

**THE ALCOHOLIC FAMILY: PASTORAL CONVERSATIONS WITH ADULT CHILDREN
UNRAVELLING THE WEB OF IDENTITY**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that ***The Alcoholic Family: Pastoral Conversations with adult children unravelling the web of identity*** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

This participatory research journey looked at the lives of adult children of alcoholics, with particular reference to how identity is affected by growing up in a home where one or both parents are struggling with alcohol abuse, and how this struggle with identity carries through into adulthood. A study was made of the particular discourses which impacted negatively upon the child from this home and the manner in which the discourses had a negative impact later on as an adult. Through narrative pastoral conversations the possibilities for healing, as well as the barriers for healing were explored. Through this exploration alternative stories were created. A vital part of the study was focused upon the witnessing of the stories of the participants' lives and the acknowledgement of some of the events from their childhood that formed their identity and contributed to who they are today.

Ten Key Terms: Adult children of alcoholics; identity; discourses; patriarchy; pastoral therapy; forgiveness; denial; emotional abuse; physical abuse; healing.

CHAPTER ONE

UNRAVELLING THE WEB OF IDENTITY

1.1 OPENING THE BOOK

When writing a book, does one start at the centre of the plot, and work outwards in concentric circles of ever widening perspective and understanding, or does one begin at the back of the book, the ending, and then work the plot from back to front? Perhaps one would find it more useful to begin the story with the front page a blank, and then develop one's plot in a "see-where-it-takes-you fashion"?

And when reading it, what element of the book captures the imagination first? Is it perhaps the intrigue hinted at in the blurb on the back, or is it in flagrantly and enticingly arranged figures or objects on the front page? Perhaps the introductory page draws one in? Is a judgement call made on the content of the book prior to the reading thereof, or is judgement suspended until a study has been made of the volume?

On this journey, it was my intent to take the longer, less familiar route. As Frost (cited in Houghton-Hawksley & Eaton 1985:112) would say: the road less travelled. I intended to savour the beginning without rushing headlong and getting ahead of myself; stopping at all the roadside offerings, immersing myself in the experience without reservation, and dipping into all the discoveries on the journey with an open mind. I intended to open myself up to all the possibilities within the dialogue of this book, and my intent was to ponder also, on the contribution I could offer towards making this journey a memorable one, not only for me, but also my valued fellow travellers! Couture (2000:94) says that practical theology asks about ways to make connections among presence, meaning and hope-filled activities – all of these helping us to plot a direction. She goes on to say that "to care with people we may plan a journey in a particular hope-filling direction", "sharing the responsibility for creating the journey". Reinharz (1992:211) describes this as a "process of discovery - a quest for 'truth'" and adds that feminist researchers embarking on important research projects are like people setting out on important journeys.

I was eager to meander the forest paths with curiosity – alive with local knowledge, and not expert opinion (White & Epston 1990), and I wanted observer bias and status differences to melt away in the co-construction of shared agendas and itineraries. The other I studied, I did not want to bombard with questions, but instead I was hoping, as Heshusius (1994:209) describes, they would "beckon me near". Harmon in Heshusius (1994:207) describes this process as "passion for

and identifying with the participants as one who does not want anything, but that in the total turning of attention while releasing all egocentric thought, will open up access. This kind of knowing is a knowing through compassionate consciousness". Heshusius (1994:206) describes this as "participatory consciousness". I was guided in this by "an inner desire to let go of the perceived boundaries that constitute 'self', and that construct the perception of distance between 'self' and 'other' – a desire to slough off the perceiver's egocentric thoughts and strivings, of all preoccupations with the self, and self-esteem." I hoped that if this inevitably led to a change in both myself and the pilgrims I encountered upon my journey – well, I could dare to say it was the choice of path that has made this difference! Reinharz (1992:197) describes feminist researchers as engaging in research "because of changes that occur to them and others in a project of long duration", which they describe as 'journeys'.

1.2 THE PROLOGUE

The impetus for this study has its feet firmly entangled in the webs of my youth. My interest with the development of identity (specifically mine) is one that has mesmerised me. My ideas regarding identity have been conceived from a subjective position, based on the trail my identity took, enmeshed in my own experience. It is ever-evolving and the jury is still out on the reliability of my conclusions in this regard.

While being engaged in this study, I was constantly aware of the dichotomous meanings the very engagement held for me. Although influenced by the call the feminists hold towards participating in the sense of "being with" the participants, I was also in the position of experiencing the topic first-hand. Reinharz (1992:212) comments that feminist researchers often share the childhood experiences that provide the context for undertaking the study in the first place. Additionally, feminist research is driven by its subject matter, rather than by its methods. So, too, it was with this study. I inherited the unenviable stigma of hailing from a dysfunctional family. Both my parents are alcoholics, and my earliest memories stir up images of saturation in inebriation and loss of control. Furthermore, I have been haunted by the question of whether I am who I am because of my experiences as a child, or possibly because of my genetic make-up. Could there have been collusion between the two to produce this identity? Is there a moment in my life that I can pinpoint a conscious, self-propelled move towards influencing my own identity? Or have I merely been a puppet in the show? Additionally, as I've sloughed off the skin of my youth with successive years, I have also become aware of a stronger emerging self – and she is not a stranger. However, she is still very much attached to her past, and her history, with gossamer threads of connection.

The question remains: Who am I? Where do I fit in? Am I justified in inhabiting my piece of space on earth? Who had written my being into existence, and with what purpose?

As if in answer to these philosophical musings, I hear Reason and Bradbury (1994:8) cite the Scottish philosopher, John Murray's argument that one's epistemological starting point should not be "I think – therefore I am" but "I do – therefore I am". In the background, echoes of Gergen's (1991:139) sentiments filter through, that I am "a teeming world of provisional possibilities".

This being the case, I found myself baffled by my own inability to put to rest the past, and get on with creating these limitless possibilities. At an intellectual level I persist in getting mired down in the insecurities of the past. I continue to feel ridiculously humble to the point of debilitation, when confronted with certain social interactions. My inadvertent grasping for control in most situations has me consciously having to stand back and reassess the logic in my behaviour. I fluctuate from being intensely and optimistically motivated in a moment, to feeling an unholy depth of despair and sadness, where I find myself drawn down into an abyss of loss, emptiness and isolation.

My present circumstances do not provide any significant cause for the pain and detachment I experience as I flounder through the seas of turbulence. The reel of film winding itself sinuously through my consciousness at these times might, however, reveal all. And what stories might this reel of film not have captured, take after retake, immortalised on film! Flash after soul-whitening flash, images and insinuations, lies posturing as "truths", totalising verbal and non-verbal onslaughts of suggestion – indelibly imprinted on the mind, leeching into the psyche, and staining the memory. This film plays its own edited version of the story, and it selects, invariably, the most sensationalistic and graphic footage, splicing it together in a farcical rendering of reality. In this regard Michael White and David Epston share the idea that our lives are told as stories. There are "always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story" (White 1990:11). We often "prune, from our own experiences, those events which do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that we and others have about us. Thus over time, and of necessity, much of the stock of our lived experience goes 'unstoried' and is never 'told' or expressed" (White 1990:12). White goes on to explain that these selected aspects of lived experience "are constitutive – shaping lives and relationships" (White & Epston 1990:12).

It led me to wonder whether, had I 'selected' and remembered different stories, my perspective on my 'self' would've been different. What other possible interpretations could have been shaped through other stories in my life? Could the presence and input of other interested people have made a difference to the stories I eventually chose to live by, and which constituted my identity?

Would this input and interest have validated certain life-giving stories, while discrediting the life-taking ones concerning my 'self'?

Instead, I sat and waited for the next show – a lone “spectator” in the audience. I longed to run my interpretations of events depicted in the movie by a friendly peer, a knowledgeable parent or adult figure, a concerned human being. Couture (2000:17) sums up this lack of “presence” rather accurately. She speaks of some children suffering a poverty of “tenuous connections” where “an environment of deep empathy” (Couture 2000:69), concern and understanding is lacking. Couture (2000:93) adds that caring also implies helping the ‘tenuously connected’ connect with resources that fulfil an articulated need, even providing “unconditional love, what many psychologists have called an irrational commitment to the well-being of the child.” In so doing, concerned communities may go a long way to “transcending the irritabilities of children’s lives” (Couture 2000:51). “The ultimate aim of pastoral care is that of a ministry as a whole: to increase love between people and between people and God. Its specific functions are healing, sustaining, reconciling, guiding and nurturing” (Pattison 1994:14). In order to engage in this, “persons who seek to care with others are usually drawn into the continuum between presence, conversation and action” (Couture 2000:81). I waited in vain, meanwhile I internalised my own conclusions. The silence was deafening.

Ah, just wait a minute... the next show has begun...

Where does this story begin?

*I have these fragments, shards of glass careering in my brain
Bumping, grinding, screeching out my old familiar pain.*

*You say you want my story, my heart drums panic. NOW?
It's ugly, weird, its trivial – it's OVER anyhow!*

*This monologue's been in my head, the words spit red-hot lava.
The “facts” have never passed my lips, the threat of blunt exposure
the words...well, some have fermented,
their meanings distorted, twisted and dented
Silence is an ugly thing, it rears its damaging head
My fears my terrors, my hurts, my doubts are never put to bed
The dredging will be deep and gory (Mine never was a fairytale story)
My memories churn, muddied, my conscience plagues me too
I'm wondering, should I, must I, is this the wisest thing to do*

*The planet rotates before me, brokenly I stand and watch it move
The world beckons “Come and join in”, I ponder, did I sin?*

*I'm different, they don't know me, I can never let them in
They don't want to share my pain...never took my hand
Loneliness is pervasive, I live in a stranger's land*

*I gulp, I blink... open the gate, my dread heavy in my tummy
Drink, and the floor, has once again claimed my hate-filled, black-bruised mummy
School is out, nightmare in, the smells of alcohol rot pervades
My father doesn't know me, he's in a stupored daze
He doesn't walk, he stumbles, the newest dancing craze.
My sense of humour abandoned, my feet find tar to pound
There is some soulful release of sadness in my predictable footfalls on the ground*

*My familiars ask, can I come and play?
I can only refuse in mute dismay
How would I ever explain the scary nakedness abnormal at this time of day
Cover up offences, cover the offensive
Read another book, I say, and don't get apprehensive.
Familiars ask, why don't you talk – you're missing our conversations
I have no voice they'd understand –my language is that of a foreign land.*

*No soft-spoken words, no "hi, how was your day", no love in a gesture.
No hugs, no humour, no coffee, no smile
For a word of encouragement I would've jogged for a mile
No interest, no nurture, indifference the norm
Didn't I matter, don't I exist in any shape or form?
The prizes, achievement, certificates and all
People must've thought I was having a ball!
It grew like a tumour, unchecked and unnoticed
Helplessness, shamefulness, I could feel myself fall,*

*My mask was up, my self-esteem flagging, my self-respect and pride was taking a ragging
The drunken affairs - the snide innuendos
rejection, abandonment, neighbourhood stares
Life's not benevolent, my life is not worthy
My athletic coach says – life comes to he who dares!
He says stop your self-centredness, you're selfish and whining
He doesn't know why it is that I'm pining
My heart is torn, an abyss is widening
My lips are glued together. Nothing is rhyming.*

*I've reached a divide, isolation is tough
I go to church and tell God, enough is enough!
I desperately need a friend – my soul's busy dying
I'm tired of living, breathing and lying*

*He sends me a brother (he answered my prayer!)
Thankfulness abounds, sunshine and flowers everywhere!*

*Foetal alcohol syndrome – is this some kind of joke
Despair and elation threatens to choke.
I mother, I nurture, he is my own
BUT when I'm at school he's home ALONE
My mother has run, I'm mother now
I'm learning fast and I think I know how
My mornings are trauma – say goodbye at the gate
He's clinging, he's screaming, it's this part I hate!
He needs me! My heart bleeds! It threatens to stop!
God, what do I do now? I'm all that he's got!
I'm hating my mother, I'm blaming the world,
Depressed, in a bundle, around myself I'm curled.
Day in and day out the best that I can,
But how will he make it, my little man?*

*Resentment, disgust in equal measure growing,
My father is pitiful - and my childhood's going!
I wake up one night, intuition my guide
That was the night I wished I had died.
Wish I hadn't seen, wish I hadn't heard,
Pretend it's a game, my madness not stirred.
I cannot comprehend – I don't want to think
Comfort myself – “It's gone if you blink!”
(!.....!), resistance is futile
I'm on the brink.*

I TELL MYSELF

*Hold on to the good, hold on to the pure,
Close your eyes, God is here
Touch a flower, immerse yourself in soil,
Find catharsis in shedding a tear
Will I ever be whole in this world I inhabit?
Could I ever remove the scabs?
How do I stem the gushing emotion that threatens with every jab?
I need to put this to the test
I need to forgive, I need to move on
I need to say goodbye
They beat me to it
They're gone.*

Far from being an isolated event, I came to the realisation that there were 'others' just like me. And as our tentative probing produced links way past our expectation, I realised that we may have been oppressed by the same fears, we may have been held captive by the same ghosts, and we may have been shackled by similar inhibitions. It was this revelation that spurred on my obsession to break the silence – the silence of shame, the silence of unworthiness, the silence of self-destruction.

In these thoughts, I found solace in the wisdom of the writings of Kaethe Weingarten (2003: 9), who expounds on her theories of trauma, and the term she coined to bring this understanding to life, namely: Common Shock.

1.3 TURNING THE PAGES, CHAPTER BY CHAPTER

As this story flitted over various salient memories reluctantly siphoned from the archives of the past, I found myself pondering the effects of these events briefly to underscore the impact they had (and still have) on me, and possibly those like me, today.

1.3.1 Trauma

“Individuals who have grown up in the traumatic environment of parental alcoholism often exhibit the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder and depression. These problems stem from the reality of the traumatic environment – living with uncertain, unpredictable, inconsistent, and incompetent parents – and from a failure of the major defensive strategies, particularly in adulthood” (Brown 1988:2). Weingarten concurs with this view.

Weingarten (2003: 9) explains that “a trauma response disrupts our fundamental sense of who we are, who others are, and our sense of safety and security. It leaves us with feelings of horror, fear and dread. It produces an indelible mark on our worldview”.

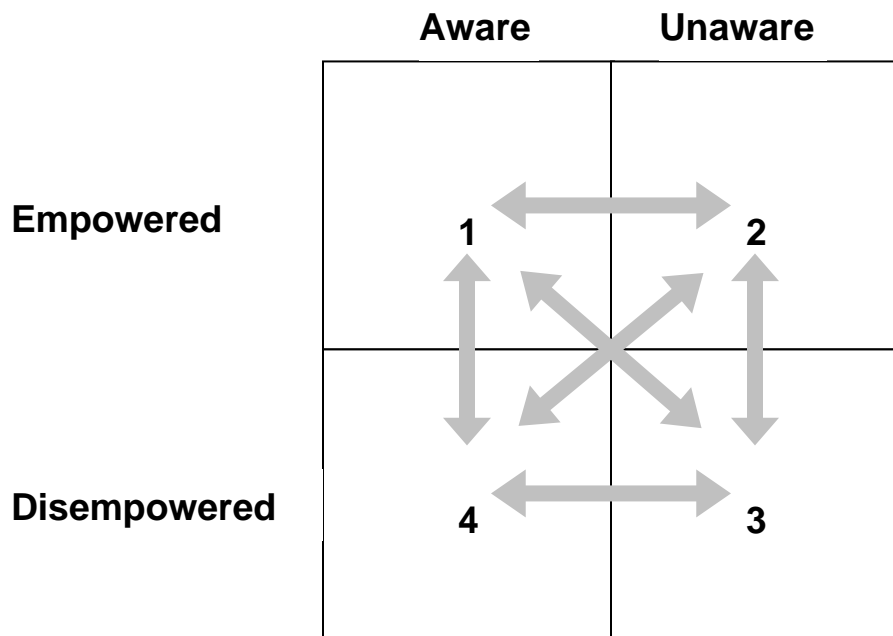
She goes on to say that “common shock is triggered by our being witness to an event or an interaction that we appraise as disturbing, whether we are aware of this appraisal process or not. Furthermore, it is widespread – hence common – it is collective, and it belongs to all of us” (Weingarten 2003:6).

In reading these lines, I wondered to what extent trauma and common shock had attempted to colonise our minds, and whether our consequent shame and humiliation (Weingarten 2003:14) had contributed to our silence? Had it had any significant impact on the people we have become? Additionally, had people from the community or society at large possibly countered these effects by becoming intentional “compassionate witnesses” (Weingarten 2003:11), and had they chosen

to take those “small, short ant steps” (Kotzé cited in Weingarten 2003:11), what way would that have gone to alleviating suffering and hardship, emotionally and psychologically? By referring to “ant steps”, I am referring to the community who may have intervened at a very basic level, doing only what would not have been interpreted as intrusive by the families involved – but gestures which might have sent a message of care, interest, availability on an emotional level, and even a sympathetic ear. These small gestures might have had a meaningful impact on needful psyches, possibly providing a setting of acknowledgement and validation for the suffering children.

Weingarten (2003) goes on to explain how one can witness oneself as a witness, fostering an awareness of what is seen. She comments that “we can become aware of what has happened to us – witnessing ourselves as victims, and we can become aware of what we do to others – witnessing ourselves as perpetrators. More able to witness ourselves in these roles, we will better be able to witness others in each of these roles as well” (Weingarten 2003:152).

Mindful of my own context, I realised the usefulness of the following graphic representation offered, as it clearly set out the possible configurations of witness positions and also pointed the way forward to contributing to an explanation of how I (simplistically expressed) might have arrived at the point I had in my life.



Could it be that as a child I had been aware but disempowered to act upon my awareness, and that the very state of disempowerment, had locked me into battle with myself, my conscience, and

even society? The fact that the community “appeared” unaware, but possibly empowered was a mitigating factor in my disillusionment with and fear of people. I often wondered whether my immediate community had in fact been aware and empowered, and yet had preferred to stand mute and uninvolved. Had they become involved as “compassionate witnesses’, what doors could not have been opened for hope and transformation. Weingarten (2003: 62) contends that in the telling of the story, “compassionate witnessing is the one way, the always available way, to transform, not repeat, violence.” She also, in an earlier edition, (Weingarten 2000: 402) speaks of “doing hope” and continues that:

... hope is something we do with others. Hope is too important – its effects on the body and soul too significant – to be left to individuals alone. Hope must be the responsibility of the community. Where this is so, and when this is so, there will be a sense of wonder, which has been called the abyss where radical amazement occurs.

“Normal” communal involvement, and gestures of understanding might have been the spark needed to carry the flame of hope for children leading a day-to-day existence in an ‘abnormal, asocial’ environment, with despair the overriding emotional state.

Conveying hope, or omitting to do so in my childhood, has been a large contributor to the evolution of what I thought of as my identity.

1.3.2 Protagonist in the plot - his ideas of Identity

My identity – and the meaning I attribute to it - has been wrought through my perceptions of the world, and my place in it (or outside it). It has been crafted through my interactions with my family (or lack thereof), my community (often in absentia), and it has been consolidated through self-talk (dominated by images of worthlessness, shame and debasement). I had, in many ways been relegated to the status of the “other”, by Western culture’s ‘truth’ – “ a metanarrative that deletes and disregards the traditions, stories and voices of those who by virtue of class, race and gender” (Habermas in Lyotard 1984) differentiate themselves. My experiences of isolation and feelings of rejection were, to an extent, dependent on what was regarded as right or wrong, acceptable or not, within the “normal family”, propagated by society at large. Discourses on what constitutes a normal family were internalised by me, and I found myself judging my identity and who I was and who I became according to these internalised discourses.

These discourses wielded the power of exclusion – “dividing the normal families from those regarded as abnormal” (McHoul & Grace 1993:183). McHoul and Grace (1993:183) describe this process of normalization in the following way: “It introduces, through various measures, the

constraint of conformity that must be achieved. It traces the limit that will define difference in relation to all other differences, the external frontier of the abnormal.” Foucault (1977:184) comments that normalization is an “instrument of power – imposing homogeneity on individuals – and making it possible to measure gaps”. To me this was experienced as a process of “measuring up” as an individual and family. Our family was found wanting in many aspects. The most profound characteristic of this process was for me the idea that normalization worked so effectively because I “entered into the process willingly” (Burr 1995:71). I had absorbed like a sponge all the medical and psychological discourses expounding on norms for healthy, functional families and what they should look like or be like, and what parental functioning should entail if it was normal. I had fallen victim to the “inspecting gaze, which each individual, under its weight will end, by interiorising to the point that she is her own overseer” (Gordon citing Foucault 1990:155). I had begun exercising this “normalising surveillance over and against myself” (Gordon citing Foucault 1980:155). My experience of Foucault’s “eternal gaze” (White & Epston 1990: 24), where nothing was hidden and nothing could hide, did much to inhibit my sense of privacy. I slowly became a master of the masquerade, participating in what Shakespeare (*Macbeth*) would call “appearance”, where “nothing is but what it is not”.

As those elements wove their influences into my constitution, I became the manifestation of my perceived reality.

Anderson and Goolishian (1992:31) describe the story I have told as a “self-defining narrative which takes place in a social and local context involving conversation with significant others, including one-self.” Furthermore, these narrative identities are ever-changing, and “individuals derive their sense of social agency for action from these dialogically derived narratives” (Freedman & Combs 1996: 31).

Foucault links with my thoughts on this by commenting that “personal identity is constituted by a myriad relationships and practices in which the individual is engaged. These relationships may be contradictory and unstable, and therefore the identity is fragmented and dynamic, always open to change and contestation” (Foucault cited in McNay 1992:109). What this implied for me was that my reality and the identity I call my own within this reality, were not fixed and carved in stone. I did not need to play out my existence shackled to a reality and identity into which despair and failure is scripted. Possibilities existed within dialogue and relationships and communal participation for another kind of script where the identities of the characters are more likeable and hopeful, where a script could be edited, and the ending is open.

Foucault's *ethics of the self* embraces the idea of "difference as a political resource", one which "multiplies the points of resistance to the myriad of relations of inequality and domination that constitute the social field". As a young girl this "difference" implied for me "irreconcilable antagonisms between different social groups" and a silencing of my voice. My family and I were the excluded party – the ones relegated to the margins of society for being different. I found the isolation and exclusion not only imposed by "normal" families, but I began to move further towards the margins of society of my own accord. However, as I grew older, to me "difference" began to mean that we could, as Sawicki puts it in McNay (1992:109) "redefine our differences, discovering new ways of understanding, ourselves and each other" and "our differences would be less likely to be held against us". What helped to ease the way for this redefinition was that as I grew older, I also gained exposure to being part of a multiplicity of possibilities besides being a child from an alcoholic home. I became part of a bigger whole: an athlete in a team, a leader in a school, a young female student on a career path, and this part helped create a being separate from the alcoholic unit, with its false promises of belonging and false threats of hereditary alcoholism. As I engaged in community activities, I found that in a myriad of ways I was a poor fit in social encounters. However, participation brought its own peculiar validation to my identity, and validation worked its magic within my conceptions of myself. "I" had evolved.

Having waded merely ankle-deep in conjectures for my ways of being, my curiosity was piqued by a film-reel flashing questions about how I came to be who and what I am today.

1.4 RESEARCH CURIOSITY

My adult years have been a maelstrom of emotions and ideas competing for podium space. What has created this internal debate is an unquenchable curiosity regarding the development of my identity. What have been the factors most prominent in moulding my identity? This train of thought got me thinking about the identities of children of alcoholics in general, but those children who have become adults in particular. What discourses in their childhood homes had contributed greatest to their identities as adults? Reflections on these ideas brought to the fore the following curiosities:

1.4.1 In what ways had the alcoholic family unit touched the personhood of the individual – especially into adulthood?

1.4.2 What had been the effects of childhood trauma on the adult survivor hailing from an alcoholic home?

1.4.3 How can I use narrative pastoral therapy to provide an environment that is conducive to positive change in some form or another?

In exploring the research questions, I needed to formulate aims to work towards. What follows are the aims formulated of this study.

1.5 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

With narrative pastoral conversations I wanted to:

1.5.1 Identify the dominant discourses within alcoholic homes and the effects of these discourses upon the children and adult children from these homes.

One of the aims of this study was to situate the negative, as gleaned from conversations, in its harmful discourse. This study also attempted to challenge the dominant questionable discourses that reside within alcoholic families as we traced the influence of alcohol and related discourses upon the child and adult in alcohol-saturated families. The most debilitating and destructive of the discourses discovered to be manifested in alcoholic homes are “Don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel” (Black 1981:24), denial - “alcohol is NOT a problem in this house” (Brown 1991: 37), survivor guilt and parent-blaming, role reversal between the parent and the child (Sandford 1982:319) and performance orientation (Sandford 1982:45). A further discourse which affects the identity of the child from an alcoholic home adversely, is the discourse which claims alcoholics are not responsible for their behaviour, and thus should not be expected to take responsibility for their actions. Patriarchy blankets and enforces all of the above, whilst maintaining a shroud of mystery, amiability and silence.

1.5.2 Co-construct alternative identity stories

I hoped the participants could engage in a co-construction of alternative identity stories, where they acknowledged their preferred ways of being. In this process I intended to explore participants’ ideas on how identities are formed in the alcoholic home.

It was my desire to, through the process of narrative pastoral therapy, cycle back through history, reclaiming the positive and the healing – the sustaining - in the process. In so doing, I was hoping to open up new and different perspectives – ones which reaffirmed our purpose in life. Also, it was my wish to splice together montages of the useful, the hopeful and the enriching. In this way I was hoping we might find a way to hold onto our emergent identities amidst the turmoil of rediscovery.

1.5.3 Provide witnessing and acknowledgement of suffering

Personal experience has illuminated a need for the acknowledgement of the relentless suffering of the grown-up child from an alcoholic home. To this end it becomes imperative to create a space where previously ignored and silenced experiences may be voiced. Coupled with this, I aimed to facilitate an audience where consensual alternative stories are validated, through the process Weingarten (2003:11) calls compassionate witnessing.

I was also committed to maintaining a therapy of “optimism”, and hope towards healing, erstwhile standing beside those who are suffering and are marginalised.

1.6 A DOLLOP OF SCEPTICISM

In attempting to maintain an ethical position within the study, I found myself questioning my position as researcher as well as participant.

1.6.1 Participant or researcher?

As I moved into the strange familiarity of this study, I realised I was treading on quicksand. I was straddling the abyss, the divide between a study of my story and a study of the stories of the participants. However, I felt justified in pursuing this interest in embracing the ideas of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (cited in Reason 2001:9) who wrote of “women’s ways of knowing, which distinguishes between connected and separated knowing: Separated knowing adopting a more critical eye and playing a ‘doubting game’, while connected knowing starts with an empathic, receptive eye, entering the spirit of what is offered and seeking to understand from within.” In situating myself within “connected knowing” I was striving towards what Schachtel in Heshusius (1994:206) calls an ‘allocentric knowing’ - a total turning to the other which leads not only to loss of self, but to heightened feeling of aliveness and awareness. Tamasese and Waldergrave’s (1994:56) ideas regarding women therapists who address women’s problems became rather relevant here as my research group turned out to be six women. Being a woman I was probably more appropriately equipped to “understand and facilitate strengths in the individuals’ stresses” that they brought to the meetings. Women, by the very position they hold within a patriarchal society, will find it easier to relate to other women, including a female therapist, who may be sensitised, more so than men, to the various challenges women encounter in everyday life. The issues brought to therapy may be closer to the life world of the female therapist than the male therapist’s life world. Women therapists may be more empathic and insightful in the interpretation of the problems, as a result. Being mindful of my own preconceived

assumptions, and thinking reflexively about all that is brought to the table, I hoped to counter the danger of being swallowed up by the experience.

I thought it was prudent that I be sceptical towards my own motivations in including myself within the study. Hall (1996:38) highlights the danger of revealing the self in research as this contribution could be interpreted as being self-indulgent or narcissistic. However, on the other hand Bochner and Ellis (1996:27) state that "...social science is becoming accountable to the public. Users are talking back. They tell us that too often we're boring, esoteric and parochial. They want to know why what we do matters and to whom. How can it help people to live better lives?" Responding to this call for accountability, Bochner and Ellis (1996:28-29) suggest ethnographic writing which is responsive to the calls for self-conscious reflexivity, dialogue and multiple voices. One such attempt is writing personal narratives by people who have suffered in silence (Bochner & Ellis 1996:24). These narratives are received with gratitude instead of being viewed as self-indulgent practice: "They [narratives] are gifts, at least to the extent that they make it possible to converse about previously silenced and unspeakable topics and prepare us to appreciate and deal more humanly with the diversity of human experience" (Bochner & Ellis 1996:25). Taking these views into consideration, I thus committed myself to trying to employ reflexivity to safe-guard not only the local knowledges of the participants on this journey with me, but also the authenticity and credibility of a study in which I was also a participant. In this regard Hall (1996:29) claims that a researcher is reflexive if:

His/her evidence is derived from authentic data, resonating the life experiences of the researched and the researcher, relations between the researcher and the participants proceed in a democratic manner, and the researcher's theory-laden view is not given privilege over participants views.

In keeping the last point in mind, I did not attempt to superimpose the meanings I hold of experiences upon those of the participants. Instead, I tried to let the ideas of Steier (1991:170) prevail, in that "as therapists and researchers, we are not privileged interpreters even of what we really did, and it is the recognition of this that can make therapy and research more of a collaborative learning programme".

Hall (1996:36) continues by saying that "reflexivity can provide an internal audit to the process in that it requires us to 'own up' to what we know of our constitutiveness in the knowledge construction process. The researcher's personal involvement in the knowledge construction process must then be evaluated by the reader". Furthermore, reflexivity can serve to offset the dominant or privileged position which the researcher assumes in order to theorise.

In attempting to maintain an ethical stance I had to keep conjuring up Maturana and Varela's words that "the stories of pain call from us an ethical stance, for every human act has an ethical meaning because it is an act of constitution of the human world" (cited in Tamasese & Waldergrave 1994:64). This position was fraught with challenges as I had to consider my ways of working with the participants throughout – especially during the moments of my emotional vulnerability.

1.6.2 Further ethical considerations in conducting research

De Vos (2001:256) explained that the researcher does not leave the field unscathed. He compared this to a journey into a minefield where there are potential moral and ethical pitfalls. An important consideration for me was then to be transparent and accountable as far as my own involvement in the process was concerned. As I am also a survivor from an alcoholic home, I reasoned that this admission would attest to my sincerity and intent in exploring this avenue of research. It did, however leave me vulnerable and exposed to the thoughts and attitudes of my fellow travellers. This vulnerability I experienced awoke in me the awareness of how sensitive this research was, and I realised my co-participants may have felt even more trepidation at embarking on this journey of exploration. Tamasese and Waldergrave (1994:66) mention that "an accountability that fosters commitment to actions makes a difference to the lives of those who suffer. If it lies in the bedrock of values like humility, reciprocity, love and sacredness, a mutual learning process can take place, both for those who call for accountability and those who respond. It becomes a mutual learning in vulnerability". With this in mind I was determined to challenge my own assumptions and preconceived ideas, which had been crafted out of my own experiences. I adopted a suspicion of my own reading of what had been written and said. I wanted to be accountable for what I was writing as the meaning I place on an experience would be different to the meaning my co-participants place on the same experience. In pursuing this research I tried to keep in mind that my experiences, although similar, were not the same as those of the participants. Consequently, I was bound by what Anderson and Goolishian (1992:25) describe as the "not-knowing" approach. Freedman and Combs (1996:44) add to my awareness that I needed to move towards "what is not yet known", even though I had possibly experienced similar events to those of the participants. The questions I raised did not spring from "a position of pre-understanding" (Freedman & Combs 1996:44) and a wanting of "particular answers" (Freedman & Combs 1996:44), but because I had a sincere curiosity about the content of people's lives. The participants needed to experience choice rather than "settled certainties" (Freedman & Combs 1996:44) with regard to the realities they inhabit.

This study proposed ethical ways of practice that intended to challenge the various discourses evident in homes struggling with alcoholism. For this process to take place the participants needed “uninterrupted space to tell their stories” (Tamasese & Waldergrave 1994:60), which the group afforded each participant. The various discourses contributing to ongoing subjugation and psychological trauma in children of alcoholics needed to be explored and deconstructed. Tamasese and Waldergrave (1994:57) explain that naming the injustices (inherent in the various discourses) “is an essential early step in the process of overcoming it”. Another benefit in naming the injustices early on in the process is that various issues are highlighted, relieving some tension within the group. Practices condoning violence - physical and emotional, injustice and oppressive practices needed to be questioned. In taking a position against the above, I was trying to ensure that these practices were not perpetuated.

The following sections served as a foundation to some of the ideas that guided this study.

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

In my research approach I was guided by feminist ideas on participatory action research and the qualitative approach.

1.7.1 Qualitative approach

Qualitative participatory action research makes use of a qualitative approach in the study of the stories of the participants. A qualitative approach was my preferred mode of research as it puts in the forefront of interest, curiosity and inquiry into the human soul, its fears, dreams, motivations and trepidations. For a group of people who have, through the power of various discourses, operating in their lives, been silenced and marginalised, it was refreshing to be considered as more than mere objects for evaluation, or a gathering of statistical data. Being acknowledged as the co-creators of conversation, and being the harbingers of “local knowledge” (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston 1997:25), instead of having hypotheses foisted upon a misunderstood minority, contributed to an experience of feeling personal worth and value. The primary goal of qualitative research is defined as describing and understanding, rather than explaining human behaviour. In order to do this I needed to understand the participants “in terms of their own definition of the world” (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:156). Furthermore, Babbie and Mouton (2001:270) describe a qualitative research method as dealing with verbal data, in contrast to a quantitative research approach, where quantitative researchers lean heavily on numerical data.

1.7.2 Feminist participatory action research approach

The perspectives of various feminist researchers have cast their influence over the manner in which the research was conducted. The very fact that I began this study from my own experiences, attests to this. I did, in the words of Reinharz (1992: 259) merge the “private” and the “public”, and I found myself working from an “epistemology of insiderness”. I attempted to reaffirm the ‘interconnectedness’ (Burstow 1992:2) of the participants and myself. Alcohol had for the most part succeeded in isolating alcoholics and their children and families from society and communities at large, thereby breaking the connections and ties that are imperative in sustaining families through periods of travail. An attempt to reach a depth of understanding about the effects of this disease and the discourses underlying these stories requires an emotional investment and involvement that Heshusius (1994:16) refers to as “participatory consciousness”. Heshusius calls for “an awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known, an inner desire to let go of perceived boundaries that constitute the ‘self’ – and that construct the perception of distance between self and other.” One must be “turned towards other, without being in need of it, or wanting to appropriate it to achieve something.” It will involve an “identification or merging” within an “attitude of profound openness and receptivity.” “If one merges, one can come to know even from silence” (Heshusius1994:208) and the distinction between the researcher and those on whom the research is done, disappears (Reinharz 1992:181). This approach did, in many ways, impact on the individuals participating in this study in lifting the curtain on the various practices which had maintained oppression in one form or another.

Thus the modernist expectation of a research that is “detached, objective and value neutral” was far from satisfied. Bonnie Burstow’s (1992:2) ideas on our interconnectedness with one another, and how one can embrace each other as subjects, link up with ideas of participatory action research. Reason and Bradbury (1994:2) comment that action research is participatory research, where “human community involves mutual sense making and collective action”. “It is only possible *with, for and by* the persons and communities, and it has the aim of liberating the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world.” This for me meant that in exploring together and laying open the discourses that exert an influence upon the identities of participants even now, as well as in the past, participants may have experienced a sense of being loosened from the grips of beliefs and ideas that previously cast a pall over their lives. Bogdan and Biklen, cited by Ballard (1997:12) encourage the researcher to challenge and try to change practices, social structures and social media which maintain irrationality, injustice and unsatisfying forms of

existence. This way of doing research may help the feeble sunray to penetrate the shroud of cloud.

Action research is concerned with creating new, practical knowledge, where knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know, rooted in everyday experience. In being able to share their knowledge participants began to feel validated and empowered to realise that they *are* “capable of constructing and using their own knowledge” (Reason & Bradbury 1994:10; Bogdan & Bilken 1992), to express a desire for and even create an alternative way of living, thinking, and being.

One of the traits of participatory action research as an approach is that it facilitates change within all participants, the researcher included. I was hopeful that the locating of my story, within the stories of a wider community with similar experiences may offer some new perspectives to our singular interpretations of our realities. In breaking my silence, I wanted to offer my fellow participants some small step in the liberation from their own pain and bewilderment. I was wondering if sharing our stories of challenge as well as victory, would not have served to reaffirm our abilities to survive? I was curious too about whether the way we each, as individuals, had flown over or crawled under the various hurdles, (and yes, maybe even straddled them) would not bring a certain hope to fellow participants in distress.

Kaye (1990: 33) is of the opinion that change is the evolution of new meaning through dialogue. It was my intent that we collectively delve into the current interpretations and meanings of all the stories offered, and in so doing possibly discover higher ground, a different vantage point, from which we could come to understand our stories. Could this be what Kaye meant by “evolution of new meanings”?

Orlando Fals Borda in Reason and Bradbury (1994:1) adds that we must keep trying to understand better, change and re-enchant our plural world. This can only come about through concerted effort and action. Elie Wiesel in Weingarten (2003: 191) comments that “action is the only remedy to indifference, the most insidious danger of all”.

I would like to, in the following section, describe the path I followed in finding the participants in my study.

1.8 THE CHARACTERS INHABITING THE NOVEL

Despite many invitations and visits to parishes, meetings with church leaders and elders, requests for voluntary participation, and even requests to print requests for participants in notices within church letters, I abandoned all hope of pursuing this line of research as I had received absolutely no response. Although seemingly helpful and understanding regarding my choice of research, I

came to understand relatively quickly that either there were no such problems within churches, church members were not forthcoming regarding these problems to the church leaders, or, the most likely explanation, they were protecting church members' interests in not even going as far as relating my request for participation in this study. Initially I experienced great frustration. Then I had to ask myself why it would be necessary for them to do this. Could the problem be so insidious that in reality there *were* a great many families troubled by this disease? Is it possible that the churches do not regard this disease palatable for public consumption because of the implications involved in exploring the true effects of alcohol abuse in families? Furthermore, were the churches maybe condoning the practice of alcohol abuse within families by their very reluctance to give family members an opportunity to voice the effects of this abuse? Could it be that the well-intentioned, but possibly misguided attempt of the churches to keep a lid on the can of worms, could actually be a step in the wrong direction for the church in addressing certain injustices taking place within families? I wondered what the churches anticipate could be the outcome of such research on the cohesion of members within not only the church, but also the family? Another thought that crossed my mind as I wondered at all of this was the role that the patriarchal discourse played within the church in suppressing the progression of the study. Who made the decision not to open this study up to the congregation? And why was this necessary?

In reflecting on these questions, the words of Cozad-Neuger and Poling (1997:36) spring to mind, where they ponder on phenomenon of the messages many 'well-meaning' pastors, husbands and even 'Christian' neighbours send, as they are proponents of the belief that there is a divine meaning in the experience of abuse, that the abuse itself is salvic or a means of a deeper spirituality, that it is the place of women and children to suffer, that husbands and parents know best, that *they* (women and children) are somehow at fault, or that it is a sign of deep Christian charity to tolerate being abused by a loved one . Could these, and other damaging messages be the 'light' that guided the pastors at the churches to act as guardians of the families suffering from alcohol abuse in its physical or emotional form? Do these ideas spring from a patriarchal view of the Bible's teachings, and the pastor's view of his/her own position and the position of women within the church? Cozad-Neuger and Poling (1997:44) talk then of the challenge pastoral caregivers within the church face in needing to familiarise themselves with the "dynamics of patriarchy" and its effects on both women and men.

Further considerations to my questions posed above, hinge around the fact that "pastoral care should be concerned with the totality of human well-being, yet it mostly ignores social and political aspects" (Pattison 1994:5) which impinge on this domain. The implication for sufferers of family

alcoholism is that the church, suffering from a kind of 'myopia', "colludes with the forces of sin, sorrow and injustices, which prevent people from realising their human potential. It has failed to recognise oppression" (Pattison 1994:8), so cannot participate in healing and transformation. Although this insight does not form part of my aims within this study, I feel that this issue should be revisited and explored in order to more effectively help those families in the grips of alcohol and abuse.

My failure to elicit a response from the church left me a quandary. If I had no participants, I had no research. Then the unthinkable happened. The participants moved into the orbit of my study in an almost biblical way. I never searched for them. Not long after my experiences with the churches, after months of dissatisfied contemplation, I was drawn into a conversation, where curiosity was expressed regarding the topic of my study. The surprise I encountered upon the revelation of this extremely sensitive topic was palpable. Along with this surprise, however, I picked up a sense of knowing, of the familiar. We were satellites in the same orbit; I was meeting the eye of the fellow sufferer. We immediately fell into conversation about reminiscences long relegated to the dungeons – by myself, at least. The upshot of our brief encounter was a "date" with the commitment of further "willing" participants. One "participant" informed the other and before long I had five participants. I considered the possibility that I might also join the sessions, not as only a researcher but also as participant. I felt that I then would not be doing the research on the participants but "with" them (Reason & Bradbury 1994:2). I would draw benefit from the study too, in that, insofar as I research the other, I would be researching myself. And so began our journey.

I invited the fellow research participants to introduce themselves and as such tried to give them their own voice right from the start – these are people who committed themselves to the journey: Nanette, Karin, Trudie, Marietjie, Dawn and Ina.

1.8.1 *Nanette*

*I am **Nanette Van Wyk** and I'm 53 years old. I'm an educator at an English medium High School in Vanderbijlpark. I teach Biology to the seniors but I don't get much job satisfaction these days.*

I've been married for thirty years and have two sons and a daughter. Louis – 28 – lives in Knysna; Tinus – 25 - works in America; and Carolien – 20 – tours the country as part of a Youth Group (C-Kruis). She does Christian evangelical work. She will start her studies in 2005.

For the past seven years I have been an active member of Elijah House, a place addressing alcohol, its related problems, and especially adult children from alcoholic homes. Elijah House

looks at this from a biblical point of view, and I feel that is where I'd like especially to make a contribution. They changed my life and ways of thinking.

1.8.2 Karen

Hello, my name is **Karen**.

I am twenty years old and my father is an alcoholic. Until two years ago he lived in a shelter for the homeless. Now he lives in a hovel.

I am studying to become a graphic designer. I am proud to say I am doing everything in my power to overcome my awful past. I don't intend on making my past my future, like my father did. I want to set an example to people like myself. I want to show them one does not need to take this "powerful punch" as hard as I did. It changes your perspective regarding people, your life, your loved ones, your soul and your trust in people. But I'm working at it, and I'm beginning to feel normal like other people. My confidence is improving. I understand my father has problems, and brought the problems he has over himself, I am not to blame.

1.8.3 Trudy

My name is **Trudy**. I am an educator and I am 53 years old. I am the daughter of an alcoholic. After an unhappy marriage of 22 years (to an alcoholic) I was divorced, and I am now in a very happy relationship with a British partner. I have 3 daughters, one of which I only met after 26 years. I gave her up for adoption in my youth. My other two daughters were also victims of my unhappy alcohol-saturated marriage. It was alcohol that destroyed my marriage.

1.8.4 Marietjie

Hello all, I am **Marietjie** and I'm 32 years old. I've been married for 11 years. I'm mom to a daughter of one and a son of five years. My father became an alcoholic when I was 10 years old, and my mother bravely struggled against this abomination for three years before joining in the game. The first 10 years were not plentiful in money, but we were happy, none-the-less. My father began an affair at the pinnacle of his success as a farmer, and so began the tumbling in of the house of cards. Alcohol walked in, along with an illegitimate child. And so continues the saga. I hold a very good position within the SAPS and am constantly amazed at the corruption within its senior ranks. They are not innocent angels: I often wonder if I could last another 20-25 years in this place!

1.8.5 Dawn

Hi everyone, I'm Dawn, and I'm eternally grateful that this get-together hasn't taken on the ambience of the AA meeting. I do not arrive at this get-together with memories copiously imbued with warmth and nostalgia. Instead, I still strain to pick out the most innocuous euphemisms with which to lay who I am before you. Even in that, a self-revelation to the perceptive.

I'm progressing to the 36-year mark, and I'm a wife and mother to two children, a son of 3 and a daughter of 7. I am both a teacher and a student. I have burrowed my way out of an alcoholic home – one in which both “parents” participated in the plentiful games of Russian Roulette – and for many years I had donned the mask of indifference. I have been co-conspirator in the denial and silencing game too. However, I sense that I'm now ready to confront Homer's lines from Odyssey – which speaks of “the blindness of one's heart.”

1.8.6 Ina

I'm Ina, and I'm a psychologist. My father was an alcoholic from before the moment of my birth. He was rehabilitated after the birth of my eldest child. I was the middle child of five. My mother was a “boys' mom”. My sister was my father's favourite, I was left over. My name became the cause of a family dispute – Sagarius Katerina – If my mother did not choose that family name for me, the family would pray for my death. And there began my story.

The following section provides a summary of the route my research journey took.

1.9 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

In getting started, we set off on our research by engaging in narrative group therapy every Friday afternoon, spanning approximately two hour periods. We continued to meet each other for close on three months, and since two of the participants work in the same environment as I do, we still talk informally on the topic with relative frequency. Initially I conducted a conversation with each, in which the purport of the study was explained. Questions were clarified, and an information letter was provided, followed by an informed consent letter. I negotiated the number, duration and regularity of our gatherings. I was hoping to meet for at least twelve sessions, of between one and two hours each, every Friday afternoon. In this aim we managed to succeed.

I chose to employ narrative therapy practises (White & Epston 1990) in our conversations. This approach was ideally suited to our journey as we were relating personal histories and experiences (in the form of story-telling), and the various discourses that have shaped each participant's ways of being and thinking. It was my desire to negotiate the direction of the study with all group members, although I was also transparent in explicating my tentative ideas around the theme of identity. I did, however, also remain open to preferences of the heart.

The conversations were generally unstructured in terms of direction and content, although I found myself constantly questioning the reasons for the direction it seemed to be taking. I had my tentative ideas of what would make this study an “academically worthwhile” one, yet the participants were taking unexpected tracks, and we were often getting bogged down in mud-puddles on the detours. At this point I had to reign in my own imagination and remind myself it was not I who needed to set the agenda, or push this study along a path that might cause the wheels of progression to stop turning. Instead, where the participants were leading, was the more respectful, more necessary path for them. With time I came to recognise these mud-puddles as yielders of diamonds. These mud-puddles became the spring of valuable reflection. We explored the themes that we felt would be most meaningful to each group member, and eventually decided to simply see where the conversations took us. The conversations were both generative and therapeutic in nature.

The issue of confidentiality put in an appearance relatively early into our conversations, and I realised how sensitive, painful and close to the surface these stories are to all of us. The events within the narrative may have been traumatic in the re-experiencing, and I have become very aware of the effects my witnessing might have on the participants’ lives (Weingarten 2000). It was not my intent to carelessly scratch open old wounds, although part of the process was to provide validation and acknowledgement of previously ignored emotional pain, and also an addressing of discourses maintaining the lifeblood of the problems.

In witnessing these stories, I believed we could all contribute to healing each other in some small way by being compassionate (Weingarten 2003:62), and by providing validation and acknowledgement of the stories, deeply embedded and festering. Introducing the option of pseudonyms, as well as the opportunity to edit all the stories before publication, did alleviate some of the trepidation, although a quarter of the way through the conversations I had a definite sense that Marietjie had withdrawn from disclosure. I felt a level of frustration, but understood the fear of exposure she posited as the reason for this reticence for further in-depth engagement. Exposure brings judgement and ultimately rejection from the very people with whom there is a day to day emotional tug-of-war, for love, acceptance, understanding and validation. Weingarten (2000:393) adds that

those who attempt to describe the atrocities that they have witnessed also risk their own credibility. To speak publicly about one’s knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attaches to victims.

My frustration made way for curiosity as I wondered whether in Marietjie's life, normalising judgement (Foucault 1977:184) played a significant role. Would the telling of her story strip her of the protective and defensive mask, and reveal the impact that opinions from significant others still have on her, with regard to her childhood home? Does this deviation in the narrative, from what is popularly accepted as the norm, still wield such power over her life that silence is preferable to emotional release? The limited conversations we shared led me to believe that this was indeed the case.

Feminists are in favour of multi-method approaches to research, and this idea was particularly helpful in sharing the outcomes of the therapeutic conversations with the members of the group (Reinharz 1992:197). The multi-method approach was especially helpful in sharing the conversations we had within the group with Marietjie, each Friday. Because Marietjie stays 600 kilometres away, communication via e-mail became our only option. I sent Marietjie a copy of every letter addressed to each member of the group after each therapeutic conversation. She sent back her contribution to the conversations, new discussions and questions, which I then gave to the group again, also in written form. The group personally communicated through me with her, via e-mail, and in this way a constant stream of conversation and dialogue took place.

To record our conversations initially, I negotiated the use of a dictaphone with the group. This helped keep my reliving of the conversations more accurate, and immediate. Furthermore, I felt if my hands and attention were free, I could direct my attention completely towards the participants – searching for clues (Payne 2000:75) in the moment, the body language, the voice and the facial expression. These also tell a story.

I borrowed David Epston's (1994) suggestions of letter writing, as well as telephone and e-mail conversations in communicating with the group. With regards to the letter writing, Epston (1994:31) says that "words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way conversation does". For this reason letters may hold significance in terms of a valuable resource for not only the researcher, but also the participants. The letters I wrote the participants following each meeting, I did for a number of reasons.

I reflected on the stories that were told within the session, checking the authenticity of my interpretation so as to remain true to the meaning the participant intended. I used these letters also as a way of expressing my curiosity regarding certain "unsaid" things (Steier 1991:78) in the stories. I also raised some ideas that I had not thought of as the conversations were in progress.

In sending each member a copy of the letter via e-mail, or hand-delivering it, I was hoping to let each member have her own copies of the stories as they were retold, re-performed, and re-authored. Possibly the participants could rewrite themselves into a present more helpful and healing than the stories of the past were.

When the conversations had been completed in entirety, I talked with the group about the possibility of highlighting the themes (see in this regard Oliver 2004:142) that had become most prominent throughout our conversations. These themes are also known by the term discourses. By mutual consent, I used a narrative form of analysis in exploring these discourses. I relied heavily upon describing the lived experience of the research participants as fully as possible, using their words as much as possible. These discourses and their effects on the identity development of the participants then became the focus of my research report. The final product was perused by all participants and amendments were made where necessary. In this way I felt authorship still remained in the hands of the participants, and power over what was being related of their lives were vested in them. They had the final say.

What now follows is a setting out of the remainder of the study.

1.10 THE GAMES TAKING SHAPE

This study took on the shape of the Olympic Games. The itinerary comprised the following. Chapter one dealt with the “foundations of sportsmanship” – the ethics of behaviour in participating, a lesson on the background of the sport and an introduction to the participants who heroically engaged their nemesis in challenging battles of the spirit, as well as of the body.

Chapter Two serves to further reveal the infrastructure around which “the games” – this journey - is constructed. The athlete’s/co-participant’s discursive positioning within the theoretical framework of the study is examined, the “rule-book” – the theoretical constructs underpinning the journey are elaborated on.

Chapter 3 focuses on the experiences of each athlete, the events of particular significance to her sporting experience. The spectator will be allowed a privileged glimpse into the “mindset” of each athlete.

Chapter 4 reveals a collage of the emergent significant and overlapping experiences (themes), and the theory and valuations placed upon these experiences and stories by “recognised coaches and promoters” as well as by the athletes themselves.

Chapter 5 serves as an intensely personal reflection of the protagonist's journey and the effect the journey had on the protagonist's life-world.

Chapter 6 offers a reflection on the meaning this journey held for the participants, an articulation of the 'prophetic voice', and a reflection on the twists and the turns on the circular track, the poignant and the unexpected, the surprises and the victories, and the undecided.

CHAPTER TWO

FLASHING BILLBOARDS TO LIGHT THE WAY – DISCURSIVE POSITIONING OF THE RESEARCHER

2.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND POST-STRUCTURALIST DISCOURSE

While positioning myself within this study I chose to plot a course through a narrative, social construction, post-structuralist perspective. In exploring the formation of identity these interwoven concepts need to be opened up a little. To reveal my situatedness within these concepts, I need to briefly unravel their strands within the tapestry of identity.

2.1.1 Post-structuralism

Burr (1995:120) describes post-structuralism in the following way. It is the “cultural and intellectual backcloth against which social constructionism has taken shape, and which to some extent gives it its particular flavour”. The terms postmodernism and post-structuralism have been used interchangeably, but for the purpose of this study I would prefer to use the term post-structuralism. An understanding of post-structuralism demands an understanding of the paradigm shift from the modernist age to the age of post-structuralism. Lyotard, cited in Dockery (1995:70) suggests that “the modern age is the age of meta-discourses, the meta-narratives, which seek to undergird and to explain the nature of the universe, the origin of meaning, and the various enterprises and schemes of modernity”. Science is also included within these enterprises, and Lyotard implies that science holds a hostile, critical attitude to narratives as they are regarded as little more than “fables” (Dockery 1995:70). Modernity espouses a “rationalizing and totalising gestalt and worldview” (Dockery 1995:71).

The paradigm shift from the modern to the postmodern period, is characterised by an “incredulity towards metanarratives. Confidence in rationality itself has been deconstructed” (Dockery 1995:71), instead, poststructuralism is a “serious effort to restore the loss of meaning that is attributed to modernism. It indicates a possible progress and a new way of doing science, a restoration of the value of human feelings as part of experiences” (Heroldt 1998:215). This holds important implications for the manner in which narratives within a therapeutic context will be interpreted. Narratives become much more than “fables” – instead they become a validated description of the life world of the individual, one regarded as very real and shaping of their lives and identities.

In thinking about identity and how one can explain its formation in children of alcoholics, it would be simplest to attempt to describe it through two differing lenses – the one hued in modernist perspective, the other tinted in post-structuralist perspective. The modernist perspective will approach children of alcoholics from an “objective” viewpoint, categorising and fitting them into predetermined classes, treating them with “replicable procedures” and being guided in their treatment and attitude with generally “applicable rules” (Freedman & Combs 1996:21). From a modernist viewpoint the future of the child from the alcoholic family is “predictable” as a glance at a genogram may reveal – children from alcoholic families may succumb to alcoholism due to a genetic predisposition, leaving little room for an alternative view to the outcome. Thus an attitude of limitation prevails. Essential objective facts guide modernist theories, objectifying and dehumanising children from alcoholic families. The specific, localised meanings of individuals are ignored. The result of this perspective is that they become “passive, powerless recipients of expertise and knowledge” (Freedman & Combs 1996:21). The modernist lens casts identity in a fixed pattern, where the possible outcomes are envisioned in shades of brown, and agency is confined to the predictable.

As modernity makes way for post-structuralism, “the multiplication of perspectives leads to a blurring of boundaries. Categories cease to be sacred, and all that once seemed securely identifiable begins to spill across the borders, merging, melding and mixing. The same may be said of our emerging conceptions of ourselves. As belief in essential selves erode, awareness expands of the ways in which personal identity can be created and re-created in relationships” (Gergen 1991:141; see also Rigazio-Digilio 2001:205).

Self-identification as a child from an alcoholic home is a problematic idea. Our self-narrative talks us into believing we are among other things, dysfunctional (a modernist label), as our families exhibit those features. Those considered to be medical experts (situated within the modern period) reify our self-diagnoses with their medicalised versions and interpretations of human problems, using medical or scientific models. Bavelas (cited in Hoffman 1990:30) comments in this regard that “the big deception is the biological package: people give you a name and you have to take responsibility for it”. Most of these names, or assumptions, are “blaming and judgemental, and as a result are disguised” (Hoffman 1990:9) in the form of euphemistic, flattering terms which none-the-less highlight the pathological nature of a problem. The very term I used – *dysfunctional* – is testimony to the pervasiveness of these notions of pathology. I, too, have succumbed to the ruse of labelling my own family as dysfunctional.

Medical “experts”, taking their power from the modernist period, begin to lose their legitimacy, as sole interpreters of the problems of individuals, within a post-structuralist perspective. This effectively brings to life the notion of the “death of the author” (Foucault cited in Dockery 1995:72). The author, in the post-structuralist world, becomes the individual and his/her community, in collaboration. And, because definitional boundaries are challenged, and expert knowledge becomes diffused or diluted, possibilities for a different cast on our own identities becomes knowable. Hoffman (1990:4) argues that one does get “an enlarged sense of choice (for a different identity – for the purposes of this study), but the cost involved is to give up moral and scientific absolutes”.

The post-structuralist lens casts the present and future of the child from an alcoholic family in a spectrum of colour and possibility. Post-structuralism is concerned with meaning, and rejects the notion of expert opinion, essential truth and a fixed reality. Instead, our realities and identities are constructed as we live them. This implies for me and the participants and myself that although certain roles and ways of being had to be entered into and lived through to survive chaotic childhood households, these scripts and ways of being can be negotiated into adulthood. We have the space to evolve our identities, when childhood scripts become superfluous, and are no longer useful in our lives. Gergen (1991:146) adds that a new self-conception develops in the postmodern perspective: “The self is no longer an essence in itself but relational. This self is constructed and reconstructed in multiple contexts. Here one’s sense of individual autonomy makes way for a reality of immersed interdependence, in which it is relationship that constructs the self.” In this regard Rigazio-Digilio (2001:205-207) concurs.

This way of thinking has significant implications for the child of the alcoholic. The modernist interpretation of an autonomous individual, is responsible “for the severe stresses of multiphrenia” (Gergen 1991:156). This perspective leads the individual to situate all failure, achievement, performance or lack thereof, in the domain of his/her own proficiency and control. The individual is at the “vortex of his enveloping sociality” (Gergen 1991:156). This can lead to unbearable stresses. However, the post-structuralist slant of a relational “me” leads to a position where one’s own role becomes that of a participant in a social process that eclipses one’s personal being; one’s potentials are only realised because there are others to support and sustain them; one has an identity only because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is part; one is allowed to be a certain person because this person is essential to the broader games of society. The child from the alcoholic family, from within this perspective is given reprieve from guilt (often survivor guilt), and self-blame for a situation he/she was unable to control or prevent. The overbearing

responsibility for the “way things turned out” may not weigh so heavily on their shoulders, the sense of aloneness and isolation may be lifted as participant and researcher engage together on journeys of exploration. The child can be returned from the margins of “the other” by a reincorporation into relationship.

2.1.2 A Narrative Social Construction Worldview

Hoffman (1990:2) describes social construction theory as a conviction that “our beliefs about the world are social inventions”. Hoffman (1990:3) cites Gergen as saying that social constructionism views discourse about the world not as a reflection or map of the world, but as an artefact of communal interchange. Social construction focuses on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family and culture, and posits an evolving set of meanings that emerge unendingly from the interactions between people. Meanings are not skullbound but are part of the general flow of constantly changing narratives, and may not exist inside what we think of as an individual ‘mind’ (Hoffman 1990:2).

What I take from this definition is the understanding that no single story can then sum up the meaning of life or the meanings that people attribute to their lives or identities. The social construction discourse has become meaningful to me because it may offer a negotiable explanation for the way in which my identity, and the identities of the participants have evolved. The emphasis on the constitutive effects of language has a bearing on my experiences as a young girl, working my way through labels, and not finding a comfortable fit within the options provided by the society of which I am part. For the participants and myself, the vast array of dialogical (and often monological) interactions that took place between ourselves and our parents, now take on a different meaning as they spin around in our heads. We may come to an understanding of how it is that we have such entrenched beliefs regarding who and what we are, despite the interplay of logic and commonsense trying to convince us otherwise. We have been fed talk since conception, we have been constituted syllable by heart-stopping syllable first on our parents’ knees, and eventually on our knees. Paradoxically, we have been both built up and broken down in language.

Burr (1995:3) explains that a social construction worldview presumes a commitment to an unflinching advancement of the following beliefs: realities are socially constructed through language, by people together as they live them; realities are organised and maintained through narratives or stories; and there are no essential truths. Freedman and Combs (1996:22) add that power, knowledge and “truth” are negotiated in families and larger cultural aggregations. How do

all these ideas affect me, the subject in the post-structuralist world? Who or what then am I within the social construction, post-structuralist worldview?

2.1.2.1 Identity – Who and What am I?

What I mean by “identity” is who or what I think I am. These conceptions of myself have been derived from the stories I carry and believe about myself. These stories have been moulded and consolidated within the communities I am a part of. I am part of my stories of culture. I live through stories and my stories are shaped by my cultural context. White (cited in Freedman & Combs 1996:32) explains that I am “born into cultural narratives” but “we construct personal narratives”. These stories are my reality. They are constructed through language and passed on in the stories I live and tell. “In striving to make sense of experiences and of life, I have arranged my experiences of events in sequences across time in such a way as to arrive at a coherent account of myself and the world around me. This can be referred to as my story or self- narrative. Because the full richness of our lived experiences cannot be captured by a dominant single narrative, some narratives become part of my life, shaping and constituting it, while others never become part of the shaping narrative” (White & Epston 1990:10). The untold stories are the subjugated knowledge of my life, and affect my life to a lesser extent. The dominant narratives are the specific preferred and customary ways of believing and behaving within culture. If, however, the dominant narratives “carry hurtful meanings and memories or unpleasant choices, they can be changed by highlighting different, preferred, unstoried events” (Freedman & Combs 1996:32).

In reflecting on the dominant hurtful memories Trudie carried of her daughter she kept secret for so many years, and the feelings of inadequacy coupled with this, the emotional release and recovery linked to a reconnection and strengthening of the bond, once thought lost, is testimony to the healing power of re-storying events. Another example of the power of alternative stories lies in the recasting of the neglect by fathers, shared by both Karin and myself. Coming to understand that it was not a choice or personal vendetta waged on us as their children, to neglect us, but that the neglect was a consequence of the disease of alcoholism which had subsumed most of our parents’ lives, not only the aspect of fatherhood, was a sad but liberating one. Nanette added that “they cannot help it, it’s not their fault, they cannot even help themselves!” In Nanette’s sad memories of her father, there has risen a new image of a nurturing, caring father in the God who does not forsake his children.

Post-structuralism focuses on how the language we use constitutes our world and our beliefs, and our narratives. Societies construct views of reality in language. The only world people will ever know is shared in language and is an interactive process. Freedman and Combs (1996:28) say

that “language does not mirror reality, but creates the nature we know”. My identity is shaped and constituted in a myriad language exchanges. Who I think I am, my personality or identity, are all effects of language. Me - the “self”, is a product of language and social interaction. Therefore the self is constantly in flux, constantly changing depending on whom I am with, in what circumstances and to what purpose. The constitutive force of language ensures a temporary identity for all of us. Any change in belief, relationship, feeling or self-concept must then involve a change in language (Freedman & Combs 1996: 29). Language is the crucible of change. Gergen (1991:139) comments that “in the post-modern world there is no individual essence to which one remains true or committed. One’s identity is continuously re-emergent, reformed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships.” Foucault (cited in McNay 1992:109) shares this view and refers to our identities as “relational”. Because our “relationships are contradictory and unstable, our identities are dynamic, always open to change and contestation”.

Paul Ricoeur (1991:73-80) has some interesting perspectives on this question of “Who am I?”. His ideas on narrative identity intersect and run parallel to the above discussion in various ways. He begins by making it clear that the confusion an individual experiences regarding her identity can be most commonly ascribed to the confusion she experiences in her understanding of identity-as-sameness (*Idem*), and identity-as-self(hood) (*ipseity*). Ricoeur distinguishes between the two in that identity in self-as-sameness implies a similarity between objects such as that the oak is the same being from acorn stage to its age of maturity, the animal the same from birth to death, and the person from foetus to old age. Here he refers to the uninterrupted continuity in the development of the being from the first to last stage of its evolution.

Identity-as-self(hood) (*Ipseity*) is more concerned with the ontological, connecting to Heidegger’s (cited in Ricoeur 1991:75) identity as “characterised by its ability to interrogate itself about its mode of being in the world”.

In this study I found that questions regarding identity in both senses are present in the participants, identity-as-sameness, and identity-as-self (*ipseity*). Their identity of self-as-sameness was affected in that questions arose as to how well they measured up in their understandings of what parents should be, they should be as children and the way families should be, thus drawing broad distinctions between themselves and others. Ricoeur (1991: 81) asks “For what indeed is an “I” when I say that it is “nothing,” if not a *self* deprived of the aid of sameness?”. The terror in being too different can be overwhelming.

However, the concept of identity-as-selfhood came out strongly too. In relating this concept to the lives of my participants I'd like to refer to Ricoeur's (1991:77) idea that "it is primarily in the plot" of a story that the narrative identity of a protagonist is created. History reveals who we are. Ricoeur comments that in reading his books, we were not his readers but readers of ourselves, "my book being a sort of magnifying glass. The self doesn't know itself immediately but only through a detour of cultural signs of sorts, articulated in symbolic mediations, among them narratives of daily life." I understand then that personal identity is located in the many cultural stories of the past. "The narrative identity of this character will only be known correlative to the discordant concordance of the story itself" (Ricoeur 1991:77). I get a sense that both Ricoeur and Derrida (Sampson 1989:12) mean that "I am who or what I am because of what I am not". Furthermore, crisis of identity of an [individual] is correlative to the crisis of identity of the plot. So, picking through the heartbreaking narratives of the participants' lives, we focused on the discordant events, in the dominant cultural stories in circulation, events defying "concordance", dumping participants in crisis. And we "undid" the "figured self" – the self created by culture and its harmful discourses. We began to figure selves with narratives which carried more internal concordance, what could be described as re-storying of a narrative. And we re-storied narratives in language, the same vehicle many participants were "figured in" initially.

Language-sharing leads to a creation of knowledge, and knowledge renews itself with each moment of interaction. Language is ever-changing, thus meanings are indeterminate and mutable. Within therapy situations and specifically the conversations we engaged in, for this study, this process became one which was enlightening. Possibilities for new interpretations opened up, instead of being shut down. Conversations became opportunities for developing this new language, where new meanings were negotiated for problematic beliefs, feelings and behaviours – and where new meanings began to give legitimacy to alternate views of reality (see chapter 5 and 6).

2.1.2.2 How do we know what we know - Discourse Theory

Discourse theory is concerned with how meaning is constructed. Davies (1990-1999:88) explains that "to know anything is to know in terms of one or more discourses". This implies that all we conceive about ourselves and our identities, has been influenced and shaped by the discourses circulating in our communities. Because discourses, which establish community norms, were never meant to be democratic, they control the prevailing, dominant beliefs people hold of themselves. These bodies of meanings, in constant circulation and competition, mediated through conversation (Madigan & Law 1992:42), advance the interests of the dominant few, while

simultaneously emphasising their power. Madigan (1996:48) adds that these complex webs of power structures dictate an ever-changing list of what is considered right or wrong, normal or abnormal.

It is possible to see how people in general, but children in particular can be recruited into subscribing to these dominant discourses. They appear believable, backed up by “expertise”, people who are more learned, older, wealthier, and people who have more social status. They are generally condoned and practised by the immediate community. If the powerful have endorsed and helped advance the discourse of the medical model, and it is offered as the “truth” to all, it becomes easy to become a part of this belief system too. In giving lip-service to the discourse, one participates in circulating the discourse further, and giving it the stamp of truth as well. As Madigan (1996:51) says, “[a]ll conversations of community that have gone before us are us, affect us and are participated in by us. Hence, I create you and you create me”.

Discourses sustain particular worldviews, and powerfully shape a person’s choices about what life events can be storied and how they should be storied (Freedman & Combs 1996:43). Dominant discourses are so familiar, they’re taken for granted and may recede from view. At one point in our conversations with Nanette I posed the question, “But why did you never say anything? Why did you just take it?” and her answer, “We didn’t know better, I thought this was how all things worked”. Discourses are hard to question, while influencing attitudes and behaviours. “They are shaped by dominant, specific historical, political and cultural practices” (Hare-Mustin 1994:20-21). Dominant discourses sustain the status of those who have power whilst subjugating the knowledges and discourses of the marginalised, rendering them powerless. These discourses can obscure power operating in society, through societal structures and practices.

In thinking back on the discourses which permeate and shape the identities of children from alcoholic homes (refer to chapter 4) one needs to concede that many of these discourses are ones which govern households in general, not only alcoholic households. In many, maybe even most households these discourses are not necessarily damaging or destructive. Discourses such as role-reversal between the parent and the child (in certain instances), performance orientation as well as the “honour thy father and thy mother” discourse (flowing from the parent-blaming discourse – see chapter 4) - can be sustaining in families where there are no other overriding familial problems. Why then are these discourses so damaging to the identity of the child from the alcoholic home?

Role reversal, seen in the context of a family which functions in an unhealthy way, could have far-reaching consequences for a child who picks up those ‘scripts’ to make up or ‘cover for’ an

inadequate parent. The child forgoes all the usual child development stages in adopting a parental role. She foregoes the socialising experience, the ability to hand over control of a particular situation, she finds herself not learning to trust that others can care. And she learns to lie for her adult parent to “save” them from losing a job. She risks cynicism and a loss of a recognisable and distinctive self, as she never has the time or opportunity to discover and develop her budding self. Concern for others overrides concern for the self (please refer to parental inversion – chapter 4). In describing the above, I have taken a page from the diary of both Nanette and myself. Nanette now, at the age of 54 cannot relinquish control in her own family. She does not let go so that her daughter and sons can find their own path, instead she holds on fanatically, to the detriment of the relationship. They rebel and cause her immense distress. I also struggle, “as I don’t blindly believe that others will work as hard as I would to make a project a success. I demand perfectionism and I find it hard to trust others with tasks, where my name is attached as responsible person. I fanatically try to protect my reputation by trying to control every possible outcome. It’s emotionally draining”.

The answer then, to the question regarding why discourses can be damaging, lies in the exploration of what Foucault has referred to as the dynamics between power and discourse. One needs to ask the question, “Whom does the discourse serve?” (Foucault 1980:15). And by implication then I ask, “Whom does the discourse disqualify?” Hare Mustin (1994:32) comments that “values infuse all knowing, leading post structuralism to ask not only what is concealed by dominant discourses but also why it is concealed”. Discursive practices should be judged not “on their truth value, but on their function and ethical implications” (Hare Mustin 1994:32).

In conceding to the pressure of certain discursive practices in alcoholic families, or even participating in these practices, one is at the least helping to maintain the status quo of power relations, and at worst, condoning the basis upon which families construct their realities. Ina commented that performance orientation became her way of gaining approval and a tenuous self-worth, praise and feeling of value. Acceptance from the family and outside was only gained with achievement. Thus self-worth became dependent on an external stimulus. If there was no achievement and praise, there was also no self-worth and self-love. In insisting on academic achievement, parents, teachers and community were unwittingly encouraging this destructive discourse.

It is vital that the constitutive nature of community discourse is examined in therapy, because not attending to this may result in individuals who will become privatised with their problems. Their identity will only be known to them through terminology reflecting the voice of the “evaluator” – this

description only a coloured shade of who he/she is, and he/she is totalised and transformed into an assessed category. Madigan (1996:55) mentions that often these people are pushed to live in isolated, solitary confinement. This was very much the case with the families of the participants in this study. They began to live on the outskirts of sociality, very rarely being afforded the opportunity to participate in what they perceived to be “life”. Karen expressed the awareness that the community regarded children, and often the wives of alcoholics as “white trash” and did not allow their children to play with them. On another occasion, speaking from a limited vocabulary, against the frustrations with my father, I called him a “sod” within hearing of an acquaintance’s mother. The shock and disapproval it was met with stifled further future outbursts against a parent and sent the message that this kind of expression was inappropriate and disloyal. Children should respect their elders! Losing this adult’s geniality meant outbursts of emotion had to be guarded or suppressed. Forever lines had been forged in conversations regarding parents. Communities encourage silence – not speaking out about issues and incidences in the home. I felt in this incident that no-one had been interested enough to even ask what had been the driving force behind the comment. I got the feeling at the time that it was popularly accepted that children knew nothing about life and how things worked, had no opinion to give regarding the lives they lead, and were expected to blindly and faithfully be led to the slaughter, with not a whimper and a cry. In situating the discourses within a wider cultural context of restraint, these communal attitudes may be laid open, critically examined, and maybe contested.

Burr (1995:3) throws out the challenge that “constructing and negotiating our own identities will always be conflict ridden, as we struggle to claim or resist the images available to us through discourse”. However, a hopeful thought lies in the idea that power is always relative, and never a one way street. Even those in marginal positions can gain some validation by drawing upon suitable discourses.

It is important then to explore the various discourses playing upon the lives of the participants, and how these discourses managed to find a foothold in their lives. The marginal stories also deserve copious attention because, as White (1994:48) says, “those stories, neglected in the grand schemes of psychopathology ...are the seeds and the soil of human transformation”.

In attempting to lay open the various discourses for critical examination in our group meetings I made use of De Shazer’s (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8) and Anderson and Goolishian’s (Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8) ideas of deconstruction.

2.1.2.3 *Demystifying reality*

There is no single, correct way to understand and define deconstruction. One may, however venture to bring together De Shazer's and Anderson and Goolishian's ideas as part of the process. De Shazer (cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8) begins by saying that there is a need to read a text (the stories of my participants) from both inside and outside its terms, i.e. from its margins, and it must remain ambivalently an act of love and respect, and of self-assertion and critical distancing. Anderson and Goolishian (cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8) describe deconstruction as "taking apart the interpretive assumptions of a system of meaning that you are examining...[so that] you reveal the assumption on which the model is based: [As] these are revealed, you open up space for alternative understanding".

I understood this to mean that I needed to listen for textures of community voice, the discourses we are born into, and have been socialised into within our conversations. These embedded meanings that have dictated the way we have interpreted behaviour and action within our families were to be underlined or highlighted. Focus on how they might have arisen and the very real effects of these meanings and messages were explored (see chapters 3, 4 and 5)

An instance where this was pertinent was when the group talked about obeying the father figure in the household and the deference exhibited by the wife towards the husband despite factors that mitigate a questioning attitude instead. We decided collectively that the term appropriate to this discourse was the one named patriarchy, and that this discourse had definitely been mediated over time, within the communities we had been a part of, but that it tended to overstay its welcome, and that it became over-familiar with time. The privileges of patriarchy (being served hand and foot, having one's drinks delivered in one's hand on order, having one's false teeth brushed) had become so taken-for-granted within the male domain that shifting out from under its excessive weight would be a Herculean task. Furthermore, trying to extricate oneself from this web of patriarchy could result in what Foucault (1977:179) describes as "disciplinary punishment", where the male figure may try to return the errant wife or child to a state where they now, once again, "measure up to the rule", abiding by the norms set by a patriarchally dominated community. And the effects of these endeavours will remain for years to come, as often, in many homes beset by alcohol, the disciplinary method is violence, verbal and physical abuse and the like. Chapter 4 has a pointed discussion on patriarchy which elaborates on this point of exploration.

It is so that centuries, or at the very least, generations of discourses would not be wiped out or destroyed by these explorations. However, that was also not the intent. What we did want to achieve in our conversations was to harness resistance against the various displays of power – in

the form of discourses - evident in the participants' lives. Foucault (1980:98) shed some light on the dynamics of power as it functions in individuals' lives and how one can investigate it. He places emphasis on the idea that power functions in a chainlike fashion, as it circulates. He sketches an image of the individual in relationship who flits in and out of the chain-like or net-like threads, at times wielding power, and at others, experiencing the effects of power. "The individual, which power has constituted, is at the same time a vehicle of that power" (Foucault 1980:98). I came to understand then that the power of discourses also had much to do with the individual who contributes to the discourse and its power, by at certain times resisting its power, while at other times helping to circulate its power. Anderson and Goolishian (cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8) explain that resistance exists in the same place as power, and because one is never outside power, resistance is also ever-present. But we needed to move even beyond this immediate mobilisation of resistance, and explore the historical context of these abuses of power. We would then come to a discovery of a history of resistance, and this discovery would act agentically, in that this history of resistance would provide an archive of positions of strength. This would become a basis of resistance upon which to build, and not necessarily one which we needed to create (please refer to chapters 3, 4 and especially chapter 5 in which I discuss the alternative stories).

In illustration of the above, it would be useful to take a few instances from Marietjie's experiences. Despite the obvious power displayed by her father with regard to what she was allowed to wear, who she was allowed to see, what she was allowed given the fact that she was a female in the household (refer to chapter 3), she managed to work in many displays of resistance and power herself. Firstly she learnt to drive a car, a taboo for the women from that household; she put extra effort into her appearance, after having had to watch the physical deterioration of a mother destroyed by a dominating husband; when her father continually alienated children from each other, and set them up against each other, she chose to try to work towards keeping them together, phoning, appeasing, and caring. These images of resistance make up Marietjie's stronghold, her archive of strength in tougher times. Her father's power is ever-present; so too is her resistance.

The point of deconstruction is that it provides a "corrective moment, a safeguard against dogmatism, a displacement, to keep it in process, to continually demystify the realities we create" (Lather cited in Kotzé & Kotzé 1997:8). Respectfully and determinedly demystifying, undoing (not destroying) the community discourses that are toxic in their effects I was hoping to break the power of the discourses over the lives of the participants.

2.1.2.4 *Foucault and Power*

Foucault, French philosopher and intellectual, regards language as an instrument of power, and that people have power in a society in direct proportion to their ability to participate in various discourses that shape that society (Freedman & Combs 1996:38). Townley (1994:1) elaborates on Foucault's focus in that Foucault wondered about the relationship between knowledge and power. Foucault regards the two as inseparable. He takes up issue with the fact that constructed ideas are accorded truth status, and that these "truths" are "normalising" (White & Epston 1990:19). Because power is relational, people then shape or constitute their lives around these norms or "truths". Forcing this form of individuality upon individuals, not only subjugates them, but "forges persons as docile bodies, conscripting them into activities encouraging a proliferation of 'global' knowledges or 'truth claims'" (White 1990:20). Burr (1995:65) comments that if we understand the origins of our current ways of understanding ourselves, we can question their legitimacy and begin to resist them. Foucault believes power and resistance always go together, and in resistance lies the possibility for change. Families suffering from alcoholism are also saturated in discourses. These discourses (mediated through language and community attitudes) wield power in normalising the kind of behaviour and attitudes appropriate and expected for children and spouses in alcoholic homes.

The (unspoken) rule of silence within and about the alcoholic family is a discourse condoned by the community in a complex way. If one speaks out, one is labelled disloyal to one's family of origin and traitorous to one's father, as mentioned in section 2.1.2.2. Secondly, in speaking out, the listener is compelled to respond, and, in the words of Nanette "the community has very little desire to get involved and interfere in others' domestic squabbles". Furthermore, patriarchy – upheld by communities and churches - supports the silencing of these voices through fear of reprisal, in the form of violence. Once again this is promoted by a tacit nod of approval.

Considering the significance of a family unit in the lives of all children, and the age differential between parents and their children, I wondered aloud in what way power and the abuse thereof served to maintain destructive discourses within the lives of children of alcoholics? From just the few examples cited in the above discussion, and the stories related in chapter three, it is clear that there is a strong correlation between the abuse of power of the alcoholic and the existing and destructive discourses playing out in the lives of children. We began to explore the extent children of alcoholics have any power then, over the experiences and outcomes of their childhoods and often adulthoods. We also began to wonder whether there were ways in which

we engaged in resistance of some kind (and still do?). We talked about how power, practised by their parents, had an influence on the forming identity of the child in that home. Furthermore, we explored to what extent the general community at large and the religious community constructed “truths” about children’s roles in homes, and their roles towards parents? We ended up with far more questions than we may ever find the answers to. However, some of the questions are further reflected on in chapters 5 and 6.

In an effort to move closer to an understanding of these curiosities, I chose to adopt a contextual approach to practical theology in my travels with my participants.

2.1.3 Contextual approach to practical theology

”Tell them...we’re the church” (Ackermann 1997:44). In these words lie the plaintive cry of all people towards whom injustices of varying kinds have been perpetrated. I count myself also within this number. And the response of feminist contextual theologians is to commit themselves to a theology of praxis – one which stands for justice, liberation and healing. These are powerful dreams and aims, yet I find my soul groaning for these ideals too – strong hurts need a powerful balm. Words, from my own experience, may not always be enough. Praxis and transformation may be the finger in the dyke – stemming the outpourings of bitterness. Patton (1993:15) refers to this approach, which embraces praxis and transformation as the communal-contextual approach, where corporate structures, both ecclesial and cultural are attended to in care. In Patton’s approach one finds various possibilities for addressing the imbalance of power, in the home. If care is afforded to men by the clergy, as Cozad-Neugar and Poling (1997) suggests, alcoholic men (and other men) may become aware of the effects they exert on their families. Should the church work towards being less patriarchal and more sympathetic to women and their experiences in the home, they may be moved to delivering more pointed sermons against the abuse of power within the home. If churches are willing to confront their own attitudes of limitation as far as women are concerned, and acknowledge their own roles in the oppression of women, what could not become possible?

A way of coming to grips with the way contextual practical theology can be linked to the communal-contextual approach to theology lies in Dunlap’s (1999:134) description of the pastor as a “bearer of discourse”, who brings discourse to multiple settings, such as the pulpit, hospital, inpatient treatment centres, and, I would like to add, possibly even the home of the alcoholic. Pastors participate in language’s creative, constitutive capacities in their roles as bearers of discourse, and consequently the language they use may have broad implications for the care-receivers. Rigazio-Digilio (2001:208) also agrees that post-modern counsellors need to first

address these kinds of cultural forces and explore with their congregations the ways in which they oppress, before attempting to redress and identify new cultural and community resources that can empower a new self and strengthen collective identities. Could the “bearers of discourse” not also become the “barers of discourses” which are imbedded in the homes of the alcoholic?

Cochrane de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:14) explain that the focus within the contextual approach is the contextual situation of living, where the contextual theologian [and researcher] would spend most of his/her time immersed in the context of people’s lives. I find myself closely involved in the lives of the research participants, even now, long after the research has been completed. The mending of creation is at the heart of this endeavour to work closely with the participants – the mending of creation rests on “transforming our relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with the environment through actions for justice and freedom, as well as changing those societal structures which perpetuate political, economic and social separateness among people” (Ackermann 1997:47). In meeting up with these five participants, I was participating with them at the very epicentre of their sources of pain. They were not removed from their context by years of “getting over it”. Instead their contexts at that moment were very much still steeped in the unresolved anguishes that have stretched, for some participants, over five decades. Each participant was still immersed in engagement with her own nemesis, the monster that had colonised her mind, and that refused to hand over the keys to freedom.

In allowing children from alcoholic families to tell their stories, we are allowing part of the meta-narrative “of the outer circles emanating from multiple communities of speech and action” (Ackermann 1997:48) to be circulated, and brought out into the open – to be exposed. In the “telling”, are we not beginning to open up space for the healing? Engaging in the telling of stories can bring about transformation; the mutual analysis and reflection upon these stories and their meanings have the power to move its tellers forward. The way in which we would be moved forward was not yet clear at the start of the conversations, yet as they progressed, I found the group more willing to skirt the margins of the discourses which have so touched and dominated their lives.

The dawning awareness of injustice upon the story being told is still not sufficient. Praxis, within a contextual approach, should follow in the form of an acceptance of the challenge to “act as an agent for the mending of creation” (Ackermann 1997:48) and “do theology” as de Gruchy (1994:3) implores. This could come to fruition in various ways. De Gruchy (1994:3) explains that doing theology is also concerned with conveying a Christian understanding of ethical issues, society and its problems, knowledge of the scriptures and general theological reflection. This was relevant as

we discussed the way the scriptures had been dealing with the issue of alcoholic homes, and women who come to pastoral carers for help, and how the gospel applied to their situation. This led at one point to a discussion on the dominant biblical interpretation of the role of women in the home and whether this interpretation was realistic in the fragmented world we inhabit. In this we needed to heed the words of de Gruchy (1994:10) who cautions us to “interpret the gospel from within the context that we find ourselves in”. Roussouw (1993:903) also explains that postmodernism challenges theology towards a commitment to “doing right” instead of “being right”. I understand this to mean that the practical theologian needs to actively engage in bringing about change, not by simply preaching words from the pulpit, but by working alongside people in trouble. In displaying his “concern for and working with the marginalised” (Roussouw 1993:903) Christianity gains greater credibility.

In the light of Ackermann’s (1997:48) words regarding the circulation of the meta-narratives of the outer circles, the marginalised, I subsequently attempted to attend to these expectations by paying attention to the contribution of power relations, as well as the conflicting discourses, which helped to form and maintain the identities of children and adults from alcoholic homes.

Although feminist theology is also a contextual theology, I have decided to afford it its own space as the content of feminist theology is close to the heart of all the participants in this study, and may contribute more so than other theologies, to transformation for all women in travail.

2.1.4 A Feminist Theology

I have positioned myself within a feminist theology of praxis, as part of feminist ideals are to reflect on the experiences of ‘others’ in order to act collaboratively with them for a transformed world. Their orientation towards dealing with the realities of the lives of women, children and the poor are a further reason for my choice. Feminists embrace a ‘hermeneutic of healing’ in trying to ‘bind up the wounds’ at every level for all in different ways (Ackermann 1998:80). Feminists also carry the belief that healing should be “collaborative with a sustained action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability and empowered by love, hope and passion” (Ackermann 1998:83). This theology is one in which I feel included and cared for, providing me with a greater reason to embrace it. Ackermann (1998:85) cites Harrison’s idea that good theology is utopian in that “it envisages a society, a world, a cosmos, in which ...there are no ‘excluded ones’”.

2.1.4.1 The embodiment of Pastoral Theology – The concept of han

I have found the therapeutic metaphors of the Eastern church, in particular the concept of **han** (of Korean Minjung Theology) helpful, in understanding how the feminist yearning for personal

transformation as well as transformation of our worldview can come to fruition. Couture (2000:50) describes *han* as the suffering that is accumulated in the victims of sin, evil and depravity, burdening them with agony. Han describes “the abysmal experience of pain” of the child from an alcoholic home (for the purposes of this study), who is abused, neglected or sexually exploited, who is torn from friends, family and school by homelessness, who is separated from a parent by incarceration (of various forms) at a distance, or who watches a parent deteriorate from alcohol or drug abuse. Han focuses on the pain of the victims and reserves the language of sin for wilful acts that victimise others. Han manifests itself passively and actively, consciously or unconsciously. The passive, unconscious *han* implodes into despair, helplessness and hopelessness. The active, unconscious *han* results in bitterness. Passive, conscious *han* accumulates in the sense of self of people who have been oppressed over a long period of time, and whose sense of hope has been destroyed. Active conscious *han* results in the collective will to revolt. At the bottom of *han* is a deeply wounded heart (Couture 2000:66). Both passive *han* (hopelessness and despair) and active *han* (bitterness) had insinuated itself into my life.

The participants in the study have provided testimony of this being the case in their lives too. Karin and Marietjie have trouble with forgiveness, borne out of a bitterness at what they perceive to be injustices perpetrated against them. Ina and Nanette describe their conviction that it is only through forgiveness that peace will come to their lives. Although they confess to this knowledge, they describe how difficult it is to walk the road of forgiveness each day, and that it is only by staying close to the Bible, and relying on the mercy of God, that they are moving towards forgiveness. Yet, forgiveness is not a static state that can be attained like a degree one possesses. From day to day the level of forgiveness differs, and it takes a constant awareness and prayer, to keep being forgiving. Karin comments that “I try to forgive him as long as he stays out of my way and I don’t see him. But he always comes around again.” And what might dissolve these destructive agents who rob and hinder individuals of agency? Both Ina and Nanette say “Forgive! Forgive! Forgive!” And the rest of us cry “HOW? How? How? Intellectually it makes sense, but emotionally we are unable!

Parks, cited in Couture (2000: 54), writes that *han* is resolved when it meets understanding, hope and engagement in action, and compassionate confrontation. This resolution will transform the tragic behaviour that results in violence against the self or others into a positive, gentle sense of self, optimism towards the future, and a well-channelled or even constructive use of anger. Although I subscribe to this advice, I have not yet managed to resolve my *han*. I console myself with the knowledge that I still have many years to recover. Nanette felt that Parks (cited in

Couture 2000:54) was misguided and that the only remedy for this was the Bible, its dedicated study and application, to the letter. Then “Jesus will set his captives free. We are captive to all our emotions because we neglect God!”

An individual who is able to resolve her *han* is able to share in responsibility for her future. Couture (2000:54) draws on the Wesleyan idea that God’s grace comes to us in order to renew the image of God in humankind, and that this is an antidote to the suffering. If God is present as we become self-aware, we can be freed from reactions that arise from the denial of guilt and shame, and we can be freed from the suffering which inordinate guilt and shame locks us into. In the presence of others we may be freed from allowing *han* to determine the outcome of life. This part regarding God’s grace, does however, find touching points with Nanette’s view. Once again I’m filled with despair at the time it may take me to reach this point in my life. And even more saddening, how then will other non-practising Christians ever reach that point of resolution if they do not have God’s word at their side to buoy them up? Will practical theology ever open up enough to come to the aid of those who will not seek help with the pastors voluntarily? Are these very children of alcoholics not the ones furthest removed from community aid?

In these ideas of Parks does lie a deeply pastoral theology, one with which I have aligned myself, although I not completely convinced of their practical applications yet.

The following section will elaborate on the need for pastoral care in the lives of adult children from alcoholic homes.

2.1.5 Pastoral care and adult children who lived in alcoholic homes

How do we care for adult children from alcoholic homes? Where do we begin to address the heartfelt cries, which should have been addressed at the moment of occurrence? Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:17) explain that the start of caring begins to flower as we dare to step out of our safe and secure contexts – this moment is defined as the “moment of insertion”. In getting in tune with people whilst they are engaged in real life struggles, we are caring. My moment of insertion occurred when I entered the field of this study, and chose to walk the path of recovery with the participants. I left my “safe and secure context”, my life of pretence and hiding, and got involved in the “bad and the ugly” along with the participants. Lest we fall into the trap of trying to cure the ills that have befallen those whom we offer care to, Gerkin (1997:84) speaks of a caring where the carer becomes physician of the soul. Although I yearned to offer more, caring was all I had. Sutherland (1996:221) explains that one of the tasks of pastoral care is to lead the individual to spiritual maturity where life is not envisioned as conflict-free but rather conflict

managed. Curing is not the intent, but rather caring and guiding to the point that the individual is able to manage his/her distress.

Pastoral counsellors are also listeners to stories. Pastoral counselling becomes, then,

a process of interpretation and reinterpretation of human experience within the framework of a primary orientation towards the Christian mode of interpretation in dialogue with the contemporary psychological modes of interpretation.

(Gerkin 1994:20)

Thus, initially, the tools needed for pastoral counselling are the tools of listening and interpretation.

And to make the process of counselling truly participative, pastoral counsellors do not arrive empty handed, but are also bearers of stories, sometimes of their own, and other times stories of the Bible which lend variety to the interpretations and understanding of the other's story, offering the possibility of a new, different interpretation. Not all of the participants in the group were practising Christians. The question raised by a participant of "how much religion we must listen to" was one that I felt difficult to negotiate in our meetings. Four of the six participants were Christian and related much wrestling for meaning to the Bible. From the Bible arose dilemmas as the Word and its prescriptions sometimes posed problems for the child from the alcoholic home. However, from the Bible many participants also found answers regarding meaning in their lives. It happened that the other two participants also extracted some meaning from the Christian participants in our meetings, and the religion we did discuss did not offend the non-practising Christians, as the points discussed were pertinent also to their lives.

We flitted from Bible verse to Bible verse, as the incidences presented themselves for comparisons of stories from the Bible. Our discussions were enriched by various stories from the Bible, among them Proverbs 31, as we talked of Marietjie's vision for women. We were saddened by the reference in Romans: 1 that the sins of the fathers would be visited on their children and it felt as though so many could relate to that. And we all shared in the hope made word in Jeremiah 11: 28. For every point made, we found a counterpoint in the Bible which made some of what we were baring more bearable.

Children of alcoholics, as evidenced from this study, express a need for much more than storytelling, and "empathy" (Dunlap 1999:143). Empathy alone leaves discourses or cognitive structures intact, that are harmful, and is therefore not an adequate form of care. Dunlap (1999:144) proposes that, firstly, the various forms of human distress be placed in a cultural,

political and social matrix or context, to be followed up by an encouragement of countercultural behaviours that subvert hegemonic power arrangements, such as assertiveness in women. The participants' particular experiences as women are typified by experiences of abuse and violence, neglect, patriarchal domination and other said but unstoried experiences, and call for a moral stand against these issues. Within this study, there have been conversations centred around blame, justice, forgiveness, and accountability. In chapter four a more comprehensive discussion around these themes was undertaken. Patton (1993:159) refers to Goldner who begins to address these issues when she says that, "[w]e must reach for the most complex psychopolitical understanding of abuse and victimisation, without compromising our clear moral vision regarding accountability".

Dunlap (1999:137) feels that pastoral care-givers possess responsibility in helping women develop agency, to choose where they will stand in relation to the competing discourses a woman is subject to. Weedon (cited in Dunlap 1999:137) explains how agency would work: "Knowledge of more than one discourse and the recognition that meaning is plural allows for a measure of choice on the part of the individual, and even where choice is not available, resistance is still possible". The pastoral care-giver actively needs to invoke alternative discourses that may lie dormant in a person's memory, by nurturing new sources of knowledge, and by empowering care-receivers to make choices for creative and life-giving discourses.

In our conversations I could feel the feminist practical theologians prod me along as we paid much attention to lifting out the harmful discourses which had wreaked such havoc in our homes. We examined the power of discourses and in these examinations I felt great responsibility in conveying hope, and finding the hopeful in bleak stories. Being especially aware of the impact that an awareness of unique outcomes (Morgan 2000:57) might have, I tried very hard to establish these as part of the alternative story. I tried, through the use of scaffolding, which usually includes the use of landscape of action and landscape of identity questions (White 1991), to build up enough confidence in the participant, that she could eventually name the abuses suffered, so that we could in turn, pick out the strengths that would move her along to recovery and agency. This involved re-membering conversations (Morgan 2000:77), where participants deliberately chose life club members, people who had been significant and positive figures to them in times of difficulty and distress, in their pasts/histories, and whom we wished to re-incorporate in the participants' lives, if not in body, at least then in memory. In this way the isolation and disconnection they might have experienced as children would be minimised and some positivity may be identified which would counter the horrid.

Nanette re-membered her grandmother, who used to call Nanette her “blue-eyed girl”. Ina reclaimed her father-and mother-in-law, who eventually helped her fund university. Marietjie, and Karin had no-one to draw closer. I wrote an athletics coach and grandmother back into my life. And so we continued to build agency.

By the end of our final session, I could say that all the women in our group had made some choices regarding where they would stand with regard to all the discourses. But the choices were not always what I was expecting. And this unexpectedness I’ll reflect on more fully in chapter 5.

The ideas elaborated on in the above discussion have particular significance for me. If I was to move forward in life, I needed to choose where I was going to stand, what choices I was going to make towards my future, which alternative stories I was going to live. And it became obvious to me through the conversations that I had already made many of those choices regarding the discourses I would contest. What did surprise me was how strongly I reacted to many of the discourses, such as patriarchy and silence. I felt I was risking my reputation, dignity, pride, call it what you will, by telling some of my story in this study. What would my family think of me now? What would my supervisors think? Would I have dropped in their estimation after reading this? But I also realised the voice of shame and fear of judgement was talking. And was this not one of the aims I had envisaged for the participants – acknowledgement of their stories? Was I afraid of having my own story heard and acknowledged? “YES!” and “NO!” For the first time in my life I feel completely vulnerable, bare, exposed and naked. Yet also liberated! I’ve told my story, and the world is still turning. And I’m turning along with it. WOW! Now I can deal with the past. Why is it necessary that I begin to deal with the past?

Grevin in Gerkin (1997:167) states that

the past holds a powerful grip upon the future by shaping feelings, actions and beliefs in the present. The pain and the suffering experienced by children who have been physically (or psychologically) punished, resonate through time, first during the seemingly endless days and nights of childhood and adolescence, and later through the lives we lead as adults. The feelings generated by pain caused by adults’ assaults (psychological or physical) are mostly repressed, forgotten or denied, but they can actually never disappear. Everything remains recorded in our innermost beings, and the effects of punishment permeate our lives, our thought, our culture, and our world.

This quote resonates with me at some primal level, as it is a reflection of my experiences to this day. The possibility of forgetting is beyond contemplation and the implication of forgetting is devastating. This would imply a negation of all that has shaped me and given me the character and identity I struggle to call my own. The answer does not lie in abandoning my roots – space to

acknowledge the experiences and come to terms with them for my present and future endeavours seems to be the more sensible an approach. I do not have to wonder if this holds true for my participants' lives too. Except for Marietjie, most have admitted the need to SPIT IT OUT! Say it, cry it, shout it. And they have.

It was my intent that through narrative pastoral therapy a different hue may be cast on the experiences of the past, that meaning would be extracted from the seemingly meaningless chain of events, that meaning would be restored to participants' lives and a renewed sense of identity and purpose would be shaped.

2.1.5.1 Narrative pastoral therapy and adult children who lived in alcoholic homes

a) Removing the blinkers through narrative

The narrative therapy approach – rooted in the poststructuralist social construction discourse – is a therapeutic tool developed by Michael White and David Epston (White & Epston 1990). White and Epston hold the conviction that "it is through the narratives or stories that people have about their own lives and the lives of others, that they make sense of their own lives. These stories determine the meaning people ascribe to their experiences. These stories are inevitably framed by our dominant cultural knowledges, specifying a strain of personhood." These stories play a role in establishing our identities, and in the performance of an expression that we re-experience, re-live, re-create, re-tell and reconstruct, we are reconstituting and refashioning our culture (Bruner in White & Epston 1990:12). In the telling and retelling of our stories there comes a shift in the way we perceive and perceived our lives, and our roles within these lives.

b) Transformations: Lizard to Steed

C.S. Lewis, cited in Sandford (1982:19) puts it beautifully when he tries to describe the process that inevitably leads to transformation. He says that "transformation celebrates that the lizard which rode our backs is the very thing which will become the noble steed to carry us to victory in the battle for others." Weedon (1997:33) goes on to explain that "[a] collective discussion of personal problems and conflicts, often previously understood as a result of personal inadequacies and neuroses, leads to a recognition that what has been experienced as personal failings are socially produced conflicts and contradictions shared by many women in similar social positions. This process of discovery can lead to a rewriting of personal experiences in terms which give it social, changeable causes". Weedon's words carry enormous impact in their implication. To a greater or lesser degree all the women in this study have experienced feelings of personal failing. These failings could be as those of disobedient children to their parents, disobedient children of

God, children who feel they have inferior intellectual ability, lack of self-esteem, children who cannot cope with the demands of social expectations, especially in the sphere of communication, and many others. Coming to the realisation that the fault for our lack of a skill or appropriate attitude, or lack of self-acceptance is not solely our own responsibility, but has been “aided and abetted” by our difficult home circumstances, and communities at large, does ease the burden a little. Furthermore, the fact that we have realised just how widespread the phenomenon of alcoholism is in our peers further helps us in shedding the cloak of pariah. In observing the success with which other children from alcoholic homes have dealt with the hand they were given, we are imbued with courage and inspiration. We have realised that to attain a similar level of “wellness” we will have to put in a little more, but knowing others have done it ahead of us does make the hill less steep. And the fact that we do not need to climb the hill alone makes the journey a co-authoring experience.

c) *The path to transformation – explicating the process*

Michael White’s (1990:16) narrative therapy approach, introduces the notion of “re-authoring” or “restorying” of one’s life. Initially one would need to engage in what Bourdieu, cited in White (1991:27) calls an “exoticising of the domestic” or identifying private stories and cultural stories persons live by, that could be problematic for them. White and Epston (1990:16) also refer to this as an externalising conversation, which situate the problem outside of the person experiencing it. In deconstructing or undoing these taken-for-granted bodies of meaning one can arrive at a clearer idea of where these discourses stand in relation to the problems posed. Externalising conversations separate the individual from the problem-saturated story, leaving the person free to explore alternative and preferred knowledges of who they might be; alternative and preferred knowledges into which they might enter their lives. The exploration of landscape of action questions (the events/actions which helped to resolve a difficult situation) and the landscape of identity (what these events suggest to them of their identity) questions assisted in highlighting the strengths of the individual. “Sparkling Moments” or “unique outcomes” (White & Epston 1990:15) are explored in the hopes of thickening the story of hope and transformation.

2.2 IN SUMMARY

In attending to the aims of chapter 1, I chose to pick a path through a post-structuralist, social construction epistemology. Because of the sensitivity involved in working with the wounds of people’s lives, I searched for the approach that would acknowledge the impact that language, context and power played in relationships. It needed to be an approach that privileged local knowledge, whilst creating space for a reinterpretation of the stories constituting people’s lives.

And this approach had to accommodate the voices of women who would offer a strong antidote to the injustices of the world, as well as make an equally strong commitment to healing our broken world. A post-structuralist, social construction approach helped the voices of feminist theologians take flight.

In attempting to bring together the most prominent ideas discussed in this chapter, I'll begin by saying that social construction contends that individuals are born into discourses and they internalise these discourses from childhood. These discourses, mediated in language, shape the identities of individuals, and become part of the stories people create of themselves. Discourses are participated in by individuals, and individuals become the vehicles of discourse. So children of alcoholics are saturated in discourses, many of which are harmful, creating dilemmas in identity well into adulthood. In bringing pastoral therapy to these children, I adopted the narrative therapy approach. Part of this process was to help the participants to re-story their lives, and the premise on which this proposal rests, is that the harmful discourses needed to be laid bare, examined as socially constructed phenomena that were harmful, and alternative, more life-giving discourses were developed.

In chapter 3 I have attempted to set down the unique experiences each participant has engaged in that have been formative of their identities, and which may have bearing on their identities still.

CHAPTER THREE

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

This chapter is consumed in memory, autobiography, brought to the consciousness in edited and unedited film. The still-movie is being attached to sound, and as the film winds, it flashes the salient events in the lived experience of the participants, which may convey an authentic view to the reader of the events which were shaping of each individual's identity. Tillman-Healy (1996:97) cites Butler and Rosenblum as saying that "giving it [the stories] language, it becomes exposed to air. It breathes, it's alive: to tell is to make real. The deepest wound was the hunger to be seen. To be heard. To be understood". Although the film is winding along uncensored in a sense, it is attending to two of the three research aims, namely providing witnessing and acknowledgement through revelation and exposing harmful discourses.

Many of the discourses to be elaborated on in chapter four are not discourses which were named as such within the conversations, yet they are culturally accepted ways of doing things that were unconsciously understood as such by each individual in her context, and they guided each participant in her behaviour during childhood.

In attempting to isolate the guiding ideas and discourses for the discussion in chapter four and make them visible to the reader, I have highlighted these ideas in red.

I have chosen to alternate the experiences of the participants to create contrast for the reader, by alternately using poems and letters, with a diversion in the centre.

3.1 POETRY AS CATHARSIS

The use of the poetry form does not only satisfy the function of serving as contrast to the letters. In formulating the background to this study, and attempting to convey my subjective involvement in the study, I found that I could not convey those memories in neat, linear, well-constructed and sensible ideas. Instead they came to me in chaotic flashes of visual and auditory experiences from the past. In our conversations, I discovered randomness to the experiences related as well. The poetry came to me as a more accurate depiction, and interpretation of the events the participants chose to share with me. In the poetry I could risk the intensity (Michaels 2005:3) that was embedded in each telling and retelling. I could imitate the flow of the mental photography as we scoured the archives of memory. In a way, this poetry read more eloquently than any prose would. The use of the poetry form was not an attempt to elevate its contents to an art in terms of its rhythm, rhyme and metre. It was, instead, a way to reveal each participant's personal "truth".

Additionally, I was working towards the idea of myself being an autoethnographer in the sense that I wanted the readers to “care, feel and desire” (Bochner & Ellis 1996:24). I wanted these letters and poems to “broaden [the readers’] horizons, awakening the capacity to care about people different from us, helping us to know how to converse with them, to feel connected” (Bochner & Ellis 1996:26). Ethnographic writing as used in this chapter is “understood as a choice among numerous alternatives. And all of these alternatives, to some extent, breach the received genre of realist writing that construes the author as a neutral, authoritative, and scientific voice” (Bochner & Ellis 1996:19). One way of doing this is described by Bochner and Ellis (1996:28) as “taking certain expressive liberties associated with the arts” whilst simultaneously feeling “the ethical pull of converting data into experiences readers can use”. The poetry form is just one of the ethnographic alternatives which make it possible to “bridge the philosophical and the evocative, alternating the ‘cool’ formatting frames of philosophical discourse with the ‘hot’ evocative stories of first-person accounts” (Bochner & Ellis 1996:30).

Both the poetry form and the letter form were an attempt to get the reader to put himself/herself in the place of the Other (Bochner & Ellis 1996:22) and to engage him/her in what it feels like to have grown up in the home of the alcoholic. And if these accounts inspire critical reflection on the reader’s own world of experience, striking some chord, the consequent change may be to the good not only for children of alcoholics, but also because the account has inspired caring. Because these two forms (the letter and the poetry) are two of a very limited number of options available for catharsis from the point of view of the participants, I pray that this attempt meets my expectations, ambitious though it may be.

3.2 LETTERS AS LINKS

In a way I consider myself an amanuensis, someone Epston (1994:32) sketches as a “scribe”, who faithfully notes down and documents the stories for posterity. In etching so much of the story of each participant in the letters, I hoped to bring to light the possible extent of the damage sustained by living in a home affected by alcohol. These stories reveal the effects of living in alcoholic homes (homes where functioning is organised around the alcoholic and the abuse of alcohol) and partially satisfy one of my aims formulated for this study. “Seeing is believing” may be clichéd, yet in this instance I feel the idiom is justified in drawing the situation as the participant intended and experienced. I regard this to be an act of witnessing and acknowledgement too. Weingarten (2003:22) calls on us to practice “intentional compassionate witnessing”, where we can in some small way “assist others” and fight the emotions of “helplessness”, which I too experience as I hear these stories.

The recording of the stories in letter form performed multi-functions. Initially, their stories were intended to generate and capture particular thoughts and understandings which help a participant to make sense of and make meaning in her life (White 1990:36; Epston 1994:32). These letters also allowed for the “accumulation of recorded wisdom” (White 1990:34), and a “context for the emergence of new discoveries and possibilities” (White 1990:35).

In my efforts to build (or scaffold) a secure context in which the participants felt sufficiently confident to breach previously-set boundaries for themselves, in their explorations of their pasts, I engaged in landscape of identity and action questions. The aim of these questions was to strengthen each participant's belief in herself, and expose, or lift out the character traits, or behaviours, that spoke to them of a self they may heretofore overlooked, or been unaware of, a self who was capable, and empowered, and had agency despite tangible setbacks. Initially these questions were broached in the summary letters after each session, but eventually these questions and the conversations that flowed out of these questions became the fare of our get-togethers. I feel that in many ways the scaffolding was the principal reason we could enter the world of alternative stories. Please refer to section 2.1.5 for further reference to landscape of action and identity questions.

Furthermore, the letter writing opened up the option of asking privately about the unsaid (hanging mute and heavy in the group meetings). In a way, I sought permission through the letter-writing, to meander through the maze of memories, the layer upon layer of hurt, without insensitively prising the wound open in premature exploration in group context. Through response to the letters, the participants either opened up new paths through the maze, or shut down particular avenues of exploration. Either response I found to be revealing. Things past – over-and-done with, would not have elicited a reticence to discussion. It is precisely because the particular path of exploration exerts an influence still, that discussion was stymied.

Often in our conversations we were limited, by time and the volume of information coming through, to only asking and dealing with the most immediate curiosities within our conversations. The letters became a way of finding our way back to pertinent issues we had not yet addressed in that particular session. At times we did examine the content of the letters and clarify, or elaborate on ideas, but other times we became too immersed in the process a specific speaker was engaged in.

The letters became a way of acknowledging each speaker's hard-earned local knowledges, wisdoms and her strengths. They were intended to be affirming, a reminder to the participant of

how far she had come in the process of healing, and the tools she had so painstakingly honed to achieve this movement.

How well I have succeeded in my intent with these letters and poems only the reader will tell. What follows is an alternate rendering of the stories of the participants in poetry and letter form.

Ina – the athlete for God

I AM!

Father's been an alcoholic since - forever
Middle child of five, mother chose my brothers, father chose my sister
And what about me? Who cares?
"It's 'Sagarius Katerina' or we'll pray for her death!"
Defended mother, despite her indifference
Absorbed her pain, father could be hard
I'll stay at home, "save you from him" I said
I was afraid he'd hurt her
Father was a good, soft, kind man (when sober)
Drank till he crawled, or lay, and swore at us, and swore and swore.

Now all off to church, It's Sunday again,
No-one would guess or believe
With God I could speak, when loneliness came.
Attention was scant, two things I discovered
Performance drew eyes, illness could be faked.
Gave it all – 200%, I craved the acknowledgement
"Girls don't go and study – they marry!" dad said

Dad's blown it again, stopped drink for 3 days
I daren't relax, he'll be at it again
Mom's bowed under pressure, now she's drinking too
Couldn't possibly leave him, I blame her I do!
Only later I realised, 5 kids are a burden
Dad's promises, lies, I believe – hope dies
Each time it was harder to work through, accept
House must be spotless, polish on your knees, Less than 100%,
Hidings in threes.

My life, this is normal, what else would I know
No friends came to visit, and to none did I go
Looking back now, I think it was a never-ending hell,
Mother made debt, dad paid her in beatings
The dead of the night promised family shootings
Hide in the mealies, the fig tree as well
Mom crawled to the neighbours, policemen to tell
But when dad caught me, he was beating a shell.

Fear all the time, especially at night, mother would lock us in with her,

To combat the fright, Quick, check the window, is dad at the gate?

Run for your lives, Still haunts me of late

Effects on my identity? Destroyed self-esteem

Had to achieve, acceptance was my dream

I seem to be successful, my achievement masks my soul

Hiding my true self is the ultimate goal.

I'm not so sweet, I'm not so good

I cannot be that, my identity lies in what "they" made of me

My coping mechanism was my performance – it eventually tripped me up

Depression led to breakdown, suicide tendencies, exhaustion

Felt like a corpse – just wanted to lie down, down, down

Couldn't spend an hour in mom's presence, forgiveness is hard

Bitterness flowing, I had no childhood,

Brother shot himself

But now I know healing, process still hard

Good people on my path, my husband, friends and in-laws

I've stared pain in the eye over and over

I've turned to forgiveness – of parents, myself and God

In reflecting on why I had placed Ina's story first, I realised that subconsciously I had positioned the stories into hierarchies of whose life was "most together" at the time of conversations. Because Ina had been so willing to share her experience with us – and so openly and with little reservation, and because she had reached for success despite her setbacks and achieved it, she came across as much further ahead in the process than the rest of us. Also, she had been able to share some definite steps in the healing process (that had worked for her) with the rest of the group, and the group got the sense that she knew what she was talking about, myself included. I've provided more about this in my reflections in chapter 6.

Nanette's story carries echoes of my own. Thus I had this urgency to attend to the witnessing of her story, because in dealing with hers, I found myself drawn into reflection on my own story continually. In talking to Nanette, it was like finding a soundboard for my soul.

Letter to Nanette dated 15 August 2004

Dear Nanette

I am grateful, and touched, that you were able to bring yourself to participate in this study. My fervent wish is that our sharing on this journey will be mutually beneficial and illuminating. I wrote this letter hoping that I could capture the essence of our conversations, and that possibly we could think about the content and the implications of that content, and that you could take

something enriching from this. Ironically, I found I was the one taking inspiration and valuable thoughts from our conversations.

You began by telling the group that what we were busy with was a good thing. You also said "God's word counsels and heals you. *Everyone is receiving healing because we are talking about all the topics that scars one.*" I got the distinct impression that you felt God was by your side, and that you were drawing courage from him in speaking of these things. Was your relationship with him sustaining you at this time, and did it make the telling easier?

While exploring the effects that coming from an alcoholic home had on present day functioning, you said something interesting at our get-together and it tickled me a little. You said that one of the effects that alcohol and its influence had on your life (and still has on your life) is *that it made you controlling - a ruler and a regulator.* It was something you said you still struggled with. But then, you also commented that although you were given the opportunity to be a facilitator at Elijah House, you chose not to. Did I hear you actually pass up an opportunity to rule and regulate? Could it possibly be that you were taking a stand against "ruling and regulation" and letting it understand that you were loosening yourself from its influence?

I wondered whether "ruling and regulating" had been trying to affect your personal life, with your husband and children? Did IT succeed? If not, how did you manage to stand against its influence in your home? Was it something you chose to do differently?

Nanette, I was so touched, and yes, even awed by your courage and selflessness when you related the story of how *you cared for and nurtured your brothers and sisters when your father became abusive. You protected them, kept the house functioning, and even cooked and cleaned, while standing in for your mother. On top of that you kept your mother safely out of harm's way (under the bed) and worried about her food and welfare.* How was it that you managed to do all that, and still stay standing? What did you do, or what helped you, to do this? What does it say of an individual's strengths and values that she does this? Possibly that you have courage, loyalty and wisdom? As a first-hand survivor of such behaviour, what advice or hints could you give others, so that they also don't give up, as you obviously didn't? Do you think your gran knew how tough it was to juggle all the balls you were juggling, without letting one drop? Do you think she

knew what a support she was in these times? If she could speak to her "blue-eyed girl" now, what is it she would have wanted to say to the young/small Nanette, and what would she say to you now? Would she be proud? She must surely have loved you very much to take you to her plot during holidays while refusing your parents access.

You added later that you also took on the great task of looking after your mom's "sielsgesondheid", as you put it, the "health of her soul". Do you, after all these years, think it was fair to give that responsibility to a daughter? Your response was "I don't feel like mothering - no psychological or physical nappies for me please - I don't have the patience - even with the children at school". I am wondering if this emotional fatigue and impatience is inevitable - given the demands placed upon a little girl? In speaking more about this later, you explained that you did not enjoy your children and the effort of nurturing and fussing over them. You'd had enough the first time around. I couldn't help wondering at how many things we were not able to enjoy anymore as we got older as a result of the responsibility we took on as children.

Nanette, you describe yourself as having been your mother's *confidante*. You said you felt burdened and guilty that she was confiding personal things, like information about your siblings too. You said that at Elijah House they refer to this friendship between you and your mother as one where you become her *substitute mate*. Considering that she told you that you were *not to have friends of your own* as you and she were friends, do you think this affected your *socialisation* later on in life. I'm thinking here of when you said that "chit chat" is "boring", that "I don't put my feet out of the house. My world is still so small and enclosed - boring, boring. I only speak with my kind." You added that your sister was the "Sheila" "and she had life, not me." Later you added that you felt *emotionally dead*. I was wondering whether "dead" was the same as "denial" or refusing to feel, because when one feels one hurts? Did your pride and passion for your house and garden help to lift the deadness a bit?

I was curious about the influence your father had on your life, but also that of your mother and sister. You talked of how you, *your siblings and your mother were beaten* severely, often with electrical cord, and that it made you "hardish". *Tying you and your siblings up together and having you beat each other if you fought* - "That's what made me who I am." You said you *didn't cry*, and that you needed to still work on that. I am left wondering at where all the hurt goes if

it is not released through tears. What could be the effect of bottling it up all the time? "Once I cried for three days without end, and then never again". You explained to me that if you are captive of your experiences and circumstances it snowballs, like when you almost shot your father. But "God has come to set his captives free, free from the pain and the hurt, and fear." Is religion the interface between being held captive in your past, and being free, finally of its influence? In this I find a spark of hope to hold onto. Do you carry this promise from God like a candle of hope for yourself too?

"My father was a hard man - a policeman." "My husband is very strict, so am I. Now my sons rebel against me." Is the fact that you and your husband are very strict, as a result of this hardness? You mention that you could never play with your kids or spend time with them. Just work, work, work. "How does one play and while away time with them? Only now I know." I am left wondering how one is able to make up for the lost time - and even if one can. Are there other ways to play besides the conventional that could speak to the relationship between you and your daughter? You have also spoken of how you allow your daughter all the friends she desires, and that you will never make a confidante of her, and lay that burden upon her. Could this be your way of granting her "play" and friends - a thing you had never known? This speaks to me of a commitment from your side to resist the destructive cycles that may perpetuate themselves if one is not wary. "You cannot attach them to you as they are not yours", you said. So much wisdom and insight that we can learn from. Nanette, I was wondering. This caring for your daughter, could this be the hardness making way for healing and softness?

"This thing during the apartheid years when they protected all the men so, caused them to just go from bad to worse. My father was in the police force, and he would go to work drunk, and work all day, and return home, miles away, hardly able to crawl out of the car. He stole game and they still protected him. If you keep covering for them they will obviously not improve."

Nanette, in reading your words, I couldn't help but wonder at the power men wield in being able to change the course of an individual's life. Do you think a different outcome could've been reached had your father's workmates and superiors dealt with the issue differently, and had they taken up the challenge of finding him some help instead of encouraging and supporting him in his self-destructiveness. Would your family have had fewer "secrets" to guard over and feel

ashamed about if the men had considered the effect of their decisions on the lives of the families involved? "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission would've been welcome at this point in my father's life." These words sound to me as though you are on the side of *justice*, that you would prefer that people be taken on and held accountable for their actions.

Inevitably, the conversation did hover over your father, and his effect on your life. "*Just dead*," you answered. "Before seven years ago he had always filled me with anger and disgust, the drunk, naked man lying on the lawn again. But one doesn't die from *shame*. *I used to blame him*, the word I use is judge, but now I know *if you judge you will be judged*. *I used to judge my mother and father all the time*. Now, I realise alcoholics need healing. They are just part of the cycle. Their fathers and their fathers' fathers and so on. *They cannot help the way they are*. *Tree has been bent at a young age*." You mentioned that the bible teaches that you must accept and forgive. That you are following the Bible to the letter. God makes it possible. I understood you to say that *alcoholics do not need to understand, apologise, take accountability, or responsibility*. I had to check this later, but you confirmed it again. You said you were further along the path in the process of healing than we were, but we would discover that was the only way to heal.

I was humbled at your courage and compassion in thinking about this *man that has so scarred* you, yet you have the strength of spirit, to not wish him any evil. Instead, you *choose to believe in other reasons for his neglect*, violence and degradation of his family, as you described. This sounds like a kind of *forgiveness*, to me. I feel that I could take a few pages from your book on compassion. I wish, also, that my heart would listen to the wisdom of your teaching the way my head understands it. However, I was wondering at what point individuals have *choices* about what they do or choose not to do, and the extent to which people should help *alcoholics take responsibility* for the hurts they cause. If the cycle is never intercepted, can it ever be broken? I remember asking you if your father would've listened or responded in the way you would've wanted him to, and the answer was "No!".

In a way, I have also reached that place where I know that there is no emotional reward in expecting parents to "own up" or acknowledge and admit" what they did. They are not capable of admitting it to themselves, let alone their children. They are usually so consumed in their own

cycle of destruction they do not care to listen, often not registering the damage, often not sober enough to be accessible in any case. The dilemma? What do we then do with all the unresolved feelings? How does the bitterness abate? When comes the closure? Is your closure acceptance through God and Elijah House?

In our conversations we got to the issue of nurturing, when talking about the way fathers ought to be. You said that children need to be brought up with nurturing and that basically that component is only possible from the father. " Why?" I asked. "Because God is male and our father." I was wondering if it was not possible for the mother to fulfil that role in the absence of a suitably equipped father? What are the implications for one then, if no such father exists? Should one now lose all hope of nurture? You go on to say that "women must just submit, they don't even need to love their husbands, as long as they submit." Is there perhaps not a parallel to be drawn in this way of seeing things and what you described your mother as doing? You mentioned that your mother was also submissive. Was she happy that way? Was it enough for her to be only submissive? You talked of a childhood in which you felt this element (nurturing) was missing but you did not at the time have the language to describe it in these words. Do you find some of this element in your husband now? You said that lack of nurturing makes you cripple in all areas of your life or emotionally dead. How would one/you be able to resist this kind of effect?

I also heard you saying that you have forgiven your father and mother for their wrongs. A question asked by the group was HOW you do that. Do you need a special "toolkit" in which you carry around these wisdoms and solutions, or do you simply leave it all to God? Is he perhaps the biggest "tool" in your kit?

You also have very strong feelings about honouring your father and your mother, and the fate that befalls those who do not. You say it is now going well with your sister, who you think did honour them, and by implication it is going less well with you. Do you think your sister's prosperity is really about honouring your parents all those years ago? I was wondering if it could not possibly have been that she worked very hard, was lucky with her business concept, and so gained success? What is "honouring" - to your mind? How does "honouring look to you?" Could the fact that you protected your mother and siblings from your father, and befriended her, not

also be a way of honouring her? Would your benevolent and forgiving God be the same God you suspect of now letting things go less well?

*A comment I felt that was quite relevant to all the conversations we had was that of **SECRECY**. No-one was allowed to know. I am still left wondering what could have happened had others been allowed to know. Who or what were we hiding and protecting by keeping quiet, and pretending? The group expressed that fear of the unpredictability of the drunk, the possible humiliation and shame, should our lives be exposed, put under the spotlight. I'm still wondering today whether we are influenced by this, in some or other way.*

I speak for myself when I say that I still try to keep a low profile, I avoid the spotlight/limelight, and this can become uncomfortable in a leadership position. I know that my social interaction is still influenced today, by the way I grew up. I don't make friends with ease, and I only feel a "fit" in terms of personality, with less than a handful of people. Is this something you may find familiar too? Is this what you meant by "I talk with my kind." Could this be where comfort, acceptance and acknowledgement lies - because not many people will understand the ways we are - so... different?

Would it be O.K. to talk a little more around these issues at our next meeting? The group has questions, questions, questions.

With love Dawn

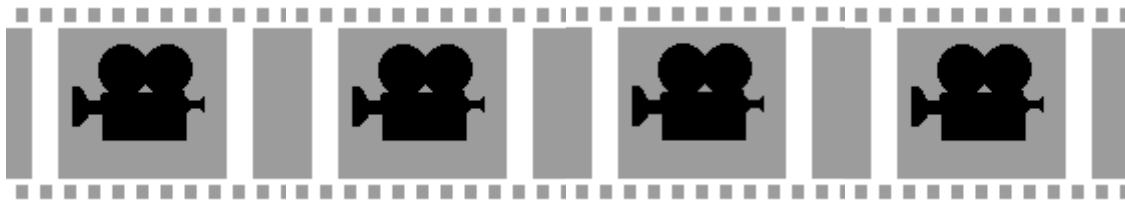
Working through Nanette's story made the past very real for a while. I found myself pondering not only my own story and Nanette's story, but I kept thinking about how long the whole process of coming to terms with and healing, is taking.

A picture popped into my head of all the participants represented on a timeline. While internally contemplating each participant's position on the timeline (in years from 1-80) and their level of healing a direct correlation to their age, I saw Ina at 60, Nanette at 50, Trudie at 50, Dawn at 35, Marietjie at 33, and Karin at 21. My path from 35 to 60 looked unending. I was disheartened. It became clear to me that there was no shortcut to "wellness" – whatever each participant considered that to be.

And Karin, being the youngest, had a far way to go....

In reflecting on the last two paragraphs I had written down, I realised that “plotting wellness on a timeline” was not an ethical way of working with participants, and they might not agree with these thoughts. However, this way of thinking had not been born out of a desire to “measure” *their* wellness at all, but I think, once again, I was contemplating the extent to which *I* was “measuring up”. Was I slower than everyone else in moving on? Not having a soundboard, or example from an alcoholic home to assess my own progress against, I was placing myself within the complicated matrix the participants made up. Ethical or not, children of alcoholics do compare themselves to others continually, in an effort to work out whether healing is taking place. Both Ina and Nanette repeatedly commented on the fact that they could see where the rest of the participants were in the healing process. And they also added that it was a lifelong process, hence, my ramblings on the process. And no-one took offence at their observations. Rather, I got the feeling that there was assent in their silences.

Flashbacks from the past - Karin's story



Take 1 - Action

*When my mom eventually came to see how I was doing after my school phoned to say something was wrong, she walked in, and I weighed 45 kg! My dog was starving too. I was sick, couldn't remember much of anything, probably too little food. Even forgot my mom had called before to see how I was. **I felt my father didn't love me. I hated him.** He didn't want me there or care if I was there or not. Now I don't care if he's there or not. Only much later I realised he had also not been eating. He wasn't even thinking of food.*

Take 2 - Action

My sister and I got home one afternoon and saw a truck loading all our bedroom furniture and clothes onto it. When we tried to stop the process he told us to "..."-off. If we wanted it we needed to pay him the R400 he was getting for all this to buy drink. It had been OURS. He didn't even ask.

Take 3 - Action

"The king" - that's what his parents and siblings helped him believe about himself when he was a child. He was the 3rd boy in the family, carrier of the family name. The king wore his mask for many years. He got my mom to drink with him. When I was small and sat on his

knee, he blamed all his sorrows on my mom. "She was the cause of all our home's ills. She made him what he was." He said the ugliest, most unforgettable things. Fought all the time. He turned us against her. Why did I believe it? He was the master of flim-flam. He was good, and manipulative. I began to see through him. When he realised he'd lost his ally, he turned against me too. Chased me out of the house.

My friends only saw the **masked man** at first, rejecting me. I was becoming thoroughly unpleasant, taking my frustrations out on them. **I looked for trouble** inside and outside the home. I became really **rebellious**, needed to hurt others as **I was hurting**. **I was aggressive**. **I was a zombie, scared of people, shy, no-one could hear me when I spoke**. **I was the quiet one**. **I was like him, an introvert**. **I hated looking at the truth in other people, what they were, clever, happy and energetic**. **I was not!** **Felt I was unlikeable - felt they also saw me in my father - "common white trash"**. **It was humiliating and embarrassing**.

Take 4 - Action

I've gone through denial, fury, depression. **At 16 I tried to commit suicide**. **That was the quick way - later I tried alcohol and drugs to forget**. **I wanted to forget him!** **The negative influence in my life**. **Drugs and alcohol took away my isolation, longing for a father, my loneliness**. **It made everything look rosier**. **I could speak to people, at least**. **He almost destroyed my relationship with my mom**. **He enjoys hurting, and hurting and hurting us**. **He enjoys seeing things broken**. **Us too**. **I think he was hurting because his siblings hated him, so he had to hurt others**.

Take 5 - Action

And now? To love and forgive - to hate and forget? **I am incapable of either of the two**. **I wouldn't know how**. **If I asked him why, he'd say, because he enjoyed it, and he'd ask, didn't we?** **He'd smile his cruel smile**. **But he is being punished for his deeds now**. **It's come back 10 times over**. **He's living in a shack**.

I keep comparing my boyfriend and my father - looking for the danger signs.

To me, I'm physically ugly, stay covered - turn out the lights! **I'm not on the same level as other people**.

Final take - take 6: Action

I have chosen to work behind a counter with people on purpose: I will learn to communicate again. **I will not simply "take" things like a zombie, as I did in the past, till the bottle spills over**. **To move forward I will need to exclude negative influences, like my father**. **And I know I can't forget, so I'll need to work through the things that have happened to me, like Marietjie and Nanette says**. **I won't be blaming myself for the way my father is, I know differently now**.

And I can look at my art works and know that I made them well. **Even though my father will criticize and try to break me with words, the words have lost their power**.

Still, I cannot quell the anxiety when I hear a cold drink or beer tin being opened in just "such" a way, the way the gate or front door is opened or closed with a certain mannerism, doors being carelessly slammed. Then I'm in there again.

The End

Karin's story wanted to move almost naturally into the one of her mother, Trudie, maybe because when I think of the one, I cannot help but be aware of how inextricably bound up they are in each other's stories.

A poem of thankfulness - Trudie

I think I am the one in our group least affected by my father's drinking

Why? Despite his weaknesses he had many **redeeming qualities** too

Looking back it was the choice of spectacles I saw him through:

The rose tinted for the good in him, the near-sighted ones for the bad in him - keeping it at a distance

My dad did everything to the best of his ability:

Best coach, best umpire, always earned respect

Dad loved me to distraction, mother resented me for this, was jealous

Then I became pregnant, mom and I kept it a **secret**

This shame would drive him to drink even harder.

Adoption - dad and siblings never even guessed, mom kept me away from them all

She robbed me of a father (and a daughter)

Later dad accepted a pregnant schoolgirl back into the school, and she obtained distinctions! ?????

He never was a mean drunk, but he became very embarrassing to the family

I did begin to hate him, sometimes even wish him dead

I lost my respect for him because of his feet of clay,

never spoke of it - not even in the family

He would arrive at school hardly sober and steadily drink throughout the day

But they protected him, never sending him home

Never a disciplinary, never some help

Member of the free masons - this helped him along

Added to the bad luck in our family

And then my sister and I married men like my father – alcoholics

And they could be mean drunks!

Why did I marry him? Aren't men all the same?

In the end this is what we searched for

After years of verbal abuse, a divorce and a new partner

No, they're not! But I tell Steve, "Don't treat me like a wife!"

I've been struggling with these things for many years

Depression for 20 years

Why would people like me?

My mom hated me, Jurie insulted me, broke me apart

Insulted my abilities as wife, mother, teacher, human being

My self-esteem was low

BUT

My depression began to lift when I began to speak about my daughter

Opened the wound, invited her into our lives

Although I feel guilt when I look at all that's happened to Karin (my other daughter)

we are working towards mending our relationship – giving hugs

And it's easier for me now, with my father dead.

Karin's father is still alive, it's not as easy to forgive and forget, then.

And why have I placed Marietjie's letter at the end? Perhaps because she is close to me (my sister-in-law) and I feel sad, helpless, and unable to clear the mist for her. These studies have taught me to be respectful to another's pain, to refrain from advice, because "the voice of the Other truly is not one's own" (Bochner & Ellis 1996:35). I feel bound up by that, and more. I find myself placing distance between us, she even more so! What we feel, in visits, will never find a voice. "Pretend I never said it – then I'll pretend that you don't know". This is a legacy of the child from the alcoholic home.

Letter to Marietjie dated 28 March 2005

(summary of all letters received and sent)

Dear Marietjie

We have probed and prodded and scratched and irritated the soul for a few months now, yours, mine and the other members of the group. How do I do justice to your experiences, which parts do I include or omit? How do I objectively gauge what - being told - would benefit not only the study, but also you, the participant, most? Maybe I need to begin where you talk of your father who, having lost his farm, turned to drink, with your mother joining him three years later. He was and still is a man who exerts great influence over the lives of your family.

*You spoke of how you understood Nanette's feelings when she said she **refused to be in a position where a man would have to care for her financially**, as it was your stance too. "My father always said a woman should not drive, and till today my mother and sister (now 31) cannot drive." Yet, the first thing you did when you were eligible was to get your licence and purchase a car. You describe it as "breaking the chains" he had created. It sounds to me like a **form of resistance** against your father who wanted "to **keep his women dependent and unable to escape**". This sounds so much like courageous and independent thinking. Other incidents you mentioned, where your mom had to slavishly serve him hand and foot, polish his shoes and brush his teeth, were designed **to keep her "obedient"**. **If she did him 'favours' and did them nicely, he'd promise to be more 'tolerant' of her**. Yet you resisted this image of how women should be too.*

*When Nanette commented that **the Bible** teaches that women should accept the situation - in this context the domination, but also the beatings and verbal abuse, you spoke of a God who wants us to preserve our temple, and not allow it to be desecrated and defiled. You chose to hear the God that created us from a rib bone from Adam's side, and that this meant for you that women should stand next to men and not be crushed underfoot. I understood this to mean **you stand for equality in power within the home and in relationships**.*

*You described a multitude of incidents depicting your father wielding his power to strike **fear** into you and your siblings. **Humiliation at imagined weaknesses, beatings with fists, and even***

unmentionable incidents. You spoke of your mom's fears when she works later that usual as it usually drives your father into a rage, where he emotionally blackmails your mom into subservience and terror, and you mentioned that he tried to shoot your brother's wife. She was not the one he had chosen for your brother.

This power your father has over your mother, and to a lesser extent over the children has led to great heartache and confusion - why does she allow it? How does he get away with it? You agreed with Nanette and Trudie that men of your father's generation and older were brought up to believe this was the way things worked. Women were subservient, men were to be obeyed. Was it as simple as all that? Could family members be alienated from each other and families be torn asunder because "that's the way things worked"? An interesting pattern emerged in that your brother treated both his wives in a similar manner. Your sister married a man like your father. I was curious about the legacy this violence and domination leaves the children. Is it one they can escape from, or want to escape from? You are witness to the fact that one does have a choice, and that you kept seeing different ways of doing and believing things. You have kept the flame of hope for a better future alive all those years. But you've also described that this comes at a price.

In the way that you have dealt with this autocratic behaviour as it has followed you even on your career path, I have had much reason to admire your courage. You encountered this same attitude of having to exchange "favours" for your career advancement in the SAPS but you chose to make a stand - you laid a sexual harassment case against your superior. You said, " they still protect the men, even the women, as they may stand to gain from the support". Although this process of challenging these men must be very hard for you, you have decided to go ahead with it. "Even if he is not found guilty, I think I have made my point. Men will not mess with me." I wonder if this is not one way of resisting the legacy of violence, dominance and destruction carried by your father. And you express such pride in the position you have worked yourself into in your profession. You have achieved beyond the expectation of not only your family, but also your in-laws. Yet you say you knew you had it in you, you always aimed to better yourself, so you don't end up in the same powerless position your mother found herself in. And now, that same empowering career has proved disillusioning too.

*In talking about the effects living in your home as a child may still have on you, you said **you are "harder, a bitch with men. If I do this, I know I cannot become my mom, I think I'm protecting myself. I'm scared to be so submissive. In the end the woman in the relationship gets destroyed. I've a stronger self-esteem now. But...I have almost been divorced three times, because of things in my husband, that I linked to my childhood years. I'll never be second-best in anybody's life! My father derived great enjoyment from seeing my mom pathetically beg at his every threat to leave. But I think I'll try a 'softer' way of solving my problems now, than my parents do. I've learnt, with time, that not everything has to be responded to in shades of RED."** You seem to have discovered alternative ways of problem solving, to those of your parents, and these are actually strengthening your relationship with your husband. Furthermore, to preserve your marriage, you chose to move town, to avoid destructive interfering. "And it's worked - our marriage is stronger now."*

*"And yes, **intimacy is a problem. I feel a hatred in my soul for men who use women only to get what they want, but I realise it's not fair toward my husband, I just find it hard to apologise, my stubbornness is also a way of protecting myself."***

*Marietjie, you explained how your **husband doesn't see the use for talking about things that are in the past, and that this can pose difficulties in your relationship, your healing, "How can I tell him why I fear roads with curves, because of the memories and fears associated with that road? But I'm learning to live with roads with curves 'cause it was not their fault, but the alcohol's fault"**.*

In hearing this I couldn't help but think back on my own terror as a passenger/driver with my father. The times I steered home at whatever speed over my father's shoulder, shouting panicked instructions to an anaesthetised mind. Other times stalling in the middle of the intersections, waiting for the impact, moving forward in slow motion...eventually the impact did come. Back-seat driving is still a self-preserving mechanism even now.

*Our conversation around **blame, forgiveness, anger and judgement** was one which evoked many ambivalent feelings. You commented that you'd been struggling for a long time with the **Bible, and how it expects us to honour our father and our mother. The part which says 'the sins of the***

fathers will be visited on the children' is also extremely problematic for you. The contempt, hatred and anger most of us feel or felt for our parents, is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Bible. They, in turn, lead us back to guilt for these disrespectful feelings and ideas. Yet, why do these parents refuse to see what they have done and are still doing to the family? Brothers have died amidst unresolved ill feeling - time has slipped through fingers. Your children have been robbed of grandparents, good role models, you have been robbed of siblings and supportive relationships. It saddened me when I reflected not only on your life but also mine, and I began to take stock of all the things I too mourned for, all the losses both of us had suffered, losses irretrievable.

Another disturbing issue for you was that you felt you had to open up the wound to drain and clean it, but how does one speak to the autocrat whose word is law, and who silences all? How do you reason with one who is almost always drunk? You Don't! When your one brother tried, violence ensued. They don't want to hear that the reason your other brother has distanced himself and cut all ties is because of their drinking. And now he's dead, and the confusion deepens.

Yet, in the final analysis you still felt that those who judge will be judged. In praying "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us" we might not understand the implications. If we don't forgive others, like our parents, how can we expect God to forgive us our wicked thoughts and wishes, our sins? How can we try to hold others accountable then, if we seek forgiveness too? You wondered if we had the right to ask our parents to take responsibility for what they had done. It's a catch 22 situation. Children of alcoholics are doomed if they rebel and question and demand, and yet, silence has been an obstacle to healing.

You speak with such compassion of your parents and your fears for them, their retirement prospects and the like, as they made no preparations for retirement themselves. Yet you acknowledge that you will not care for them as it will destroy your marriage. In this, I have to think about the legacy that the alcoholic parents once again pass onto their children. This emotional tug-of-war the child plays, with his/her feelings of guilt, sense of responsibility towards the aged, respect in the face of many destructive issues, confusion and questions. More

questions than answers. But it does sound as though you have made the almost *impossible choice* to make - you chose your family over your mom and dad.

For me the contents of this letter have been a very thought-provoking experience. Your compassion and your determination, not to forget, your resistance to destructive male domination, has made me wonder at all the challenges women have to armour themselves against, in the "normal" stream of life, not to speak of the challenges faced by children of alcoholics!

Warm regards

Dawn

On briefly skimming over the letters and poems, I was struck by some undercurrents of similarity, discussed in the next section.

3.3 WE WEAR THE MASK

The following poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar is a reflection of the thoughts and emotions of the participants in this study. The sentiments shared in the poem are to be found in traces throughout the lives of children from alcoholic families. It reflects much of their present-day realities. It sums up much of their attitude to the world.

We Wear the Mask

*WE wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.*

*Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.*

*We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile*

*Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
We wear the mask!*

Chapter 3 is an anthology made up of the stories and poems the participants felt comfortable in sharing within our group discussions. It was not an attempt at analysis or interpretation in any way. I simply wanted to sketch for the reader the events formative of every participant as she sees it. I wanted to acknowledge each story in writing as it was told, because in the circulation of these letters to each member of the group, the story would have been witnessed six times at least, and verbally reinterpreted in conversations regarding the content, afterwards. More detail in this regard follows in the reflecting chapters.

Chapter 4 attempts to bring together the discourses and ideas touched upon in the conversations, which affect the performance of each participant as she shifts through the terrain where she needs to prove her mettle.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SCOREBOARD OR THE RACE EXPERIENCE?

The challenge of presenting the findings of the research is upon me. Which ideas may I use to guide me in the narrative discourse analysis? Would I be considered presumptuous in likening the participants' experiences to a race, and presenting my findings within the spirit of winners or losers? Although tempting, I need to wonder about the usefulness of the concepts of winners or losers. Would such an approach not once again lead to what postmodernists caution against: polarisation of a particular group? Perhaps my focus should be on how the race was run? Would the unpicking of the web not perhaps reveal that the scoreboard is also part and parcel of the complexity of the race?

Janesick (1994:215) suggests that I "stay close to the data" (the data being the content of the stories offered), zooming in on the athletes and their experiences. Being mindful of this I'll use the inductive approach (Mouton 1996), finding categories, themes and patterns (see in this regard also Oliver 2004:142-143) within the data – as a coach would study the rhythm, stride, speed and technique of an athlete. Just as the coach would not presume to impose presumptions of ability and weakness upon an athlete before a thorough and timeous analysis, I have also not selected categories and themes prior to data collection. Instead, I have immersed myself in the setting over time, trying to capture and interpret the meaning in individual's lives, seeping through not only the written data, but also that which was unspoken.

Capturing and tracing the patterns of a lifetime of hurts and deceits is not possible in a study of such limited scope. However, together we have picked a few common discourses operating within alcoholic families, amongst the tight web of interwoven influences, which have helped to maintain the position of the participant as a "docile body" (Foucault cited in McNay 1992:83), within the alcoholic home.

4.1 DISCOURSES THAT DAMAGE

To be warm and secure, I need to cover my nakedness and vulnerability with a blanket of meaning that gives coherence and a mythic sense to my life. But there is always that deep and powerful, growling presence of the forces from the depths of my life that have shaped and continue to shape who I am. They lay bare my nakedness. The covering is so thin, and it keeps getting yanked away just when I need it. I am left exposed and vulnerable.

(Gerkin 1984:52)

The following section covers a few of the most pertinent discourses embedded in the lives of children from alcoholic homes which continue to damage them, into adulthood. They are: Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel; denial; parental inversion and substitute mate and patriarchy.

4.1.1 Deafening silence – don't talk, don't trust, don't feel

4.1.1.1 Speak no "evil"

Children of alcoholics essentially survive - alone. They grow up isolated, separated and made lonely by the disease, enduring in silence. All the participants have experienced abandonment, and aloneness, although their fathers or mothers may have been in the next room. Kershaw-Bellamare and Mosak (1993:108) refers to the alcoholic family adopting an 'avoidance style' which dominates all feelings and behaviour within the family system. Kershaw-Bellamare and Mosak (1993:108) cite Witfield (1987) and Black (1981) in saying that "this 'shame-based family' colludes in a 'conspiracy of silence' to diminish extra-familial connections", successfully isolating the family from the intrusive gaze of curious community members. Despite "emotional distance, the co-dependent spouse becomes more dependent, resulting in ACOA (adult children of alcoholics) becoming virtually abandoned, and thus deprived of consistent support from either parent and also validation from neutral sources. The resultant deleterious impact on their self-esteem is...the cruellest inheritance of the alcoholic legacy" (Kershaw-Bellamare & Mosak 1993:109).

Furthermore, secrecy is described as the protective measure resorted to, to "maintain the family's integrity" (Jahn 1995:72), and to uphold the image the family wants to present to the world, that there is no alcohol problem. Silence helps to preserve the "façade of normality about the family, by denying or ignoring questionable behaviours, thoughts and feelings" (Jahn 1995:72).

Our dialogical partners were not other people, or even our family members. Instead we conducted monologues, conversations "to me, from me". The family didn't speak much about anything, and never about the alcohol in the house, denying its very existence, thus also a denial of its influence upon individuals. No-one would've believed us had we dared to breathe a word to anyone. In various guises we were told, "*Nothing has happened here, you didn't see a thing, and don't you dare say a word!*" So...I saw it, but I didn't. It must be so if dad says it's so, why would he lie? I must be crazy, I'm the one with the problem.... So why did I remain silent? I obviously could not tell anyone about something that didn't happen.

Personal safety was revealed as another reason for maintaining the silence. Maguire (2001:64) cites De vault and Ingram as saying that "there can be consequences for speaking up. These

include figuratively killing one's career or love relationships, and literally getting killed". Marietjie commented that *"not speaking was a way of not getting caught up in the terrible violence. Also, how could a little girl protect herself against the force of an enraged father? Better to pick up the pieces afterwards, for now not add to the chaos"*. Silence is then a survival strategy. And now, when the walls are starting to come down enough for her to let out some of the hurt and reasons for her previously odd behaviour, her spouse insists on her silence: "Why do you need to talk about things you've coped well with for so many years? It's all in the past." Is this an impediment to her ultimate healing, that the provider of love and nurturance has once again put limits on what she might or might not need to say? Another form of silencing?

Shame of the events occurring in the house also had, and might still have, a repressive effect on the possibilities for speaking out. Nanette said that this was such a secret at the time that "no-one was allowed to know". Hadley, Holloway and Mallinckrodt (1993:354) explain that adult children of alcoholics report a sense of shame that their families were so far removed from societal ideals. In addition, they often internalised shame as a "basic fault" in their sense of self throughout childhood. Kurtz, (cited by Woititz 1993:29) describes shame as "a feeling of inadequacy, sense of worthlessness, 'no good'. It relates to the essence of the person, the self". Internalised, shame still has an effect on many of the participants. Why else do we avoid conversations of our parents, or even our home-lives as youngsters? Why do we feel a cringing fear when, at a social gatherings, women talk of how invaluable their moms have become as grannies, babysitters, advice-givers and recipe-providers? When we are asked whether our parents live close by? A common enough topic, yet each question carries so much history, memory and pain, that lying about it becomes an acceptable option, to move a conversation along.

As for myself, I wanted no-one's pity. Naively I assumed that if they knew nothing they could think nothing, and I could uphold the façade of normality. Silence, for me, also meant invisibility, a state desired like no other at the time.

Relatives and neighbours, who were aware, maintained this silence, sharing in these secrets. Many years later we can cognize now, as we could only feel then, the betrayal implied in the condoning of the "goings-on". Gordon (1994:319) speaks of this silence as a social construct, critical to maintaining certain taboos, like for example the taboo to expose or speak of the harmful things happening in others' families. Is it perhaps a discourse the neighbours and relations had internalised, which says no-one has a right to meddle in the affairs of others? Could a discourse be operating which implicitly conveys that men are the heads of their households, and as such may run (or ruin) them as they wish while others stand by? Or perhaps it could be a reason as

mundane as “if we look the other way it is not happening”, borne out of a lack of knowledge in being able to deal with such a complex problem?

Perhaps there is much wisdom in the question Gordon (1994:320) asks herself, in determining whether to keep silent or not, “Do I come out of my silences wounded or as a victor?” If we remain silent, and unhealed, wounded, has the silence been justified? Would speaking out dull the pain and set the healing in motion?

Inevitably, not being able to talk about things happening in the family, and being told, “*You did not see me just beat your mother senseless, she’s all right*”, when she’s lying unconscious, and your heart is beating in your throat, forces children of alcoholics to disown what their eyes see and what their senses tell them. Gravitz and Bowden (1985:20) explain that children of alcoholics distrust their own judgement of reality and learn not to trust anybody else either. They learn that their judgement is poor and incorrect, and they should ignore their body signals, their feelings. The dissonance between what’s visible to the eye, but what is taught by the parent is often too great. We end up feeling scared, sick, bad and even crazy, because we cannot run the confusion by parents and receive consolation that this is normal within families run by alcohol. And progressively we separate from our feelings. Nanette said, “*I cried for three days and then never again*”. Gravitz and Bowden (1985:51) describe this phenomenon as a self-protective mechanism also known as “flattened effect”.

A further risk to identity development in the discourse of silence, lies in the acquisition of communicative skills, coupled with self esteem. The art of small talk, sharing ideas and generating solutions to problems together, are essential to communicating with the world around us. In giving and taking in dialogue, we are more securely connected to the world in which we participate and are part of. However, in the alcoholic home the rules of culture and society, necessary for participation, cannot be learnt. The family, bound by denial, withdraws and “isolates itself from a culture whose rules might challenge it” (Brown 1988:178). The child, recognising that her family is different in many ways from other families, becomes ashamed, “humiliated, and the deviant outsider” (Brown 1988:178), resulting in a furthering lowering of self-esteem.

In the homes influenced by alcohol communication skills are weak (Woititz & Garner 1990:3; Hadley, Holloway & Mallinckrodt 1993:348). Communication is characterised by words which contradict behaviour, silence is encouraged, verbal contradiction is met with violence, and insults and bad language pervade. Subordination and inferiority are commonplace experiences. Healthy communication patterns and models are lacking, and it is no wonder then that communication remains a stumbling block for adult children of alcoholics on the road ahead.

Karin described the obstacles she had to overcome, *“I was aggressive, a zombie, scared of people, and shy. No-one could hear me when I spoke. I was not like others (clever, happy, energetic). I was the quiet one.”* Only when she also drank, could she speak to people. This only began to change with a conscious move to *“work behind a counter with people. I will learn to communicate again.”*

Nanette spoke of a dislike of *“chit chat”*, that it’s a waste of time one could constructively spend elsewhere. *“I only enjoy speaking with my kind”*, confirmed to mean those who had like concerns and would understand the reasons for the way she was.

I still find initiating conversations very hard, always needing to “get it right – say the right thing” and I often get caught saying the socially unexpected. This still sets me apart today. Small talk, so necessary for interaction, is a skill many of us need to still learn. The perception of many that children of alcoholics are snobs arises from this tendency to disengage from conversations. Speaking about the “trivial”, to me, is inane, yet it is expected, if one is to “fit in well enough”. In our homes we discussed injuries, police interest, our illegitimate siblings or nothing. Fashion was anathema and the weather always bad.

4.1.1.2 Don’t trust

Black (1981:34) and Woititz and Garner (1990) concur that children of alcoholics have learnt it is simply best not to trust that others will be there for them, emotionally, psychologically and even physically. To trust another means investing confidence, reliance and faith in that person, and these virtues are often missing in the alcoholic home. Children of alcoholics need to have their physical and emotional needs met in order to develop trust. The alcoholic environments of the participants in this study have imitated literature in providing this notorious absence of physical or emotional availability. “Emotional unavailability and inconsistency in responding to childhood emotional and physical needs, can have serious detrimental effects in adulthood, especially in interpersonal relations. Unresponsive, inconsistent parenting may also lead to the self internalised as unlovable, and of others as unlikely to meet emotional needs” (Hadley, Holloway & Mallinckrodt 1993:354).

Trudie’s father was physically preoccupied with alcohol when she most needed that support to carry the burden of having an illegitimate child. Trudie’s mom, being caught up in this alcoholic family system, became emotionally unavailable to Trudie as well. The consequence of this lack of availability, emotionally and physically, was that the baby was offered up for adoption. Had Trudie

been able to discuss the situation with her father, the outcome might have been otherwise. The proof in this assumption, explains Trudie, is that:

“My father helped a pregnant girl to be allowed back into the school, and she eventually got straight A’s. Yet, I was not allowed to talk to him as it might push him even further over the edge. Now, after three decades, only after inviting my daughter back into my life, am I starting to heal.”

Karin, Nanette and Ina, Marietjie and myself all experienced scorn for our fathers, and often mothers who were incapable of caring for themselves, let alone their vulnerable charges. How possible is it to trust a parent who cannot keep the child or themselves safe in the home? How can one trust parents with one’s dignity and pride when a friend invited home becomes a witness to one more incident of humiliation and degradation. When driving from A to B becomes a traumatising dodgem-race, and survival of the trip is seldom guaranteed.

Karin describes the pain of tracking her father down at an athletics meeting he had promised to attend, sober. Yet he had missed the event and was lost in his inebriation. Later he had stood by while she starved into illness, oblivious to her condition.

Ina spoke of promises heaped on promises of sobriety, fuelling a disbelieving hope that this time, this time things would be different! She explained that *“my parents did not want me. On top of that I wasn’t male, that’s why eventually they decided if I couldn’t have a male name, the least they would do was pray for my death – I felt that at birth and later”*. Sandford (1982:210) says of this that *“by the time the person emerges from the womb, or shortly thereafter, his spirit’s ability to trust and open to life may be greatly hindered or blocked already”*. In not being able to trust her parents, even from birth, she had had to build walls around her heart – toughen up, so to speak.

How does one trust the parent who put one’s life in jeopardy in so many ways, and goes on to deny one the tools and strategies necessary to cope successfully with life? In the lives of the participants and myself, trust has been elusive, and self-reliance has been the norm. Trudie, Marietjie, Nanette, Ina and I concur: We need to be able to support and look after ourselves. Getting an education and a job guaranteed that we did not need to place our lives in others’ hands again, so this was our central driving force.

The consequences of these attitudes have been varied. Self-reliance to the extreme has had some fall-out.

Black (1981:113) mentions that children of alcoholics frequently are unable to ask for help, or for what they need. Not being able to reach out, or reveal things that may make one feel vulnerable, could become unhealthy. One needs to be able to talk about the hurts and sadnesses which

make up daily life. However, many of us exist on our own islands, interacting only superficially. I think a possible explanation for this lies in two things: our inadequate communication skills, and our inability to trust people with information that we think might be damaging to us or held or used against us. An example of this would be Marietjie's admission of discomfort with the possible audience of this dissertation and how they might view this information. Despite confusion and turmoil, and a need to purge, she prefers to hold it close to her heart, and not share it with a soul.

Marriages have had to go through some very rough patches in the area of trust too. Robinson and Rhoden (1998:73) describe children from alcoholic homes as having ineffectual peer relations, they have trouble forming relationships with the opposite sex because of suspicion and distrust, and they carry their distrust of intimate relationships through into adulthood. "Unmet needs are stockpiled. Difficulty being intimate is the hallmark, because stuffed feelings from childhood impair the ability to feel or express emotions" (Robinson & Rhoden 1998:143). Trudie feels that trust is not about wearing a ring but about being able to be together anyway, and has refrained from marriage to her partner of many years. Could there still be an issue of trust in this? Marietjie and her spouse have had to negotiate positions of trust for many years. I still struggle to ask favours from people, and I expect to be disappointed in my encounters, so that I am not surprised when I am disappointed. In my own marriage I find myself vigilant in every respect, trying to cover all the angles, trying to "pre-empt the inevitable". This, despite the fact that I have never had cause for concern. Big jobs I prefer to do myself, instead of delegating, as I don't trust people to do it as it should be done. At times I wonder if my behaviour is not a self-fulfilling prophesy. This is an area I'm working on improving on.

4.1.1.3 The Stony-hearted

The stony heart – a concept borrowed from Sandford (1982:209), is the metaphorical depiction of the processes of the heart that have plagued the participants throughout their childhood and much of their adult life. The stony heart is characterised by detachment, the inability to feel for the self in suffering, but the ability to feel for others in their predicament.

So it is that all the participants could feel pity, concern and anguish for the mothers and siblings in the alcoholic home, rushing to protect them and console them, yet feel no compassion for themselves. Black (1981:43) comments that children isolated with feelings such as fear, worry, embarrassment, guilt, loneliness, anger and so on, arrive at a point of desperation, of being overwhelmed. These powerful emotions aren't nurtured and entertained, dealt with or tolerated in their families, so the message is sent that feelings and needs are not valid. This state does not lend itself to survival, so children find other ways to cope, learning how to discount and repress

feelings, and some learn simply not to feel. They wall in their pain, coping alone, as others are not perceived as resources. Nanette and Karin's description of their own experiences with this lends credence to Black's theory.

Dawn: *What feelings did you have for your father?*

Nanette: *There was just nothing. I am emotionally dead. I never cry. I see myself as hard. God created us to be brought up with nurturing. If that is missing we become cripple in all areas of our life. That's what happened to me. It must still come right.*

Karin: *I was like a zombie. I felt nothing, to feel hurts too much.*

The consequences of having stony hearts are that we learn to control, pretend, and lie. We learn to blur, distort and confuse. Love is confused with caretaking, spontaneity with irrationality, intimacy with smothering, anger with violence. The boundaries of feelings, thoughts and behaviours are blurred due to the alcoholism of parents (Gravitz & Bowden 1985:22).

So it happened that Ina "*had to pretend to become sick to get any attention*"; that Ina, Nanette and I ended up taking inappropriate care of our parents; that a sister's love can become a mother's love, and that Karin had to become a rebel at home and at school to get any recognition. Because stony hearts have not yet been dealt with, the controlling urge in myself, Nanette, Ina and Marietjie's lives is still very much alive.

The reasons why stony hearts are so difficult to work with in children of alcoholics are because for every wall broken down a well of guilt and a feeling of betrayal springs up. In allowing themselves to feel, and acknowledge strong emotions, they feel disloyal to their parents as well. In relating one incident and the feelings that accompanied it, to her spouse once, Marietjie's spouse chose to bring it up at a family gathering, albeit in her defence, and as a weapon against her parents. He seemed not to understand the tenuous link between love, attachment, loyalty and betrayal of the adult child to her alcoholic parents. In so doing he had damaged that trust that makes voluntary disclosure even more difficult, if not unlikely, the second time around. Already feeling guilty about "speaking out of home" in mentioning the incident, she has also risked her attachment to her parents in verbalising the unspeakable. She had broken the unspoken (and sometimes spoken) rule the child from the alcoholic home had been manipulated into internalising. The web curls itself tighter around the child of the alcoholic.

Gravitz and Bowden (1985:30) describe this disclosure as "simply stop(ping the) colluding with the family on the issue of alcoholism". The reality is more stark and over-reaching than this. From the point of view of the alcoholics in the family, if you're not in, you're out, barred from what may

have been the only place of “belonging”. Still yearning for nurture, validation and love that have yet to present themselves from her parents, how can she choose disclosure and risk the possibility of the above? Adult children, drifting on the tide of such choices, may still choose not to feel, remaining, until intervention...the stony-hearted.

Nanette, Ina and Marietjie, in this question, have found their refuge in the promise of God’s healing. Nanette has taken from Elijah house the following quote (which could appear to be out of context for the reader) which carries her in times of hopelessness:

More-over, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.

(Ezek. 36:26)

Denial is another one of those destructive allies of silence that densely shrouds the alcoholic home – hiding it from prying eyes.

4.1.2 Denial - alcohol is not a problem in this house

Denial is, simply put, a wall of self-protection, a coping mechanism that protects from fear – a fear of reality. Denial functions on two levels within the alcoholic family: on the level of the parent and on the level of the child.

“In alcoholic homes, the alcoholic’s use of alcohol is the issue around which everything else is centred. No other issue affects the family so deeply” (Wegscheider-Cruse, cited in Gravitz & Bowden 1985:21). The parent/s use the strategy of denial to sublimate their fears and guilt about using alcohol in the first place. They will attribute the state of affairs (usually negative) at the time to any reason under the sun, but the prevalence of alcohol in their lives. The family rule will state that alcohol is *not* the cause of family problems, something or someone else is at fault. More times than I can account for, I had to hear, “*Your mother has been around again. Speak to her!*” and comments in similar vein. Additionally, the status quo must be maintained at all costs, and everyone must take over the alcoholic’s responsibilities, cover up, protect, accept the rules and don’t rock the boat. To abide by these rules is safe, to break them will court certain disaster, often in the form of violence. These rules are built on domination, fear, guilt and shame.

Children in the alcoholic home fit into this pattern of denial, also to protect themselves from fear – a fear that their parents are failing them, a fear of a reality they are instructed to deny, despite irrefutable proof of its existence, a fear of emotions they experience, but are not safe to express. Suppression is safe.

It is under these conditions that the participants had been scripted into various roles, in a bid to maintain the rigid, unhealthy and inflexible demands set by the alcoholic.

4.1.3 Parental Inversion and substitute mate

“I cooked and cleaned, ruled and regulated my siblings, looked after my mother where she hid under the bed for a whole weekend, and cared for the health of her soul. Furthermore, I became her confidant, the keeper of her secrets. She taught me, ‘no friends, we are each other’s friends’”
- Nanette

These words embody what Brown (1988), Sandford (1982) and Black (1981) refer to as parental inversion (also known as role reversal). In essence the child takes on the responsibility of parenting his/her parent/s because they have become so immature or ineffective. This phenomenon is complicated and damaging for a variety of reasons. Many questions sprang up in our conversations and I wondered at the causal link between the feelings of these adult children now, and the behaviour they took on as children in the alcoholic home:

“Why did I get so impatient with looking after and mothering my own children? I didn’t enjoy them as babies at all.” (Nanette)

“Why can I not bear to see my mother before my eyes?” (Ina)

“I find myself ruling and regulating – controlling, controlling, controlling.” (Nanette)

“Where did my childhood go? I don’t know how to play or relax with my children?” (Dawn)

Both Brown and Sandford criticize the behaviour of the child who engages in role reversal, for different reasons. Brown (1988:159) feels that in taking on the parent role of control, one is subverting, temporarily one’s own deep needs for safety, care and nurture. Daring to hope for the above needs to be met, and learning to trust that they will be met, are put off. Into adulthood the individual might hang frantically onto control, so that the above needs and lack of trust might never be addressed. In hanging onto control, one’s emotions are never given free reign and release.

Sandford (1982:319-321) regards the behaviour of a child adopting a parent role tantamount to “usurping” that position within the family, with all the privileges that may go with it. Furthermore, this behaviour is interpreted as disrespectful, towards the parents and God, as it overthrows God’s natural order as far as the role of parents and children are concerned.

I am wondering whether a postmodern, social construction, feminist cast or interpretation on role reversal would not be a more healing and helpful approach to the adult child from an alcoholic

family, than the interpretation which heaps guilt upon the shoulders of children who are still carrying heavily on the burdens of a childhood home fraught with difficulties. Children of alcoholics carry guilt over the manner in which relationships in their households unfolded, and their roles, often leading, within these homes. If one slavishly adopts Sandford's belief of a child usurping a parent role, even under duress, more guilt for disrespecting God and parents will be placed upon the already burdened shoulders of these children, and their already limited options for positive messages of their childhood, will be further diminished.

Literature abounds with descriptions of the roles members of the family develop into in order to protect the integrity of the family system. Levoy, Rivinus, Matzko and Mcguire (1991), Stafford (1992), Black (1981), Brown (1988), Gravitz and Bowden (1985), Woititz (2002), Woititz and Garner (1990) all elaborate on the child who adopts the role of the "Hero" (Johnson 2004:142), also known as "The Responsible One" (Stafford 1992:78). These children might also become the "Chief Enablers" (Johnson 2004:142). These children often take "responsibility for themselves, their brothers and sisters, and often even their parents, providing structure for all in an often inconsistent home setting. They may adopt parental responsibilities" (Stafford 1992:78). Johnson (2004:142) comments that they may manage the family by "paying the bills", and "seeing that the family system remains intact from day to day". This child, being the firstborn and oldest of the siblings, exhibits behaviour towards being super-responsible and "high-achieving and industrious," yet, "no matter how hard they work, their families remain troubled and continue to disintegrate" (Johnson 2004:143).

Post-modern feminist contextual practical theologians call for a contextual practical theology which embraces praxis, and an immersion of the pastoral carer in the context of the individual's life (see chapter 2). In paying heed to this call, the carer will become aware of the realities of living in a home dominated by alcohol. Not attending to a sibling physically means their death. A participant has saved her sibling from a watery death, as her parents were in no state to practice vigilance, and did not even notice the two year old slipping under the surface. But she noticed – she was mother and father again. She was torn between letting him drown "to teach them a lesson", showing the world how sad and negligent they really were, and sprinting to his rescue, as she frequently needed to do. Is the reader shocked? Probably, and no more than she was that the thought had even crossed her mind. But this example does serve the purpose of illustrating how far from reality some moralisers live. Children from alcoholic homes need to make these calls all the time while in the home, living with their own thoughts of vengeance and accompanying shame. Meanwhile, carers are not getting their hands dirty in the realities of everyday living.

Possibly their, and Sandford's interpretation of the Bible, and its messages on obedience and service to parents need to be revised and contextualised, so that living out the Word can be a practical possibility for these children. Instead of stone throwing, knowledge needs to be disseminated by carers, pastors and any who are involved with these children, so that sufficient support is built into their lives.

Needless to say, the position the child from the alcoholic home found herself in is one socially orchestrated and endorsed. Since no intervention occurred, and survival was paramount, children did what needed to be done, to ensure survival for their siblings and themselves, including stepping into the parent position at times.

4.1.4 The shadow of patriarchy

Patriarchy deserves space in this dissertation for the shadows it has cast over the realities of each participant, realities which have been sanctioned, shaped and panel-beaten by centuries of Western culture. Cozad-Neuger and Poling (1997:26) describe patriarchy as:

[A] complex and interwoven system that organises perspectives, relationships, institutions and the rules that govern them around a set of dualistic and hierarchical assumptions. It is a conceptual error of vast proportions, a conceptual trap. Furthermore, patriarchy is a deep spiritual ordering that invades, and spreads across a social order.

Patriarchy has insinuated itself into the lives of women and children in alcoholic homes, in layers and layers of meaning. The participants have experienced the backlash of patriarchy at its most profound, culminating in acts of cruelty to the women and children in these homes.

Its tentacles have reached out to suffocate and inhibit the movement of women in alcoholic homes.

My mother was not allowed to work, women should marry and stay at home. For that reason my father refused to let me go and study, saying he would withhold money from me. Under duress, threat of public shame, and personal humiliation he eventually did pay, but only for the studies. I had to find the rest of the money elsewhere – Ina

My father refused to let my mother, sister or I learn how to drive. It was his way of keeping his women obedient and subservient. To this day my mother and sister still do not drive. My mother was not allowed to work, when, eventually, the financial pressure became great enough, she could go, but was not allowed to be five minutes late from work, or dreadful fights and insults would ensue, breaking down my mom's will to live. He would threaten to take on the boss if he kept my mother later. – Marietjie

My mother was constantly accused of infidelity when, sporadically, she chose to look for work. These efforts to find a job contributed to what was left of the home caving in totally – Dawn

Using male power to subdue and ensure subservience and obedience, was, and for some, still is the daily bread of women and children in these homes.

My mother was subjected to beatings, murder attempts and threats. Violence was not unusual, and attempts to flee in terror common – Nanette, Ina, Dawn

My mother had to polish my father's shoes, brush his false teeth, carry food and drink after him. He beat my brothers mercilessly, and tried to shoot my brother's wife, as she was not the one he had chosen for my brother to marry. We were not allowed to see boys in high school as we would get pregnant, and the list goes on... - Marietjie

My mother was so afraid of my father that she barricaded herself into her room, not being able to sleep at nights, where all of us had to sleep with her in bed –Ina

My father sold all we possessed for drink, as though he had that right. He threw us out of the house when he felt like it – Karin

The list of injustices and depravity is not exhaustive. But it is overwhelming. And it is characterised by a lack of respect for women and children, an attempt to tie women to the stereotyped roles of inferiority and submission.

Some men justify their perspectives of women as “second class” citizens, by pointing out that “women are inferior in God’s hierarchy and must be submissive to men. Religiously sanctioned notions of women’s obedience and service are often obstacles to women’s freedom from exploitation” (Chopp & Taylor, cited in Cozad-Neuger & Poling 1997:29).

Cozad-Neuger and Poling (1997:28) explain that an almost exclusively male image of God in the Christian tradition has helped cause the affirmation of male, white, Western superiority, and has led to a sense of inferiority of women and of people from non-Western cultures. Furthermore, the use of male God-language, in a faith in which God is revealed as incarnate in a male human being, has contributed to a distorted vision of God, further supporting male dominance in society.

In fact, Brewer (in Graham1996:176) argues that patriarchy has been entrenched within the church too, to the extent that the church silences victims of varying kinds, including incest victims, upholding ‘family values’ and refusing to admit to the complexity and pain inherent in situations of conflict or abuse. The church’s structures of care are designed to control, repress and deny such pain and confusion in the name of reconciliation, tolerance and forgiveness. Bons-Storm (cited in Cozad-Neuger 2001:65) argues that even “pastoral care-givers, steeped in the same patriarchal dominant culture as their distressed counselees [specifically women], have difficulty believing the stories and experiences of women in their care that speak against or deny the ‘truths’ of that culture”.

The question arises then as to how one would begin to address patriarchy within both homes of alcoholics and also the churches in general.

Van Leeuwen (1993:3-12) has some useful perspectives regarding the role of the church within gender reconciliation. Basically, there would need to be a reinterpretation of the past and revisioning of the future within a new understanding of the Bible. It would need to involve a recontextualisation of the Bible into today's reality. Van Leeuwen is extremely hopeful that this is possible. She says that "those who confess Christ should feel more rather than less free to acknowledge past errors and sins, knowing that sin is common to all of us... and that our God is ever the God of the second chance" (Van Leeuwen 1993:3).

She logically points out that God's purpose for gender relations aims at mutuality and equality between women and men in marriage, the church and society. Furthermore, men and women were intended to be covenant partners, and to share in the abundance of God's provision from the earth. She draws on the book of Luke, which proclaims he was sent to release the captives, restore sight to the blind and free the oppressed. Moreover, Jesus elevated the status of women, and subverted the structures supporting male privilege and superiority. Van Leeuwen (1993:10) draws on the following verse to emphasise women's equality "I will pour out my Spirits upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy...Even upon my slaves, both men and women..." (Acts 2:17-18). She further argues that in the New Testament church, gifts and functions are not distributed along gender lines either. Instead "they are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. Women also prophesy, function as deacons, and are prominent among the apostles" (Van Leeuwen 1993:10).

Van Leeuwen (1993:11) ends off by explaining that it is "God's desire to oppose societal patterns that elevate some persons over others and that harm, demean, and subordinate, and oppress various women and men".

I am left wondering how visions for the practical applications of the Bible could have become so dispersed, that men and women seem to be standing on different mountains whilst looking at the same city and its people. Using the same Bible, how is it possible that the core message is so misinterpreted and misused to the benefit of some and the detriment of others, mostly women and the marginalised.

Bons-Storm (1996), a feminist theologian, also goes a long way to explaining how the above-mentioned phenomenon gains *credibility*, while women are regarded as *incredible*. Essentially, stories of faith and dominant (legislated) theologies (in the Christian tradition) are constructed in

the context of a dominant belief system in Western society. These legislated theologies have as their basis patriarchy, and women find very few figures in the Bible with whom to identify, of their own sex or male figures. The male representation of God mirrors and reinforces the patriarchal father model: almighty, all-wise, all-possessing. In the Bible even wives and daughters were possessed by non-members of the family, sanctioned by husbands and fathers.

Women in the Bible are “to exist as silently and secretly as possible” (Bons-Storm 1996:122) as they are depicted as vessels of corruption for pious men, and associated with “threatening sexuality and unreason” (Bons-Storm 1996:123). She goes on to say that it is difficult for women to live a redeemed and liberated life knowing they are judged by a God who looks at them with the eye of a judging father, always finding fault. Women need a Deity, who demands no sacrifice or ransom, and who loves unconditionally, a truly gracious and forgiving God/dess. “Women can look up to themselves as persons who stand tall, because their God/dess looks upon them as worthy of his/her love, not as a person ashamed to be representatives of their sex” (Bons-Storm 1996:133).

Bons-Storm (1996:137,138) suggests a reason for men's lack of interest in exploring the liberation of women. She cites Peggy Mackintosh's opinion on this, which talks of “‘hidden privileges’ of people who are perceived as ‘superior’ in our dominant belief system”. If the dominant belief system were to change in favour of a true equality between sexes, men would stand to lose many ‘hidden privileges’, in the form of status, worldly goods, and cost them interminable frustration. Counsellors and pastors, in trying to be truly unbiased would be sorely tested too.

Besides an affirming ear and eye, a woman's weak sense of subject quality needs to be encouraged to grow and become courageous enough to take her reality into account. Transgender empathy needs to be nurtured. “The pastor needs to explore, together with women, what it means to be woman in her particular situation, living her life with a female body in this world, and in the church with its patriarchalized culture” (Bons-Storm 1996:142). Finally, “women need models: stories about strong women, who use their subject quality and are not ashamed of their object quality” (Bons Storm 1996:147).

Graham (1996:126) makes her contribution to this argument by insisting that theology must take its share of responsibility for reinforcing male domination and women's acquiescence in such relationships; so a pastoral response requires the issuing of a challenge to patriarchal prescriptions and the development of more positive images of women. The pastor and the church also have a role to play in listening to women's experience, or as Nelle Morton referred to as “hearing into speech” (Cozad-Neuger 2001:68), in breaking the taboos of silence which surround

issues of abuse, sexuality and non-conformity (Cozad-Neuger 2001:95), and in rethinking harmful and oppressive images and church teachings in order to achieve greater justice and mutuality (Cozad-Neuger 2001:12).

A further perspective I consider to be vital in bringing about change is one which takes into account the care of the men, who, some might say, have fallen foul to the bug of patriarchy. In crisis regarding the questions of being male in a rapidly-changing culture, many men resort to “hard masculinity” (Cozad-Neuger & Poling 1997:19), a way of survival for some men with little economic and social power. Judy Orr (cited in Cozad-Neuger & Poling 1997:19) suggests “neighbour care”, defined as “being there” during the daily events of men’s lives. The pastor, who like a good neighbour, lives with the people and is available in times of transition and crisis, is a model for the care of working-class men.

Bons-Storm (1996:146) contends that the church will stay the same and society will not change unless the patriarchal belief system itself is directly confronted.

4.2 DO WE NEED MORE?

A description of the discourses which affect families suffering from alcohol is not enough to satisfy the research aims of acknowledgement of all of the experiences of children from alcoholic homes. This study needs to take into account and acknowledge the strong emotions, forged through intense hurts, which children of alcoholics experience. Gravitz and Bowden (1985:75) comment that it is only when feelings are acknowledged, when one becomes aware of them, that one can begin to move beyond them. The very act of expressing a feeling begins the process of transformation.

In summary, I have flitted over the most common discourses which posed challenges for the children of alcoholics during childhood, and may continue to affect the identity of the child into adulthood. I also partly explored the emotions which seem most problematic for the adult child from an alcoholic home.

In chapter 5 I will be attending to the alternative stories generated during our therapeutic group discussions, and on the emotions which hinder the scripting of alternative stories. Chapter five will serve also as a reflection on the process of this research as it impacted on me personally, and the participants in general.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEDICINE FOR THE INJURIES

Chapter 5 dwells on the obstacles to healing, as explored by the participants in the group meetings. Furthermore, some space will be given to the alternative stories, which developed as the hurtful stories gave way.

5.1 GETTING IN TOUCH WITH OURSELVES

Why has it been so excruciating, and for some of the participants in the research group almost impossible, to get to the point where we can say we are healed. That we have made peace with our pasts? We show no outward signs of tumult and confusion, we have relatively happy lives, we are dressed well and possess infinitely more than in our childhood years, material as well as psychological. Thus, I am partial to Sandford's ideas in this regard, as this, for most of us, is the final frontier, the only unexplored avenue left.

Sandford (1982:8) explains that “the heart has not yet effectively been dealt with.” (Jeremiah 6:14). Furthermore, “they have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying ‘peace, peace’, when there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 8:11). Ina commented that if one heals by trying to restore self image, one causes people to trust in something repaired in the flesh – and this is doomed to fail sooner or later. Injuries of the soul need to be repaired in the soul.

My ability to perform academically took me only so far, and then it began to destroy me. I was hiding my feelings behind performance, and they caught up with me... (Ina)

If this is the case, then Greenberg and Safran's model cited in Bolger (1999:342), could be the starting point to healing, as it identifies *allowing* pain as part of the change process, because allowing pain involves accepting and owning painful feelings. Allowing pain will lead to the identification of needs and dysfunctional beliefs, such as the discourses still operating in the participants' lives, which may in turn lead to a change in the participant's view of self and others. In the following section I will discuss the painful feelings, that needed to be dealt with in order for healing to take place, which were identified during the group meetings.

5.1.1 Grief, mourning and loss

5.1.1.1 What is loss?

Baker McCall, a pastoral theologian, who writes about loss and grieving within the pastoral care context, describes loss in the following way. She explains that human beings are relational by

nature, dependent on people and our environment to survive. We are connected not only to people but also to things, objects, ideas and dreams. Some connections are more essential than others, and whether the connection is severed by our choices or those of others, or simply the natural course of things, the feeling of loss, and separation is the inevitable result. These connections or attachments can be of many kinds e.g. spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional, social, as well as past, present and hoped-for experiences and expectations. “We experience loss when we become separated from that which we care about or to which we were attached” (Baker McCall 2004;31-34). Thus we grieve. Children who grew up in alcoholic homes, as children, lost a range of things, from the physical possessions, sold, pawned or lost through financial difficulties and repossession, to the less tangible, like parents’ emotional unavailability, parents’ absences due to a running away/abandoning the family, loss of childhood, loss of the emotional development and maturity learnt at specific phases throughout childhood, loss of emotional nourishment, loss of friendships and friendship sustaining skills and so forth. While in the home and experiencing these losses, often there is no opportunity or the insight necessary, to mourn for these losses. Only as these children grow up, do they realize the impact the losses had and might still have on their lives.

It has been suggested that the adult, who grew up in an alcoholic home, should give herself the opportunity to mourn, on behalf of the child, the losses sustained so long ago.

Stafford (1992:141) reminds the reader that it is “vital to remember that the grieving is being done on behalf of the child within. As recovery progresses the child becomes more and more able to tell her story, and it is the story of a child suffering great loss. (The) child did not have adult knowledge when these losses were sustained. (The) child was overwhelmed by the losses and needs more time now to tell how bad it all was.” I could identify with this experience of loss, as I shared with the research group my story of living in an alcoholic home:

I desperately wanted a family of my own because I never had one. I’ve never considered myself part of a family. We were all tenants subletting in the same house.

I felt a particular sense of loss in discovering as a grown up I would have no stories to tell my children of their grandparents. I never knew who they were or what made them tick. What I knew from experience I could not relate – the unspeakable. My first baby would never be held by my mother or father, and I would have no photos to show my children of them. My parents robbed me of a childhood with (acceptable, socially speakable) memories that would form my roots as an adult. I think all these deep losses made up the hole I could not fill, and never would. - Dawn

“One of the challenges in helping people get through losses is the popular misconception that a truly important loss occurs because of death” (Baker McCall 2004:35). For children, losing a parent to alcohol can be as devastating and traumatising as losing a loved one through death or divorce. Missing out on a normal (functional) family life (could) be mourned (Robinson & Rhoden 1998:66).

For those with parents who are still alive, the feeling of loss makes its presence known again, but this time as a loss of attachment. In recovery, and the consequent break in denial, the attachment to the first family (family suffering from/under alcoholism) is lost, an attachment that secured a sense of belonging or illusion of belonging (as one’s ‘family’ who loves, accepts and nurtures one), but that also guaranteed the repetition of destructive behaviour (Brown 1988:246).

I have been wondering, as in Marietjie’s situation (where as much as she needs to break with her alcoholic family, at the same time she feels this overwhelming need to protect them), whether the strong pull to reclaim the bond, no matter how destructive, has created choices which should be the prerogative only of God. Choices which could become heartbreaking, not to mention complicated. How can a child from an alcoholic home choose to grow away from the attachment family, the only family they knew, and introduce this void of emptiness, where they will not be able to say: “This is who I am, and this is my family.” Also, forever the possibility will be cut off of a recovered alcoholic parent and the possible repaired, perfect child/parent relationship each child yearns for. The child was lonely before, and if no other secure relationship has developed for this child, breaking with their “dysfunctional” first family will leave them with no family and weak communication and relationship building skills. Staying close to the family means continuing the cycle of unhappiness, and an inevitable lack of healing. Going means being alone and forever yearning for what might have been, had one just stayed a little longer. This constitutes a catch 22 situation. One cannot win. The healing process demands disengagement and detachment from the family (and loss of that family), while earlier unmet needs and losses are clamouring to be met and nurtured, by the very family who caused the pain in the first place. The adult child from the alcoholic family is only just beginning to deal with the losses of childhood and the mourning that must necessarily accompany this process, and then the adult is confronted with the reality that healing constitutes a second loss, a break with the family of origin. Logue and Rivinus (1991:66) explain it like this, “If the roles children play in alcoholic families become rigid and inflexible, they can be detrimental to the child regardless of whether they are positive or negative roles. Roles are related to family myths, which are beliefs that go unchallenged in spite of reality. Family

myths are not readily recognized as distortions, and developmental problems arise when a child must accept a distorted myth in order to remain in the family”.

Brown (1991:74) goes further in explaining that the tasks of detachment and disengagement are at the core of recovery, disengagement not only from the behaviours that supported and maintained the co-dependent position but from the destructive reliance on the reactive attachment to the alcoholic and non-alcoholic parent itself. The process of recovery is a threatening one from start to finish, because it represents a loss of the parental bond, and makes the decision one needs to take to start the healing process that much harder.

Further complications for Marietjie in the healing process are evidenced in the following:

“Should I expose my children to my parents’ alcoholism and let them see the destruction it creates? They will see things they cannot possibly understand yet. Should I alienate my husband because I need to visit my parents? And they do not agree on anything. He hates going there. They always blame him for things. I sometimes feel I’m going mad, I don’t want to have to choose between them.” - Marietjie

Karin described her yearning for and loss of a real father, one she had as a little girl, who had somehow slipped away when no-one was looking. She spoke of a loss of possessions. Trudie spoke of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the wonderful man when sober, who became the wicked stranger in inebriation. Ina mentioned a constant and profound cycle of loss of hope after effusive and believable promises. All the children of alcoholics from this study reported a loss of friendships, and friendship-making skills, a loss of family members to alcohol, suicide, abandonment, the loss of a secure and carefree childhood.

Stopping at this list, and consulting the scoreboard, I think I have the answer to the question I asked at the start of Chapter Four. The scoreboard should be abandoned in favour of the experience. Both the adult children and the alcoholics were the losers. The only victor: the bottle. With alcohol there is no contest, few remain standing.

All these losses led to inevitable grief in various manifestations, and part of the healing process is to mourn the losses incurred.

5.1.1.2 Mourning

Braband and Martof (1993: 1111) are of the view that “issues of loss and abandonment come together to form the core of unfinished grief. Many adult children of alcoholics adopt a chronic grief state and could be described as part of the walking wounded”. One particular cause of this

grief emanates from a “yearn(ing) for a relationship that never was but might have been”. Some of the other causes of grief particular to the participants in this study are discussed in section 5.1.1.1

Baker McCall (2004:58) identifies, within the pastoral context, numerous resources in the management of grief resolution, which she describes as being essentially a process not requiring much professional intervention. Self-management is most commonly applied, with the understanding that there is already a certain confidence and self-esteem in place. Supportive people, relationships and beliefs are presumed for healthy resolution, as is access to popular literature, rituals and ceremonies, and talking to resolve the pent-up problems. It becomes evident that the children from alcoholic families may not manage the grieving process with much success at first as the discourses permeating alcoholic families also work against talking about the problem, building supportive relationships and developing healthy belief systems, which are replaced instead by denial. See in this regard 5.1.1.1. Depending on the age of the children, and taking into consideration the nature of the family suffering from alcohol, and its lack of resources and social connection, it may become a chronic grieving process, which may only be resolved in adulthood, when certain skills for healing have been developed with time, or a voluntary search for help and counselling is undertaken (Woititz & Garner 1990; Woititz 2002; Brown 1988).

All the participants from this study are still in the process of resolving grief. Leick and Davidson-Nielsen (1991:25-63) talk of the four tasks of grief work, namely: acceptance of loss, dealing with the emotions of grief, acquisition of new skills and reinvesting emotional energy. Pearson (1994:131), a pastoral counsellor explains that this process does not have a linear progression, and that it is possible to be struggling with all four simultaneously.

The weeping phase could be one way of dealing with the emotions of grief. Leick and Davidson-Nielsen (1991:10) explain that “weeping that heals is the profound sobbing which helps the body release its tensions...Weeping, in understanding surroundings can help a wound become visible and be healed”. However, they also mention that despite the weeping release, the grief keeps returning as the depth and magnitude of the loss becomes clear, with further mourning.

In our group, at some stage during the meetings, we all experienced this release of grief to some extent. Others felt some of the mourning process most acutely while reflecting on the conversations we held that week, or while reading the letters each of us sent each other. Marietjie recalls often not being able to sleep for her over-wrought emotions. Nanette didn't attend work for days after one of our sessions. I was sad for hours while composing my letter, and hours afterwards. Trudie gave vent to her sadness, commenting later that she had never let

go, and should have done it ages ago. After these incidents, the participants felt movement in their emotional lives. Their “inner children” had never been afforded the luxury of this release, or the empathic embrace offered by our compassionate group, while doing so. In allowing “our children within” to grieve their losses, we could eventually tell and retell more of our stories. However, this process would not be over in a day. All felt their mourning processes had been enhanced by the experience, but realized that much more was to follow.

5.1.2 Guilt and shame

As to the question of what *guilt* is, the following may be offered: “Guilt is a feeling of shame or remorse. It is the subjective reaction of persons to some of their thoughts or behaviour. People who experience guilt are self-critical and self-condemning. They have put themselves under the burden of their own self-judgements and what they consider the judgements of society.” (Wilson 1987:19) Thus, this kind of guilt and the shame stemming from this guilt is described by Johnson (2004:149) as “normative shame”.

Johnson (2004:149) explains that normative shame is one of the two kinds of shame. Normative shame which “teaches people how to function in society and tells them if it would be appropriate to act in a way they are contemplating. In the past, experiencing shame was seen as ‘positive’, the associations being that the person is ‘honourable, discreet and modest’, someone ‘respectful of society’s norms, others’ boundaries and others’ privacy’” (Johnson 2004:149).

Shame in families with parents who are alcoholics is not the same as normative shame, but could include normative shame additionally. Within families, “the presence of parental love defends against shame, while its absence seems to promote shame in children. In this kind of shame the individual believes he or she is defective. It is not connected with doing anything wrong” as in normative shame, but is a general state of being. Deep shame is typical of emotionally and physically abusive homes, and with this shame comes also a fear of abandonment. These feelings become part of that individual’s identity as she grows up, and need to be dealt with effectively for healing to take place. All the participants expressed the presence of this kind of shame in the conversations.

Guilt and the consequent shame is one of the common emotions children of alcoholics experience, and can be an important barrier to the recovery of children of alcoholics. Children of alcoholics can often be preoccupied with thoughts of not having done enough for their family in distress, and feel guilty for doing better emotionally than some of their siblings. Stafford (1992:139) draws particular attention to the concept of experiencing “survivor guilt”, as it can be a

debilitating guilt. For the adult child, guilt is still very much a reality in their daily endeavours. This guilt sucks its nourishment from the daily reminders that the participant has survived the alcoholic home, but the siblings did not. Siblings were lost to shootings, suicides, foetal alcohol syndrome, and even, inevitably alcohol. Much of the guilt is also rooted in unresolved feelings and issues within the family, which will never be resolved, due to the death of a parent or sibling. So the mantra goes,

If only I tried again to speak to my estranged brother, reconciliation in the family might have been possible, I might have prevented his death - Ina and Marietjie

If only I had stayed in the house and not left my sibling to fend for himself, his terrible life could've been averted – Dawn

If only I was more obedient (Nanette), respectful (Nanette), helpful, and, and, and...

Wilson (1987:74) draws the distinction between earned guilt (true guilt) and unearned guilt, and speaks of earned (true) guilt as being tied to the breaking of a societal law, or God's standards. "It is that set of thoughts or feelings that accompanies wrongful or sinful behaviour. The person *feels guilty* because he *is guilty*." True guilt is resolved by confession, restoration where possible and acceptance of the forgiveness extended by God and the offended person. In contrast the person who experiences unearned guilt "is often tied to rigorous, perfectionistic standards. They will say 'I should have...'" (Wilson 1987:64-65), because they feel they have not met some undefined standard or expectation. It could revolve around shame over past behaviour, but not related to a specific sin. The person feels incapable of doing the good thing, often feeling inadequate or incompetent. Unearned guilt can be damaging, as problem solving and prevention is rarely dealt with in these circumstances. Wilson (1987:74) comments that "a major ministry of the body of Christ is to learn how to effectively help such persons. Instead of allowing them to continually focus on their shame, which only increases such feelings, we need to call them to be all that they can be, and then support them spiritually and emotionally as they leave their shame to seek their full potential". The research participants without exception attest to experiencing *unearned* guilt (in retrospect) as children in the homes, but those whose parents do not live anymore have managed to work through this guilt much more effectively with intervention, as adults, than those participants whose parents are still alive, and place particular demands upon them still. In the situations where the parents are still alive, both kinds of shame that Johnson elaborates on, as well as unearned guilt (Wilson) still flourishes.

“Honour thy father and mother that your days may be long” – one of the hardest things for a child from an alcoholic family to do, and one of the commandments from the Bible that bring the greatest emotional anguish. Children of alcoholics see very few reasons in their parents for obeying this command. In rebellion we would wonder whether honour and respect should not be earned. How could God exact this from a child in the throes of hatred, resentment, anger and vulnerability. Yet each one of the participants have in individual ways attempted to obey this command in an attempt to be obedient to God, secure a fruitful future and live a blameless and guilt - free life. Many participants practise emotional self-flagellation due to an inability to see their own efforts in abiding by God’s command. However, in our letters we did explore the possibilities of identifying honour in the actions we, as children, did perform.

Marietjie said *“I have always loved my mother very much, and I acknowledge the hard life she has had to endure with my father. I think she is a much better woman than I am, as she probably endured many hardships to care for my father as the Bible suggests. Is it really asking that much to try just once more to make peace with them, and sort things out, in exchange for a lifetime of peace for my soul?”*

Nanette agreed that it was *possible* that all the years of protecting her mother and siblings could also be construed as honouring her parents, although she thought of it more as something one just did because one had to.

However, from experience I realized that the lines between honouring, surviving, and performing pitiful, ingratiating tasks to win or secure love from our parents are blurred. The truth is probably a messy merging of all the above-mentioned components and others we have no words for. Also, the group seemed to find it hard to acknowledge honouring their parents, as the relationships fostered a great deal of guilt too. Reinterpretations of our childhood behaviour were limited due to the relatively brief time we spent in conversations, and the manner in which conversations so took on a life of their own. Slowing the conversations down was hard, and unnatural at the time.

A further set of closely interwoven emotions that presented particular challenges for the group were centred around shame, assigning blame, judgement and forgiveness, these also being a cardinal part of the four tasks in mourning.

5.1.3 Blame - Jesus came to set his captives free

I found that the feelings around blaming and holding to accountability the alcoholics for their actions, were fraught with unresolved emotion. Not one of the participants had reached a point where discussing forgiveness, was something they wanted to delve into. It became one of those

subjects that frustrate myself as researcher, but out of this frustration grew the awareness that these were issues children of alcoholics had particular problems with.

Before I accepted the Lord as my saviour – many years ago - I judged and blamed my father for the things that he did, for the way that he was, at Elijah house we call it judging. Now I know he's just repeating the cycle, his father, and grandfather were like that too. "The sins of the fathers will be visited on the children". They cannot help the way they are and don't do the things they do because they're vindictive, don't take it personally. Only God can let me see – he sent Jesus to set the captives free. – Nanette

Because of the emotional and physical wrongs we perceive to have been perpetrated against us, and because of the fact that in the lives of children of alcoholics the parents have yet to acknowledge that *any* wrong has been done, accountability becomes the proverbial thorn in the side. If there is no acknowledgement of an injustice perpetrated, and therefore no reason to forgive the parent, why are the emotional wounds unable to heal?

Nanette and Ina have explained that for many years they prayed to be able to forgive. They ask nothing of the alcoholic, and try to feel nothing for the alcoholic, but forgiveness. They added that it's still a lifelong process, but they're walking that road. They've received the gift of forgiveness that Patton refers to in Wicks and Parsons (1993:586):

Forgiveness of one's parents, family and self is not an act of will (though it may pose as such) but God's gift. God gives when gifts can be received; for the neglected, rejected or abused child that readiness may come after a lifetime process of healing.

The rest of us are stuck at seeking acknowledgement. This will be a big step in moving through to acceptance and forgiveness. In some instances our parents have died, and that acknowledgement will never come. For other participants, although their parents are alive, they will never be sober enough to listen or acknowledge wrongdoing. Many parents won't even be aware of wrongdoing or injustice. An alternative needs to emerge from the pain, which will facilitate a forward movement.

Waldegrave (2002:56) comments that there will never be peace without justice. He adds that the likelihood of forgiveness being a way to harmony diminishes in situations where the people who have acted in unjust ways are not prepared to take up responsibility to make things right.

Benestad (2002:76) adds some interesting and, to this group, extremely relevant ideas to the pot of forgiveness. She comments that "forgiveness can contribute to the maintenance of pain-inflicting ignorance. Perhaps one should spend some time thinking about the usefulness of

forgiveness when forgiveness is undeserved.” In reading this I couldn’t help but think of Marietjie’s response to why we should forgive – it is not because the perpetrator deserves it, but because in the Lord’s Prayer we intone: *Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us*. Her trepidation lies in the summation that we will only be forgiven our sins if we forgive others theirs. It never becomes a question of the kind or enormity of the sin.

Personally, I have considered this question of holding others accountable for their abuses for a great number of years, and I have wondered at a possible misinterpretation I hold of the Bible in that God may hold us accountable, yet we may not expect the same from others? Maybe what I mean by accountability is that I would like to understand or make sense of the motivations of the abusers, emotionally or physically, in my family. This becomes intertwined with acknowledgement in my mind – admitting what happened, and why it happened. Alan Jenkins (1990) has some insightful ideas to offer in this regard.

5.1.3.1 *Jenkins’ Theory of Restraint*

Jenkins proposes that there are two ways of viewing men who abuse – emotionally and physically. The first way explores the route of finding *causal explanations* for the abuser’s abuse. These causal explanations cover the ground of causes located within the individual perpetrator, causes located within the individual’s interaction with others, causes located within the individual’s developmental history and finally causes which are located within western culture and society (Jenkins 1990:18). Jenkins’ disenchantment with the preoccupation with causal explanations lies in the fact that going this route does not promote the idea that the perpetrator must take responsibility. The perpetrator feels “let off the hook” as he understands he has a smorgasbord of reasons to choose from to excuse his deeds. “It was not his fault” and he has no motivation to change his behaviour, as the reasons can always be fallen back upon.

The alternate, and more helpful way of viewing perpetrators of abuse, is to adopt a theory of restraint in relating with them. Jenkins (1990:57) proposes that “instead of accepting the abuse perpetrator’s ‘invitation’ to search for the cause of abuse, I am able to invite him to consider:

- What has stopped him in the past from taking responsibility for his abuse?
- What has stopped him from taking responsibility to develop sensitive and respectful relationships with the victims (and/or) other family members?

(Thus, the perpetrator) can examine restraints to his acceptance of responsibilities without the risk of unwittingly attributing responsibility to ‘causal’ factors”.

Had Jenkins' ideas had some fertile ground to develop roots in, I am certain I speak for all the participants when I say that this would be a preferred route we would want our alcoholic parent/s to take. It would have pointed towards a possible healing and wellness on the part of our alcoholic parents, and at the same time, infused a hopefulness into the lives of the participants, that meaningful and caring dialogue may one day resume. However, realism dictates that we no longer search for the unattainable. We no longer ask for admissions on the "what happened" or "why it happened".

5.1.3.2 *Alternatives to blame*

Since the prospect of the above is not within the realm of possibility, I have found some helpful ideas on healing in the ideas of McNamee and Gergen (1999), who speak of relational responsibility, positioned within the social construction discourse – the same discourse in which I have positioned myself as researcher (see in this regard chapter 2). These ideas do strip the alcoholic parent of taking accountability for their abusive actions, and I can feel Jenkins' admonishing frown alight over this way of thinking, as it is once again quite a departure from Jenkins' theory of restraint. However, relational responsibility promises a smidgeon of sanity to those in distress, while the theory of restraint is simply a pipedream for those who truly believe alcoholics will willingly come to the table to negotiate change.

McNamee and Gergen (1999) propose a move from assigning individual responsibility for a blameworthy event, with its isolating, alienating and eradicating effects, to assigning relational responsibility. The thrust of this approach is that it moves towards means of valuing, sustaining, and creating forms of relationship out of which common meanings – and thus moralities – can take wing. It requires of the abused the capacity to understand and the willingness to consider the contributions of four domains of intelligibility to the occurrence of the abusive event.

Firstly, we need to acknowledge that we are misled in assuming that an action performed by a perpetrator is autonomous. The individual's actions are hardly his/hers alone but bear the mark of a myriad others. Because 'we contain multitudes', we are invited to expand the retinue of guests at the table of responsibility (McNamee & Gergen 1999:12). In this regard it is interesting to note that all the participants' parents who were alcoholic, had a family history of alcoholism, handed down from generation to generation. In the group meetings we could trace back at least three generations, of each participant, who were affected by alcohol abuse. These 'others' have in one way or another contributed to the inheritance of a legacy of alcoholism.

Secondly, “persons do not commit evil actions, if they are evil to him/her only. Required for their perpetration is at least one domain of intelligibility in which they are approved “(McNamee & Gergen 1999:14). Thus, for any action that is blameworthy in a relationship, there are silent interlocutors who look on approvingly. The focus of this comment is not on the idea of evil, but on the fact that the community allows the acts of abuse to continue because they appear to condone it, in not speaking out. In chapter 4, 4.1.1.1, I mentioned that “not meddling in the affairs of others” could be a powerful discourse that has seeped into communities, and that breaking this taboo might be very hard for people. Therefore, I understand McNamee and Gergen’s statement to involve a moral choice that needs to be made by the community, who is aware of the particular problem, and wants to end the misery of others. The choice falls between either spectating or acting on behalf of the children of alcoholics.

Thirdly, individuals’ actions are seen as “manifestations of larger aggregates”. We may then understand our construction of another’s action in terms of the larger institutions by which we are constituted (McNamee & Gergen 1999:15). Cast another way, it would be useful to consider why the alcoholic parents of the participants choose/chose to behave and relate in ways which are emotionally damaging to their children. It would be helpful for the children of alcoholics to realize that these alcoholics – essentially men – have been influenced, moulded, socialized into internalizing certain ways of doing and saying, consciously and unconsciously, with the understanding that what is being done and said is O.K. and is condoned as acceptable, and excusable, backed up by millennia of similar attitudes and cultural institutions. Social structures, traditions, norms and ideologies of the western culture have left traces in the bloodstream of alcoholics, and an inevitable fusion of man and culture has ensued. Because the alcoholic parents in the study are essentially male, patriarchy could very well be one of these larger institutions, as it undergirds most religious institutions, and has trodden deeply into the paths of western male attitudes. In this regard section 4.1.4 can be consulted for a lengthier discussion on patriarchy. Thus, behaviour and attitude of the alcoholic is not so much a personal choice made by him, but is an entrenched way of being, for which “many” or “multitudes” should be held accountable.

Lastly, we can entertain the notion that there are “no untoward injustices to which we have not all made a contribution, whether by our language, actions or physical existence. If we are all constituted within a so-called systemic soup, then there are no events that escape the flavouring of our being (and conversely)” (McNamee & Gergen 1999:17).

In attempting to employ the above, we may discover that “the landscape of possibilities for understanding any untoward action is without horizon” (McNamee & Gergen 1999:17).

The above ideas, however, are all grounded in theory. It is in the practical living of these ideas that we may hope to find emotional release. May our hearts understand these ideas as our minds do. Put another way, it is simple and logical to see and understand how each individual is constituted by communities before him/her and around him/her, and that decisions which hurt others should not be attributed solely to his/her power of choice. But there are parts of our make-up which govern our feelings – our hurts and angers, which appear not to have read the manual on relational responsibility, and refuse to respond “reasonably” to the logic Gergen and McNamee (1999) puts forward, parts who are asking “But what about the conscious, purposeful, willful choices people make?” And often these parts loudly drown out the voice of logic.

To facilitate healing, a fusion of ideas on relational responsibility and a nurturing of alternative stories are needed. Furthermore a study should be made of forgiveness, the role of spirituality and the role of religion, in the healing process.

5.1.4 Forgiveness

Many of the participants have mentioned their daily struggle with forgiveness especially when issues of accountability remain unresolved. Although forgiveness is briefly referred in section 5.1.3 in connection with blame, it does need a more detailed discussion if children of alcoholics are to achieve healing.

The New Testament contains various words conveying the message of forgiveness, the two most common being (1) *eleao* – meaning to show mercy, and (2) *aphiemi* – meaning to release, discharge or put away. Another word often used is *splanchnizomai* – denoting compassion for or feeling sorry for someone, and is literally derived from a word for intestines. It literally means to pour out one’s insides, one’s intestines (Rye et al 2000:20). It is assumed, from a Christian perspective, that forgiving someone releases that person from injury, offense and debt, and that signs of repentance from the “perpetrator” create a balance. The forgiver, with compassion would release the “perpetrator” from any act or attitude that would impede the relationship of those involved. Exline and Baumeister (2000:133) comment that when one person harms or transgresses against another, this act effectively creates an interpersonal debt, (and) forgiveness by the wronged party cancels this debt. This cancellation could take various forms, such as those which are cognitive (deciding not to think about the debt, and recalling one’s own debt), affective

(ceasing to feel angry about the debt), behavioural (deciding not to seek redress), and or spiritual (deciding to relinquish control of the debt to God).

Exline and Baumeister (2000:134) mention that research has revealed various benefits to forgiveness, such as increased mental health and marital satisfaction. Defensive responses such as revenge fantasies and blaming have been associated with psychopathology, poor recovery from bereavement and poor health outcomes.

Furthermore, a distinction should be made between *implicit* and *explicit* forgiveness (Exline & Baumeister 2000:35). Explicit forgiveness implies some form of confrontation where the victim implies they have suffered harm and the other person is the cause or source of this harm. If this forgiveness is unsolicited as the person addressed feels no harm has been perpetrated, outrage might be provoked to the further detriment of the relationship. In implicit forgiveness, it is not expressed clearly that harm was committed and a personal debt caused.

Children of alcoholics express the need to convey *explicitly* the emotional debt caused by their parent/s, yet due to reasons discussed in section 5.1.3 they end up being incapable of forgiveness, or they resort to implicit forgiveness, which is often not enough to appease the pain of emotional trauma, abandonment, neglect or physical abuse. It is also little wonder then that recovery and healing takes such a long time.

Ultimately, the children of alcoholics in our group sought repentance from the parents, and possibly a change in behaviour. In not one of the cases has repentance been a possibility. In instances such as these, the pastoral caregiver might assist the child of the alcoholic to at least consider the possible barriers to repentance, as described by Exline and Baumeister (2000:140). The alcoholic parents could disagree with the charge levelled against them; be fearful of the punishment or restrictions placed upon them upon admission/confession of their acts; they could be experiencing shame and guilt at their behaviour; or they could sincerely be so self-absorbed in their own predicament that no amount of talk will penetrate.

However, there might also be barriers to forgiveness that needs to be identified and talked about within a pastoral care-giving context. The particular barriers to forgiveness identified by Exline and Baumeister (2000:144) include the fear that the transgressions will simply be repeated; the fear by the person that they will be perceived as weak; the belief that justice will not be served; and the loss of benefits of victim status. Within this particular research group, the children of alcoholics experience the first three as inhibitors of the process of forgiveness.

Although concepts such as reconciliation or repentance can be addressed by Jenkin's theory of restraint (see section 5.1.3.1), the research participants felt that repentance and reconciliation do not really form any tangible possibilities in the lifeworld of most children of the alcoholic. However, for Emmons (2000) it is of great importance that possibilities for extending forgiveness should still be explored, possibilities which do not necessarily include the concepts of reconciliation or repentance. This is of critical importance as Emmons (2000:171) elaborates that "[i]dentity is concerned with achieving unity and purpose in life". Thus, "a restoration of coherence, integration and wholeness in personality" (Emmons 2000:171) can be facilitated through forgiveness. In section 5.1.3.2 I have explored how the theory concerning relational responsibility could be one possibility towards embracing an attitude of forgiveness. However, within the pastoral context Emmons (2000:171) suggests that the "use of religious stories or parables can also serve as a powerful source of inspiration and guidance for those desiring to grant forgiveness. Forgiveness is the integrated state of a person who is in a right relationship with God, with others, and within himself or herself". Lundeen (1989:177-193) emphasizes that one can extend forgiveness, without repentance and reconciliation, if one revises one's knowledge of God. Lundeen (1989:178) comments that:

God is not just a God of forgiveness, but the ground of all reality and the power of the future. Putting forgiveness in the centre marks God with personal, loving features. Forgiveness elevates love of the most radical kind to ultimate dependability. It means God can be trusted, making all the difference in the world.

If a child from an alcoholic home grasps that "God's forgiveness provides a solid grounding for our initiatives" (Lundeen 1989:184) of forgiveness towards our parents, we become aware of our own sinfulness, and God's radical love in forgiving us. Should we forgive, we would be growing closer to Him, striving to be more like Him. Lundeen (1989:181) makes it clear that "forgiveness is not a relaxation of standards, but is still a clear recognition that something has been lost, broken or damaged". It "frees us to mount an assault on the very challenges that led to our defeat," (Lundeen 1989:182) by taking "yesterday's sense of loss and mak[ing] it power for tomorrow". From this I understand that Lundeen implies that children of alcoholics will be able to reach that point of forgiveness by revising the way in which we think of God and the role and purpose of forgiveness. Nanette and Ina both spoke of forgiveness in such a way as to convey that they have studied the scriptures intensively at Elijah House, and they have come close to Lundeen's thoughts reflected on forgiveness. It was also implied that this newly gained knowledge regarding forgiveness specifically, has contributed to making their lives more purposeful and content, and as Emmons (2000:171) explains, more coherent, integrated and whole.

Finally, which route would a pastoral caregiver need to follow in facilitating the process of forgiveness? Malcolm and Greenberg (2000:179) explicate the process in 5 steps: (1) the acceptance into the awareness of strong emotions such as sadness and anger; (2) letting go of previously unmet interpersonal needs; (3) a shift in the forgiving person's view of the offender; (4) the development of empathy for the offender; and (5) the construction of a new narrative of self and other.

This is going to pose quite a challenge to the pastoral caregiver, as just one of those steps can take years to accomplish. However, Patton (2000:281) comments that "forgiveness is necessarily a religious or theological term for a pastoral counselor...because it has to do with the relationship between God and humankind, and with the relationship of human beings to each other". Patton (2000: 281) leaves the reader with a thought that implies to me a promise of hope, in that he says:

[W]e [pastoral counselors] do not encourage or insist that they (people who have been hurt by life and relationships) forgive, but to be with them in the pain of being themselves. It is an attempt to break the isolation of shame and rejection.... The task of the religious community and its ministers is not to supervise forgiveness, but to provide relationships in which genuine humanity, including the possibility of forgiving one's transgressions, can be discovered.

5.1.5 Spirituality

Oates (1997:36), comments that "in the journey of the soul, the life of faith in Jesus Christ, we keep moving forward. In bringing the church's ministerial tradition of "cure of the souls" (Foskett & Jacobs 1997:318) to a congregation, pastors would do well to remember the influence that religion and spirituality has on the healing and transformation of those in pain. In bringing healing pastors are looking increasingly to integrating social and behavioural sciences with their religious and theological studies. This will lead to a "less directive, less authoritarian and less moralistic ministry" where a greater capacity has emerged "to help individuals explore their own needs and aspirations, to resolve their own problems and to seek their own direction" (Foskett & Jacobs 1997:320).

Stafford and others (Booth 1995; Royce 1995; Alpers 1995; Finnegan & McNally 1995; Weaver, Revilla & Koenig 2002; Van Cleave, Byrd & Revell 1987) concur that alcohol and co-dependency are diseases of the spirit, "an illness which only a spiritual experience will conquer" (Finnegan & McNally 1995:45) and "not to be confused with a religious experience, although for some the two are equivalent" (Stafford 1992:32). Most literature dealing with alcohol abuse, mentions the need to address spirituality as a facilitator to physical and psychological wellness. Spirituality is discussed as part of not only the alcoholic's healing, but also the healing of the rest of the family.

Finnegan and McNally (1995:45) point out that in the case of the trauma of alcoholism, survivors must find some source of existential meaning, some spiritual connection and empowerment in order to continue to survive and begin to thrive, and that the definition of spirituality must be as broad, diverse and inclusive as possible to allow the individual's conception of God or other beliefs that will allow the individual to heal.

"People who are ill have a drive to heal themselves. Nothing is more important than to do that. This means they experience a great need to feel real..." (Sutherland 1996:222). Burke and Miranti (2001:602) raise the question of whether it is not feasible to believe that much "anger, depression, guilt and/or sadness that the client brings to counseling sessions has their origins in lack of connectedness or meaning in the client's life?" Royce (1995:21) indicates that the success of treatment (of adult children of alcoholics) is in direct proportion to attention to the spiritual aspects of the disease of alcoholism, and that there is general consensus in the counselling field that relapses of health are invariably caused by spiritual regression. To this end Burke and Miranti (2001:601) encourages discussing spirituality in counselling "directed at exploring meaning and purpose in life".

One of the tasks of the pastoral counsellor is to treat the whole person – body, mind and spirit – towards a wholeness. Addressing spirituality will bring fulfillment to a part of the task required of the pastor. Father Leo Booth (1995:6) understands spirituality to encompass the relationship between body, mind and emotions that allows people to be positively and creatively connected to others and the world around them. "Spiritual power is within us, manifested in our self-esteem, our ability to make choices, and to take responsibility for our lives" (Booth 1995:6). Our relationship within the self of body, mind and emotions shapes our abilities to relate to others, and to the spiritual power in the universe. Wounded spirituality results when the above connection is broken and the ability to respond healthily to life's circumstances is limited. Thus, working on wounded spirits may lead to a restoration of meaning and connectedness in the life of the adult child from an alcoholic family.

Both counselling and spirituality attempt to foster self-acceptance, forgiveness, acknowledgement of shortcomings, an acceptance of personal responsibility, letting go of hurts and resentments, dealing with guilt and modifying self-destructive patterns of thinking. Working on the above might also restore purpose to the lives of these children.

In summary, according to Van Cleave, Byrd and Revell (1987:151) healing is a life-long process, and healing therapy for co-dependents includes:

1. confrontation of the impaired thinking,
2. therapeutic discharge of the repressed emotions in a safe environment
3. processing the grief over lost relationships or a childhood,
4. finding and nurturing the inner child, and
5. accepting the grace of Jesus Christ, their higher power.

In our narrative pastoral conversations, I feel we have covered *some* of the ground the above healing model suggests. However, the fifth step was an issue which we did not delve into too deeply. Nanette and Ina are very open regarding their relationship with God. Marietjie and Dawn, although acknowledging Christ as the Higher Power, still experience many undercurrents of emotion regarding God and the experiences they went through as children in the alcoholic home. Trudie and Karin did not feel willing to explore the issue of religion, and all of the participants' wishes were respected, as that was the basis upon which the research procedures had been negotiated. Under particular circumstances, where a child from an alcoholic home seeks out pastoral care from a pastoral care-giver, one could expect the fifth step in the process to be raised and dealt with, as suggested by Van Cleave, Byrd and Revell.

A further step in the process of healing which has not been discussed, but which I feel can make a large contribution to the overall healing of children from alcoholic families, is the facilitation of alternative stories.

5.2 THE POWER OF FILM LIES IN THE EDITING OF THE REEL

If the plot in a film can be equated to the story of an individual's life, then it is fair to say that the same way a film can be cut and spliced, edited and recast to improve the quality of a film or scene, so meaning in an individual's life can be edited and enhanced, by cutting away what is extraneous, splicing it with the more desirable, playing with the focus to emphasize certain aspects while taking less desirable parts out of focus. One way of applying this would be to facilitate the creation of *alternative stories*.

Various authors refer to this process also as "reframing" or "restorying" (Van Cleave 1987; Pearson 1994; Rigazio-DiGilio 2001; Wilson 1987). Creating an alternative story implies one would need to look at the problem or situation from a different perspective. Pearson (1994:150) explains that "the meaning that any event has depends upon the "frame" in which we perceive it. When we change the frame, we change the meaning". She also describes the process as changing a negative (perception) to a positive (perception). Although adult children of alcoholics

cannot go back and change their actions of the past they can change how they perceive the past. This requires a pastoral caregiver to become keenly aware of the perspectives from which counselees approach life, “and then call upon biblical truth (should the counselee allow this, or request this, or open up this avenue of conversation) and psychological realities to equip these people to gain new hope for life” (Wilson 1987:133).

5.2.1 Alternative Stories – Alternative Ways of Understanding

Alternative stories are stories which provide the child of an alcoholic with alternative ways of viewing a problem-saturated incident. In being able to look at an incident from a different vantage point, one may discover a new way of understanding oneself, the perpetrator, and the incident/s as a whole, and in this way we may all find a certain measure of peace. In editing the ‘colour’ of an incident, it often affects the atmosphere surrounding this incident. What once caused pain, may now look different, once coloured in understanding and (hindsight) wisdom. The possibility for the development of alternative stories are captured in the following words by Morgan (2000:8): “Our lives are multistoried. There are many stories occurring at the same time and different stories can be told about the same events. No single story can be free of ambiguity or contradictions and no single story can encapsulate or handle all the contingencies of life.” During the group conversations and the letters written to the participants, I tried to invite alternative ways to understanding the experiences of living with alcohol.

The participants in this study have expressed a certain consolation in being able to view their circumstances or aspects of their circumstances differently. And with this mindset has come a more hopeful view of their futures, their purposes on earth, and their ability to cope with day-to-day issues in general.

5.2.1.1 The emerging alternative stories

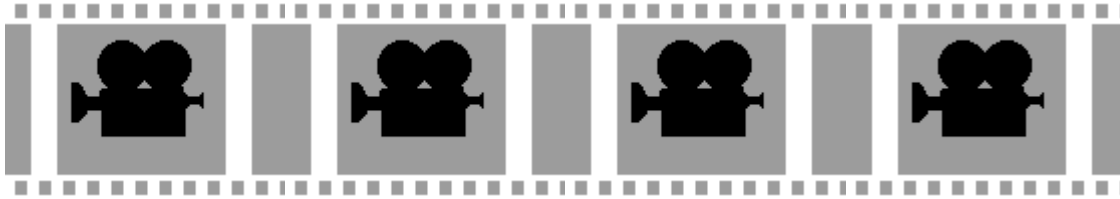
What follows are the alternative stories which emerged as the conversations in the group discussions progressed.

Nanette explains that *“I know that I cannot blame them for who they are. It is not their fault. They are the fruit of their parents, and their parents’ parents. I do not take it personally anymore, as I now understand they were not trying to be vindictive. They cannot help how they are. Besides, Romans 8:28-29 teaches me that ‘all things work together to the good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose’ because he will conform us to what he wants or needs for his work here on earth.*

I have also learnt through trial and error that the house I wanted, and tried so hard to make beautiful, and my garden, were all helpful to my healing at the time, but they were temporary. God has taught me that - because now I find my house falling apart around me, so dilapidated and neglected. I realize he's showing me that only his word counsels, and only the Holy Spirit heals you! The house was only healing in the flesh, God is healing me in the spirit."

The path Nanette chose in bringing up her children has taken a very different image, to the one she grew up with. When she finds her story with her children intersecting the one with her mom and herself, she consciously alters her behaviour so that it does not imitate the relationship she had with her mother. *"I find myself doing the same things to my daughter that my mom did to me, and then I stop! I must remember, or I will push my daughter away too. The answer lies in breaking those destructive cycles, then the future can look different."*

Karin has had to edit her story dramatically to move forward with her life. Blame has been moved to the backburner, in order to facilitate self-healing. The following is the way she has described this forward-moving.



My father hurt me and my siblings because as a child he was hurt by his siblings. He was unhappy and it affected how he dealt with us. I understand that now. I also know that trying to cope with his problems by using alcohol was what destroyed him, and what tried to destroy me! But I won't let that happen. I have realized I need to build different ways of coping with my fear, sadness and uncertainties. His methods do not work!

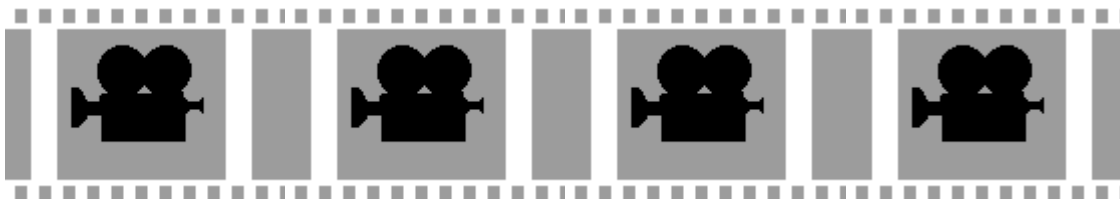
I know my self-esteem was my biggest problem. It affected my ability to COMMUNICATE! That's why I've decided to work behind a counter to learn how to communicate with people again.

I also speak louder now, no longer whisper at people. My confidence is growing as I work on this. I am NOT like my father!!!

My designs are good, and no-one can take that away from me. I'm doing really well at college too, my father wouldn't believe it!

My boyfriend may be so much older than me, but he loves me for who I am, warts and all.

I need to ignore and exclude my father from my life if I am to move on. That part's still hard, but it's getting easier every day.



Marietjie's moments and gestures of resistance against the influence of alcohol, as it seduced her parents, have been moments which have helped to define, and still define the woman she chooses to be today.

INDEPENDENCE:

I'll drive my *own* car, *with* a license!

I'll be *financially secure*, secure a *high position*

And *not* need to *depend* on any man.

Relationships:

Emotionally:

My husband is not my father,

Everything does not need to be

and I will treat him with less

Seen in shades of RED

suspicion.

I will continue to love and care for my parents

As the Bible expects me to do, although at

Times it is VERY hard.

Trudie related how her decisions in treating her teenage daughters had been dramatically affected by the way in which her mom and dad treated her during adolescence and young adulthood. Her father's alcoholism led to a negation of her unwed pregnancy as "my mom didn't want to upset my dad (the alcoholic) or push him over the edge into drinking even more". Trudie described her loneliness, depression (which lasted ten years) and her eventual pressured decision into giving the baby up for adoption. Furthermore, very little physical love was demonstrated in her home. As an adult Trudie underwent counselling for many years, and the end result was a lessening of her guilt to the extent that she invited her adopted daughter back into her life – despite the terrible risk of rejection. Also, she has committed herself to being accepting and loving towards her own daughters, and embarked on a concerted effort to be more demonstrative physically, both to herself and her children. She has learned to love herself.

Ina's alternative story is one in which forgiveness has been at the forefront of all her endeavors. She has found that self-worth and validation can come from other sources than academic

excellence, but has never managed to shrug off the need for approval through it. She has found that studying her own history with alcoholic parents and helping others in similar circumstances through her profession of psychologist has changed her perspectives on her childhood. An alternative parent model in God has played a central role in her transformation and taught her how one can become a good parent, despite a chaotic and traumatic childhood.

5.2.2 Editing my own novel

And me? What does my alternative story look like? I have plotted a path through the lives of as many people as I could, scripting them into my life, peopling my life with individuals who will build me as an individual, while challenging me to grow in as many spheres as possible. I have tried to stop the gaps with academic achievement, and have been fortunate enough to find doors opening, the harder I tried. Becoming a teacher has been healing, as I have had cause to look beyond myself, at the plight of others, and immersing myself in their stories, I have often found release from my own. I consciously remember the people who have helped me transform, those who believed I had “rights beyond survival” (Stafford 1997:163), and the knowledge that I couldn’t have developed on my own is humbling, and warming.

I have come to realize that McNamee and Gergen (1999) were insightful in their observations that one should look at blame and responsibility not as concepts to be taken on in an individualistic manner, but that one needs to acknowledge the cultural contributions made to every individual’s behaviour and ways of thinking. This way of thinking about blame and responsibility has affected the way I see my father, and his penchant for alcohol. I have decided not to tackle the stigma of alcohol abuse as a weakness and as a choice people have made regarding how they live. Instead, I will try to alter my understanding of alcohol abuse to one which accepts it could be a disease (Stafford 1997:175), and treatable at that. But the ultimate taste I am left with is one of despair and disillusionment. I feel disillusioned with a world which appears to promise the child a happy, carefree childhood existence, yet has put into place every vehicle at its disposal to destroy the very possibility of happiness. We are all complicit then in the abuse of alcohol, physical and emotional abuse, the yearning to fill our material coffers and the like. And in the process people are losing their souls.

5.3 IDENTITY: FROM COCOON TO BUTTERFLY?

The identities of the group members have undoubtedly been influenced and shaped by their experiences. Each discourse discussed in chapter four has stamped its ink upon our psyches. It is so that we will never know the extent to which we would’ve been “different” had we undergone

different, less impactful childhood experiences. The fact, however, remains, that we are who we are, personalities unique and unquantifiable, shaped by self-talk and community talk, and tied to our pasts to varying degrees. Some group members feel their “identities” are still shackled to their pasts by wrought iron chains, while others feel only the featherlight pull of silk threads. Throughout our meetings, no satisfactory resolution to the issue of identity was formed by the group. A definition of identity still eludes us, although we all have a better sense of where we’ve been and where we are going. We all feel we know the person we are now, more closely than we knew the young child of the alcoholic in the alcoholic home. And more importantly, we all feel compassion, understanding and acceptance for the child of today and yesteryear.

In summary, Chapter 5 elaborated on the various emotional hurdles impeding forward movement in the participants in this study. It then went on to describe the alternative stories many of the participants had developed or were beginning to develop for themselves. Because the stories of our lives are continually being edited by all the newfound knowledge and experiences we are going through, it may be useful to note that these alternative stories contain only traces of all the exciting and growth-inspiring events which affect us and change us daily. The undefined nature of identity has also been explored.

Chapter six is a chapter of reflections – reflections on the process of action research as a whole, reflections on its impact on the group, and reflections on my ability to fulfill the aims I set regarding this direction of research. Reflections on the role pastoral care has to play in the lives of alcoholics and their children, is also an important part of this study, and as such has been discussed here.

CHAPTER SIX

IT NEVER WAS A RACE – IT’S A JOURNEY

6.1 LOOKING BACK

What I would like to do now is end off my research study, very much as I began it – by reflecting upon and contemplating the path the journey took. And what a trip it was!

Initially I started off with the thought foremost in my mind that I had to impress, academically. I had to get it right! I had to prove somehow that I was capable of doing this. Coupled with this was the compulsion to explore this avenue of research – Identity and adult children of alcoholics – as it has been a pivotal force and influence in much of what I have undertaken in my life. However, as I look back now on my initial thoughts about the research, and about my insistence on trying to “get it right”, I can’t help but grimace at my intensity, while once again marvelling at how my thoughts still continue to reflect the literature I have become so absorbed in..

What I have come to learn through this research is multifaceted. I have realized that following Frost’s advice in *taking the road less travelled* (see section 1.1) has indeed made all the difference. In researching a topic more alien to my life, I would not have come to Murray’s insight that it is not in *thinking that I am*, but that “*I do – therefore I am*” (see section 1.2). It was only in engaging with people of similar experience, that I came to realize that I was not alone in my predicament as a child from an alcoholic home. Instead of being a lone boat on a vast ocean, I discovered I was only one of millions of boats bobbing within touching and towing distance. My single biggest discovery!

6.2 TRUE PARTICIPATION: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

This section is a reflection on the nature of participatory action research. In sharing the responsibility of the direction of the journey, as Couture (see section 1.1) suggests, the participants did “beckon me near” (Heshusius 1994:209), and we proceeded to “witness” (see section 1.3.1 and section 1.5.3) each other’s stories and share a hope for recovery through this process. In sharing our “war stories” we were validating each other’s ignored experiences, and legitimating the heretofore misunderstood emotions, emotions we all had considered inappropriate before.

This process helped both myself and the participants to feel comfortable with the process, no matter where we found ourselves to be on this journey. There was no overwhelming pressure from my side to “push an agenda” and get the answers I was wanting or expecting. I had ideas,

yes. However, they had the freedom to raise issues most needing discussion. By the same token they felt liberation in the freedom to refrain from the conversation if they so chose, to. Marietjie availed herself of that option at one point. The participants were able to change the run the conversation if they did not appreciate its direction, and often one would feel the need to apologise for “hogging” the allocated time for the discussion. I’ve come to believe that quantitative research could not even remotely have yielded the results and outcomes that qualitative participatory research has. The depth and quality of feeling is a sincere and life-changing experience that could not be produced or replicated in quantitative work. Its dynamic, unpredictable flow, its surprises, made for a journey worth the travelling.

In this group we all discovered and built on the fact that we had rights beyond mere survival (refer to section 5.2.2), and because the qualitative approach makes provision for the perspective that the researcher is not the expert, but that local knowledge is a valid and appreciated source of knowledge (see section 1.7.1), I was not surprised that I was learning so much from the participants. Possibly much more than they were learning from me! I felt that the boundary between researcher and researched had blurred to the extent that we became truly concerned for each other’s welfare and progress. Nanette, Trudie and Karin still contact me every second day with another profound offering of insight, bringing home the fact that research of this nature does not stop at the end of the final meeting. True immersion in the process exacts an emotional investment, which isn’t nullified when the contracted hours expire. I’ve found that this kind of relationship brings emotional rewards that enrich my life not only as researcher, but also as participant. In seeking me out they are also enriching my life in terms of continued interest in the research and its value, but also my life and its value. I hope these contributions are truly reciprocal.

6.3 LACK OF AWARENESS BREEDS LACK OF EMPOWERMENT

In my literature search on the topic of adult children of alcoholics I was saddened at the ignorance revealed by millennia of cultures concerning the popular notion that the only person affected by alcohol in a home, could be the alcoholic. Various writers (Brown 1988, Woititz 2002) draw attention to the fact that in the 1960’s and the 1970’s the field of alcoholism dealt only with the drinking alcoholic. The drinking alcoholic, and the male alcoholic in particular received the primary and most exclusive attention. In the 1960’s social services and academia acceded that wives of alcoholics needed help in dealing with the alcoholic mate, yet discussions of the children were resisted. It was only at the start of the 1970’s with the book *The forgotten children*, that that children of alcoholics became a new focal point of research and treatment, as well as a national

social movement. In 1979 children of alcoholics gained recognition as a new, previously unrecognised legitimate population. Janet Woititz – a trailblazer in providing literature on children of alcoholics (specifically *The Complete ACOA Sourcebook: Adult Children of Alcoholics at Home, at Work and in Love*, which also became a best-seller in 2002) reports that upon offering her first book on this subject to publishers, they commented that she was making a big deal about a little problem, and only in 1983 were the publishers willing to publish a book of this subject matter, and only if sold by mail order. According to Woititz, this book had no section on recovery for children of alcoholics, and a revised edition appeared in 2002 – a resource that a child of an alcoholic may keep to aid in recovery. Over the last few years many more books, workshops and conferences have become available and is offering hope of recovery to children of alcoholics, that our parents did not have the opportunity to experience.

In my dissertation I have preferred to focus on adult children of alcoholics, as I am one. That in itself for me is ironic and disillusioning, as I feel it is the young children and adolescents who most need intervention, and coping skills. Yet they never seem to be identified, they never seem to reach the counsellor, the psychologist, and the very systems designed to treat families suffering from alcohol, such as AA or Al anon do not function with much effectivity as far as the WHOLE family is concerned. Husbands, and peripherally the wives, are afforded attention, while children slip through the cracks. Although this is a subjective stance, as I have as a child been part of such a process, Johnson (2004:302) does bear me out. Johnson describes the family therapy offered to families struggling with substance abuse, as little more than information/education sessions where families are informed of the “disease concept, and the family’s role in the disease process”. At times they may meet to provide the substance abuser and the family members with space to express pent-up feelings regarding the substance abuser’s use. Johnson (2004:303) comments that “few actually utilise family therapy as a central part of the treatment process”. Johnson (2004:303) cites Kaufman and Kaufman in describing that the “family needs need to be met as an entity, the spouse subsystem, the sibling subsystem and the individual needs of each person in the family must be considered”. Furthermore, I have worked voluntarily at AA and Alateen, yet found only children who abuse substances other than alcohol, or whose parents abuse substances other than alcohol, there. So where are the children of alcoholics and how will they be helped if they are not found? They don’t seem to come forward willingly in childhood to receive help. People don’t make light conversation about children of alcoholics, and the consequences seem to be a lack of awareness.

If there is no awareness of the extent and scope of the phenomenon, it can never be addressed. Children from homes affected by alcohol will never feel empowered sufficiently, or supported appropriately to effect the changes and insights required for content, fulfilled lives. A great number of years of life are lost to recovery in adulthood, which should have been spent cementing relationships, identity, careers and so forth. Although I focused my research on how women have experienced this issue, the literature I did find abounds with references to male children who take up alcoholism, as their fathers did, for a variety of reasons, including modeling (on the father role model), a popular coping mechanism, societal suggestions of what “cool” is and so forth. The effects for the male children too are far-reaching, and include addictions, failed relationships, failed marriages, frustrated violent outbursts, physical abuse, and other harmful behaviour.

Making literature available is one way of empowering children from alcoholic homes, to take control of their lives. In discovering what it is exactly, that they are experiencing, and in helping them come to grips with the fact that their experiences are “normal” or “common” in such an environment, they are then receptive to literature which could help them cope or recover.

In the same vein, there are NO self-help groups for children from alcoholic homes in South Africa that I could track down. Nanette, a member of Elijah House, explained that this institution works with troubled adults, but not necessarily children from alcoholic homes, and the focus is completely religious. The Bible is used to counsel the troubled individual. While volunteering my services at the Alcoholics Anonymous offices in Vanderbijlpark, I discovered that there were insufficient support systems for children of alcoholics. There was a group for teens addicted to alcohol and drugs, but none for teens/children who live in alcoholic homes but don't drink themselves. And certainly none for adult survivors from alcoholic homes. On asking about this, I was informed that there are none, there wasn't a demand for this. In America, the U.K., Canada and Australia they have groups – the equivalent of AA in South Africa (in terms of publicity), which deal specifically with these issues. Alcoholics Anonymous in South Africa is the only group dealing exclusively with alcohol problems, and only as far as the adult alcoholic is concerned. For whatever reasons, there is little or no support for the rest of the family.

Barring one source, the literature devoted to the topic of adult children of alcoholics, is exclusively American, Canadian and Australian. Africa experiences a literary poverty in this area of research. I am convinced the need for this type of literature abounds (5 self-confessed children of alcoholics on a staff of 23), yet no-one has made the effort to embark on such a course of investigation, and publication. Excluding a handful of sources, most available sources date to the nineteen-eighties (see the reference section).

American figures estimate there are upward of 10 million alcoholics in America (Woititz 2002:10). Brown (1988:11) estimates that in America there are upwards of 28 million *children of alcoholics*. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is fast increasing, as mothers consume vast amounts of alcohol while pregnant. The National Centre for Disease Control in America reported an increase in FAS babies, almost sevenfold, from 1979 to 1993 (Robinson & Rhoden 1998:78). Furthermore, FAS has a lasting effect on physical appearance and intellectual functioning, and continues to handicap academic performance throughout individuals' school years and into adulthood. Could the country afford this kind of preventable effect, economically?

Advertising and the media are to a large extent responsible for the distorted perception of excessive drinking in our society (Stafford 1997:178). Images of alcohol, linked to escapism, elitism, physical, manly strength and all that is hip and sexy puts at risk the young and vulnerable in society. Possibly alcohol advertisements and bottles should carry detail of dangers, safe drinking levels, effects, and even a helpline number for either those addicted, or the children of those addicted. Labels on bottles would also expose and help end the stigma of alcoholism, and encourage people to talk about it.

The above facts paint a rather dismal picture of society in general. Yet, serious efforts at controlling the messages sent out by the media, and the messages received by alcohol users, could have hopeful effects for all involved in the imbibing process. Equipped with facts, many minds could be swung from silence to talk and awareness. Even church institutions, and pastors, could be sensitized to the gravity of alcohol consumption and its effects. Pastors could become more available and directive, whilst remaining supportive. A collective effort is needed to change the very culture of the way societies think, and behave. And it begins with us – children of alcoholics – with ME.

If I can use the debris of outrageous misfortune, and turn it into something positive – then none of what happened to me occurred without rhyme or reason.

(Gravitz & Bowden 1985:2)

Churches, in being willing to address these issues within congregations and invite possibilities to healing, can do much to create an awareness of, and intolerance for, the behaviour resulting from alcohol abuse. This attitude will empower women to take a stronger stand against abuse arising from alcohol abuse, and they will feel more willing to approach pastors and pastoral caregivers for practical help if it is obvious such behaviour is not condoned.

The crux of the matter is that the status quo will be maintained regarding this issue within churches and by extension the pastors of these churches, unless there is a vigorous drive for publicity and awareness of the extended sufferers in the alcoholic family. I'm not in any way diminishing the emotional experiences of the alcoholics themselves. I'm saying that the focus needs to be shifted to being more inclusive of the whole family experience. And in the meantime, those of us who are aware, will try to empower those who aren't, using Weingarten's "ant steps" (please refer to section 1.3.1).

6.4 DID I AIM AND MISS?

At this point of the research report I need to take stock and evaluate the extent to which I managed to fulfil the research aims I set out to investigate.

It was my aim to *identify the dominant discourses within alcoholic homes, and explore the effects these discourses had/have on adult children from alcoholic families* (refer to section 1.5.1) In attempting to do this I found the discourses too extensive to adequately deal with in a project of limited scope. I did attend to the most salient of these discourses (see chapter 4), yet throughout I felt I wasn't doing justice to the whole topic. The effects of the discourses are profound in their influence, and required more space to elaborate on. All the participants, however, found that setting them apart, each as a harmful influence in its own right, was extremely helpful in terms of providing an eagle's view perspective on the whole phenomenon. The strong patriarchal influence came as a surprise to all of us, as no-one had dared to name this powerful discourse as such in our lives. It was like getting to know the name of the enemy you have fought for a great many years.

Furthermore, from apportioning blame, many in the group have moved in perception, to the point where the discovery of how discourses worked, has led to the determination to have discourses work for them, and not against them, as has been the trend. Forewarned is forearmed!

Providing witnessing and acknowledgment of suffering (see section 1.5.3) was an aim I purposely had tried to be rather thorough with. I know very well the value of having my story heard, through compassionate witnessing (section 1.5.3), the difference it made to my sense of self to have my story written down to be mulled over. I gathered then that it would be of particular significance to every participant to have their stories heard too.

In listening to Trudie, as she speaks of the changes that have come over her daughter, Karin, since we began the conversations, I can take heart from the fact that it has seemed to impact her life positively. Trudie herself has mentioned her own new-found confidence, and that it has made

even her work-life easier. She voices opinions more confidently, and feels a certain selfworth, that she had forgotten she possessed. She likes this 'new' person much more than the 'old' one. Nanette is a firm believer in the fact that these meetings were necessary, and they have become the fodder of discussion for the self-help group that she attends. She felt that much of the process had been experienced by her before, but that each retelling helped to clarify her purpose on earth for herself, and that 'everything works to the good'. Marietjie has chosen not to speak of these meetings, and the value they may hold for her again. I am wondering if it is because many of the issues we discussed are still very much alive and impacting her life every day. Could it be that she draws strength simply from the fact that there are others that know, and provide unconditional, non-judgemental friendship in spite of the difficulties she is encountering?

I also tried to keep in mind the impact it might have on other readers, in terms of how they may be more observant of people they know or know of, and how they may play a part in raising awareness, or simply contributing to Weingarten's idea of "ant steps" in making the lives of other sufferers from alcoholic homes more bearable. By writing down what they allowed me to, of their stories, I felt that I had succeeded in the aim of witnessing and acknowledging the suffering of the participants.

The final aim of *co-constructing alternative identity stories* (see 1.5.2) was the aim I found I had most trouble evaluating. Because the stigma of being a child from an alcoholic home sticks so strongly to all "survivors" they, themselves found it hard to acknowledge that alternative stories may be just that, an alternative story, and not just another coping mechanism. The two have become so intertwined in the participants' minds that I wondered if there was any difference at all.

There were alternative stories available for all participants (please refer to section 5.2.1). The fact that some of the parents were still alive at the time of working on creating alternative stories, hampered some of the participants' attempts to move forward. Alternative stories which did not directly affect the participants' relationship with their parents, were eagerly embarked on. However, when these stories would affect the relationship adversely, obvious reticence was experienced with regard to dealing with the issues directly. At times, conversations ran dry, and could not be rekindled in this direction. Clearly, in issues related to relationships with parents, there are deep, loyal, complicated emotions running riot.

All the participants did move from an often unaware position to one which was aware (refer to section 1.3.1), as far as the influence of the various discourses was concerned, and this did lead to a confessed feeling of empowerment and agency. However, this feeling of empowerment was still a tentative one, where confidence could only grow in the spreading of wings in the relevant

direction for each participant. Discourses are hard to break into and challenge, but breaking the “silence rule” (refer to section 1.5.1) is already such a monumental step, for all participants.

I think expecting more from the fleeting conversations, we, as participants had, would've been unrealistic. As it was, the conversations yielded much more than I expected. There could not possibly be quick fixes and instant solutions to decades of tumult and confusion. Instead, we, as a group, have steadfastly built up a relationship that will in time yield even more in terms of insight into this profoundly sad and complicated topic. Not to be used for the purpose of this research report, but to develop ourselves as individuals, to become more of who we already are.

And the whole question of identity? This research project has taught me we are MORE than we thought we were, we have been CREATED BY MORE than we thought had created us, we can CHOOSE who we want to be, over and above all of the aforementioned.

6.5 PASTORAL CARE: CARE NOT CURE

How was I able to provide pastoral care to a group of women, in a group context, burdened by the often unspeakable, and for decades, the unspoken? I imagine that heeding the call of Cozad Neuger (2001), who refers to the importance of pastoral therapeutic contexts where silence is broken and women are “heard into speech”, was a place to begin. In projecting sufficient care and concern over a topic ignored and overlooked by society, I think it signalled that there was a sincere interest in exploration of the topic. In inviting a group of women of similar experiences, to explore only what they felt safe exploring, it nurtured a realization that in coming together, and in sharing their stories and fears, silences – inhibiting and suffocating – could be expanded into trickles of words, which would lead to torrents of emotion and release. The words, once freed, wove magical connections among the listeners, and the once “tenuously connected” (Couture 2000:17) – children of alcoholics, inhibited by fears and insecurities – became connected to friends in compassion, ones unafraid to listen and care. Often listening and caring is enough, cure is not the expectation. In this regard Weingarten (2001:124) reflects “that care not cure will keep us floating in the ocean”, where care creates metaphorically, “a variety of rafts and docks and buoys and life preserves for us to cling to ...”. Sutherland (1996:221) does remind us that pastoral intervention does not have as its aim cure, but rather a “transformation of perceptions, which is not the alteration of underlying dynamics, but a change in the individual’s capacity for an increased tolerance of the underlying psycho-emotional tensions and conflicts”. Management of conflict will lead to growth of the individual. Growth implies healing and as such a greater awareness of the role of religion and spirituality in an individual should be fostered, to facilitate healing. Forgiveness is essential in this transformation (Brenner 1989: 205-206).

These ideas are not unfamiliar to Nanette, Ina, Marietjie and myself. At a visceral level we have been struggling with this very insight for a number of years. Yet it is much easier to intellectualise the whole process of healing in discussions where one is expected to remain objective. Forgiveness on a subjective level is still posing grave problems for all six participants. However, many of the participants are open to exploring previously untested suggestions for healing, such as religion and spirituality. Each new insight holds the potential for growth, and as such the participants are eager to master intellectual territory which may lead to fulfilment, purpose and healing.

Koenig and Weaver (1997:92) state that “religion is the primary coping strategy for persons suffering severe psychological trauma”. When dealing with an individuals’ questions regarding abandonment of the earthly father (such as in the case of the research participants) and the perceived abandonment of the heavenly Father, Koenig and Weaver (1997) feel that modeling the caring presence of a tender God who does not abandon us in our horror and helplessness is more healing and quick than pat answers. – Nanette and Ina have been covering this ground for a number of years at Elijah House, and have confessed to finding the perspectives gained to be invaluable in their growth and healing, from the trauma of the past. Furthermore, the pastoral care and teaching they have received there has nourished them spiritually, and drawn them closer to their heavenly father. Although Marietjie and I have been less outspoken regarding our views of the perception that God had abandoned us in childhood, we have described our initial confusion but subsequent consolation in the awareness that God has always been a loving, caring God, who would protect us. Religion was often all we had. Trudie and Karin did not find religion to be of use to them in their struggles within the alcoholic home.

Foskett and Jacobs (1997:329) focus our attention on the prophetic role pastors [and/or pastoral caregivers] need to return to, by using the knowledge of issues gained in private and in confidence, to inform public decisions and policies. Learning of the effects that emotional deprivation, alcoholism and the like have on children of alcoholics, pastors have a platform for suggesting interventions by the church to improve the lives of these children. This aim runs parallel with the ambitions of the feminist theologians towards healing, discussed both in chapter 2 and more briefly in chapter 3 (with regard to patriarchy).

Compassionate witnessing opened the door to festering stories, in need of the balm of words to allow for their validation. And in being uttered, they could also be waved on. The shame that breeds silence was banished. The unconditional love and acceptance Couture (see section 1.2) spoke of indeed has affected each of the women in this study. Everyday conversations with them

are now punctuated by sincere care and concern. This interaction had led to a confessed general growth in self-confidence, self-love and self-acceptance. The group not only became a place to share war stories, but it became a place to find resources, ideas, advice, reassurances, and shoulders, as well as validation, hope and promises from the Bible. And the availability of these things is a constant, despite the terminated group sessions. Care is thus a constant.

6.6 IN SUMMARY

I think in our own ways we have all reached the point and received the “gift” that Weingarten (2003:207) describes, where *“your suffering has mattered. Knowing about it changes me. Your pain is not in vain.”*

This research project has given the *majority* of participants the impetus to pursue transformation, for the sake of healing. With revelation has emerged confidence, and the strengthening of the belief Nanette cannot help but share with us, *“Through Him, all things become possible”*.

“My righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back my soul shall have no pleasure in him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and keep their souls.”

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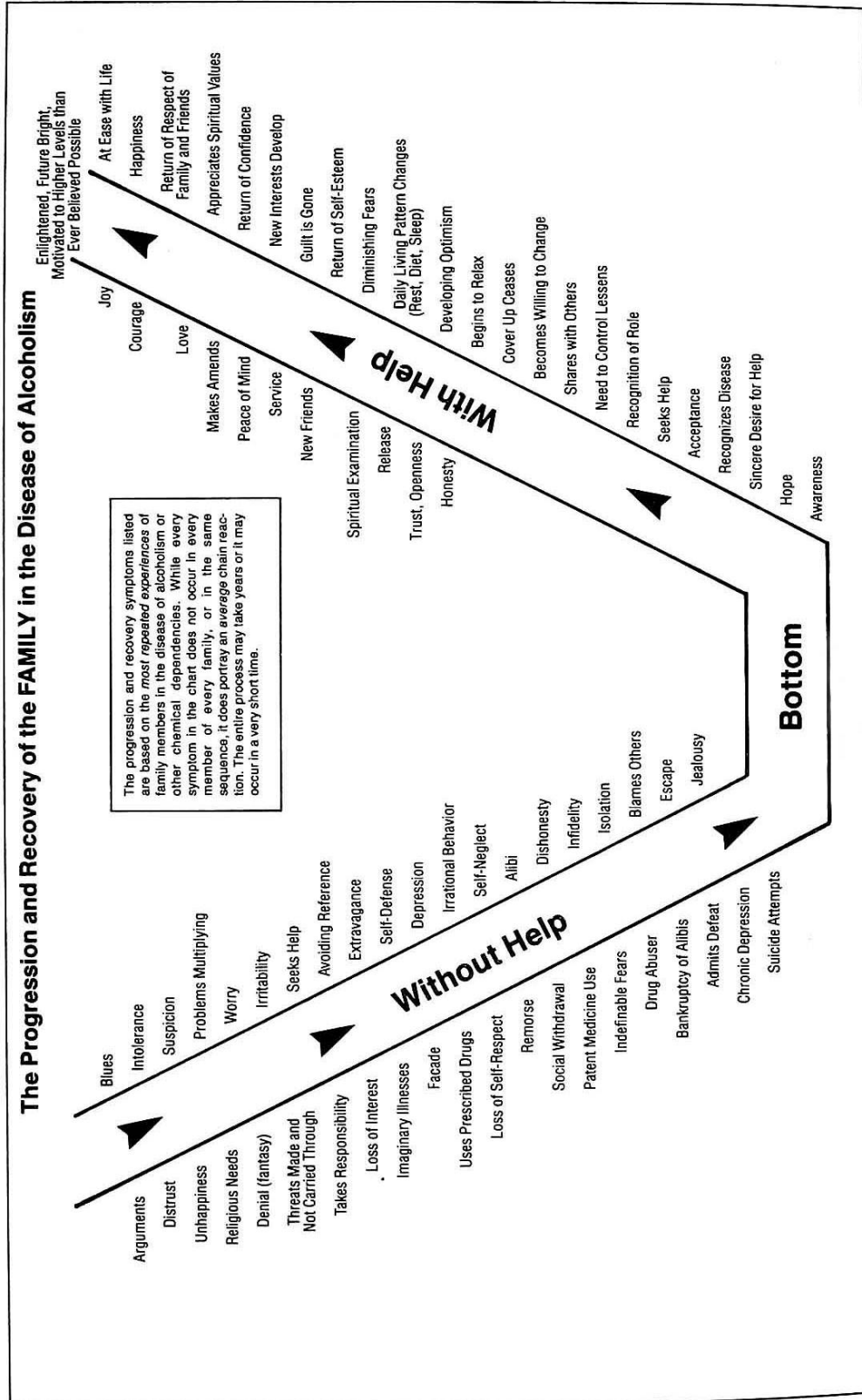
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Appendix: The progression and recovery of the alcoholic family



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