

# chapter one

## CO-SEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

During the course of the past few months I<sup>1</sup> frequently found myself sitting, my fingers poised on the computer keyboard - just sitting. Not moving, but staring at the computer screen as conflicting ideas, emotions and energy levels flitted across the spectrum of my being. At the core of these conflicting ideas, emotions, and energy levels is the question: “How?” How am I going to start writing about this monstrous thing called missing children? How am I going to tell Michelle’s story in a respectful, non-hurtful way? Can I find a way that will not make her relive over and over again the absolute desolation of the time when Matthew went missing? Will the fact that I choose to position myself as a feminist co-searcher be enough to tell her story in a way that completely centres Michelle and her experiences? Will my personal praxis of pastoral care be enough to cushion her against the effects of answering questions, telling, reading, reliving, remembering – all it takes to re-knit the yarn of her story? How am I going to tell her story in a way that creates and engenders hope for herself, for her family and for other readers?

Inevitably the sitting and staring at the computer would culminate in me getting up from my chair and choosing rather to find something else to do. I would go into squirrel-mode: feverishly collecting every written word I can find on the subject of missing children. I would read furiously and ponder and reflect furiously. I would also speak to Michelle endlessly – enquiring of her whether it will *really* be OK for me to write her story. Are things really the way they seem to me? On many occasions we would speak late into the night. It was almost as if I did not want to let go of Michelle. She must make this project of “missing children” acceptable for me to tell. I would visit her

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<sup>1</sup> According to Jones (1990:176-177), “Postmodernism celebrates the constructedness of accounts thus opening a gap for authors to legitimately reveal themselves in their work, to include our explicit subjective presence in our writing”.

frequently and we would talk and talk. Everything I read in my squirrel cache of references I would check with her: “Michelle, is this the way it was for you? Is this what you experienced? How would you rather say this?”

I would find myself swept up in a fight against time and emotion. I would find myself wanting to protect someone who has become more than a friend. I would find myself wanting to make it all better for her. I would find myself wanting to go out there and scream from the rooftops at the people responsible for taking Matthew away from her to bring him back to her. I would find myself wanting to take on the big world out there ... and to make it all better for my friend.

As I am confronted by the task of writing about missing children, all these emotions and desires are enveloped within the hesitancy I feel. This hesitancy is fed by my fear that in writing this story I will not do justice to the being of losing a child (Anglin 1996:93).

A far greater fear, though, is: “What if I did *not* write about Michelle’s story?” What would happen if I contributed to yet another silencing of her voice? How could I write about the phenomenon of missing children in a way that would be different from just another piece of literature? What would alert the authorities to the fact that a child going missing is more than a mere number or statistic - more than a mere file in one of their endless filing cabinets?

A different kind of fear about writing Michelle’s story is entrenched in the fact that I am actually in the process of constructing an academic document and that research tradition demands a specific kind of academic writing. How am I going to do the writing of Michelle’s story without my personal narrative making itself fully felt? (Dudley-Marling 1996:36) Fortunately, delving into my squirrel-cache of literary sources results in me finding the writing of Allen and Barber (1992:10-11). They attempt to deconstruct the notion of including the personal in feminist writing and research and conclude that self-disclosure is an important and unique part of feminist research methods. According to them, if the researcher did not self-disclose during the research project, the researcher would be with the participant(s) in an unethical way by seeking to

maintain a false neutrality towards the participant(s). Confronting one's personal experience with the issue at hand is an important part of the feminist research process. When the researcher self-discloses, it encourages the participant(s) to speak the unspoken.

Reinharz (1992:33) speaks of Ann Bristow and Jody Esper who see the researcher's self-disclosure as "true dialogue" that allows the participant(s) to become "co-researchers". I have to agree with Susan Griffin when she states that she wrote "associatively and went underneath logic" (Griffin 1978:74). This is what I experienced during Michelle's knitting of her story. Mary Simpson Poplin (1996:67) pleads for the researcher to be authentic. Being with Michelle in the knitting of her story touched and changed my life: it became a "relation rather than an activity" (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:172). It would be disrespectful of me not to recount this fact.

I ponder whether this discomfort I continually experience when referring to "our project" as research is founded. I re-read the previous paragraph and I scan the literature again. I settle on the idea that within feminist research it would be acceptable to speak of "our project" as co-search rather than as research. In fact, it would be disrespectful of me not to.

## **1.2 CO-SEARCH AND METHODOLOGY**

In the following section I will discuss the "moment of insertion" (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17) into this research project and the consequent research questions and aims that followed from this moment of insertion.

### **1.2.1 Background and co-search questions**

#### **1.2.1.1 Background to the co-search project**

Almost every missing child incident is a story not simply of a child, but also of a family plunged into crises. The focus of most missing children efforts to date understandably has been on finding missing children, reuniting them with their families and prosecuting offenders. But relatively little attention has been paid to the families of missing children, who experience enormous trauma and strain – for which nothing can prepare them – from the first awareness that their child is missing until a final resolution is reached (if ever it is).

I attended a workshop on Hope by David Epston on 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> August 2002 in Somerset West, South Africa. On 20<sup>th</sup> August 2002, my husband brought the *Cape Argus* home and left it on the kitchen counter. As I had been so sensitised to the concept of hope during the Epston workshop, my eye immediately caught the front-page article entitled "*Mom's tears as hope fades*" (Appendix 2). As I hardly ever pay any newspaper any attention, noticing this article stands with me concerning the role of destiny in terms of my involvement with the cause of missing children in our country. I read the article and knew (Heshusius & Ballard 1996a) that I had to contact Michelle and Michael Ohlsson and offer to stand with them in the loss of their son, Matthew, in a way that they preferred (Morgan 2002:2).

The next day I contacted Lynette Johns, the reporter who had written the article. I asked her whether she had the Ohlsson's telephone number and if she thought I could contact them. She gave me their number, which I then duly dialled. I explained the reason for my call to Michelle and she agreed to see me the next day. For me, this telephone call marks the 'moment of insertion [which] located [my] pastoral response in the lived experience of individuals and communities' (Cochrane, de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17). This meeting was the beginning of a life-changing journey for me.

I began my personal journey of life in a home where my father suffered much because he chose to stand with marginalised people. Yet, he chose to stay with this practice and in this way instilled in me the notion that this was the way to be in relation to others. Throughout my early years – from toddlerhood to young adulthood - my father was subjected to frequent abuse and threats at the hands of an elitist, politically motivated, Afrikaner secret group because he refused to subject himself to their stated and implied rules and regulations regarding the people with whom he chose to associate himself. The effects of the power which this secret organisation wielded in our small rural community, and in the country as a whole, markedly impacted on his business and on our family life. Yet my father stood firm in the face of their subjugating ways and chose to remain loyal to his friends.

This is the legacy he left with me. It is also the legacy I choose to adopt for myself as I embark on my journey with the struggle for the rights of missing children in our country. This legacy empowers me to tell Michelle's story, thereby giving voice to the pain and desolation of losing a child into the mist of nothingness and not-knowing. It is by living my legacy that I invite the use of the total person into my co-search (Gallagher 1996:119). I realise that many difficult days lie ahead of me as the powers-that-be in our country are confronted regarding the issue of missing children. Power-politics never seem to design occasions for equality and fairness (Freedman & Combs 1996a:37-40). Allen and Baber (1992:3) mention that

Feminists are called on to stand for principles that are congruent with their theories and practices.

This statement aids my knowing that a certain course of action on my behalf with respect to the missing children issue in our country is inevitable. I find myself agreeing with John K Smith (1996:85) when he remarks that "it is one thing to 'know' something, it is another thing to know something." I realise that merely to be aware of the incidence of something – this shallow knowing that almost borders on unconsciousness – is light years away from the embodied 'knowing' of something: what Michelle has taught me about losing a child, about pain, about hope and about friendship.

Until I read that Cape Argus article on 20 August 2002, no single community matter had impacted on me enough for me to know with certainty that this was what I wanted to dedicate my clinical and research energies towards. Heshusius and Ballard (1996a:ix) write that

Knowing is not always dispassionate, and it is always personal. Its forms are rooted in feeling as well as in the cool light of reason. Knowing is embodied and having a sense of rightness, a nose for fit, a feeling of coherence matters.

For the first time, I became alerted to and conscious of the incidence of missing children. This realization touched my heart and my being and jolted me into wakefulness. It was only when I visited Michelle for the first time that I really began to live the legacy I had grown up with. Whereas previously,

although I had been involved with many community struggles, none have had the permanency that my involvement with missing children has had. Heshusius and Ballard (1996a:2) speak of one's physical reaction towards the stories of others.

Reading that newspaper article that day was like an epiphany: for the first time the issue of missing children became embodied. Even though I had not personally been subjected to the horrors of having a child go missing for a considerable length of time, I could recall the time when my son disappeared for two hours one Saturday afternoon when he was about seven years old. He had gone to ride his bicycle with some friends without telling me. I will never forget the horror of that day: combing the streets looking for him whilst screaming at God to bring him back to me; the café owner telling me that he had been there about 45 minutes previously; phoning other parents to find out if maybe he was with them; yelling and crying in the park where he used to play under my supervision; feeling as if I was going insane with worry. And then the utter and all-encompassing relief when he rode into the yard, unscathed. I have only the recollection of these horrific two hours to guide my being with Michelle and her experience of Matthew's disappearance. Will it be enough? Keith Ballard (1996b:105) stresses that all researchers cannot have authentic voices in terms of all problems, but that researchers can address problems as the problems form part of the social arrangement of a society which fails to support the victims of the problems.

The more I became involved with Michelle, her family and the people who form part of her organisation, the more I knew I *had* to tell her story. I knew that I needed to educate myself regarding the phenomenon of missing children in the world and, specifically, in our country. I knew that I would have to write about this phenomenon and in this way facilitate the hearing of Michelle's voice. I had already embarked upon a course which requires a dissertation: this could provide a useful vehicle for the initial telling of Michelle's story and the theoretical and epistemological placement of it. From my involvement with Michelle and hearing her story, the following co-search question came to the fore.

### **1.2.2 Co-search question**

This co-search report focuses on a single co-search question:

What does pastoral care and counselling for the parents of missing children in a disadvantaged community involve?

This research question guided me to formulate the research aims set out below.

### **1.2.3 Co-search aims**

Burr (1995:162) writes that the aims of social constructionist researchers should not be the discovery of “facts”, but the mobilisation of the research towards a different goal. This goal is of a more political orientation, where the research focuses on bringing about change for those who need it rather than the gathering of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. Melrose (1996:51-53) cautions against the value-ladenness of research aims. According to her, however, reflexivity assists in counteracting the effects of such value-ladenness.

At the outset of this project I had contracted with Michelle that it would be of a collaborative and participatory nature. In formulating the co-search aim, I was aware of the fact that the co-search aim I formulated was more important to me than to Michelle. Although I had discussed most of the co-research eventualities with Michelle, there are ethical considerations in constructing the co-search aim without her input. I was also mindful of Janesick’s (1994) caution that:

Because working in the field is unpredictable a good deal of the time, the qualitative researcher must be ready to adjust schedules, to be flexible about interview times and about adding or subtracting observations or interviews, to replace participants in the event of trauma or tragedy, and even to rearrange term of the original agreement.

Ballard (1996b:105) warns that research can get really “messy” and that when this happens, the researcher should take care not to fall into the control-trap. When I consulted with Michelle again, we considered the possibility of rearranging the terms of the original agreement. We decided that I would take

care of the technical and reporting aspects of the project. She would then consider the initial draft, after which we would discuss the first draft and I would then make the mutually sanctioned changes.

Formulating the co-search aim for this project confronts me again with the “why” of the project. Asking “Why?” leads me to a part of the answer. I wanted to become a part of Michelle’s journey for reasons that were simplistic to me at my moment of insertion: journeying with Michelle would be both a confirmation of my personhood and an expression of the doing of pastoral care.

Dudley-Marling (1996:34) clarified part of my assumptions about my position by stating that being in research connects who we are in private with who we are in public; it connects the personal with the professional. My assumptions about the doing of pastoral care and counselling were not so easily satisfied. This led me to the formulation of the first of three co-search aims for the project. The second and third co-search aims follow from the aspects considered during the course of the co-search.

The first research aim is to consider how pastoral care would reveal itself within the scope of working with parents of missing children within an economically disadvantaged community. More specifically, how pastoral care and counselling would reveal itself in terms of Michelle and her family.

I would endeavour to research the theory and praxis of pastoral care as it is described in the available literature, to see how applicable the notions suggested by the literature are to Michelle and her family. I would also make possible suggestions about alternative and/or contributing areas that may be considered in the pastoral care of parents whose children have gone missing. The question of ethics and doing pastoral care in terms of the parents of missing children will also be addressed here.

Pastoral praxis can be described as the self-creative activity through which we make the world (Lather 1991:11). Praxis requires grounding in a theory

that is relevant to the world, but that is also supported by the actions it prompts (Lather 1991:12).

The second research aim would be an attempt to explain the concepts of hope and meaning-making and to discover whether the concept of hope contributes to helping the parents of missing children to cope. Whenever I discuss the matter of Matthew's disappearance with Michelle, or the disappearance of their children with other parents of missing children, the topic of hope invariably arises. The core of the candle lighting ceremony (to be discussed in Chapter 4), which forms part of the finale of all Concerned Parents of Missing Children (CPMC) activities, is hope.

The third research aim is to endeavour to define the term "missing child"; to distinguish between a missing child and a run-away child and to establish what the relevance of such a distinction is. The third research aim will also seek to provide the most recent South African statistics in terms of missing children. It is to be noted at the outset, though, that the Minister of Police has placed an explicit moratorium on the provision of any statistics of this nature. It is also proposed that the report will highlight the plight of missing children and their parents. Kenneth Wooden, in his address to the United States House of Representatives (1984:55), briefly reflects on the plight of missing children, when he states that these priceless children:

are being treated like garbage. Raped and killed, their young bodies are discarded in plastic bags, on trash trucks and left on dumps....Like litter, they are thrown into lakes, rivers, and streams – the tender drift wood of life. Some are found on roadsides like empty soda and beer cans....or cast aside like broken furniture in dirty, empty houses or stripped, abandoned in cars in wooded or swamp areas....Poor little wilted flowers, plucked from the vases of home and safety of parents, are, in large part, left unburied and alone in the openness of fields – and now the closed minds of our thoughts.

(Best 1987:109)

Although this research project was guided by the above research aims, I was also guided by a feminist co-search methodology.

#### **1.2.4 Co-search methodology**

#### 1.2.4.1 Feminist research

It would seem that action research and feminist research have similar goals:

Action research is *emancipatory* when it aims not only at technical and practical improvement and the participants' better understanding, along with transformation and change within the existing boundaries and conditions, but also at changing the system itself or those conditions which impede desired improvement in the system/organisation. It also aims at the participants' empowerment and self-confidence about their ability to create 'grounded theory'.

(Zuber-Skerritt 1996:5)

When Zuber-Skerritt (1996:5) refers to action research as *emancipatory*, it would seem as if she is referring to the liberating nature of action research. This is what Dale Spender (in Reinharz 1992:7) alludes to as well when commenting about feminism in the following way:

at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial insight that there is no one truth, no one authority, no one objective method which leads to the production of pure knowledge. This insight is as applicable to feminist knowledge as it is to patriarchal knowledge, but there is a significant difference between the two: feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understandings.

It would seem as if Zuber-Skerritt and Dale Spender choose to allude to feminist research as a perspective on an existing method in a given field rather than a method *per se*. Feminist research is undeniably connected to theory, but it is also connected to social change and social policy, or consciousness-raising questions. Explicit policy recommendations are typical in feminist research – the question of “how can we bring about change?” Feminist research can be described as being dual-visioned as it seeks to contribute to knowledge and to the welfare of women (Reinharz 1992:251). Feminist research also recognises women's diversity:

Women are both different among themselves, and different from men, and such diversity must be accommodated in any women's history .... Beyond acknowledgement of diversity among the groups of women, there is the need to acknowledge the diversity of each individual woman.

(Jill Matthews 1984:18)

Feminist research occupies the space between either/or, between black and white – the middle ground. The space between is what Foucault terms the binary opposites. Reinharz (1992:16) mentions that feminist researchers can - and must - speak *out* for others. She also notes how many feminist writers report that “finding one’s voice” is a crucial process of research. During the “finding one’s voice” phase of the research, the researcher begins to understand the researched phenomenon and finds a way of communicating that understanding.

Janesick (1994:217) notes that it requires passion for a researcher to become immersed in a qualitative research project: passion for people, passion for communication and passion for the understanding of people. This passion finds itself rooted in the wellspring of one’s bodily knowing, the somatic knowing that Heshusius and Ballard (1996a) alludes to. That research is now more accepting of the *being in research* of a researcher is a far cry from the dispassionate stance which a researcher was expected to take up until the very recent past – and in some fields is still expected to take.

In writing this research project, I am continually confronted by the question of position: am I writing as a researcher, or co-searcher, as I prefer to view myself? Or am I not more of a concerned citizen with the necessary time, funds and opportunities and thus able to write about Michelle’s story because she has become my friend and I care for her so much?

Extensive exploration of the literature regarding feminist research, led me to the conclusion that this concern is what feminist researchers refer to as being at the heart of feminist research – someone who is enchanted with the act of knowing, fully participating at the spiritual, psychological, emotional and somatic levels of their being (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:4). I realised that this kind of being in research was as grounded as the dispassionate, emotionless, cold, measured research of other paradigms, especially since “both a mindful body and an embodied mind are needed to tap into somatic and emotive sources of knowing” (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:8). Michelle had *become* my research as much as I had *become* my research (Ballard 1996a:30). Research has become more of a relationship than an activity – a

relationship that acts *in* the world rather than on it (Heshusius & Ballard 1996c:172).

#### **1.2.4.2 Feminist Case Studies (FCS)**

Michelle's story would require using a form of research that makes such a revealing possible: a way to tell her telling. The narrative or case study method provides the opportunity for a story, over time, to unfold and for intimacies to be displayed. It would allow for her total personhood to participate in her telling and the recording and reporting of her telling. By using the feminist case study as a way of reporting Michelle's telling, it allows me to "pay careful attention to inner ways of knowing, to somatic and affective layers, so that we might consciously work on the evolution of our story." (Heshusius & Ballard 1996b:15).

Ballard (1996a:102-105) specifically draws the reader's attention to the importance of making use of stories, and thus case studies, in the research process. He refers to stories as "'tools of enchantment': magical experiences that can involve our whole selves and touch our soul, but which, nevertheless, can be exposed to critical reflection in terms of their social contribution to our understandings of theory and practice, values and ethics." Reinharz (1992:164) describes case studies as

a method of studying social phenomena through the thorough analysis of an individual case. The case may be a person, a group, an episode, a process, a community, a society, or any other unit of social life. All data relevant to the case are gathered, and all available data are organised in terms of the case. The case study method gives an unitary character to the data being studied by interrelating a variety of facts to a single case. It also provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details that are often overlooked with other methods.

In its broadest sense, feminist case studies refer to research that focuses on a single case or issue. Feminist case studies usually consist of a fully developed description of a single event, person, group, organisation or community. It makes use of, among others, interviews, survey results and observations. Feminist researchers select case studies so that they may study a particular point of theory that may be posed as a question. Feminist

case studies are written to illustrate ideas, to explain processes of development over time, to explore uncharted issues and to pose provocative questions.

Feminist researchers use case studies of individual lives as an important method of uncovering information. Feminist interest in case studies often stems from the wish to document aspects of women's lives and accomplishments for future analysis and action. Frequently feminist scholars set case studies in theory to allow analysis as well as the description of an issue. Case studies regularly are the source of experiential, analytic and historical information needed for feminists and activists to form an understanding of a particular area of women's lives. Case studies document history and generate theory. They defy the social science practice of seeking generalisations, working instead towards specificity, exceptions and completeness. Feminist researchers want to utilise the power of the case study to convey vividly the dimensions of a social phenomenon or individual life. "Telling the story of ..." is most often the way used to indicate that the format to be utilised is that of a case study (Reinharz 1992:164-174).

Doing research that is *with* people and not for or about people, assists us to choose our research projects in such a way that the knowledge gained promotes individual growth and maintains the caring community. My concern with doing research *with* Michelle has encouraged me to invite Michelle as an equal participant in this research project and not merely to view Michelle as an object whom I wanted to do research on.

## **1.2.5 Co-search process**

### **1.2.5.1 Participant**

McTaggart (1997b:28-29) notes that authentic participation in a research project means sharing in the way research is conceptualised, practised and brought to bear on the life-world of the participants. It also infers ownership of the research by the participants. In turn, this implies responsible agency by the participants in the production of knowledge and the improvement of practices. It calls for a collaborative stance towards the project, by both the researcher and participant(s). Collaboration in terms of the project ensures co-search *by* the participants and not research *on* the participants. When a stance of co-search by participants rather than research on participants is adopted, the coercion of participants and control over participants by the researcher is minimised. By striving for a position of 'insiderness' on the part of the participants and the researcher, collaboration becomes part of a shared research goal.

Patti Lather (1991:60) reflects on the relationship between the participant and researcher as one of reciprocity. The participant and researcher are in a both/and rather than an either/or relationship. Both researcher and participant are both pupil and teacher and all parties are co-labouring towards the same goal. This co-labouring towards the same goal undermines the chances of what Foucault terms "the indignity of speaking for others" (Lather 1991:99).

Feminist researchers often express a sense of connection or rapport with the people involved in the research project. Frequently this lasts beyond the duration of the research project and goes beyond the realm of the project. It enters the personal lives of the individuals involved as well as adding to the researcher's changing sense of self. This sense of connection is often what characterises feminist research. Feminist researchers give direct assistance to the women they study. This assistance is typical of the embodiment of the ethic of care that typically forms part of the feminist researcher.

Although the aforementioned rapport is often presumed in feminist research, one also needs to be aware of the possible structural barriers ensconced in feminist research – for instance class differences, ideological differences and gender differences. These increase the likelihood of filling the feminist

researcher's involvement in the lives of the research participants with ambiguity and controversy. Rapport with research participants should not be viewed as the only core prerequisite for feminist research. Relationships of respect, shared information, openness and clarity of communication are equally valuable during the research process.

The feminist researcher often uses a particular style of writing during her reporting of the case study to intrigue and capture the reader. The practices she employs may include quotes from interviews, self-disclosure by the researcher, addressing the reader, the inclusion of documentation like letters, etcetera (Reinharz 1996:263-269).

Michelle Ohlsson is the only participant I am including in this report. She explicitly chose to use no pseudonym for herself. Her husband, Michael, and her children, Melanie, Justin and Jason, were unanimous in their decisions to forego using any pseudonyms. Michelle and her family emphatically stated that they stood for justice towards missing children and that they wanted to exercise their option of using their given names. Michelle is 35 years old and lives in Mitchell's Plain with her husband, Michael, her daughter, Melanie, and her sons, Justin and Jason. Michelle's son, Matthew, was stolen from the yard outside their home in Mitchell's Plain six years ago when he was nine years old. He has not been seen or heard of since. Two years after Matthew's disappearance, Michelle and Michael formed a non-profit organisation called Concerned Parents of Missing Children (CPMC) which aims to assist other parents on numerous levels when their children go missing. CPMC also plays a large educational role in the community. Michelle is involved in extensive community projects under the auspices of CPMC.

Although CPMC functions more often in the Mitchell's Plain community and the communities closely surrounding Mitchell's Plain, none of the members of CPMC have ever been daunted by the prospect of operating in any other area or in any other culture. Michelle, who speaks both English and Afrikaans fluently, is widely known as a public speaker and addresses people from any culture or background.

As Michelle and I do not share the same cultural background, it was thus important for myself, as the researcher, to take note of respectful cross-cultural conversations. Being guided with a concern for participation, I needed to acknowledge cultural differences and not impose my own cultural beliefs and practices on Michelle. Doing so would only marginalise Michelle's ways of being and therefore impinge on the value of equal participation.

### **1.2.5.2 Cultural considerations**

McTaggart (1997b:31) notes that culture can be defined in terms of the "characteristic substance and forms of the language and discourses, activities and practices and social relationships and organisation that constitute the interactions of the group." Krause (1998:1) remarks that "everywhere we turn, culture is the basis of some sort of classification, of whether people receive or are denied resources, of whether specific policies operate or not."

On reading the stories told by Barbara Wingard and Jane Lester (Wingard & Lester 2001) I was struck, once again, by the fact that to disregard one's culture, or in this instance, the culture of the research participant, would be to discount the being in the world of someone. Wingard and Lester (2001:vi-vii) stress the importance of taking into account the culture of the people with whom we are journeying:

We must make it possible for people to be able to tell their stories in ways that are right for them. With Aboriginal people this means thinking through what would be a comfortable place for the conversations. It might mean sitting out on the lawn. The conversation might not be called counselling, but instead just talking together under the trees. Sometimes the environment and the way that people sit together makes it more likely for people to tell their stories. We also need to take care how we begin our conversations .... This process all happens before we think about talking about our own lives....Our people understand the significance of our stories ....As Indigenous people of this country, our stories are precious.

By staying cognisant of the differences in our cultures, we could ensure that both Michelle and I practised mutual transparency and accountability on a personal level, but also in terms of the co-search project. Transparency and

accountability reflect a certain ethical stance. I strived to position myself in such a way that I was more likely to be transparent about my association with certain ideologies - for instance, gender, patriarchy, feminism, liberalism, postmodernism, etcetera. I found that being open and transparent also brought safety into the relationship and allowed me to position myself outside of the role as the “expert” (White 1991; Freedman & Combs 1996a; Elliot 1997).

Accountability refers to being open about the possible “privileged” position I might be seen to have in our relationship. Michelle had already been abused and exploited by international, so-called community workers and researchers, various local and international reporters, and other individuals in positions of power in our country. My sense of ethics and integrity forbade me to position myself in such a way that I could be counted as another one of Michelle’s exploiters. Therefore I discussed with Michelle my positioning in our relationship at length during our second meeting. We made a pact that she would indicate to me - either by telling me face-to-face, telephoning me, or writing to me - if ever she experienced the presence of abuse in our relationship. I am very aware that my constructed reality is not necessarily Michelle’s constructed reality. Accountability allows me to discuss any assumptions with Michelle (White 1991; Freedman & Combs 1996a; Elliot 1997). It is fortunate that the notion of power has ceased to be an issue in our relationship, as Michelle is mostly the expert in the situations we experience. Most postmodern, social constructionist, feminist and narrative authors regard transparency and accountability as vital matters when cultural differences are at play in any relationship, whether of a therapeutic or research nature.

On scanning my available literature on culture and ethnicity, I am confronted with the decision about how deeply I want to venture into the quagmire of the culture debate for the purposes of this study. Would it suffice to say that I was aware of the cultural differences between Michelle and myself, that I was aware that these cultural differences might impact on our relationship to a certain extent, and then to list some of these cultural differences? If culture is indeed a social construction and thus maintained, reconstituted and changed

through social relationships, both public and private, general and intimate (Krause 1998:4), would it not mean that Michelle and I could then reconstitute our own space where culture, as previously defined, is not an issue although there may be an awareness on both our sides? A space where a curiosity about our 'differentness' makes us similar, if not necessarily the same? A space where we are even in our formed-over-time understanding of our specific relationship? A space where we could create our own story? (Howard 1991:192). I think that we have to accept that this is possible as it happened in this way. Goodyear (1992:207) notes that

Cross-cultural awareness is a *way of life* and need no longer be consciously sought. The individual is comfortable in all human environments, responding appropriately, but effortlessly and spontaneously. Although the individual is aware of how others, be they of majority or minority background may perceive his or her actions and responses, this is not a major factor determining behaviour in cross-cultural situations.

During the course of this project, the following cultural possibilities will be considered, although I am aware that this list is not exhaustive: both Michelle and I are victims, in our own specific ways, of the Apartheid legacy of South Africa; Ubuntu<sup>2</sup>-practising comes more naturally to Michelle than to me; I could be seen as the latest white Messiah; I could also be seen as exploitative of the situation - a position which raises the issue of trust; socio-economic differences are evident; and finally, the practising of our respective religions are different.

As mentioned previously, Michelle and I discussed the possibility that cultural differences might impact our relationship quite openly and specifically during the course of our second meeting. Our contract to question each other about our differences and in that way to create a space where our differences could be dealt with and thus become non-issues proved to be both revelatory and enriching to us both.

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<sup>2</sup> Ubuntu describes the central cultural values of African people; their peoplehood. It denotes the "centrality of human beings in society". It affirms commitment to community (Thomas 1997:54, 67-68).

Creating space for participatory actions amongst Michelle and myself has also resulted in us negotiating the research process. In the following section I elaborate on how this research process was co-constructed between Michelle and myself.

### **1.2.5.3 Co-search Procedures**

When I contacted Michelle on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2002, I was in *no* way considering the possibility of using her story as the topic of my research project. I contacted her solely as her story resonated with something within me and I thought that I might be of some assistance to her in her journey of coping with Matthew's disappearance. It is only after I got to know Michelle, and other parents of missing children, that we decided, together, that I might use her story as the topic of my research project. We hoped that in this way we would add to her voice and draw attention to the incidence of missing children.

Writing letters to Michelle, using the narrative way (to be discussed in Chapter 5), became a way of documenting her story. As our relationship progressed, we saw so much of each other that this practise dwindled into nothing. When the documentation of the research project started, Michelle made a tape recording of her story for me to refer to during the writing-up process of the project. Much of this "research" is a lived experience for me and a process of writing myself into being (Heshusius 1996:130). Over the past year I have become so involved with Michelle's family life and her organisation, CPMC. The co-search procedure of this co-search project reflects more of a selection of relevant information from lived experience and less of procedural decisions that were exactly followed. But if I were to attempt an outline of the research procedure, it would include the following:

- Collecting information
- Compiling a written report
- Submitting the written report to Michelle for verification
- Discussing and making the changes suggested by Michelle
- Incorporating the changes
- Resubmitting the written report to Michelle
- Including Michelle's reflections as the finale to the report

#### **1.2.5.4 Collecting information**

As discussed above, the collecting of information was initially a non-issue, as her story was not intended to form the topic of this co-search project. However, the information to be used in the recording of her story, is information gathered from interviewing Michelle, documenting our interviews by means of case notes and writing narrative letters to her with the case notes as basis. Michelle and her children also recorded two audiotapes, which I transcribed, giving the small details of her story. As our relationship developed, I became more and more involved with Michelle's life as a whole and with CPMC.

I frequently noted my reflections and thoughts regarding these times by jotting down ideas on any available piece of paper, filing these pieces of paper for no apparent reason at that stage, recording reflections in a more structured journal and, often, by discussing my thoughts directly with Michelle. Telephonic conversations constitute a large part of my information gathering. Speaking with other parents of missing children also aided my understanding of Michelle's story. All of the documents regarding Matthew's disappearance, CPMC, some police records, and press articles also form part of my collected information. Much of my information gathering is lived experience, which I constantly reflect on with Michelle. Michelle verified the authenticity of my recollections of my lived experience by reading the report and suggesting corrections.

#### **1.2.5.5 Reporting**

The co-search report on Michelle's story was in the form of a case study. As I completed a section of the report, I submitted the completed section to Michelle for verification and suggested changes. This report has, from the outset, been a collaborative attempt, between Michelle and I, at writing up her story.

It is hoped that this report might be reworked into a booklet for the commercial market that will create awareness regarding missing children.

The proceeds from the sale of the booklet might be used for the furthering of the cause of missing children and of CPMC specifically.

Feminist research required me to do research ethically, according to the ethical considerations discussed in the following section.

#### **1.2.5.6 Ethical considerations – transparency, reflexivity, accountability**

Ethical standards that guide feminist practice arise from assumptions about the nature of truth. These assumptions characterise certain ways of thinking and knowing, and thus represent an epistemology or standpoint. Such a standpoint is not something that a woman has simply because of her gender, but rather it is something that develops over time through intellectual and political struggles against inequality (Allen & Barber 1992:1-15). Taking a feminist ethical stance will include considering the following questions:

- Am I, through my enterprises, making the world a better place for subjugated persons?
- Am I prepared to allow the personal to become the political?
- Am I prepared to adopt open and inclusive research methods?
- Am I prepared to self-disclose to avoid false neutrality?
- Am I prepared to speak the unspoken?
- Am I prepared to engage in a position of reflexivity?
- Am I prepared to stand with those who form part of the research project? (Allen & Barber 1992:1-15)

Dirk Kotzé (2002:1-34) discusses the need for engaging in participatory ethics, or, as Heshusius and Ballard (1996) express it: “knowing *with* the other – a participatory process distinct from a Western perspective of *knowing the other* or *about the other*.” During this research project I was concerned that Michelle, who in the past had been silenced and marginalised due to her race and gender, should be an equal participant who could benefit from participating in this research project. Kotzé (2002:18) comments that by engaging in participatory ethics, “[t]hose who have a voice and power have an ethical obligation to use the privilege of their knowledge/power to ensure

participation with the marginalised and silenced, to listen *to* them, but not to decide *for* them, and to engage in participatory solidarity *with* them.” As such, my central and guiding challenge as researcher is to be guided by the question, “Who benefits?” (Kotzé 2002:18).

The question, “Who benefits?” (Kotzé 2002:18) raises ethical considerations of transparency, reflexivity and accountability. These will be discussed more fully, although not exhaustively, due to the constraints incumbent to the writing of a dissertation.

*Transparency.* Transparency refers to the process of deconstructing the hierarchy that is based on unrevealed expert ideas about what is best for the client. If the therapeutic process is to be co-creative, then transparency allows for the process to be shared between the therapist and client. In this way the therapist can bring knowledge to the relationship and the client has an equal voice in deciding what is acceptable or not.

White (1991:30), in describing therapeutic practices, states that the therapist needs to be “transparent” about her own values, explaining enough about her situation and life experiences that people understand her as a person rather than viewing her as an expert or conduit for professional knowledge. Situating comments helps to flatten the hierarchical structure that positions the therapist as the expert (Freedman & Combs 1996a:276). The practice of transparency does not, however, centre the therapist, or researcher in this case, as it allows the client/participant to ask questions, make comments and take decisions (Friedman 2001:219-220).

Participatory discussions around the issues concerning values and ideologies, where ideas are not imposed and choices are free, help both researcher and participants to explore and navigate their positions, the effects of their positions and what ideas and practices they prefer.

*Reflexivity.* According to the social constructionist discourse, reflexivity refers to the way that theory reconstitutes the role of the research participants, their relationship to the researcher and the significance of their

tellings. The significance of the tellings of the research participants implies also that the telling is simultaneously a description of the event and part of the event due to the constitutive nature of talk. Reflexivity also refers to the reflections of the social constructionist discourse on other theories (Burr 1995:161).

Steier (1991a:2) describes reflexivity as a “bending back on itself.” It is a circular process which views the constant questioning of oneself with regards to one’s research methodology and the research process in general as an integral part of the research. Self-reflexivity unavoidably leads to a position of ethics. Reflexivity is liberating rather than debilitating (Steier 1991b:168). Reflexivity allows the researcher to be *in* the research. It protects the researcher from taking an expert position as a constant self-questioning stance is maintained. Lather (1991:10) uses Derrida’s conceptualisation of writing under erasure to address reflexivity. By being engaged in the process of reflexivity, one is at the same time contributing and deducting; in the process of reviewing and revising the essence is purified. Ballard (1996b:30) summarises the notion of reflexivity as follows:

Critical self-reflection requires that we rigorously challenge our motivations, ideas, and assumptions from alternative perspectives. But it does not require the pretence that we believe in nothing, that our work is independent of values.

Reflexivity allows for the process of inquiry to include the dialogue between the researcher and the participants concerning the possible interpretations of experience. This process of questioning contributes to the validity of the research by showing that extrapolations are made on the grounds of reflexive, interpretative supposition rather than external facts (Winter 1996:18-20). Reflexivity is, furthermore, an attempt to monitor and reflect on one’s doing of research and to account for one’s constitutiveness (Hall 1996:30).

*Accountability.* An immediate problem inherent in a researcher/participant relationship is that the researcher is in a privileged position in terms of the research, especially when we work with people from marginalised cultures. An instinctive power differential is almost always present when research is conducted. Accountability structures help to

minimise the unequal power distribution inherent in most research situations, by creating space for the participant where concerns can be voiced. Accountability structures privilege the voice of the research participants. It also creates a space for the researcher to deconstruct personal biases, assumptions and beliefs (Freedman & Combs 1996a:278-282; Tamasese & Waldegrave 1993:29-45).

Feminist researchers take an active stance, which is for accountability and against injustice and inequity. Checking and re-checking, voicing and re-voicing, hearing and re-hearing, ensuring and re-ensuring promote the practice of accountability by the researcher (Elliot 1997:64).

### **1.3 OUTLINE OF THE CO-SEARCH PROJECT**

At the start of this chapter I recounted how difficult I found the decision to embark upon the re-telling of my journey with Michelle. The inevitable

deliberations with myself during the process of my decision-making, however, did not conclude with the decision to write Michelle's story. Further deliberations entailed considerations of what to include in the report – what the focus of the report should be. After discussions with Michelle, the following content for the scope of the report was co-decided on.

Chapter One would concentrate on the co-search methodology of the project and specifically on feminist research.

Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical positioning of the study with reference to post structuralist discourse, as it emerges from the post modernist discourse and, more particularly, the influence and contribution of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in this regard. Furthermore, it looks at social constructionist discourse and how it is that language constitutes reality. The theological focus centres on feminist theology, pastoral care and the role of narrative pastoral therapy.

Chapter Three researches the incidence and technicalities regarding missing children. It questions how the concept of missing children is defined by literature. It also addresses the role of the parents, school and other authorities with regard to missing children. When the attitudes towards missing children are considered, the effects of power and patriarchy are reviewed. Meaning-making, hope and loss are linked to the effects of losing a child and the process of making sense of the loss.

Chapter Four concentrates on my introduction to Michelle, the issues of cross-cultural therapy, trust and the question of agency. My conversations with Michelle regarding Matthew's disappearance and my involvement in Michelle's life are narrated. A special focus on the subject of letter writing and outsider witness groups forms a part of this chapter. The importance which rituals play in the loss of a child is discussed.

Chapter Five gives attention to the role of doing community – of not only living one's experiences in the seclusion of one's own life, but taking the experience to the larger community. I will discuss the role of contributing to the

community in terms of the pain and loss one has suffered and in this way making sense of what has happened.

Chapter Six is titled *Participatory Reflections*: it considers the weaving of the steps taken to begin the telling of Michelle's story and her reaction to this telling. This chapter also attempts to answer the question of what pastoral care towards Michelle would look like, both in practice and conceptualisation. The last word of this research report belongs to Michelle. It is her unabridged account of her experience of the journey as part of this dissertation. I find this to be appropriate and just.

#### **1.4 CONCLUSION**

When initially considered, the co-search methodology and the epistemological underpinnings of this project might often appear either unrelated, or overlapping, or repetitive. It is only when the report's central theories are discussed, that the unifying nature of the core assertions of the theories are evident.

It is with the words of Michel Foucault that I would like to conclude this chapter on the co-search methodology of the project and prepare myself for the next chapter of this report – the chapter on my theoretical positioning:

The problem is not one of hanging people's "consciousness" or what's in their heads; but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.

(Foucault 1977a:14)

## **chapter two**

# THEORETICAL POSITIONING

## 2.1 A POST STRUCTURALIST EPISTEMOLOGY

In the following sections I will discuss my own discursive positioning during this research project. I was guided by a post structuralist and a social construction discourse which also consequently had an effect on theological positioning as well as my positioning within pastoral therapy.

### 2.1.1 The post structuralist emergence from post modernism

The philosophical foundation for modernism was laid by René Descartes' dictum, *cogito ergo sum* (I think therefore I am), which defined human nature as a thinking substance and the human person as a rational being. Isaac Newton provided the scientific framework for the Cartesian philosophy by picturing the physical world as one of laws and regularities, which could be discerned by the human mind. Jürgen Habermas' Enlightenment followed and had as its objective the unlocking of the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit and create a better world, thus generating modernism's rational management of human life (Grenz 1996:2-3). Put simplistically, Postmodernism seems to be the mission to provide more options than those that the empiricists offer. It is at the outset to be noted that the term "post modern" refers to a time rather than an ideology (Dockery 1995:13).

Although the term postmodernism may first have been coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition already underway, it did not gain much academic attention until the 1970's when Jean-Francois Lyotard (Powell 1998:19-33) wrote a publication bearing the title: *The post-modern condition: A report on knowledge*. At first postmodernism ignited a new style of architecture, then it moved on to the academic circles, but eventually it surfaced as the description for a broader cultural phenomenon. Postmodernism represents a challenging of the Enlightenment and the foundational assumptions upon which it was built (Grenz 1996:2-5).

The immediate intellectual impulse for the dismantling of the Enlightenment project came from the rise of deconstruction as a literary theory, which influenced a new movement within philosophy. Writers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida spearheaded this new movement. Their thinking evolved from the work of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Hegel, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, and others.

Movement from a modern to a postmodern discourse was also accompanied by a movement from a structuralist to a post structuralist discourse. Post-structuralism argues that meaning is not inherent in a text itself, but emerges only as the interpreter enters into dialogue with the text. As the meaning of the text depends on the interpretation of the reader, the text has as many readings as it has readers (Appignanesi & Garrat 2001:72-77).

Michael White (1997:22-235) writes that post structuralist ideas ask the question: "What are we today?" This question informs the inquiry into how lives are constituted through the knowledges and practices of culture and also how it is that the knowledge and practices of customs inform our modes of life and thought.

Having thus attempted to construe the emergence of post structuralism from post modernism, it is inevitable that a vignette of the central notions of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, post structuralism's main proponents, should follow.

## **2.1.2 The inceptors of the post structuralist discourse**

### **2.1.2.1 Focusing on Michel Foucault, power, knowledge and patriarchy**

The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no “meaning”, though that is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent.

(Foucault 1977b:97)

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.

(Foucault 1980:44-45)

Michel Foucault was born in Poitiers, France on 15 October 1926. His family were well-to-do French provincialists. Michel is documented to have had a close relationship with rebellion since an early age. This is evident from, among others, his educational record, his writings, the way he chose to conduct his sexual relationships and his various interpersonal relationships (Strathern 2002).

Michel Foucault was a prolific writer during the course of his life. The following books come from his pen: *Madness and Civilization: A history of insanity in the age of reason* (1967), *The birth of the clinic: An archaeology of medical perception* (1973), *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences* (1970), *The archaeology of knowledge* (1972), *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (1977a) and the three volumes constituting the *History of sexuality* (1979, 1986, 1988) address mainly the power/knowledge issue he was so engrossed by.

According to Strathern (2000:10) Michel Foucault was “feeling trapped” within the social structure created by changing and contingent cultural forces. On reading Nietzsche he realised that he was free to create himself as he saw fit. He experienced Nietzsche’s work as a thunderbolt from heaven. Nietzsche’s stress on the central role of power in all human activity and his expositions of “will to truth” and “will to power” played major roles in Foucault’s thinking. Nietzsche’s influence led to Foucault’s postulation that Western society has erroneously believed three fundamental errors, namely (1) that an objective body of knowledge exists and is waiting to be discovered, (2) that they actually possess such knowledge and that it is neutral and value-free, and (3)

that the pursuit of knowledge benefits all humankind rather than just a specific class (Grenz 1996:131).

Foucault further rejects the Enlightenment by stating that because knowledge is embedded in the world, knowledge is involved in the power struggles that constitute our world. In this way, knowledge creates the discourses as we understand them. Discourse brings objects into being by identifying, specifying and defining them. The power of knowledge reveals itself in a discourse through which it arbitrarily, and for its own purposes, engages in the invention of “truth.” In this way, knowledge produces our reality (Grenz 1996:124-133). Foucault is against any form of global theorizing. He wants to avoid totalising forms of analysis and is critical of matters that can be systematically explained (Sarup 1993:58).

Michel Foucault stresses that every interpretation of reality is an assertion of power because “knowledge” is always the result of the use of power – to name something is to exercise power and to thus violate what is named. Social institutions inevitably engage in violence when they impose their own meaning on experience. Knowledge is always purposive: it is characterised by a will to dominate or appropriate. It was not some neutral abstract entity. Knowledge was sought for use; it was potent and unstable. Foucault recognised that the most important aspect of power lay in social relationships. According to him power is involved in the production and use of knowledge. As long as the constructed truth works well, it will be accepted even though it may contain flaws, gaps and contradictions. The shifts and negotiations of power create the spaces where discourses appear. Foucault stated that power and knowledge were so closely related that they could not be used as separate terms, which forced him to collate them into the term “power/knowledge”.

Foucault's goal was to find a new discourse that enables one to take a stand outside of and against the truth claims of reason. His method involves tracing the “genealogy” of a body of knowledge – that is, observing how the concepts

of a discipline or human science came to be constructed and in this way to then disrupt or dismantle the knowledge and resultant power of the established discourse (Grenz 1996:135). Patriarchy is one of the hegemonic discourses established through the course of history. One of the goals of feminism is to challenge patriarchy and its powerfully subjugating effects on society.

The concept of patriarchy can possibly best be introduced to this writing by asking the questions: (1) What intentions or aims do the power/knowledge wielders have? And, (2) what are the effects of this power? For the purposes of this study, the power/knowledge wielders mentioned here are those persons in the power positions in our country who have the authority to decide regarding the well-being of a child; for instance, whether or not the child will be searched for. The effects of the power which these people wield are monstrous. In many cases, deciding on behalf of a missing child can result in the child's life or death.

Patriarchal discourses have given power to men in our society, while women and children have been subjugated by this power. Patriarchy thus refers to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women and characterizes a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways (Bhasin 1993:3).

Patriarchy is most often described in terms of men's subjugating of women. For the purposes of this writing, however, the focus is on patriarchal practices of institutions in society, hence the previous discussion on Foucault and power/knowledge.

The discourse of patriarchy permeates the power institutions of the world. As discussed previously, Foucault is of the opinion that the self-ascribed "knowledge" that an institution or person adopts, convinces the institution or person that it is acceptable to be in a position of "power".

(Foucault 1980)

... it is the crucial importance of accountability processes in forming partnerships between dominant and marginalised groups. Change needs to happen in partnership, and this partnership must recognise the realities of power differences, and find ways of addressing them. Modern Western culture, however, finds it extremely difficult to come to grips with issues of power, accountability, and the importance of structured power differences in forming the contexts of people's lives....Where our society does recognise the realities of power, it does so on an individual and hierarchical level ... our society is fundamentally structured by collective power differences ...

(McLean, Carey & White 1995:4)

In the case of this research project, most of the power/knowledge experienced by the Ohlssons in their search for Matthew lies with the South African Police. The Ohlssons sought help and guidance from the South African Police and often they were merely brushed aside, given incorrect information or ignored.

On various occasions, I have personally sought the help of the South African Police's Child Protection Unit to give me information regarding Matthew's case and the possibility of re-opening Matthew's case. To date, I have yet to receive a positive response from them. My mission to obtain information regarding the statistics of missing children from the South African Police's Missing Persons Bureau is proving equally fruitless. Regarding the availability of statistics from governmental departments, Johnella Bird (1994:51) claims: "It is power and politics that shroud the statistics in silence, relegating the abuses to numbers that bear no relevance to us." Freedman and Combs (1996b:34) write that "[t]he police, the military, political parties, the legal system and the media, all exhibit and enforce the characteristics of patriarchal masculinity."

In many instances, South Africa is still suffering from the legacy of the apartheid regime. Minority and marginalised groups are still treated with a certain amount of disrespect and the power of the authorities is ultimate. It would seem that the issue of accountability has not reached many of the power-bearing institutions in South Africa. The challenge of the dominant

culture of patriarchy within the power-bearing structures in South Africa seems to be for the benefit of their media face and not for internalisation and use. It seems as if the patriarchal practices enhanced by the apartheid era in South Africa have stayed entrenched in the power-bearing structures in South Africa and as if democracy is a matter of choice and selectively practiced.

“Official” history suppresses the stories of resistance and dissent against the status quo and presents the past either as the triumph of the deserving or as inevitable. Critical history breaks open the past, in its full complexity, and re-presents that past as bearing a story of human struggle against domination. Even failed resistance bears powerful evidence of human dignity and courage that informs our contemporary vocations.

(Harrison 1990:128)

Weedon (1987:12-42) describes patriarchy as a trans-historical, all-embracing structure, which makes use of the social relations of gender, class and race to wield its power/knowledge. Language and discourse are the vehicles for conveying patriarchal stances. When patriarchy is taken for granted, men are unaware of how much the social structure yields advantage to them (Pease 1997:139).

Patriarchy is abhorrent. Patriarchy - its roots, its effects, its continuance - should be faced and rethought, by all genders.

Any breakthrough of new consciousness, though it may have been maturing for months or years out of sight, comes through the building up of tension which releases a breaking point. If the man or woman stands firm with courage, the breakdown becomes a breakthrough into a surge of new life.

(Murdock 1998:58)

Freedman and Combs (1996b:38-39) instruct their readers to educate him-/herself about recognising the patriarchal culture and the effects of patriarchy in society. Only by becoming aware of patriarchal practices and ways can change be brought about. Patriarchy has as its most central aim to exert power and control. The effect of this power and control is the subjugation of marginal groups (Castells 2000:242).

Let us come back to the definition of the exercise of power as a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions. What therefore would be proper to a relationship of power is that it be a mode of action upon actions.

(Foucault 1980:222)

### **2.1.2.2 Focusing on Jacques Derrida and deconstruction**

All attempts to define deconstruction are bound to be false ... One of the principle things in deconstruction is the delimiting of ontology and above all of the third person present indicative: propositions of the form 'S is P'.

Derrida's deconstruction attempts to show that everyday language is not neutral; it bears within it the presuppositions and cultural assumptions of a whole tradition ... Maybe this anti-Platonic element ... is Derrida's most important contribution.

Derrida was considered by some the most 'important philosopher of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, nobody was sure whether the intellectual movement he spawned – Deconstruction – advanced or murdered it.'

(Strathern 2003:44-45)

Jacques Derrida was born in Algiers in 1930 of a colonial French, Jewish family. The World War II monstrosities affected Derrida due to his Jewish origins. The effects of the war were visible in the teenage rebellion of this highly intelligent, sensitive person. The reading of Camus, Sartre, Husserl, and Heidegger mainly influenced Derrida's thinking during a time of personal flux.

For Derrida, philosophy is rather a questioning of the notion of philosophy – a questioning and interrogation of its very possibility - than a philosophy as such. He questions the entire basis of philosophy and its ability to operate on its own terms. He argues that previously philosophy had been mistaken in searching for essential truth that was somehow contained in the essence of things. On the contrary, philosophy should rather have concentrated on the language it uses (Grenz 1996:139).

According to Jacques Derrida, language does not have any equivalence to the things it is trying to describe. Western thought has been based upon the binary notion implicit in the law of the excluded middle. Our defining of concepts is dependent on oppositions. Language begets ambiguities. Language eludes clarity and precision. Every word has its own meaning or meanings, although its meaning as a way to communicate holds fast. Jacques Derrida called his process of argument or philosophical approach 'deconstruction' (Strathern 2003). Deconstruction refers to the taking apart what has already implicitly been put together in a text. The monumental authority of a text is disassembled. Instead of one meaning, it takes on many. Jacques Derrida wants to open us up to the possibilities contained in the written/spoken word so that we might engage in an ongoing conversation with texts, whether written or spoken (Powell 1997).

Central to Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy is his insistence that "there is nothing outside the text." Derrida deconstructs a text not to oppose or subvert it, but to reveal what the text attempts to exclude and suppress and to examine its conceptual and ideological underpinnings. Deconstruction is not about opposing discourse, but rather about analysing the conceptual operation of the discourse. Deconstruction contains a certain reflexivity and folding back on itself to thus reveal hidden meaning and possibilities within the text (Larner 1994:12).

Deconstruction is largely a philosophical response to structuralism, formalism and phenomenology and was developed in an academic milieu respectful of Marxism and psychoanalysis (Fish 1993:225). Deconstruction regards the text, the words as they are arranged, as exclusively relevant. Although the meaning of the text is held to be undecidable so the reader is allowed any interpretation resulting from a "free play" of meaning, with the understanding that the reader's interpretation, too, may be deconstructed at will, Derrida still seems to be committed to history and context. Fish (1993:227) discusses Derrida's response to the concept of Apartheid in South Africa: "...one must be attentive to what links words to concepts and to realities but also to what can dissociate them. Now if even as it kept the concept and the reality, the

power in South Africa has tried to get rid of the word, nobody has been fooled. The concept and the reality persist, under other names...”

Derrida coins the terms “difference” and “différance” to attempt an explanation of his conceptualisation of deconstruction. These terms, in Derridian language, refer to both differing and deferring. They refer to Saussure’s observations regarding linguistic signifiers – a word does not possess a fixed meaning within itself, but derives its meaning from its relations within the language system (Collins & Mayblin 1996:75-77, 79). Derrida adds, however, that not only does the signifier derive its meaning from the signifier just before or after it in the language chain, but also from its corresponding mental meaning signified – the concept, idea, perception, or emotion to which the word is attached. Meaning is never static. It changes over time and with changing contexts. Thus one should continually defer one’s tendency to attribute meaning (Johnson 1999:49).

Derrida borrowed from Heidegger the practice of crossing out signifiers after he has written them by putting a cross through **the word**. Derrida adopted this method to further promote his thinking that words are only “valid” as long as they are seen to construe meaning in terms of the signifier proceeding it or coming after it or in terms of the context attributed to it (Powell 1997:16).

Jacques Derrida calls for the abandonment of attempts to ontologically describe reality as well as the idea that something transcendent is present in reality.

If, then, it lays claim to any consequence, what is hastily called deconstruction *as such* is never a technical set of discursive procedures, still less a new hermeneutic method operating on archives or utterances in the shelter of a given stable institution; it is also, and at the least, the taking of a position, in work itself, toward the politico-institutional structures that constitute and regulate our practice, our competencies, and our performances.

(Derrida 1981:22-23)

Michel Foucault’s cultural relativism was in accord with Jacques Derrida’s linguistic relativism. Both were seen as leaders of the movement known as post structuralism, which regards all knowledge as textual (i.e., a relativistic

interpretation of text). History, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology – all these dealt not so much with concepts, but with words. For Foucault, this led to *epistemes* (paradigms) of knowledge in which power was invested. For Derrida, it led to the “dismantling” of linguistic conceptualisation as we are bound within the circularity of our discourse. Jacques Derrida is thus concerned with the question of meaning: How does language derive its meaning? (Strathern 2003).

Derrida’s question of meaning and language prompted an exploration into the social construction discourse and, more particularly, the notion that meaning is constructed through language.

## **2.2 A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST EPISTEMOLOGY**

### **2.2.1 The practice of the social constructionist discourse**

The social constructionist discourse has at its core the notion that language constitutes reality. Our language contains our constructions of the world and ourselves. Because this is so, we own the possibility of creating agreeable or disagreeable stories about our lives. Our formulations of our stories are thus very important in constructing our futures (McNamee & Gergen 1999:4-5). The social constructionist discourse invites the kind of critical self-reflection that might open the future to alternative forms of understanding. The social constructionist discourse upholds an ethic of participation, where new stories or narratives or discourses are created in a collaborative way.

Neal (1996:66) reflects that the social constructionist perspective recognises not only that reality is socially constructed, but also that cultural constructions that are dominant inevitably have marginalizing and disqualifying effects upon some persons and groups. This perspective, which stems from the work of Foucault, focuses on the processes through which dominant ideas and practices constitute persons’ subjective experience and understanding of themselves and others in the world. The social constructionist perspective allows a set of tools that enables one to view persons as distinct from their culturally dominant ideas (discourses) and to observe how power operates through the application of culturally dominant meanings and practices and contributes to the problems persons present with.

Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:2-4) point out that the social constructionist discourse is more than just a new social paradigm: it is also a way of understanding knowledge from the perspective of the social processes through which it is created.

The social constructionist approach offers the possibility to draw a new framework in which all sorts of dualisms can be overcome. Constructionism is an observer's point of view in which movement for the observer is from the considering of self looking at a universe to the recognition of self as part of the social multiverse (Fruggeri 1999:44). The observer's/therapist's descriptions are constituted by the descriptions of the client's own description. The symptoms of personal struggles are not at the outset labelled as pathology, but are rather re-conceptualised past the aetiology of the symptoms to the interpersonal and social processes and dynamics that maintain the symptoms. The observer should note of the possibility of the power differential in the situation and should thus take responsibility for his/her power of construction within the constraints of the relational/social domain. It is only when the individual proves that this process of re-conceptualisation is personally unattainable, that the possibility of pathology is entertained.

The clients' own description of themselves – which informs the observer's/therapist's descriptions of them – is formulated by the stories which clients tell about themselves and their lives and about how they experience their lives. In short:

1. It is the stories in which we situate our experience that determine the meaning we give to experience.
2. It is these stories that determine the selection of which particular aspects of experience should be expressed.
3. It is these stories that determine the shape of the expression that we give to those aspects of experience.
4. It is these stories that determine real effects and directions in our lives and relationships (Epston, White & Murray 1999:98).

Knowledge emerges as an on-going self-referential construction: a recursion of descriptions that generate other descriptions. Individuals, in their processes of constructing the world, are bound by the beliefs, maps and premises that they have about the world (Fruggeri 1999:40). Our lives are multi-storied. No story of life can be free of ambiguity or contradiction (Nicholson 1995:23). White (1995) emphasises that “the personal story or self-narrative is not radically invented inside our heads. We don’t individually make up or invent these stories. Rather these stories are negotiated and distributed within various communities of persons and also in the institutions of our culture.”

Anderson and Goolishian (1988:380) add that “we live with each other in a world of conversational narrative, and we understand ourselves and each other through changing stories and self descriptions.” Narratives are the bedrock of social relations – they are consequential actions, not optional add-ons (Efran 1994:224). Any story told is a relational event and implies an audience. The nature of the audience will have an impact on the way the story is told and on what is said or not said (McLeod & Balamoutsou 1996:68).

The social constructionist discourse has encouraged a self-reflexive stance for the development of our approaches (Hoffman 1993:198) enabling us to take a more evaluative stance on our thinking and practice. Life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organise and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story (Bruner 1986:143).

Bruner (1991) describes the narrative as a conventional form, transmitted culturally, which can achieve verisimilitude. This achieved verisimilitude is then a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and narrative necessity rather than by empirical verification.

Social constructionist discourse focuses on how ideas and attitudes developed over time within a social, community context. It is especially interested in the narratives or discourses that have taken on a normative

standard against which people measure and judge themselves. It focuses on how the prevailing norms have evolved over time, especially those that marginalise and subjugate people. It focuses on knowledge as power and recognises that therapeutic practices are political, although it does not recognise that all stories are equally valid. Rather, it recognises that some accounts are not respectful of difference, like gender, ethnicity, race or religion. The social constructionist discourse prefers stories that are based on a person's lived experience rather than some domain of "expert knowledge". Stories based on lived experience allow for the experience of personal agency (Doan 1997:130; Gergen 1985:266-275).

During the course of the above attempt to focus on the ideas and practices of the social constructionist discourse, mention has often been made of the terms discourse, story, and language. For clarity, it is important that a closer, but succinct, look at these terms be attempted, although keeping in mind that an ontological, etiological, philosophical explanation of the terms is not the objective of this discussion.

McNamee and Gergen (1999:4-5) reminded us that "[t]he social constructionist discourse has at its core the notion that language constitutes reality. Our language contains our constructions of the world and ourselves. Because this is so, we own the possibility of creating agreeable or disagreeable stories about our lives. Our formulations of our stories are thus very important in constructing our futures. This reminder underscores the necessity to *briefly* address the terms discourse, language and story, keeping in mind always that these are intertwined almost inseparable concepts.

### **2.2.1.1 Language constitutes reality – language, discourse and stories**

*Language.* The social constructionist discourse sees language as more than just a way of connecting between people. People exist in language. Language is a reality. Meaning and understanding come about in language

(Anderson & Goolishian 1988:37). Meaning and understanding cannot exist before language has been spoken, but it comes into being within language. Language thus constitutes meaning. The social constructionist discourse focuses not just on the individual, but on the social interaction in which the language is produced, maintained and discarded. Burr (1995:43) states that language is “[t]he crucible of change, both personal and social.”

*Discourse.* Kotzé and Kotzé (1997:2) write that the term discourse has become a central concept in postmodern thought. They mention that the term may indicate firstly, a public “process of conversation” through which meanings are constituted, and secondly, it refers to “systematic and institutionalised ways of speaking/writing” or otherwise making sense of language. The social constructionist discourse “views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world, but as an artefact of communal interchange” (Gergen 1985).

White (1991) states that it is through the narratives and stories that people have about their lives and the lives of others that people make sense and give meaning to their experiences. These experiences then become dominant stories. The dominant stories determine what is included into the person’s discourse regarding his/her life and how his/her life is shaped. What is excluded from the person’s discourse about him-/herself becomes marginalised and is not told. Although it is through language that meaning is created, it is not language as such, but the way the language is used in a discourse that becomes constitutive of our reality (McLean 1997:14). Hare-Mustin (1994:19) sees discourse as a “system of statements, practices and institutional structures that share common values.” Discourse can include linguistic and non-linguistic elements.

*Stories.* It would seem that the term “discourse” might also allude to what might be described as, or understood to be, “a story”. Yet, in the relevant literature perused for the purposes of this research report, the underlying supposition seems to be that discourse refers to the many stories that make

up a certain (cultural) context, whilst stories are the narrated bits and pieces that contribute to the discourse. Stories constitute what people believe to be true about themselves and are thus building blocks in the person's "knowledge/truth" regarding him-/herself. It is through the exchange of stories – the dialogical process – that opportunities are created for agency, freedom, and the exploration of possibilities unique to a specific person (Anderson 1997:93-100). Without the telling of the "old" stories, "new" stories cannot unfold. With enough new stories unfolding, new discourses can be built, new cultural narratives can be born – new possibilities, new days and new ways can be born.

The concern that the social construction discourse has with stories, discourse and language has heightened my awareness of the socially constructed nature of theology and the effects of language and discourse on our theological positioning.

## **2.3 THEOLOGY**

In this section I will be discussing contextual nature of theology. I express a concern for the marginalised who, in the case of this research project, are the parents of missing children and the children who have gone missing.

### **2.3.1 The nature of theology**

Bosch (1991:426-427) talks about a theology that has to remain provisional and hypothetical so that there would be ongoing dialogue between the text and the context, or the participants, especially when the realities of the participants differ. Bosch (1991:439) calls such a theology a theology from below which does not grow from a position of power-mongering. Such is the nature of the spirituality I choose to position myself with.

Furthermore, I would have to agree with Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:1) when they state that they:

prefer the term 'spirituality' rather than 'theology' for several reasons. The most important of these is that the term 'theology' literally means

to study God, whilst the concept of 'spirituality' is more inclusive, focusing on any of our experiences including theological ideas and narratives about the Other whom some call Friend/God/Goddess/Divine and so forth. Whenever we use 'theology', we do so to respect the language used by other writers, whilst we would often prefer to translate the term as 'spirituality'.

De Gruchy (1994a:2) distinguishes between the notion of 'doing theology' and 'reading' theology with the intention of becoming an ordained member of the clergy. He hints at the essence of theology – an essence that seems to have eluded many practicing ministers of religion. According to de Gruchy, doing theology refers mainly to engaging in doing theology in particular contexts and situations and to examining our Christian history with the intention of allowing the history to inform our praxis. De Gruchy (1994a:3) cautions about being technicians of theology rather than doers of theology. Up until the Middle Ages, theology referred to 'knowing God', whereas afterwards theology assumed a scientific façade in which the focus was more on explaining and predicting God. Currently there is a movement to a 'doing of God'.

The contextuality of theology – all theology develops within a certain context – should not be ignored in the doing of theology as contexts continually change. The contextuality of theology is possibly best explained by Gustavo Gutiérrez in his *Theology of Liberation*. Gutiérrez accepts the academic premises of theology, but prefers to focus on "the central concern of theology, namely the critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word" (De Gruchy 1994a:11).

In South Africa, where orthodoxy has often given support to non-contextualised theology, the praxis of the church is now an essential mark of a true church (De Gruchy 1994b:132). If the church in South Africa has a future, that future lies with the marginalised people. It is consequently important that they be made to feel that they belong, that the church takes them and their traditional way of life seriously and that they contribute to the responsibility for the church and the life and well-being of the church and its credibility in the world (Pato 1994:161). Theology can only become real to those who actually suffer poverty, oppression and marginalisation in any

society if it also connects with the quite specific material and historical conditions which shape their local contexts of life (West 1994:55).

It is an essential part of the church to be involved in doing the mission of the Spirit – to be engaged in the *Missio Dei*. Contemporary theology stipulates that the church exists by virtue of its participation in the *Missio Dei*. The *Missio Dei* is holistic – it has to do with every aspect of life, whether personal, social or environmental. It encompasses the struggle for justice and liberation, the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, the healing of mind and body, the search for meaning and the awakening and sustaining of faith, hope and love, and the renewal of the earth (De Gruchy 1994b:134).

Theology is, then, about more than ‘faith seeking understanding’ in an academic way; it is also about obedience or faithful praxis. When these are brought together in struggling to witness to the gospel in our context, then our theology, with all the critical rigour which it requires, is placed at the service of ‘doing theology’ and thus is able to make its vital contribution to the task of the church.

(De Gruchy 1994a:12)

Central to the nature of theology is the examination of the relationship between our theological theories and our faith practices in order to move towards healing and liberation. The ‘how’ of the theology we do is as important as what kind of theology we do (Ackermann 1994:197).

Feminist theology, for me and for the purposes of this report, does justice to my sensibilities regarding the practising of spirituality. It also allows for the opportunity to include comfortably what Heshusius and Ballard (1996c:96-99) term the “spirit” into the scope of this research report. They note that there appears to be a current need to explore something as intangible as the spiritual dimension. Yet, it is important to understand that for some cultures, spiritual development is central to knowledge and life. What is required, though, is an approach that accommodates and allows spiritual talk, without the ultimate goal of conversion. Feminist theology proves to be such an approach for situating the practice of pastoral care. Feminist theology takes much of its terminology - such as terms like oppression, constructed knowledge, power, ethics/values, agency, context, deconstruction - from feminism (Gosling & Zangari 1996: 47-63).

### 2.3.1.1 Focusing on feminist theology

My role as a feminist is not to compete with men in their world – that’s too easy, and ultimately unproductive. My job is to live fully as a woman, enjoying the whole of myself and my place in the universe.

(Madeleine L’Engle in Murdoch 1998:23)

Keane (1998:122) defines feminism as a term that originally meant, ‘having the qualities of females’. In time it became identified with a movement for the liberation of women. This liberation was initially the liberation from male dominance, or patriarchy, which relegated women to the realm of second-class citizens, with no rights and/or competencies.

Keane (1998:124) recognises the fact that reformist feminists position patriarchy as the result of men fearing women and thus having to “protect” themselves against women. The beginnings of men fearing women are part of antiquity and unable to be traced. The fear, though, seems to be rooted in the fact that females are the reproductive species. The reproductive aspect of womanhood caused males to relegate females into a subordinate, subjugated, marginalised role, hence the emergence of patriarchy. It would seem that theology has served this male fear well and that fear’s hand-maiden, patriarchy, has been an extremely loyal servant to its master (Keane 1998:122-124).

Theology has nurtured and upheld patriarchy as one of its dependable foundations. That is, until the turn of the 18th century when women like Sister Juana Inés and Mary Wollstonecraft (Watkins, Rueda & Rodriguez 1999:6-11) publicly started to voice their concerns regarding patriarchal practices. Phyllis Trible’s *Texts of Terror* (1984) illustrates the propagation of patriarchy in the Bible by scrutinizing the story of Hagar the Egyptian slave woman, the story of Tamar whose brother raped her, the story of the Levite who “takes” a nameless woman and the story of Jephtha’s sacrifice of his daughter.

The notions of feminist theology correspond with the notions of the worldwide theological movement known as liberation theology. This movement was

directed against the major social evils of our time and claims to offer a new way of doing theology that contributes to the overcoming of human oppression. Like Liberation theology, feminist theology endeavours to empower oppressed women and other marginalised and subjugated groups, enabling them to stand against domination and subjugation by oppressors. Feminist theology takes context, culture and religious traditions seriously and is revolutionary and reformist.

The feminist theology movement spans a continuum between the separatist approach, for instance Mary Daly (1979) and the reformist feminists, such as Rosemary Radford-Reuther (1973:13) who advocate mutuality between the genders. Nor is the focus exclusively on women. Eiseland (1994) reminds us not to forget disabled persons when considering the scope of marginalised people: “deafness, paralysis, multiple sclerosis, and mental retardation may produce the same social problems of stigma, marginality, and discrimination” (Eiseland 1994:24).

Reformist feminist theologians advocate mutuality between the sexes, they recognise the importance of examining “her-story” as well as “his-story”, they recognise that both men and women are made in the likeness of God. The state, however, that patriarchy can never be condoned as it is intrinsically evil. Isherwood and McEwan (1993) speak of the ‘Eve-trap’ in which women have been caught. This was created by patriarchy which indoctrinated women into believing that they were unequal to men, subservient to men and only valuable in terms of their productive abilities.

Kamla Bhasin (1993:10) has the following to say about the role of patriarchy in religion:

Most modern religions are patriarchal, defining male authority as supreme. They present a patriarchal order as being supernaturally ordained. The feminine principle of power which existed before the evolution of institutionalised religions has been gradually weakened, goddesses have been replaced by gods. All major religions have been created, interpreted and controlled by upper class and upper caste men; they have defined morality, ethics, behaviour and even law; they have laid down the duties and rights of men and women, the

relationship between them. They have influenced state policy and continue to be a major force in most societies ... a person's legal identity with regard to marriage, divorce and inheritance is determined by his or her religion. There is sufficient analysis now to show how almost every religion considers women to be inferior, impure, sinful; how they have created double standards of morality and behaviour; how religious laws often justify the use of violence against "deviant" women; how inequitous relationships are sanctioned and legitimised by recourse to "religious" creeds and fundamental tenets.

Rakow (1992:4) states that feminist theory has helped us (feminists and feminist theologians) to understand our individual standpoints and provides the framework for seeing and participating in the world around us. It enables us to discuss our history or current state of affairs by using our different fields of expertise as the vehicles for these discussions. According to Rakow, we must make it impossible for anyone to render us invisible. We can perpetuate our process of visibility by never forgetting our history and struggle. bell hooks (1997:533-539) cautions us to know our history and our identity when we claim that the "personal is the political". We need to be mindful of the fact that we are accountable to each other, on both a historical level and a current level, in our endeavour towards ethical practices when being in the world and doing theology.

Feminist theology is primarily about two disciplines – feminism and theology - reflecting upon and completing each other. In its broadest sense, feminism is understood as providing a social analysis which reflects social inequality rather than simply demanding equal access for women in an unequal society. Theology is the reflection upon the nature of God and the implications of these reflections for society. The feminist theology vehicle enables feminists to envisage a world that is in the process of becoming and which achieves that becoming most fully among people who live with peace and justice (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:10). Most importantly, though, is the opinion that feminist theology concerns itself with practice, or praxis, the lived reality of women and men. It is about the practising of a basic belief about the right to the inclusiveness and the interconnectedness of people:

Feminist theology is one of the vehicles through which women express a critique of existing theology and religious practices, and contribute creatively towards the unfinished dimension of theology.

(Ackermann 1994:197)

When the private and corporate pain of sexist oppression is reflected on systematically and critically by women seeking to make sense of a life of faith, feminist theology is born (Ackermann 1994:198). Feminist theologians dedicate themselves to finding a more inclusive view of humanity that affirms a woman's value and integrity. *Relationality* has become a key description for an inclusive view of humanity and is understood as the practice of love and justice between people (see also Hogan 1996:202). Feminist theology without any exception rejects patriarchy. Feminist theologians interpret the unheard voices of violated women and children so that the praxis of our theology will be transformed to reflect love and justice. To be able to mirror ourselves (as feminist theologians) we need to be accountable. We need to construct situations where victims can be heard into speech (Ackermann 1994:198-207). When one strives towards being an accountable instrument of change, by exercising one's praxis of accountable change one can dare to begin to envision the possibility of an embodied God (Grey 2001:72-85).

There are many themes that run through the nature of feminist theology – such as mutuality, reciprocity, interdependence, relationality, etcetera - but as South Africans we need to define a spirituality that fits our context. Ackermann (1994:207) refers to such a kind of spirituality as 'a spirituality of risk' with justice as its fundamental premise. Embedded in the concept of a spirituality of risk, is the notion of hope.

Sharon Welch (1990:155), a feminist theologian, speaks of 'cultured despair' as being the knowledge of the extent of injustice in a society, but being unable to act on that injustice. She claims that one needs sheer holy boldness or an ethic of risk to walk where angels fear to tread and to take responsible action when all the odds are against one. An ethic of risk refers to an ethic that begins with the recognition that we cannot guarantee changes in the near future, but that we nevertheless keep pushing toward transformation. While we might push for resistance and transformation, we always need to

remember that we cannot make the decision to go on the journey on behalf of someone else. This risk of losing control, the risk of becoming vulnerable, is the doing of risk and the doing of feminist theology.

The task for the future of feminist theology is to present an alternative theological model where the vision is one of transformation and where domination, subjugation and marginalisation is eliminated. Feminist theology draws its strength from the diversity of its members. Feminist theology is engaged in directing women's and men's potential away from conforming to a system towards finding personal fulfilment, away from surviving a system towards living a faith (Isherwood & McEwan 1993).

Feminist theology offers a different approach to the religious understanding of women and men by exposing the cultural conditioning of religious belief. This involves for some a real examination of religious tenets and beliefs, a re-thinking and a re-appraisal of whether traditional forms of worship are meaningful or meaningless. It is also a discipline in search of truth, understanding that the past can only be experienced through seeing how relations in the present are constituted. Truth can only be discovered through the experience of its meaning within the lives of the people, not through the authoritative pronouncement of officials in power (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:61-62).

Words and language play an important role in feminist theology. Words create and perpetuate reality. Feminist theology wants to overcome the false divisions between spirit/matter, male/female, black/white, human/animal, humanity/nature, heterosexual/homosexual, young/old, rich/poor. It is looking for a language that re-images God in such a way as to reflect the mutual interconnectedness of what is perceived to be true and real and important in the lives of people (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:105-106).

Positioning myself within a feminist contextual theology has several implications for doing pastoral care.

### **2.3.1.2 Focusing on pastoral care**

**Working towards a description of pastoral care raises the possibility of answering the question: What does pastoral care and counselling for the parents of missing children in a disadvantaged community involve?**

With the emergence of feminist theology, women and men have applied feminist thought to the task of 'doing theology'. This has enabled them to look at women's realities from a theological point of view, a view largely overlooked by liberation and black theologies. Feminist theology takes as its starting point the lived experience of women and men and their interaction with each other and with society, as a source from which to do theology. Emphasis has shifted from authority, imposed from outside, to self-authority, striven for throughout life (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:35).

Couture (2000:13-14) informs us that pastoral care is a work or practice of care; pastoral theology is the practical theological discipline whose job it is to conceptualise care and ministry; practical theology is a discipline that helps us to think about the work of care in relation to other practices of ministry, such as worship, and helps us think about the practices of ministry not only in relation to the church but also in relation to the world.

Bons-Storm (1998:14) notes that practical theology is 'faith lived in context' that combines three ingredients, (1) Christian tradition as imparted through different theologies and education, (2) the context we live in and (3) the touch of the Holy Spirit. She quotes Gert Otto who portrays practical theology as the theological discipline that tries to answer questions about how people, in their different contexts and conditions, can live as faithful people and can contribute to the renewal of life – personal, communal, worldwide – according to the longing of the Divine.

Rebecca Chopp (in Bons-Storm 1998:21) sees pastoral care as a pattern of meaning and action that is both culturally constructed and individually initiated. Practices involve embodied actors. Pamela Couture describes it as the divinely-given mutuality of care shared across laity and clergy on the basis of theological beliefs and values (Couture 1998: 27). She closely equates the

concept of grace as being central to her practice of pastoral care. According to her, grace would include practices that create attitudes of compassion, hospitality, and generosity. She points out that it is the dimension of the art of the pastoral carer to discern the relationship and choice between the pursuit of theological truth and mission, or service to the common good. Our caring with a person urges us to ask how we can mutually empower one another, not only to cure the ills of our lives, but to proactively create conditions for fullness of life (Couture 1998).

Denise Ackermann (1998) gives details about a feminist theology of praxis. For her, this praxis is critical of current models of practical theology largely because of their inherent male-orientation and inability to deal with the reality of the lives of women, children and the poor. She suggests that a feminist praxis should reflect on the experiences of the 'others' in order to act collaboratively with them towards a transformed world. It would seem that she does not prescribe pastoral care from a specific theological paradigm, which makes the possibility of doing praxis by furthering the cause of liberation and healing in society far greater. Social and political healing are as inseparable as the politics that harmed our society and which has had such dire effects on the social fabric of our society (Ackermann 1998).

For a healing praxis to be truly restorative, there has to be a collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion. A healing praxis is concrete: it is rooted in the understanding that daily living is not separate from the life of faith, and is insistent on the need for justice (Ackermann 1998).

Ackermann (1994; 1998) suggests that a feminist theology of praxis involves all of the following: acknowledging the quality of human suffering; the acknowledgement of stories from our different contexts; seeking change by means of a collaborative effort; accepting that a feminist theology of praxis is embodied practical theology; accepting that it involves risk and requires stamina; recognizing that it is imaginative and creative and means imagining daring acts that will contribute to justice. A healing praxis starts with

awareness and the willingness to see, hear and feel. Accountability due to our moral agency is the next step on the road towards a healing praxis (Ackermann 1998).

Elaine Graham (1998) draws attention to a feminist praxis as a praxis that: enables the voices of the oppressed to be heard; embraces the building of relationships of mutuality and empowerment; listens to personal stories; and uses inclusive language as well as expecting inclusive language to be used.

A feminist praxis recognizes the need for inclusivity. It also encourages, inter-faith dialogue and co-operation which allows us to study the values, norms, dictums, etc, of other religions. Hopefully this will assist us to work towards co-operation between different religions to establish values that will work for the common good and a joint action to enhance justice and peace (Pieterse 1998:184). Working towards a common good for people of all religions will lead to the doing of pastoral care.

Pastoral care reaches out into our souls to engage our intellect and our bodies, our being and our doing. Pastoral care 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 (Couture1998:27).

### **2.3.1.3 Focusing on narrative pastoral therapy**

The underlying practices of the post modernist discourse, the post structuralist discourse, the social constructionist discourse, feminism, feminist research, and feminist theology all seem to share similar assumptions, namely, that: research is not about discovering facts, but more about mobilisation towards

change; there is no one truth; a sense of ethics should prevail, which includes accountability, reflexivity and agency; power and patriarchy rob people of their personhood; language constitutes reality; the subjugation, suppression, and marginalisation of people is unacceptable; and care is about giving voice to voice-robbled groups and individuals.

How can one be with someone in a therapeutic/caring situation in such a way that would do justice to the practices mentioned above? The way of being in therapy, known as narrative therapy, which emerges from the writings of David Epston and Michael White, allowed me the vehicle for doing care in a way that I prefer. I have named my preferred way of doing care as 'pastoral narrative therapy'.

Postmodern approaches to therapy focus on the client's narrative. The narrative worldview proposes that people are interpreting beings and that people are active in interpreting their experiences as they live their lives. Since people then live their lives according to their interpretations of their stories, this means that these stories have the power to shape and constitute their lives. Narrative pastoral therapy accepts that the client is the expert about his/her life (White 1995:13-14). People seeking therapy have stories about their lives that are not working for them. The therapist's task is to help clients to come up with stories that work better for them. This happens by way of externalising conversations (White & Epston 1994:38), mapping the relative influence of the problem and focusing on the unique outcomes – outcomes that do not fit with the dominant, crippling stories. Various written interventions – letters, certificates, cards, etcetera – are used to document these sparkling moments (Lyness & Thomas 1995:129).

Metaphors are used richly in narrative pastoral therapy. When therapists present clients with metaphors and stories, clients attempt to make sense of them by going back through the client's working models of the world, comparing the metaphors to the client's working models and evaluating the metaphor's suitability (Lyness & Thomas 1995:130). The use of metaphors in

therapy also allows the therapist to continuously remain curious about the client as options are tested and questions are asked. A stance of curiosity and tentativeness is a core value of the narrative pastoral therapy practitioner (Freedman & Combs 1996a:44-46).

Respectfulness is another core value. A client should be spoken to and should be spoken about in an ethical and respectful manner. The content of any written material about a client should be equally respectful. This respectfulness is evident in the fact that the narrative vocabulary is free of concepts of power and oppression, free of the need to seek truth and is free of normative descriptions that limit one's capacity to work and love with others we live and work with (Epstein 1995:175-176). The ethical stance discussed in Section 1.5.6 is a further core value upheld by narrative pastoral therapists.

#### **2.3.1.3.1 The problem is the problem and externalising conversations – re-storying and re-authoring lives**

White (1988) and Epston (1993) initiated the idea that the person is not the problem; the problem is the problem (Doan 1997:131). Externalisation is a practice supported by the belief that a problem is something operating or impacting on a person's life and that this problem is separate from the person

(Freedman & Combs 1996a:47). Problems seem to develop when people internalise conversations or stories about themselves that narrow down their descriptions about themselves. Problems objectify people. Problems clients deal with in therapy are actions that express their human narratives in such a way that they diminish their sense of agency and personal liberation (Epstein 1995:180). By using externalising language, the problem is removed from the person by making use of non-totalising language. For example, "I am depressed" is replaced by : "You seem to be struggling with depression?"

Externalisation and separating the problem from the person is aided by means of deconstruction, a term first introduced by Derrida (White 1991: 147-109). Having named the problem by way of externalisation, the clients are asked questions about the problem. Categories of questions asked can include questions about the origin of the problem in the client's life, the nature of the problem in the client's life, the effects of the problem in the client's life, etcetera In this way the client is now free to disown the problem (Freedman & Combs 1996a:51-59) and to construct a preferred view of him-/herself (Epston & White 1994:45; Gosling & Zangari 1996:51).

*Alternative stories, unique outcomes or sparkling moments.* Alternative stories, unique outcomes or sparkling moments are those developments in the client's life that facilitate the re-authoring of his/her life according to preferred stories. Frequently, these developments might not have been predicted by either the client or therapist. For an event to qualify as an unique outcome, it must be regarded as eligible by the person to whose life the event relates (White 1991:26-30).

A client's local culture often includes attitudes and practices - such as patriarchy - that support the problem-saturated story. One of the practices of narrative pastoral therapy is to delve for and uncover possibilities for helping people make the stories they are re-authoring thicker and more multi-stranded. As clients construct their narratives, they search for small stories in their past that can help explain or account for more multi-storied options. Often clients miss these sparkling moments in their lives, either by ignoring

them or seeing them as 'not such a big deal'. Repetition of the stories, thorough questioning about details in the stories including more people in the stories, and including various perspectives from various people in the stories, all help to add to a more multi-layered version of the stories (White & Epston 1990:55-63; Freedman & Combs 1996a:195).

*Letters.* Writing and the written text constitute and actively shape our lives, defining our identities and location in the larger social context (White & Epston 1990). Letters are used for a variety of purposes. For instance, engaging absent members of a family; acknowledging attendance of therapy; focusing clients' attention and clarifying directives; paradoxical injunctions; communicating post-session thoughts and the understanding of the problem; summarising new events; promoting change in the direction of clients' goals; modifying the rules of the system; and terminating treatment (Bacigalupe 1996:362-363; Freedman & Combs 1996a:208-224).

Letters are a tool to be used by a client by which to manage their own case. Their documented words manage to become constant reminders of their personhood.

## **2.4 CONCLUSION**

The social constructionist discourse describes how meaning is negotiated within different domains of social discourse. These meanings mould our perception of the world into the realities we know. The social constructionist discourse analyses our traditions, languages and institutions to discover how they shape our social discourse. As much as a person who chooses to

consult with me comes to the consultation process with specific discourses as part of his/her being-in-the-world, I too go into the consultation process with my personal being-in-the-world very much present. Experience has taught me that on those occasions when I went into the consultation process with a measure of uncertainty about my personal epistemological and therapeutic positioning, it reflected in the consultation process and hampered change. Knowing that I root myself within the social constructionist discourse, feminism and narrative pastoral therapy allows me to bring my being-in-the-world to the consultation process with a sense of security about creating the best possible space for co-labouring with someone towards his/her preferred story (Griffith & Griffith 1992:5-11).

## **chapter three**

### **MISSING CHILDREN**

#### **3.1 WHO, WHAT, WHERE AND HOW OF MISSING CHILDREN?**

But among all the evils in the world, there was one worst thing, and he had always known what it was. It grew out of a single image; a child hunched in the dark, alone and in pain, whimpering for help, where no help would come. That child had a thousand faces, plastered on bulletin boards in the entrances of WalMarts, on milk cartons, on desperate flyers in the mail. *Have you seen this child?* The abandoned. The kidnapped. Runaways. But worse than being that child crying in the dark was being the parent of that child. Pondering forever the moment you let your attention wander in the mall, or that you'd said yes to that out-of-town trip, conjuring scenes of cruelty beyond Goya himself, living and reliving them in the everlasting torment of self-inflicted damnation.

(Iles 2001:227-228)

To my knowledge, no academic document regarding the issue of missing children in South Africa has been published. Since the only sources that I have been able to locate are those in newspapers and magazines, the information regarding missing children in South Africa has thus to be largely extrapolated from international sources. As previously stated in this report (Section 1.3.3 Co-search Aims), a moratorium has been issued by the Minister of Police against any information regarding the incidence of missing children in South Africa "leaving his office". Considering both the Minister of Police's moratorium on information and the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics, Capt. Fanie van Deventer, Head of the Bureau for Missing Persons, makes a daring statement when he maintains that the Bureau has an approximately 84% success rate in locating missing children (Kuhne & Kemp 2001:11).

In the USA missing and abducted children became an issue of national concern when 28 black children and teenagers went missing in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981. When the 6-year-old Adam Walsh was abducted from a shopping mall during 1981 and was later found beheaded, his father, John Walsh, led a crusade to find missing children. It was only when John Walsh made the issue of missing children his business that the American authorities began to take notice (Wishon & Brooks 1997:8-9).

Although child abduction may not always be sexually motivated, it is nonetheless a violent way of achieving a sense of power (Tedisco & Paludi

1996:xix). The question invariably arises: How many Sasha-Leigh Crooks<sup>3</sup> will have to die in South Africa before *meaningful* actions are implemented by the South African authorities in order to stop children from going missing?

Wishon and Brooks (1997:10-15) state unequivocally that they are unable to accurately report on the number of missing children in the USA: in fact, many police departments do not even have an accurate definition of whom to regard as a missing child. Moreover, the recovery rate is poor: of children who go missing, only 10% have a chance of ever seeing their custodial parent again. The missing children's low return probability is mainly due to the abductor's distinct *modus operandi*, which usually includes the following:

*Short-term abductions:*

- A child is directly transported to a specific location, frequently with no intention on the abductor's behalf to sequester them for long enough to establish a fugitive identity.
- There is no attempt to officially establish a new residence or to change the child's name or appearance.
- The abductor's intention is marked by the temporariness of the abduction.

*Long-term abductions:*

- The abductor's lifestyle clearly indicates law enforcement evasion.
- The abductions frequently involve interstate flight, many changes of residence, attempts to mask the child's identity and deprivation of social interactions with peers.
- Life with the abductor generally promotes a less stable and safe lifestyle.

Abducted children, whether short-term or long-term, face intimidation, abuse, violence and sometimes death at the hands of their abductors. Most of these children find themselves trapped in a hopeless world of confusion, humiliation, pain and agony (Wishon & Brooks 1997:10). There are three classifications of missing children, namely runaways, parental abductions and abductions by

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<sup>3</sup> Sasha-Leigh Crooks, an eight-year old girl, went missing from her home in Ottery, Cape Town, on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2003 and was subsequently murdered by a neighbour. Her mutilated body was found in Pelican Heights, Strandfontein, on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2003.

unknown persons. Child victims come from all families representing all ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

*Runaways:* The majority of missing children involve apparent runaways. The question has to be asked, though, regarding whether this fact attributes to the children *in reality* running away, or whether the law enforcement authorities choose to categorise a missing child as a runaway as that involves far less effort in locating the missing child (Forst & Blomquist 1991:14-17; Tedisco & Paludi 1996:27-41).

*Parental abductions:* The figure for parental abduction is enormous. Because a parent is mostly trusted and loving, the abduction by a parent can be exceedingly traumatic for the child. The non-custodial parent's perception that the custodial parent wants to exclude him/her from the child's life often leads to a parental abduction (Forst & Blomquist 1991:10-14; Tedisco & Paludi 1996:16).

*Abductions by unknown persons:* "Kidnapping" is the more familiar term used for abductions by unknown persons. It also possibly evokes a more emotional response from the public. "Kidnapping" is the intentional taking of a person and compelling the person, either adult or child, to be detained against his or her will (Forst & Blomquist 1991:2). *The investigator's guide to missing child cases for law-enforcement officers locating missing children* (1987:vii) informs law-enforcement officers that stranger abductions are cases in which the child was taken, kept or concealed by a person other than his parent or legal custodian (see also Collins, McCella, Powers & Stutts 1989:35,41).

The National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children defines non-family abductions as the coerced and unauthorised taking of a child into a building, vehicle, or a distance of more than 20 feet; the detention of a child for a period of more than an hour; or the luring of a child for the purposes of committing another crime by someone other than a family member (Steidel 2000:43).

Stranger abductions are perfectly related and sanctioned by means of the children's story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Stranger abductions refer primarily

to those children kidnapped by strangers. Compared to the numbers of the previous two categories, the incidence for stranger abduction is small. Once again the question has to be posed regarding the law enforcement authorities' motivation for the different classifications in terms of missing children. Missing children abducted by a stranger are almost *always* abused physically, emotionally or both. Sexual abuse is almost inevitable. When such a child grows older and loses his/her usefulness to the abductor, they are put out on the street to fend for themselves. Often a missing child will identify so strongly with his/her captors that he/she will become confused and accept the captors as his/her family (Tedisco & Paludi 1996:42-56; Wishon & Brooks 1997:12-15).

*Otherwise missing:* Although most publications refer to only the above mentioned categories of missing children, Finkelhor, Adigian and Hotaling (1996:291-310) describe a fourth category of missing children, namely 'Otherwise missing'. This category contains in turn, four subgroups of being 'otherwise missing': (a) children who are injured, (b) children who are engaged in delinquent, time-testing, and rebellious behaviour, (c) children who get lost, and (d) children who only appear to be missing because of mix-ups and miscommunication among caregivers.

### **3.1.1 Preventing child abductions**

People need to be made aware of ways in which we as a community can prevent child abductions. In this section I will explore practices that can assist in the prevention of child abductions.

#### **3.1.1.1 The parent's role**

*Non-custodial abductions:* Parental, or non-custodian, abductions occur when a non-custodial parent removes a child to another town, county, state or country (Dabbagh 1997:5). Dabbagh (1997:5) states that these non-custodial snatchings most often occur due to revenge on the ex-spouse's behalf.

Custodial parents are advised to have copies of the court order granting them custody available at all times to expedite procedures in the event of non-custodial kidnappings. They should notify schools, day care centres, sports clubs if a non-custodial parent is not allowed access to the child. Their child should understand perfectly when he/she is to be returned home by the non-custodial parent. Procedures should also be in place which ensure that the child could contact the custodial parent should he/she be away from home for a specified length of time. The custodial parent should also discuss sensitively with the child the possibility of abduction by the non-custodial parent (Arenberg, Bartimole & Bartimole 1984:5-9; Tedisco & Paludi 1996:55-73).

*Runaways:* 'Running away' conjures up images of a child with a stick and a bundle setting out to look for greener pastures. Running away as a solution to the perceived unbearable home situation has thus been dramatised and made acceptable by the media (Arenberg, Bartimole & Bartimole 1984:24-33).

Similarly stories like *Huckleberry Finn* help to illustrate and promote the illusion held by youngsters that running away will solve all problems. Children mostly run away because the situation at home is unbearable. Most often these children do not discuss their problems with anyone, probably because they do not trust the system or other persons enough.

Literature cites the following warning signs for children who are contemplating running away: growing personal isolation, excessive blow-ups, abrupt mood-swings, increased violations like truancy, loitering etcetera, increased sleeping, diminished communications, school troubles, continuous parental outbursts due to personal, financial or marital problems, family crises and unexplained money or possessions (Arenberg, Bartimole & Bartimole 1984:33-34; see also Appendix 3 – Runaway Prevention Tips).

*Stranger abductions:* Parents should educate their children regarding the possibility of being abducted, thus taking their child's safety very seriously. Certain safety tips regarding child abduction should be given careful attention (Appendix 3). Child abductors will search for the easiest target to abduct: the child who is alone, one who is too trusting, one who appears to be unwarned about criminals. Most abductors try to trick children into coming with them, as they do not want to attract attention to themselves. Parents should work out definite strategies with their children to avoid the possibility of abduction (Appendix 5 – The exploiter or Abductor: Not necessarily a stranger). Following the same school route, each day, on his/her own; school bus stops; shopping areas; wooded areas; alleyways; playgrounds; video parlours; leaving a child alone in the car or in the front yard; carnivals; fairs amusement parks; public rest rooms; being alone at home; baby sitters and hitch hiking are all potentially dangerous situations/places for a child (Arenberg, Bartimole & Bartimole 1984:38-78; Tedisco & Paludi 1996:77-94).

### **3.1.1.2 The school's role**

The possibility exists that a child might be abducted from a school. What can schools do to prevent abductions? (Appendix 4 – School Safety Tips). Schools should have all relevant and current information about any child on file, along with a current photograph of the child. When parents submit their child's annual information documentation, this should include a current head and shoulders photograph. Schools share the responsibility of up-to-date information on children with the children's parents. When children are absent from school, the school should have a reliable system for checking up on where the child is. Schools should keep parents informed regarding the possibility of child abductions and how to keep their children safe. Schools should continually reinforce information regarding personal safety that children are hopefully taught at home. Personal alertness and user-friendly guidance reduce the risk of children being abducted.

Schools should ensure children's safety by considering the following:

- All visitors should report to the office

- Control all exits and entrances to the school building and yard to monitor unauthorized arrivals and departures
- Check the validity of student absences
- Provide adequate adult supervision on the playground
- Report the presence of “suspicious” persons on the school grounds
- Sponsor an annual child safety week

Schools should include the message in their abduction awareness campaigns that running away from home is not an option. Speaking to someone who might be able to help them might be a better option to the solution of their situation (Tedisco & Paludi 1996:95-109).

### **3.1.1.3 The law enforcement authorities’ role**

The local police should be the first in the line of help should a child disappear (Dabbagh 1997:27-31). The police should respond *instantly* when a child disappears and *not* wait 24 or 48 hours. More often than not, parents experience that they are told by the police to wait 24 to 48 hours to see whether the child does not come back and then to contact the police again. Dillmuth (1984:24-32) states equivocally that any missing child is child at risk and that if a child should be missing for more than 48 hours that child is probably dead. If the child is a teenager, he/she will probably become a prostitute in order to survive. Every case is a serious case.

A uniformed police officer should arrive at the parent’s house within 15 minutes of the parent’s call. The police officer’s responsibility is to evaluate the situation. The parent needs to complete a missing persons form. Police officers should search the immediate area. Should more manpower be needed, this needs to arrive at the parent’s home within 15 minutes of being summonsed. The police should search the neighbourhood using tracking dogs if necessary. A missing persons alert should be issued and a central command post established. The parent has the right to information regarding the search at any time (Arenberg, Bartimole & Bartimole 1984:79-84; Dabbagh 1997:53). However, this may not always be the case in South Africa.

*When your child goes missing: A family survival guide* (Bilschik 1998) provides excellent guidelines regarding what to do to alert the law enforcement authorities when a child is suspected of being missing and what to expect from the law enforcement agencies once they have been contacted.

Both the formal and informal categories of missing children evoke varied attitudes and reactions among the law enforcement officers (Forst 1990:5). The police officers' perception regarding missing children is directly related to their actions in terms of finding a missing child. By and large, from the perspective of most police personnel, missing children cases do not constitute a unique problem. Police officers' perception of a case's seriousness is in direct proportion to the perceived danger of the child in question. Those cases where the police officers do not perceive the child to be in any danger get little attention. Juvenile specialists employed by law enforcement authorities may have a different view on child kidnapping and the execution of their investigations (US Attorney General's Advisory Board on Missing Children 1988: 54; Forst & Blomquist 1991:251-252). The response actually given to a case relates to the number of cases the particular law enforcement agency is expected to investigate at that time and the investigative resources available to solve the case. Generally, police feel that they respond appropriately to the missing children cases.

#### **3.1.1.4 What needs to be done**

No legislation regarding missing children has been adopted in South Africa. It is of utmost importance that such legislation should be considered by the responsible authorities. It is reported that legislation seems to curtail, even in a small way, the activities of child snatchers (Tedisco & Paludi 1996:111-122). The following are non-specific needs regarding legislation in terms of missing children in South Africa:

- The term "missing child" needs to be accurately defined
- Relevant legislation regarding missing children in South Africa needs to be introduced
- Public awareness and education regarding missing children in South Africa should receive concentrated attention

- Increased and specific training for the police in dealing with child disappearances in South Africa
- Applicable perpetrator punishment should be introduced in South Africa

### **3.1.1.5 Defining the term “missing child”**

The definition of the term “missing child” remains confused, varied and in need of clarification. Elements that need definition and clarification included the categories of missing children (run away, parental abduction, stranger abduction, unknown, or otherwise missing), what length of time away from home constitutes a child being missing, and the age of the individual to be regarded as a child. Until clear definitions for the missing children problem have been constructed, accurate estimates of the incidence of missing children are virtually impossible (Forst & Blomquist 1991:2).

Missing children is actually a generic term, with no uniform or standardised legal meaning (Collins, McCella, Powers & Stutts 1989:5). In reality, missing children and homeless youth encompass a wide variety of formal legal classifications as well as informal categories. Possible definitions to consider are the following: A missing person is generally regarded as a person whose whereabouts are unknown (by close family members, friends, or associates) and whose safety and welfare cannot be confirmed (Forst 1990:10). A missing person is a person who is missing under circumstances which indicate that he/she may have committed suicide or may have been a victim of crime or a victim of accident (Forst 1990:11). Missing children are persons under 18 years of age who are missing from the care, custody, and control of their parents, guardians or persons responsible for them (Forst 1990:44).

Exploring the discourse of child abduction has up to now included understandings of different meanings attached to what constitutes the phenomena of missing children and what practices would assist in the prevention of child abduction. However, I think it is also important to explore ideas and opinions regarding the perpetrator of child abduction and possible discourses that maintain the prevalence of child abduction.

### **3.1.2 The effects of power and patriarchy on abducting practices**

Very few abductors are motivated by sex. The only sexual pleasure abductors normally receive is from the humiliation of the victim (Doyle & Paludi 1995). The abductors' primary motivation is the feeling of power. The sense of power is rooted in the dominance and humiliation of others who are less powerful. One prime ingredient of abduction is the element of aggression that is deeply imbedded in the masculine gender role in our culture (Doyle & Paludi 1995). Men who abuse children regard aggression as one of the major ways of proving their masculinity:

To win, to be superior, to be successful, to conquer – all demonstrate masculinity to those who subscribe to common cultural notions of masculinity, i.e., the masculine mystique. And it would be surprising if these notions of masculinity did not find expression in men's sexual behaviours. Indeed, sex may be the arena where these notions of masculinity are most intensely played out, particularly by men who feel powerless in the rest of their lives, and hence whose masculinity is threatened by this sense of powerlessness.

(Russel 1973 in Tedisco & Paludi 1996:9)

Lang and Frenzel (1988) report that abductors confirm using power, threats and force during the abduction. Their power and anger is defined by dominance and humiliation. Child abductors focus on children, as they are less likely to confront the abductor's sense of power. Abductors typically view sexual victimisation as an element of the masculine role and right in society.

Non-custodial abductions are partly attributable to the fact that men and women define marriage differently. Husbands imagine themselves to have power over wives as they see women as their property. When custody of the child/ren is awarded to the wife after the divorce, the husband is unable to accept his loss of property and power and has then to find a way to exert his power over his property. The husband subsequently retrieves part of his property by abducting the child/ren (Tedisco & Paludi 1996:59-60).

"Kidnapping" is the intentional taking of a person and compelling the person, either adult or child, to be detained against his or her will (Forst & Blomquist 1991:2). The taking of the person – by seizure or confinement - the perpetrator's physical control over the victim; the confined person's

constricted personal liberty; and the secrecy regarding the whereabouts of the victim all contribute to the kidnapper's construction of meaning regarding his own power and right to decide on behalf of someone else.

Abductors are very seldom women. Women most often abduct infants should they, personally, be unable to have a child (Fass 1997). These abductions very seldom have the harm of the infant or monetary gains as goal. In contrast, it would seem that the notions of personal power, or the perceived lack thereof, and patriarchal practices in society contribute to the compulsions of male abductors.

The abduction of children poses a challenge to communities regarding how to care for families who have lost a child. In the following section I will explore practices of hope and meaning making as ways of caring and supporting families who are uncertain about the welfare and whereabouts of their children.

### **3.2 HOPE, MAKING MEANING AND A MISSING CHILD**

On 5 September 2003, during National Arbour Day, the Department of Water Affairs hosted a Tree Planting Event at the Belville Community Centre. The Tree Planting Event was to pay respect to the parents of missing children and to remember those children in South Africa who had gone missing. During this event the Minister of Community Safety, Mr. Cyril Ramatlakane, reminded parents of the promise they had made to love and protect their children and implored the community to develop an attitude of protection towards all the children in their community. He stressed that only by mutual caring and through forming communities of support forming would we be able to protect our children against abduction.

If we are to embrace Mr. Ramatlakane's call for mutual caring and for forming communities of support, then narrative pastoral therapy needs to take into account the effects of child abduction on the family who has lost a loved one. The loss of a child and/or sibling opens the door to experiences of grief, loss

of hope and the struggle to make meaning both of the loss itself as well as the effects of that loss.

### **3.2.1 Loss**

Michelle and Michael lost their child and Melanie, Justin and Jason lost their brother when Matthew was stolen from their front yard six years ago. Grief is their response to the loss of their child and their brother. This most monstrous thing called child abduction had taken up residence in the most inner being of their family. At first their family experienced an indescribable sense of loss, and then came the grieving. Can anyone ever accurately describe the effects of this multi-tentacled monster? I will attempt to do so for the sake of this report.

When there is loss in a family, the resultant grief is said to be the interplay of individual family members grieving in the social and relational context of the family: each member affects and is affected by others. Grief is the reconstruction of a sense of a new “normal” that must be put in place so that the bereaved may have a predictable and orderly world in which to function. Grief results from the destruction of the meaning that is drawn from a significant relationship. The more central the lost relationship was to one’s life, the greater the sense of loss (Gilbert 1996:271).

Grief also results in the loss of the security of knowing that reality can be trusted to be predictable and understandable. Following a loss, meaning must be attributed to it in such a way as to allow the griever to regain a sense of order, control and purpose in life. Assumptions about how life “ought” to be which were disrupted by the loss must now be reconsidered and reconstructed. Through this reconsideration and reconstruction, the loss is gradually integrated into the new, revised assumptive world. This process is an expansive one: it grows to include the questioning of those assumptions that serve as basis for other beliefs and behaviours along with those that are directly related to the loss. The result is some degree of psychological and emotional upheaval. This can lead in turn to disruption of interpersonal and relational processes in the family and other social systems (Gilbert 1996:272).

Contrary to the family's expectations, grief does not show itself for everyone in the same way. Behaviours are interpreted and comments are made and assessed, all within the context of each member's assumptions about how their family relationship should progress. Each family member's grief, though, will have its own unique character, informed by the relationship which that member had with the person who is no longer there (Gilbert 1996:276-279).

When a loss has occurred in a family, it frequently happens that the whole family or some of its members might begin to concentrate their efforts on assisting others in the community who have been affected by a similar phenomenon, for example AIDS, cancer, child abduction, etcetera. The Ohlssons' stand against the cause of their loss is awe-inspiring. To be privileged with the position of walking alongside the Ohlssons in their time of loss is a humbling experience. That they could receive my small offers of support so generously was indeed an astonishing experience.

It is heartening to see the way the faith community they are involved in rallies around the family and supports them with food, clothes, electricity, petrol, singing, prayers, touch, or with practical chores like washing clothes and dishes or cleaning the house, etcetera. But the most beautiful sight is watching the faith community just sitting with Michelle. Not speaking, not praying out loud, not preaching – just sitting. For me, this was the epitome of a community genuinely caring and trying to keep hope alive in times of grief and turmoil.

### **3.2.2 Hope**

It would seem that most of the literature on hope sees hope as something that is engendered, or not, within a pastoral conversation. Stone and Lester (2001:259) claim that engendering hope is key in all pastoral conversation. Hope is the spiritual perspective on every aspect of life – its low points as well as its peaks. According to Stone and Lester (2001:259) the pastoral caregiver needs to foster a kind of hope that recognises the past, but also steps directly

into the future by exercising freedom in the present – by taking action. Vandecreek, Nye and Herth (1994:56) describe hope as central to an active religious faith. Sustaining hope is an essential function of pastoral caring, even if the hope is attached to a reality beyond death.

Hope is something that breaks the framework of causality: the effect far surpasses what is apparently the cause, and reverses the logical order. When we speak of hope, we are entering the realm of mystery. The power at work in hope that transforms is a power of enablement rather than a power of dominion. When we consider the notions regarding power that were discussed previously in this writing, it is easy to see how institutions might hold out hope to people as a way of domination. Domination includes the shortage of literacy, food, shelter, primary health care, social security and true freedom. A life of dignity becomes impossible. It would be amiss not to make mention that all over the world there are people who hold out hope for such subjugated groups by their mere commitment to freedom and human rights (Wilfred 1999:68-70).

Hope exists in the future. While the past may hold valuable memories and lessons, its troubles need not chain us. Only the future holds promise, the hope of something better to come, a chance to grow. The attitude we take toward the future can be placed on a continuum between despair and hope. In the future we can find possibilities. We can make stories about this future and call them “future stories” (Stone & Lester 2001:259-265). The future stories, though, should guard against despair becoming part of their fabric. To nurture hope, effective pastoral caring must attend to the future stories – to become their gatekeepers against despair. How people encounter the not-yet is crucial to their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

When speaking about hope and spirituality it would be amiss not to mention the name of Jürgen Moltmann (Meissner 1973:13-16; Moltmann 1975). Moltmann was influenced by Ernst Bloch’s work. Moltmann invariably calls attention to the importance of the future dimension of time consciousness – hope. Moltmann sees human beings as always on their way towards some expected future wholeness. It is within this reaching to or becoming in the

future that pastoral carers can walk the walk with people. William Lynch (in Stone & Lester 2001:262) describes hope as:

the fundamental knowledge and feeling that there is a way out of difficulty, that things can work out, that we as human persons can somehow handle and manage internal and external reality, that there are “solutions” in the ordinary biological and physiological sense of that word, that above all, there are ways out.

Farran, Herth and Popovich (1995:101-139) are three nurses who have investigated hope and health over a twenty seven year period. Their four dimensional model of hope, is worth considering. They delineate hope as the following:

*Hope as an experiential process.* Dynamic hope seems to arise in the concept of suffering, illness and death. Suffering is the greatest challenge to hope.

*Hope as a spiritual or transcendent process.* Many people use spiritual resources such as prayer, meditation and guided imagery in their hoping process. Hope transcends the finite. When finite hopes are dashed they transcend into the infinite.

*Hope as rational thought process.* This aspect of hope is the easiest to observe. It is very powerful and practical. A central dimension of hope is the provision of some sense of control. Even if people cannot control their circumstances, they can control their response to it.

*Hope as a relational process.* Friends, family and caregivers contribute to the maintenance of hope. Previous experiences regarding hope and trust also influence the possibility of hope during adversity.

Since hope is future-orientated, caring for persons who feel hopeless means helping them to imagine the future. For the despairing it means turning the “what’s it worth” into “maybe” and then, possibly, into “yes”. Turning thin, lean, washed-out stories into big, fat, thick alternative stories (Stone & Lester

2001:263). The pastoral carer now becomes the detective, digging out stories by asking new kinds of questions such as: “What do you think is going to be different for you in a year’s time?” “How are you going to get to that place where you can laugh again?” “Who do you think could tell me right now that they can already see you in your laughing place?” (Stone 1998:47-62).

Hope, rather than love, appears to be the central emotion. Although hope can be present without love, love cannot be present without hope. Hope lifts our spirits, making us think better and work better. In hope, reason and feeling come together. Hope is the imagination and the mind engaged at full tilt. Hopes that do not pan out abound, but ... it is hope that turns things around. Often hope scares people as it implies loss of control (Little 1999:236-243).

Hope is in the future, but it can often be found in the past. The memory of great deeds - particularly acts of kindness - spur us on to do the same in our day. Hope is not always about success – about what we will get out of it – but about meaning. Hope thrives when it has to rise above what it knows is the truth although all the truth may not be pretty. Hope attaches strongly to all kinds of people. Hope is also daydreaming – about the jackpot, about the new baby, about the new book ... Hope creates future (Little 1999:236-243).

It takes a degree of life energy to have hope (Richardson 2000:75). Without hope, we die. Where there is the promise of a future, a reason for living and people who care, there is life. But, for people to sustain us and in turn be sustained, we need to voice our stories of hope. By voicing our stories of hope, we give voice to the pain and the triumphs; we also strengthen each other and ourselves. When we give voice to the interactions that exercise our souls and our hearts, we can categorise them, wrestle them, lasso them and tame them. We cannot exorcise our demons alone, but together we can begin to round up the acts that cause us hopelessness (Mathews 1997:29-27). Hope is something we do together. Grief, like hope, is a family affair. Family members struggle to make sense of their loss by talking to each other. In so doing they attach meaning to their loss (Nadeau 2001:95).

Previously I alluded to hope being done by means of pastoral conversations and stories or narratives. Hope-stories are all embedded in their own specific socio-cultural, political and economic contexts. Hope-stories are not fairy tales. These stories are the stories people tell themselves about themselves, about others and about events. Personal and relational stories come in many forms: some are tragic, comic or romantic; others are mundane or repetitive. Some stories are startling. Some stories inspire and others accuse or degrade. Meaning is shaped and characters understood by way of stories. The way events are interpreted affects how people behave towards others and interact with others. What is told or left out during the telling of stories have real effects on the teller and the listener (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:47).

When people are experiencing hopelessness they mostly tend to take the experience very seriously. During hopelessness people often make totalising statements like “I’m stupid”, “I never get anything right” or “I deserve to die”. People often say equally totalising things about others and about their own relationships. When people come for help, they mostly present these problem-saturated stories about themselves, others or their relationships. These problem-saturated stories have the tendency to hide hope. When externalising language is used to speak about the problem, it allows for the problem to be detached from the person and to become its own entity. When the person can speak about the problem as “the stupidity”, “the guilt” or “the worthlessness”, it allows for hope to emerge again (Freeman, Epston & Lobovits 1997:47-67). Pastoral conversations conducted in a way that allows hope to emerge are mostly experienced as caring conversations.

### **3.2.3 Meaning-making**

If the pain went away, then it would be a real loss, a greater loss. The pain that stays with me is to honour him. I keep the pain at a level that is tolerable, but it is important to me that it is there, and it's for the same reason that we like to talk about him. We also think that our zest for life is a tribute to him. Life can be exciting. How would it honour him – and all that he lost – if we couldn't go on?

Dale's father, 10 years after losing him  
(Silverman 2000:131)

Narrative pastoral therapy is concerned with people's expression of their experiences of life and their spirituality. People mostly seem to express their experiences in the light of their interpretation of their spiritual experiences and their spirituality as a whole. By means of these interpretive acts people give meaning to their experiences of the world, often making sense of life largely through the looking glass of their spirituality. These sense-making acts also shape their lived experience.

Attempts to make meaning and to understand why one's child has been abducted can hurl a person into crisis – a disorientating period where they struggle with theodicy – making sense of their suffering in the light of their belief in a God of love. What is the correlation between God and suffering (Louw 1993:412; Louw 1983:53)? Four alternative explanations exist for the theodicy question: (a) either God desires to prevent harm, but cannot (then God is a God of love but is not omnipotent), (b) or God has the power to prevent harm, but does not desire to do that (then God is omnipotent but not loving), (c) or God neither has the desire nor the power to prevent harm (then God is neither omnipotent nor loving) or (d) God has the power to harm and desires harm (then God is the author of our sin) (Louw 1983:54). When people are facing a theodicy crisis in their attempts at meaning-making, narrative pastoral conversations can open the door for people to explore how they have socially constructed God through previous experiences and stories about God. Through conversations new meanings can be constructed and a perhaps new theodic orientations negotiated. An example of such a new theodic orientation is offered by Louw (1983:55) when he says that God is in our suffering. Could the caring and support that the Ohlssons experienced from their faith community reflect this new theodic orientation that Louw offers? Questions like these could perhaps invite people to negotiate the meaning they have attached to their suffering and loss.

Expressions of life are units of meaning. The meanings people attribute to their experiences are not independently derived. Rather, the interpretive resources available to people at a certain stage will determine the meanings they construct during their meaning-making acts. Meaning is at once personally, relationally and culturally achieved. Narrative pastoral therapy

assumes that the narrative, or story, provides the main way for people to understand their day-to-day life and to extract their meanings from those stories they tell themselves about themselves, tell themselves about others or are told about others:

A primary focus of narrative therapy is people's expressions of their experiences of life. The conversations of this therapy are shaped by the proposal that, in order for people to express their experiences of the worlds that they live through they must engage in acts of the interpretation of these experiences. Not only do these interpretative acts make it possible for people to give meaning to their experiences of the world, rendering life sensible to themselves and to others, but these acts also shape their expression of this lived experience. According to this understanding, people's expressions of life, which are actually shaping and constitutive of their lives, are units of meaning and experience, and these elements are inseparable.

(White 2000:9)

People coping with loss or trauma in their life are compelled to attribute meaning to the event with which they are expected to cope. They often attribute one or more reasons to the loss of their loved one. It is important for the pastoral therapist to keep this meaning-making in mind during the course of the therapeutic journey. The meaning-making can assist the therapist in finding unique outcomes and sparkling moments in the life of the bereft loved one. Some of the attributable reasons are the following:

*Social bonds.* Social supports and friendship may become strengthened or newly established through the grieving process.

*Spirituality.* Although one's spirituality and beliefs are often upset by the betrayal of death or loss, frequently the altered belief system that emerges from bereavement is stronger. This spiritual enrichment may occur as one frames and reframes actions and events and retrospectively revises, selects and orders past details in order to justify and find more purpose in one's current life situation. This process may also help individuals in the construction of future stories by projecting hopefulness and a sense of purpose into their futures. During this process, one's spirituality is also revised, re-viewed and re-accepted often with a resultant stronger sense of one's spirituality (also in Kirsh 1996:55-61).

*Lifestyle.* Personal growth often accompanies the grieving process. Grieving people may gradually become aware of internal resources that were unknown to them prior to the loss. A sense of independence and competence often also stands with the grieving person.

*Emotion.* People learn healthy ways to express and deal with emotion as they have to struggle with the sadness, guilt, anger or fear that come with loss (Franz, Farrel & Trolley 2001:191-194).

Meaning is directly influenced by the ideological structures we live in (for instance, ethnicity, gender, class). How we create meaning about specific events is not the result of scientific proof, psychological fact or religious truth (Madigan 1994:82). Rather, it is the result of the meaning we accept as our own when we listen to the stories we tell ourselves; when we decide what part of a specific experience to include in the telling of the story. These stories shape our lives (White 1991:30).

Narratives have long been recognised as an important part of healing from loss. The inter-subjective telling of a story, both privately to an imagined other and by confiding in an empathic companion, is often thought to be the vehicle through which healing occurs. The narrator tells and retells the story. At some point the story of loss becomes a story of meaning (Romanoff 2001:247).

### **3.3 CONCLUSION**

Hope is to desire and to expect. To desire but not to expect is not hope: although you may desire the moon, you will hardly hope for it. To expect but not to desire is not hope: while we may expect our loved one to die, we would hardly be hoping for it. But to *desire*, and to expect the *desire's* fulfilment, that is *hope*. And we are saved by hope (Townes 1997:4).

Hope rises; hope hopes against hope; hope crosses its fingers; hope burns steadily; hope flickers, fails, is given up and is extinguished; hopes are dashed. Hope calculates; hope plays out its rope and reels in its invisible catch. Hope springs eternal. Hope revises. Hope's friends are euphoria,

excitement, faith, illusion, expectation, imagination, trust, armistice and pride. Hope's opponents are discouragement, disillusion, despair, fear, guilt, scepticism, doubt and self-doubt (Townes 1997:4).

Hope makes meaning; meaning makes hope and loss finds its place somewhere in between. Loss sometimes invades the fibres of hope and meaning, baring everything and engulfing the soul. But for Michelle, her story provided protective layers of meaning enriched by hope which enabled her to withstand the agony of loss.

# chapter four

## PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS WITH MICHELLE

### 4.1 BEING INTRODUCED

#### 4.1.1 The moment of insertion

The moment of insertion is that moment which locates one's pastoral response in the lived experience of individuals and communities (Cochrane,

de Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17). Kotzé (2001:2-3) describes the moment of insertion as the therapist being inserted into or directly confronted with the pain and suffering of people. Moments of insertion introduce trauma as well as challenges for the pastoral therapist: they cannot but take a stand in terms of what it is that they are being faced with when they engage with people in their pain and suffering.

The moment of insertion for pastoral therapists into the lives of fellow South Africans has become quite critical, particularly since so much hurt and pain has been the daily bread of so many people. Pastoral therapists need to realise that an “insertion” into the lives of people who have faced poverty, marginalisation, attacks and abuse is the basic point of departure for a holistic practical theology that refuses to focus its concern only on the issues limited to the comfort zone of the pastoral therapist. The moment of insertion probably contains two levels: firstly, the decision to become part of the lives of fellow human beings and secondly, being the actual face-to-face connection with the people.

The first level – the decision to become involved - of my moment of insertion came when I read the newspaper article I referred to in Chapter One. The second level – the actual meeting – occurred on the next Wednesday when I actually met face-to-face with Michelle for the first time. My first, and subsequent, meeting(s) with Michelle will be described during the course of this chapter.

My experiences since the moment of insertion have in many ways reflected the ideas which White (1989; 2002) and White and Epston (1990) describe as the rites of passage. Michelle has also reflected on her experiences during the conversational process she embarked on when accepting me into her life. The metaphor of the rites of passage also resonated with her.

#### **4.1.2 Rites of passage**

The rites of passage metaphor invokes in me the picture of being allowed through a door. It is as if I have been part of a ceremony or ritual which has

allowed me the privilege of passing from one place to another. This idea of passing from one distinct place into the next is a very real reflection of what happened in me during my journey with Michelle. When I discussed this idea with Michelle, she acknowledged that she too had often pondered on how far she had moved from the place she had been when we had first met. She describes her migration very eloquently throughout the course of Chapter Five.

White (1989:76-84; 2002:25-33) and White and Epston (1990:7) describe three stages in the rites of passages.

*Separation phase.* The person breaks from life as they know it. This separation from life as they know it marks the beginning of their journey.

*Liminal phase.* White calls the liminal phase a 'betwixt and between' phase in which one's familiar sense of being in the world is absent and where nothing means quite what it meant before. Disorientation, confusion and despair often mark this phase.

*Reincorporation phase.* Reincorporation happens when a person finds that they have arrived at another place in life. In the reincorporation phase they experience a 'fit' that provides for them a sense of once again being at home with themselves and with a preferred way of life. During this phase a sense of being acknowledged and skilled with regards to the task of living is experienced.

When a client is introduced to the rites of passage metaphor during a therapeutic session, they are provided with a map that guides them in terms of what to expect next on this journey of new possibilities. The map often prepares the client for possible times when turning around and going back to familiar land becomes an option. White (1989:78) suggests that the theme of "it's either them or me" frequently marks the thinking of the person before he/she gets on board for the journey towards reincorporation.

Michelle was often confronted with the "it's either them or me" choice during the course of her life journey. Tenacity is her close companion. This is

especially apparent when one considers how far she has travelled, and how she has negotiated the ups and downs on her life's journey. Right from the start, Michelle knew that God had given her a vision regarding CPMC. She knew that she had to propel and initiate the inception of CPMC. Yet, Michelle's voice had been silenced on many occasions, making it difficult for her to speak out the injustices that were being perpetrated against her, her family and the members of her organisation. When Michelle speaks of her rites of passage, she describes herself as embarking on the journey as "the voiceless one" and as disembarking at the end of the writing of this dissertation as "the one with the booming voice that everybody listens to."

Michelle's journey also reflects a story of personal agency where she challenged dominant discourses and chose to position herself as "the one with the booming voice that everybody listens to."

#### **4.1.3 Agency**

When one is socially constructed within a specific cultural or ethnic group, one would most often speak from positions or discourses held by that group. Feminist and postmodernist discourses hold the position that those persons who subscribe to the tenets which these discourses uphold are open to the possibilities and ideals of the group rather than their own. When we are open to other possibilities, we may speak of these possibilities in a new and mobilising way. We become agents of these new possibilities by voicing in every forum possible our disenchantment with the previous ways of doing, and thus become participants in the co-construction of the new ways. As agents of the new possibilities, we practice agency by making heard the voices of the new possibilities (Davies 1991:42-53), thereby liberating them from old and limiting discourses.

Agency is the possibility to resist, change and subvert the discourses through which one is being constituted. Agency means positioning yourself so that no powerful other can capture or control your identity (Davies 1991:42-53). Personal agency is exercised when an individual reviews the controlling discourses that operate in his/her life and then opts for options that are

preferred – opts for alternative stories that are more constitutive of life (White 1988/9:8).

Self-agency, like personal agency, is the ability to act, feel and think in a way that is liberating; that opens up new possibilities and allows us to see that new possibilities exist. Self-agency is freedom and is embodied in language. Labelling, or the practice of describing someone in totalising language, stands against agency (Anderson 1997:31). Agency and accountability go hand in hand, as both agency and accountability require constant self-reflection. If agency is dismissed, accountability disappears as well (Lannamann 1999:85-88).

Agency, is the extent to which individuals can act for themselves and speak on their own behalf. Such agency is more of an achievement than a right. Agency is established in the face of dominant discourses and it often involves a deliberate break from the influence of dominant discourses (Monk et al 1997:301). Dominant discourses are those discourses that, at a particular time, govern a particular society. In Michelle's case, the silence of her voice would be attributable to the dominant discourse in her society that husbands speak the "important" things and wives are quiet and in the background. Michelle also had to face the dominant discourse that academic qualifications constitute one's right to speak and write. At first she felt uncomfortable writing to me but as her journey continued she challenged this discourse by writing back to me, to the reflecting team (who were all qualified academic people) and also as a woman, running a successful organisation: Concerned Parents of Missing Children (CPMC). When plotting the development of self-agency in Michelle's life, one is able to hear her voice becoming louder and louder as she stands against the totalising discourses of her community.

Possibly the best way to observe Michelle's growing stand for self-agency is through her own voice. Her letters reflect her life-journey.

## **4.2 THE FIRST CONVERSATION AND THE FIRST LETTER TO MICHELLE**

#### 4.2.1 Writing letters

In 1974 Jacques Derrida published *Glas*. This work consisted of two continuous columns of print. Both these columns begin in mid-sentence and go on for almost 300 pages, with occasional indented passages like remarks and occasional slabs of quotation. The left-hand column, with slightly larger print and closer-set lines, consists of a highly original reading of, and interweaving of quotes from the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Hegel. The other column is a commentary, also with extensive quotation, on the works of the French lyrical pederast writer and jailbird, Jean Genet (Strathern 2003:34).

I borrow from Derrida in the formatting of this section describing my conversations with and letters to Michelle. The left hand column reflects extracts from her story as she told it to me on the first four occasions we met. The right hand column reflects the first four letters I wrote to her in response to our conversations. By juxtaposing these two literary forms in this way, I wish to reveal some of the multi-layeredness and richness of Michelle's narrative. In using the direct transcriptions of her telling, Michelle's voice will have the loudest reverberation and subsequent authenticity.

Conversation is, by its very nature ephemeral. After a particularly meaningful session, a client walks out aglow with some provocative new thought, but a few blocks away, the exact words that had struck home as so profound may already be hard to recall ....But the words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does; they endure through time and space, bearing witness to the word of therapy and immortalising it. A client can hold a letter in hand, reading and re-reading it days, months and years after the session.

(Epston 1998:95)

Letters are more than simply a summary of what takes place in a session. In a storied therapy; the letters are used mainly for the purpose of turning lived experience into a story format. In letters one is always tuning in to what opens up new possibilities, any glimpse of an alternative to the clients' problem-saturated story. Letterwriting allows the therapist's thinking about clients and the therapy to be as transparent as possible. Letters are taken home, read and re-read, told and re-told. A letter can be read anywhere and at any time. Narrative letters tell a story, rather than exposing or explaining.

All letters normally contain the same elements – a report or summary of the useful moments of the session, additional reflections and questions from the therapist and the inclusion of people who did not attend the meeting – but can be used in many different situations. For instance, letters of invitation, letters of prediction, counter-referral letters, letters of reference, brief letters, letters for special occasions, letters of redundancy, discharge letters, letters of retirement (Epston 1998:95-110). According to David Epston (Freedman & Combs 1996:208), in an informal survey he found that on average one letter is equal to 4.5 sessions (White & Epston 1990:84-163; Freedman & Combs 1996:208-222; Epston 1997:112-124).

My first conversation with Michelle was rather uncomfortable for both of us, as neither of us really knew what to expect. She invited me into her house and when we sat down I explained to her that I would like to support her in her struggle with the pain of Matthew's disappearance if she would want me to. I explained to her about the practice of asking questions during our time together, about writing her a letter and that she was free to tell me if anything we did together did not fit for her. When Michelle started telling me about Matthew's disappearance, the discomfort between us started evaporating.

#### **4.2.2 First conversation / first letter**

## THE FIRST CONVERSATION

Matthew came in and said “Mummy can I go get the bin?” I said well go get the bin outside and why he asked me, I know it sounds stupid these days, children just do what they want to. I am always locked up, my door is always locked up and my children are never outside alone. Whenever they are outside I am outside. If I got tired of them we would come in and we go lay and watch TV, read or a take a Hymnbook and we would sing. It didn't matter what we do. That was our routine. If they feel they want to go to the park I would go along and I was then tired because in my mind my children were always around me because they never went on holidays, they never went to spend weekends with family because I just had this bond with my kids. I feel every pain they have and as he went outside Melanie went after him and she came back in she said “Mummy look here” and she's got my slipper he put thorns in and she would like to take it out with a needle, but I just heard him pulling the bin then I heard a bang – a bang that actually told me he had put the bin down. I said,

“Melanie, I heard Matthew put the bin outside, go look outside. She went outside, no, she went to the window and

## THE FIRST LETTER

Dear Michelle

I have been wondering about how, since I saw you on Wednesday, to start this letter to you. I am so aware of the privilege of having been allowed into your home as a complete stranger who approached you. You had every right to be sceptical about me approaching you, yet you agreed immediately and invited me into your home with no reservation. It made me wonder whether you are aware that this hospitality and openness to people is something that is very much a part of how you live your life? You told me about the street children that you welcome into your house, I met Miela, your “other daughter” whom you raised, and then there are also the parents of other missing children that you support and help. You also told about the street children that you invite to sit at your table

and share your meals. Would you say that this is something like having a big heart, one filled with warmth and care for others?

Michelle, you spoke so often about the important role God plays in your lives and how you and your family would never have been able to get through this ordeal without the knowledge that God was there for you. You said that it is also a special consolation to you that Matthew has a strong relationship with God and that you know that God is watching over him wherever he is. What was it that Matthew did that gave you this impression about his relationship with God?

I share this sense about God watching over me. I never read the newspaper. It is something that I state categorically to anyone who wants to listen! Yet, on that particular Thursday evening, I stopped to look at the front page of the Cape Argus that my husband had brought home. It was as if something was drawing me towards it. I saw the article at the bottom of the page that Lynette Johns had written about you and your family moving from your house and just had a knowledge that I was to contact her to find out where it was that I could get hold of you. She told me that the number provided for the Concerned Parents of Missing Children Organization was actually your number and that I could get hold of you at that number.

That was how it happened that I called you and you told me that you would be pleased to see me as you were struggling with the moving from your house and that you had not really experienced much support from other psychologists or social workers in your area. You explained how the psychologists you had

she said “Mummy he is outside” and I said, “well go get him”. From the window she goes to the door and she said “Mummy he is not there” and I jumped up and said, “how can you say he is not there. But she said, “ Mummy he isn’t, he’s not here”. I looked in the bin, maybe he was playing hide-&-seek, maybe he himself got in the bin to make Melanie think he is not there or whatever, I thought that and I ran over to my opposite neighbour and I asked her “did you perhaps send my son anywhere” and she said “no I would never do that” and I ran up and down. I came inside, I lift up all the beds, I empty all the cupboards, maybe he’s playing with Melanie or something. I empty all the cupboards; I lift up all the beds. We had a lot of animals outside – we had dogs, chickens, rabbits, birds, ducks – you name it, we had it. I said Melanie “go look in the chicken’s room”. “Mummy he is not there”. I said go look in your Daddy’s tool shed – “Mummy he is not there”. “Just go look”. We went and looked everywhere and afterwards when I couldn’t find him I said, “just lock the door” and over, ran through the park to go to a public telephone – at that time we didn’t have a telephone as the line was cut a long time ago – I telephoned my husband at work. Mr. X, tell Michael Matthew is gone and he said to me “how

seen had told you that you were depressed and that you needed medication, which you felt contributed to you feeling like a zombie. You said that you then decided to stop taking the medication and see this thing through in you own strength. You told me that you experienced God’s help in your struggle against the depression. How did you make use of God’s help? Was it through prayer, through scripture or in other ways?

Michael explained to me how to get to your house and we made a date for Wednesday. All the way to your house, I had the feeling that I might be intruding on your privacy and I was not at all sure that you would be happy to see me. Yet, Michelle, when you welcomed me at your front door, I knew that it was OK that I was there. You said “hallo”, smiled and asked me to sit down with what I experienced as much warmth. Do you think that it is your willingness to be warm and open with people that draws other parents to knock on your door when they have to face the fact that their child had disappeared?

When I asked you how you thought I could contribute to your journey, you were more concerned about the other parents of missing children than about yourself. You thought that maybe you could get these parents together and that I could speak to them as well. Is this another quality that you prefer to treasure in yourself, the loving concern for others and this ability to act on their needs? You told me that you try to put your own feelings aside. How has this been helpful to you? Did it perhaps provide opportunity to help others, which in turn helped you in feeling you are doing something instead of just helplessly waiting? Have there been times that you have also received the love and care of others for whom you have cared?

You spoke a lot about Matthew. It seemed to me that your memories of Matthew have supported you during this time since his disappearance, would you agree? You told us how Matthew is a “hardkoppige mannetjie” (pig-headed little guy) and that Jason is just like him. You said that it often surprises you how much Jason is like Matthew. How his gestures, way of speaking and even the way he sleeps is just like his brother! I wonder if seeing Jason and parenting him while holding on to the wonderful memories of Matthew strengthens you?

You explained that you believe that if there was a possibility for Matthew to have come home, that he would have been home already. That he is a wise boy. Am I correct that you

long is your child gone?" I looked at my watch and said 5 minutes and he said, "no, maybe your child is next door or somewhere" and I said "you just tell Michael that Matthew is gone". And I got this feeling, I don't know what this feeling was but I couldn't see right, I couldn't hear right and I only had one thought and that was to find Matthew and I couldn't believe it – he just vanished. I telephoned my family – they didn't believe me at once because they know I was an over-protective mother. They know that my child will not be anywhere else because he is always around me – they are always around me and they didn't actually believe me at first and I was looking, and looking, looking, looking. Within a few minutes, 10 minutes I think, Michael came here with the van, he and his friends they were searching for Matthew. First they telephoned the police. Mr Lucas and his wife were very good to us. They let us use the telephone and we telephoned and they told my husband they will send a van and I couldn't wait – I just could not wait. I went and I walked and I walked until late at night – I think until the morning because I just had one thought – I need to find Matthew and obviously he didn't come that night. The next morning me and Michael went again with my sister. By that time the

sense that Matthew would "be in charge" where ever he is? You seem to be sure that the fact that he is so spiritual would sustain him, because he often used to be the one that spoke about God and how God would help you when times were hard for you. I imagine that it must have been be such a proud moment for you when the only fingerprints the police could get of Matthew, were on his Bible? What did this tell you about him?

Michelle, you say that Mondays are the most difficult days for you, explaining that you will never be able to forget the feeling you experienced when you realized that Matthew had disappeared on that Monday morning. How have you managed to get through all the Mondays since that terrible Monday? You explained how people, like Sergeant XXX, have been abusive towards you. How Sergeant XXX twisted your words, got Melanie to say things she didn't exactly mean and how the influence of this could have contributed towards the police not doing as much to find Matthew. Yet, you and Michael keep on helping others. According to you there were even people who "skinder" (gossip) about you saying that Matthew was abused and that he ran away from home. Do you think that the work that you have done since Matthew disappeared is a strong indication of your love for him and your commitment as parents?

Michelle, I was so honoured and privileged to have been allowed into your life in this way. When I left your home on Wednesday, I was so aware of the love and power of God as it is evident in your life. I was so aware of having been in the presence of someone who manages to put her trust and her family's safety in the hands of God even in times when she seems to have a lot of reason to be bitter and angry with God.

When I got into the car to leave, it was a long time before I could speak to anyone. I just experienced waves and waves of goose bumps rippling over my body as I thought about what you had told me. I was so touched by your story of strength and courage that I found it difficult to speak without becoming overwhelmed with sadness for days afterwards. As I am sitting here typing this letter, I am so aware of someone with the personal strength to turn a personal tragedy into a way of helping and serving the larger society. I think it is something really special you are doing. Your story has already gone to Pretoria with Dawie, a friend of mine. I know that he has already told many people about you and the work that you do.

family was here, the neighbours helped, everybody helped looking for him and we just couldn't get Matthew and I think it was about ten to four the police sent the gang squad and they went to look at the place at the dunes where we had already been.

Dearest Michelle, thank you for opening your house and heart to me. I hope that I will be able to contribute something of value to your life and the hope and love that you so unselfishly distribute to others you come into contact with.

God bless,

Margot

### **4.3 TO TRUST OR NOT TO TRUST**

When pastoral counsellors meet with a client, an atmosphere of trust is a prerequisite. Where there is no trust, nothing sacred will be revealed. If trust is first given and later betrayed, nothing else sacred will be revealed again. Confidentiality is one of the keys to trust. Confidentiality is an explicit promise or contract to reveal nothing about a person except under conditions mutually agreed upon. Trust is an ethical matter as trust entails the understanding that whatever happens between the pastoral counsellor and the client is sacred and will not be abused.

Trust is built by genuine caring. Caring is demonstrated when someone is interested enough to look at you when you talk, allows no distractions to interrupt his/her listening, thinks before responding, does not talk "over" you, honestly tries to understand, co-searches for unique outcomes, asks for clarification, suspends all judgment and is patient (Wicks & Rodgerson 1998:18-19). Building trust through genuine caring can also include what Cozad Neuger (2001:88) calls "woman affirming listening" which includes belief and affirmation in the story the woman is telling: "... to listen deeply to one who has deprived of voice or authority, believing whatever she says and allowing her to name and define the problems that she experiences, creates a novelty that in itself empowers and strengthens" (Cozad Neuger 2001:88). When a pastoral therapist is with a client in this way, it allows the therapist to be with the client fully and to journey with the client to all the places the client would wish to visit during their time together.

Respect is one of the core ingredients of trust. Trust permits openness and the valuing of differences. The offering of personal vulnerability is a demonstration of trust. Trust is what makes processes work. When trust is broken it brings great sorrow. If there is a deliberate violation of a prior understanding and trust is broken, then it is inevitable that significant injury will occur. Maintaining realistic expectations of the therapeutic relationship and protecting the therapeutic partnership from entanglement in utopian ideals can protect trust. Care should be taken to shield the partnership from hypocrisy by being clear about what is possible and what is not in terms of the therapeutic relationship (Tamasese, Waldegrave, Tuhaka & Campbell 1998:51-62). When introducing myself into an area where people have often come to reap benefits for themselves and to leave the community bruised and mistrusting, it is thus important to create an awareness with my co-searcher regarding what she can and cannot expect from the relationship. This helps to ensure that no unspoken or unclear expectations are created which cannot be met and which in turn can harm a budding relationship of trust.

Feminist pastoral therapists like Riet Bons-Storm and Denise Ackermann (Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998) mention that it takes time to establish trust in a new relationship. New partners make small offerings of information. When these offerings are treated with care and are respected, trust is gradually built until it becomes an unspoken or unquestioned component of the relationship. Trust is earned and not deserved. Michelle chose to verbalise her experience of the trust growing between us as follows:

You are a nice woman and it will be very easy to love and trust you, but I want you to keep in mind that I will only call on your help when it is really needed, ok! The way you wrote about me makes me think is it really me? I hope to feel more relaxed in your company and maybe I'll let you into my secrets.

Michelle, 24 September 2002

As the trusting relationship between Michelle and I grew, I became more free in my speaking to her and the letters to her were easier to write. The

following conversations with Michelle and the letters to her reflect more of her life story as she shared it with me.

#### **4.4 MORE CONVERSATIONS AND MORE LETTERS**

I have had many, many more conversations with Michelle during the past year than those recorded in this report. I have managed to write her a few more letters, including the next three. The following three letters sum up Michelle's story as she told it to me. Our other conversations were elaborations of her core story. The themes discussed with her during our many conversations were mainly the pain and loneliness that forms part of losing a child, how depression keeps the pain and loneliness alive and strives to break down all one's reserves so as to be the victor in the situation, but how one's hope and belief in God stands with one to overcome depression.

Michelle's finding of her silenced and subjugated voice formed a critical part of our discussions. According to Cozad Neuger (2001:68) the idea of women's voice enjoys centrality in feminist theory and feminist theology, particularly because nondominant groups, such as women, are denied voice. It was thus important for me that Michelle gained access to her own voice. Nelle Morton (cited in Cozad Neuger 2001:68) refers to the importance of "hearing [women] into speech", where

[i]t is not just a matter of being able to tell one's story that I am emphasizing. It is the empowerment of hearing oneself speak and learning to believe in the truth of that long denied voice, language, and narrative.

(Cozad Neuger 2001:68)

As my journey with Michelle continued she was "heard into speech." Her story was documented in my letters and she was able to move from being "the voiceless one" to "the one with the booming voice that everybody listens to."

After Michelle had read the first therapeutic letter I had presented her with at the start of our second visit together, she sent me an SMS (short message service) via her mobile phone mentioning how much the letter had meant to her. Her SMS made me think of my own choice regarding whether to ignore

or to pay attention to the voice of God in my life. Melissa Griffiths (2002:103-136) speaks of how one listens to the voice of God, how one makes sense of this voice and the role of this making sense of what one perceives as God's voice in one's life. Her SMS also made me think of what Tom Andersen (1991) describes as the therapist's "inner and outer conversations" which happen whilst a therapist is engaged in the process of therapy. As with almost every other instance of my conversations with Michelle, I was again confronted with my own efficacy regarding certain aspects of my life. Transparency and accountability prompted me to mention my own experience regarding God's voice in my life in my letter to her. According to Michelle, this transparency and accountability was one of the aspects that facilitated her trust in our relationship.

#### **4.4.1 Second conversation / second letter**

##### ***THE SECOND CONVERSATION***

I just want to talk about my life – then and now. I am a mother of four children of which one is missing for six years now and all I can say is that my childhood was not so easy but yet I've learnt a lot from it. I was raised by my sister and her husband. My sister has given her life – she took punishment from her husband – abused by him to protect me verbally...So for her it was also something new to be a mother and she didn't even have children of her own at that time. Actually I owe my life to her – I love her so much just for what she has given to me all these years...I was so excited making new friends, going to a higher grade but then again I had to leave school. All I can remember that

##### ***THE SECOND LETTER***

Dear Michelle

I received your SMS this morning saying that you had read the letter that I had given you yesterday and that it made you feel so special, but that God was to be honoured for all that you have managed to achieve in your life. It immediately made me wonder how you had opted to make yourself available to hear God's voice in your life rather than to ignore His voice? I know that many times I had been certain that I had heard His voice and had chosen to ignore it because the task He put before me was either inopportune, too big or I simply just did not feel like doing what He asked. In my discussions with you, however, I get the impression that you choose to listen to what God has to say to you, make a note of it and try your best to implement His wishes for your life. Is this how you see yourself?

Michelle, whenever I leave you after a discussion between the two of us, I always come away from there with a sense of having shared time with someone whom has withstood much adversity in her life. Someone who had chosen to focus on the lilies in the field and not to wallow in the mud surrounding the lilies. Some of the lilies I can think of now, is the way your Mom gave you to your sister to raise when you were just days old, how her husband did not want you there, how he let you know this in no uncertain terms, but that you found ways within yourself to

my sister gave me to my mother and the words that she said "Please just look after my child" as she walked away with tears in her eyes because she couldn't take me home because every night when her husband came home he demanded that I was supposed to be gone and I thought well I am here with my mother now maybe life will be easier. Then again my mother took me to my other sister, whom I didn't know at the time, and when I came there I was like a maid. She went to go work, her husband went to go work and I must look after her other kids, doing homework, housework and all that. Then I decided no and ran away and I decided I was going to work for my sister and I was only 14 years old. The first factory that I went to was Rochelle Anne. I went there with my best friend Elizabeth and the manager came out and he said to me "I am sorry there is no work" and all I could think of was "what can I go and say at home now?" and I just looked at the manager and said "ok" and I waited outside. When it was lunchtime he asked me what I was still doing here. I lied and told him I did not know how to get home and had to wait until the evening. He looked at me and said you can't wait the whole day and said well ok there's work for you, we can take you in. I was too glad. I told him I

cope with this and to stay strong. What, do you think, helped you to stay strong? Is this a strength that is still part of you today? Were there people that stood with you in a way that contributed to your strength?

Another lily stood out for me when you told me about how you decided to find a job when you were only fourteen, how the man at the store said he had no job for you, but that you just sat outside his store until he said "OK, I have a job for you"! Are there other areas in your life that you have also shown this kind of tenacity? Would you say that tenacity was one of your qualities that have allowed you to cope with Matthew's disappearance? If you do recognise tenacity to be a quality that you have, how has it expressed itself since the disappearance of Matthew?

I also recall you telling me about how horrible Michael's aunties were to you when you came to tell him that you were pregnant and coming to stay at his house. You explained that they used to drink and fight and were abusive of you when he was not there. Yet, you said that you stuck this out for the sake of your unborn child. It made me smile when you told me that you were only seventeen years old at the time, but that you decided that enough was enough and just one day took a stand against them. When this happened, they backed off, did they not? I'm wondering if this courage and strength you showed in standing up for yourself and for what is right is an example of a golden thread that runs through your life? Do you know of other times when you were courageous in standing up against injustice and speaking out like that?

You said that at some stage you thought that if you can't beat them you would join them and also started drinking beer. This continued until about six years ago. You told me how you woke up one morning and decided that no more alcohol and no more cigarettes would be allowed in your house. That was that. What made you choose this for your family and your home? Looking back, does it still seem like a good decision? If so, in what way does it still seem like a good decision? Yesterday when I was at your house, Cilla said that they had to smoke outside because you don't allow any cigarettes in your house. She was very aware of the things that you prefer for your life and how you want to live inside your own home. Would you say that being able to know what you want and stick to it in a way that people seem to respect without questioning was another example of a lily in your life?

When I asked you what the qualities were that allowed you to manage despite the adversity in

was 16 years old – lucky for me, at that time they never asked anyone for ID so I was actually lucky.

Not so much luck as God was with me because my mind was just I can't bear another night with him arguing with my sister. I went home that night I was like happy, jolly, jumping all the way home, excited to tell my sister I finally got a job and as I got home I gave them the news and then he decided no pocket money. Well I could live with that and I never knew what it was like to have money in my hands anyway. I was just happy because I was doing something for my sister...It's not [nice] when you go home and my brother-in-law would say some nasty things to me. He wanted me out of the house... I would lie outside in the yard and my sister would come and throw me a blanket through the window to keep me warm. Then my brother-in-law would see her give me a blanket and take it away and he never, never let me forget I was not his child...I heard I got sisters somewhere I heard I got brothers somewhere but I never actually knew them. They would come and visit but they never made me feel I was as part of them and it never bothered me because besides my brother-in-law my life with my sister was ok. She was there for me, her children were my sisters, we would sleep together and I was the only

your life, you explained about how you were taught from a young age to be strong due to everything that had happened to you – your mom giving you away, your sister's husband being so emotionally abusive of you, Michael's aunties fighting with you, Michael maybe not always understanding your emotional needs and you often being alone on the inside. You were adamant, however, that God played the biggest role in keeping you upright. God and your music and your Organization. You are also very, very sure that your children play a large part in keeping you steady when things get tough. You said that you hold your babies and know that you will keep on for their sakes.

Michelle, when you spoke about the police and the people who skindered (gossiped) about you and other people like your sister who have deliberately come into your house to harm you, I got the impression that people have often managed to disappoint you. Am I correct in assuming that these disappointments have taken a toll on the trust that you would normally have had in people? Are there people in your life that you trust? If so, what allows you to trust them? God's voice in your life seems to be the one thing in your life that you trust with ease. Am I right? How has God's voice proved to you that you can trust Him? You said that you knew right from the beginning of your life that God is with you – you always had a "voorgevoel" (premonition) that someone is there looking out for you. It was also God that kept the spooks/demons out of your house after Matthew's disappearance. Did I understand you correctly? Has there ever been a time that you have maybe not been able to put so much trust in God, or have not felt His presence so closely? If this was ever the case, how have you managed to re-establish contact with God?

When I left yesterday, you said that you often asked God to give you someone that will listen just to you and that God had said: "Be still and wait" and that it is so good to now have someone that is just interested in you. Michelle, I am privileged that you think I can be that person. You must know, though, that you are always allowed to disregard any questions I ask if they do not fit for you or to tell me if I talk about anything that is uncomfortable for you or you prefer not to discuss. You indicated that when we spend time together again, you would like to talk about everything surrounding Matthew's disappearance. How you had felt at the time, what had happened, and how you had coped up till now. It will probably be difficult for you to talk about that. It would have been for me. I hope that I will be able to create a safe place for you to address this sensitive topic. Maybe we can go somewhere quieter to talk about this? Would

child in that house that was confirmed that liked to go to church and when I was about 17 I met Michael ...

that be good for you? I look forward to seeing you.

God bless, Margot

Coming away from Michelle after spending time with her and then subsequently writing a letter to her, allows and, in a way, almost forces personal self-reflection, especially when one considers the way in which she relies on her God and trusts in her God. Michelle does not hesitate to acknowledge the role of God in her life. She does not hesitate to bear witness to how deprived of support she was before her conversion to a faith where she can openly acknowledge God and testify about God. Listening to Michelle reminds me of the need to listen to the internal dialogue which Andersen (1991) refers to. The richness of Michelle's conversations stirs an excitement to meet with her again.

#### **4.4.2 Third conversation / third letter**

During our previous conversation, Michelle remarked that she felt uncomfortable talking in her house, as there were people constantly coming and going and there was no sense of privacy. I suggested that I fetch her from her house and that we go to a coffee shop where we could continue our conversation. These coffee dates became an integral part of our times together.

Because I choose to uphold an ethical stance of accountability and transparency (Kotzé 2002:8), it was necessary for me to discuss with Michelle my role in her life. Sometime afterwards, Michelle related to me that the fact that I spoke to her about this also contributed to her trusting of me. When she told me about the ways in which the German lady and the English lady, especially, had chosen to conduct their relationships with her, I was profoundly thankful that I had discussed my own way of choosing to manage a relationship with her. By checking and rechecking the information Michelle discussed with me with her, Michelle reported that "she never experienced abuse" during our discussions.

As I reflected on Michelle's re-telling of her experiences with both the German and English women, I was reminded of Kotzé's (2002:21) discussion on "the disembodiment of knowledge" where "ethical considerations are seldom the primary focus" (Kotzé 2002:27) in research projects. "Research too often becomes an intellectual activity with researchers obtaining degrees on or receiving acknowledgement based on the suffering of others – with the latter most likely not to benefit from the research" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9). Michelle's experiences with these women were in no way beneficial to her.

Because I was committed to doing ethical research, I wanted to include Michelle as an equal partner in this research project. I thus spoke about our roles, positions and cultural backgrounds, and invited Michelle to reflect on her experiences and encounters with me. According to Kotzé (2002:25), "if we are committed to doing ethicising research, we can find *participation* to be a very helpful value and practice." Furthermore, I was concerned that Michelle should benefit from participating in this research project: "Only if participants benefit from the research will it contribute to ethically acceptable academic research" (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:10).

During the course of Chapter One, I touched on the fact that Michelle and I came from different cultural groupings and different backgrounds. In time, Michelle and I found a mutually comfortable space where we had jointly negotiated the "cultural" boundaries of that space. But did this allow for a 'neoracism' to emerge?

Whites need to listen to the stories and struggles of people of color in their own or surrounding communities. Not judge, debate, defend, solve, or critique – but listen. Through the simple act of listening, the subtle and pervasive nature of 'neoracism' ... may become evident.

(Ayvazian & Tatum 1996:18 in Akamatsu 1998:135)

Was that what Michelle and I had done? Had we fallen into the trap of developing a new racism where we declare: "here we are like this and we think you are different – actually our way is the superior way"? But, are we

not rather telling a *neocultural* story than a *neoracist* story? If a cultural story tells the group's collective story of how to cope with life and how to respond to pain and trouble and if it teaches people how to thrive in a multicultural society (McGill 1992:340), then is "our way" not rather a *neocultural* way? "Our way" needs deconstructing, re-looking and redefining. We need to discuss how it was that "our way" had become such a holy ground, how it was that we were going to protect it or whether we were going to open it up to others, how we were going to find other words and phrases to describe it, how we were going to introduce the subject to others – for their input – without causing conflict and hurt, how we were going to ascertain that we consistently stayed aware of the possibility that this thing called "*neoracism*" was in our midst, how we were going to keep on keeping on at equality ... even between ourselves.

Although we had managed to find a place where we could define our own "cultural space" - where our own rules and regulations evolved and were subsequently applied - it would nonetheless speak of obtuseness if the possibilities of the effects of cultural diversity during pastoral conversations were not considered. Sturgeon (2002:173-181) discusses the effects of the therapist's personal life experiences and how these life experiences affect tolerances of and prejudices towards others. She claims that the therapist's life experiences will play out and affect their client's. In our case, the life experiences of both Michelle and I have been impacted by the effects of the apartheid system, questions regarding the inferior/superior roles attributed to the different cultural groups, the fear of violence, the fear of racism, the role of religion and the attitude towards the current political dispensation. By introducing these themes into our awareness, it helped to bridge the ethnic divide in ways that were helpful to both pastoral counsellor and client.

In my letter to Michelle, I attempted to bridge this ethnic divide by exploring the boundaries and expectations of this relationship. I also told her about my father's position during the apartheid era and the effects of this on us as a family. I addressed the power positions that apartheid had ascribed to me and whether the effects of apartheid could still linger on within our own relationship. White and Epston (1990:22) remind me that since "we are all caught up in a net or web of power/knowledge, it is not possible to act apart

from this domain and we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others.” Therefore one needs “to establish conditions that encourage us to critique our practices ... [to] identify the context of ideas in which our practices are situated and explore the history of these ideas” (White & Epston 1990:29). For me, this is “the ethical challenge of accountability” (Kotzé 2002:8) when having pastoral conversations with people who come from communities who have been marginalised and oppressed.

Ethnicity and cultural diversity are realities to be noted by the pastoral counsellor. Yet, the question begs: within ethnicity and cultural diversity, is there more that is the same or more that is different or something in between or something else completely?

## THE THIRD CONVERSATION

Mr Lucas and his wife were very good to us. They let us use the telephone and we telephoned and they told my husband they will send a van and I couldn't wait – I just could not wait. I went and I walked and I walked until late at night – I think until the morning because I just had one thought – I need to find Matthew and obviously he didn't come that night. The next morning me and Michael went again with my sister. By that time the family was here, the neighbours helped, everybody helped looking for him and we just couldn't get him and I think it was about ten to four the police sent the gang squad and they went to look at the place at the dunes where we had already been. That was the graveyard were the Station Strangler used to bury his kids that he kidnapped, sodomized and murdered or whatever. I was very furious because I had feeling my child wasn't dead – I felt he was very close by and I couldn't, I just couldn't get this feeling out of my head that he is around here somewhere and that someone is keeping him in the house. But then again you don't have the proof – they don't go for a gut feeling that a mother has and it just went on for months and months and months. And I simply started to lose my vision I felt that I

Dear Michelle

I have been thinking about the talk that we had on Friday at the coffee shop. I have not managed to write this letter yet, because I have been mulling over the main topic of our discussion and why it was necessary for me to talk to you about the nature of our relationship. The fact that I did not take any notes also makes it more difficult to order my thoughts! Maybe we can talk about your understanding of our conversation when I see you again?

Michelle, I am very aware of the injustices that have been brought about during the apartheid era of our country's history. In a small way my family has also been affected by it. My father was a businessman and a part of his business was to build. He was a part of building the Fort Hare University in Alice. In this way he became friends with many of the people connected to the university. There were people in my hometown who were not at all happy about this. They decided to isolate our family and his business really suffered due to this isolation. There were many personal hurts and injustices perpetrated towards all the members of our family. I can recall how the names I was called on the school grounds hurt me and how it was bad for me to not have any friends to play with because the parents forbid their children to play with me because my father chose to be friends with people from the university. These memories are my earliest recollection of inequality in our country. When I try to understand why it was necessary for me to talk to you about our relationship on Friday, I think that I want you to understand that I am aware that there may be some feelings of "what is her motive?" when you think of how it is that I contacted you and why it is that it is important to me that we are on as equal ground as possible from the outset of our journey together.

When I addressed the topic with you, you told me that Michael had said to you that sometimes there are people that you can trust in life and that you should give me a chance. This confirmed to me that you did at times wonder why it was that I wanted to see you. Am I right if I think this? Did my talking to you help with these thoughts that you might have had?

I also pointed out to you that I was aware that there may be a sense of a "one-up / one-down" situation where I was concerned. That I could be seen as this white person who came as the saviour from nowhere. When I said this, you told me that this was something that you had considered, as there have been people that

couldn't go on anymore because there is no explanation for this that has happened. There is just no explanation... Jason was with my sister-in-law because I was breastfeeding him and at that time I couldn't breastfeed him because my milk wasn't good enough for him and the only way for him to get off me was to be taken away. I was alone in the house that Friday morning. I was so sick. I ate at night and I broke my tooth, if I brushed my hair it would fall out like nothing, my legs got tired of walking, I got so big and heavy I couldn't believe it was my body that I was carrying around. Actually I didn't even see it I just felt tired because I couldn't sleep. I knew while I was lying awake looking after my kids God was looking after me because sometimes my body didn't even know it was morning, when it was night because I couldn't leave it up to Michael because he didn't know what was happening and I couldn't leave the children and say daddy is going to look after you tonight because mommy is tired.... I went to a priest. I went to the mayor who was mayor at that time, Theresa Solomons, I went to the councillor,

I went to the doctor. Everybody just said one thing – depression. The family is depressed.... It could be but there was no belief. I told my children I am not sure

have come to you, taken from you and have then disappeared. Like the German woman that interviewed you, wrote a book including some of your information and then left for Germany without contacting you again or even checking with you that the information she had included in the book was correct. You had not even laid eyes on a copy of the book. You also told me about Rose, the English lady, who contacted you when she read about you, as she wanted you to do some work in South Africa. Once you sent her your information, she never contacted you again. This made me wonder if there were people that you had not told me about that have come to you and have remained in your life in a respectful way? I promised you that I would not write one word about you or your situation that you would not have the opportunity to OK. You seemed happy about this kind of arrangement. Did I understand this correctly? Have you given any thought to how it is that you would want to organise such an arrangement?

I also told you that I would like you to continue to contact me if you think I could be of assistance in any way if you might be stuck in a situation. Like with your car in Hout Bay the other evening. I explained to you that I might not always personally be able to assist, but that I could make use of the people I know to find a way of assisting. You replied that it was difficult for you to ask for help and that you did not want to always just complain when you spoke to me. Michelle, I understand this feeling! I have a friend, Jenny, whom I always seem to complain to! I have often said to her that it feels as if this is all I do when I see her. I know that she does not experience our times together as such, as she has often reassured me about this. Would it help you if I promised you that I would be honest with you in this regard and tell you if I ever felt as if you were "always complaining"?

Michelle, I also mentioned that next year I would possibly be able to assist you in a more active way with your Organization if you would want me to. I think I have told you that I am currently studying and about Elize, my supervisor? When I told her about you, Michael, Matthew and your Organization, she said that she could understand why your story has touched me so deeply, as my own children are so important to me and she can see how I would connect with someone who has lost a child. I think she is right in her summary of the situation. I think that this may be one of the reasons why I would like to be more actively involved in your Organization, if it is at all possible and acceptable to you and Michael. Do you think that there would be a way that I could become more involved? Would it be of any help to you?

but I think we are in a moulding process, God is busy moulding us we are growing. I remember one night Mr P's mother, a wonderful person, offered up his time for us. After he come out of work we would fill his bakkie, he would tell his wife put in some sandwiches and make some coffee we would walk those streets of Cape Town till morning. Mr P. was a very sick man but not one time did he say no. I remember I think it was in July 1997 Mr P had a heart attack, then another and then another. His wife invited me to a service, she said people of Blackheath are coming to them and they are going to have a get together. You know the same time I just put the telephone down another person telephoned to say he is in town and telling me weird things that he knows my child is being raped at night and he can hear my child cry. My heart is pulled in two places. I felt I need to get to Mr P.'s house that night and that my child needs me...I said I must go to Mr P's house. And I went there and as I came in, these people were there that I had never seen in my life before, but as I entered that room they started to praise God and you know at times you get to feel they can tell you anything and you don't get to hear anything. But as I came in there I just felt something, I felt as if I was floating somewhere and I just hear this man

Then I received your letter yesterday! (*Please see letter on page 105 of this report*) You wrote about your wishes.

- To live closer to God.
- To finish school.
- To go shopping for "me" without thinking twice or rethink.
- To have a mom to hold your hand, rub your head and hug you and comfort you.
- For our families to meet.

A thousand questions and thoughts tumbled through my mind when I read about these wishes of yours. Maybe it will be OK for you if I wrote down some of these questions and thoughts and we can talk about them sometime soon? How are you already living close to God? What does living closer to God mean for you? How will you know when you are living closer to God? If I had to ask your special friend if she thought that you were living close to God, what would she say? If we could ask God whether you were living close to Him, what would He say?

Have you explored the options for furthering your education? I feel very excited about the idea of you completing your school career. I also had a dream about going to university to study psychology. When I was 35 I went back to university. At that stage I was a full-time mother and housewife and I held a half-day job. It was not always easy to do this, but I found it very enriching and fulfilling. When I think of how you make your speeches without preparing, how you wrote the letter, how you speak to me and how you encourage your children to do well at school, I am wondering if this is such a far away wish and if it is not more doable than you think? Is there a way that I can maybe help you explore the possibility of finishing school?

About going shopping for you without considering others and costs! What kind of things would you like to buy? Where would you go to do this shopping? Who would you take with to help you shop and carry your parcels, or would you prefer to go on your own? Is there a way in the near future in which you can maybe just do some shopping for just one thing that will be special to you? Will shopping for one thing give you a sense that you are closer to your wish than before?

Michelle, you told me about how your mom warned you that you should look for the problem close to you. Do I recall this correctly? I am wondering whether your mom is maybe a person who shows her loving and caring in other ways than holding and hugging? I know that my mom does not hold me or hug me, but that she shows her caring in other ways. Are there other ways in which your mom shows her caring? Are there other people in your life that could take over the

saying “here’s someone whose pain is heavy – God we have to help this person. Someone? How can they say someone because me and Michael are here? But they specifically said someone’s pain and as I was standing I felt like I was drinking something but I hear this person say “drink up, it’s God giving you this water” and you know I’ve been to so many churches, so many people in that few months that my child is gone but each time the people ask is there someone who could give you unto Jesus like I didn’t even hear but that night when this priest who didn’t even have to ask, he just said “is there anyone?” and I just couldn’t believe it. His words weren’t even finished and I was right at the front and my hands were in the air and I said “take me Lord” and I couldn’t believe it. As he laid his hand on my head I just fell out and I was crying, I was weeping, I said God I was praying, I didn’t even know I could pray, I was saying words I didn’t even know I can think about. That night I gave my heart to Jesus because it was the right time...if you come to God the angels will know and the angels are rejoicing so I just thought that the angels must have sent a message because I didn’t have the time to talk to anyone...

holding of your hand, the rubbing of your head and the hugging? Is there a way in which you could maybe let your mom know that you would like her to hold you? Maybe she would like to hold you, but does not know how to do this?

My family also expressed the wish to meet you, Michael, Melanie, Justin and Jason. Your story has touched their hearts as well. Maybe we could discuss on Friday how we can arrange this meeting? Part of my studying is to interview clients when the other students and Elize are present. Do you think maybe I could fetch you one Thursday and we could have a conversation about your story with them witnessing it? Then you can meet Elize and my friends that I study with?

I think this will be a good opportunity for them to learn about your bravery and courage. After I have the interview with you, they get a chance to talk among themselves about what it was that they had heard us discussing and we can listen to them talk. Afterwards they write you letters about what they have learnt from you. We don’t have to discuss anything in front of strangers that you will be uncomfortable with. You will have a chance to get your story to go further into the world and who knows what other connections you might be able to make in this way? Can we discuss this possibility?

Michelle, when we left Westgate Mall after tea on Friday, you told me that you felt much better about our relationship after I had talked to you about my interest in your live. I hope that having spoken to you in this way has opened the possibility of more trust developing between us. In my own life trust is earned and not a given thing. In my own life trust comes with respect. I hope that you will be free to tell me when things are happening that allow distrust to come into our relationship.

I look forward to seeing you on Friday.

God bless,  
Margot

In retrospect, I now realise that the more I became involved with Michelle, the more I became aware of the feminist research notion of being in research with

people for their own benefit. The more time Michelle and I spent together, the more she became aware of how her voice had become subjugated and silenced in her life by the perpetrations of patriarchy. Foucault (1980:82) describes subjugated knowledges (voices) as “a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, below the required level of cognition of scientificity.” Foucault (1980:82-83) also uses the term “genealogy” – when those who have been identified as having unqualified, low-ranking knowledges voice local memories and knowledges of struggles. In terms of Foucault’s description, the genealogy within this research project was to give a voice to Michelle’s knowledges which have been subjugated by dominant discourses. The more she discovered about her own way of being she was now choosing for herself, the more she chose to stand firm in the face of injustices and to educate the members of her organisation that they also had the right to take a stand for themselves, their missing children and their community.

When we attended the church service with her, I was aware of how patriarchy was being upheld by the rituals of the service and by the statements made during the preaching of the service. I was unsure of how, if ever, I was going to address this matter with her, as church was so much a part of her sustaining of herself and of the context that she chose for herself. As Michelle started choosing different options for herself, she started mentioning the role of patriarchy in her church without me initiating this topic with her. Michelle’s decision to “eat the fish and spit out the bones” (to go to church, but not to believe everything she heard as the voice of God) was made mainly because the people of her faith community sustained her during her difficult times and she was not yet prepared to sacrifice them for the sake of escaping patriarchy. She decided that she was now learning to distinguish “between the voice of man and the voice of God” and therefore she could attend church without allowing patriarchy to disempower her.

As Michelle gained her own voice and started to question and challenge oppressive discourses, she has been able to negotiate her own spirituality.

This included relationships of support and care amongst the people of her faith community. In this regard, hooks (2000:108) states the following: “Choosing alternative spiritual paths has helped many women sustain commitment to spiritual life even as they continue to challenge and interrogate patriarchal religion.” Through the hearing of Michelle into speech, she has regained her voice and the “the power of naming one’s self, one’s environment and one’s God” (Cozad Neuger 2001:71).

#### **4.4.3 Fourth conversation / fourth letter**

##### ***THE FOURTH CONVERSATION***

... when I was about 17 I met Michael and because of all this stuff that was going on, the abuse ...I thought maybe, maybe if I got pregnant he would kick me out, get rid of me I would find my own way. I met Michael and I think only a month after that I realised my brother-in-law realised that I was pregnant and he said to my sister he was not going to work for me and my child and my sister said don’t be mad my sister can’t be pregnant she doesn’t even know this boy for a month and it just went on and on and on. Then one Sunday morning I packed some stuff in for me, clothing and so on, and decided to run away and I threw the packet out of the window and just walked out with my Bible as if I was just going to church. Then I got into a bus and went to Michael. Me and his mother were good friends. She asked me if she can talk to my brother-in-law and say that

##### ***THE FOURTH LETTER***

Dear Michelle

It feels as if I have not managed to write you a letter for ages. You have told me how much my letters mean to you and how they help to sustain you during the times we do not speak to each other. Writing these letters to you also means a lot to me as it gives me time to reflect on what it has been that we have been discussing and to question myself about why the things that you discuss with me are important to me and manage to touch my own life to such a large degree. After my last letter to you I have been to see you twice, we came to Melanie’s birthday party and Tielman and I went to church with your family when you had the service where the congregation mainly focused on the issue of missing children. It seems to me that this is a lot to cover in this letter, so maybe this letter will not contain as much detail as the previous ones. This makes me wonder what exactly it was about the previous letters that helped sustain you? Was it the detail of the letters, the questions I asked you or maybe something else?

You have mentioned your sense of personal privacy on a few occasions. If I understood you correctly, you seem to find that it is often difficult for you to read your letters in privacy, reflect on them in privacy and to keep them for your personal records. Would the fact that you are expected to share your letters with others maybe inhibit you to speak on some topics that you would actually like to address? Have you possibly thought of a way that we could overcome this if this should at all be the case?

The church you attend with your family and the way in which you experience some of the ways they choose to practice their ways of doing church have in the past managed to cause you

Michael will be there for me and that I will help raise the baby and I said no I am out I am going to be on my own. In January I turned 18 and Michael and me decided we are going to get married. At that time it was the only way out. I lived with my mother-in-law all these months before I got married. She is a wonderful woman, then and now, and I couldn't have asked for a better mother-in-law and she said yes I can stay there as long as I needed. When I cleaned that house, the family of Michael were worse than my brother-in-law. I remember Thursdays they used to get paid, I don't know if it was maintenance or pay or whatever kind of money but they would get drunk and they would yell at me, swear at me, tell me it's not Michael's child and that I am looking for a father, all those bad words that you can call a young girl they have called me. And when I was just going in for my ninth month I decided I am going to go away if Michael decides not to marry me now then I am not going to live like this because he do have a cupboard but the family uses it. And all my clothes and the baby's clothes were packed in a box and I said to him I was going to leave now because I am not going to let my baby be born on the floor because I was actually sleeping on the floor. And all the drunk uncles and

some discomfort. When you have discussed this with Michael, he does not seem to be experiencing the same discomforts that you are. How do these discomforts affect your relationship with God? Are there other times that you can practice your relationship with God in a way that is comfortable for you? What helps you to do this?

I know that in my own life there was a time when we were still involved with a certain church whose practices made it very difficult for me to attend that church, but because my family were seemingly happy there, I had to find alternative ways of being with God that addressed my personal needs of worshipping. I know that you have often told me how much your music means to you. I know that during this time my own enjoyment of music helped me a lot to worship in my preferred way. I can recall singing and dancing before God in my own way. This was helpful to me because it helped me to hear His voice in my life. Are there things that you could do that will allow you to tolerate attending your church on Sundays? You often tell me that patience is one of the special qualities that you treasure about yourself. Do you think that this patience will help you to get through the times that you have to attend church?

You also told me that you wonder whether everything that gets said and done at the church is from God and whether a lot of the things are not "man-made". How would you be able to discern what is and what is not? Are there ways in which you have maybe in the past been able to discern this in your life? Have you found some of these ways to be trustworthy? If they have been, could you maybe re-employ some of these ways to help you during this time?

When you told me about the "goeters" that were in your house around the time of Matthew's disappearance, I got the impression that it was important to you to know whether I believed you, as there were so many people that did not believe you about the existence of demons, etcetera. It was not something that you specifically said or did; it was just a sense that I got. Was this a correct sense on my behalf or not? Michelle, I think I told you at this stage that I did believe in the existence of evil beings and that they could be employed to harm people and to create situations of damage. Is it important to you that I believe you about this? Why would it be important to you? Would it have changed anything about our relationship if I had not believed you? Would we have been able to continue our relationship if I had not believed you? Maybe we can discuss this

aunties they had beds and they were all fine and I decided no and I packed in and he asked me what it is that I wanted. I need a bed and I wanted to get married – I am not going to stay like this. I was looking for security. I was looking for somebody who loved me. I was looking for something that I can call mine which I never had all these years and as we got married the first night I slept on my bed – the new bed - my labour pains started and I just thought phew my baby was looking for warmness, bed, not a floor, not anything like that ... I made a promise to her that one day when I am going to get married it's going to be forever and my children are never going to have a step father, never going to go through the things I am going through and I asked God to help me...

when I see you again if it will be comfortable for you.

Michelle, when you telephoned me on Sunday, you told me that you are finding it difficult to sleep and that there is a sadness that seems to be with you for the most of the day almost every day. I know that you did not have a good experience with medication when you last used it. Do you think that we could maybe discuss the possibility of you using something for your present situation? I promise that I will be in contact with a medical doctor about a prescription for you and that I will help you monitor the effects of the medication so that it does not leave you feeling like a zombie.

I look forward to seeing you again on Wednesday. The date for coming with me to Somerset West to my study group is as follows:

24 October 2002 at 14:00

Thank you for being prepared to do this. I will fetch you from home and return you back there after the session.

Blessings, Margot

#### 4.4.4 Receiving letters

*(Please refer to page 100 for the reference to Michelle's letter.)*

Writing slows down perceptions and reactions, making room for the thickening and the gradual layering of an alternative story. Writing encourages the client to develop many different readings of their experience. A written document of their version of their story allows clients to have something in hand, something which they can review and revise as their stories thicken and expand. Clients often bring the therapy journals and/or notes they have kept for the therapist to see. Clients sometimes write letters to the therapist, especially if there is a break in the therapeutic process (Freedman & Combs 1998:221). The first letter I received from Michelle touched me deeply. I still recall the tentativeness with which she presented me with the letter. The boldness with which she currently yields a pen is a tribute to the thickening of her alternative story and the increase of her voice.

Hi Margot,

I am not used to writing letters so be patient with my handwriting and my wording ok!!!! I have to tell you I cant wait to see you again, it sure feels nice to talk and to think of "me", my needs and my wants and I do not want to stop now.

You are a nice woman and it will be very easy to love and trust you, but I want you to keep in mind that I will only call on your help when it is really needed, ok! The way you wrote about me make me think is it really me? I hope to feel more relaxed in your company and maybe I'll let you into my secrets.

I got one friend who turns any bad day into sunshine maybe you will to one day. I know many people say you have three wishes but I have some. It may sound stupid but I'll tell you anyway ok.

I would like to live closer to God because I am nothing without God.

Then I want to finish school, lucky its only a dream – it costs nothing.

Then I want to go shopping for "me" without thinking twice or rethinking.

Most important I would like to have a mom to hold my hand, rub my head and hug me for comfort and caring. Enough complaints, I would like for our families to meet one day if you would like the same ok.

C U Soon  
Love, Michelle

I discussed with Michelle the possibility of attending my study group and telling her story there. She was very excited about this possibility. I explained

the procedures of the Outsider Witness Group to her. She experienced the time with the members of the study group as nurturing and encouraging.

## **4.5 AN OUTSIDER WITNESS GROUP AND THEIR LETTERS**

### **4.5.1 Outsider Witness Groups**

Tom Anderson introduced the notion of Reflecting teams or Outsider Witness Groups (OWGs) to the family therapy world in 1987. Anderson found it increasingly difficult to ignore the ethical considerations embedded in strangers behind a one-way mirror, observing a family involved in the therapeutic process. Michael White (1995:172-198) suggests that OWGs can provide the “conditions that conspire” to engage people as “active participants in their own history.” Barbara Myerhoff uses the “definitional ceremony” metaphor to illustrate how important outsider witnesses are to acknowledging and authenticating people’s claims about their histories and their identities and to the performance of their claims. It is through the event of reflecting on our experience that we can make meaning of our experiences.

The OWG is normally structured in four parts, with each part consisting of an interview in itself. In the first part the therapist interviews the client(s), who the team members have met prior to the start of the interview. The team members witness this conversation. In the second part, the team members reflect on what it was they had heard during the interview whilst the therapist and client(s) witness this conversation. During the third part of the process, the therapist interviews the client(s) about his/her/their experience of listening to the team members reflecting on the conversation they had witnessed – a re-telling of the re-telling. During the fourth part of the process, the therapist, client(s) and team members reflect on the complete OWG process.

The value of the OWG lies in the joining of the team members with the client(s). The team members focus on the unique outcomes they witnessed during the conversations, as well as focusing on the points of entry of alternative stories in the clients’ life. The team members also deconstruct each other’s responses, and situate their ideas in their own experience. The interviewer and the team members continuously maintain a curious, not-knowing, ethical, transparent and accountable stance. Reflexivity is a core

notion of the OWG process. It is important that team members do not engage in patronising applause, but that they strive rather to engage in de-centred self-disclosure. Clients normally value taking-it-back practices. A team member “takes it back” to the client when he/she can honestly reflect on how something the client(s) said resonated with him/her.

Team members often write a narrative letter to the client(s) about the conversations they have witnessed. Tentativity on the part of team members is crucial. While the OWG team members engage in a *conversation* about what they have heard, suggestions and directives do not form part of the tentativeness of the conversation. (Michael White 1995:172-198; Freedman & Combs 1996:169-193; McLean 1997:21-23; White 1997:93-115; White 2000:59-85).

Michelle found the OWG experience sustaining to the point where she was comfortable enough to address a letter to them. Letter writing is something that Michelle only attempts when she is very comfortable with a person/people as she is very aware of the fact that her education is lacking especially when compared with that of other people.

#### 4.5.2 Michelle's letter to the Outsider Witness Group

*Dear Group*

I just felt a need to write you this letter because it will always and always be in my mind and heart, the special way you made me feel. God sent Margot on my way and its been wonderful these past months. I seldom feel sad and lonely because I know there's someone I can call on "anytime". This was one of my needs God answered because when I ask him for an ear to listen I did not say rich or poor, black or white and his time is always the right time.

I remember one of your members thought there is nothing you can say or do for parents of missing children but if I may as a parent myself tell you, there's a lot, specially Christmas time. (1) Light a candle – it represents a light in the darkness for them to see their way home. (2) Help me with my parents to give them a spare Xmas lunch, I have done it for four years out of my pocket and I am truly blessed to put a smile where tears are supposed to come. The way to help if you can donate some food, it will be for the lunch and I normally take 20 sets of parents, if possible old toys that I wrap and give to the other siblings and as you know kids go mad for toys. Money I hate to ask but because only I got a Golf I need to hire taxis or buses to get them to the venue, lastly left over food. I make food parcels because they always need it in the holidays. To really do Goodwill like God wants us, if you can help me this year and for an extra blessing, come join us or just send a letter with Margot or telephone me 083 7399 155 because we are planning to give the event in your area.

You may not see your blessing today but God has his own time. God loves someone who gives with his heart and soul.

Love, Michelle

Bless You.

#### 4.5.3 Outsider Witness Group letters

It is the norm that members of the OWG write letters to the person whose telling they witnessed. Two of the members of my study group chose to write to Michelle. Bev – a teacher who attends my study group – found Michelle's telling about motherhood inspiring and wrote the following letter to Michelle:

*Dear Michelle*

Since witnessing your conversation with Margot, at our study group on Thursday, I have thought so much about your story. So many of your words have stayed with me, and have allowed me to reflect on many issues.

Perhaps one of the greatest messages I received from you, was to allow God and His angels to protect our children and that we should not believe we are the only ones who can take care of them. That spoke so strongly to me for a number of reasons. I have 6 stepchildren in my life, who are a true blessing to me, and there is often the temptation to 'overprotect', especially the youngest who is only 5. Your message encourages me to have faith, to believe that they are also cared for by others. Hearing you say these words, in the light of your experience with the disappearance of Matthew, made them all the more powerful.

I was in awe of your humility on many levels, not least of which, your surprise at finding Melanie's writing in which she said 'my mother is my role model'. Earlier on in the

conversation you had mentioned that “children take out from a home what the parents bring into it”. Melanie seems to have learned a great deal from you, her mother. The way that she is willing to take off her nightie or her shoes and give them to another child – a stranger – temporarily in your home, shows that she has already learned the compassion for others that you have modelled for her.

You said to Margot, after you had listened to the comments of our reflecting team – that “it made me feel as if I’m a hero – but I’m not, I’m just a mother”. Michelle, you are indeed a “mother” in the truest sense of that word, would it be ok to see yourself as a “heroic mother”? Having not had a mother of your own, on which to base your own mothering, I have the sense that you have done an incredible job in this role. You make time to spend quality moments with your children. You are always willing to listen to their voices. You share your stories of your childhood with them. You have taught them to have faith. You have taught them to be honest, to be open, to be compassionate, to live with hope. These are not lessons they could have learnt from a book. They have had the privilege of learning these through the way you live your life. That sounds to me like the epitome of a “role model” a very heroic mother.

Michelle, the work you do in your organization “Concerned Parents” must bring so much to the lives of so many. Having had the experience you had when Matthew disappeared, only you can know the pain that the tragedy brought to your life. How supportive it must be to others in that same situation to have somebody like you, out there helping them search. Somebody who is truly able to know how they are feeling. This gift you have given the community, is yet another way you demonstrate the compassion, which is so much a part of who you are.

I have a strong sense that, wherever 14-year-old Matthew may be today, he will know in his heart, that he is blessed with a mother in a million. Good luck Michelle, you, Matthew, your family and your organization will be in my prayers.

Fond regards,

Bev

Hugo, a Dutch Reformed Church minister, whom also attends my study group, was also touched by Michelle’s way of being and her way of practising motherhood and chose to relate this to her in a letter. His letter forms part of Appendix 6.

This short description above of our conversational journey, does not reflect or richly describe the friendship and care that grew between Michelle and I. In the following section I would like to briefly describe how the quality of our friendship grew and how over time, we challenged and crossed the perceived boundaries between the researcher and the research participant. As our relationship grew we broke through the boundaries that the positivistic sciences have created between the knower (researcher) and the known (participant). Heshusius (1994:16) reflects that this letting go of perceived boundaries allows for a participatory mode of consciousness.

## **4.6 RELATIONSHIPS THAT GROW**

What started off with a formal telephone call, has lead to a friendship. Feminist theologian, Mary Daly, uses the term “Be-Friending” to describe the process of developing a context in which women can be friends (Hunt 1996:75). For me, developing this context included creating a space for mutuality and relationality. According to Hogan (1996:202), relationality includes concepts of interdependence and mutuality. Heyward (1996:155) claims that “[m]utuality, in feminist liberation theology, is the basis of right relation. It is a relational process in which all persons, or parties, are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them.” According to feminist theologians “friendship is one of the most political relationships possible” (Hunt 1996:75) because “friendship is that quality of relationship that invites risk-taking, both in terms of interpersonal intimacy and in terms of social action” (Hunt 1996:76). I hope that through the description of this research project, one will be able to see the risk taking that was involved for both Michelle and I as we entered a space where we faced cultural as well as class differences and where we together challenged socio-political discourses regarding missing children (see also chapter five).

I would like to hope that through our conversations about what would be ethical, caring and just within our relationship (a relationship that is marked with power differences on many levels) we were able to create a friendship, where “power differences are handled in a just way” (Hunt 1996:76).

### **4.6.1 Telephonic conversations**

Because the relationship between Michelle and I was never intended to be the topic of a research report, both Michelle and I are guilty of not keeping meticulous records of our contacts. The recollections of the contacts I will be mentioning here are a reconstruction of how it is that we remember the chronology of the contacts. If I (we) recall correctly, I telephoned Michelle the day after our very first conversation to thank her for talking with me and to confirm that I would be seeing her on the following Wednesday at 10:00 at her house. After our second meeting, she telephoned me during the course of

that week to find out whether there was any way in which I could contribute towards the groceries needed for feeding the street children that week.

I started by networking in my personal circle for any extras there might be in their grocery cupboards and ended up delivering quite a hamper to Michelle. My friends and family need to be honoured for the selfless way in which they have supported Michelle and her endeavours during the past year. The street children have been dressed and fed from many homes in our area.

Michelle's telephone call regarding the groceries was the start of many, many calls to and fro. While at first the telephone calls were rather strained, as we got to know each other they became more and more relaxed. I looked forward to them with a sense of expectation and joy. Frequently Michelle and I would speak late into the night about many subjects quite apart from missing children and her experience of having Matthew go missing. So much of our getting to know each other happened on the telephone. The more I got to know Michelle and to network with her, the more involved I became in Michelle's life.

#### **4.6.2 Attending family celebrations and meeting friends**

Melanie's birthday party was the first family celebration we (my husband and I) attended. We were awed by the privilege of being invited into the privacy of the Ohlssons' family. I recall how excited my daughter (Bianca) and I were when we went shopping for Melanie's birthday gift. I recall Bianca saying: "I don't know her yet, but it's like shopping for my little sister." Somehow this is the way it was between our families from the minute Michelle and I met. Those tenuous, ephemeral filaments of connection that exist and cannot be explained or even fully comprehended were part and parcel of our relationship. The party was such a joyous affair. The spread of cakes, chips and goodies, the braai, the aunts, the uncles, Aunty Maud, the friends and the photographs. I have a library of celebration photographs.

The next family celebration was Justin's Junior Prom. How smart the young man was! We all piled into the car to take him to the Prom. Michael dropped us a little way from the red carpet leading up to the hall entrance. He then

stopped right at the start of the red carpet and opened the car door for Justin. Justin looked so grown up when he climbed the steps to the hall entrance. We snuck in to have a look at the hall. It was all so beautiful. And then it was more photographs. What a special experience to be included in such special family moments. After the Prom, we were invited to the Ohlssons' house for dinner. They had gone to so much trouble for us.

The Ohlssons taught my family new meanings to the concept of doing theology. For them, sitting around a table and sharing a meal, community and fellowship is important, even if it meant that the next day they may not have enough to eat. To the Ohlssons, sharing is how they conduct their lives and live their faith and how they do theology.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

Many occasions followed where we shared meals with the Ohlsson family, visited with each other and went to church together. The blanketing sense of sharing time with Michelle, Michael and the children is always one of fun, laughter and special memories – and photographs! The times of being in and about the community with the Ohlssons are also times marked by a sense of sharing and giving.

## **chapter five**

# DOING COMMUNITY

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Boff (quoted by Pattison 1994:15) encourages pastoral care to share liberation theology's point of departure and goal: "[T]here is only one point of departure – a reality of social misery – and one goal – the liberation of the oppressed." Pastoral care, according to Pattison (1994) thus involves taking a political stand and that a political stand involves taking care of the subjugated members of our society. Michelle continuously finds it part of her life work to be involved in her community and the community at large, educating them regarding the phenomenon of missing children and drawing the attention of the authorities to this horrendous thing being perpetrated by members of the community for their own gain.

Becoming a part of CPMC and becoming involved in the community with the Ohlssons entails many different aspects of doing community.

## 5.2 BECOMING INVOLVED OUTSIDE OF THE CONVERSATIONS

As I was invited to become part of the community of people who have lost their children, I experienced what feminist theologians describe as community: mutuality, interrelatedness and compassion (Gelder 1996:32). This community that the Ohlssons made available to me, reflected an inclusive community (Gelder 1996:32) where there is a concern for those who are marginalised. This community comprised the street children of Mitchell's Plain, the parents and families who have a missing child and who are not receiving adequate support from police and other governmental organisations and the Ohlssons, who founded and run the CPMC.

Being part of this community required not only narrative pastoral conversations with Michelle, but also many other diverse practices of pastoral care. Ackermann (2003) says that true feminist contextual practical theology or pastoral care requires one to get one's hands dirty – to get involved in

people's lives in whatever manner the receivers of care deem important and valuable. Ackermann's (2003) reminder to get one's hands dirty, emphasises doing theology (Bosch 1991:424). There is thus a shift from being right to doing right (Rossouw 1993:903). Bosch (1991:425) builds on Bonino's idea regarding the importance of doing theology: there is no knowledge except in action itself, in the process of changing the world through participation. In this section, I would like to describe my attempts at "getting my hands dirty" and changing the world through participating in that community which the Ohlssons invited me to enter.

### **5.2.1 Networking for CPMC**

Michelle founded Concerned Parents of Missing Children (Appendix 1) during 1999 after a vision from God. CPMC makes use of the services of a group of volunteers who search for missing children, provide emotional support for the parents of missing children, educate the community regarding missing children and liaise with the authorities regarding missing children.

The CPMC is run from the Ohlssons' home and is financed mainly by the wages that Michael earns as a municipal labourer. Small donations are received from the community. The CPMC is a registered Non-Profit Organisation. The CPMC's most pressing needs are funds for the daily running of CPMC's activities, a vehicle for conducting searches, a secure telephone and internet line and an office and general office requisites. Many applications have been made to organisations like The Urban Renewal Fund, the ANC, the City Council, etcetera, but no funds have been forthcoming. It would seem that politics play a large part in the distribution and allocation of funds.

The CPMC's funding and day-to-day running is largely dependent on the goodwill of others. Networking for CPMC largely entails finding individuals and organisations that are willing to reach into their hearts and funds for the benefit of this community project. The fact that so many dishonest individuals run so-called "community projects" for their own benefit harms the law-abiding and genuine organisations in terms of fund-generating.

Networking for CPMC cuts across the complete spectrum of activities – from seeing that the Ohlssons have food on their table because their wages have been exhausted due to the exorbitant fuel needs that these searches require to finding venues for the annual Day of Prayer for Missing Children. When one touches on the subject of a pastoral care of praxis, the question of networking for an organisation would have to be addressed. Would a pastoral care of praxis include making sure that a family that dedicates their whole life to the well-being of others has food to eat? Would a pastoral care of praxis include using possible contacts to source a computer for the organisation?

During the course of the past sixteen months networking included personally funding the following activities from my private practice, as well as finding other financial resources to contribute to:

- keeping the Ohlssons' vehicle in running order; organising for tow-ins when it broke down; and sourcing funds for fuel needs
- sourcing food for personal use
- sourcing food to feed the street children
- finding an affordable venue for an office
- sourcing office furniture and requisites
- sourcing funds for a telephone
- sourcing affordable venues for CPMC activities
- connecting with people and individuals who might further CPMC's cause, like politicians, media (television, radio and printed media) and police
- finding appropriate schools for children and seeing to the payment of school fees
- sourcing funds for electricity
- transporting CPMC members to activities
- disseminating CPMC information

When one is involved in community work and one chooses to adopt a stance of a pastoral praxis of care, networking becomes a core responsibility. It would be impossible for a single person to accept the liability and exercise the practicalities of supporting and funding such an organisation. Networking for

a community service organisation entails one *main* frustration: promises by individuals and organisations that are never delivered. Experience teaches that people will say anything to get the community worker “to go away” – people habitually seem to make promises they are not planning to.

### **5.2.2 Feeding the street children**

Many street children live in the immediate environs of Mitchell’s Plain. Michelle speaks about these children as “my children”. These children often come to the Ohlssons’ house when they need medical care and clothing. Michelle tries her best to maintain the feeding scheme she started for these street children. A certain medical doctor in the Mitchell’s Plain community supports Michelle in her endeavours regarding the street children. He provides many of the ingredients for their meals, as well as supplying medical care to the street children free of charge.

Often the meals Michelle brings these street children are the only solid meal that these children will have for that day/week/month. When she is able to feed them, Michelle puts the word out that the street children need to be “at the bridge” at ± 19:00 that evening as they are going to be fed. The leader of that particular group of street children, Daniel, is very possessive and territorial when it comes to Michelle. He protects her by walking near her when she is anywhere near his territory or when any of the other street children try to harass her.

At about 19:00 we transport the food, crockery, cutlery and cold drinks to “the bridge” and distribute it to a very orderly group of children. Daniel has taught them well about standing in rows, about waiting their turn and about thanking everyone as their portions are handed to them. Daniel starts the meal by saying grace and ends the meal with a prayer of thanks.

It is sad to think that there are times when food and finances are just *not* available and these children are forced to go hungry. None of these children would choose to live on the street if they had a decent home to live in...

### **5.2.3 The Christmas Party**

Very soon after I met Michelle, she started telling me about the Christmas Party. Each year the CPMC treats their members to a mid-year picnic in July and a Christmas Party during the first week of December. The reasoning behind these occasions is the emotional support of the parents and siblings of the missing children. The party was held at Pinkster Park in Somerset West. All the parents and siblings were bussed in from a central pick-up point in Mitchell's Plain.

Hours and hours of networking and fundraising goes into hosting such an occasion. Once again I have to honour people I know for their contribution to making the Christmas Party a success. Elize Morkel rallied her church cell group into donating funds, presents and food, and into giving their time to help with the counselling of the parents. Those parents whom Elize spoke in person to that day still testify to how much it meant to them to speak with her and how they still read the letters she wrote to them afterwards in which she reflected on her conversations with them. The members of my study group donated money and toys. Beverly Voigt is a teacher at St. George's Secondary School in Cape Town. She rallied her pupils to make presents and cards for the CPMC as their Christmas community project. Michelle went to the school to receive the gifts from the pupils and to tell them about missing children. My only regret is that the pupils who had spent so many hours making the gifts were not at the party to see how much joy their handiwork had brought. Michelle had a copy of the video tape recording of the handing out of the gifts made for the pupils as a "thank you".

The Christmas Party was a time of sorrow and joy. Sorrow about children missed. Joy about care, support and love from people who really care.

#### **5.2.4 The Day of Prayer**

The CPMC annually hosts a Day of Prayer for Missing Children in the St. George's Cathedral on the first Saturday of June. June is declared as the National Children's Month in South Africa. The Day of Prayer is CPMC's contribution towards creating awareness regarding child exploitation. The

Day of Prayer event was one of the most beautiful, moving and rewarding occasions I have ever had the privilege of attending. So many people rallied together to make this day a success. So many people contributed towards supporting and caring for parents who were experiencing the depths of grief about their missing children. The whole occasion was perched on pylons of hope.

### **5.2.5 The honouring ceremony**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> March 2003 Matthew had been missing for six years. Michelle decided to mark this date with an honouring ceremony for Matthew. All the CPMC members were invited to the Ohlssons' home for a celebration. The Church Brigade Band played music, loads and loads of food was prepared and consumed, photographs were taken and Matthew was honoured – wherever he was – with the Candle Lighting Ceremony. Michelle refused to see this day as a day of tears and mourning. She claimed that the day was a day of honouring Matthew and a day of hope ...

Many of the CPMC's activities include rituals. The Candle Lighting Ceremony that the Ohlssons had would be an example of an ritual which honours Matthew. In the following section I will discuss the rituals which the CPMC has created in memory of the missing children.

## **5.3 THE PLACE OF RITUAL**

### **5.3.1 Rituals**

Rituals are found in all human societies and appear everywhere to be deeply affected by cultural themes of meaning. Ritual highlights the stresses and strains imposed on human lives. Rituals are not fixed and thus encompass the processes through which people comment upon or reconstruct their conditions and societies. Ritual can be broadly described as a sequence of actions in which actors actively participate by carrying out similar or complementary tasks singularly or together, where the order of the sequence is prescribed and where reference may be made to some more or less obscure objects or texts which many, if not all, of the participants cannot explain (Krause 1998:82).

Denise Ackermann (1998:98) notes that all human beings have a longing for ritual. Ritual is an intricate fabric woven from reason and rite, knowledge and religion, prose and poetry, fact and dream. Human creativity, longing, need and faith come together when groups seek ways of expressing newfound relationships. Rituals are about relationships.

Rituals, ceremonies and spiritual practices share similarities. The same actions are repeated sequentially over and over, at regularly prescribed times. Rituals change little from one celebration to the next and from one generation to the next. In order to perform rituals one must participate with body and mind. Ritual goes beyond language to engage the body through physical action and bodily experience. There is a direct encounter of bodily experience with culturally shaped stories, myths and sagas.

Rituals signal to others messages about “to whom I belong”. The form of the ritual also embodies its symbolic meaning. Rituals punctuate experience into meaningful chunks of time. Rituals provide a way for human beings to address that which existentially must remain ambiguous or uncertain. When a ritual is enacted, there is a pervasive spirit of unity among those who participate in the ritual. The spirit of unity goes beyond differentness according to wealth, social status, power, race or culture. Rituals mostly accompany transitions from one situation to another (Griffith & Griffith 2002:165-188).

During the past four years CPMC members have encapsulated the organisation’s essence in a ritual that constitutes their tears, pain and anguish, but also their hopes, unity and spirit. The candle is their metaphor of possibilities – endless, boundless, limitless possibilities ...

### **5.3.2 Lighting the candles**

Michelle had made mention of the notion of hope and the ritual of lighting candles to guide the missing children home in the telling of her story and in

the writing of her letters. The continual light symbolised by the lit candles guides the children home and keeps hope alive. The Candle Lighting Ceremony takes place at the end of each CPMC event. It follows a specific routine.

The narrative of The Five Candles is read. Whilst the story is being read, Michelle and four of the missing children's siblings are positioned on the stage, each holding a lit candle. Michelle holds the big Candle of Hope. The children enact the story as it is told. At the end of the story the parents of missing children each light their own candle from the Candle of Hope. They stay on the stage, holding their lit candle. The other siblings form a procession down the centre aisle of the room, each holding a poster of a missing child and a lit candle. They join their parents on the stage. With the stage aglow with the light of the burning candles, Michael Ohlsson closes the event with a prayer of hope and inspiration.

### **5.3.2.1 The narrative of the five candles**

Five candles burn slowly. Their ambience is so soft you can hear them talking. The first one says: ***"I am peace."***

However, no one can keep me burning. I believe I will go out. Its flame rapidly diminishes and goes out completely.

The second one says: ***"I am faith."***

Most of all, I am no longer indispensable, so it does not make any sense that I stay lit any longer. When it finishes speaking, a breeze softly blows on it, putting it out.

Sadly the third candle speaks its turn. ***"I am love."***

I have not got the strength to stay alight. People put me aside and don't understand my importance. They even forget to love those who are closest to them. Waiting no longer, it too goes out.

The fourth candle, with a tear, says: ***"I am happiness."***

I am but a figment of someone's choice. A mere mood extinguishes me. It sighs and dies.

Suddenly ... a child enters the room and sees the four candles are not burning. "Why are you not burning? You are supposed to stay alight until the end of days." Saying this, the child begins to cry.

Then the fifth candle says: "Don't be afraid, while I'm still here and burning, we can relight all the other candles. ***"I am hope."*** With shining eyes, the child took the candle of hope and relit the other candles. The flame of hope should never go out from our lives. Each of us can maintain faith, love, peace and happiness while the flame of hope burns within us.

#### **5.4 CONCLUSION**

So much to say; so little said. I am reeling under the damning evidence of all the not-yet-tolds. Then there are the already-saids that are still vibrating with expectancy in their filigree cocoons of silky-fibrous threads, waiting to explode into letters, words, sentences, paragraphs and cognisance. For the world to see, to hear and to take note of. Michelle's story is waiting for the transition from the already-spoken version to the world-has-heard version.

So the heroine? Who needs a counterpart to the hero? I see a vastly different woman coming out of the rubble that the heroes have left after them. One who will not be "going" anywhere (she can spiral to her heart's content dancing the days away) but who will have caught on little by little, in company with other women, that there is no place to go, and no one to be. May be that's the essence of the way that lies ahead for woman ... to know that she "is". That ought to be enough to keep her busy for at least a couple of centuries!

(Fiona O'Connell in Murdock 1988:143)

## **chapter six**

# PARTICIPATORY REFLECTIONS

## 6.1 “WRITING THE BOOK”

Once again I find myself sitting in front of my computer staring at the screen. I am humbled by the realisation that I have come this far with a process that I was initially so afraid of. Humbled that someone, who owes me nothing trusted me enough to take the first step on this journey with me. I re-read Michelle’s reflections on our conversations together and on the process of “writing the book”.

The tears represent the tribute I wish to put her most personal and most private thoughts out there for the world if only it will just benefit her children. Michelle’s children are not only the children born from her body.

Michelle goes about her tasks in an unobtrusive way, with an unflinching certainty of purpose. She stands firm in her convictions and requires nothing but justice for the children and their parents. She asks for no recognition of her efforts, other than that the authorities will recognise the pain of missing children and put structures in place to minimise the possibility of other children being abducted.

Although my relationship with Michelle and her family did not start out as research, with her permission ended up as such. I learned that research is also pastoral care and that when there is caring, there is much more to be learnt than mere objectifiable data.

I learnt how practising pastoral caring by listening, by writing a letter, by holding a hand when the effects of the pain are overpowering, by dropping a food parcel, by making a telephone call and by merely being available seems to be more effective than any number of techniques (Couture 1998, 2000). This reminded me that a therapist can *never* go away from a meeting with a client without being touched, moved or changed by that meeting in some way.

In this chapter I reflect on how my meetings with Michelle have affected many lives, including mine and Michelle's as well as the life of the research project. These reflections will include Michelle's voice as well as my own regarding what I have learned and experienced about doing research and doing pastoral care.

## **6.2 REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH EXPERIENCES**

In this section I reflect on what I have learned and experienced during this research journey.

### **6.2.1 Consulting my consultant**

Reflecting on my conversations with Michelle invariably leads me to the notion of "consulting my consultant" (Epston & White 1994:77-85). Caring *with* Michelle (Sevenhuijsen 1998:15) introduced her to me as a consultant whom I could consult. When I walked into Michelle's lounge on that first Wednesday, although I did not recognise it at the time, I was linking up with one of the greatest teachers in the university of life.

Michelle acted as my consultant on many issues, including when I was unsure of how to live in a traditionally economically challenged area like Mitchell's Plain, or how it is to have your child go missing, or the many practicalities involved in trying to find your child or the various people one consults when trying to network for an organisation such as CPMC.

Every time Michelle is invited to re-tell her story and every time she refocuses on those knowledges that have helped her make sense of her situation, she is acting as a consultant, both to herself and to others (Appelt, Thandi & Roux 2002:110). I believe that her problem saturated story of loss is pushed further into the background every time I consult with Michelle on the theory and practice of being the mother of a missing child, or on the practical aspects of the laws of missing children as she has experienced them and studied them, or regarding whom to ask for information on missing children, or on the experience of being on our journey, or on the experience of "writing of the book".

By giving close attention to Michelle's voice and views (see McTaggart 1997a:14), I also attempted to move away from research that is *done* on people. McTaggart (1997b:39) claims that participatory action research "does not treat people as objects for research, but encourages people to work together as knowing subjects and agents of change and improvement."

### **6.2.2 Personal reflections on the co-search process**

I started the co-search process not knowing that it was going to be a co-search process. The moment of insertion presented it to me. Michelle granted me the liberty and entitlement of reflections.

Introducing myself to Michelle and working towards an understanding with her about my motives for engaging with her, left me with uncertainty of having intruded in Michelle's private space and not having been invited into her life. The uncertainty diminished as time passed and an easy rhythm was established between Michelle and myself. The initial stiffness disappeared and we looked forward to our times together.

I continually guarded against not taking knowledges for granted or making assumptions. I had to keep on focusing on asking the smallest questions as my focus still had to be on giving voice to her alternative story. Through participatory action research she experienced herself as an "autonomous, responsible agent[s] who participate actively in making [her] own histories and conditions of life" (McTaggart 1997b:39). The times when we were just together for the sake of being with each other had to be clearly separated from therapeutic times.

As the first drafts of the various chapters of the co-search report were completed and as Michelle read them and gave me her feedback on them, it became easier to construct the writing of the co-search report. Michelle appreciated the measure of literary research I had invested in the project and found it fascinating reading material. Although she found it hard, at times, to read about her telling of Matthew's disappearance and how she articulated this hardship, it re-affirmed her voice she had gained by speaking about his disappearance. McTaggart (1997:14) reminds one that participatory action

research is concerned with ensuring that the “otherwise unheard voices (for example, disenfranchised groups) are given expression.” Michelle’s sharing when reading “the book”, made it easier for me to write about the topic. My initial fears about being disrespectful and hurtful in my writing began to dissipate and I again began to realise the healing power of the narrative pastoral conversations.

McTaggart (1997b:26) as well as Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:10) claim that research is only ethical when participation to the research has in some way contributed to or improved participants’ lives. Michelle questioned whether I was sure I was writing about her when she read the report. “It can’t be true, because I’m not so,” she repeatedly said. In time Michelle’s posture became more upright and she began to tell people that “we are writing a book about me” with such a sense of pride that I found it humbling.

Michelle also became more aware and accepting of the relevance of the position she holds in her community. She now chooses to accept this as a result of her preferred way of being and her choice to contribute to the community rather than to take from it. Watching her and experiencing her read about herself strengthened my belief in the written word and the way that our language constitutes our realities.

I derived an enormous amount of pleasure and fun from this co-search process. Although this might seem contradictory - how can a topic as intense, severe, brutal and ruthless as a missing child be described as fun and pleasurable? – nevertheless the laughter, fun, pleasure, silliness and just enjoying life will always stand out for me. Being with Michelle, on her own or with the members of her organisation, always ended up being “*vet pre!*” (huge fun). Certainly the tears were there, the intensity of feelings were there, the pain was always part of the fibre of our beings, but the sense of embracing life was always unmistakable.

According to Reinharz (1992:194), many feminist researchers are profoundly changed by what they learn about themselves. The ability to still be alive, even in the face of such anguish about one’s child, is the one thing that this

co-search process has taught me. These days I often find myself questioning myself for complaining about irrelevant things. This is a new practice for me. Questioning myself really only started when I started this documentation process, but it is a practice I am valuing more and more.

Furthermore, until I got to know Michelle I felt that I had been living in a cage. Once I drove into Mitchell's Plain to see her for the first time, it was as if the cage's door was unlocked and I was allowed out into another world - a world that I always suspected was there, but had never personally experienced. The privileged life I had led up until the time I met Michelle shielded me from coming into contact with people from economically less privileged backgrounds within their own environment.

Meeting with Michelle changed me and this change rippled through all my interactions. My transformation has affected my husband and children, my mother, my family, my friends, my acquaintances, my colleagues, clients and everybody I come into contact with. My family got the opportunity of going with me to feed the street children, of attending the day of prayer, of speaking to other members of the CPMC. This had a profound effect on them as they had also been shielded from the less privileged side of life. My mother went with me to Michelle's house and contributed her tithe to CPMC directly. Actually seeing the difference her tithe made was a very different experience for her than merely monthly putting it into the church coffers.

My family got to know about people who live with circumstances beyond their own wildest imaginations and how they cope. My family met people who live in hope, who have an exuberance and *joie de vivre* that moves one to tears, people who believe in the grace and mercy of God to carry them through each and every situation.

Reinharz (1992:194) suggests that this change also includes the learning that the researcher experiences "about the subject matter under study." I have learned and experienced a lot about pastoral care and counselling specifically to families who have missing children.

### 6.2.3 Pastoral care and counselling

In attempting to answer the question regarding what pastoral care and counselling involves for the parents of missing children in a disadvantaged community, the following assertions could be useful: pastoral praxis can be described as the self-creative activity through which we make the world (Lather 1991:11), and as something that requires grounding in a theory that is relevant to the world, but that is also supported by the actions it prompts (Lather 1991:12).

*“Pastoral praxis can be described as the self-creative activity through which we make the world (Lather 1991:11)”*: The concept “self-creative activity” would most likely imply the actions referring to self-innovation. When I met with Michelle for the first time, I had no preconceived ideas about the interactions or conversations I was going to have with her, barring my grounding in the theory, epistemology and practice of narrative pastoral therapy and an indisputable and sincere desire to be of assistance to her in some way. I was honestly receptive to her lead and direction of what it was that she would find useful during our times together. Our times together self-created as it moved through the different levels of discovery and self-discovery. In this process “we made the world.” This was a world where culture and ethnicity became a non-issue in the space of our creation, where tears and happiness stood side by side, where practical, emotional and spiritual needs were spoken and addressed and an initially tentative meeting become love and friendship.

*...and as something that requires grounding in a theory that is relevant to the world, but that is also supported by the actions it prompts.*

*(Lather 1991:12)*

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:35), point out that feminist theology takes as its starting point the experiences of women and men and their interaction with each other and with society. These experiences are then used as a source from which to do theology. The emphasis has thus shifted from authority,

imposed from outside, to self-authority, striven for throughout life (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:35).

Pamela Couture (2000:13-14) informs us that pastoral care is a work or practice of care. During a personal conversation with her (Cape Town 2003), she mentioned that to her the core of pastoral care and counselling is friendship and equality. She qualified equality by pointing out that equality did not necessarily refer to equality in the status of the conversing/care partners, but referred more to equality towards each other in the minds of the conversing/care partners.

CPMC has many members who are not professing Christians, such as Muslims, Hindus and non-believers. During the course of my literary research for the theoretical grounding of this project, I noticed that many writers state that the practice of Christianity by the carer and the receiver of the care, is a prerequisite for doing pastoral care, i.e., De Jongh van Arkel (2000:32-45) whom associates Christianity very closely with the act of pastoral care, and Bons-Storm (1998:14) who mentions that Christianity is one of the three ingredients necessary for “faith lived in practice.”

Pamela Couture (Cape Town 2003), however, emphatically stated that for her the religious beliefs of the receiver of the care and counselling were not a prerequisite in her doing of pastoral care and counselling. This assertion supported her notion that our caring with a person urges us to ask how we can mutually empower one another, not only to cure the ills of our lives, but also to proactively create conditions for fullness of life (Couture 1998: 27). Rebecca Chopp (in Bons-Storm 1998:21) seems to agree with Pamela Couture when she asserts that pastoral care is a pattern of meaning and action that is both culturally constructed and individually initiated and that involves embodied actors.

Denise Ackermann (1998:52-74), a South African feminist theologian, also does not seem to prescribe pastoral care from a specific theological paradigm. This makes the possibility of doing praxis by furthering the cause of liberation and healing in our society far greater. Her view that social and

political healing are as inseparable as the politics that harmed our society and which has had such dire effects on the social fabric of our society (Ackermann 1998:52-74) contributes to the doing of pastoral care and counselling in our society as it sanctions the across-religious-border praxis of care.

For a healing praxis to be truly uplifting, “it has to be a collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion. A healing practise is concrete, rooted in the understanding that daily living is not separate from the life of faith, and the need for justice” (Ackermann 1998:52-74).

Pamela Couture (2000:19) puts it this way: “Pastoral theology looks at the world honestly...and holds out hope. Hope can be born in personal presence, conversation, economic opportunity, rebuilt institutions, restful activity, or liberating symbols.” If I take these ideas about pastoral care as my starting point, then what I was involved in with Michelle was indeed the praxis of pastoral care and counselling.

My experience with Michelle and, to a lesser degree, with the members of the CPMC, points to several factors as being at the heart of a praxis of pastoral care in our society. The *basic practical needs* of the society - like clothes, food, schooling, work, health care - must be addressed. While it is preferable that the basic practical needs are provided by means of assisting the community to fend for themselves rather than consistently providing *for* their needs, if this is not an option, then networking possibilities must be investigated. Pastoral praxis appreciates that a community cannot live on theology alone. Hands on, getting dirty in the trenches care is more than the laying on of hands and preaching – it entails the laying on of hands on practical solutions to practical situations by digging in the trenches alongside the community members (see chapter five).

Pastoral care and counselling operate on a praxis of *support* - support in terms of both the practical needs and also of the emotional and spiritual needs. Support means holding another – either physically and/or emotionally - when heart- and gut-wrenching sobs of longing are tearing them apart;

joining in the uncontrollable weeping for a lost child, but also laughing and dancing at the monumental joy of a child found; pounding pavements whilst looking for a lost child; cooking huge pots of food to feed the street children their only meal for the day/week/month; holding hands in prayer for the sick, needy and hopeless, but most of all, being there in the time of need, whatever that need might be.

Pastoral care and counselling requires unselfishness and selflessness. The only reward is the realisation that the needs of the community member are being served. The pastoral carer is fuelled by a spirit of love – love for the community and for God. Without a profound, deep love a praxis of pastoral care seems to be inconceivable (Graham 1998:129-152).

As the pastoral care and counselling during this process included caring *with* (Sevenhuijsen 1998:15) Michelle, it enabled egalitarian relations (Reinharz 1992:182) among myself (researcher) and Michelle (research participant). Since this feminist research project was thus “communal rather than hierarchical” (Reinharz 1992:182), it is important that Michelle also reflect on the research process.

### **6.3 MICHELLE’S REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH PROCESS**

Michelle reflected on how her experience of being a participant of this research project has been a transforming experience for her.

#### **6.3.1 Reflections on participation**

Once I started to record information for this co-search report – the document that Michelle consistently refers to as “the book”, “her book” or “our book” – I would give the chapters to Michelle to read, mainly for her verification that my view on the information was also her view of the information. Reinharz (1992:3-17) and Myerhoff (1982:34-49) regard this as a practice of respecting your co-search partner/s. Since Michelle still finds writing a laborious exercise, she chose to tape record her thoughts and these were later transcribed.

Her feedback helped guide the writing in a direction that proved useful for her and validating of her story. Her feedback also strengthened my own

perceptions of the usefulness of pastoral counselling and pastoral care. In *Narratives of Therapists' Lives* (1997), White cautions that burnout can threaten the lives of people engaged in the caring profession. Hearing from Michelle that the work we had done together had strengthened her and allowed her to live in a way she preferred for herself, helped the possibility of burnout to rather hound someone else. The following is Michelle's reflection on my role in her life:

My name is Michelle. I am a mother of four wonderful children and a wife to my husband Michael for almost seventeen years. I never really worked after my marriage because I always felt my kids are my responsibility and I am the only person to take care of them. Maybe because I never had a normal childhood life with parents who loved me or themselves.

In the last year I met a wonderful woman – Margot Brink – I have to admit it took some time for me to really trust her, not because of her but because the bitterness I went through when my son Matthew disappeared. I had so many people promising me help and support and then never came back. I am 35 years old with a hell of a life behind me, but the only happy thoughts I have are those of the birth of each of my babies. My husband was very good and pleasant with our kids.

Margot really showed me there are good people somewhere out there. I always had hope, and when Margot came with her hope I truly found strength in every way because she did not come in to my life for what she can gain out of it, but her interest was what is important to me.

It was so wonderful having a person to give you an ear when you need to talk even if it takes hours of listening.

God sees our hearts and he chose her to try and heal mine, but no person can heal the pain I have for Matthew. I can remember the first time Margot took me to have coffee I was so shy because I am not used to someone making me feel special the way she does. If she could she would really take all my burdens off me. I sometimes dream how I take her out and spoil her the way she spoils me, but one day it will happen, sooner or later. God knows how deep I feel about it.

Michelle's statements regarding my role in her life and in the lives of her family indicates the power of the ethical stance which feminist theology, feminist research and pastoral care suggest we adhere to. In contrast to the contact she had had with other researchers which had left her with an experience of having been used for their benefit only (see chapter four), the practices of accountability and transparency, had allowed the pastoral care and counselling to support and nurture the possibilities of a preferred way of being.

### **6.3.2 A transforming experience**

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate ... Stories are located within a number of different discourses, and thus vary dramatically in terms of the language used, the concepts, issues and moral judgements made relevant and the subject positions made available within them. In this way poststructuralism shades into narratology.

(Davies & Harré 1991:46)

Michelle remarked that she experienced transformation or being reconstituted in a different subject position (Davies & Harré 1991:46). Michelle reports that she is now able to refuse when people ask things of her that she feels unable to give – such as food, shelter, clothes, money, time, etcetera. When she is unfairly accused of having perpetrated abuse towards Matthew or when he is regarded by the police as a runaway child rather than a missing child, she now has a strong enough voice to challenge such accusations. Michelle reflects as follows:

But with Margot and this book it gave me a whole different version and it gave me the strength to go on. It gave me focus and not to let go. I need to have more hope than ever.

I used to think so low of myself but working on this book made me realize again that I am the chosen, I am the one that God has put here to do my utmost best to make a change in the way our community and people think of missing children.

The time that I have spent with Margot, writing, thinking about this book I just get more and more excited and I begin to see things in a more perspective way. It's all going to work out.

Although we never knew we loved children, although we never knew that one day we would become foster parents, we have helped so many kids, taking them from the streets, took them in the house, feed them, clothe them without using anyone's help but God's and without asking for a star.

### **6.3.3 Reflecting on Michelle's reflections**

Reading and reflecting on Michelle's reflections of the therapeutic process and the co-search process or "writing the book" leaves me in no doubt about the effect of engaging in the post structuralist, feminist and narrative pastoral way of counselling and care.

When one has an epistemology and praxis that advocates equality, caring and an ethical stance of accountability and transparency as its foundation, it allows one to interact with a client in such a way that the client experiences the liberating effects of the process. Such pastoral praxis does not expect me to bring solutions to problems, but to decentre problems so that the solution to the problems can be generated by the client from solutions she already owns within her personal solution-repertoire.

When I spoke with Michelle on the telephone two days ago, she told me that she is now surer than ever that I had listened to her because each and every word she had said I used in the book without twisting her words. She now knows that I respect her because I regard her words/stories as important enough to use them as she told them to me without questioning and distorting them. The feminist research methodologies allow one to acknowledge the research participants by using their words without having to change them, edit them or interpret them.

My reflections on "writing the book" and everything that preceded "writing the book" has one word that runs through it like a golden thread – humility. It is with a great sense of humility that I acknowledge the words that Michelle has spoken about the process. It is with great humility that I reflect on being trusted enough by her to risk coming on a journey of so many uncertainties with me. On this journey there were pit stops – people like Elize Morkel, Elmarie Kotzé and some of my fellow students – where I could refill my tank. I

am certain that the effect of the process would have been far less valuable for Michelle had I not had the wisdom and guidance of these people in my life. My mentors directed me regarding reading I could do on the subject of feminist theology, feminist research, cross-cultural therapy, pastoral care and counselling and many more aspects. My colleagues kept my feet on the ground by asking relevant questions, by challenging many of my assertions and by always being truthful in their reflections on my reflections.

Had Michelle not been the kind of person she is, it would have been far more difficult for me to care for her in the way that I was able to. Michelle was always very certain and clear about what worked for her and what did not work for her during the process we were engaged in. When she says that I was always very good to her, I was able to be good to her because she verbalised what “being good to her” would be for her. The narrative pastoral way of working allows one to centre the client and his/her needs. I am privileged to have the use of a process that allows the client to become my consultant, as well as her own consultant.

Reflecting on Michelle’s reflections leaves me energised. I know that I am now engaging in a pastoral praxis that is more replenishing than draining, more co-creating than authoritarian and thus ultimately freeing.

This co-search report is about the reporting of a lived experience shared with a unique person. Michelle chose to share her story with me. I believe that the last word on the report belongs to Michelle. If she had not shared her story with me, the co-search report would not have come into being. Reinharz (1992:3-17) describes feminist research as a research that allows the voice of one’s co-searcher to be heard in its original format. In the following section I would like to give the final word of “our book” to Michelle. (please refer to Appendix 7 for complete version)

#### **6.4 THE LAST WORD – Michelle’s reflection on reading her story**

I just want to say that the first time Margot mentioned to me about writing a book about missing children I said in my mind ...oh well we'll see how far this one goes.... But after a few months or so... I started to get excited....

[A]s we started on this book things really changed for me and I was just looking forward to see the outcome of this book because it would not actually benefit me but it would benefit a whole lot of people, a whole lot of parents who are still all these years in this mystery that I am in with these missing children.

[I]f you really think about missing children, it's a total sad story. It's something that is really worse than death... because you know you don't know how to act on it, you don't know what to think of it. All you can think is am I going to live with it? How long is it going to take? You fantasise about what if your child comes home tomorrow. You dream, you never stop thinking. The words that Margot shared with me it gave me... hope. She showed me there is hope - don't give up yet. I had no intention of giving up but I have to mention, I am only human.

And this is something that takes you like a sickness...you don't know when you are going to be up today, you don't know how it is going to take you down tomorrow, you are just not in control of yourself. Not in control of your thoughts, your needs, your wants, especially your wants. Because one thing you want is your child. But with Margot and this book it gave me a whole different version and it gave me the strength to go on. It gave me focus and not to let go. I need to have more hope than ever. And I really hope and I pray that this book will open up eyes of people and surely open up doors for us people in need of help

God does not take a child away from its parents. God does not put you in this agony... God is the one who came in and healed a broken heart. He is the only one that can give you the security, this sense of

happiness. Because I thought when Matthew disappeared I will never be able to love, how can I be happy when I don't even know where my child is. When he first disappeared I didn't even want to eat. Who is feeding him? Here I have a nice plate of food – who knows what my child is eating? I didn't even want a bed. I didn't want to sleep because is he warm? He is a sick child, he had a touch of asthma and when his chest goes tight, who is there to give him medicine? Who is there to look after him? To give him an extra blanket? To give him a second helping of food when he is hungry?

Those all are thoughts that goes through a parents' mind – day by day – night by night – and sometimes all day. And without God I don't think anyone can survive it...I see myself doing speeches and when I come down from the stage people are so impressed... how can I, me, this Michelle Ohlsson living in Mitchell's Plain with nothing, except a name, how can I be such a comfort and courage to some people, to a lot of people? Its only God.

I know this book is going to bring us joy. It's going to open up hearts, minds and even moods because out there are a lot of mothers who gave up on their children. Not because they want to, but because they don't have the hope.

Time can not take it away – you do heal but it can't go away. You can't start tonight and say well I have had enough - no more looking, no more praying, no more asking, no more advertising, no more nothing. How can you, you are the parent. I just got this feeling that whatever I do, my child knows and if I decided to give up he is going to feel that he needs to give up because my mother gave up, my parents are not looking. I know that somehow, somewhere he must know that we are really doing everything. He sees his mother and father on TV, he sees his brothers and sisters sometimes in the newspapers. I used to do some silly things, keep all the newspaper clippings, make a recording of everything of him that was on the news on the TV, everything, and keep it in a box and I will show

Matthew someday when he comes back what we have done for him. I don't you want him to come home and say "mommy I hate you". Or she didn't come look for me.

Do you know what I have been going through. All that stuff goes through the mind and believe me or not, the time that I have spent with Margot, writing, thinking about this book I just get more and more excited. It's all going to work out I hope she has got a lot of courage but it is a pleasure for me to do this – to write this book – to present it to the world and not to be ashamed of using my real name, my son's real name, my family's real names because me, my husband and my children are one in this because we are together in this.

...God has really given me a good family, beautiful children, an understanding husband, good friends, especially my organisation members. The members worked this year without having a child missing in this year. Another nice thing happened. A lot of the parents whose children are missing joined up with us, that's good because we are now real concerned parents of missing children ...I can't do everything alone and they realise that because it is not only Matthew, there are so many children missing in this country...

What happened to these children? If [the police] need help they can make use of us. We are an organisation with no resources but yet we have got the ability to do more than a job than those who get paid for it. I work from my home for these past four years, my office is in my house and if I would have the resources, the telephone, the transport, the fax machine, the copy machine all these tools that you need for an organisation. ...if our organisation could have helped 144 families without these resources just think what we could do with these resources.

If we would have our organisation on our feet...and running with the help of the police I am sure...that we can break all ties that these

syndicates got. We can change the minds of the policemen how they handle the cases. Now just imagine your child disappears and the child is gone for the whole weekend isn't that enough excuse for the perpetrator to do whatever he or she has got in mind to do with your child?

.... If they don't have the manpower to work weekends, we can fill in. Give us the resources and we can do it. We don't want to take over, but as a parent you know when a child is in trouble. You know how you feel, you know what they are thinking, and you know the way they imagine. That is why.

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