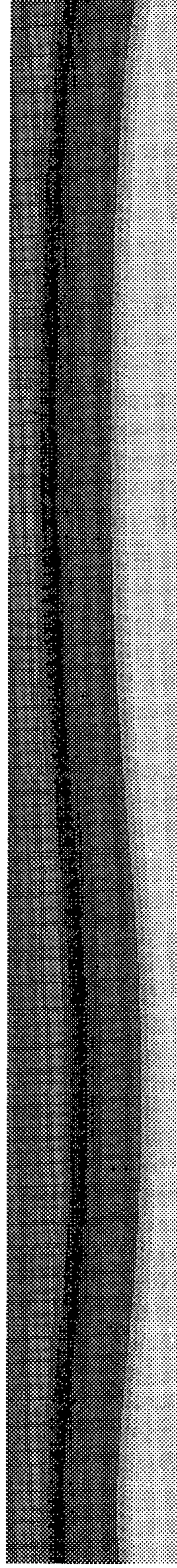
We hope you give it a try!



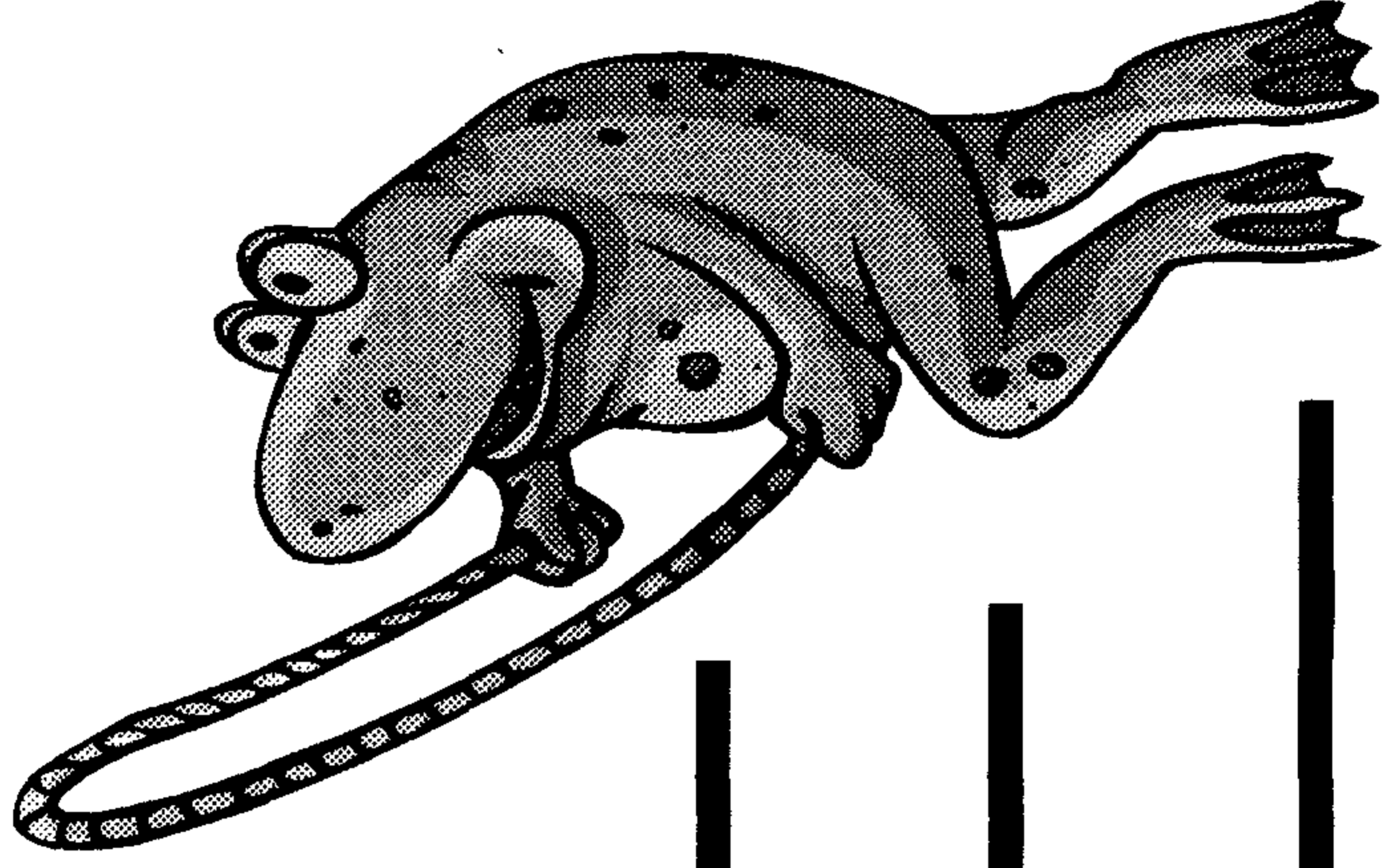
Lots of different things can be tried as an antidote.

These are some of our ideas:

1. You must have a good laugh.
2. Sing a silly song.
3. Have good memories.
4. Keep a book of good memories.



If you have any more ideas of antidotes for sadness,
please write them in the space below.



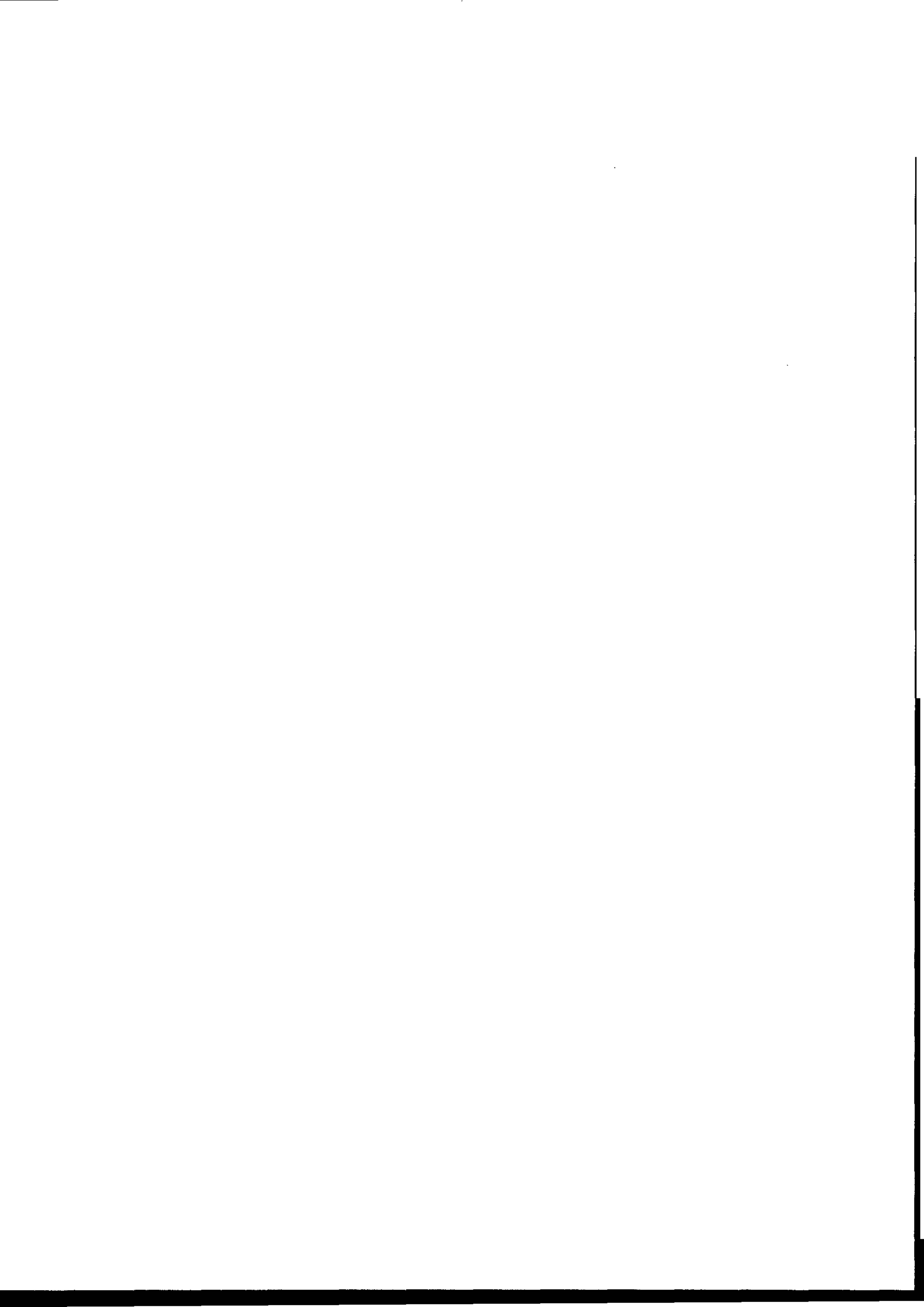


Special thanks go to Dorothy May Head, who died recently. She taught me, Matthew Thomas Davies, how to keep good memories of her. She showed me that it is very very important to have a good laugh and to be brave and full of fun and naughty stories and songs. I want to say

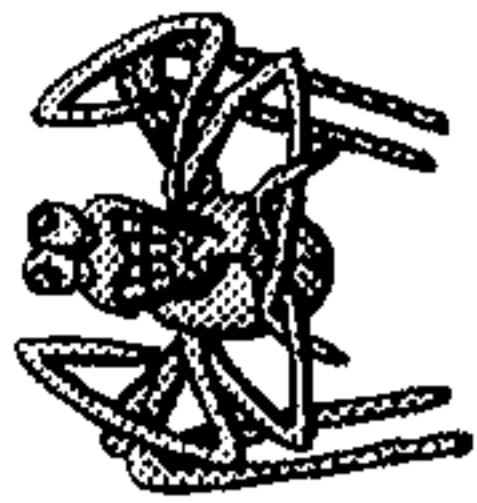
THANK YOU to my Nana..I am very very very very very and a million verys more proud of you.

Love

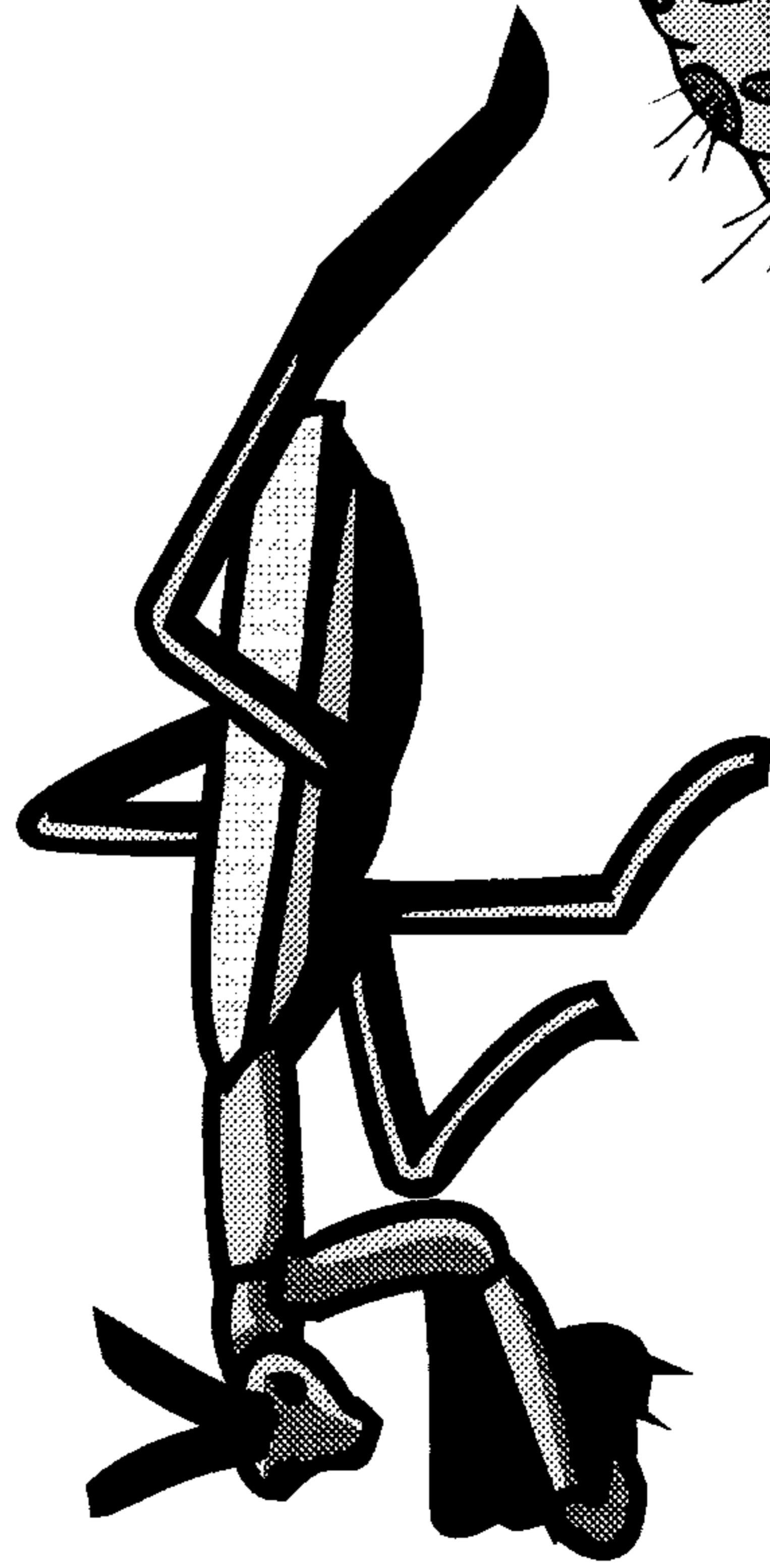
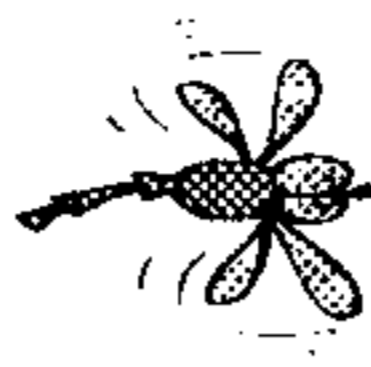
Matthew



Amina Books

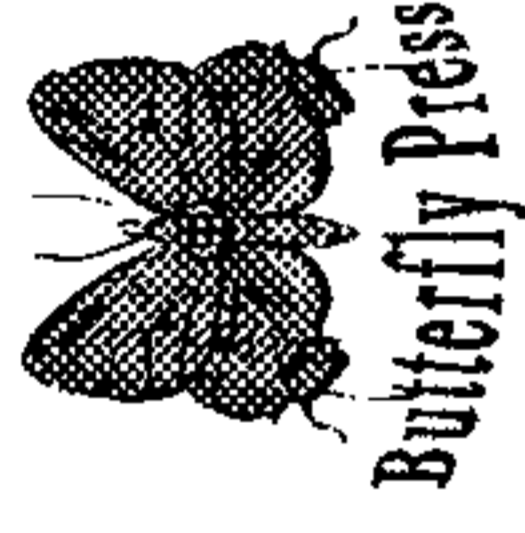


A FANTASTIC DADDY



Author:
Amina Adams
(Co-authored with Linda van Duuren)

*Published by Butterfly Press
Mowbray, 7700*



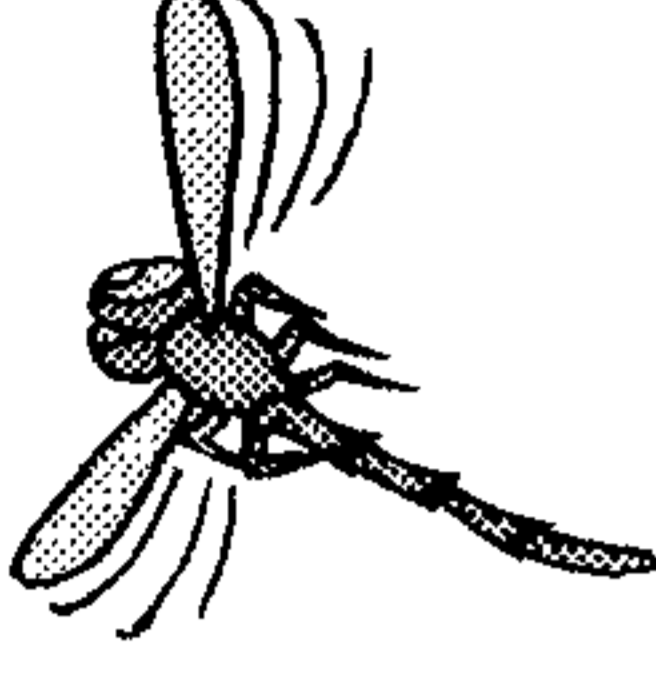
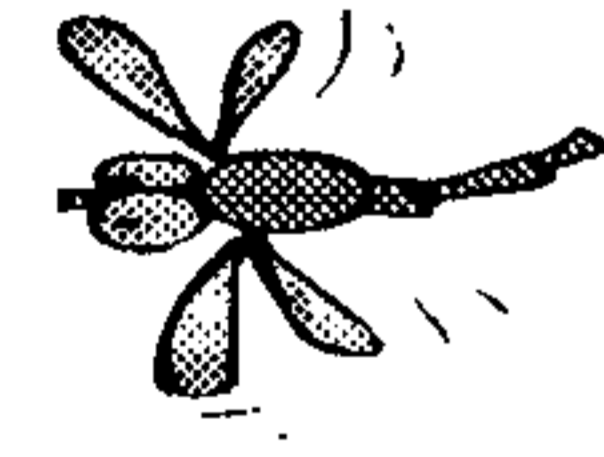
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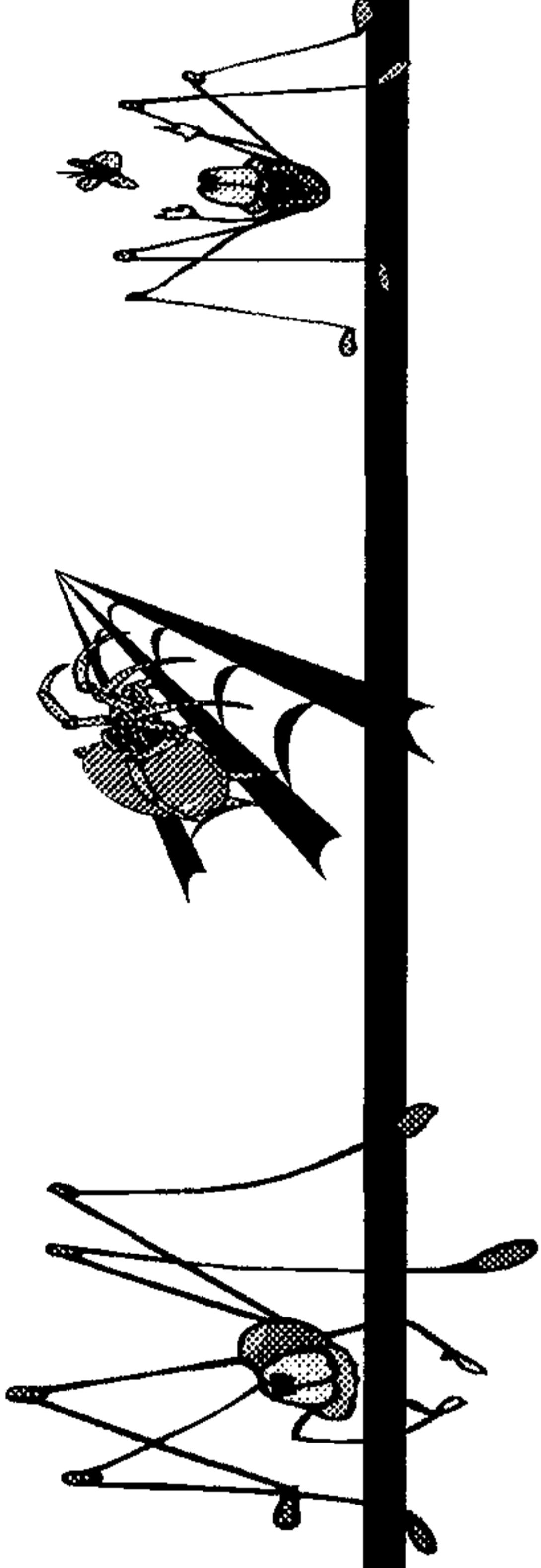


My daddy died on the 7th of
October, when I was 7 years old.
That means that I had 7 years to
get to know my dad. These are
the important things that I learnt
from him:

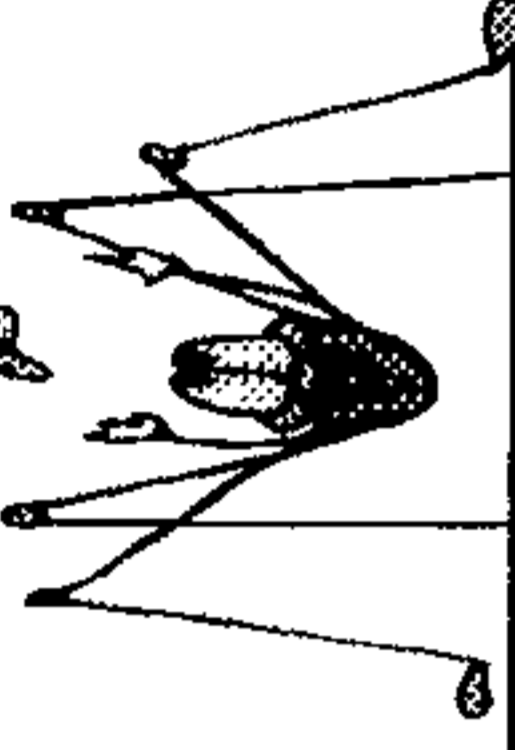
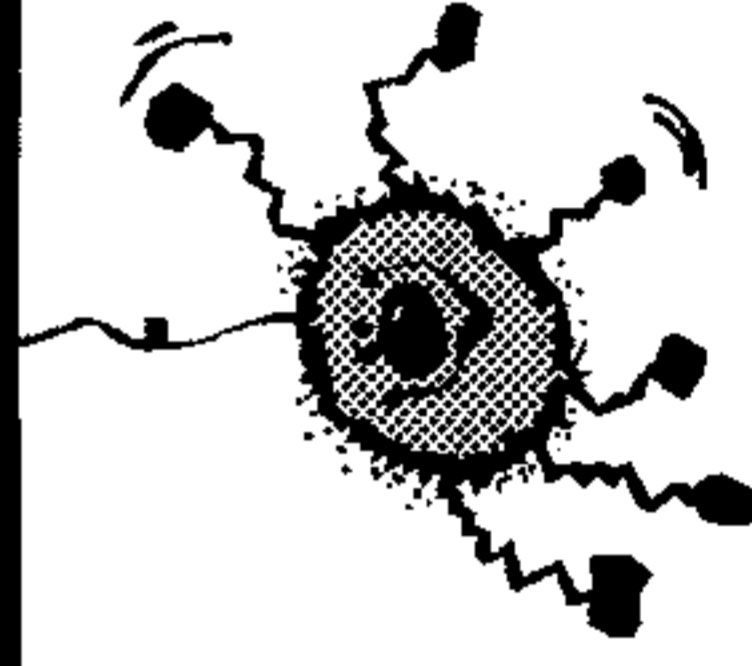
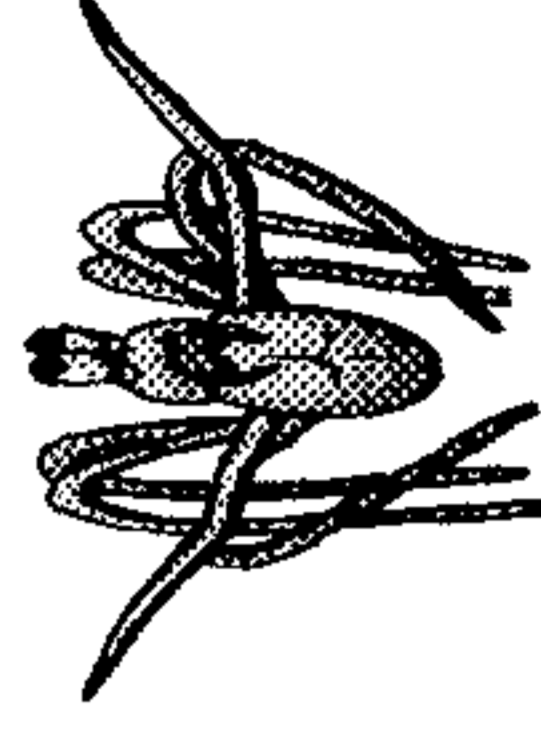
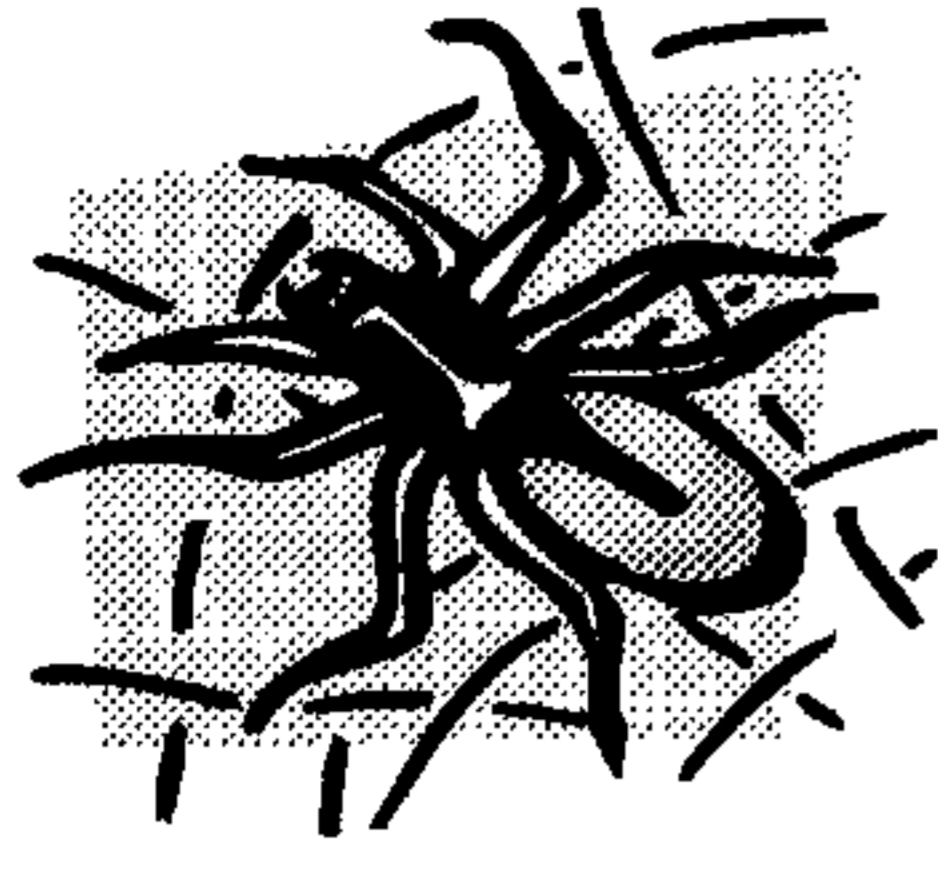
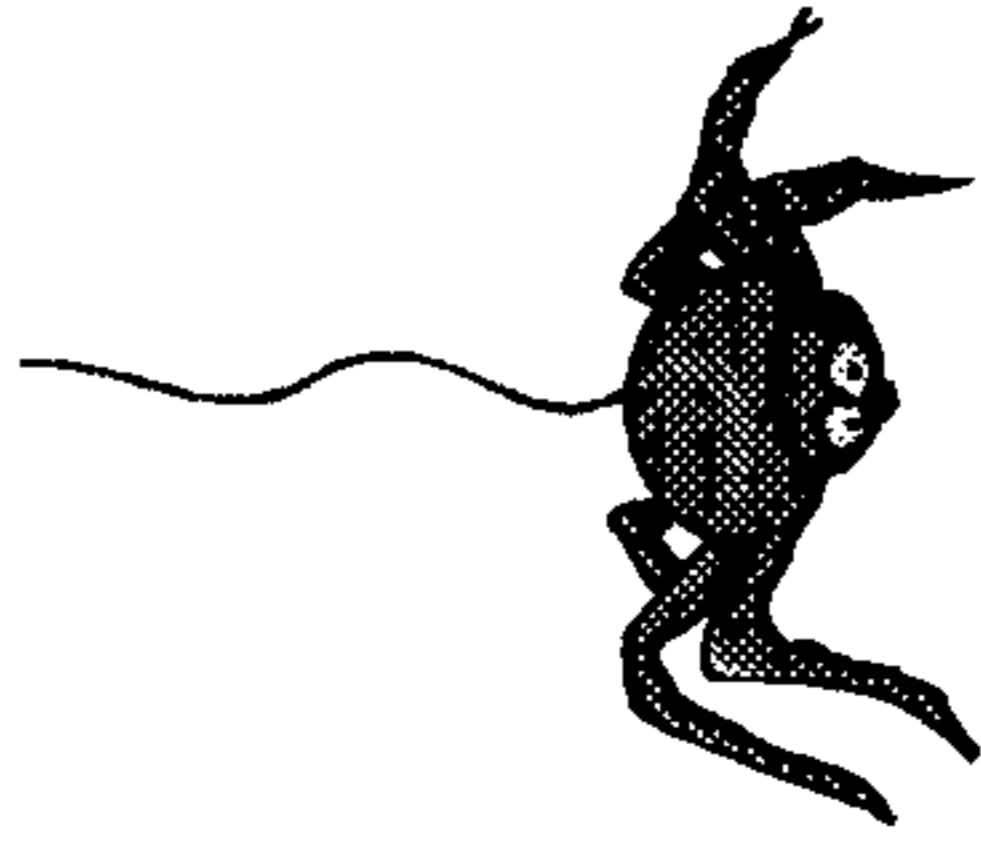
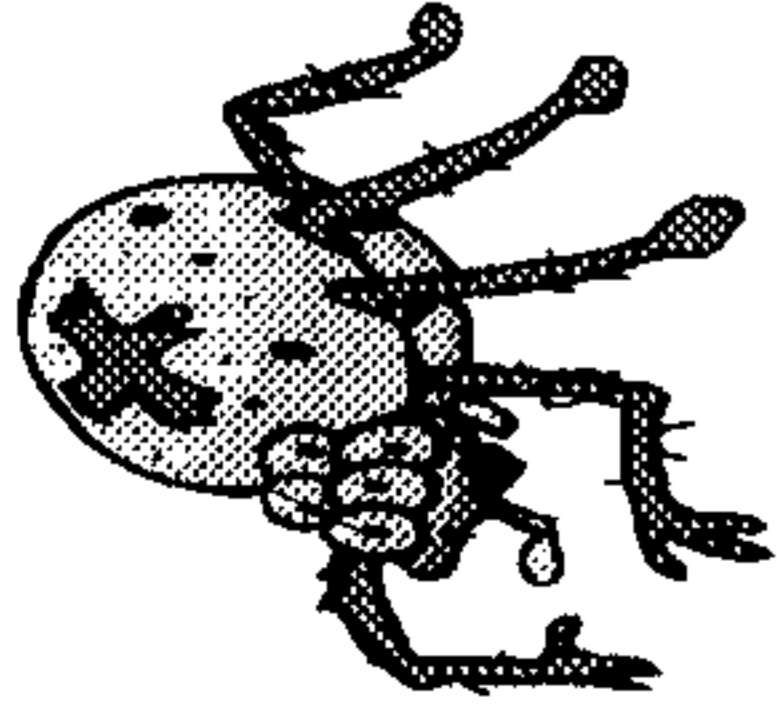
He taught me not to harm nature. If ever I was scared of a spider
and I squished it with my shoe, he would say:

*Amina! Why did you do that?
How would you like it if he had to
squash you? That wouldn't be
quite nice.*





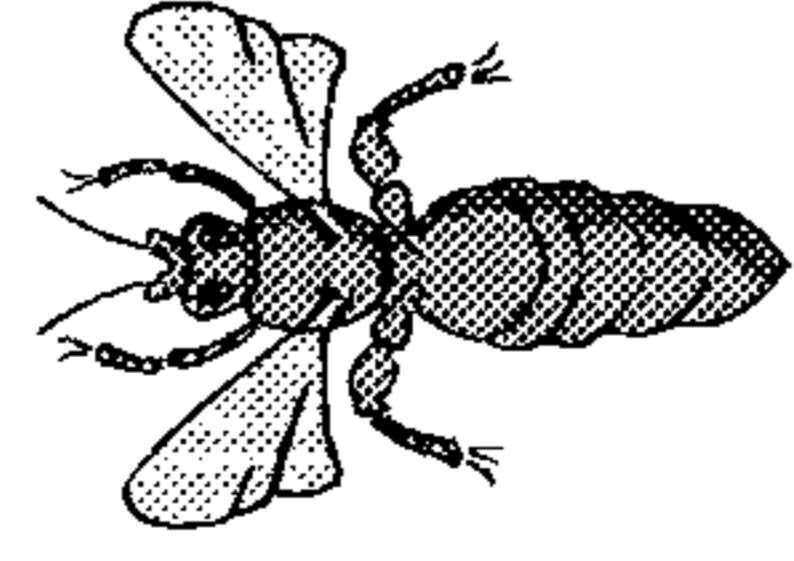
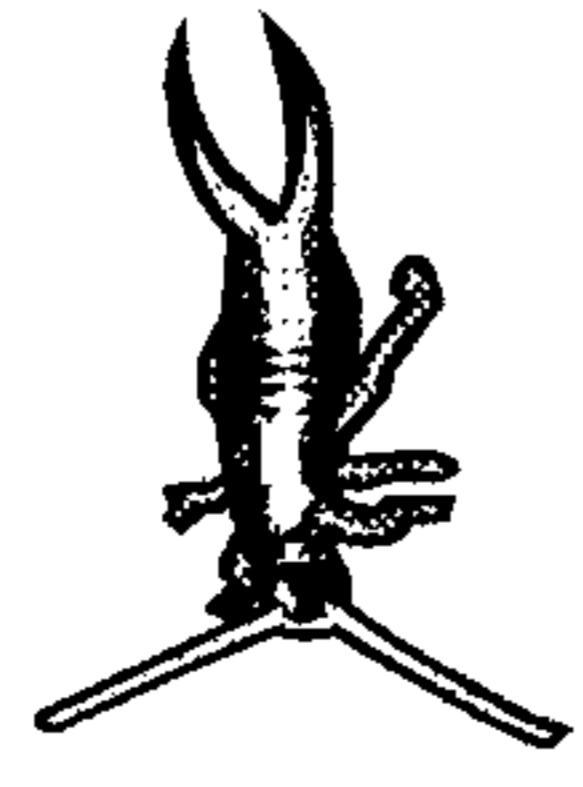
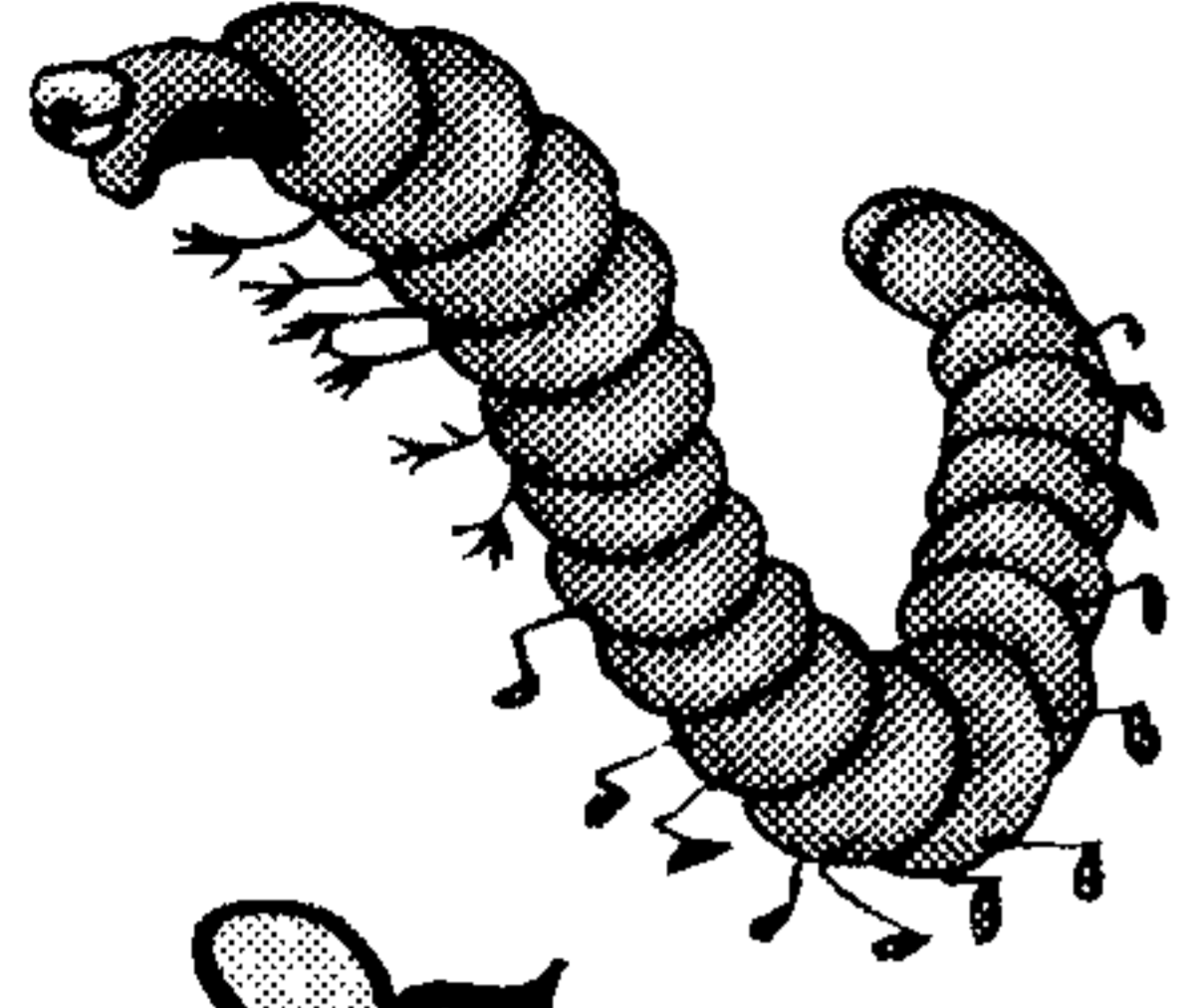
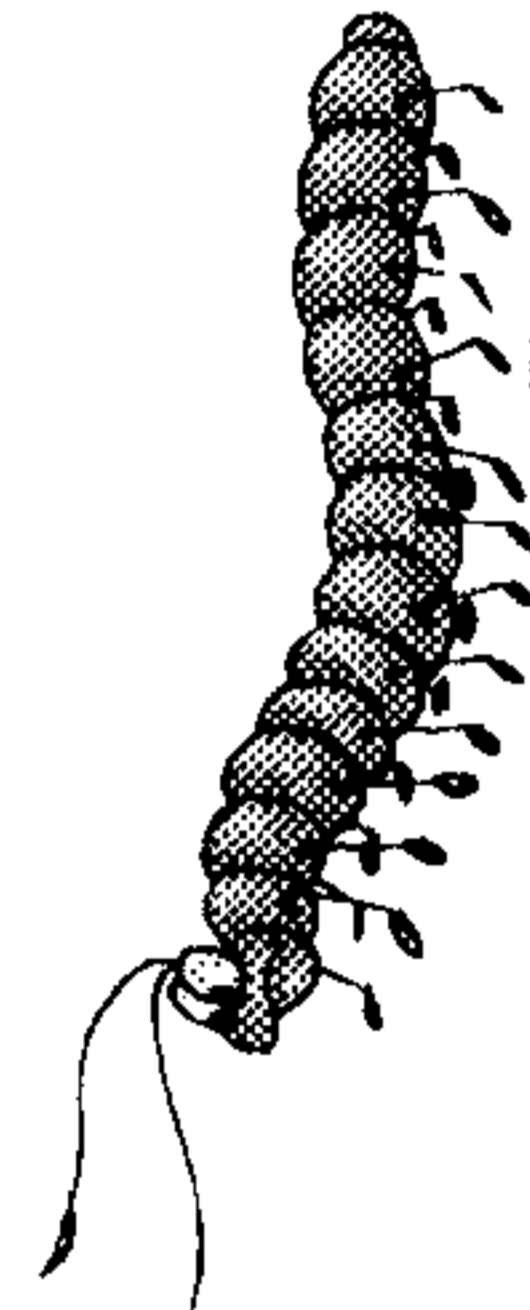
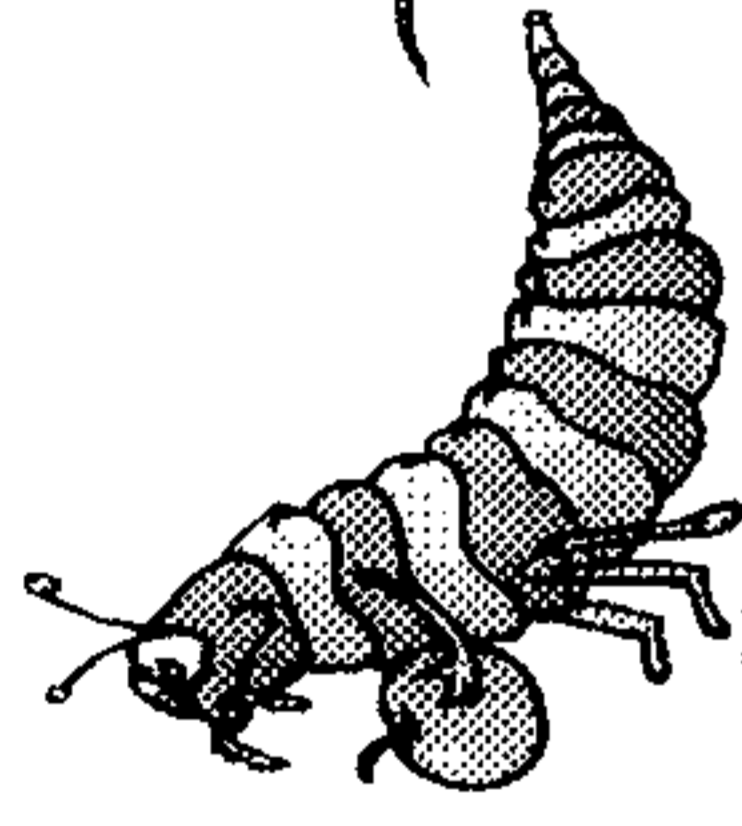
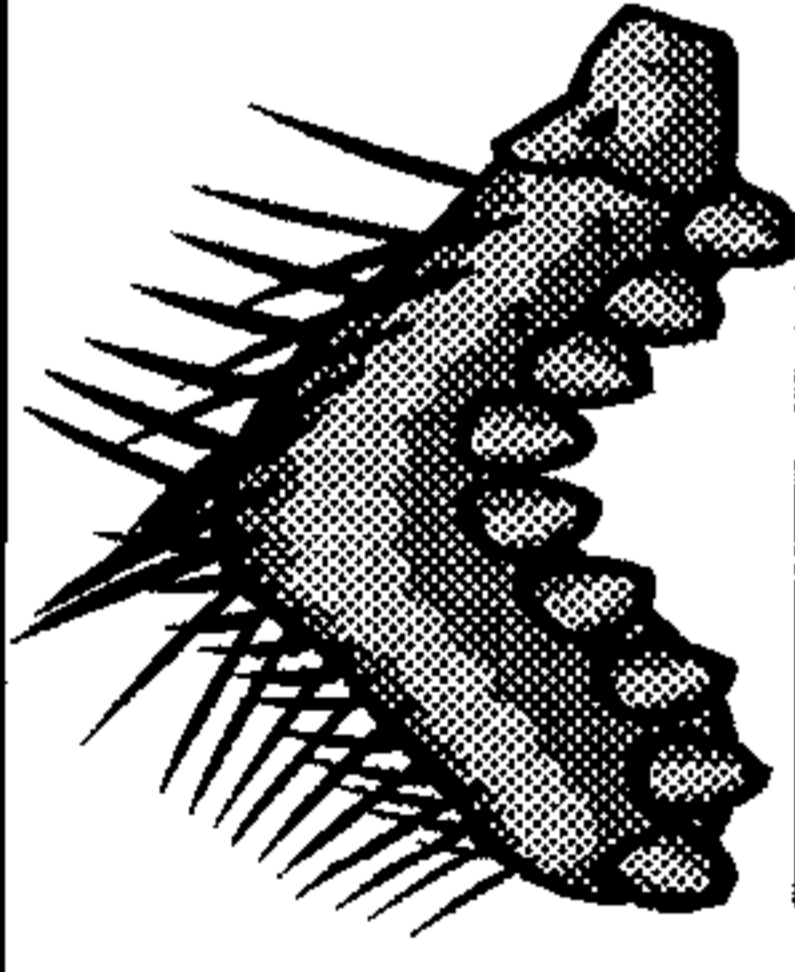
I know that my daddy taught me
not to harm nature, because we
talked about abusing God's
creatures and he said it's not a
very nice thing, because we are
also God's creatures.



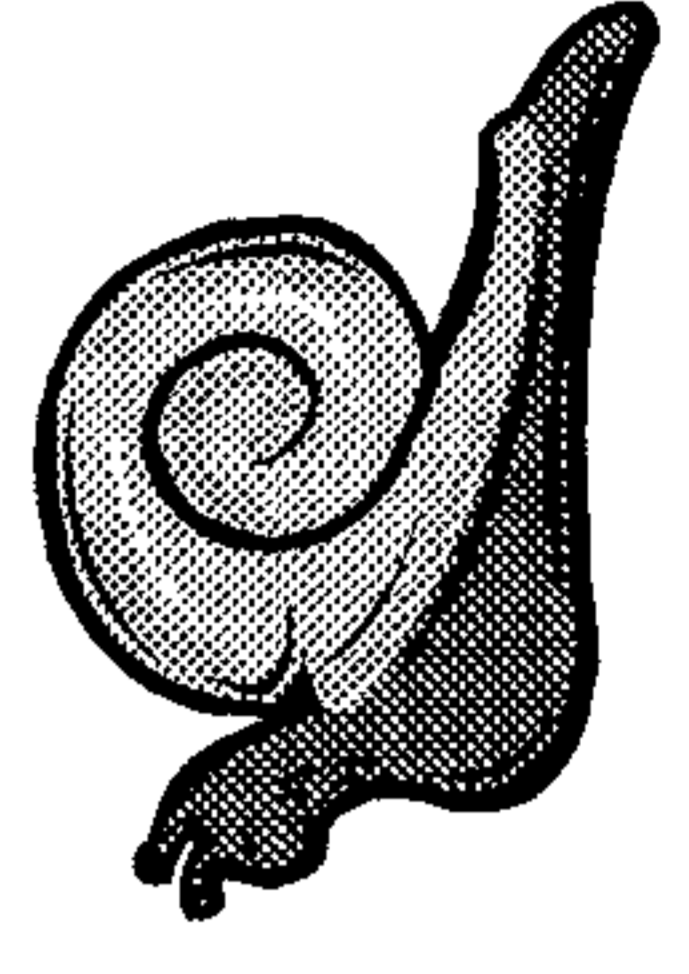
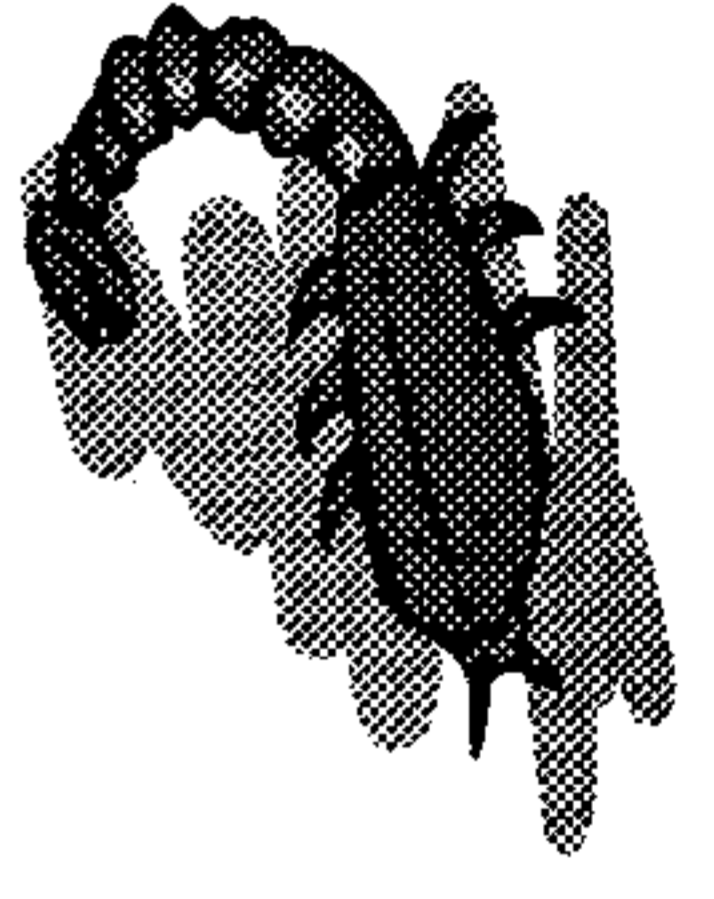
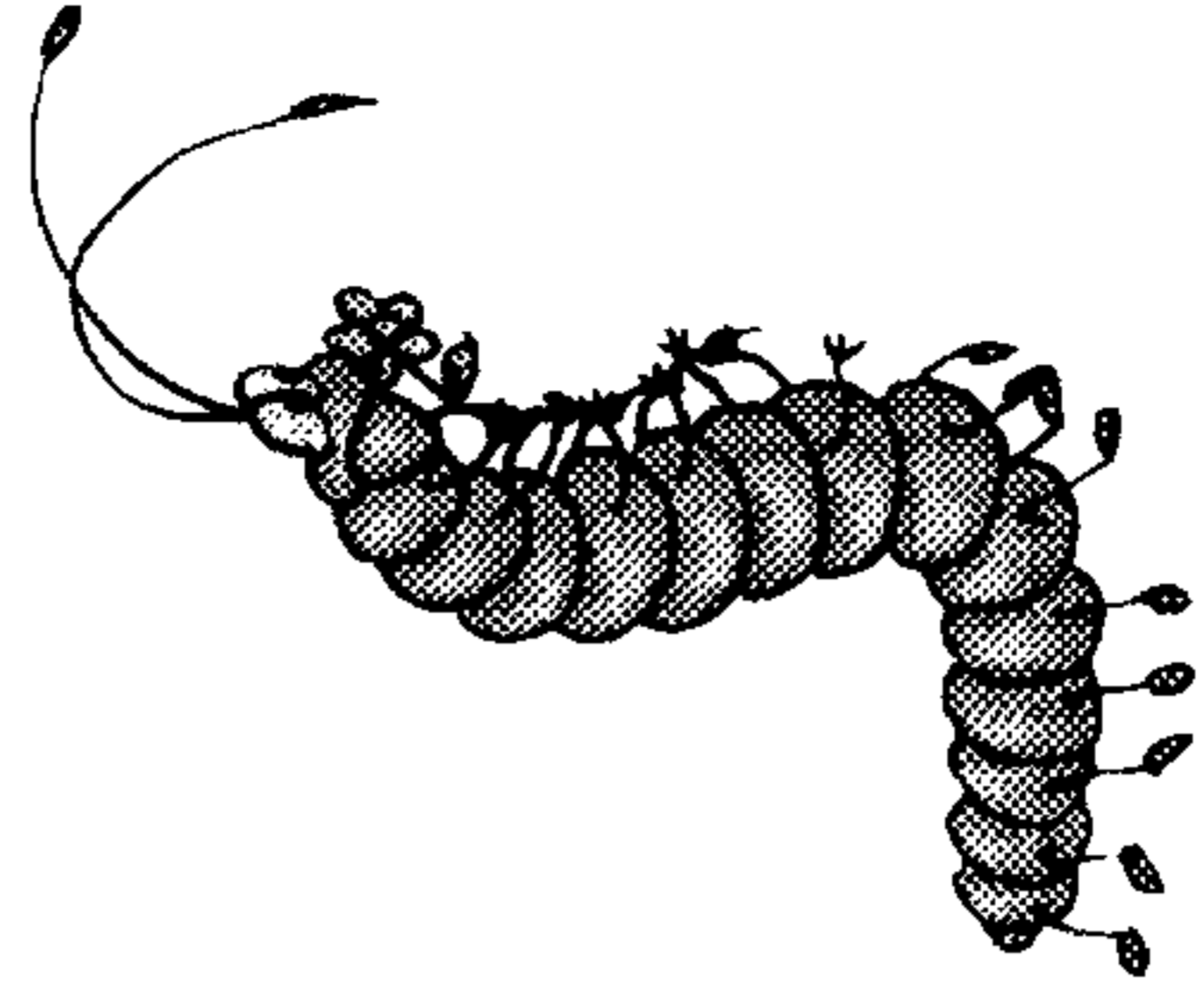
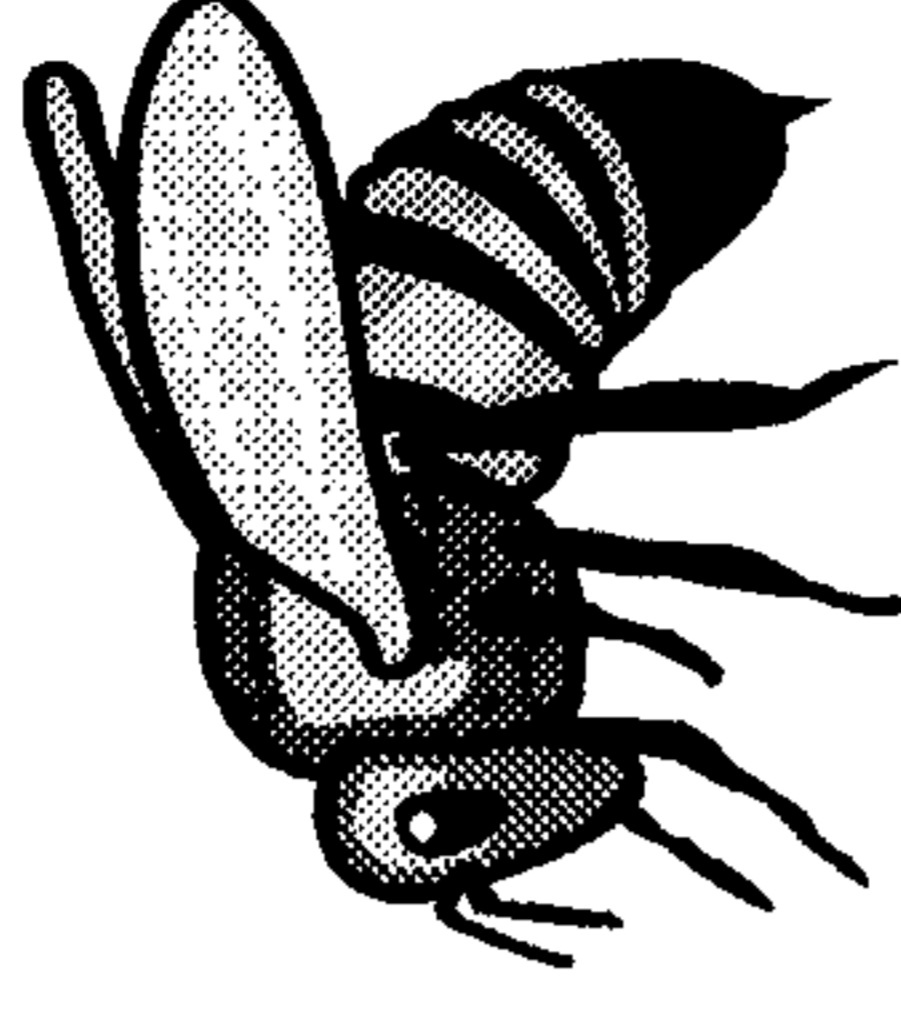
My daddy taught me not to be afraid of nature,
like insects and bigger beasts. He told me:

*Amina, you shouldn't be afraid of the
preying mantis and other insects like
hairy caterpillars. They won't do anything
to you if you leave them alone. The hairy
caterpillar will just give you a little
sickness...the preying mantis will only give
you a little peck with its pincers.*

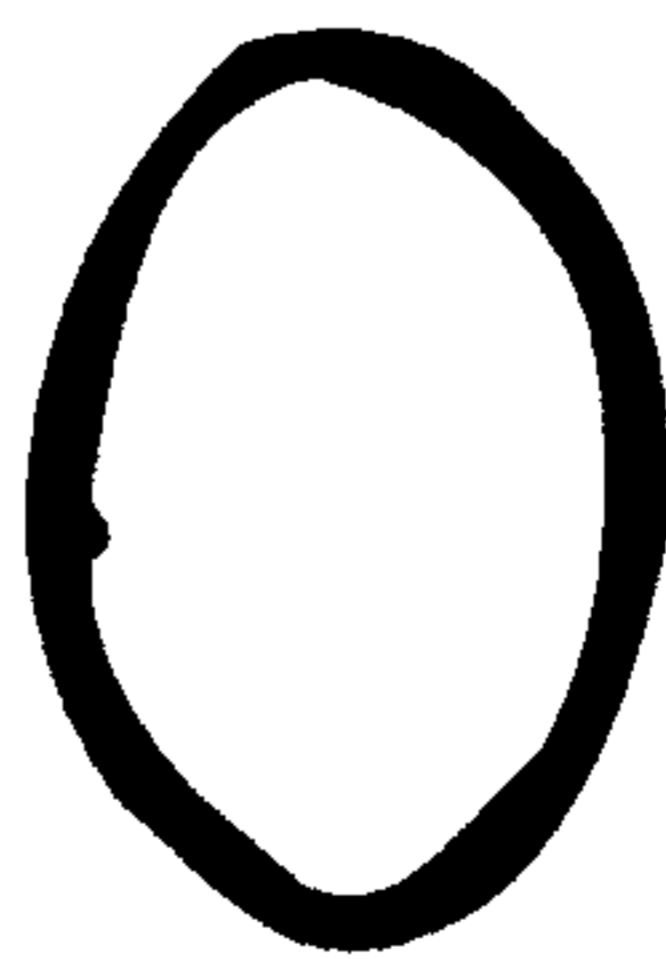
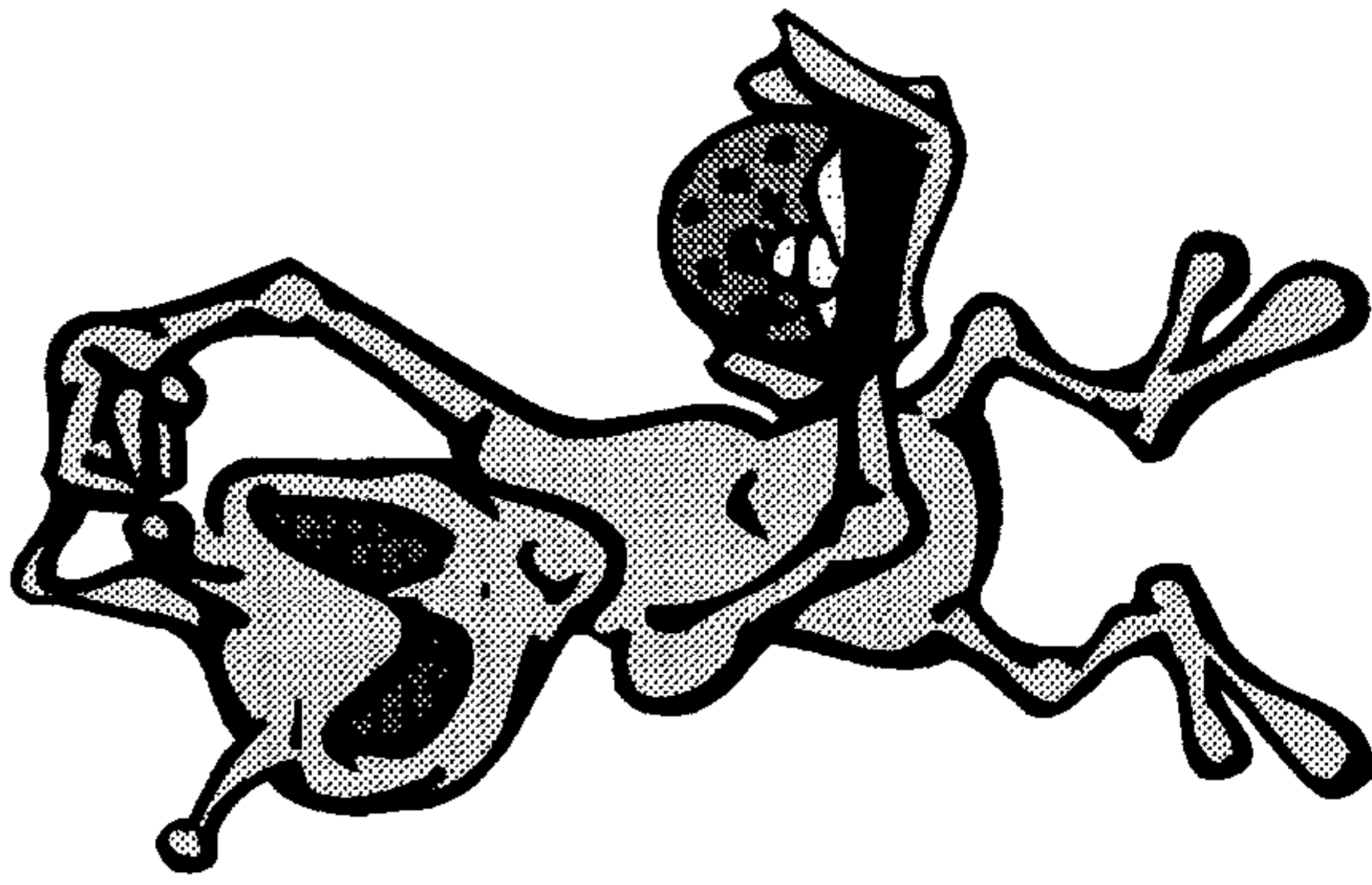
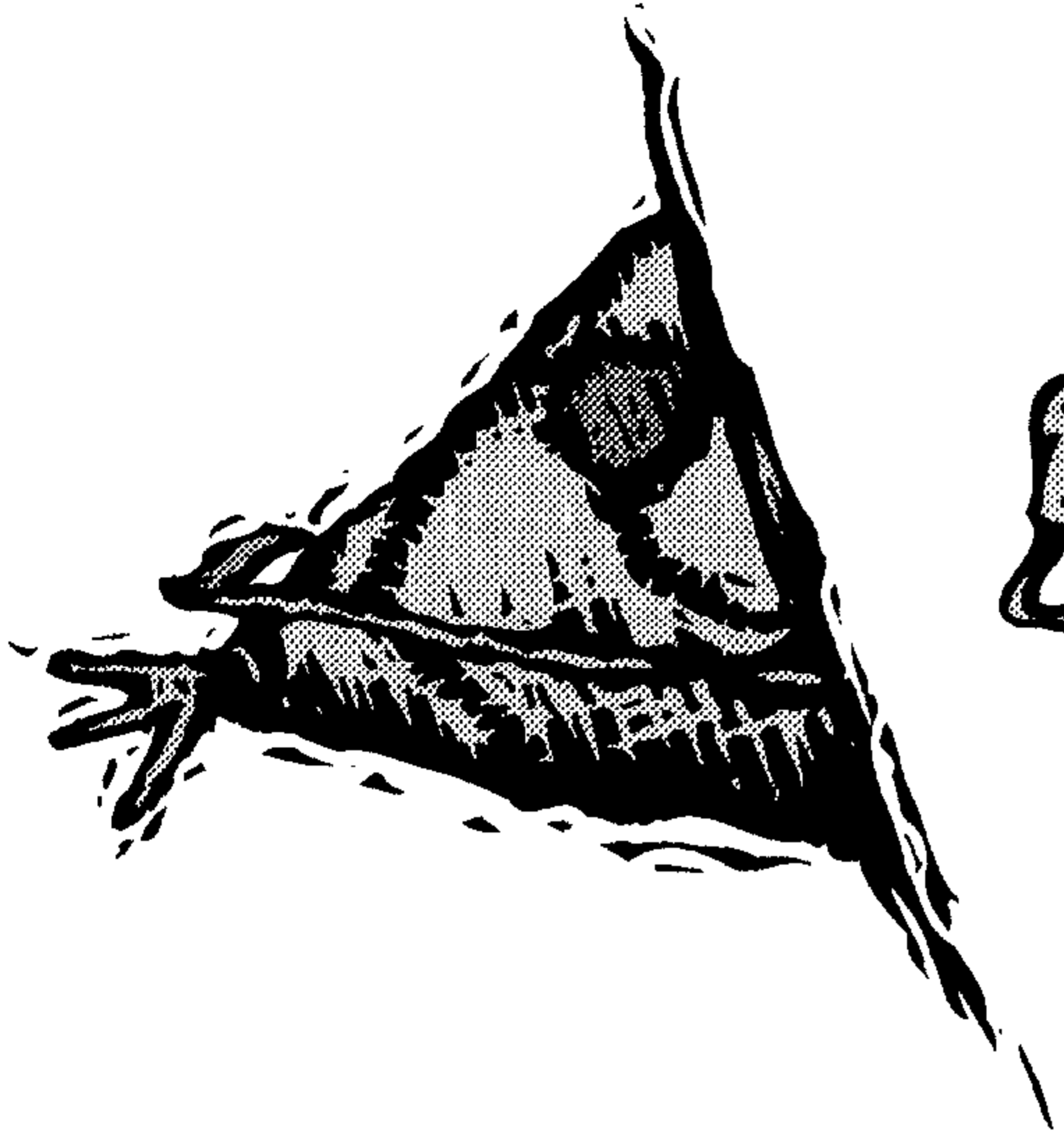




I know that my daddy taught
me not to be afraid of
anything, because if you are
scared then the thing that you
are scared of will follow you in
your imagination or even in
your dreams.

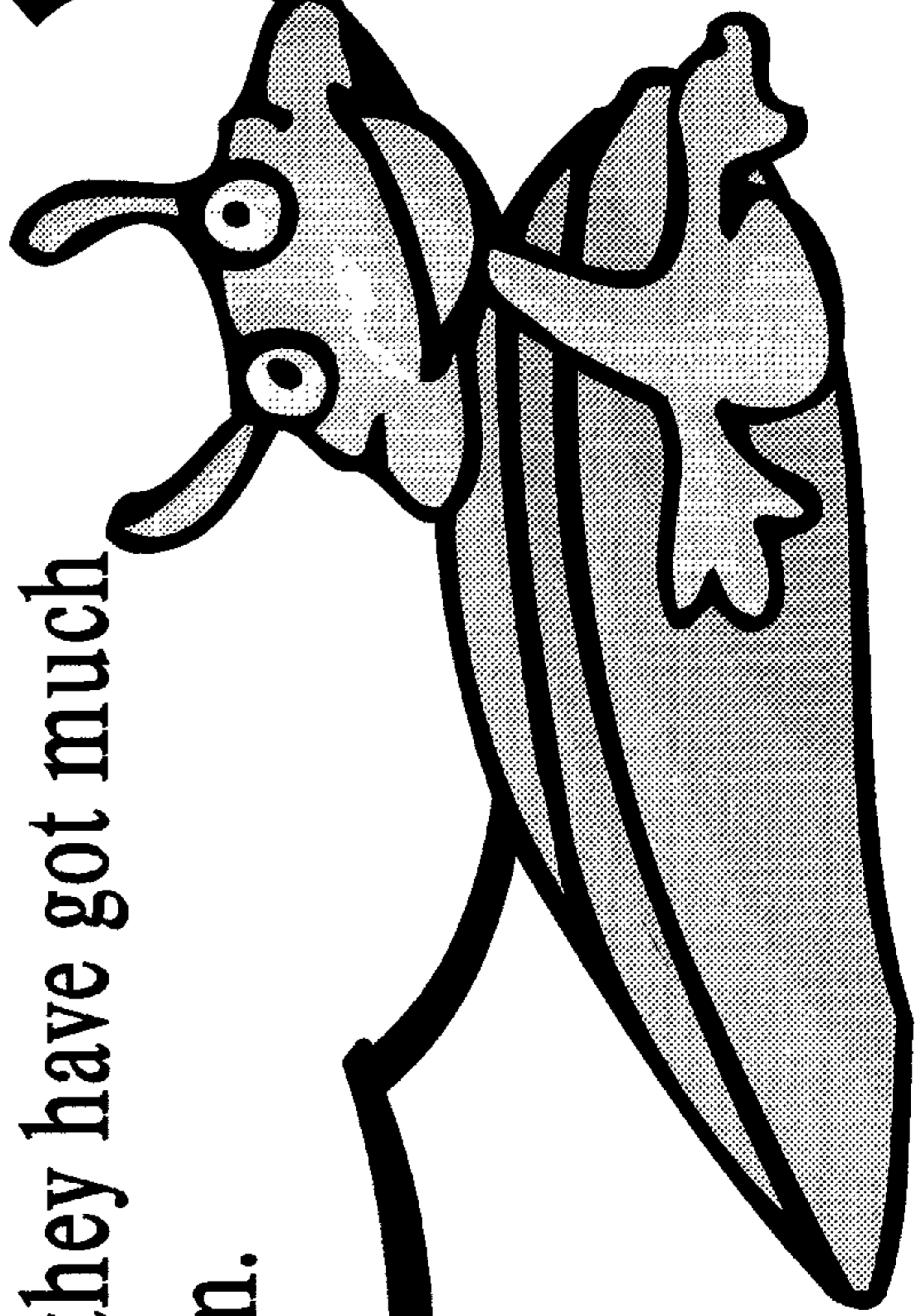


My daddy also believed in
supernature like aliens
and flying T.P.'s.



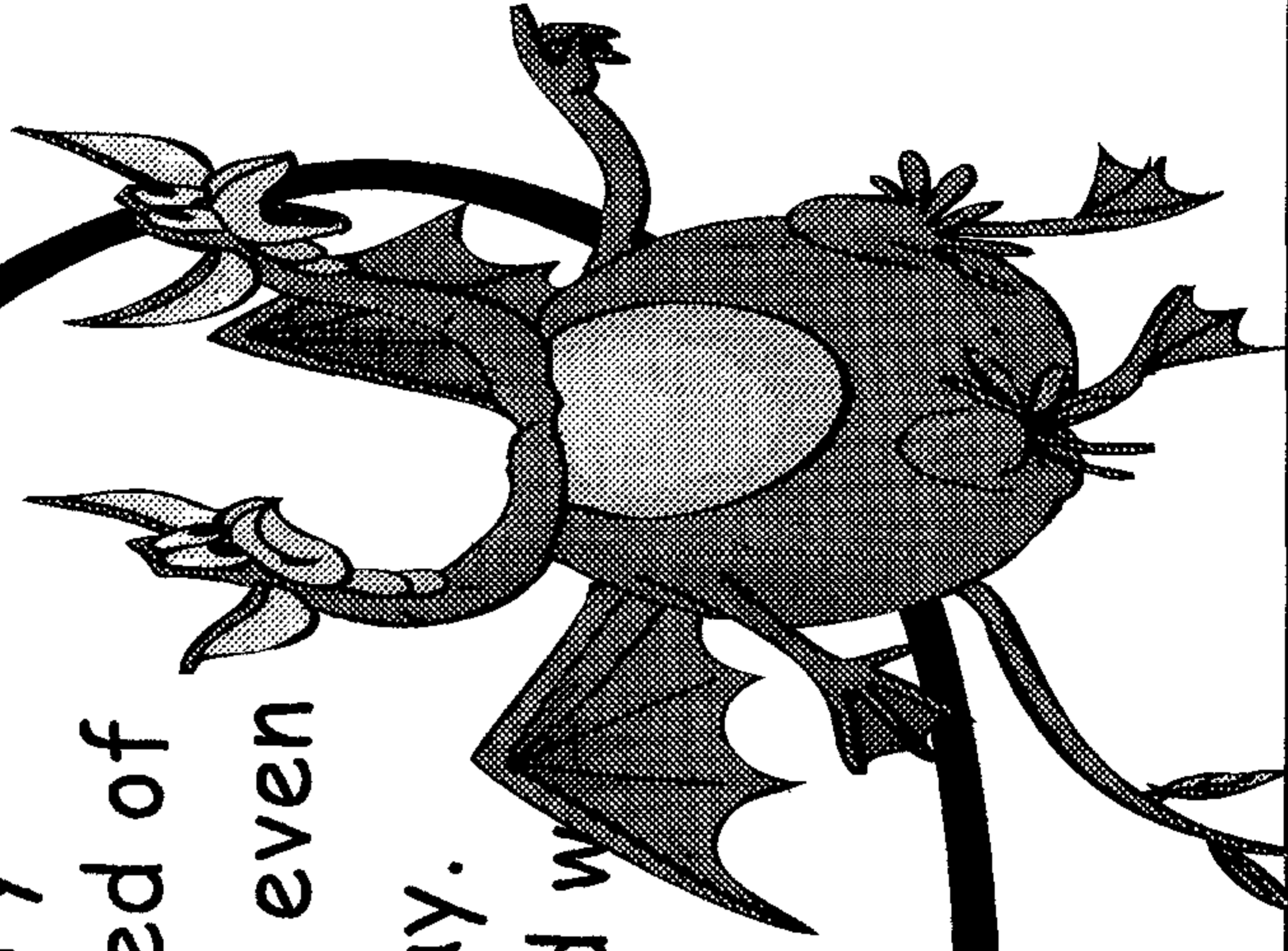


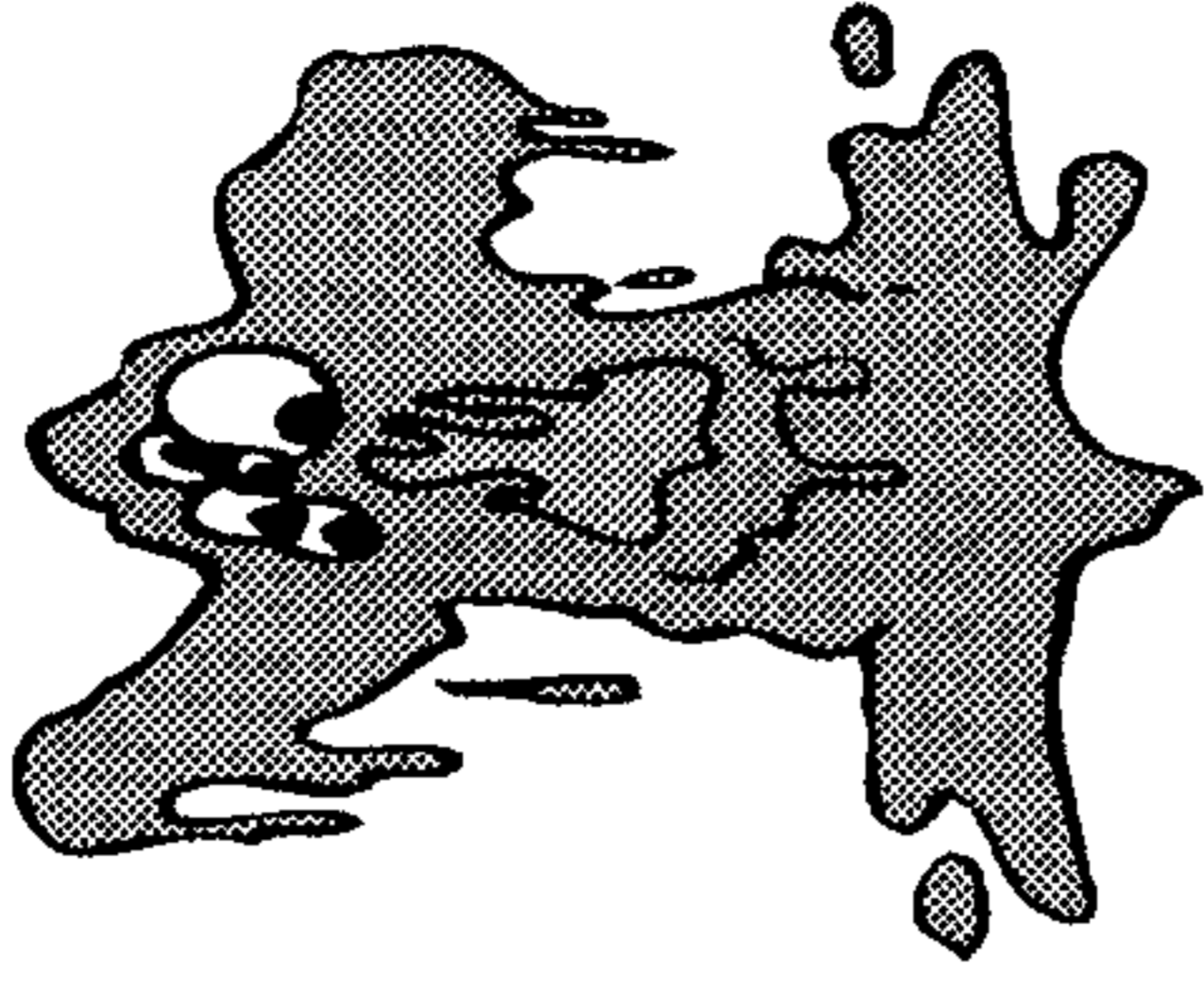
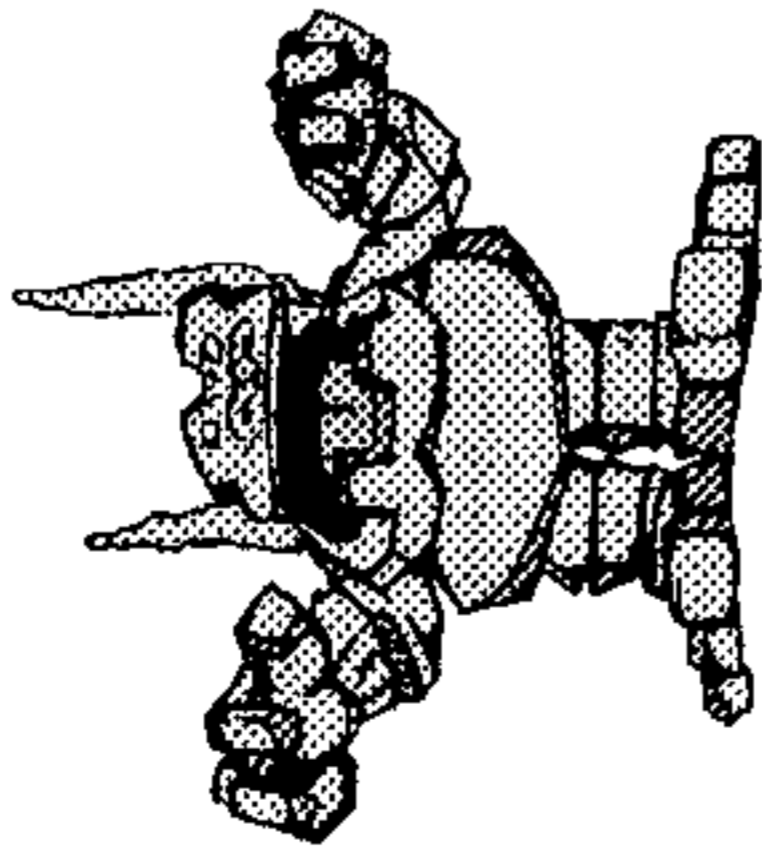
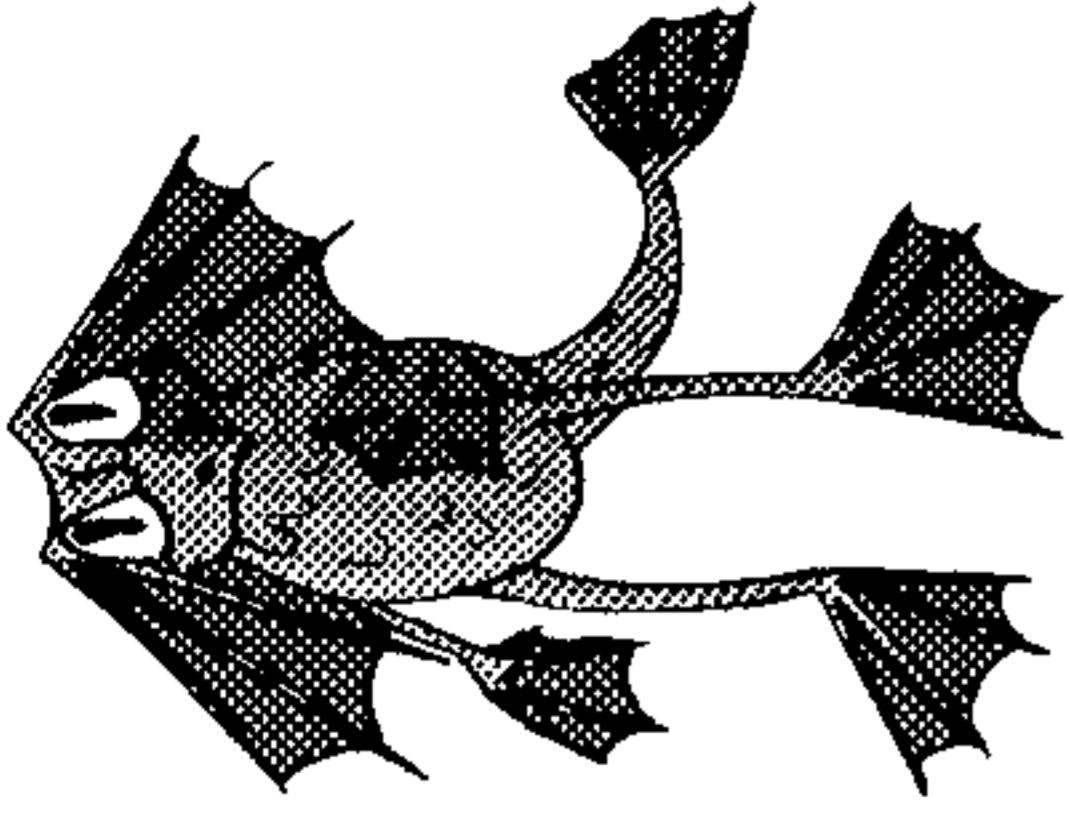
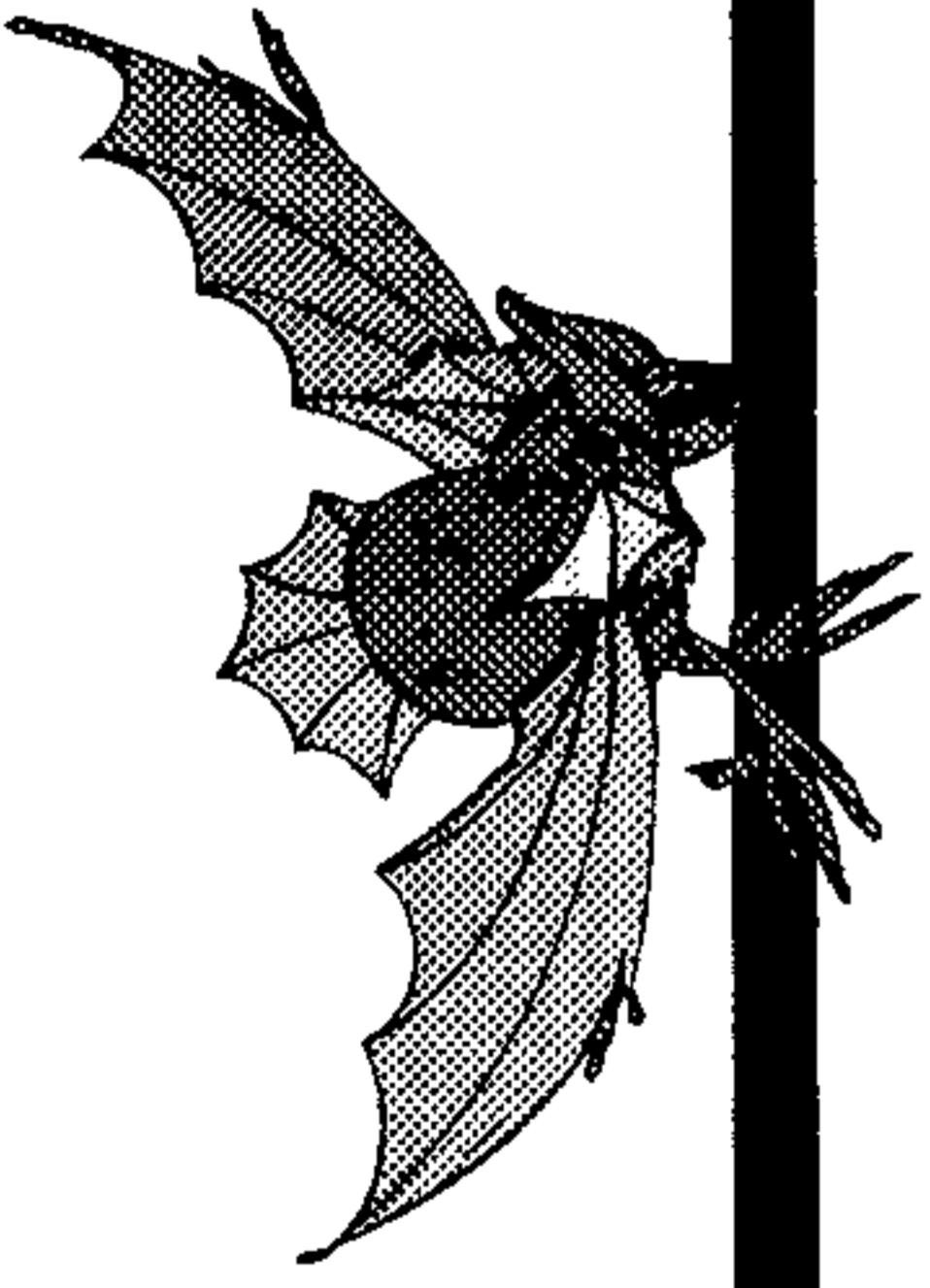
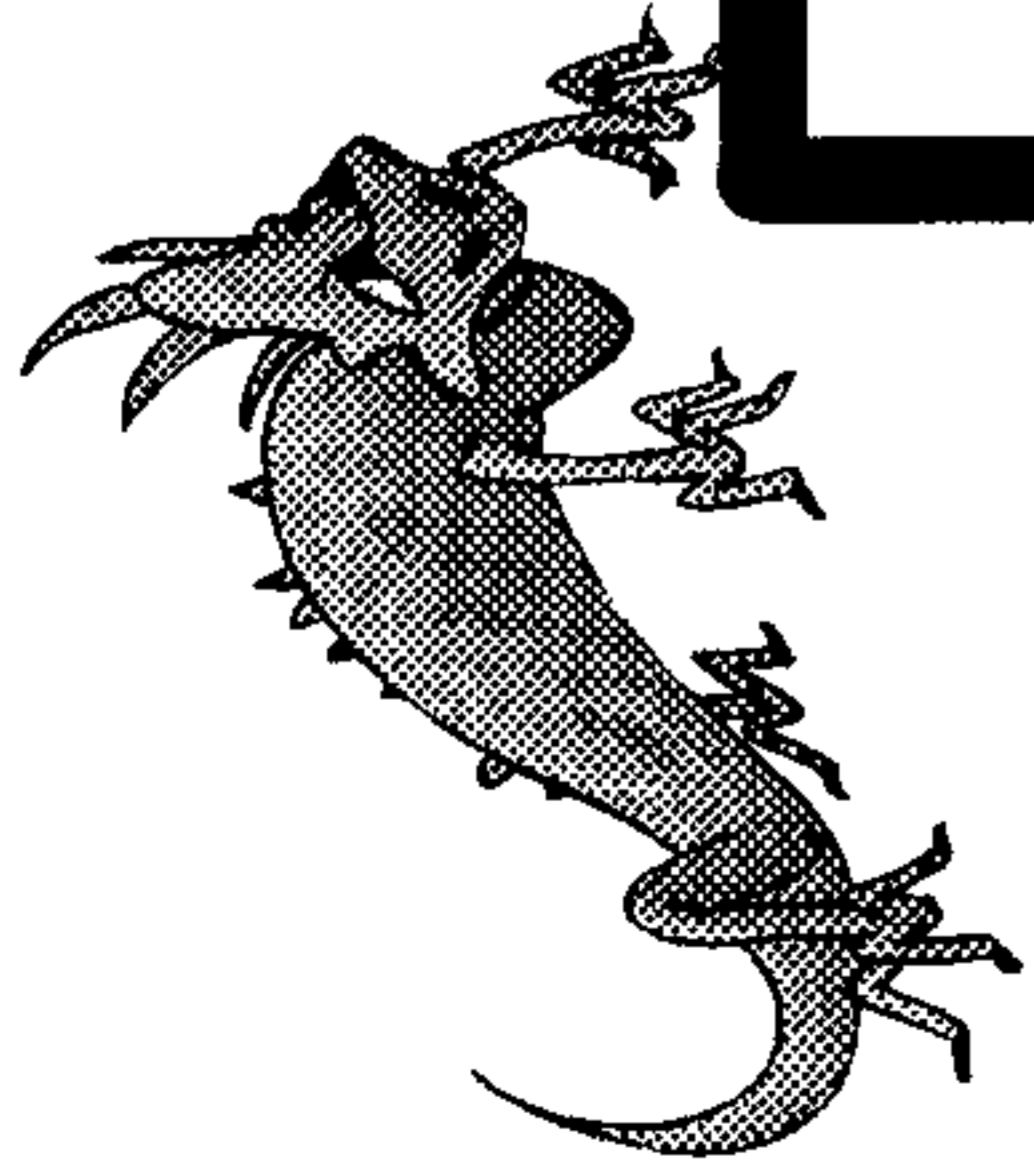
My dad even used to believe that there were alien fish! You also get alien mussels now, they are bigger than normal mussels. They are about the size of my foot (size 11) and they have got much more meat in them.



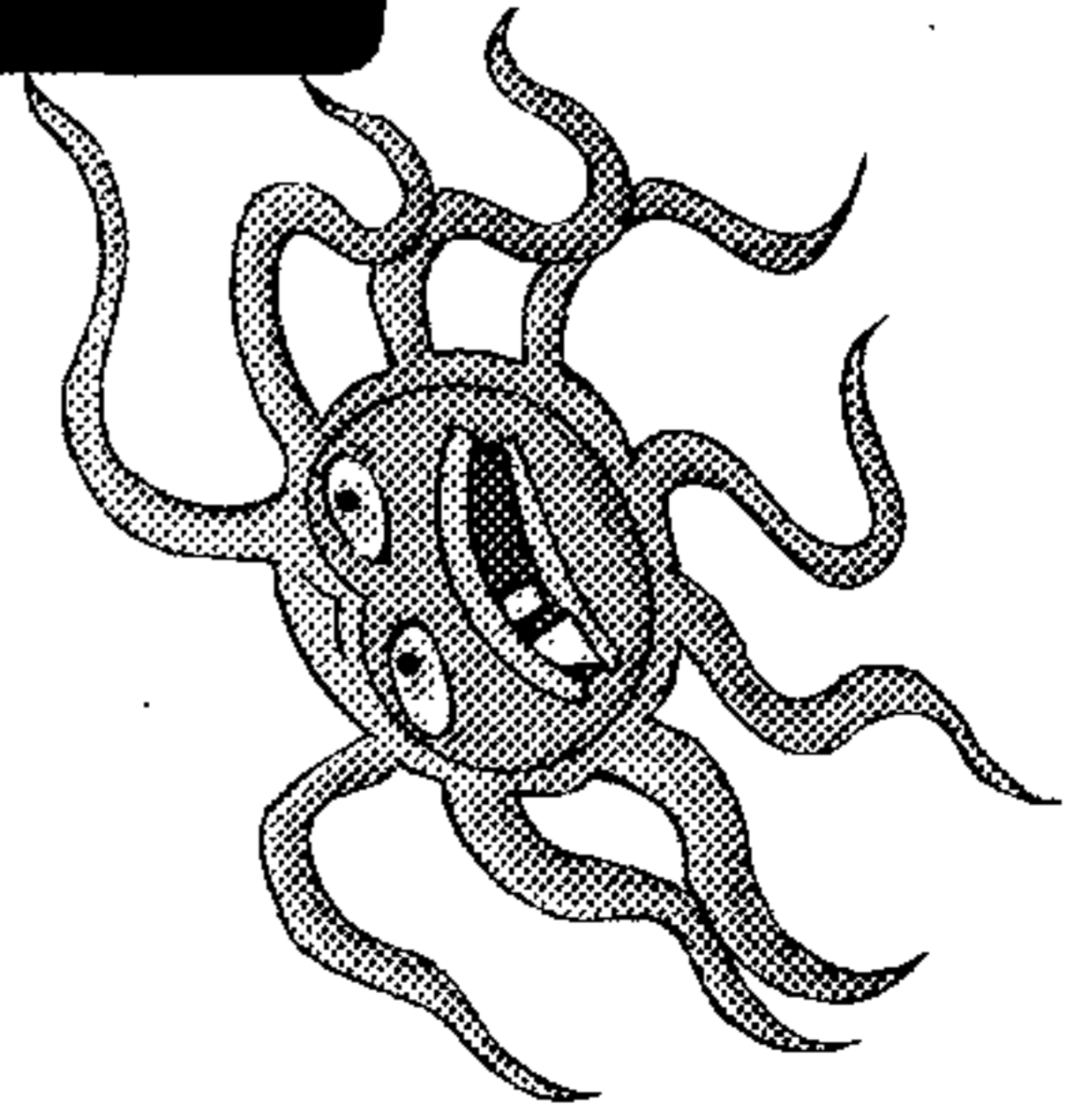
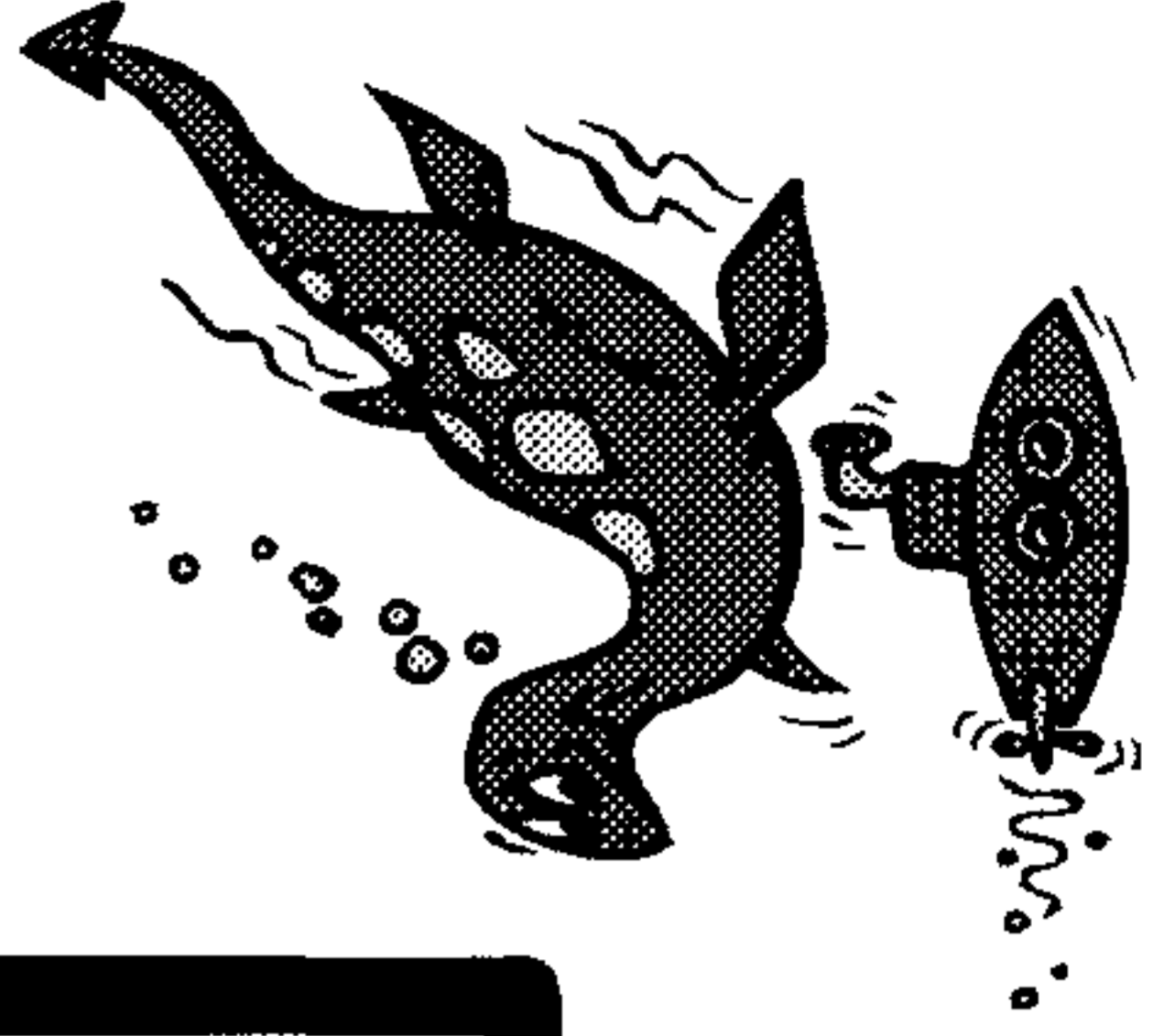
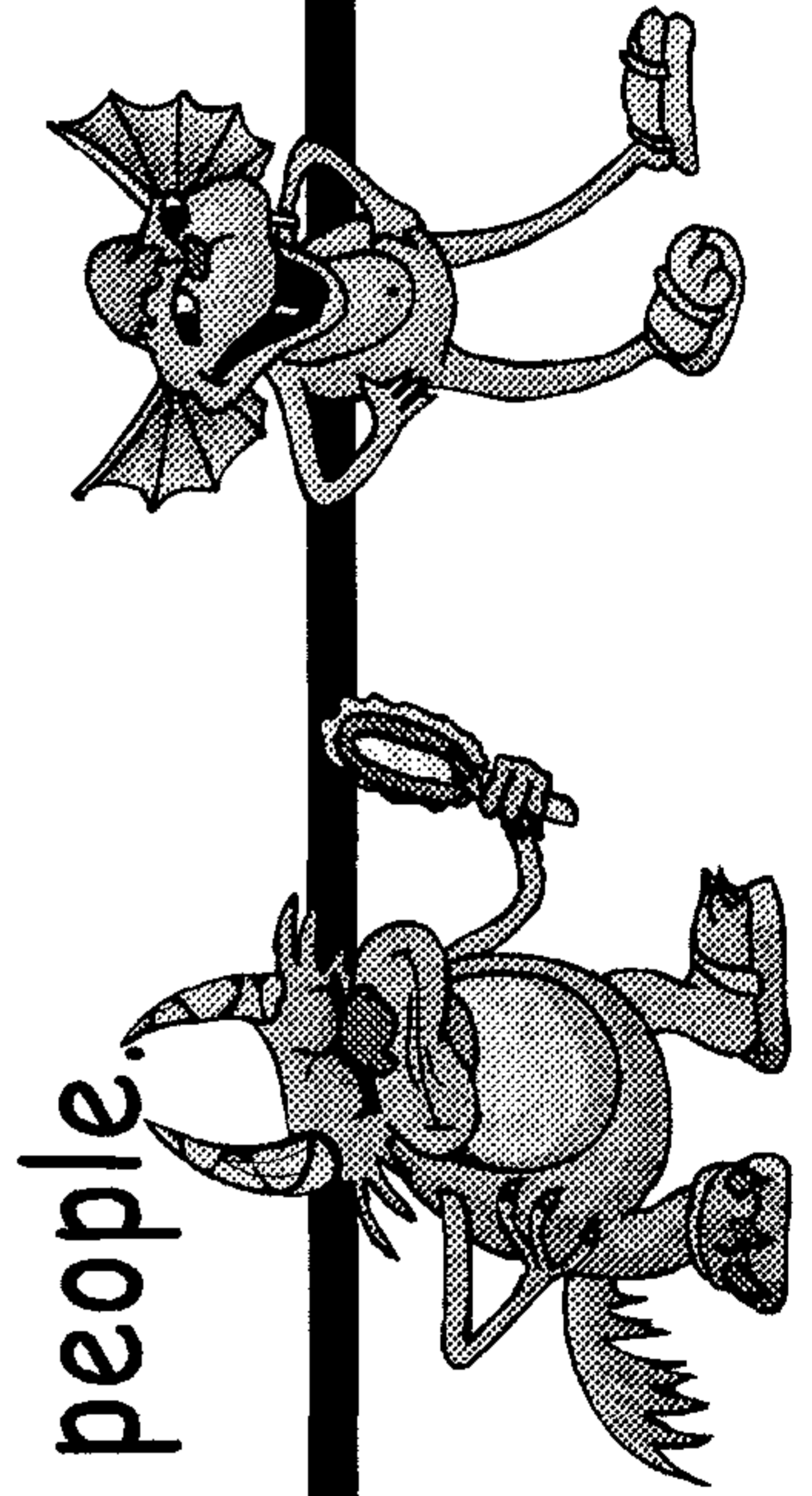
The most important thing that my daddy taught me, was not to be afraid of monsters. He said:

Amina, if you scream out, then the monsters will also scream out very loud. Monsters are actually scared of humans. Sometimes they scream even louder than normally and run away. They think we are dangerous and will think that they are dangerous.



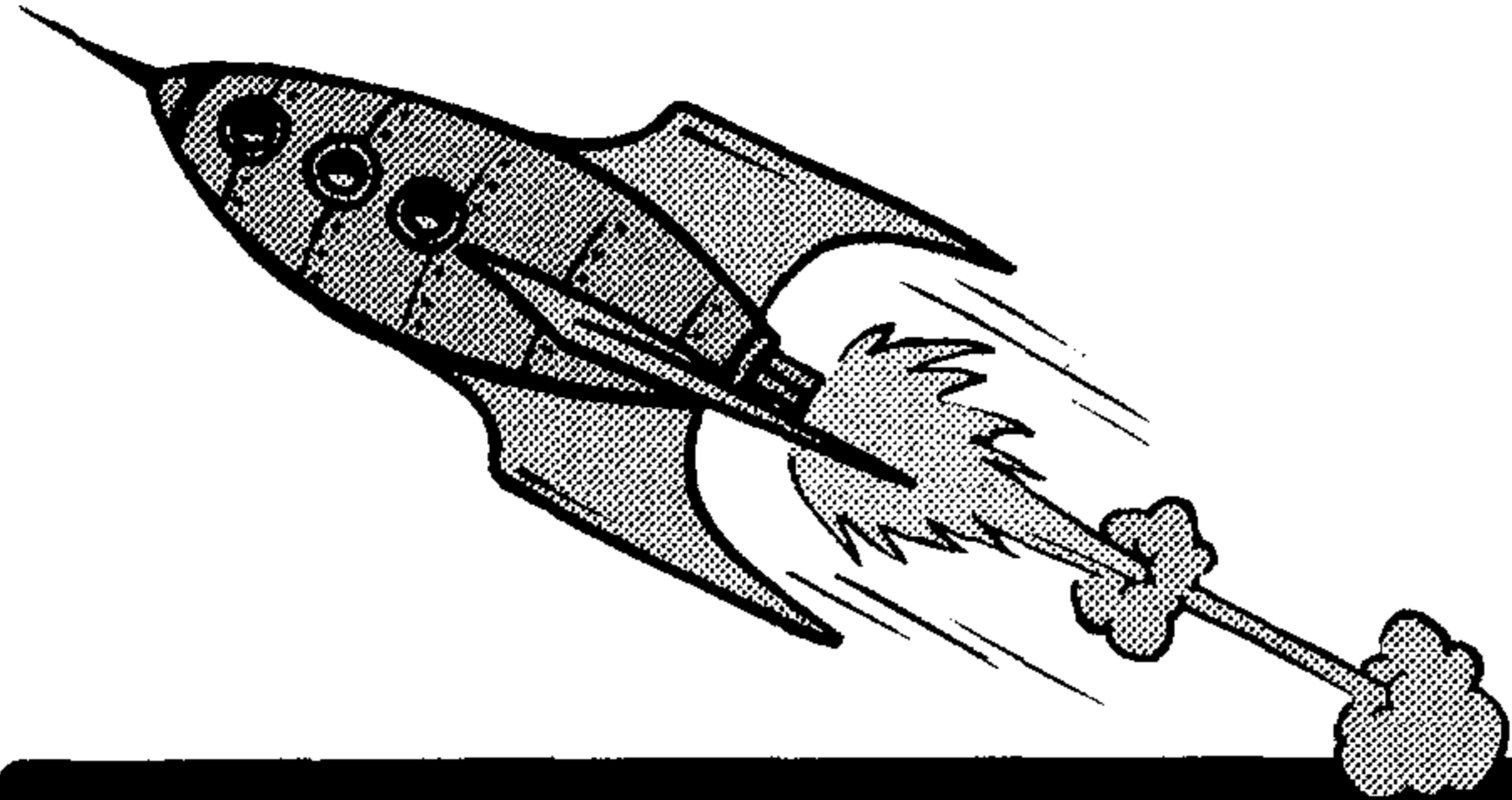


He told me that monsters
 would be quite scared of you if
 they were still alive. They are
 not alive any more, you only
 get them invented into toys
 and robots on the videos to
 scare people.





I am glad my daddy is in a very
very safe place in heaven with
God. If I had to be in Mark
Shuttleworth's audience one
day, I would ask him, "How is it
up there in heaven? Is my dad
doing ok up there?"



I know that my daddy's soul is in heaven, because when everybody dies their souls go to heaven. The body stays in the grave, but the soul goes up to heaven. When somebody dies, God's heart fetches the soul and takes it to heaven to rest in peace. When somebody dies they don't get older, you only get older on earth. That's how people will recognise him when they go to heaven too.



I think it's a very good idea for me to try to write a song about how there should be no guns. Why don't you tell me more about what you would want such a song to say, and I'll try to write it? Then it would be our song and not just my song. I love writing songs with other people, and we already have a start with the two lines that Them bani wrote. So, maybe Linda could help you and using e-mails we can write a song together, even from opposite sides of the Indian Ocean - that would be very special for me.

*It's true that I'm a lawyer, and I used to live in Sydney, but now I live in Melbourne. Melbourne is a big city in the state of Victoria in the southeast corner of Australia and like Cape Town, it is on the water, in our case a huge bay called Port Phillip Bay. I sing and write songs in my spare time, but I used to do that full time. For 16 years I travelled all over the world (well almost - I've never been to South Africa) singing to lots of different people - in New Zealand, the USA, Canada, the UK, Denmark, and even Fiji and China. Maybe one day I will come to South Africa - I would like that very much. We have heard a lot in Australia about what has been happening there, and in the times when the apartheid system was in place, I joined many demonstrations against the South African Government. Once, when Oliver Tambo came to Australia in 1987, I sang for him at a rally at the Sydney Town Hall and he gave me a medal with Nelson Mandela's face on it. I still have that and it is one of my most prized possessions. So, I am very pleased to have "met" you via the Internet and I hope we can keep in touch. I'll start work on our song, and you can keep sending me ideas until it's finished. Is that a deal? With very best wishes to you all,
Judy Small*

3.2.5.14 Letting our own light shine: re-search as co-search and co-search as care

Receiving an e-mail from a person living in a different country injected fresh energy into our conversations. The children urged me to get back to the computer and type ideas for the song. This was writing for real reasons and they were totally engaged in making a stand against violence in this way.

Dear Judy

We were thrilled to get your messages last Sunday. THANKS so very much for your warm and encouraging response to the children and to me. Your response was more in keeping with what the children expected...they had entertained no doubt whatsoever that a busy lawyer/singer living on another continent would reply promptly to our letter...I wish that I had still their natural faith in humanity...and thank you for reminding me by your actions, that we should always dare to dream! Mandela said that:

"As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others..."

(Nelson Mandela 1994)

This makes me think of how your warm and "in-touch" response to the Three Wise Young Men is helping them to do just that. They listened very carefully when I read your letter to them. They nodded gravely at your ideas about how music sometimes communicates feelings the best, and that we all need friends and love in our lives. (Them bani, incidentally, must be a good singer, as he sings in the Cathedral Choir...so I think he's being a bit humble when he says he doesn't sing too well. Now he wants to be a songwriter...and I think he's got talent!) When you wrote about your home and life, we looked at the map and found Melbourne and the various countries you have visited and sung to. (Your stakes did go up at that point, I must tell you!) The highlight for me was when we read the part that you had received a medal of Nelson Mandela's face from Oliver Tambo, King's face lit up...for, unbeknown to you, King and I had in our early work together, designed and made a beautiful piece of jewellery in memory of his parents and their values for his life...ever since King was a small child in our school, he has been crazy about medals...and so the piece of jewellery we made has a beaded necklace and a gold medallion with the picture of a man's face on it. He says that that man is his father...and of all the children in the world to understand that a medal with a