

**CHAPTER 4: CONTINUING TO CARRY THE TORCH OF NARRATIVE
PASTORAL THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES**

*“When spirituality informs our therapy
with individuals and families, the aim of care
is to empower people to embrace paradox,
seek justice, and glimpse the contingency of life
in order to live with
both feet planted firmly in mid air”*

(Anderson 1999: 160).

4.1 FURTHER STEPS

In this chapter I will highlight aspects of our narrative pastoral approach to therapeutic conversations (*trauma debriefing*) that have been co-created by, and of benefit to, Rosie and Andrew. The therapeutic conversations I had with Rosie and Andrew were shaped and guided by the same narrative pastoral approach that shaped my conversations with Joan (see chapter 3). Following up on these therapeutic conversations, I asked Rosie and Andrew to comment on certain aspects of the narrative pastoral journey we undertook together. I was particularly interested to hear from them whether the introduction of spirituality into these conversations was helpful.

In order to thicken the alternative story (White & Epston 1990:17) of introducing talk of spirituality into trauma work, I have also included extracts from an e-mail conversation I had with Todd. His story resonates with the importance of spirituality in counter-acting the effects of trauma. For Todd, his spirituality played a central role in standing with him and defusing the impact of trauma invited into his life by politically related events in Zimbabwe.

4.1.1 Continuing to carry the torch of spirituality

My research journey with Joan has strengthened my belief in the importance of including a spiritual perspective in my therapeutic conversations with people who have encountered trauma. I believe this spiritual perspective sharpens the focus of our therapeutic conversations. Griffith and Griffith (2002:267) list several benefits to incorporating a spiritual perspective. Firstly, it keeps the integrity of important relationships a central theme in the conversations of therapy. Secondly, it guides a therapist to keep centre stage those strategies that can buffer existential crisis states and counter their adverse influences. Thirdly, it establishes as primary objectives of therapy the sustenance of hope, purpose, and self-agency. The benefits Griffith and Griffith list here resonate for me with both the therapeutic conversations I had with Joan and with my knowledge of how she managed to stand against further trauma on her return to Zimbabwe. Allowing God back into her life appears to have played a crucial part in this strengthening of her hope, purpose and self-agency (Griffith & Griffith 2002: 267).

Griffith and Griffith (2002:267) believe religious beliefs, spiritual practices, rituals, and other expressive genres of spiritual experience can play a role in countering illness. My research

journey has shown me that spiritual experience can similarly counteract the effects of trauma. This certainly appears to have been the case with Todd.

4.2 TODD

Like Joan, Todd is a member of the MDC (Movement for Democratic Change) Party in Zimbabwe. At the World Cup Cricket Match held in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in March 2003, MDC supporters made maximum use of the international media coverage of the match by holding up protest posters with anti-Mugabe messages. As the spectators left the stadium at the end of the match, the police randomly arrested people. Todd was among those arrested and illegally detained under the infamous Public Order and Security Act that outlaws any form of protest against the ruling party in Zimbabwe. As Todd puts it: *“I was one of the 50 unfortunates that were arrested at the Cricket World Cup by Mugabe's thugs in Bulawayo and spent 96 hours in an overcrowded cell.”*

Todd spent four nights in prison. There were up to 24 men in the cell, a cell meant to hold a maximum of 6 people. There was one open toilet that did not flush. Sleeping was difficult as there was insufficient floor space for everyone to lie down. Todd described the cell as a “pit of snakes”.

Curious about how Todd coped with this traumatic event I asked him whether his spirituality had been a resource he could draw from, and how had the trauma impacted his faith? Todd wrote:

I don't think it has changed my faith much. Maybe I have got a little closer to God. My faith in God was strong before the trauma of being sent to jail and it is still strong. I do know that God is always close - hearing my prayers - not always answering the way I want but He mostly seems to give me the positions/things I need. For example: I realised that there was no way I was going to get out of the cell. I was in for a long time - claustrophobia, fear, exhaustion etc had set in. How I coped was by picking a spot or mark on the roof. I would concentrate on that spot and speak to God, asking Him to see me through the next time period, say 4 - 8 hours until someone or something else would occupy my mind and time – things like mealtimes, seeing my wife, or interrogation/ question time.

Todd's faith provided a buffer for him. By placing his trust in God, he was able to take a stand against the trauma itself, taking it one 'time frame' at a time:

I have always expected a lot from God and I knew he would get me through this fix, especially as I had committed no crime. My innocence was a freeing thing. I could expect even more from God. If I could see each time frame through with God's help then I knew I would be able to face the following time frame with His help.

Curious about what meaning making Todd would make of this traumatic incident in his life, I asked him if he could think of any way in which this traumatic experience had “uniquely en-abled” (White 2002: 21) or equipped him? Todd said:

No. It has just reaffirmed the fact I'm still going to see plenty miracles in my lifetime. I've already seen plenty, both very big and small.

Todd's response brought to mind Weingarten's (cited in Walsh 1999:240) emphasis on the importance for me of adopting a *listening stance*, listening to not only what Todd said but what was unsaid. While Todd said the traumatic incident had not equipped him in any way, what was unsaid was a growing sense of empowerment through his spirituality: “*it has just reaffirmed the fact I'm still going to see plenty miracles in my life time.*” It is this sense of growth in his spirituality that resonates for me with Weingarten's ‘small green shoots’ of awareness:

I listen for what is and can be, not just for what was and should be. Clients make much of the latter; I can assist my clients by noticing what they have not made much of yet - the still small green shoots of awareness of what they want to be so. I bring to this listening a willingness to empty myself of preconceptions, expert knowledge, and facts. I go alertly blank. At these times, I feel vastness and emptiness, terror and wonder looped together.

Todd's description of how his spirituality stood with him in that prison cell brought to mind Perry and Rolland's (1999: 275) description of a spirituality that gets its hands dirty. “It is down to earth. It is the experience of spirit immersed, embodied, incarnated in the nitty gritty of life.” Spirituality thus understood locates “divine revelation ... in the concrete struggles of groups and communities to lay hold of the gift of life and to unloose what denies life” (Harrison 1989:214). Through Todd's telling of his narrative of trauma it is possible to see how through his relationship with a caring, compassionate God, Todd was empowered to *lay hold of the gift of life* and was able to resist the despair and helplessness that this experience could have invited into his life.

Todd's contribution to our research journey has highlighted an important consideration for me. That listening out for the ‘small green shoots of awareness’ (Weingarten cited in Walsh 1999:240) in people's narrative of trauma can make a significance difference to how we co-author an alternative (White & Epston 1990: 17) or preferred story with them, a story that embraces the possibility of spirituality.

4.2.1 Germinating spirituality

Spirituality, or at least an awareness of spirituality, is not necessarily always present in people who have been exposed to a traumatic event. For people who have a conscious relationship with their God, people like Joan, Todd and as you will see, Rosie, talk of spirituality was willingly invited into our therapeutic conversations. For others spirituality may be something they have genuinely not considered relevant in their lives or in the context of a *trauma debriefing*. Listening out for ‘sparkling moments’ or unique outcomes (White & Epston 1990:74) that could possibly invite a consideration of spirituality in their story of trauma can be likened to watering seeds that may or may not germinate and contribute to a growing *alternative story* (White & Epston 1990:17). My therapeutic conversation with Andrew provides an example of this.

4.3 ANDREW

Andrew and his work colleague, Matthew, were hi-jacked by armed-men in the parking lot of a busy shopping centre. They were robbed of their personal belongings as well as their hired car. In our therapeutic conversation, Andrew shared how this had been the culmination of a series of traumatic events in his life. Prior to the hi-jacking trauma, Andrew had managed to save a colleague from drowning during a hike; he had another motor vehicle stolen from him; and he had had an intruder in his home. In his meaning making of these traumatic events, Andrew said these previous traumatic events were like parts of a puzzle that culminated in the hi-jacking where his life was physically threatened. He said that it was almost as though he had been exposed to a *conditioning* exercise, almost as though he was being prepared for what happened in the car park.

Andrew also spoke about how his mother had a premonition that something was going to happen to him and she had been frantically trying to get hold of him to warn him around the time the hi-jacking took place. Wondering if Andrew’s sense of *being prepared* for what happened to him and his mother’s ‘premonition’ could be seen as ‘sparkling moments’ (White & Epston 1990:74), I asked him if these moments could be seen as the handiwork of God in his life? Andrew seemed genuinely surprised and yet intrigued at such a possibility. His immediate response was just to say that he had not thought of that. I wondered whether considering the possibility of spirituality could possibly help him to put together the various pieces of ‘the puzzle’ he spoke of and included this part of our therapeutic conversation in the letter I wrote to him (a copy of the entire letter is included in appendix g):

One of the things I remember asking you about is your sense of spirituality. What made me ask you this was the fact that you shared with me a sense of almost knowing something was going to happen, just before the hi-jacking took place. Also, when you finally got hold of your mother, she told you that she had been frantically trying to get hold of you because she had a “premonition” of something bad happening to you. Is it possible that this could be another dimension of that puzzle you used to explain what happened? Now that you have had more time to reflect on the puzzle, do you think God could have played some role in helping you stay calm, and to survive? Is this a thought that could help strengthen you further in standing against the anxiety and stress?

When introducing spirituality into therapeutic conversations I am fully aware of the importance of focussing attentively on my co-traveller’s language and meaning making rather than imposing my own agenda. When talking to Andrew I could have chosen not to pursue a conversation about spirituality or I could have spoken about my own interpretation of the events he described. Either of these options could have closed down the possibilities for Andrew to explore this option altogether. The importance of this consideration resonates with former South African president Nelson Mandela’s observation (cited in *The Cape Argus*, 18 July 2003:1): “If you talk to a man in a language he understands that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.”

4.3.1 Spirituality in their own words

To speak in my co-travellers’ ‘own language’ calls for a sensitivity to the meaning of words. For example, I was curious about Andrew’s reference to experiencing a sense of ‘knowing’ something was going to happen to him, and how his mother had had a ‘premonition’ about the traumatic incident he experienced. I wondered if these ‘sparkling moments’ (White & Epston 1990: 17) we had picked up on in our conversation could also be seen in some way as signifiers of spirituality to Andrew?

A poststructural discourse points out that the meaning of signifiers (such as words) is constantly changing, is context specific and not fixed (Burr 1995:105). Words can have different meanings depending on the circumstances in which they are used, and by whom and in what context. In the context of our therapeutic conversation about trauma I wondered if these words could possibly be ‘small green shoots of awareness’ (Weingarten cited in Walsh 1999:240) of spirituality?

Derrida (1978) sees language as a self-referent system, with signifiers only being able to refer to other signifiers. Elaborating on this understanding, Sarup (1998:35) writes:

Suppose you want to know the meaning of a signifier, you can look it up in the dictionary; but all you will find will be yet more signifiers, whose signifieds you can in turn look up, and so on. The process is not only infinite but somehow

circular: signifiers keep transforming into signifieds, and vice versa, and you never arrive at a final signified which is not a signifier itself.

For Derrida (cited in Burr 1995:106) meaning is always both dependent upon a signifier's difference from other signifiers and constantly deferred from one signifier to another in an endless chain. The meaning of say 'darkness' only emerges through its relationship to other words such as 'light'. In fact, just as we might think of darkness as being the absence of light, Derrida suggests that all signifiers are like this; the identity of something is given by that which is absent from it (Burr 1995:106). Because we are not conscious of this when we use words, and mistakenly believe the meaning of a word is fully present in that word alone. Thus, for Derrida, meaning is always both dependent upon a signifier's difference from other signifiers and constantly deferred from one signifier to another in an endless chain. Derrida uses the French term 'différance' to refer to these features of difference and deferral (Burr 1995: 106).

Derrida also believes that when we talk about something, we are also referring to what that object is not, to what is absent from it. These 'absences' are repressed and we forget they are there. Believing that these absences need a way of being revealed in language, he offered 'deconstruction' as a methodology to achieve this. White and Epston (1992:121) highlight the importance of deconstruction:

[d]econstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices: those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of the self and of relationship that are subjugating of person's lives. Many of the practices of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them.

These social constructionist ideas and the work of Derrida (1978) constantly remind me in the context of my therapeutic conversations that I cannot assume my own understanding of the words people use in our therapeutic conversation have the same meaning. It was only through deconstructing or unpacking Andrew's references to 'knowing' and 'premonition' that we could explore the possibility of spirituality in his life. When I later asked Andrew for feedback on our therapeutic conversation, and on whether or not it had been helpful to raise the question of spirituality in particular, he wrote:

Yes it was helpful. It was very subtle and I appreciate that. I don't want anyone to force their beliefs on to me and you handled that very well. Spirituality is very personal and I think it has given me an appreciation on life itself. The fact that a higher power had protected me, I don't think it was my time to go.

In our therapeutic conversation I had been careful to make the distinction between 'religion' and 'spirituality' when conversing with Andrew. For many people, 'religion' is equated with

the rites of formalised religion, such as attending church every Sunday. As Andrew had already told me that he was not a religious person, he may have thought I would suggest or imply he should be attending church or pursuing some other form of formalised religion. I explained that my curiosity was more about whether he had experienced a sense of peace or connectedness with a higher being prior to the traumatic incident, particularly as he had said that he felt strangely at peace throughout the armed robbery itself. In response to my question, he said he felt at peace in nature, that this was in fact something he had felt passionate about. By unpacking this passion I again was curious to know if for Andrew this could be how his spirituality found expression? I do not believe that a spiritual relationship is necessarily confined to the pews of the local church, the synagogue or a temple and wondered if Andrew's experience resonated with this viewpoint? The following extract from a letter written to Andrew reflects how a possible spiritual relationship appears to find expression for him in his appreciation of nature:

You explained that your time was previously taken up almost exclusively by work matters. You said you were religious about time-keeping in this regard. Part of this re-allocating of your time has been to spend more time just appreciating life in general – slowing down, watching sunsets, taking walks on the mountain with your dog. You told me you were passionate about the outdoors and that you were finding this passion again.

This sense of re-connecting with the source of his passion spoke to me of the possibility of it being a form of spirituality that acted as a healing or coping resource in Andrew's life.

4.3.2 Spirituality taking root

Perry and Rolland (1999:275) point out that when people are spiritually alert and alive, they discover (recover) themselves not as apart and isolated but as connected and engaged. "The life of spirituality," writes theologian Robert McAfee Brown (1998:118-119), "will be located in the midst of the world's turmoil, rather than in safe havens of disengagement." More than just an insight, spiritual attentiveness inspires one to action. Spirituality inclines one to engage the world with a praxis characterised by a sense of responsibility to and for the creation in all its fullness and by a commitment to live in right relation, through practices of love, compassion, caring, and mutual respect (Perry & Rolland 1999:275).

Perry and Roland's (1999: 275) comments resonate with the words Andrew wrote in response to my request for feedback on our therapeutic conversation and the letter I wrote him:

The event has highlighted that I need to spend more time with myself. I have decided after 13 years of driving my career goals that I will be taking a sabbatical for 3 months starting in January 2004 – for reflection on my direction

in life, and time to evaluate my relationships with friends and family that have drifted.

Perhaps if we consider Andrew's response to the trauma of his hi-jacking, his seeking to re-connect with significant people in his life and a deepening of the relationship with his partner, we may even surmise that this *connecting* and *engaging* work of spirituality takes place in our lives without our awareness. When I highlighted these *connecting* and *engaging* outcomes of the trauma in the following extract from the letter I wrote to Andrew, I believe neither of us were at that time aware of the rich undertones of spirituality contained as it were between the lines:

When I asked you what had changed in your life since the hi-jacking, you said your perspective on things was different. It had made you realise how important people in your life are. You said you spent a bit of time actually tracking down and making contact with friends and family members. These "connections" were always important to you, but you now seem to have prioritised them and that you are now making time to chat to them.

...You also spoke about the fact that you are spending more quality time with your partner. Would it be right to surmise that the lessons you took from and the choices you made following the hi-jacking has brought you closer together?

Later, when consulting Andrew again about the content of this chapter and his participation in this research journey, I was curious to hear his impressions of the therapeutic conversation we had had together and particularly if he was aware of any change in his experience of spirituality. His closing remarks at the end of chapter five indicate a notable change in his views of and openness to spirituality.

Decker (1993:40) believes it is possible to see all of life as a process of spiritual growth with trauma demanding that we give up our ordinary ideas to encompass a significantly changed reality:

Our investment in how we perceive ourselves and the resulting ideas about ourselves are based on a lifetime of experiences. When those experiences are shown to be inadequate preparation to cope with trauma, but we have extreme difficulty in changing our perspective, we may feel overwhelming despair. Fortunately this despair may be the beginning of genuine spiritual development (Edinger 1985; Decker 1993), which may ultimately result in the integration of the traumatic experience. Trauma has demanded that we question our ordinary perspectives, search for a more expanded self-concept, and restructure our value hierarchy.

(Decker 1993:41)

Decker (1993: 42) elaborates on this point by claiming that trauma opens up awareness to vastly greater potentialities within physical life. A claim that resonates with Carmil and Breznitz's (cited in Decker 1993: 42) reports from Holocaust survivors that indicate that, at

the least: “a hope for a better future has occurred but, even more, that a former belief in God has been deepened” (Decker 1993:42).

For Rosie, her emerging alternative story was underpinned and greatly strengthened by a deepened belief in her God.

4.4 ROSIE

Rosie’s story of the traumatic events that happened to her left a lasting impression on me. Rosie and some friends were accosted and chased by gang members in a busy street in broad daylight. While her friends managed to escape, Rosie fled down a dead-end alley and was caught, robbed and severely beaten by the gang members. I was deeply touched by the importance she placed on her faith and the fact that had felt God’s presence while she was being mugged and beaten up by these young men. I feel the alternative story we co-authored together in our therapeutic conversation was enriched and strengthened by that sense of God’s presence.

When I wrote to Rosie to ask her permission for me to use her story and our letter in this research journey, she was very enthusiastic. She replied: *“You totally have my permission to use my letter in whatever way it can help you. I hope your dissertation has a powerful effect on the way debriefings are done. I know it will because I have faith and confidence in you and I’m sure I’m not the only one.”*

I also took this opportunity to ask Rosie a number of questions about our therapeutic journey together. As we only had one therapeutic conversation I was curious to see if Rosie’s experience of our narrative pastoral journey would in any way mirror Joan’s thoughts. I have reproduced my questions and Rosie’s responses below:

Iain: *Was it helpful to follow a structured format – going over your story from different perspectives – facts; thoughts; feelings? If this was helpful to you, how was it helpful?*

Rosie: *The fact that I could open up to you and talk my heart out was helpful. The questioning and making me look at it from different perspectives and the fact that you didn’t look at me in pity or like a victim, you were just normal not saying words like “shame” all the time. After the session I felt so much better. It’s best if you talk things out and not keep it inside. I don’t actually know how, somehow it was just very helpful.*

Iain: *Was it helpful to talk about spiritual matters and if it was, how was this helpful?*

Rosie: *I'm a believer. My whole world revolves around spirituality. For me I could talk about God because I felt His presence, His power at that moment. He helped me, no-one else. I had to mention who saved me and I didn't know you would be able to share that moment with me.*

Iain: *Looking back now, do you think that the trauma you went through has changed you in any way? Have these changes given something to your life or taken something away?*

Rosie: *Yes, I realised that there is really someone up there that helps and heals. The thing that was taken away from me was my freedom of going out alone. I hate being alone but I know that's going to fade away sometime.*

As I read Rosie's response to my question about inviting spirituality into our therapeutic conversation, I could not help but think how thin our alternative co-authoring (White & Epston 1990:17) would have been if we had not opened the door to spirituality. It was interesting to hear Rosie say how important her spirituality was to her and her *surprise* at being able to speak about it to me: "*I had to mention who saved me and I didn't know you would be able to share that moment with me.*"

It would seem that inviting spirituality into our therapeutic trauma conversation might have helped deepen Rosie's faith: "*I realised that there is really someone up there that helps and heals.*"

In the following extract of a letter I wrote to Rosie (a copy of which is included in the appendixes) I emphasised the central role her spirituality played in helping her not only survive but emerge victorious from the trauma:

You spoke about how you could feel His presence and had His assurance that despite something bad happening, you would be ok. It seems to me that calmness and bravery came to your assistance because of the faith you have in God. These qualities appear to have helped you to regain the will to do something when they were beating you and not to just give in. The clarity that calmness and bravery provided seems to have helped you to get away from the gangsters.

By emphasising the empowering support of her spirituality, I invited Rosie to be an audience to her own performance of this alternative story, which White and Epston (1990:17) claim can enhance the survival of the story and a sense of personal mastery. I was deeply encouraged by the letter Rosie wrote to me giving her permission to use her story. In this letter she said:

I feel I grew a lot last year, I still achieved a lot despite what happened. I even got my driver's license at the end of last year. I know it's all through God and faith and I don't feel any anger or hate towards the "gangsters".

These are not the words of a young woman bowed down by the effects of trauma, but rather words imbued with a feeling of Post Traumatic Growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996:455-471). Her letter refer to spiritual growth and an enhanced sense of personal strength. Rosie shares in her letter her plans for a future in banking and also speaks of how the trauma she experienced appears to have equipped her to deal with traumatic events in other people's lives too:

In this past year I met such a lot of people who were robbed, stabbed, hurt in Woodstock. It's like it still comes and haunts me because people will just come and open up to me in our conversation about what happened to them in Woodstock. It's so ironic because I can actually relate to them ...

Rosie's words invite a response in me that resonates with Wolin's (1999:121) comment: "For me, this affirmation of the human capacity for resilience was a welcome contrast to the prevalent concern in therapy with people's vulnerability and psychological damage."

Apart from gaining a greater awareness of the healing power of spirituality in the lives of those who have encountered trauma, I have also learnt the value of allowing these stories of trauma and spirituality to be heard.

4.4.1 Being heard into speech

Rosie's meaning making of the traumatic events that took place on that Saturday afternoon also highlight another important consideration in our narrative pastoral approach to trauma. It is important to realise that beliefs that are not life-affirming can be changed. For example, we may hold beliefs like "Bad things don't happen to good people" or "A person of faith should be able to accept all loss without pain". In our grief, we come to realise how these beliefs are judgmental and restrict healing. Again this resonates with Foucault's point about power and resistance always operating together (see Chapter 2).

While discourses such as "bad things don't happen to good people" may be powerfully held by people who have been impacted by trauma, it is possible to *resist* these beliefs to embrace change and healing. The healing possibilities of change that resistance can help bring about are contained in the words of the Alcoholics Anonymous serenity prayer: "May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference." According to Walsh (1999:43), this position, a key to resilience, helps us to achieve the possible and accept things beyond our control.

Ackermann (cited in DeGruchy & Villa-Vincencio 1994:206) claims the task of feminist theologians is to interpret the unheard voices of violated women and children so that our

practices in ministry can be transformed continually to reflect love and justice and values of the reign of God. Ackermann adds:

Not only is the welfare of women and children concerned but the values which shape our society and the church's role in shaping these values are at stake. Issues which are central to a feminist theological perspective, like human relationships, the work of justice, caring for your neighbour and liberating praxis, are all directly drawn into this work of healing.

(Ackermann cited in DeGruchy & Villa-Vincencio 1994:206)

The challenge to our narrative pastoral approach to trauma debriefing is to provide a space within which people who have experienced trauma feel safe enough to be 'heard into speech' (Morton 1985:202). When I asked Rosie to comment retrospectively on anything she found unhelpful about our therapeutic conversation, her response highlighted the importance of allowing the people who come to me for trauma debriefing to be *heard*. When Rosie's mother asked to be present in the room with us, I had mistakenly assumed that Rosie would be comfortable with this. I was *deaf* to how Rosie really felt:

Rosie : *I would have preferred to talk alone to you, but my mother wanted to be with me. I think it would have gone much better if she wasn't with me, because it's hard for a mother to hear all the details of what happened. I didn't like the fact that she looked at me with pity. I know she felt sorry for me, but it made me feel uncomfortable.*

Despite this reservation, Rosie was able to share her story with me. I am grateful to her for her honesty and will be more sensitive to this consideration in future therapeutic conversations I have with people who consult me about trauma.

Another important consideration in helping bring about healing for those who have been traumatised at the hands of others is the question of forgiveness.

4.4.2 The healing light of forgiveness

"For healing praxis to be truly restorative, it has to be collaborative and sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion" (Ackermann 1998:83).

In our journeying together, Joan and Rosie, both women who have been traumatised in different ways at the hands of men, voiced *forgiveness* of their perpetrators as part of their preferred way of being. Part of this research journey for me has been a realisation of the importance of forgiveness in terms of healing from the effects of trauma. What my co-travellers have taught me though is that the meaning of 'forgiveness' (like 'spirituality') has to be understood from the point-of-view of the person who has experienced trauma and not as some patronising imposition of the *trauma debriefer*.

The forgiveness expressed by Joan and Rosie fits with Ackermann's (1998:83) description of a truly restorative healing praxis, and in no way can be mistaken for "cheap forgiveness". Bonhoeffer (1984:36) likens "cheap forgiveness" to "cheap grace" which he describes as "the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance." For Bonhoeffer (1984:36) "true repentance is embodied in a life of discipleship. Forgiveness is thus costly. Forgiveness cannot be demanded. It can only be hoped for. The aim of forgiveness is to restore communion with one another and with God in order to reconcile our brokenness. Forgiveness is a way of life."

Sadly the meaning of 'forgiveness' has been so cheapened by Christian churches that Neuger and Poling (1997:158) believe it is almost useless in terms of healing and reconciliation between people:

Because forgiveness is automatically and unconditionally given to everyone without the work of repentance and restitution, this doctrine has become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. For example, abusers have developed a reputation for going to their pastors after disclosure of their violence and asking for prayers and forgiveness. In too many cases, pastors are willing to engage in this empty ritual and send the abuser back to the family to continue his terror. As a result, many survivors have rejected forgiveness as an important part of their healing process.

(Neuger & Poling 1997: 158)

Ackermann (1998:93) believes healing processes can only begin by acknowledging the trauma of victims in its entirety, including their feelings of moral outrage and their desire for retribution: "The moral judgement and the forbearance from vengeance are the prerogative of the victim [survivor]."

Rather than buying into the 'false theology of forgiveness' that Neuger and Poling (1997:159) describe, Joan and Rosie both appear to have experienced forgiveness as one of the last steps in their healing process. Neuger and Poling (1997:159) support this sense of 'process' in the journey of healing from trauma: "After a former victim is safe from violence, after she has grieved the many losses caused by her experience of violence, after she has reorganised her life to the way she wants it to be, after she has gained inner strength and a relationship with God, then the work of forgiveness can be considered."

For Rosie going on with her life, focussing on her goal of a career in banking, and a deepening of her faith in God, all appear to have played a part in bringing her to a point where she was able to *forgive* the gangsters. In a letter she wrote to me, Rosie said:

Last year I passed and I got my certificate in banking management. This year though I am studying for my diploma ... I feel I grew a lot last year, I still achieved a lot despite what happened. I even got my driver's license at the end of last year. I know it's all through God and faith and I don't feel any anger or hate towards the "gangsters". The devil thinks he's the master but he has long time been defeated. It will stop eventually because everything comes to an end.

Neuger and Poling (1997: 159) describe forgiveness as "letting go of the immediacy of the trauma, the memory of which continues to terrorise the victim and limit possibilities". Neuger and Poling (1997:159) liken this memory to a lens through which the person who has experienced trauma views the world. Forgiving involves putting this lens aside but keeping it close at hand. It is the choice to no longer allow the memory of the abuse to continue to abuse. For Rosie and Joan this meant choosing to go on with their lives, Joan choosing to return to her country and her husband, and Rosie choosing to continue with her studies.

For Joan (see chapter 3) her 'time out' in Cape Town appears to have allowed for a processing of the many losses trauma had introduced to her life, a re-connecting with her God, and a growing realisation that she wanted a new relationship with her husband, Mike. An integral part of this processing was a conscious choice to forgive him, or as she preferred to put it: "*to show him mercy.*" In this context, forgiveness is redefined as an aspect of healing:

Not only inner healing of the spirituality of the survivor but also healing of the relational web that includes other people. Violence rends God's web of relational love that holds people together. Forgiveness as healing creates new webs of relational love through solidarity between victim/survivors and their advocates. This reinterpretation of forgiveness moves beyond a naïve desire for forgetting or overlooking that many offenders wish for but which is often re-abusive for the survivor. In this context, forgiveness does not mean one-to-one reconciliation, but it means that the internalised hatred that resulted from the violence has been overcome in the loving spirit of the survivor. Healing has progressed to a spiritual depth where hatred of abusers is no longer the primary force of one's life.

(Neuger & Poling 1997:159)

Neuger and Poling (1997:159) make an important point about forgiveness, that this step of healing must be carried out according to the trauma survivor's timetable. This is not a step that can be hurried along. It is a carefully considered process, a process that takes time. Only the trauma survivor her/himself truly knows when that time is right. Referring to our therapeutic conversation, Rosie said: "*...I am still very grateful that somehow somehow you came into my life at the right time.*" Her reference to the timing of our therapeutic conversation somehow being right, reminded me of the words written by this Old Testament writer:

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:
a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

(Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8)

I am reminded of Joan's words shortly before she left to return to Zimbabwe. Words that resonate with Neuger and Poling's (1997: 159) reference to violence being overcome by 'the loving spirit of the survivor'. Joan said: "*Just because you suffer through things is not an excuse to be bitter. I want to be driven by love again. Love conquers all! You reap what you sow...*" The hope and healing invited into her life through these words hold a special resonance with the simple sentence included in Rosie's letter: "*I know it's all through God and faith that I don't feel any anger or hate towards the "gangsters"*".

Being able to let go of the hate she felt for the gangsters appears to have invited in more hope into Rosie's life.

4.4.3 The warming glow of hope

"Hope, like the gleaming taper's light, adorns and cheers our way; And still, as darker grows the night, emits a brighter ray" (Goldsmith cited in Cohen & Cohen 1991:173).

Reflecting on my narrative pastoral journeys with Joan, Rosie and Andrew, and my e-mail conversation with Todd, I am in awe of the power of hope. The hope that empowers people to believe in the possibility of new relationships, new beginnings, even new countries. The hope in a God whose mere presence binds up the broken-hearted, proclaims freedom for captives and release from darkness for prisoners (Isaiah 61:1). I am awed by how spirituality appears to have been the key that unlocked something profoundly healing in our therapeutic conversations. By opening the door to spirituality, it appears as though we also invited in hope.

As I look back along the road we have travelled together and consider the different *threads* of our conversations, I find myself identifying with the following quotation by Ackermann (cited in DeGruchy & Villa-Vincencio 1994:208). Ackermann's words resonate with my own understanding of what it means to be a *trauma debriefer*:

Faith and feminism, theology and spirituality, theory and praxis, all come together when aware and committed women [*and men*] become involved in the work of justice and healing. We can choose to claim our power and our capacity to effect good in our society by being willing to risk tension, paradox, uncertainty, and even ridicule. To choose to live relationally is to choose to undo evil. As feminist theologians [*trauma debriefers*], this is our passion.

Therapeutic conversations that neglect any of these threads only offer thin descriptions of the lives of people impacted by trauma. While I believe this research journey has taken important steps forward in terms of co-creating a more holistic approach to trauma debriefing, we are still in the early phases of what Doherty (cited in Walsh 1991:91) describes as "exploring the work of the spirit in our consultation rooms and our communities".

In the light of Doherty's comment, the narrative pastoral approach to trauma debriefing that we have co-authored in our journeying together is imbued with a pioneering spirit. Perhaps our invitation to spirituality will encourage others to follow in the footsteps we have left along this way. It is an invitation after all to *hope*.

In the final chapter I would like to elaborate on the effects this research journey has had on me as the 'researcher' and on my co-travellers, Joan, Todd, Rosie and Andrew. I would also like to comment on how it has opened up new *ways of being* (Reinharz 1992:211) for me as a pastoral therapist working in the field of trauma and for them as trauma survivors. It has been a rich journey for which I am deeply indebted to my co-travellers. It is appropriate that the final chapter should also provide Joan, Rosie and Andrew an opportunity to have the final word on what this research journey has meant to them. While I extended the same invitation to Todd, although grateful for the opportunity to voice his narrative of trauma and spirituality as part of this research journey, he declined to comment further.