

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I am employing narrative analysis to analyse the data known as my primary writings or life stories. The dominant themes embedded in the fabric of the stories are identified, discussed and interpreted. In order to appreciate the interpretation of the themes, it is advisable to first read my life stories as contained in the Appendix (pp.150-252). While the stories are autonomous units, it is recommended that they are read in chronological order, as arranged in the Appendix.

The themes are therefore my particular personal punctuations of the stories at this point in time. I am aware that different punctuations of the stories are possible and could be considered as equally valid. These themes I glean not only from the actual stories but also from inferences contained within the stories.

There are two types of themes that form the building blocks of the discussion in this chapter, namely initial and inferred themes. Five initial themes and five

inferred themes have been identified. A full analysis for the extraction of the themes can be obtained by personal request. The five initial themes include the following: loss, quest for education, determination, finding meaning despite suffering and silence. The five inferred themes are: belonging, separateness/ otherness, aloneness, change and fragmentation. A discussion and interpretation of the ten identified themes is presented below.

5.2 INITIAL THEMES

5.2.1 Theme 1: Loss

The theme of loss is contained in all the stories. In some stories the theme of loss is explicit while in others it is implicit. Loss is a complex phenomenon and I have found Martin and Doka's (2000) categorization of loss into physical, relational and symbolic types of loss very useful in this regard. While at times loss may seem to have occurred at simply a physical level (e.g. loss of assets), one discovers that loss also occurred at other levels namely at a relational level (e.g. loss of community) and a symbolic level (e.g. loss of identity).

Agherdien, George and Hendricks (1997, p. 94) captures the destructive process of forced removal, with particular reference to the suburb that my mom and her family had been forcibly removed from, with the following description: "within a short time houses, shops, schools, churches and various businesses lay in a pathetic heap – just so much rubble. The life went out of

South End". My mom's letter (story 11a, dated 26.09.2001) outlines the loss related to the harsh impact of forced removals, and makes reference to some of the physical, relational and symbolic losses that were experienced by us. In other words, mom's letter, both explicitly and implicitly, draws attention to the loss of life, loss of family homes and income, loss of control, loss of community, loss of security, and loss of educational dreams. My letter (story 11b, dated 06.10.2001) in response to mom's letter highlights additional losses related to forced removals, like loss of identity, loss of school friends, loss of voice, loss of safety, loss of innocence, loss of health, and loss of church connections.

During my high school years (story 3), a loss of certainty of returning to the same school the following year was acutely felt as the threat of closure due to the fact that the group areas act hung over our heads. Despite the constant threat of closure, and the distraction caused by such a threat, I managed to complete my high school with fairly good grades. Despite a good academic record I was not able to attend university once I matriculated due to financial constraints.

During my nursing career (story 3), I felt disrespected by many white patients, nurses and doctors. Additionally, I felt a lack of support from my immediate black superiors since they seemed to be in collusion with an oppressive system operating within the segregated hospital where I trained, qualified and worked.

Amidst untenable conditions in the hospital environment, I set aside lunch and tea breaks, to complete UNISA assignments in an attempt to study my way out of nursing. My first experience as an international correspondence student through UNISA was a rather harrowing experience. I travelled from the state of Michigan to Chicago in the USA to write my UNISA exam (story 3). I felt at a complete loss when an embassy official informed me that there was no Psychology 1 exam paper for me. Providentially, an extra multiple choice questionnaire had been included with the other two candidates' exam papers, so I was able to write the exam.

My visit to East Germany (story 5) seemed to illuminate the loss of our utopian dream, a loss of hope with regard to our future, and a loss of safety. This sense of loss seemed to be further reinforced by the intimidating scrutiny of our passports and faces by the border post guards.

Ruben and I have lost close family members at critical moments in our lives. First, in August 1991, Ruben's mom died suddenly (story 8) just as Ruben was trying to complete a theology degree in Switzerland and I was six months pregnant. My sister's husband was tragically killed in December 1999 (story 9) as I was completing my UNISA Psychology Honours exams.

During my clinical psychology training, I re-experienced some of the losses I felt at critical moments in my life. I experienced a loss of respect and equality in relation to my trainers – in fact, I liken them to the apartheid regime (story 10). Added to this, I feel that there is a loss of positive regard for my socio-

political history, and my years of experience as a competent and skilled person. I feel once again oppressed and humiliated, but this time the loss of acceptance and positive regard is felt more intensely than during the apartheid era, partly because of my heightened pre-training expectations. I did not expect to encounter the high level of disregard and disrespect that I did from the some of the trainers and fellow -students.

It is striking that loss is confronted at definitive moments in my life, such as during my early childhood, as a high school graduate, as a first-time employee, and as a trainee. Despite the potentially crippling effects these losses might have had on me, somehow I do seem to persevere and move beyond the difficulties and losses, and I seem to succeed in being able to survive.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Quest for education

Schools during the Apartheid era were racially segregated. The only exceptions were some private schools (Omond, 1986). Inequality of access to schools ensured that 'non-whites' were academically disadvantaged (Unesco, 1967). Despite being academically disadvantaged, I was determined to pursue tertiary education. Many of the stories capture not only my desire for further education, but also my parents' unfulfilled dreams with regard to education.

My mother was forced to terminate her school career to provide sustenance for the family to “keep the wolf away from the door” (story 11a). Mom often used to lament about the fact that she’d always wanted to be a nurse (story 11b) but had not been able to fulfil this dream.

Dad writes about his regret at not having been able to pursue tertiary education (story 6, last paragraph). In 1967, Dad had decided to move from P.E. to C.T. and one of the main motivating factors was to ensure that his children could be educated at the only university in S.A. reserved for coloureds i.e. the University of the Western Cape, at that time.

Ruben spent the first 10 years of our married life studying fulltime (see story 3). The sacrifices I made for Ruben that enabled him to accomplish his dream caused lots of family members, mutual friends and acquaintances to express their dissatisfaction. Despite lots of well meaning individuals warning me to stop supporting Ruben financially and spiritually, for fear that he might discard me at the end of his studies, I continued to give him my wholehearted support.

The tremendous sacrifices I made in order to become better educated and qualified runs like a golden thread through the stories. Amongst other things, Ruben and I used to clothe ourselves with secondhand missionary clothing, and we furnished our living quarters with others’ discarded items. I worked as a domestic worker, a counterhand, and an assistant nurse in order to enable us to study. I scrubbed seminary floors and flights of steps until I was 8

months pregnant. I sacrificed sleep, food, and other comforts (e.g. driving a car) in my quest for education.

5.3 Theme 3: Determination

In stories 3, 6, 9, 10, 11b and 13 I come across as quite determined to overcome any and every obstacle that dared to stand in my way as I pursued my quest for a tertiary education.

Bureaucracy, motherhood, marital difficulties, financial problems, and countless losses did not deter me from striving towards my goal to qualify as a psychologist. There are, however, two occasions when my determination does seem to dwindle. The first occurrence is when I received negative feedback from a UNISA lecturer in 1998 following my submission of a poor quality assignment. The second time is when my sister was tragically widowed and this happened in December 1999, shortly before my final UNISA Psychology Honours exams.

There were times when my determination blinded me to various realities. For example (story 3), I mistook my husband for the 'enemy' rather than a partner who wanted to be supportive, but was finding it geographically impossible to do so. Ruben had been forced to relocate to Cape Town in order to remain employed. He had been working for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and they had closed down all their regional offices, including the Gauteng office where Ruben had worked. Ruben couldn't find a job in Gauteng. I

however was determined to eliminate any actual or perceived problems that stood in the way of my quest for education. I felt abandoned and misunderstood by my husband during this time, and was determined to rid myself of the problems he represented. It was only when my sister unexpectedly lost her husband that I was able to begin to be prepared to entertain alternative realities.

In most of the stories, there seems to emerge a determination, an undying quest to strive for education despite the limitations, obstacles, and prohibiting factors. My therapist once remarked that my determination outweighed my energy levels. She could not have more accurately interpreted my feelings and actions at the time.

Barbarin and Richter (2001) identify personal attributes like, humor, optimism, the ability to focus on a task and stick with it even when it becomes very difficult and the capacity to derive pleasure from accomplishments as factors that contribute towards determination. A well-published and internationally acclaimed author, Richard Rive, who happened to be one of my high school teachers, captures a number of these elements, highlighted by Barbarin and Richter, in several of his writings. Rive's (1981) autobiographical work describes his upbringing in a notorious slum and then traces his academic and literary careers. It is Rive's life stories that have served, and continue to serve, as inspiration for me when I have encountered adversity in the past and sometimes continue to do so in the present.

5.3.4 Theme 4: Finding meaning despite suffering

My response to my mom's letter highlights the capacity of my mom and dad to have risen above their difficulties in order to create meaningful lives for themselves and their children. Their spirituality seems to have provided anchorage and hope for them through their everyday struggles. Once my siblings and I were old enough to take responsibility for ourselves, there was a fresh appreciation for the role that my parents played in our development. All of us seemed to have internalized the values, morals, and principles that our parents instilled in us.

As a newly wed couple, Ruben and I discovered that we were both motivated to turn our stumbling blocks into stepping stones. Together we struggled to find ways of surviving despite the lack of support from the church (story 4) and Ruben's immediate family. We find meaning in whatever context we find ourselves. Our complementary relationship stood us in good stead in enabling us to face the challenges that we have met thus far. Our reliance on a spiritual being beyond ourselves seems to be the main reason for our finding meaning despite the suffering, for our thriving, and sometimes for our mere survival.

Frankl (1987), a holocaust survivor, personifies humankind's potential to find meaning despite suffering when he ultimately triumphs amidst tragedy. Kübler-Ross (1970) identifies hope as a key element in maintaining people's spirits amidst suffering. I seemed to have internalized my parent's ability to

overcome adversity and their capacity to remain hopeful despite the hopeless situations they found themselves in.

5.3.5 Theme 5:Silence

There are various levels of silence within the texts, between the texts and outside of the texts. Explicit mention is made of silences that have been invoked over the years within the family, and these are mentioned in the stories. There is the unmentioned silence that I have struggled with while trying to write the texts, and these are the “between the texts” silences that the reader might otherwise not be aware of. There are the silences of those stories that I have chosen to exclude from this dissertation, and these are the “outside of the texts” silences that the reader will not encounter within this dissertation.

I grew up in a home where maintaining silence with regard to painful matters seemed to be the dominant coping style. Mom and Dad remained silent with regard to socio-political matters for decades. Mom wrote about the harsh impact of forced removals for the first time following an explicit request from me in 2001(story 11b). This seemed to start breaking an almost lifelong silence. As siblings we seemed to take our cues from our parents and felt disabled to talk about the intense sense of loss we felt once we’d relocated to Cape Town. Our youngest sister, Wendy, who had been born in Cape Town, had remained unaware, up until October 2001, of our family history.

My pervasive silence in all my letters (see reference to letters in story 6) while living in the USA and Switzerland with regard to my struggles around education, adapting to the role of mother, and longing for my family in S.A. strikes me in quite a profound way. I seem to perpetuate the mode of silence I had become familiar with, and learnt as a child.

I think because one didn't dare openly confront the S.A. government without the fear of possibly being silenced forever, we seemed to develop a culture of silence. Even though we were all appalled by the gross injustices, a fear of feeling too overwhelmed or uncontained, should we have attempted to get in touch with our abhorrence and anger, probably resulted in resorting to silence. My letter dated 06.10.01 (story 11b) makes reference to this. It seems as though silence had become a mechanism for survival.

The TRC marked the beginning of creating a collective national narrative (Krog, 1998) based on the experiences of a silent majority, namely the marginalized black majority. This dissertation marks not only the breaking of an eery silence of many decades within my family, but also the opening up of conversations that lead meaningful interactions. These types of meaningful interactions ultimately enable thicker and richer descriptions to emerge and thus facilitate the living out of new self-images and new futures, as Morgan (2000) describes.

5.3 INFERRED THEMES

5.3.1 Theme 6: Belonging

A history of forced removals preceded my birth. My mom's letter (story 11a), dated 26 September 2001, described how her family becomes disconnected and separated. My immediate and extended family found ourselves without a place of belonging when forced removals were implemented in 1965. At that time we were living in a beautiful suburb in Port Elizabeth called Fairview. My grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins lived close by, within walking distance. At this stage I was five years old. My dad and my maternal grandfather made a financial arrangement that enabled 16 family members to reside together in a home purchased by my father. It was a spacious and fairly luxurious double-storey house. Then there was a rumour that this area, Korsten, too was going to be declared as a whites only area. This was one of the main reasons my dad then decided to relocate and move to Cape Town. Added to this, he didn't want our immediate family to be separated one day when his kids graduated from high school and wanted to study further. Since Cape Town was the only city with a university for coloureds, this was therefore the necessary place to move to.

Some of the stories capture my sadness at being disconnected from the place of my birth and my extended family. Totten, Parsons and Charny (1997) point out that mourning and sadness are often the consequences of losing a sense of belonging. Once in Cape Town, we as a family, struggled to find a place of

belonging. This feeling of not belonging is highlighted in story 7 where I mention that only after I had lived abroad did I start owning Cape Town as the place where I had spent the greater part of my life. In other words, it took me almost 25 years to verbalise my sense of belonging to the beautiful city of Cape Town, where I had spent my formative years, in fact 30 years of my life.

Primary school life for me was riddled with struggling to make friends, and in so doing finding a place of belonging within new contexts. I attended four different schools in the first five years of my school life (story 1).

Chronic illness i.e. asthma and subsequent frequent absence from school exacerbated my feelings of not belonging. I was not allowed to play with other kids due to prevalent myths around the inhaler (pump) weakening one's heart. This was confirmed when a fellow Sunday school classmate, also an asthma sufferer, died at the age of eight of asthma. I developed a love for reading at a very early stage in my life. It seemed as though I tried to create my own community through immersing myself in my books. This passion continues to this day.

Another way in which I seemed to compensate for my feelings of not belonging was by creating my own sense of community. Mom and I connected with other regular patients and their moms at Red Cross Hospital, since we spent almost every alternate Monday of every month at the hospital including some Saturdays (for research trials) as well as the irregular and essential visits when I developed acute asthma attacks and needed

emergency treatment. It is interesting to note that later my many career paths would involve nursing and research co-ordination, particularly in the field of respiratory diseases!

We turned down an opportunity for Ruben to do his doctorate in Switzerland. This decision was mainly based on my desire to maintain good family relations and foster belonging. I wanted my children to grow up knowing their grandparents, extended family and be “close to the land of their parents’ birth” (story 7). We also decided that Daniel would be classified as South African despite having been born in Switzerland. We felt he belongs to South Africa and his identity needs to reflect that.

Once we returned to S.A. we become separated in a brutal way from Ruben’s family of origin due to conflict. We subsequently feel that we have no sense of belonging to Ruben’s sisters and their families.

Initially when we moved to Gauteng, we struggled to find a place of belonging and a church community, given our cultural, historical and political history. We first attended a church in Soweto, then in Berea, Yeoville and now in Bramley, Johannesburg.

In one of my stories (story 3), I verbalise my desire for my children to attend the same school from Grade 1 to Grade 12 – providing them with “stability” and “belonging”. This desire is probably prompted by my history of having continually moved as a child and then later as an adult.

This is our seventh year of residence in Johannesburg. We have been living in our current home for the past 5 years. In the seventeen years that Ruben and I have been married, this is the longest that we have ever resided in one place for such a long period of time. I feel as though this is where I now belong.

Totten et al (1987) highlight *persistence* as a contributing factor towards establishing a deep sense of connectedness. My persistence can be traced throughout my stories, especially in stories 3 and 11b.

5.3.3 Theme 7: Separateness

The policy of Apartheid had far-reaching consequences not only geographically, but also economically, educationally and culturally (Unesco, 1967). Apartheid policies were designed to ensure the 'separateness' of its African, coloured, Indian, and white people on the basis of skin colour (Omond, 1986).

Not only did I have to cope with insitutionalised separateness but also separateness at a very personal and individual level.

As a child, I used to feel separate and different from my siblings and friends due to my chronic illness and the mismanagement thereof. I was physically separated from my friends by not being allowed to play with them. As an

adolescent in high school, I also felt different and separate since I was not allowed to participate in any sports activities due to my asthma. As I prepared to leave high school, I had a distinct feeling of separateness since my peers who had attained a university exemption went on to university. I also attained a university entrance pass (i.e. an exemption) but my family could not financially afford two children at university simultaneously.

From day one of my nursing career I felt as though I didn't belong in the nursing profession. Most of the young women who pursued nursing in those days were the ones who had no other option based on their academic achievements, or more accurately their lack of achievement.

Once I started studying through UNISA, I was the only one in my circle of friends and colleagues who was not pursuing a nursing degree. I felt separate.

Since I worked night duty a lot of the time, I missed out on a lot of fun events at the church and in the family. I was the only one in my family who would miss out on special celebrations like Christmas, New Year and Easter due to my working awkward shifts. I felt as though I was missing out on life and felt separated from my family at times when I should have felt connected.

Additionally, I am the only one in my immediate family who suffered from a chronic illness and who was ever hospitalized. I am the only one in my immediate family who has ever lived abroad for extended periods of time, the

only one who has given birth overseas, who married a student and who currently does not live in Cape Town. I am also the only one who has studied through correspondence, changed professions and moved constantly. Somehow my life has evolved in such a way that feelings of separateness seem to dominate my everyday experiences.

5.3.3 Theme 8: Aloneness

I grew up feeling a sense of constant aloneness. I was a loner a lot of the time, partly circumstantial (isolation resulting from my not being able to play like normal, healthy kids) and partly because I'd grown used to reading and preferred books rather than relationships. It would appear as though my latent needs for hiking, walking, gyming and making friends seems to be compensatory in terms of my trying to relive my childhood and adolescence.

When I peruse my stories, I notice that I hardly write about the times I lived in America. This is probably because it epitomizes the most difficult times in terms of interpersonal relationships and friends. This was the first time that Ruben and I had lived outside S.A. It was the first time I could take a brief break from full-time work. It was also the time when I was most available to build friendships. Initially I took people seriously when they invited me to "pop in" at their homes. I took them at their word and to my dismay discovered that when I did arrive on their doorsteps, I was certainly not welcome. I felt rejected. Aloneness became my companion.

The other period of my feeling utterly alone was when Daniel was a baby and we were living in Switzerland. I had had the experience of having taken care of 15 babies in a hospital nursery during my training as a midwife. I felt competent that I would be able to take care of one baby. I was in for a surprise. I remember one day crying out of sheer frustration – Daniel had been crying non-stop for hours. I did not know how to stop his crying, so in the end I started crying as well! My struggles in adjusting to my role as a first time mother in a foreign country created constant feelings of aloneness.

Studying through correspondence via UNISA has been a lonely experience as well. I felt quite nervous when I started my master's training since I'd been studying through correspondence for 13 years. My master's training marked the first time that I'd be in a classroom with fellow classmates at a university. This was anxiety provoking and a very lonely experience since I'd been the only one in the class who hadn't as yet been to university full-time.

My marriage to Ruben has been marked by loneliness. For the first ten years (story 3) of our married life, Ruben was either studying, attending university or actively involved in some or other political rally. I found myself feeling alone and lonely a lot of the time. Again, as in my childhood, my books (UNISA) became my constant companions. I felt that as long as I had a book with me, I'd be okay. During the dark lonely nights of working night duty in the ICU, sometimes without a colleague for twelve hours, books were my solace. During long, lonely business trips overseas, my books satisfied my need to talk with someone.

I was alone in Switzerland during the sixth month of my first pregnancy – it was summer holidays and most students had returned to their home countries. I was painfully alone during this time. Eating alone has always been hard for me. During this period it was even harder because I had to cook for myself and eat while feeling constantly nauseous.

Aloneness and loneliness was never as stark as during 1999 when Ruben lived in Cape Town. One night in particular comes to mind when I was scratching my eczema-ridden children with my UNISA book balancing on my knees while in bed, preparing for an assignment (story 3). I felt abandoned and left alone by Ruben. I was being stretched beyond my limits and he was in another province, oblivious to the torment I was going through.

Ruben was away when I went for clinical psychology entry interviews. I felt alone in my success. I felt that Ruben was the only one who had witnessed firsthand how I'd toiled to get through my undergraduate and Honours studies. Yet, when he returned from his trips, no celebration was facilitated.

I felt alone when I started the UNISA Clinical Psychology Master's Training program, not knowing whether I'd passed my exams and whether I'd be allowed to continue. One year later when another student was forced to leave the master's program due to having failed his Honours exams, I relived the potential trauma I'd feared experiencing the previous year.

I felt burnt out when I started my master's training. Everyone else seemed rested, enthusiastic and ready to embark on the program. I lacked the vitality I needed, and was too scared to admit it to anyone for fear that I might be victimized.

I felt alone when I requested time out from Agape during our mid-year break. I felt that no-one truly understood how much I needed time out to try and recuperate. That was the first time in seventeen years that I would ever be able to take time out without having to study for an exam or do an assignment.

Aloneness was what I struggled with in August 2000, when I was told by trainer B to pick up garbage (story 10). Ruben, as usual, was away. I was seriously contemplating withdrawing myself from the Master's program. I felt that I would not be able to cope with this kind of disrespect and disregard for another one and a half years. It was a long lonely weekend. I had anticipated receiving some support from my trainers on the Monday morning. Alas, I was left feeling even more alone and misunderstood.

Moustakas (1961) draws one's attention to some of the advantages of aloneness. Two of the advantages outlined by Moustakas (1961) resonate with me, namely firstly the strengthening of sensitivities and awareness and secondly the increasing of fortitude. I do believe that these qualities are advantageous to a psychotherapist.

5.3.4 Theme 9: Change

Stories 1, 3, 6, 7 and 13 illustrate that I have been exposed to change from an early age; change in living environments, change in school environments, change in health status, change in community, church and dietary habits.

I had to learn to adapt to change from an early age. As a child I felt I was being doubly punished – first for having asthma and then for being prohibited from eating chocolates, ice-cream and my favourite fruits. I used to cry because I was forced to eat dry bread and herbs and my brother and sister could eat whatever they wanted. Not that luxuries were part of everyday life, but when we got treats at the end of the month (on payday) I felt excluded. I used to try and hide my asthma attacks from my parents so they wouldn't have to spend money on doctors and medication. While adapting to change became the norm, what remained constant and stable was my excelling at school.

In later life, as I adapted to living in different cultural environments and adapting to different climates, the one constant was that I studied through UNISA wherever I lived and moved.

As a nurse, I subjected my body to tremendous changes, particularly when I used to work night duty. I would drastically cut down on sleep and rather spend those hours studying. I would sacrifice meals and walk as opposed to drive long distances in order to ensure that I had sufficient money to pay my

tuition fees were paid up. Rather than succumb to emotions like exhaustion, sadness and feeling overwhelmed, while working in the ICU, I would suppress my feelings. I would then develop tension headaches, insomnia and loss of appetite but wanted to appear to be coping.

As can be gleaned from my stories, I have moved several times since marrying Ruben (eighteen times altogether on three different continents). These moves do not include my moving as a child. Constant adjustment and re-adjustment to changing circumstances is probably an asset to me in my future career as a psychologist where the nature of one's work is based on people's capacity to bring about change within themselves.

We were living in America when Nelson Mandela was released from prison. What a day! We longed to be home in S.A. and in Paarl where Mandela was emerging from prison. Ruben and I cried together for the first time – we were witnessing the beginning of the positive political change process in S.A.

My most positive and advantageous experience of change was probably during the two years of living in Switzerland. Here my change of worldview (story 7), from a linear to an ecosystemic perspective, began to take shape and crystallize. I was exposed not only to the stories of feminists, liberals and radical black theologians, but I also met them in person at a conference. All that I had been "schooled" to believe in was fundamentally challenged, and I grappled with issues that had an enormous impact on my life. For example, on a sociopolitical level, I realized that I was not inferior to any white person.

On a spiritual level, I realized that one's commitment to God encompassed far more than disengaging from carnal vices.

I had worked as a maid, an assistant nurse and a counterhand in Switzerland and America and had to adapt to being treated as such. It seemed to be easier for me to handle the effects of discrimination while I was working as maid and counterhand than as an assistant nurse.

Adaptation to change, prior to Daniels' birth, went so well in Switzerland that momentarily I had forgotten that I was coloured (story 7). The impact of giving birth in a foreign hospital with a German-English dictionary in hand and rearing a child as a first time mother in a foreign country marked my most tumultuous change experience.

Having to readjust to living back in S.A. in 1992, where change was imminent, but had not as yet begun to take shape was extremely difficult. The day when we cast our first vote as "free" South Africans, on 27 April 1994, marked the official beginning of tremendous and permanent change in S.A.

Barbarin and Richter (2001) mention that when parents cope well, they seem to provide an antidote to the adverse effects their children encounter. Furthermore, they (Barbarin & Richter) postulate that adaptive families tend to produce children who are able to cope with change and adversity. My parents seemed to have assimilated and transmitted to their children what Frankl

(1984) calls a 'tragic optimism'- the capacity to remain optimistic regardless of one's changing circumstances.

5.3.5 Theme 10: Fragmentation

Agherdien et al (1997) point out that the Group Areas Act wasn't merely an administrative procedure that resulted in people moving from one place to another, but it was the a process of *fragmenting* and uprooting settled communities.

One could argue that fragmentation preceded my birth (story 11a) and continued to pervade my life up until very recently, including during my training (story 10). Koka (1996) outlines the detrimental consequences that community fragmentation has on the self, namely irreparable harm to one's self-image, self-love and self-identity. These consequences can be detected and inferred in some of the stories (e.g. stories 3 and 10) in the attached Appendix.

I feel quite overwhelmed when I read through my stories and encounter the pace at which I used to move from one situation into the next and constantly switch roles. It seemed as though the parts of my being were split off from one another and I come across as quite fragmented a lot of the time (stories 3 and 10).

At work, I had to self-monitor constantly in order to ensure that I would not divulge my psychology studies (story 3). I used to excuse myself early from business get-togethers in order to create time to devote to my UNISA studies.

My life used to be marked by constantly rushing. I was always aware that I could not afford to waste any precious moment. I always had a UNISA book hidden in my bag. I would study while standing in long queues to pay bills, in peak hour traffic, on business trips, and during air travel. Public holidays were always utilized as study time. Sundays when everyone else was enjoying an afternoon nap and Christmas and New Year when everyone else was partying, I was studying.

Since starting this dissertation, I have been able to spend a lot more time with my children. They teach me how to live in the moment, to take time to smell the roses in our garden, to enjoy nature, walking, going to gym and walking the dogs. I am learning to appreciate the everyday beauty of a bird chirping and the sun rising and setting. Previously I used to become quite agitated and found it very difficult to 'be in the moment'. Nowadays I see sitting in a traffic jam as an opportunity for reflection, to look around and admire nature. I enjoy having picnics with my daughter in the front garden. I am content with the home I'm living in. At times I enjoy living comfortably and at other times I try to find meaning when we struggle to make ends meet. I do not constantly feel the urge, like I once used to, to have more, own more or want more.

Very recently (story 13) I experienced a sense of wholeness as opposed to fragmentation. I had been invited to a Christian women's group to talk about the impact of AIDS. This seemed to mark a beginning for me to be able to integrate my nursing, research, theology and psychology training.

Having come from deprivation and being on the brink of being able to enter the job market as a qualified psychologist, I find myself rethinking my values and enjoying the sheer luxury of entertaining options.

5.4 CONCLUSION

One particular theme, namely 'loss' emerges from all the stories and could be considered the pervasive and dominant theme. Some themes like 'quest for education and 'determination' are prominent in the majority of the stories, while others like 'finding meaning despite suffering' and 'fragmentation' are minor themes, yet pertinent enough for me to explore even though they appear in very few of the stories.

The first five identified themes are the more explicit themes and are more directly identifiable – hence they are called initial themes. The last five themes are of a more implicit nature, are less direct and hence are called inferred themes.

There is a lot of overlap between the themes, and the artificial boundaries drawn between them were done for practical reasons. As indicated at the

beginning of this chapter, the distinctions drawn, and the inferences made should not be considered conclusive and exhaustive. However, given the requirements for the completion of this dissertation these are the punctuations I chose at this point in time.