

# CHAPTER 1

## WEAVING WREATHS OF HONOUR THROUGH RESTORATIVE WITNESSING PRACTICES

Laurel, *n*, the sweet bay tree (*Laurus nobilis*), used in ancient times for making wreaths of honour ...

(The Chambers Dictionary, 1994:949)

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Research has taken me in two directions. Whereas I had initially expected to witness with a group of mothers, women and caregivers in one community, I was subsequently also invited into another school community to be witness to their working in community.

In this chapter I describe the contexts of the two communities I have engaged with. I shall also provide a description of the position I take in terms of contextual and feminist theology and the narrative therapy ideas that guided my practice. I also provide an overview of the ideas from participatory action research that fitted, enhanced and guided my praxis as researcher and as a narrative pastoral therapist and caregiver. Finally, I provide an outline of how I had envisaged the research would progress and the ethical implications of my engagement in these communities.

#### 1.1.1 The Reporter Of Research

In my capacity as the reporter of the research, using language, according to Gergen and Gergen, 'as a performative means for coordinating activities' (Steier 1991:5), what is written here inevitably reflects my thoughts, insights, meanings, knowledge, information and interpretation according to my language and conceptual structures. I understand that when I write about another person in any way, I am also writing about myself. I agree with Elaine Graham (1998:8) when she speaks of her concern, as practical theologian, for a praxis that is 'a gender-sensitive practical wisdom that will combat the binary divisions of public and private, of inclusion and exclusion, self and Other...' This view resists the 'discourse that separates the personal from the professional' (Weingarten 1991:xii) and embraces intimacy and connection. I understand that in and through the writing and re-telling of experience, I write about a self that is in process; a self that has been altered by the experiences I had. I understand that what I put in written text also implies all 'text' that remained unselected and so, what is selected is open to questioning and written under revision. At the very least I therefore need to offer some representation of the 'who' I understood I was at the time of 'insertion' into the school communities.

According to Cochrane, de Gruchy and Petersen (1991:17), a 'moment of insertion' happens for us at each occasion or event, when suffering or oppression in persons or communities' lives directly confronts us or includes us as witness or participant in some way. Those moments of insertion 'can often have deep communal and social significance' (that is, political significance) (:17) and 'brings us to the basic point of departure for a holistic practical theology which refuses to reduce its concerns to the atomised individual or family' (:18). We are challenged to become socially, communally, ethically and politically accountable. Our lives bring us many moments of insertion: moments which call us to engage holistically and to re-examine our personal morals and practice. In telling about myself I hope to illustrate some of the moments of insertion in my experience of life.

I was born and lived in the Transkei on a mission station, Decoligny, just outside Umtata. My father was a teacher of Old Testament Theology at the training college for black ministers. He spent most of his adult life working and living in the Transkei where he was most at home. He had a deep and abiding love for the communities he became involved with – so much so when he took a teaching post at a 'white' university, he always expressed his longing to go 'home'. Our understanding of 'missionary work' was shaped by the stories of a father who used to sit with families in their homes, learning to speak and write Xhosa fluently, sharing meals and becoming a 'friend' – a man who was more excited to meet with his old students and colleagues from the Transkei than with the most prestigious academics from around the world.

My family moved to America for two years because my father had received a scholarship to study at Princeton University. I started school there. I also got bullied there. For a period of almost six months a boy had tracked me down at intervals and mercilessly beat me – there was nowhere I could hide. I also learnt about silence. As a child of six, I carried the burden of the bullying in silence and was only able to speak about this experience years afterwards. I also learnt about impatient and bullying teachers. The teacher I had for the first few months seemed to dislike the intrusion in her class by children from other countries, especially those who had not acquired English yet. I learnt about feeling invisible. I remember feeling helpless, hopeless and scared on the way to school. I learnt about the frustration and isolation that comes from not being able to speak the local language. I learnt about the tremendous relief one feels when one's father realises that the child clinging to his legs for dear life on the first morning of a new term is not 'just naughty' but scared, and takes her home.

I became a teacher myself. I preferred working in school communities that were less affluent because I felt that there was more scope for creativity and a much larger challenge to me as

a teacher. A few years later I was disillusioned of this understanding of 'disadvantaged'. I did a course which helped me to understand that even those schools were comparatively affluent compared with the vast majority of schools to which coloured and black children were relegated. Most of the children in these schools were from working class white families and were often labelled 'poor whites'. I became very aware of the patronizing ways in which parents and children from such families were treated and the distaste with which many who were better off treated them. Any attempts to resist teachers' bullying practices were discredited and teachers were seldom held accountable for their actions. Over time I discovered, and resisted, the oppressive hierarchies within the education system and the authoritarian styles of school management, where little consultation and collaboration with learners occurred. Comparison and judgment created unsafe environments for teachers.

A year of studying, during which I completed an honours degree in Education, conscientised me. The overall intent of the course was to alert us to the function and effects of apartheid on the lives of persons in South Africa. This was a difficult experience for me. My ideas and life experiences of black people had been so different that not for one minute could I conceive the brutality and harm that had been wrought on persons by the technology of apartheid. With such naiveté shattered, I found it even harder to consider working in privileged communities. I was left deeply perturbed by the realization of the extent to which my thinking, my understanding and my life, had been colonized by patriarchal ideas – that I had certainly lived, benefited and thrived within the confines of 'white supremacist capitalist patriarchy' (hooks 2000:71). bell hooks (2000:ix) explains that the feminist movement intends to 'end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression'. She highlights her belief that those who benefit, even vicariously, from 'sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression' are in as much need of liberation as those who are on the underside of these practices (:70). I agree with Denise Ackermann (1998:89) when she writes that 'mindfulness or awareness is a waking up, a willingness to forego the sleep of chosen ignorance and to face the grim and exacting reality of our history and legacies of apartheid.' I had experienced a rude awakening.

The last school I taught at was a small Catholic school and one of the first 'open' schools established in Cape Town. I really enjoyed working at this school. Over time, however, I experienced growing uneasiness, or dissatisfaction, with my own teaching practices. I felt a niggling sense that there had to be ways in which I could work that would be more in keeping with the ideas I had of how I, as a teacher, would prefer to be with children. I often left the school feeling badly about my actions. Gradually, I had the growing insight that they reflected the same unkindness I had experienced as a child. I became actively driven to find honourable and honouring ways of inviting children, and parents, to become co-responsible

for our being together in a classroom. Still, I felt that I needed to find something to weave together the huge assortment of practice and ideas archives that I had collected over the years.

During these years I also married and became a stepmother to two young girls. I had to struggle against the debilitating discourse that goes with being stepmother. I also had to learn to live with the idea that I would be childless. A friend of mine, a black woman whom I had known for many years, asked me why I did not have children. I responded by saying 'I don't know, it was not of my choosing.' She then said: 'Maybe you are meant always to be looking after other people's children'. For a long time this idea rankled, but I have come to see the worth of her wise observation. I have read that in Africa, when women are unable to have children, they take on the children of the community as their own, and so become a communal parent. I am learning to be a communal parent, I think. I have found support for this idea in Anderson and Johnson (1994:91) when they reflect on the value of the African proverb 'It takes a village to raise a child' and say that:

[t]ogether with other families and individuals we create an environment in which pregnancy and birth are filled with promise, in which nurture and discipline are possible, in which children are valued and families protected for the sake of every individual and for the sake of the community.

I decided to resign from teaching for a while but then was offered a post at a teacher's training college where I remained for two years. Two things stood out for me from this experience. Firstly, I discovered that I was uncomfortable with the often unquestioned, 'expert' positioning that the appointment brought. I would rather have seen my task as researcher and collector of ideas on behalf of the students. Secondly, I had the opportunity to visit many schools throughout the Cape peninsula, including many of the classrooms of the black part time students. I became aware of the ways in which the legacy of apartheid had dis-empowered teachers and children – the taken-for-granted conditions and equipment, resource materials and ideas, that most white teachers and children enjoy in a classroom, were hardly ever available to the black teachers.

Further, I felt shame and embarrassment at the attitudes of the lecturers - mostly white - towards these students, who were often women much older than they. These black students were treated with impatience, spoken to with open disrespect and intolerance or spoken of with disparaging amusement. They were expected to enter our 'culture' of learning with gusto, to pick up in six months what we had gained over years of access and exposure to 'good' education, and simultaneously buy into the discourse that apartheid is now over. I took the severance package. At this time I was intimate with weariness and heartache and

knew I needed to find another way to offer my skills to benefit children. The college was not a good fit.

### **1.1.2 Starting off**

During the time that I collaborated with a primary school, for the practicum of my studies, my focus was very much on children. I had every intention of making my particular focus the ways in which children manage conflict in a school situation. As it turned out, I became acutely aware instead of the phenomenal women, mothers and caregivers in this community. They manage, in the face of overwhelming odds, to survive and care for their children. As I invited mothers to join in as part of the support groups for their children's action against problems, I was privileged to hear the stories of women who have managed to survive very difficult situations from an early age. I have become aware of the lack of support and acknowledgement and celebration mothers enjoy while they are managing to make do in dire circumstances.

### **1.1.3 Diverging**

I took extra time to complete the research report largely because I had become overwhelmed in facing 'the grim and exacting reality of our history and legacies of apartheid' (Ackermann 1998:90). During this time I heard - really heard - for the first time the invitation that a friend, Hélène Rykaart, kept extending to me. She offered me the opportunity to become involved at a pre-school in Somerset West where she was collaborating with, or what she refers to as mentoring, three women, who are teachers, wives and mothers. I was invited to support the teachers in preparing school materials and giving ideas for extending their teaching practice. I was very keen to become witness to this community's practices after I had met with the teachers the first time. I also wondered in what ways, when stepping into their world, I could also bring honour to their work-in-community while challenging racism and classism.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND AND GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

### **1.2.1 Context of the two communities**

In trying to give a brief account of how persons reported the context of their lives in their communities and of my own observations, I have focussed on some aspects only. Nevertheless, I remained very aware of the huge complexities that may not be touched on, acknowledged or mentioned here.

#### **1.2.1.1 The primary school in Steenberg.**

The primary school is in Steenberg, one of the southern suburbs of Cape Town. It is a coloured community. In general, Steenberg is a poor community, with people living in, as one

of the children described it, small over-crowded houses, flats, bungalows and 'hokkies' (shacks). It is noticeable that women head many households – even if they are partnered. In many instances men, in their prime, seem to mark time: many fathers in the community are in and out of prison. Some make theft their full-time job; some are just unable to find work; while others openly refuse to find work because their relatives continue to support them. It is a community where gangster intimidation is a matter of course – any action by concerned members often results in threats of retaliation. There is a tendency towards drug and alcohol abuse and this leads to neglect of children. Women and children are given 'hidings' by angry and intolerant men. Sexual abuse of children, boys and girls is prevalent. Children of this community witness a great deal of violence, either in their homes or on their streets. One can only surmise the extent to which AIDS has invaded the community – the context for it to take a foothold is favourable. 'There is no choice when you are hungry; there are no options. It is a situation of "choiceless choice" according to Byron Good, reflecting on Aids research in a poverty stricken community in Uganda, as reported by Spittel, Nakuti, Sewankambo and Willms (1997:106). This 'choiceless choice' also seemed true of the community that I am involved in.

It appears that the education of children and school attendance enjoy little priority: many children absent themselves from school easily, and as many children will use any opportunity to avoid school. Some children miss school for weeks on end to care for their siblings or parents because there are few other reliable caregivers, or they stay away from school when there is no money for fares and fees. Youngsters between the ages of thirteen and eighteen seem to leave school in droves: they tend to sit around and move through the community in gangs. Parents appear to have little control and influence in their children's lives. Many parents are intimidated. They will try to appease their children to avoid physical injury or to restrain their children from doing impulsive things that will endanger them, the children. It is noticeable how children will demand, and often receive, the most fashionable gear and luxury items from parents who barely manage with what they earn in a month. As one mother explained to me about her son: 'He knows he does not have to work because we will always look after him, even when he causes trouble – he is our son.'

Persons in the community are positioned in various class stratifications, for example, financial status, church affiliation, those who drink and those who abstain, people who were born and bred in Steenberg and people who are described as 'buitemense' (outsiders). Denis-Constant Martin (2001:187) supports this insight when he speaks about 'a class differentiation enforced by an elite's recognition of the value of "respectability" that has been expressed in

that elite's efforts to differentiate themselves from "coons".' Some of the 'groups' support those among them who are struggling but will tend to distance themselves from others who may become regular dependents and with whom they feel pressured into sharing their already limited resources.

Families tend to stick and live together, sharing resources, rather than 'mixing' in the local community. They try to keep private the family conflicts and struggles and often do not seek or expect to find support. It also seems as if people live in a fish bowl - that every event is local news. Often, when persons are in conflict, they will not talk to each other. They tend rather to talk about their concerns with others, which results in a circulation of resentment. Distrust and struggle to survive also invites low tolerance of frustration and strong reactions to situations. Many persons, especially women, experience that children, young adults, and men, are out of hand: they get away with their abusive and disrespectful actions. Very often it is reported that a mother has either threatened or has gone to lay a charge against a child who has bullied her child, or that a child has been taken to the police cells to scare them or that a woman has assaulted another who showed interest in her husband.

A teacher at the school, on several occasions, said: '*Ons mense is lui*' (our people are lazy). This view towards the parents of the school community, together with the parents' unwillingness to become involved in the school and in community activities, does not invite understanding of the tremendous pressure which most families are living under in order to survive on a daily basis. I wrote the following journal entry about the hour-long message that Pastor Killian gave the mothers who had been invited to a Mother's day meeting at Lourier primary School:

*Mothers' day talk. I was invited to talk with to the mothers of Lourier. The school organised a great event for the mothers. I did not get to talk however, because there were two other speakers. One of the speakers, Pastor Killian, spoke at great length to the mothers. He first talked about his own experiences of having his own mother beaten by a drunken father. He also told the mothers that they had to stand up for themselves by not having men knock them about. He admonished the mothers to avoid drinking, neglecting their children and spoke to them about the role of women as the mainstay of families. Something he said that intrigued me was a comment about mothers that need to teach their children to save money and that they should not expect the children to work for them – I realised that the latter was a practice that happened quite often. His point was that the mothers exhausted their children and kept them bound in a way that stopped them from taking responsibility for their own lives. They were in a way kept at home until they got married. He challenged the mothers to start finding self-employment so that they could get out of the 'hokkies' and move in to decent homes – I wondered what kind of support there was in the various church communities for mentoring mothers to find ways to look after themselves.*

*I did not have time to say my bit – especially not after two hours of talking with restless pre-school children in the audience. I just invited the mothers to come chat with me when they had the opportunity and the need. I really need to connect with the church communities and find out what they do in terms of creating opportunity for people to generate ideas for working*

together.

Wilson and Ramphela (1989:4) in their book *Uprooting Poverty* quote Raymons Aron who says that 'the existence of too great a degree of inequality makes human community impossible.' It seems that the tremendous survival struggle against poverty and overcrowding has made it difficult for 'human community', mutual care and support to take root and grow in Steenberg. This can also be said for many of the lives of people in Lwandle.

### **1.2.1.2 Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School, Lwandle**

Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School is in Lwandle, originally an informal settlement outside the Strand in the Western Cape. Most of the families living there relocated from their rural homes in the hope of finding employment. Parents are often unskilled and ill equipped to deal with city living. In many cases, children are left to care for themselves when parents are at work. Families struggle to make a living because of the high unemployment rates. Often two or three families live on the same plot in shacks or 'hokkies'. The municipal housing scheme has been halted due to a misappropriation of funds. Many of the conditions I described about Steenberg are equally true of this community. Neighbours who get along help each other to look after their properties and try to and maintain order. If any crimes are committed, people tend to avoid reporting them as they have found that the police response is slow. Besides this, they want to avoid being taken to identify the perpetrator and so put themselves, and their families, in jeopardy.

One of the teachers from the pre-school said: *'there is no value of life, people have lost their humanity'* and then described how many parents have little say, and seem to make no effort to have any influence in their teenaged children's lives. Children *'exaggerate'* the lifestyles they see amongst their parents and adults – mothers taking boyfriends, fathers taking girlfriends and generally doing what they please and neglecting their children. Youngsters, especially girls, engage in sex for clothes and possessions (also the case in Steenberg). They refuse to go to school and do not have to give account of their whereabouts, thus endangering their lives. Many teachers are not good role models. For example, on outings: *'children and teachers will take their alcohol along and drink together.'* Teachers are also *'seen drunk in the taverns'*(Victoria 2003).

Many people of Lwandle live in a liminal space. To a large extent, they try to make a living in Cape Town, where they 'hlala' (stay), and home is where they are from, where they 'vela' (come from). Their thinking and planning is to have a place to retire to in their old age.

Class-consciousness - in terms of wealth and the kind of provider a woman has - plays a



strong role in social acceptance and interaction. It seems that, although most families are women-headed households, the ideal is still to have a male-headed household (Ramphela 2002:107). Single women and widows experience a loss of dignity in the community, even if the partner was abusive or an alcoholic. Ramphela (2002:107) found in her research that 'jealousy or envy was a recurring theme. Those with some means of support are envied by those without and expected to share the little they have.' This comment resonates with the descriptions the residents of Lwandle give of their experience of living in Lwandle.

## **1.2.2 Religious Influences**

South African society is strongly influenced by religious practice and 'cultural conditioning of religious belief' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:61). Many of the norms and ethics of behaviour originate from a very patriarchal perspective. In effect, this always places women and children in a position inferior to men and as belonging to men and in need of supervision and control (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:34). For the purpose of this study, I have attempted to give an impression of the religious practices in the communities I engaged with. It is necessary to keep in mind though that these descriptions can by no means be an exhaustive description of the variety and complexities of the religious practices.

### **1.2.2.1 Steenberg**

In Steenberg, many of the conversations I had with members of the community, teachers, parents and young people emphasised the strong religious (Moslem and Christian) influence within the community. This becomes visible in the judgement of people's behaviour, of roles of women, men and children as well as parenting style. Even the people who reject religious beliefs still speak of and live the many discourses which have originated in a religion. For example, the discourse that the man is the head of the home, and children have to respect their parents and elders. The devil gets a lot of credit for what goes wrong in the community. In many cases where partners come from different religious backgrounds (for instance, a Moslem mother and a Christian father), the religious preference of the father is favoured or he insists that children be raised in his religious tradition. He is expected to take an active role in the children's religious connection. Many conflicts and resentments arise when the father then shirks this duty.

There are also many directives about what 'civilised behaviour' looks like. These seem to originate from these religious ideas such as: children should know their place – no opinions from them are required; they need to be punished so they can learn; as well as that loyalty to the family is more important than one's own safety and well-being. The following idea stems from the patriarchal discourses of the man as the head of the household: mothers and

children may get hidings but it must be about important things. Added to this is the agency stealing theology 'which tells people that it is "good" to suffer, to be a victim, to make sacrifices [and] overlooks the unique diverse gifts and talents which remain unlocked' (Isherwood & McEwan 1993:32).

It also appears that religious affiliation and commitment becomes a means of inclusion and exclusion for people in the community – it creates an invisible class structure for holiness. Those who belong to small house churches tend to socialize and provide support for one another and are also very vigilant over each other. There are many churches in this area – house churches, charismatic churches and a variety of the mainline denominations. It seems that much of the energy is focused internally and little compassion spills over to the 'less deserving'.

When reflecting on the role of the church in a poverty stricken area in Honduras, Ornelas (1997:142) says:

The church uses social control, influencing people to think that if they do not believe in the Church, they cannot believe in themselves. "The Church is you and you are the Church" is the message. In Latin America, a person can be with the Church or against the Church but it is impossible to be out of the Church. The same is true of politics in Latin America.

When hearing the 'twisted theology/ dogma' that people use to make sense of their lives in this poverty-stricken area in the Cape, I wonder how many of these ideologies/ dogmas have been used to silence others, especially women and children. I wonder about who and what has benefited from these patriarchal ideas. I also wondered about the similarities in the context of a liberation theology in Third World countries which could be used to assist with the decolonising of oppressed people. I wondered about their own local knowledge of and wisdom about their religious and spiritual experiences.

#### **1.2.2.2 Lwandle, Somerset West**

The religious practices in Lwandle vary, from what the teachers describe as 'disinterest', to 'very traditional', to Christian. There appears to be a spontaneous co-mingling of traditional spiritual practices and Christian practices. Christian churches have different management styles – some are very open to women's participation and propagate the idea that '*women must say their part*'. Others have a very hierarchical patriarchal style, for instance, they insist that only men are allowed to speak, and that the women's groups are split according to age. Each age group is then guided and supervised by older women in the ways that correspond suitably to that age. The guidance and supervision is regarded as a way to groom the young

women in respect and appropriate behaviour, so that they do not become 'pushy'. It also seems that the majority of members of local churches are women.

### **1.2.3 Vulnerable women**

In the communities of both Steenberg and Lwandle it appears that women – mothers - are in a particularly difficult place. They are the go-between their children and the men with whom they are in relationships. In many cases, mothers have one or more children from different partners. These fathers do not always pay maintenance and if they do, this amount is often used to support the whole family. Some mothers are able to apply for the state subsidy for one or two of the younger children.

Mothers will often stay in abusive relationships because of the perceived security and status of having a partner. The mother is then caught between protecting and providing for her children with the resources she gets from a stepfather or live-in partner who will often be less caring and supportive of those children that are not his. This tension and worry about keeping children safe and provided for, coupled with trying to keep the man's interest at home, often forces mothers to compromise a great deal. They often accept much abuse and neglect. Mothers seem to fall prey to despondency and hopelessness which, in turn, affects their children. Women who have been victimized and have been 'negatively affected by poverty and stress are often unable to engage actively in resistance efforts' (Sparks 1998:231). Collective activism may be effective, but many women are not even able or willing to get involved.

Often women have a strong sense of ownership about a particular man. Frequently they will physically attack each other over possession – as if the man has no control over himself – and the onus is on the other woman not to tempt the man. In many cases, women will be the perpetrators of violence, hitting or stabbing their husbands in fits of anger and frustration.

Both communities have a strong undertone of patriarchal, paternalistic ways of thinking. Men presume to take the lead, they '*talk, talk, talk*' and claim the positions of leadership, yet seldom taking action that makes a difference. Things get done when the women undertake to do them. In the community of Lwandle, for instance, I was told that women do not understand why a woman would choose to go out and work when she has a home, a husband and children. It seems that the view is that women should be satisfied to stay at home and enjoy the luxury of being taken care of. In addition, men are expected to take the lead, to discipline the children and to give instructions. Yet many men are not able to take on these roles. This supports what Ramphela (1989:178) wrote that women, divorcees and widows often find

themselves destitute because 'the society has been structured in such a way that women are compelled to be unusually dependent financially on their husbands.'

In families where fathers have moved frequently and have lived away from their families, mothers have taken over as heads of the household. Ramphele (2002:62) comments that '[s]ingle female-headed households are very common ... even though the idea of the family is heavily influenced by patriarchal values.' She also comments that women, often because of their extreme poverty, are caught between having to 'ensure the physical survival of their children at the expense of emotional nourishment' (:66).

Tension exists around the ideas of the traditional patriarchal norms about women's worth and women's ideas about their worth and how they prefer to express it. According to the patriarchal norms a woman's worth and standing in a community is directly linked to having a live-in partner. Many women feel the need to choose definitions of worth for themselves, as Victoria says, '*Women are ignoring the church's advice. Women are standing up, will not keep quiet – it's the women that are standing up; the women [who are] willing to put themselves at risk.*' It also appears that many men take a dim view of the idea that their wives or partners may become independent and educated. They seem to have the belief that their wives' independence will result in disrespect, that the men will not have any say and that they would not '*fit with an educated wife*'. Ramphele (2002:160) comments in this regard that a woman who succeeds 'without the aid of a man is regarded with suspicion. How can a woman thrive where men have failed?'

As a result of the huge struggles facing women as 'unauthorised' heads of households and their struggle to make ends meet, they are often not able to attend to much outside their immediate family. Clearly, parents would find it difficult to value their involvement at their children's schools as an important activity for them.

#### **1.2.4 Parents in the school bring transformation**

From my experience as a teacher, I have come to understand the gift of parents' participation as an integral part of school communities. Parents can play an important role in the enrichment, decision-making, maintenance, care giving and support of the school. When parents are involved in a school, they are able to appreciate the teachers' struggles. They can keep teachers accountable, but also 'sanction' the school to the children. Many school communities are the poorer because their parent body is missing, uninvolved or have been squeezed out by the 'experts' in the school. It seems clear that the lack of parental involvement impoverishes children's school education. Despite this, parental involvement

appears to become an even more distant hope for the school community, especially when it is a struggling community.

### **1.3 THE NEED FOR AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

#### **1.3.1 Binding women for restorative witnessing**

It seemed to me that many women and some concerned men struggle in isolation to cope with child rearing, difficult partnerships and unemployment. Instead of being able to find sustained and sustaining support in their survival struggles they try to cope alone. It appears that children often bear the brunt of these struggles. They are confronted with various difficulties, ranging from very restrictive and silencing situations to severely abusive and neglectful situations. In this study I invited a group of women, who were also mothers, from the Steenberg community, who have had to stand alone in many struggles, to become witnesses to each other's stories of survival, to lament with them the injustices and to become a sustaining, wise community of concern for each other. In reaching out with care to parents, I hoped to reach back into the heart of the school, which was the children, in particular, their children.

#### **1.3.2 Working alongside and restorative witnessing.**

When I was invited to become involved at the Lwandle Pre-school in Somerset West to work alongside the teachers of the school, I soon realised that I had been offered an opportunity to learn from persons-in-community about being a person-in-community. I realised that not only would I have an opportunity to be a restorative witness to the community, but also to experience restorative witnessing from the community. The value of writing about the efforts that these teachers have made to build a school and to include their community is to celebrate, to support and to encourage – to show that the seemingly impossible can be made possible.

### **1.4 RESEARCH CONCERN**

Our country is in the throws of finding ways to transform itself – on social, political and economic levels. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided scope for many to tell their stories of pain and loss and devastation. Many people took advantage of this opportunity but many, many more continue to live with their struggles: they are not heard, not acknowledged and supported, and not honoured. This seems to be particularly true for those women, both black and coloured, on whose shoulders rests the burden of keeping families safe and together.

The research study in effect had two parts. It started in the school community in Steenberg

through which I was then 'prepared' to become involved at the pre-school community in Lwandle at a later stage. For clarity's sake, I have elected to describe the research concern in two parts.

#### **1.4.1 Lourier Primary**

The focus of this study was to invite women, who were also mothers, to gather at the primary school for community and support; to witness each other's stories (Weingarten 2000:392), to share each other's wisdom; to be given opportunities to receive; and be nurtured without anything demanded in return (Heshusius 1995:122). I imagined that our gatherings would be a time of mutual caring for each other.

I imagined that our gatherings would also provide opportunity for deconstructing discourses around the roles of women in their community. I hoped that we could create space to challenge the kinds of abusive practices which many women accept as being 'normal', but which leave them ashamed and somehow guilty and consequently silenced (Ackermann 1996:145, Bons-Storm 1998:10, Cooper-White 2000:97, Eiesland 1994:117, Neuger 2001:94, Strebel 1999:114). A warm, caring community could provide women with a place to voice their resistance and to become energised to live tiny acts of resistance and to have these witnessed, encouraged and celebrated. This idea seems to be supported by the observation made by Sharon Welch (1990:80):

Such actions are manifestations of the power people have when they work together. They sustain hope for freedom and encourage further reaches of the imagination, further visions of ways in which ... people can work together to resist exploitation.

Conversations around child-rearing practices and views of children could create the opportunity for deconstructing discourses around children as 'possessions' and those practices that silence children, make them invisible and expose them to extreme abuses and neglect (Couture 2000:62). I imagined the group talking about respectful parenting practices.

#### **1.4.2 Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School**

For the project at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School, I hoped that the witnessing practices we engaged in through our work sessions and through our conversations would provide the teachers with new ideas around teaching practices. I wanted their contribution and community that they had established to be affirmed and strengthened.

I also wondered how the women regarded education, what it meant to them and what their ideas were about how they could take part in shaping it.

## **1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to create the opportunity for women to:

- witness, without blame or judgement, each other's stories of survival
- celebrate strengths and share wisdom in a safe and supportive environment
- connect with each other in order to become a community of concern for each other or strengthen the bonds as a community of concern for each other
- deconstruct (challenge) dominant discourses
- start taking small steps in resistance to oppression and abuses perpetrated against them and their children and
- have support in the witnessing and re-telling of these acts of resistance.

I was curious whether restorative witnessing would affect meaning, honour and community for the participating women, including myself.

## **1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION**

How could restorative witnessing contribute to:

- acknowledgment and honouring of marginalized women's narratives of resistance and
- marginalized women's sense of agency?

## **1.7 THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

As 'researcher' or inquirer, I was concerned with finding a route into this study that would keep me honouring of the people I collaborated with so that the study would benefit them in the manner they chose for it to do so (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7). It was clear that I, as a white, middle-class, privileged person and strongly moved by ideas of liberation from oppression - but also as initiator of the first meeting and already perceived as a 'counsellor' (expert) - could easily impose, manipulate and overrun the study with my ideas, beliefs and intentions.

In my view, we had to engage in a way that transferred to participants

- Ownership of the support group, once commitments were made to participate. The group needed to define what transparency was for them, where power imbalances lay and the kind of action they thought was needed
- Design of and decision-making about the ways that interactions and support would be done and what would most benefit them as a group
- Ways of engaging in reflexive practices and in evaluating the usefulness in their lives of their interaction with each other
- Freedom to generate various kinds of knowledge and skills in identifying

oppressive discourses (social, religious, political, economical/ power) in order to decide on joint or individual supported action

- Choices regarding how they perceived my role in the group and how they elected to include and employ me as a participant. For us to work together, they needed to see how my liberation was bound up with theirs (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:4).

The ideas that informed my praxis have been shaped by my exposure to contextual and feminist theology, post-modern philosophy and social constructionist discourse, and more specifically, narrative practices. The research philosophy that seemed to interweave these ideas was the multi-dimensional and interactional approaches of qualitative action research. To illustrate my understanding of this I shall discuss those aspects of the research philosophy, practical theology and some principles of the narrative therapy that seem particularly relevant to this study.

### **1.7.1 Research Paradigm: Qualitative Action Research**

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(Denzin & Lincoln 1994:2)

#### **1.7.1.1 Action Research as emancipatory action**

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994:154) state very clearly the kind of interaction and collaboration a researcher can bring to different contexts. They say that

to engage in critical post-modern research is to take part in a process of critical world making, guided by the shadowed outline of a dream of a world less conditioned by misery, suffering, and the politics of deceit. It is in short, a pragmatics of hope in age of cynical reason.

According to Willms (1997:7) participatory action research should be understood as a process of rediscovering and recreating personal and social realities, because the word research means to look again granting a legitimacy to liberate. In the process of critical world making through participatory action research knowledge is produced and circulated: 'knowledge based on experience: the wisdom of the people' (Smith 1997:6). This kind of research leads to knowledge that can nurture, empower and liberate.

#### **1.7.1.2 Action Research to improve practice**

McTaggart (1997:5) states that there is a general assumption that action research 'is research done by the people for themselves: 'Learning to do it by doing it'. This statement speaks of participation or 'responsible agency in the production of knowledge and the



improvement of practice' (:6). It also has a multi-method focus which is concerned not just with interpretation of situations but is also concerned with changing situations (McTaggart 1997:40).

### **1.7.1.3 Action Research is contextual**

Social construction ideas maintain that interpretation is always grounded and local; it is always in an intelligible context that social events, behaviours, institutions and processes can be described. The language and symbols in a culture do not simply refer to objects but are constitutive of them. Geertz, as quoted by Schwandt (1994:123) suggests that 'the actions of the members of a culture both construct and signify meaning.' For me, the important thing here: is the emphasis on the people in context: their life experiences and meaning making are privileged and honoured in the research process.

### **1.7.1.4 Action Research includes researcher as researched**

Any research study, or engagement in people's lives, also has implications for the place or position the researcher takes in the study. Far from being aloof and 'objective', according to Gadamer, the researcher 'participates in the very production of meaning via participation in the circle of readings or interpretations' (Schwandt 1994:120). My understanding is that the researcher is also being newly constituted with each new interpretation, knowledge and experience. As much as the research impacts and hopefully benefits the subjects, so it should also effect change in the life of the researcher - even by way of just being a witness and recorder of the process. This understanding is supported by Reinharz (1992:127) in her view that feminist research is often sparked by an awareness about women's lives which leads to a closer look, and in that involvement the researcher may find answers to her own life situation. Heshusius speaks of the 'participatory consciousness' that is in action:

[w]hen one forgets self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status. It renders the act of knowing an ethical act. The other you are studying is no longer someone you can bombard with questions, but someone who can let you near.

(Heshusius 1994:19)

### **1.7.1.5 Action Research demands reflexivity**

Qualitative action research 'clearly demands a high degree of reflexivity' (Olesen 1994:163) in order for the researcher to ensure that the object of study does not become objectified and so further entrenched. In the case of this study, this would mean women's exclusions and silencing. It is in 'reflective humility, (that) critical researchers do not search for some magic method of inquiry that will guarantee the validity of their findings' (Kincheloe & McLaren 1994:149).

Reflection, as an integral aspect of both qualitative action research and emancipatory action research, invites participants, as the owners of the research, to reflect on the impact of the research on their lives. According to Hall (1996:29) this means that:

1. evidence is derived from authentic tellings (which resonate the life experience of the researched and the researcher);
2. relations between researcher and research participants proceed in a democratic manner; and
3. the researcher's theory-laden view is not given privilege over the participants' views.

Validation for the 'findings' in this study is provided in the reporting of the interpretations of the narratives, the impact of action taken, and the recording of their knowledge, skills and insights that flow from the reflexive practices of the participants. Validation, according to McTaggart (1997:13), is an explicit process of dialogue.

#### **1.7.1.6 Action Research informs**

Participatory action research is political because 'it is about people changing themselves and their circumstances and about informing this change as it happens' (McTaggart 1997:6). It is clear that 'research is ideologically driven. There is no value-free or bias-free design' (Janesick 1994:209). If this is kept in mind, then it seems appropriate to introduce discussions around 'discourses, practices and power' (ideology critique) (McTaggart 1997:5). It would offer scope to try and comprehend the ways in which the participants have come to describe their life-worlds and engage it with others (McTaggart 1997:14).

The practice of Action Research is always contextual, with an emphasis on the inclusion of the researcher as researched and demands reflexivity. Action Research becomes a rich resource to the practices of Contextual and Feminist Theology as it supports a process of re-looking at personal and social contexts: aiming to support emancipatory action, to improve practice and to inform.

#### **1.7.2 Contextual and Feminist Theology**

Poling and Miller (1985:70) state that the first step in practical theology (pastoral care) is connecting with the context in which people live and acknowledging their lived experience and the structures of meaning that are already there, in all their abundance, complexity and depth. Imposing, in authoritarian ways, one's own faith claims or even ideas of what liberation should be for others, works contrary to those practices of self-awareness and self-

critique (Cochrane, DeGruchy & Petersen 1991:16) which characterize a contextual practical theologian. Bosch (1991:439) states that contextual theology is a theology 'from below' or 'from the underside of history' and mostly co-created by the poor and marginalized for the poor and marginalized.

Many feminist theologians value care and mutual care in faith communities, and indeed, for all communities, as the incentive for action. They write movingly about the task of care as 'building relationships of mutuality and empowerment, being at the cutting edge of social change and solidarity with the marginalized' (Graham 1998:141). Denise Ackermann (1998:83) states that healing praxis can only have effect in a sustained, collaborative 'action for justice, reparation and liberation, based on accountability.' All of this needs the sustaining energy of love, hope and passion.

Contextual and feminist theology has at heart the concern for the silenced, the marginalized and oppressed. Our acts for justice begin when we stop and connect with people in their context: 'justice begins in hearing, in heeding a call rather than, in asserting and mastering a state of affairs, however ideal.' Justice begins with the relationship of speaking and listening (Eiesland 1998:108).

Practising pastoral care in contextual ways also provides the opportunity for the caregiver to be emancipated, held accountable and be changed. This willingness to open ourselves to other people and their lives brings us in a place where:

[w]e come in touch with a depth within our humanness when we live from generosity, and we touch others' humanness when they extend their generosity toward us. Needless to say, we hope that others will respond to our Christian generosity by receiving something from it that makes their lives better, just as they hope that we will respond by enlarging our lives because of their gifts to us. Often, such mutuality does occur.

(Couture 2000:57)

Pastoral care, as I understand it, is a way of doing and being, where we cooperate and collaborate with people in their context, in humility, with care and commitment, standing with them as they find the face of God in new ways and with new hope:

Our responsibility then, is not a grand scheme or a coherent system, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations – they can become their imaginations

(Brueggeman 1993:20)

It seems to me that contextual and feminist theology finds a natural resonance with action research – our faith and spiritual commitments indeed imply a continued reflexive way of living in order to grow in love and care.

### **1.7.3 Narrative metaphor in counselling practices.**

The narrative metaphor, as guiding principle for a way of being and doing in relation to ourselves and the persons, people and communities we come in relationship with, serves as the 'tool' for living or 'doing' pastoral practical theological beliefs and values.

The meaning people give to their lives is 'at once a personal, relational and cultural achievement' (White 2000:9). White explains that these meanings – narratives - we use to describe our lives at times become problematic for us. Since these can be negotiated - re-authored - it is possible for us to alter our relationship with our own histories (White 2000:36). Often these re-authorings of meaning is a result of looking at the 'absent but implicit descriptions', or discourses, of our world. Within a social constructionist worldview we need to attend to cultural and contextual stories, as well as those individual stories that we inhabit but which also inhabit us (Freedman & Combs 1996:31).

This approach takes the view that the client is always centred in conversations: that the client is the 'expert' on his/her life. The counsellor's participation in the co-authoring of an alternative description for a person's life is from a position of 'not-knowing'. Through respectful, curious questioning the counsellor is given access to the meanings the client has of his/her life and can invite the 'not-yet said' (Anderson 1995:35).

Narrative therapy views problems as separate from people and assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will support them to minimize the effects of problems on their lives (Morgan 2000:2).

There are many different conversations that can be had. These can take the client in many directions for action, but this must always be on the client's terms - that which fits best for her/him at the time.

The client is encouraged to identify a community of support that not only witnesses the re-authored narrative, but also to help thicken this new story through the tellings and re-tellings of the story. This community of concern is an audience to the description the client prefers for him/herself (White 2000:57).

Narrative practices allows for many recording practices: letter writing, certificates, ceremonies, contracts with self, cards, posters, book writing, journals are a few examples (White & Epston 1990).

Even from this very cursory description of narrative therapy practices it should be clear why this way of being is complemented by action research. The research itself becomes a means of doing therapy, particularly when the research is ethical (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:9).

## **1.8 RESEARCH APPROACH**

### **1.8.1 General description and motivation of research approach**

From the reading that I had done, it seemed that the approach most suited to this study was participatory action research. The group of mothers I had invited to collaborate in order to co-create community and mutual care chose their various commitments to this process in an 'organic' way. Generally the women attended the meetings for as long as it suited them, or attended when they preferred to. As I had been the one to initiate our meeting as a group it seemed appropriate to avoid imposing any agenda that could leave the impression that I was waiting to extract something for my effort.

When doing participatory action research Ornelas (1997:140) says clearly that one enters:

the process as ignorant. You start by recognizing your ignorance and working with it. Only when you do this, can you truly "know" your own ignorance.... This does not mean that you are a mess of doubts. You do not doubt that you will have doubt.

When commenting in an article entitled *You start your research in your being*, Willms (1997:7) describes how a participatory action research is like being on a journey, a movement – 'a movement from the way things are to the way things could be.' This movement takes time and patience as well as 'authentic listening and speaking' (Willms 1997:7) as I discovered during this research journey.

Smith (1997:252-253) uses other metaphors – such as a tree, river or mountain path to describe participatory action research. Participatory action research is like a:

... tree, deeply rooted in people's realities, grounded in the earth and, at the same time, stretching upwards to the sky...participatory action research flows like a river, open-ended...sometimes deep and calm, at other points shallow and turbulent....Those creating knowledge and change through participatory action research climb up mountains... we will circle the mountain many times, with each turn finding a broader, more enriched view.

I considered it to be important, at all times, to nurture the participants' lived experiences, to hear their stories of joy and pain, to listen for the many strengths and wisdoms they were sharing. Together we were telling and re-telling our stories, and through restorative witnessing opportunities, we were enjoying new understandings of ourselves and of our lives.

### **1.8.2 Collecting tellings and re-tellings of stories**

In the collecting and re-collecting, in the telling and re-telling of stories, I was reminded of

Smith's (1997:252) words:

When we struggle together to meet challenges, we add to our complexity as individuals, our abilities to care and be cared for, our sense of rooted connectedness, and our capacity to re-humanise our world. Giving birth to the knowledge of hopeful dreams, we regain commitment to a meaningful way of life, no longer "in fear of stepping out".

Sharon Welch (1990:163) also emphasised the idea of struggling together and simultaneously being extended as individuals when she suggests that to 'work with others is not to lose oneself, but first and foremost, it is to find a larger self.' This struggling, together or as individuals, found its expression in story telling. Our stories of our understanding of what was happening in our lives were, and are, essentially meaning-making activities. Janesick (1994:215) says that the researcher, in a study such as this, needs to find 'the most effective way to tell the story. Staying close to the lived experiences of people is the most powerful means of telling the story.'

In collecting stories, especially where many participants are involved, justice needs to be done to each person's contribution. Mere descriptions of observations will not suffice: what is also needed is interpretation of beliefs and behaviours of the participants. Eliciting interpretation, according to Mc Taggart (1994:14), requires 'explicit theoretical effort to comprehend the ways in which participants have come to describe their life-worlds, engage it with others, and enact their work practices, for example, through processes of deconstruction and ideology critique.' The chosen version of the story elicited by this study was derived from thick, rich descriptions and multiple perspectives. These were used to create a many-layered, many-faceted, detailed source from which categories, themes, patterns, actions and knowledge could be drawn (Janesick 1994:215).

All interactions, planned or spontaneous, provided opportunities for a variety of practices that supported relationship building, sharing and supportive action (restorative witnessing). Every encounter brought an opportunity for personal stories to be told. Sometimes this necessitates appointments for individual conversations. Group meetings led to reflections on the stories which the participants had heard and planning for action. Sometimes the discussions centred on themes (theorising that came from the lived experience of the participants). All of these provided many opportunities for recording, such as: note taking of particular tellings or communal reflexive practices, audio recordings of conversations and recording of the action taken. For my personal reflection on the journey with the research, I recorded ideas and reflections in a research journal (See earlier 1.2.1.1 in this chapter).

The texts that were generated were handed back to the participants for approval. Before a

final draft was settled on, they always had the opportunity to make changes or add any information they wanted to include. These documents proved to be very meaningful.

### **1.8.3 Ethical Considerations**

An active insight in feminist circles is ‘the personal is the political’ (Jakobsen 1994:151). Nothing we do is free of ideological influence and nor can it be viewed as neutral (Brueggemann 1993:7, Lyall 1995:55). When we understand this - that our actions and the way we are impact on our relationships and our choices and that they may even further perpetuate societal injustices - then it brings us to a place where we continuously reflect on our actions and to what purpose and value we do them. We have to face and accept the very real effects of our interactions on other people’s lives.

In this study I made a choice to interact and intervene in people’s lives. I hoped that through this interaction a richness of mutual care would be experienced, both by participants and as well as by myself as ‘convenor’. In reflecting on the ethical implications of this intervention, my praxis needed to reflect a ‘doing’ of ethics.

In my view, ‘doing ethics’ implies a way of living and being that holds me accountable and responsible for my actions and the commitments I make. ‘Doing ethics’ impacted on the way I believed I was connecting and relating to people: was I doing care/hope *for* people or was I doing care/hope *with* people? Doing care/hope *with* people would remove me from a position of expertise and point out attitudes in me that were patronising and authoritarian, thereby perpetuating oppressive systems. Doing care/hope *with* people would keep me in the position of apprentice because I could never assume to know what care/hope means for any other person.

Heshusius (1994:17) talks about ‘participatory consciousness’ as an ability to let go, temporarily, of all self-preoccupation and to enter into a state of complete attention to the other in a way that does not demand anything for oneself. Smith (1997:250) talks about a ‘compassionate consciousness’ which is seen as the energy of humanness when each forms and informs the other. It also means that I am, of necessity, bound to an attitude of respectful humility – I am able to forgive but also to ask forgiveness (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7).

When ‘doing ethics,’ I collaborate with people - particularly those who are isolated and voiceless - and let them guide me in the ways I should talk/act on their behalf. I open my mouth on the mountaintop and say what it is they want said – not what I think they want said. I also let them guide me in knowing what it is that they need or what they see as ‘liberation’

for them. By positioning myself 'with' persons with whom I engaged and not acting on their behalf or for them, I believed that I was 'doing ethics' and working for justice. Living ethically and choosing for justice is a 'way of being' that I invite in my life, wherever I am and whatever I do. I found affirmation of this position in the words of Welch (1990:70) when she comments that:

....working for justice....is not 'somehow optional, something of a hobby or a short-term project, a mere tying up of loose ends....[and] is not incidental to one's life but is an essential aspect of affirming the delight and wonder of being alive.

Living ethically meant that I invested in self-care, caring for the whole of me. In taking this responsibility, I enabled myself to be available for the journey – fully present, fully aware and ready. In taking responsibility for self-care, I am also reminded that no amount of compassion filled up an empty stomach. Where I undertook to care for myself and to commit to action I also realised that care, love and self-care for others may well have meant a piece of bread.

I believe that living ethically is also an ability to be biddable and flexible, but not breakable. It enables us to keep to our 'small regular commitments' (Couture 2000:61) and continue 'actively seeking to be partially constituted by work with different groups ...overcoming ideology difference, a mutually challenging and mutually transformative pluralism' (Welch 1990: 151). For me, living ethically ultimately means recognising that:

knowing consists not in settled certitudes but in the actual work of imagination. By imagination, I mean very simply the human capacity to picture, portray, receive, and practice the world in ways other than it appears to be at first glance when seen through a dominant, habitual unexamined lens... Imagination as a human act does not yield the kind of certitude required by Cartesian anxiety but it does yield a possible "home" when we accept a participating role as "home-maker."

(Brueggemann 1993:12,13)

## 1.9 OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

In **Chapter 2** I provide further reflection on the philosophical and theoretical ideas that enrich and support my praxis as a narrative pastoral therapist. I also discuss and acknowledge the influences that shaped my thinking about restorative witnessing. **Chapter 3** offers a telling and reflection of the interaction with the group of women at Lourier Primary School. **Chapter 4** offers an introduction to the women and their mentor at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School. **Chapter 5** is a reflexive look over the shoulder at the journey I have made thus far (induction as a narrative pastoral therapist) and a squaring of the shoulders for the commitment to and continuance of the journey.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF RESTORATIVE WITNESSING

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I describe the social constructionist and post-modern perspectives that have influenced my understanding in terms of my practice. These ideas interlaced my understanding of contextual, liberal and feminist theology, and are the mesh for the narrative practice (Chapter 1), which coheres my practice as a narrative pastoral therapist/caregiver and counsellor. Insights around Participatory Action Research (Chapter 1) further intertwined and supported the ways in which I engaged with the women who participated in this study.

I will look at frequently used words which may, in various contexts, have different meanings for persons doing pastoral care and counselling in practice. I will also investigate how, engaging from a contextual, liberation and feminist perspective with the meanings that can reside in these words and the beliefs expressed by them, we as narrative pastoral caregivers and therapists can appropriate hopeful agency. To live one's hope for a better world means: 'realistically acknowledging brokenness and need while at the same time engaging with life in such a way that deeds express that which one hopes for' (Ackermann 1998:89).

De Jongh van Arkel (2000:34) states that being a pastor - I took this to include practising pastoral counselling and care as well - is a 'way of being'. It is this 'way of being' that directs our 'doing'. As I understand it narrative pastoral counselling and care is primarily about relationships. Couture (2000:93) reminds us that the

means of grace are practiced, in personal presence, meaningful conversation, and hope-filled activity, in every location on this map. Each location may be a place of care in pastoral space – a space where God may be found and care with family, friends, neighbours, and strangers fills life with hope.

I shall reflect on the effects that religious/spiritual ideas can have in binding persons and communities into those discourses that usurp human agency from seeking access to possible liberating practices.

The perspectives, ideas and philosophies of postmodernism provide the backdrop for the practices that bind restorative witnessing as a way of engaging with people. Before engaging in an exposition of the ideas that constitute restorative witnessing, I shall first describe some pertinent aspects of postmodernism that influenced my thinking and practice as narrative pastoral therapist.

## 2.2 POSTMODERNISM

Post-modern discourse refers to those epistemologies that have grown out of disillusioned responses to modernist claims. Modernism, following Cartesian thinking, refers to the epistemology of rationality and objectivity, which is regarded as the only way for understanding, ordering, managing knowledge about the world and human life (Van Wyk 1994:2,3). Descartes, in response to the uncertainty following the collapse of the medieval world, through 'an intellectual process of individuation', found a 'certitude' which managed to place the self as 'an absolute point of reference' Brueggemann (1993:4). As Brueggemann explains, the effect of Descartes' thinking, which created a 'new cultural world', was:

- a new model of knowledge based on objectivity – experiential, empirical and factual. Various disciplines accumulated specialised information in abstraction from one another. Scientists saw themselves as 'spectators' rather than as 'participants in the study of the world' (Van Wyk 1994:15).
- an emphasis on rationality, 'pure reason' ... which meant escaping from all forms of body and earth into the purity of the mind. This would leave no room for other ways of knowing – such as the visceral, emotional or intuitive.
- a view that 'body and earth as producers of life ... were seen as peculiarly feminine and material' which led to 'an impenetrable masculinity that nicely linked 'objectivity' and masculine power'.

Brueggemann (1993:5) suggests that this 'new model of knowledge' offers eternal truths or grand narratives that form a 'large, coherent whole'. Toulmin's (Brueggemann 1993:5) identification of the kinds of knowledge that, from a modernist perspective, constitute 'real knowledge', offers us an understanding of how these grand narratives were shaped, in that:

- the written as more reliable than oral
- the focus is on finding truth that is universal or eternal, rather than particular. Understanding was reduced to essential concepts which were accepted as truth-for-all-time.
- the general applicability of truth everywhere is emphasised rather than its local and contextual nature and;
- the timeless, unchanging nature of knowledge is valued as opposed to the 'timely' (situational and historically time-bound) nature of knowledge.

The modernist view, impacted on Christian spirituality and philosophy and ensued in a search for eternal truth, provable data and a cognitive understanding about God rather than of God (Van Wyk 1994:15). These totalising, universalising and impersonal, de-contextualized

understandings of God colonized the Western world. Supported by patriarchy's favouring of masculine power, it left people torn between what they 'knew' intuitively and what the 'experts' were telling them. The binary oppositions in understanding and relationality created intolerance for pluralism and supported practices of oppression, racism, sexism and marginalisation – it created 'the other'.

Postmodernism is a response to the 'tenuousness of *grand narratives* of modernity and enlightenment' (Graham 1996:20). The grand narratives of progress, optimism and rationalization - which offered emancipation and progress for all and which strove to offer 'eternal truths' by which human life, and nature, could be organised – fell short of including 'the diversity and specificity of local interests' (:20). Grenz (1995:97) comments that it is impossible for us to 'stand outside the historical process or gain universal, culturally neutral knowledge as unconditioned specialists'. We are both historically and culturally situated in a particular context. Post-modernism challenges ideas of essentialism, autonomous individualism and narcissistic hedonism (Oden 1995:28) and knowing through reason and empirical observation only. It insists instead that 'there is only continuous interpretation and contextual examination of the world' (Dockery 1995:14). One could argue then that post-modernism invites knowledge that nurtures a move from written to oral, from universal to particular, from general to local, from timeless to timely.

The epistemologies that evolved in response to modernism and which are 'clustered' under post-modern discourse include: post-modernism, social constructionism, post-structuralism, feminism and semi-post structuralism. For the purpose of this research paper and for the practice of restorative witnessing I will draw on social constructionist ideas. By reflecting on notions of discourse analyses as propounded by Foucault, Derrida (both preferred not to be 'categorized' under a particular post-modern epistemology) and feminism I attempt to offer further insight in post-modern thinking.

### **2.2.1 Social Construction and Language**

Social constructionist thinking, which falls under the scope of the post-modern challenge to modernist premises (see above 2.2), provides a broad base of 'liberating' ideas for understanding the world. Gergen (1985) offers key assumptions that reflect the production of knowledge from a social constructionist perspective:

1. What we take to be knowledge of the world, in the 'taken-for-granted-world', needs to be challenged from a stance of 'radical doubt' (:266).
2. Knowledge of the world, our versions and shared versions of knowledge, are the 'result of an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship' (:267), largely through

language.

3. Our ways of knowing and interpreting 'may be suggested, fastened upon, and abandoned as social relationships unfold over time' (:268). Our understandings are relative to where we are placed in the world, historically and culturally.
4. Knowledge, that is socially constructed between persons in relationship, influences corresponding human action and '[t]o alter description and explanation is thus to threaten certain actions and invite others' (:268).

According to social construction ideas, 'language does not mirror nature; language creates the natures we know. Meaning and understanding do not exist prior to the utterances of language' (Anderson 1988:378) or as Michael White (1995:30) says: 'Words are so important. In so many ways, words are the world.' Thus, to connect with the four tenets of social constructionist thinking, depending on where and when in the world they live, what people understand, know and believe is constructed, largely in language, between themselves in that particular historical and cultural context (Burr 1995:4). The ways in which we language our dreaming, thinking, knowing and believing and our resultant doing and being, is coded heavily by dominant ideas in our culture of what is right and wrong, of what is say-able and un-say-able, what is doable and knowable and who is included and excluded in the 'in-group'. Patti Lather (1991:118) supports this idea when she writes:

While we are not the authors of the ways we understand our lives, while we are subjected to regimes of meaning, we are involved in discursive self-production where we attempt to produce some coherence and continuity.

### **2.2.2 Discoursed Lives**

Our understandings of the world are intertwined and shaped by a myriad of discourses. According to social construction ideas, these were and continue to be culturally and historically constructed through human interaction.

Discourses are networks of 'taken-for-granted' understandings of the world. These are 'developed', for example, for economic prowess or control. They become 'truths' that are reproduced over time and continue to govern persons' lives, often going unchallenged (White 1995:215). In effect, discourses perpetuate conditions of selection whereby persons are included through certain norms, where persons are 'othered' or excluded from selection or where other ways of knowing and being are suppressed or marginalized. These discourses continue to function long after the historical purpose that 'designed' them has currency (White 2000:35,36).

For the purpose of this research report, I offer a condensed and selective interpretation of

three practices for challenging or deconstructing discourses that are particularly significant in order to 'make visible the otherwise "hidden" social and political processes' (Parker & Shotter 1990:7) which are ordering our lives, as described by Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, feminist thinkers and activists.

### **2.2.2.1 Michel Foucault deconstructing the 'truths' we live by**

Foucault's (1980:83) notion of genealogies - tracing the historical evolution of 'universal truths' - led him to his exposé of discourses regarding discipline and punishment. These 'current truths' are subjugating of persons, create 'docile bodies' in support of governance and economics and 'norm'-alise (creating universal homogeneity) behaviour (Foucault 1977:183).

Foucault (1980:82) was also interested in the origins and effects of power and knowledge: power is not seen as 'outside' or 'up there' and thus imposed on persons, but is as much ascending as descending (:99) (enacted and perpetuated from the very edges of society); Power is everywhere and happens (moving and circulating) between people (:98); and is appropriated and accorded by individuals with expert knowledges which are exclusive of and which subjugate local knowledges (:88). Oppressive power thrives on perceived - even manufactured - threats, resistance or threatened subversion (:90). But, he asserted, wherever power is circulated amongst persons, resistance (criticism, subjugated knowledges) to that power is also always present (:123).

Foucault investigated the discourses - the technologies of truth - regarding 'illness' (also crime, punishment, mental disorder, sexual disorder) which lead to the pathologising and medicalizing, controlling, isolation and the intensive study of the human body and behaviour, ostensibly for 'cure and amelioration' but intended rather for 'coercion and legislation' (Graham 1996:21).

These notions are significant for restorative witnessing as a way of practicing pastoral counselling and care because they offer insights into the effects of those dominant discourses that 'recruit persons into an active role in their own subjugation' (White 1990:24). They also invite us to find ways to resist these dominant discourses. It also invited reflection from me, as therapist, to know what the discourses are that influence my thinking and action: in terms of expert positioning, totalising persons through judgement, and endeavouring to equalise power distribution.

It seems that the purpose of deconstructing or unpacking those above-mentioned discourses

that govern our lives could serve what Hess (1998:60) describes as communicative justice:

Communicative justice is not simply teaching people to adapt (play the master's game); it is also building on the skills, powers, experience, knowledge, and talents that people have which are unacknowledged in the power structures.

Foucault's ideas of deconstruction bring us ways to think about the multi-faceted complexity of social processes and relationships. Derrida's ideas offer yet more ways of looking at the complexities of social processes and ways in which 'truths' contradict themselves in their very origins.

#### **2.2.2.2 Derrida deconstructing to show contradictions**

Derrida argues that all texts (speech acts, writing,) are not unitary, once for all statements or meanings, but are always embedded with meanings; 'in the margins and between the lines lie the echoes of the meanings that were repressed and negated in the process of establishing closure' (Graham 1996:21).

He maintains that describing what something 'is', is not only describable from the vantage point of the meaning we attach to it at the time but it also includes its meaning relations to what is not said in the present and the much larger background of meanings in the past from which it was selected. All the meanings that are 'deferred' are always already present as a reference or 'traces'; presence and absence are not opposites, 'but rather ... there is an inevitable defining of the one through the other: there is both presence and absence' (Sampson 1989:12).

Derrida proposed that, through deconstructing the un-deconstructable, the commonly held, unquestioned ideas of virtue and virtuous practices (hospitality, community, justice and the gift), it becomes clear that each of these virtues and their possibilities (for actual phenomenological enactment) becomes constrained by what is im-possible to enact. Both the possible and impossible are present through each enactment; they are not imposed, but come from 'within'. Interpretations and preconditions of what is possible regarding the management of these ideas are politically and culturally constructed between persons and communities, and become imbedded, invisibly, in practice. The impossibility of going beyond possibilities creates the tension that sustains and maintains these ideas. It also brings the challenge - the push - to make the impossible possible, to go beyond the limits. Deconstruction is not about destroying, but finding ways to re-do or even reconstruct. Caputo (1997:116) interprets Derrida as saying that

[t]he question of opening oneself to difference, to the other, will *always* come back to the gift, to trumping greed with generosity, to breaking the self-gathering circle of the same with the affirmation of the other.

Derrida's ideas challenged me to be aware of the tension that exists in all actions: namely, that what I choose to say, do or live by also implies the presence, albeit deferred, of many things that I do not say, do or live by. What I choose to say, do or live by is coded by the norms of the group I belong to. I also engaged with the realisation that this 'coded-ness' through which we view and experience our lives was true of persons I connected with as narrative pastoral therapist. It was a useful insight to me that when our 'variety' of codes - already invested with tensions - were brought together in a relationship, further tensions were created. These tensions were a challenge to those norms or ideas, inviting us to 'open up' and stretch beyond the limitations of certain understandings and actions and to discover new ways of making the impossible possible. Tensions always challenge us to take up the 'invitation to explore an alternative construction of selfhood' (Welch 1990:135), or of many other possible ones. At heart, restorative witnessing evolved from a longing to break into – or rather to break out of - 'the self-gathering circles' which were holding us hostage to the ideas, conditions and preconditions of what was possible in our country with its history of injustice, prejudice, exclusion and marginalisation.

### **2.2.2.3 Feminists deconstructing for liberation**

Feminist activists focus on discourses of gender, patriarchy, and paternalism. In general they challenge social and political processes that serve a majority and effect oppression, marginalisation, and abuse on groups of people. bell hooks (2000:104) says that:

... genuine feminist politics always brings us from bondage to freedom, from lovelessness to loving. Mutual partnership is the foundation of love. And feminist practice is the only movement for social justice in our society which creates the conditions where mutuality can be nurtured.

Jakobsen (1994:198) comments that feminism does not 'benefit any specific group, race or class of women, nor does it promote privilege for women over men'. Feminist deconstructions of discourses are always interested in justice, liberation of all people and therefore always political: 'Justice, which includes the defeat of oppressive forces, involves recognising, engaging, and dispersing power among those who differ from one another' (Hess 1998:57). Concurrent with, and inextricably linked to resisting oppression, feminists are always specifically interested in addressing women's struggles and oppression, always in context (situated) and always from the women's lived experience (Jakobsen 1994:198).

It seems then that the feminist maxim that 'the personal is political' is particularly true for the practice of Christian pastoral care (Graham 1996:51). Pastoral counselling and care from a feminist perspective values, validates and nurtures women's voices in the expression of their experiences. These are not the same as men's, but are equally valuable. Graham

(1996:193) supports this perspective that pastoral counselling and care from a feminist perspective focuses on

the recovery and naming of women's experiences and needs, which have been hitherto undervalued, misrepresented and pathologized by the patriarchal Church. In the process, healing, reconciliation and empowerment can take place as women articulate ... the sacredness of embodied experience, exorcize the oppressions of injury, violation and abuse, and celebrate the landmarks of menarche, childbirth, menopause and other social and morphological transitions.

In this process of healing, reconciliation and empowerment, in the regaining of voice and power, women are encouraged to value their own spiritual wisdom and experiences so that in 'naming ... one's God' (Neuger 2001:71) women are liberated from patriarchal prescriptions of who God is for women.

Ackermann (1998:87) states that a feminist theology of praxis is 'embodied practical theology' because, she argues, we are our bodies. Feminist liberation is also about 'returning' women's bodies to them as the rightful owners who can choose how they will present, use and enjoy them (Stevenson Moessner 2000:13). Although I have stated this concern in over-simplified terms, it requires radical resistance to stand against the enormous external and internalised patriarchal pressures that women experience to conform to the descriptions of patriarchal society.

By attuning myself to the discourses through which both my own life and the lives of those persons with whom I was talking, had been constituted, I was able to stand with them and to find support for myself in challenging oppressive and limiting ideas. I have positioned myself strongly as a feminist and as pastoral narrative therapist. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will show how the ideas of many feminist activists, feminist theologians and feminist researchers have helped me to formulate the praxis of restorative witnessing and to describe my way of being pastoral carer and counsellor. I found support in Ackermann's (2003:35-36) words regarding praxis when she says:

It is not to be confused with mere action. Praxis describes the inseparable relationship between reflecting and acting, between what I think and believe and what I do to achieve the goals of my beliefs. Praxis is not the opposite of theory. It is opposed to separating theory and practise. For liberation theologians, praxis always has an historical and social character. Any theology, including mine, which is praxis-based theology in the making because the goals of liberation and justice are expressed in the very act of doing theology.



### 2.3 TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

Bearing in mind the ways in which our worldview is socially constructed and embedded in many discourses, it follows that when ideas associated with words such as 'witnessing', 'listening', and 'narrative/story' and 'community work' are interpreted and enacted, they would reflect a particular construction of meaning for the interpreter or actor. These words featured greatly in my thinking around the involvement I had in the two schools and also in my thinking about and understanding of pastoral care and counselling.

As a narrative pastoral therapist I realised that I had to unpack the understandings and beliefs I held about these ideas (witnessing, listening, narrative/story and community work) whenever I ventured, or was invited, into other people's lives and life experiences. I realised that the 'personal values and social mores' influencing my practice would have a 'political function and a political genesis' (Welch 1990:56) and that this was equally true for the persons I engaged with. I had to discover the constructions which the persons I engaged with (for example, the women that were co-participants for this research) held about these words and I invited them to co-construct meanings (about witnessing, listening, narrative/story and community work) with me. This was a way of discovering new interpretations. But it was also a way to keep me accountable and vigilant against imposing my ideas as a norm, becoming the expert and taking up a power position: '[t]o be in dialogue is to attempt to understand others and to involve oneself in the co-evaluation of understanding and meaning' (Anderson & Goolishian 1988:385).

It was also important to acknowledge that, although I adopted a 'not-knowing' position, I was not entering either of the communities as an empty vessel to be filled and reconstructed in any which way. Harlene Anderson (1997:36) supports this understanding when she says

[a] not-knowing position does not mean the therapist does not know anything or that the therapist throws away or does not use what she or he already knows. We each bring who we are and all that entails – life experiences, professional experiences, values, prejudices and strong opinions.

Many of the ideas I had about these words - witnessing, listening, narrative/story and community work - had already been co-constructed through the course for which I am writing this research report, through many conversations and my own life experiences. I had already arrived at a place in my life where I had taken a position against oppressive, unjust and marginalizing ideas that kept persons in subjugated positions. These were ideas that fitted my understanding of pastoral care and counselling as relational practice (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:40).

I support Halperin's (1995:83) idea that the biggest challenge is to avoid the practices that effect domination. If not, then there is no 'evil in the practice of someone, who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells [her] what [she] must do, teaches [her], transmits knowledge to [her], communicates skills to [her].' If there was a possibility that any constructs I held were also to be useful to other persons, it would not make me bully them to think my way, but would make me to be transparent about my stance and choose for collaboration. It was important to choose to take 'relational responsibility' and how I would accept the 'authority' (power/knowledge) given.

Before I could do this, I needed, however, to examine the ways in which my own life, as a woman, has been run by sex and gender descriptions and to discover how they shaped my personhood. As it is, a myriad of blatant and subtle discourses converge on the sex and gender discourses that further fix views and standpoints for people (Bons-Storm 1998:10). I needed to investigate the ways in which these discourses convinced me to take an active role in my own subjugation.

Through ongoing reflection, I was able to identify the descriptions and positioning I preferred and I tried to formulate and to live them, for instance, through this research report. By doing this, I believed I could be transparent about my own views and standpoints. I could also permit myself to be open to other possibilities and could make ethical commitments to social justice. Social and transformative justice (Ackermann 1994:209) requires action when views and standpoints deny the personhood of people through oppression and abuse, poverty, marginalisation and silencing of voices. By identifying (through reflection and conversation) my personhood through discourses and by appreciating the ways in which I had struggled to untangle them in my thinking, but also by appreciating the ways in which I had resisted them, I could better connect in solidarity with persons who were 'reconstructing' the ways in which they preferred to view their personhood. Together we found ways to encourage, support and co-construct many possible selves. In the words of Davies:

Human beings are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity. It is one and the same person who is variously positioned in a conversation. Yet as variously positioned we may want to say that that very same person experiences and displays that aspect of self that is involved in the continuity of a multiplicity of selves.

(Davies & Harré 1991:46)

## **2.4 DE-CONSTRUCTING, RE-CONSTRUCTING AND CO- CONSTRUCTING**

Pastoral care and counselling, from a feminist perspective, challenges us to engage with persons, especially women and children, in ways that acknowledge and affirm their emotions

and experiences and thoughts (Bons-Storm 1996:16). It was with this insight that I chose to contemplate the implications of some constructs that could support women in such a way that they did not feel that they had 'to be silent about parts of their lives' (:17).

Of the many discourses that can be de-constructed in this research report - such as 'witnessing', 'listening', 'stories/ narrative' and 'community work', 'class', 'gender', 'race', 'education', 'parenting', 'success', 'children', 'survival', 'life style choices', 'poverty', 'authority/ leadership' and 'power' and the 'right to power', 'bureaucratic structure' and 'religion' - I will focus on witnessing and community work.

From my experience these words, 'witnessing' and 'community work', are mutually inclusive. I found that to try and define any one of these words immediately invites the qualities of the other into the description. They also, inevitably, implicate the meanings and practices associated with many of the other words in the list. These words - constructs of meaning and action - featured greatly in my experience in the communities I engaged with in terms of pastoral care and counselling. At times I had to do battle with the dominant discourses that tried to subvert the preferred meanings of the words and thus turn my actions into power tools for alienating people (See Chapter 4). I continuously re-engaged with these ideas, in co-operation with the women, their communities and my support community, in order to 're-mean', to appropriate them, in the co-construction of my identity as a restorative witness.

## **2.4.1 Witnessing**

**wit-ness** *n* [ OE *witnes* knowledge, testimony, witness, fr. *wit*, n. + *-ness* – more at WIT] **1** : attestation of a fact or an event: EVIDENCE, TESTIMONY, **2** : one that gives evidence regarding matters of fact under inquiry **3** : one who is called on to be present at a transaction so as to be able to testify to its having taken place **4** : one who is cognizant of something by direct experience: one who beholds or has personal knowledge of something **5** : public testimony by word or deed to one's religious faith **6** : PROOF

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1976:2627)

### **2.4.1.1 Independent Witnessing**

For the purposes of this research report, I have selected some of the understandings I believe are commonly attached to the word 'witness' in our South African society. For me, the areas in which the act of witnessing had a particular interpretation were in the legal system, the church and being present, at an event. I offer a brief discussion of each in the following paragraphs.

Our society appears to be bound in legalistic, positivist thinking where proof, truth, crosschecking, double-checking, and finding and closing loopholes guide interaction. As a

result, distrust is nurtured. Witnessing is invited into situations with the view to establish truth and reliability, or used as a means of discrediting persons, or for establishing control, or for retaliation and punishment. Often witnesses, and lawyers, will speak on behalf of a person. Information may be selected or suppressed for maximum effect. As much as we may need to concede that the judicial system tries to maintain justice in a particular way, we also have to acknowledge the oppressive effects and influences which its practices and ideas have on human relationships in terms of power and control outside the courtroom.

In many faith communities, the practice of witnessing or giving testimony by persons with first hand experience seems to be employed as a convincing outreach to 'others', by way of proof and of extending an invitation to respond in a particular way (repentance, conviction). The audience or listener is generally not invited to ask questions or express their doubts - or add their own experiences, reflections or insights to what they have heard. When they do, they are often given 'guidance': pre-scribed and pre-scribing responses.

Just by being a person in the world we are positioned to witness. On a daily basis we are constructed by what we witness and what we are witness to, through our very presence and our senses. We may also be called on to be present in particular contexts to act as witnesses, to watch and listen, to speak and sign. We may be part of a setting or context where a momentous event has constituted that setting or context differently and can join others in attesting to this event.

From these generalised descriptions around witnessing, I concluded that witnessing is often perceived as an individualised, one-sided, non-interactive, closed conveyance of information from one party to the next.

As none of these constructs of witnessing fitted the perspectives I have acquired from social construction ideas, contextual and feminist practical theology, participatory action research and the narrative metaphor, I chose to re-construct the word witness. I chose to qualify it with the word 'restorative' in a way that allows many voices to decide what the speaker can say or what the scribe can write. In the following sections I explain the thinking that led to the 'kind' of witnessing I engaged in as 'restorative witnessing'.

#### **2.4.1.2 Restorative Witnessing as inter-dependent witnessing**

The word 'restorative' brings together ideas of restitution, re-construction and safekeeping:

**Restore** *vb* [ME *restoren*, fr. L *restaurare* to put back into an original state, renew, fr. re- + -*staurare* (fr. *restaurare* to renew, restore, perform)] **1** : to give back : make restitution of **2** : to put or bring back (as into existence or use) **3 c** : to bring back to a healthy state, cause to recover **d** : to make calm and tranquil in mind **5a obs** : to make amends or

compensation, **b** : *Scots law* to give or make restitution to

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1976:2627)

**Re-story** *vb* **1**: repeating of a narrative **2** : creating a new story from an original story **3** : discovering an alternative meaning for an original story **4** : constructing new layers of meanings for a story **5** : deconstructing hidden meanings in a story **6** : telling a narrative with focus on generally ignored details.

Helena Schoeman and Linda van Duuren (2003)

**Store** *vb* [ ME *storen*, fr.OF *estorer* to construct, restore, store, fr. L *instaurare* to renew, restore, perform] **1** : FURNISH, PROVIDE, SUPPLY, FILL : to stock or furnish against a future time **2** : to collect as a reserved supply : lay away : accumulate **3 a** : to leave or deposit in a store, or other place of keeping, preservation : CACHE, STOW **b** : to record **4** : to have space for : HOLD

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1976:2252)

The idea for 'restorative' witnessing developed as a response to what I perceived as the need, for *restitution* in our country. But it is also a statement of hope: for the healing effects of participatory action research, pastoral care and narrative praxis on those of us *co-researching* (White 1997:172) and *re-storying* (therefore re-story and it's definitions) our lives together. The idea of 'store' is to intimate the ways in which we become *listeners*, *co-custodians* and *co-recorders* of the memories and the tellings and re-tellings of stories. It also indicates that there is always place for new ones, thus building up archives of stories, especially those of the silenced voices who spoke themselves into being.

I focus only on restorative witnessing. Listening and stories (as an event) are fundamental to witnessing and as such are given some reflection and consideration in the discussion.

### **2.4.1.3 Laying out the strands that weave restorative witnessing practices**

The 'strands' of ideas I drew together was my attempt to refine my understanding of the person-in-relationship I preferred to be. These 'strands' describe the 'way of being' and the 'doing' of pastoral counselling and care that I connected with at the time.

#### **2.4.1.3.1 Restorative witnessing assumes accountability**

In order to grow from one-sided independent witnessing to inter-active, inclusive witnessing I have had to perceive the ways, in which I have been knitted by the society in which I have been raised. Only then could I be pro-active in my ways of relating or choose to *live consciously* (Villa-Vicencio 1994:75). Slowly and painfully I have had to uncover the ways in which my life experience is shadowed and shaped by a society that lived, and still lives, under the influences left by harsh judgement and discrimination created by the apartheid ideas, a patriarchal society and a patriarchal church (Jakobsen 1994:148). It is a society

which is also driven by materialistic values, which maintains, however subtly, the ranking of people according to race, gender and class.

#### **2.4.1.3.2 Restorative witnessing deconstructs power**

I kept in mind that as I was witnessing, so I was being witnessed. It was imperative to the ethics of restorative witnessing to resist the power that witnessing others' stories gave me in the ways I spoke of and about their stories. I was struck by what Fiona Ross (2003:6) writes about the effects reported events had on testifiers at the TRC:

For some testifiers, seeing the self as though from the outside can be disconcerting, even painful. Some have been angry at the ways in which, once uttered in public, their words circulate beyond their control, reported and repeated in the media, on the internet, reproduced and analysed by scholars or others. Frequently discomfort stems from a sense that the products of these processes do not do justice to the self.

Riet Bons-Storm (1996:27) believes that 'to speak in the name of somebody else' easily becomes an oppressive gesture of representation, by which a powerful figure reduces a dependent one to silence.' Patti Lather (1991:91) says that 'social relations mediate the construction of knowledge; who speaks for whom becomes a central question.' My evolution towards accountable witnessing and caring impressed on me that I had to keep checking with the participants how they were experiencing our interactions (White 1997:138). I was concerned that I would un-consciously (unwittingly) take up a power position in ways that would render the women silent. In particular I was mindful of and agreed with Patti Lather's (1991:ix) idea that:

[w]e must shift the role of critical intellectuals from being universalising spokespersons to acting as cultural workers whose task is to take away the barriers that prevent people from speaking for themselves.

#### **2.4.1.3.3 Restorative witnessing embodies persons**

... the pain of the other not only asks for a home in language but also seeks a home in the body ... pain is not confined to the individual body but is shared and possibly transformed by the relationships between people.

(Ross 2003:49)

Restorative witnessing gave us an opportunity to move from being 'editing', talking heads to full-bodied, multi-sensed, in the moment, persons. Restorative witnessing meant that we could speak ourselves (bodies, minds, emotions) into being. We worded away at the shrouds that have kept much of us invisible and unnoticed, even to ourselves (Davies 1993).

Griffiths and Griffiths (1994:42) comment that the 'splitting of language and silencing of the body seem to be the soil in which somatic symptoms grow.' Witnessing each other's stories

brought us to a place where we started making peace in and with our inherited bodies (genes, sex, skin colour) and our histories. This did not mean forgetting, but making peace and healing – because we had discovered together that we have been able, at the very least and against all odds, to stay alive.

By witnessing each other's presence through touch, by acknowledging each other's physical bodies, by seeing each other with our eyes but also through our voices, we helped ourselves to take up an identity in the lived, present story making. We also empowered ourselves to venture into acts of resistance, however tentative. Bons-Storm (1996:81) speaks about this interconnectedness when she says: 'The self can only tell a story about itself if it becomes aware of itself by being addressed and touched by others.'

Many of our conversations opened possibilities for discussing the roles women were expected to take in society and in the various cultures. In these discussions it became clear that each one of these women had some beliefs about her capabilities and identity that did not fit the dominant ideas where:

men have been equated with mind (spirit) and women with body (material), it has been women who have traditionally prepared food, cleaned the domicile, attended to material needs, bandaged the wounds, and generally cared for the corporeal well-being of others.

(Stevenson-Moessner 2000:15)

Whilst many of these women were forced to continue with the 'given' role they knew they were also mind/spirit.

#### **2.4.1.3.4 Restorative witnessing as an act of resistance**

As I have grown in understanding narrative ideas, I have also become very aware of the effects of our narratives on our lives – either they give us hope and a sense of agency or we become re-traumatised. My role as pastoral carer, I believed, was to relate with the women so that they could relate to their own narratives in hopeful ways. Riet Bons-Storm (1996:147) says that:

women first have to tell their stories among themselves, get used to their own voices, and listen to one another. It is not easy. Solidarity among women who live in quite different situations and positions has to be won the hard way. Together women practice their subject quality and power to speak, and find the strength to endure the scorn of the dominant discourse.

Witnessing stories of harm and suffering is not a neutral act, just as 'remembering and recounting harm is neither a simple nor a neutral act' (Ross 2003:162). I, as a witness was called upon to respond to the stories I had heard. But the storyteller was also able to re-witness their own story: to be drawn into remembering the ways in which others had

inflicted oppression, abuse and suffering on them. As a narrative pastoral therapist, I became co-custodian of these memories, although I stored them with an activist's refusal to see any person 'solely as a victim but ... as [a person] fully alive, new, engaging in an infinite number of possibilities' (Welch 1990:163). Through active witnessing - restorative witnessing - we started standing together against the marginalizing effects of these experiences and moving towards finding settled stories.

Restorative witnessing became an act of resistance when we listened for ideas, actions and descriptions that spoke against a defined problem. In narrative practice these are called unique outcomes (White & Epston 1990:16). Listening joined me with the speaker against the oppressive effects of a problem in that person's life. In this I am in agreement with Hess (1998:66) when she says that:

[j]ustice in conversation is not merely a social goal in response to shifting demographics; it is an ethical and epistemological commitment to fight oppression and mobilize differentness on the way to knowing.

Restorative witnessing offered the speaker an opportunity to listen to her own voice, of 'hearing [her] into speech' as Nelle Morton (in Neuger, 2001:68) was quoted saying. I found the idea of this kind of listening empowering, not only through the telling of a story, but also because '[i]t is the empowerment of hearing oneself speak and learning to believe in the truth of that long-denied voice, language and narrative' (Neuger, 2001:68).

Salomé and Wendy (Chapter 3) found, through telling their stories, many new ways of describing and appreciating their survival skills.

#### **2.4.1.3.5 Restorative witnessing invites listening relationship and friendship**

When I became actively engaged, moving from the 'status of stranger to friend' (Lather 1991:57), we could mutually create the space where we shared our stories and experiences with each other, thus finding out where we were coming from and 'trying on voices' (Lather 1991:149) or 'creating a plurality of sites from which the world is spoken' (:33). As a pastoral caregiver, I was at pains to avoid:

[j]ust getting and not giving back, The word 'engaging' ... is meant to signify an activity considered binding because one has pledged oneself to it. Engagement means active involvement rather than detached explanation.

(Ackermann 1995:34)

As with any new relationship, I understood that it was about taking small steps and giving time. I found support for these ideas when Nancy Eiesland (1998:108) quotes Young as saying that:

"rational reflection on justice begins in hearing, in heeding a call rather than in asserting and mastering a state of affairs, however ideal." Justice begins with the



relationship of speaking and listening.

The difficulty and challenge of 'doing' respectful listening, 'in an active and responsive way' so that persons experience their story as something worth listening to was supported from a stance of 'not-knowing'(Anderson 1995:35). My focus remained with the meanings which the speakers attached to their words. This stance of

[n]ot-knowing refers to the attitude and belief that the therapist does not have access to privileged information, can never fully understand another person, and needs to learn more about what has been said or not said.

(Anderson 1995:34)

My thinking around listening practices was extended by Heshusius' (1995:121) thoughts regarding her own listening practices:

My position here is that it is important to understand the difference between listening with a specific purpose and listening without a specific purpose, that is, listening without wanting anything from it. The latter, paradoxically, opens up fuller access to the totality of the other.

I discovered that when I started thinking of research as something 'out there' to be found or made, I started listening, keenly, for those things I thought would hit the mark. When I moved the anxiety to find that 'thing' out of the way, and instead enjoyed being engaged with the women, the research happened amongst us. We listened to each other in 'participatory consciousness', which meant to 'temporarily dissolve the boundaries of the self, making complete attentiveness to other possible, and in turn opening up access in new and unanticipated ways' (Heshusius 1995:121). When I was able to suspend focus on my ideas and thoughts and listen for connection, I *participated* in opening a self-other space in which relating and relationship could happen.

On the occasions when we met and created such a context for being together, I came away very energised and longed for more. It was wonderful news to me when the women also reported that our meetings had had this effect on them (See Chapter 3, 4). Salomé and Galiema both said that they enjoyed the conversations very much and had experienced them as meaningful support against their concerns.

#### **2.4.1.3.6 Restorative witnessing creates an audience for validation**

Narrative practices opens up many possibilities for creating audiences for the stories people want to share about their lives. Restorative witnessing draws on these ideas (White 2000:65). The women I engaged with were not just individuals struggling on their own with their lives, they were continuously involved in a variety of conversations and relationships (Monk, et al, 1999:98). Women who lived through pain, abuse, poverty and hardship, and who have found

ways to respond to or survive these experiences, were given the opportunity to share their stories, their survival and relationship knowledges. It was also an opportunity for the person to hear how others respond to their life story and to experience acknowledgement and support for what they choose in their lives. The goal is not to supply reasons or offer explanations, but to awaken compassion in each toward the other and toward the self' (Parry & Doan 1994:29).

One of the ideas that I had when I started my involvement at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary school (Chapter 4), was to become a witness - a restorative witness - to the considerable collaborative and inclusive skills that the women demonstrated in building up this school. We managed to have one conversation where the women were able to share life stories and the ways in which they took their lives back.

Narrative therapy also emphasises the importance of persons' communities of care (Morgan 2000:119). While witnessing with people, I tried to listen for and invite reflection on the contribution to their survival made by other people in their lives, even those not present or alive anymore. This was a way of taking action against ideas of isolation. It was also a way of inviting ideas of connection to persons not present and alive but who made a contribution to their lives. As pastoral narrative counsellor I had also become part of their communities of care.

Salomé remembered and experienced a neighbour's care for her and her siblings in a new way (Chapter 3). Victoria remembered a teacher who had valued and encouraged her as a child (Chapter 4).

#### ***2.4.1.3.7 Restorative witnessing finds ways to record events***

I expected to have many conversations and to be able to write letters, documents and so forth to the women as a way of reflecting their stories back to them. In this way, I hoped that a 'further loop [would be] created when reflections themselves were recorded and forwarded to the client. Reflections on reflections [were] then invited, until the client [was] satisfied that her preferred histories [were] being accurately recorded' (Monk 1997:150).

As the intention of the meetings were to honour the creative survival, determination and the wisdoms of these women, I documented each story as a re-telling of their story, with the focus on the many things which they had put in place to foster connection and relationships. These documents were meant to be re-edited until the women could have a co-authored 'life story' at hand. It was important to regard these 'recordings' as completely and organically

intertwined with the conversations – they became a way of continuing the conversation (Epston 1998:99).

Each of the women commented that the letters were very meaningful to them. One of the women said that it had been the first letter anyone had written to her and another mentioned that she appreciated the opportunity to tell her life story.

#### **2.4.1.3.8 Restorative witnessing re-visions God/ Spirituality**

Feminist theologians have written about the many ways in which women's voices have been silenced and marginalized in religious communities. In response, Neuger (2001:72) asserts that '[w]omen's naming of self, context, and creation is necessary for the full participation of humanity in the on-going co-creative process with God.'

In witnessing women's faith practices, I invited persons to investigate, compare and imagine creatively what their spiritual life meant to them. Further to this, Lyall (1995:84) makes the observation that:

the religious history of an individual is not something separate from the story of a person's whole life. ... The spiritual journey of the client is nearly always a reflection of important themes in that person's life.

I found in both communities that the women were very connected to certain religious ideas. They had embraced many of the 'traditional' descriptions of women's roles as submissive wives and mothers, and often used the 'evangelical discourses / ideas' as a set of 'rules' against which to measure their lives and actions. I also witnessed the oppression which these ideas exercised on the lives of women. In our conversations, I invited descriptions or understandings which they had of God that did not fit the set of 'rules'. In effect, I was trying to liberate God and spirituality from restrictive descriptions towards becoming multi-faceted and versatile. Michael White (2000:132) says that spirituality is

about the exploration of the options for living one's life in ways that are other in regard to the received modes of being. It is to do with the problematising of the taken-for-granted, the questioning of the self-evident.

In conversations about ideas such as 'it is wrong to get divorced' or 'maybe God is punishing me', I asked questions in order to problematise these ideas. I wondered what God was like for them or whether there were any persons that they knew that reminded them of some qualities of God? What did they think those persons would say to them? I asked how they thought their God would respond to such totalising statements? These conversations surfaced many times. Sometimes the women found it very hard to formulate their own ideas and at times they chose not to participate in such talk.

#### **2.4.1.3.9 Restorative witnessing emphasises 'taking-it-back-practices'**

Restorative witnessing, and narrative praxis, included taking back to people what the effect their actions had on me, just by my happening to be there and even though I was often not directly part of the interaction (White 1997:142). Many times the women were surprised that their actions were appreciated as meaningful when they hadn't regarded them as anything out of the ordinary. Two of the mothers wrote to me in response to a few questions I had asked them. These validated the research, but they also reflected back to me how I had managed to 'do' pastoral care and counselling. Wendy telephoned me a few times out of concern and care for me and I appreciated this a great deal (Chapter 3).

#### **2.4.1.3.10 Restorative witnessing invites agency and co-constructing of knowledge**

Restorative witnessing created a construction site for us, where we were empowered and re-constructed through co-construction of new ideas of our worth in the world. It also reminded us of the agency we possessed and promoted new ways of relating to others or encouraged us to venture to act on our insights. Patti Lather (1991:4) validates this idea when she says:

It is important to note that ... empowerment is a process one undertakes for oneself: it is not something done 'to' or 'for' someone: the heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts.

I realised from the feedback that the women, whilst listening to each other, picked out ideas that encouraged them to take steps to be in charge of their lives. Salomé started a care-giving scheme for people in the community. Wendy and Galiema decided to become involved in the school. Similarly, when one of the women had a practical problem and we discussed it, we could allay fears of 'getting into trouble' and could talk through the 'how to' step-by-step. It was thus a great achievement for Wendy when she travelled to the city centre by herself and knew exactly what she had to do. These conversations about sharing knowledge communally and empowering persons to manage their lives in their context confirmed my ideas about the purpose of pastoral care and counselling.

Restorative witnessing practices would inform the 'doing' of community work. If restorative witnessing has at heart relationship, it would also imply deep reflection on what I meant when I spoke about community work and the kind of practices I would engage in. According to Kenny (1997:191) Kant believed that the test of care is the extent to which our investment 'cost us something to do what is "right".' In the following paragraphs I reflect what it will cost a pastoral narrative therapist engaged in restorative witnessing to do what is 'right'.

## 2.5 COMMUNITY WORK

My resident dictionary offered an explanation of the word community. In summary, I found ideas such 'society', 'neighbourhood', 'city', 'town', 'state', 'population and 'group that is like-minded' (Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1976:460).

For the word 'work' a school thesaurus offered many possible interpretations

**Work** v **1** : labour, toil, effort, exertion, trouble **2** : employment, profession, business, occupation **3** : task, chore, assignment, job, project **4** : creation, achievement, accomplishment, product **5** : labour, toil, strive, strain, endeavour **6** : perform, function, operate, run (Hellweg, 1991: 281).

In this section, I would like to juxtapose two interpretations of the word 'community work'. I regard working-in-community - working *with* and not *for* people in their context - as primary to the doing of pastoral care and counselling. I also felt the obligation to collect the various understandings I had gathered around community involvement as a support to my action, but also to grapple with ideas that were not useful to the context of the people I engaged with.

### 2.5.1 Community work as we know it

Religious, and particularly Christian communities, have strong ideas about the salvific effect of 'works', that is, the performance of religious and moral acts that flow from one's beliefs. It is in the interpretation of religious 'works' that much harm has been done to communities all over the world – actions that had cloaked themselves as love and care but which imposed control and disempowerment.

Those who thought they knew what was needed imposed these 'works' by colonising the world in patriarchal and patronising ways. These 'works' were also described as 'charity'. These 'works' brought oppression, marginalisation and destabilisation to many culture groups, no less so in this country. In this context, we find many people providing charity for others: looking after themselves first and giving away what they don't need (Debbink 1997:27). I was strongly influenced by the way in which Arratia and de la Marza (1997:135) in Smith, Willms and Johnson describe the concerns they have about ways of intervention and charity:

Generous people elsewhere are willing to come and provide charity. But, if we are talking about constructing a different kind of world – a world where people are less polarized because of their surname, birthplace, or economic status [and I add in, race and gender] – we need to look at different options. Assistance and charity are not going to create this reconstruction.... [We need to find ways of] strengthening communities, fostering local organizations, and in the process, transforming realities.

Community work or charitable works often calls for 'volunteers', which invite descriptions of

involvement as 'sacrifice', 'tedious', 'hard' and a 'performance of duty'. Many well-meaning people, not necessarily religious, collect and deliver donations. They often bring broken and soiled things that they would never use and turn the receiving parties into a dumpsite for rubbish. This leaves already under-resourced people with yet more to deal with.

It is often the case that persons involved in community work have a 'quick fix' mentality. Problems are listed or diagnosed. They want a project to go somewhere quickly and so they 'do' for the recipients. They do not consult the recipients, but tell them what to do and treat them like children, expecting them to be obedient and grateful. It also seems that many prefer their community work to take place at a distance, on the other side of town. They donate something, but stay where it is safe and clean: nothing challenges them physically and morally. Resistance to engaging in community work or any kind of involvement with others sprouts from 'an unacknowledged power differential' that 'thwarts transformative interaction' because of 'the extent to which the changes sought by those who have been victimized are seen to entail only loss for the more privileged' (Welch 1990:135).

Intervention from various institutions and money donated from countries is often aimed at prescribed agendas or a 'cause'. Often these institutions have a time limit attached to them and expect particular results. As with volunteers, many of these social outreach programmes, or community work programmes are prone to easy withdrawal of persons and funds: there seems to be an unspoken proviso vested in every commitment. Sharon Welch (1990:134) comments on Paule Marshall's work *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* in which she says that a:

material power imbalance is maintained in that those who come to help hold on to the privilege of leaving the fray. They choose to help those who are oppressed but hold on to the possibility of leaving ... of going back to life as usual. As long as people think they can leave, the trust necessary for genuine conversation is impossible. Those who are being helped cannot trust either that they will be heard or that, if they speak honestly, the group that has more privilege will stay in the conversation.

### 2.5.2 Work-in-community or commune-ity work as pastoral care

**Commune** *n* [ME *comunen*, *communnen*, fr. OF *comuner* to put in common, share, fr. *comun* common – more at COMMON] **1** archaic: CONVERSE, CONFER **2** archaic: to associate together : have dealings **4a** : to hold converse or intercommunication esp. with great mental or spiritual depth or intensity **b** : to attain to an earnest or deep feeling of unity, appreciation, and receptivity

(Webster's Third New International Dictionary 1976:460)

When I looked up the word 'commune', which has a variety of interpretations, I found words - such as 'speak', 'talk', 'converse', 'confer' and 'correspond' - to be a better fit for the way I

think of community. I preferred to re-frame community work as 'work-in-community' or 'commune-ity work' as a reminder of the 'way of being' I was acquiring through communing and relationships in the communities that constitute my life. The ideas for restorative witnessing praxis fitted closely with the ideas of work-in-community.

Debbink and Ornelas (1997:14) state that their interpretation for community is 'common unity, common goals [and] common work.' According to them, people have become isolated from each other through ideas of individual success and achievement with the result they are often set up against each other. Thus it happens that '[w]e cannot struggle together easily.' Ornelas (Debbink & Ornelas 1997:17) shares the view that when we engage in communities, we will only connect when we work with the people in the community: manual work supports self-transformation. He goes on to say that '[w]ork is a source of transformation; it is also a source of knowledge. There is a sense of community when a group of people comes together to do work.' Although Debbink and Ornelas are referring specifically to Mexico, I found this view to be true from the experiences I had in the communities. As I participated in their contexts, working with them, I also learnt much more about their context. Over time I had also been included in the planning and activities (Chapter 4).

I hold dear the belief that rather than only 'servicing' its own, at heart pastoral care and counselling should be engaging in working-in-community. I agree with Elaine Graham when she says that pastoral practice, therefore pastoral care and counselling, should aim 'to develop a pastoral care which is reconstructive as well as critical and prophetic' (Graham 1998:137). According to her, many feminist practical theologians have as a constant, critical reminder the 'human experience as gendered,' which is what feminist Christian *praxis*, is about. Consequently, feminist situated practice challenges 'coercive and deterministic values' and tries rather to support an understanding of 'human identity and agency, and of ultimate truth, as provisional and situated, yet grounded in a pre-commitment to a common humanity and the possibilities of ethical action' (Graham 1998:137).

Patti Lather (1991:xv) says that 'in our action is our knowing.' As a pastoral narrative person and caregiver, I preferred to 'be' in commune-ity work than to 'do' community work. I understood that my transformation 'occur[ed] as the reformer feels the pain of the people who [were] oppressed' (Welch 1990:135) and that '...service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which [s]he speaks' (Nouwen 1990:xvi). Commune-ing invited intimacy, relationship and openness: 'Working with people effectively and interactively to elicit change means building trust and developing rapport over time' (Seymour 1997:84). It also means demonstrating our intentions through 'small regular

commitments' (Couture 2001:61).

I ensured that any intervention on my part resulted from consultation with the women. They directed, selected and indicated what needs they wanted met. On those occasions when particular needs were expressed for acquiring skills, I offered to become a facilitator or mentor. To work-in-commune-ity while using restorative witnessing praxis, would mean that their context and their needs would determine the action I could take, but never on their behalf and never without their consent. In Couture (1998:27) I found inspiration and support when she said that:

Pastoral care, as one practice of theology, draws on the methods and insights of science, but, in the end, is a creative of imagination. It is an artistic practice which simultaneously engages human gifts, meets human need, and witnesses to a vision of life in which care for persons, for creation, and for God is central.

(Couture 1998:27)

My interaction in the Lwandle community taught me, as had Smith, Willms and Johnson (1997:60), the 'value of working within a team or with an accessible, experienced mentor who is able to provide supportive guidance'. In the witnessing of effects of mentoring on commune-ing practice I understood what Hess (1998:60) meant about 'building on the skills, powers, experience, knowledge, and talents that people have which are unacknowledged in the power structures.' It was clear to me that it was important for those I engaged with to know that I was not there just to take from them (their collaboration for this research report) or 'do things that would somehow have negative repercussions' (Arratia & de la Marza 1997:135).

The qualities of witnessing, listening to narratives and co-constructing new ones are important for the way in which we find opportunities and connections for people to engage in self-care, so that the 'concept of wellness moves even further toward a positive vision of health: wellness emphasizes physical activity, nutritional awareness, stress management, and self-responsibility' (Couture 1998:47). I envisaged that my service as pastoral carer and counsellor would be to journey alongside to assist in the networking and finding of information, as agreed upon by the women.

From the stance of narrative pastoral therapist, I realised that 'feminists know that the personal and the political cannot be separated' (Ackermann 1998:81) and that besides drawing alongside the women in the communities, my commitment to work for justice and equality did not diminish or get shelved. Isherwood and McEwan (1993:60) believe that working for equality has two foci:

the structures which inhibit equality have to be identified and denounced and the



positive steps must be taken to devise and promote strategies that enhance equality.

It is in taking a stand against oppressive structures in our society that we need to hold on to 'an unshakeable belief in the incomplete nature of an oppression' (Monk, et al, 1997:184) – a belief which the narrative metaphor maintains. It is in this belief, and by cooperating with each other, that I found encouragement to continue as an apprentice to work-in-community, pastoral carer and counsellor. Pamela Couture (2000:92) reminds us that it is:

[T]he broad frameworks of practical theology [that] help people who care with one another to share the responsibility for creating the journey. Some people know parts of the terrain better than others: no one knows the whole. A caring journey requires cooperative knowledge. If practical theology helps provide a direction, it also helps us to know whether we are prepared for the journey. An overall map helps us know when to travel with our present companions and when to find a guide with different knowledge.

## 2.6 IN CONCLUSION: MAKING THEOLOGY FOR TRANSFORMATION

I was captured by the idea of Deist's (1994:258) that

[w]hen theology becomes a contemporary theology of making, as in the days of early Christianity where 'theologians' had to transform and not only transmit, theology becomes contextualized.

I liked the idea that as we care and relate with each other in our 'ordinary' daily contexts and we 'do hope' (Weingarten 2000:402) with and for each other, by witnessing, listening, and sharing the narratives of survival and communing, we are also making theology. In a 'contemporary theology of making' I realised that '[e]ach location may be a place of care in pastoral space' (Couture 2000:93).

In thinking what a contemporary theology of making would mean in terms of the women I met at Lourier Primary School and Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School I connected strongly with Mary Pellauer, quoted by Neuger (2001:71), says in her book, '*God's Fierce Whimsy*', that

if there's anything worth calling theology, it is listening to people's stories – listening to them and honouring them and cherishing them, and asking them to become even more brightly beautiful than they already are.

But in the honouring and cherishing of people's stories and asking them - supporting, collaborating with them, sustaining and encouraging them - to become even more 'brightly beautiful', we need also to engage with transformation, that is, to work towards justice and equality, liberation, reparation, restoration and to hold on to hope (Ackermann 1998:83).

Transformation moves us away from eternal truths towards an

ethic of risk-taking, ... [i]t is risk-taking because it challenges 'tradition'; it is risk-taking because it actually unmask the harm that is done in the name of tradition.

(Isherwood & McEwan 1993:30)

In a contemporary theology of making I imagined contexts where women 'regained language and voice for the power of naming' their self, their environment and their God (Neuger 2001:71). I imagined that in the naming we would collaborate and engage in 'healing praxis' (Ackermann 1998:83), and that in caring with others we would be transformed (Couture, 2000:55) and able to hold on to hope. In engaging hope with each other we were also engaging in resistance to that which tries to deprive us of hope and disempower us (Ackermann 1994:208). Simultaneously we were engaging with hope that 'nurtures the courage to love, that is, to [be] open to others and to see the best in them and to cherish them without being afraid. Without hope in the midst of dread there cannot be faith' (Bons-Storm 1998:15). It was this hopeful courage that helped me to take the risk of commitment, which in turn, moved me to persist in working-in-community for healing:

[For] without a clear vision of how to solve immense problems, simply knowing that to live is to see the problems and to find a way forward, boldly living although you're not sure how to stop the forces of oppression.

(Welch 1990:96)

In **Chapter 3** I introduce the women's group of Lourier Primary School and describe how their stories - through our re-authoring, acknowledgment and support - became richly described and 'more brightly beautiful'.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **WREATHING COMMUNITY THROUGH CONVERSATION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter I introduce the women from the school community of Lourier Primary School in Retreat, Cape Town who were active participants in the research. Together we untangled strands of appreciation from a knotted mess of debilitating discourses and ideas. I describe how various practices supported and guided restorative witnessing to transforming relationships.

#### **3.2 CHECKING FOR VALUE...**

When I asked a few mothers, who were involved at the school on a regular basis, whether they thought a women's group was something that could be useful, one of them had said that she wasn't convinced that it would work because I was not from the community, and moreover, I was white. This was a valid comment because I had been doing support work at the school for a short time and not many parents had had dealings with me. The parents I had met usually came by invitation out of concern for their children. Another mother said: *'Families tend to keep to themselves because they don't want everybody to know their business'* and that *'it brings a lot of trouble to you when people know your business.'* People would not associate with others because of reasons of social standing and religion. Frequently I picked up comments such as: *'The people in that house don't know how to behave'*, or *'you know what she is doing every weekend!* (hand gesture for lifting bottle to mouth) or *'I only stick to the people in my church.'* I was surprised to realize how many people knew each other and a lot about each other through a strong gossip network or by observation (See Chapter 1). At this time nothing could do much to quell my enthusiasm and hopes.

#### **3.3 ON MEETING MOTHERS**

.... [restorative witnessing conversations] offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because this way of learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.

(Reinharz 1992:19)

When mothers came to speak with me about a child, frequently the problem-saturated story formed their focus. A problem-saturated story refers to the way in which a problem, over time, defines a person's notion of their identity. The difficulty is that 'so often problems present persons with what they take to be certain truths about their character, nature, purposes, and

so on, and these truths have a totalizing effect on their lives' (White 1995:22). Often, in school contexts, children are totalised as one 'kind' of person or the other, with little room for the parents or children to introduce other descriptions. It also happens, as I saw from my teaching experience, that parents' identities are managed the same way. For the most, mothers were called in to deal with 'the problem' and about each mother there often was a pre-conceived framework of 'what she was like'.

In this community mothers are under pressure to hold their families together, raise their children in safety, keep them interested in school and find means to provide for them. Most women are doing so single-handedly, partnered or not. Furthermore, they live with the pressure of ideas about what a 'good mother' should be. According to Garcia, Surrey and Weingarten (1998:6), mothers are at risk of becoming 'diminished and devalued in comparison to others, or having [their] ideas, feelings, practices, or actions rendered less valid in relation to the dominant ideal.'

One often hears mothers say that children 'must not be rude, because they are carrying their mother's name with them.' I discovered that one of the worst insults one could make is to 'swear out my mommy': people have died for doing so. This value attached to mothers in the community speaks against the discourse that fathers are the heads of households. Mothers are regarded as the important parent. Fathers are generally expected to be unreliable. Mrs Summers (See 3.4.1 below) said that: '*Women must step forward and do things for themselves. They cannot wait on a man.*' She also said that: '*Women can have better ideas than men and that women need to start thinking for themselves, think out their own ideas and stand forward in what they decide.*' I learnt from the women's stories that they were 'standing forward and thinking for themselves' – making the best of what was available to them (See Chapter 1:1.2).

As a result of the pressures of survival and the need to protect their reputations, mothers expressed anger and frustration largely because their children seemed repeatedly drawn to certain actions and behaviours that brought them trouble. At times the anger was also about a sense of powerlessness when they felt their children were being victimized and their ideas discredited, albeit subtly. Sevenhuijsen (1998:136) commented that in the Dutch health-care system, women, situated in the variety of social roles and responsibilities, are often expected to be the 'gatekeepers' of health-care but have 'little access to power resources' to stand up for their rights. This expectation that women fulfil a variety of social roles and taking responsibility with little access to power resources is appropriate for many women in South

Africa, including the women of Steenberg. Women experience this expectation when they have to deal with people in 'expert' or power position, be it the nurses at the day hospital, a clerk behind a counter, the police or the staff of a school.

When the focus was on finding solutions, mothers were rendered invisible and 'the problem' enjoyed the centre stage. Garcia, Surrey and Weingarten (1998:111) comment that many women experience invisibility and marginalisation because they are unacknowledged especially when they do not fit societies' ideas of what a 'good mother' is. They were even made to feel they are misfits. Whenever I met with a mother, invariably they headed the conversation directly towards the trouble they were experiencing. They had no expectation of acknowledgement and care for themselves, and often asking me to 'tell them what to do.' These women often seemed to have little faith in their own solution-knowledges, that is, 'the private stories and the cultural knowledges that they live by; those stories and knowledges that guide their lives and that speak to them of their identity' (Epston & White 1992:126).

Narrative therapy holds a helpful perspective on a problem-saturated story. We take the position that the problem is the problem and then the person's relationship with the problem becomes the problem (White & Epston 1990:40). In order to extricate the mother and her child from the problem-saturated story, I usually asked the woman to tell me a little bit about herself first, about her own life and her interests, and about what she values about her child that is unrelated to the problem. Invariably the conversation stayed around her story for much of our time together. Very often I was spellbound by the story I heard. I became aware that these women had life stories that spoke of a determination to survive, and a commitment to care for their children and others in their community. I am reminded of what Sevenhuijsen (1998:26) says about mothers: '[M]otherhood should not be seen simply as an identity, but as a series of relationships within which identity and commitment are expressed.' Our conversations often focused on the woman's identity, which included being a mother, but which also invited descriptions of self and self-in-relation to many other persons and situations.

I also learnt that many women become 'mothers' because of lack of opportunity to do anything else or because they started working at a young age to help their parents. So often I heard of daughters who had started caring for families with/on behalf of their mothers and then who often stayed put in the role of caregivers as their life's 'work', paid or unpaid. Wilson and Ramphela (1989:271) write about the drudgery required of girls in poor households that leads to the distorted idea that women are expected to serve men, and are subordinate to men even in the allocation of resources (for instance, men are served the best portion of

meat, then the children and then the mother) and labour at home. Ross (2003:42) comments that: 'Hidden in the discourses of domesticity are powerful forms of knowledge and agency that need to be recognized and sensitively heard.'

I wondered at the almost matter-of-fact ways in which the women spoke of their lives and the kinds of action they took to care for themselves and others. I wondered if this was because they lived in a community where managing hardships was the context of living. I had the impression that these women were mostly focused on getting on with living. They did what they believed had to be done just as many people in their lives and community have done and were doing. They seemed unimpressed by the dynamic actions they took to manage their lives. I was always surprised by the laughter that crept into these narratives – it lightened the heaviness of the problem and I often marvelled at the bravery it expressed. I have also come to understand the value of focusing 'attention to nonverbal communication' (Reinharz 1992:20) and not just words. People, when they 'cannot clearly articulate their frustrations and discontents' can rather express themselves in 'inchoate ways such as laughter.' I would add to this my idea that people may respond with non-verbal cues when they are unexpectedly brought into the centre of attention from a place of invisibility. Laughter could be a response of embarrassment and discomfort but it could possibly also be an indication that one is freed up from self-protection because one is being heard and taken seriously.

I found witnessing stories of persistence, creative survival and care from the position of a privileged woman in our South African context, quite overwhelming. It seemed to me that people living closely with survival do not have the luxury or the leisure to sit around trying to make sense of what they are dealing with – they just do it and then use the knowledge of experience to guide them. Further, people living with survival seem to use very little to go a long way – be it food or support, knowledge or one narrative pastoral therapy conversation.

It was during these conversations that ideas of restorative witnessing evolved. Sometimes the stories were so big that I was stunned and speechless and often found it difficult to intrude into their telling as a 'therapist': I just listened in awe and wrote down their story. Often when I expressed awe and surprise at the way they managed their lives and thanked them for allowing me to ask questions and to hear their stories, the women would then connect with these ideas and see themselves differently. Sometimes they even expressed surprise at such acknowledgement of their achievements. Some women said that they were grateful just to have the opportunity to '*get everything out*' (Mrs Summers 2002). Narrative therapy employs reflection on stories in a way that brings to attention 'a landscape of

consciousness or meaning' that unfolds 'through landscapes of action.' White (1995:31) explains that the

landscape of meaning is derived through reflection on events in the landscape of action to determine what those events might say about the desires, preferences, qualities, characteristics, motives, purposes, wants, goals, values, beliefs, commitments, of various persons ... [and it] is a recursive process, for the established accounts of characteristics, motives, commitments, and so on, inform the arrangement of experiences of events in the landscape of action.

I valued this insight because it provided a strong 'guideline' for restorative witnessing. It centred the women's lives and identities in the conversations; it supported women to find words that described themselves clearly; it confirmed what they knew about themselves; and brought to light qualities they never thought to ascribe to themselves. Reinharz (1992:20) describes how conversations with women can raise concerns that are not part of typical public or academic discourse and therefore 'have no name'. She continues to say that '[a] woman listening with care and caution enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means'. Overall, the women expressed surprise at the view of themselves we co-constructed. Shirley, in particular was surprised that that others could see her in this way. She said: '*I looked at myself through other eyes.*'

I longed for these stories to be embraced by a larger audience. I also imagined that these women, in sharing their stories, would be able to open up many possibilities for action and for connection with each other or at least to 'know how other women saved their souls alive' (Reinharz 1992:127), and to discover the ways that they 'accorded "dignity" to the rich processes of living' (Reinharz 1992:127). I could not foresee how deeply restorative witnessing would affect my life.

### **3.4 WONDERFUL WOMEN**

Mrs Summers or Aunty Jane and I met in May 2002, when I invited her to join her grandson, Brentino, and I in a conversation. (Brentino's story about his action against fighting was shared in the book *Matchboxes, butterflies and angry foots 2002:16-18*). Wendy Matthews, Salomé Adonis and Shirley Brickles were mothers I met because they were referred to me through the school about their concerns for their children. I met Wendy for the first time the day before the first meeting in April 2002.

The whole 'original group' met in April 2002. After that, there were four more sessions, mostly with only two participants present. By the end of May, the only two regular participants were Wendy and Galiema, who joined toward the end of May, 2002. By the end of the school term, Galiema had become a regular support parent at the school. Besides the snippets of

conversation at chance meetings, I managed to arrange at least one conversation by appointment with each woman in the following months. For the rest, I kept in contact with the women by telephone. I wrote each of the women a letter early in March 2003, weaving together the many conversations so as to 'store', as it were, a re-remembering of their ideas. In response to these letters, some of the women and I had another conversation to add or refine the story. These conversations are still continuing at present. For the purpose of this research report, I focus on the first story draft (also included in the appendix) which I had sent each participant.

For each of the women, I have elected to focus on a particular quality or aspect of their lives that they have managed in special ways. I realise that by doing so, I run the risk of totalising persons as just limited to that particular aspect. Thus I want to emphasise that the quality used as 'title' of each women's story is but one quality of many and would not be that unless it had many others supporting, strengthening and informing it.

#### **3.4.1 Community weaver - Mrs Summers, Aunty Jane**

I met Mrs Summers for the first time through her grandson Brentino, who together with his Mom and his sister live with Mrs Summers and her husband in their flat. Brentino and I collaborated to find ways to manage the influence of fighting in his life.

After our third conversation we invited Mrs Summers to join us in a conversation to help us think of ways to keep the fighting under control at home and to find out what she thought were his strengths. After this meeting I was surprised with a delicious, fresh loaf of bread baked by Mrs Summers. This gift spoke of Mrs Summers' acknowledgement of my care of Brentino and herself. In opening up space for conversation, I did not want anything from them. Rather, I tried to 'embody' interest. White (2000:75) says that to 'embody' one's interest in another persons life is to contextualise: the person's context, the context of my own lived experience and the context of my curiosity, imagination and/ or purposes. The effect of embodied interest 'in people's lives...is unlikely to be taken as academic or to be experienced as patronizing' (White 2000:75).

In our first conversation, I asked Brentino what his granny would say about him. He said that she would say he was helpful. When I asked him how he helped her, Brentino said that his granny was sick and that 'she doesn't listen and won't lay down' even if his mom says that she will do the work. As I got to know Mrs Summers better I could see why they couldn't get Granny to 'lay down'.



Most of my conversations with Mrs Summers were about celebrating her life as a caregiver to many, many people. She had done volunteer work for twenty-seven years because, as she says: *'My heart is always with people, I love people and I love my community.'* Her life speaks of caring action. While it would be easy to list the variety of actions Mrs Summers took, and it would make an impressive list indeed, to do so would be to ignore the meaning that she attached to these actions. By inviting Mrs Summers to describe the values and meanings she attached to her life long service to community experience, she could comment that: *"It was nice to have a look at my history and that you can talk about things you never talk out and this is a chance to get it out, say what is in my heart."*

Isherwood and McEwan (1993:10) suggest that '[o]nly when a theology comes from deep spiritual and social commitment to people will it be a 'good theology'. It seemed to me that Mrs Summers saw her life's work as a calling and that many of her actions constituted 'good theology'. She had a dream as a young woman, and I quote from the letter (Appendix B) I wrote her:

*You told us about the dream you had as a young person. This dream was about a room with white beds in a row. You said that only when you started nursing sick people did you know what this dream meant – you say that you know it was the work you had to do. You worked for the Home-carers Bureau for many years.*

It seems that Mrs Summers lived this dream from a very early age. As a young girl she had found employment to supplement the family income. Later on, she located her father with whom she had lost contact, lived with him and nursed him when he became frail. When she married she had a son, and because she did not want him to grow up alone she decided to foster other children. She said that she had a special place for children in her heart and liked having children around her. She also used to keep a pot of soup going: the children in the community knew they could knock on her door for something to eat. When Mrs Summers noticed the people in the old-age home in Steenberg had lost their interest in life, she started sewing classes and used to go and play games with the residents to stimulate them. Mrs Summers' care and responses to becoming aware of the need in the community reminded me of my ideas about a 'theology of making' (Chapter 2) in which 'God, without losing transcendence, is viewed as historically immanent working with and through people and situations to bring about the full becoming of humanity and the cosmos' (Isherwood and McEwan 1993:10). Mrs Summers said that she may not be 'rich in possessions' but she is 'rich in [her] heart because of all the people in [her] life.'

I also appreciated the way in which I perceived Mrs Summers took action against invisibility, but ensured connection and identity for herself:

*You told us that you think every person is important and that is why you greet each person you meet along the road. You say that this is a way of noticing people and a way that people can get to know you. If something happens to you then people will know who you are and will help you.*

(Appendix B – Letter to Mrs Summers)

Mrs Summers commented specifically that she was *'not a person that needs to be praised and rewarded for [her] generosity towards others.'* This brought to mind the way in which Christian traditions discouraged pride and celebration of one's achievements even if one regarded them as the result of a God-given purpose. I have the idea that ours is a society where control and subordination – homogeneity - is achieved through the religious (Christian) views of 'secret' service, and humility. It discourages being proud and gratified by your achievements and the energy which you have put into starting some action or into setting up structures that effect changes for the community and maintaining them with responsibility and commitment. To ask for acknowledgement would be frowned upon in the community – one has to wait to receive acknowledgement and then be grateful for it. I believe that Mrs Summers and I, by re-constructing her journey of committed care and sharing it with the women in the group, challenged the silencing imposed by the discourse of humility. Restorative witnessing invited Mrs Summers to speak at length about how she served her God by the actions she took and how she *'saved [her] soul alive'* (Reinharz 1992:127). It also brought her honour and acknowledgement – and was also inspirational to me and the other women.

Two weeks after I sent the letter (in March 2003, see Appendix B) I telephoned Aunty Jane again. Aunty Jane said that she enjoyed the letter: she found it *'interesting'* and *'got so happy and it feels so good.'* Besides this, she said it helped her to remember many other things she did in her life. She said she wanted to come and tell me about these things, so that the story will be richer. In our subsequent conversations she told me about leaving school at 15 to help her mother care for her younger sisters; her horse and vegetable cart; the malnutrition club she cooked for at the day hospital; about finding her father after years of no contact and then taking care of him until he died; and of the long distances she walked from Steenberg to care for her mother until her mother died. We also invited the memories of her grandmother who loved her and would have been very proud of her.

Through these conversations I believe that Mrs Summers has experienced restorative witnessing. Restorative witnessing as praxis of healing has brought Mrs Summers out from between the lines of patriarchy's script into full focus in her own eyes. A feminist praxis of healing could be seen as praxis of transformation, in the words of Russell (1996:25):

'Transformation only comes through resistance, interpretation and shared action. It comes partially and slowly as small pieces of our cultures are lifted up and reshaped to affirm life-giving values and spirituality.' Mrs Summers' story was received and valued and her generous actions of care in her community celebrated. In addition, those persons who appreciated her service and who were meaningful to her had been restored to memory. There is no measure for the effect which Mrs Summers' story may have, in the long-term, on the other women who witnessed her story. I believe that they were given a glimpse of one way of being person-in-community in their daily context. It possibly also affirmed their own experiences of care.

Mrs Summers said that her daughter read the letter and said that she did not know any of these things about her. Her daughter was surprised at the detail in the letter and that it contained such a lot of information. Mrs Summers explained to her that I copy down everything she tells me and then I type it up. For me, the most profound moment of our conversations was when I asked her, as I was seeing her out after at the last conversation we had at the school, whether she had ever told anyone else her story as she has told it to me. Her eyes filled with tears and she said that this was the first time that anyone had ever asked her to tell her story.

It so happened that in a conversation with another couple about their concern for their son a few months later (June 2003) the father mentioned that they had a wonderful next-door neighbour who kept an eye over his son in the afternoons: she would encourage him to do homework, gave him food and took an interest in him. I was hardly surprised when I realised that he was speaking about Mrs Summers. She had mentioned to me in one of our conversations that when she has dealings with young people and children she tends to 'talk as a mother would talk to the children.'

### **3.4.2 Doctorate in care - Salomé Adonis**

Salomé lives in a bungalow in the backyard of a block of flats with her two children and her husband, Clive. Her daughter is Orion and her son is Clyde.

Salomé's daughter, Orion, and I had a few conversations to take action against the 'Stress' that tried to convince her to fidget in class and get into arguments. I sent Salomé a note to tell her that Orion and I were talking together and we invited her to meet with me. Orion had already told me that when a problem came up, her mom always said: "n boer maak 'n plan' (Afrikaans idiomatic expression: 'A farmer will find a way'). She said her mom could always find a way around a problem. Salomé came to chat to me and brought her sister with her. Her sister came to support her and to be 'witness' to the conversation, for instance, if I

launched an attack on her parenting. She told me that she was called in on a few occasions regarding Orion's behaviour, but that a lot came from other children's provocation: she was ready to do battle for her child.

After that first conversation, a week later, Salomé popped in at school to show me a book, *'Teach your child to manage stress'*. The 'prescribed behaviours' for parents seemed to suggest respectful practices towards children. I asked her how useful she has found the book. She said that she, and her sister has learnt a lot from it because they read it together. My initial response (to myself) was a resounding: 'Oh no!' I realized, however, that our conversations about parenting and supporting children could offer opportunities to deconstruct totalising descriptions about children and parenting that cropped up in the book and to open up possibilities for inviting in children's ideas for solving problems. I told her that Orion said that she, Salomé, could always find a solution to a problem - "n boer maak 'n plan'. She found this very funny, and said that this way of thinking has always helped her to think positively. I was curious to find out how this idea had helped her before. I was privileged to hear the story of a young girl who became the caregiver of her family when her mother became ill.

I also kept contact with the teacher to ascertain how Orion was managing 'the Stress.' He said that she seemed much more settled. Orion told me that she liked being at home with her mom and that their times together made her feel good and happy. She told me her mother helped her with her homework and spent time talking to her.

A week later I spoke with Salomé. It sounded as if Salomé had changed her whole life around in support of Orion. She said that she found that talking to Orion got better results than hitting; that she tried to make homework times fun; that she would switch the oven off (even if it had a cake in that could flop if stopped baking mid-way) and focus attention on Orion. She also said that she was on the lookout to find ways to compliment Orion.

Our conversation turned to cooking and baking because she had mentioned that she bakes cakes and treats for her family. I confessed to her that I was not so great in that area and my family would tell me to learn from her example. The following day she arrived with some of the flapjacks she had made that morning. I was touched by her generosity and caring act – I was benefiting from her care giving too! I was reminded by her care that mutual care, as a reciprocal uplifting relationship, was pastoral care (Heyward 1996:155). She told me then that she and her sister were enrolled for a six-week course in Home Care Nursing and that they were looking forward to it.

From the age of four, Salomé had helped her father take care of her siblings. Her mother, who had been diagnosed with Münchausen Syndrome, spent most of her time in bed or in hospital. When Salomé's brother was born, he was brought home whilst their mother stayed in hospital for a further three months. During this time, Salomé helped care for the baby – waking at night to give him the bottle her dad had prepared. When her mom was discharged from hospital, she took no interest in the new baby, nor was she interested in her two daughters. From the age of nine, Salomé had started preparing meals for the family and looked after her two younger siblings whilst their father was at work.

Her parents eventually divorced. Her father felt sorry for their mother and cared for her until her death, because, as Salomé said, her mother had nowhere to go. Salomé mentioned that her Standard Eight-year stands out in her mind. This was the year in which her mother was bedridden: Salomé became the primary caregiver of her mom and also ran the household. She described how, before going to school, she would wash and change her mother, give her breakfast, give her the necessary injections and settle her for the day. After school, she came home to change her mother's colostomy bag and then she went out to work to help her father support the family. When she arrived home at eight o'clock she would wash her mom again and settle her for the night.

In her Standard Eight year Salomé decided to take a job as they were struggling financially and their father tried his best to care for them all. She said that she realised that her father was overwhelmed by care and depression in the struggle to provide for the family. She also said that she realised that the only way she would get what she needed was if she did something about the situation. She did not tell him that she had decided to take the job at the supermarket. He only found out when she brought home her first pay packet and handed it to him. After that, she said, he took on more responsibility with the two younger siblings when he realised that Salomé was contributing financially. She said that her father often expressed his appreciation at the support he received from her. She passed Standard Eight that year and then left school to work full time.

Salomé said that she believes her special gift is "*om vir mense om te gee en te versorg*" (to care and nurture people). She said that relationships are very important to her and that she is always willing to try out new approaches and to make plans to do what is necessary to support relationships and people. This special gift of care has always been something that her father, brother and sister draws and relies on. In time, she also became the caregiver for the children of the owner of the shop where she was working. The children loved her so much that the wife misused this relationship. She sent the children to the shop to be with

Salomé – one of them often said ‘Auntie Lomé is my mommy’. Her daughter mentioned that many people come to their bungalow to spend time with her mom because she is caring.

I also wrote her a letter (Appendix C), re-telling her story to her from the conversations we had with the group and from our individual conversations. I also asked her to answer a few questions (Appendix G) regarding the group-meetings she attended. I was thrilled when I received a letter from her in response to the questions I asked. Salomé wrote that it was *“n wonderlike ervaring om met iemand te gesels. Om my oogpunte te stel. Daar was geluister toe daar ‘n gesels was. Dit het nie gevoel dat ek alleen gepraat het nie’* (‘a wonderful experience to speak to someone, to state my viewpoints. Everybody listened when someone spoke. It did not feel as if I was speaking on my own’). She wrote that she would arrive at the meeting *‘soms sielsmoeg al het dit nie so gelyk nie. Maar as ek by daardie geselsgroepie gewees het dan was ek weer reg vir die dag wat voorlê. Dit was vir my lekker om oor myself ook te kan praat’* (‘often exhausted, even if it did not seem so. But when I had been to the little conversation group I was ready for the day that lay ahead. I also enjoyed the chance I got to speak about myself’). I connected with this experience of our meetings, as I also felt energized by them. I thought of this energizing effect of our meetings as a ‘mutually empowering relationship’, which leads to ‘power in mutual relation’ and brings each person a greater sense of zest (vitality, energy); a sense of agency (enabled action); a clearer sense of the identity of oneself and the other’s, an affirmation of worth, a sense of connection; and an openness to connect with others beyond the group (Heyward 1996:155). Salomé also wrote: *‘Ek was baie bly toe ek die brief gekry het. Dit het my laat beseef dat my werk nog nie klaar is om ander te help nie. Ek wil so graag uitreik om iets te beteken vir ander. Selfs vir die boemelaar langs die pad wil ek iets voor beteken.’* (‘I was very happy when I received the letter. It made me realise that my work in helping others is not done yet. I long to reach out to others in a meaningful way. Even a vagrant on the side of the road is someone I would like to care for in a meaningful way’).

I found connection with Bons-Storm’s (1996:85) comment regarding the value of her speech community as being a place to discover ‘what could be of ultimate importance for our survival.’ I related the idea to the value of women talking together about their struggles and the ways in which they find meaning in their lived experiences, especially when Salomé wrote that: *‘Soms het ons as vroue dit nodig om te gesels of om met een die ander te praat. Party skinder weer van ander. Maar vir my was dit lekker die tye wat ons bymekaar kon kom’* (‘Sometimes it is necessary for us women to speak to each other. Some gossip about others. But the times we got together I found enjoyable’). Transformative witnessing, I

believe, offered her a space where women gathered as a speech community to celebrate their relational wisdom and their determination to take care of those relationships. What she appreciated most was that the letter provided her a place to look back at her history, but it also gave her renewed courage to '*gaan vir wat voorlê*' ('go for what is ahead').

I made Salomé a certificate (Appendix D) following a conversation in November 2002 about her interest in becoming a doctor. We came to the conclusion that she had managed, through her life's experiences, to achieve a doctorate in survival or care giving. Towards the end of the conversation, we picked out the qualities and actions that described her and these were the qualities I put on the certificate. I signed it and Mr. Kruger, the principal of Lourier Primary School, co-signed it with me and offered to have it laminated for her. White and Epston (1990:191) say that documents like letters or certificates serve the purpose of recruiting an audience to the acknowledgement of achievements and to the constitution of the subject's life. Many times these documents invite audiences that it was not intended for (:192), but nonetheless serve to continue validating a person's sense of personal responsibility and affirming their agency in 'the shaping of one's life and relationships.' When I handed it to her, Salomé burst out laughing and said she would put it somewhere she could see it all the time. She took it to work to show her colleagues and they affirmed her caring qualities acknowledged by the certificate.

Salomé's experience as a home care nurse motivated her to do a further nursing qualification. I helped her research the various places that offered an in-service nursing training and committed myself, in support and out of interest, to attend an open day at a hospital training centre. I fetched her in Steenberg and we attended the presentation. Afterwards we spent time reflecting on possibilities that she could pursue. Bosch (1991:439) states that contextual theology is a theology 'from below'. I did not try to impose my ideas, but offered my knowledge, my strengths, my skills and resources on the terms of the person I joined in empowerment (Halperin 1995:83). Welch (1990:171) insists that 'in solidarity with others, in work for justice, we remain human.'

### **3.4.3 Child protector - Shirley Brickles**

I met Shirley at Lourier Primary School. She was one of the mothers who used to offer help at the school and was a kind of teacher's assistant. I had only recently joined the school community (May 2002) when Mr. Kruger asked me, on my arrival at the school one morning, whether Shirley could see me. She had some difficulties in the family and had been upset the whole morning.

Shirley's story impressed me deeply about the unbelievable care that still exists in a society like ours, even where there is much carelessness with people's lives, and where violence, poverty and struggle are rife. She fetched Zane, her twelve-year old, abandoned nephew from a foster home. He was recovering from tuberculosis, which he contracted whilst living on the streets. He kept running away from home because of neglect and bad treatment, but he was repeatedly abused sexually when he lived on the street. When Shirley discovered that Zane did not live with his family she started to track him down. When she found him she arranged for him to live with her. I met her just after he moved into her very small house with her and her two children. The quote from the letter (Appendix E) I wrote her shows her compassion and concern for children: *'you said you couldn't rest until you found him – partly because he was family, but also because you couldn't allow a child to be neglected so badly. You said, once before, that no matter how hard it is for you, you will never send him away because he also deserves a chance in life.'*

Shirley found it very difficult to manage frustration about money and the worry about Zane's anxiety about food. She explained to me that she worked on a very tight budget because then she could have food for the children every day. I quote from the letter I wrote her: *'You explained how carefully you plan so that there will always be food for the children – they know they can trust you to care for them and that you know what children need in life.'* Added to the concern regarding money, Zane was involved in fighting and arguments at home and school, Lourier Primary School. This brought a huge amount of frustration and anger into her life.

Zane and I had a number of conversations following the one I had with Shirley. To support Shirley and Zane I contacted, at Shirley's request, a nephew of hers who was a social worker. I found Zane a really charming, creative and very interesting person to talk to. I hoped the cousin would take an interest in him. He took Zane out once, but did not continue the connection.

After a few months Zane told me he felt more settled. Shirley had mentioned that his sleep was much more peaceful, that he was less anxious about food and more cooperative. He had started going to church with his cousin, Donna. She told us that: *'Ek het in die aande saam met hom gebid toe hy by my kom bly het omdat hy in die nag so rusteloos geslaap het en na tyd het hy baie rustiger geslaap'* ('I prayed with him in the evenings when he came to stay with me because his sleep was so restless at night and after a while he slept more peacefully.')



Shirley told me that his catechism teacher said that he prayed beautifully, that he and Donna were arguing less and that there was no trouble at school. When I asked Zane how he was experiencing his life, he told me about a dream he had had. In it 'the satanists' had abducted him. He said that he dreamt that Mr. Kruger, Antie Shirley, Vernon (the cousin) and I had come to fetch him back from these people and had locked them away. During our conversations we spoke of those people whom Zane could rely on and whom he believed were on his 'nurturing team.' This was the team that took action on his behalf in his dream. Freedman and Combs (1996:246) describe a nurturing team as a community of people, in the present or from the past, that are invited into a person's life to take or represent a particular supportive interest in their well-being and preferred identity. Zane's understanding of his dream was that he was safe and that there were people who would take action with him to save his life. This settledness and sense of safety would not have been available to him but for Shirley's insistence that '*he also needs a chance in life.*'

Shirley is a caring and supportive person and mother. As mother, this care became clear when she told us that she gets up early to see her eldest off to work because it can be lonely getting up when everybody is still sleeping. She also waits for the younger children at the gate in the afternoons and notices from their body language whether they are well or when something is amiss. She builds up good relationships with her neighbours in the community as reflected in this quote from the letter I wrote her: *You find it a huge responsibility to raise your children single-handedly; that is why it is important that you have your neighbour's support on a daily basis. You said that you help each other with bread and sugar when there is a need. You also look out for each other's safety and homes.* Shirley's notion - that she needs support, from family and neighbours, to be the mother she wants to be and to feel safe - is reflected in the way she and her neighbours support each other and by the fact that she offered Zane an opportunity to live in a caring community. It reminds me of the main idea of Ubuntu; that a person is a person first through persons (Shutte 1994:29).

Shirley only attended one of the women's 'group' meetings. By the third one she had found employment, as she needed an income quite urgently. Her son was working and contributing a small amount to the household, but she felt she couldn't expect him to look after her and the younger children. I telephoned her at her the neighbour's house to keep in contact with her but I was unable to speak to her as she worked long hours. On one occasion, when I did manage to speak with her, she told me that she enjoyed the group meetings; she liked listening to the other's stories and the sharing.

After I sent her a letter (Appendix E), constructed from our various conversations and the

one meeting she attended, I wondered what affect it would have on her thinking about herself and her life. As with the letters I wrote to all the other participants, there were many possible conversations we could still have that could add to parts of their story or to correct details I had misunderstood or left out. I sent her messages via Zane, sending my regards and inviting her to connect with me. She did try to contact me, but I did not receive the message as the slip of paper fell behind a bookshelf. When I discovered it, I tried in earnest to contact her again. Eventually I managed to speak to her to find out what her reason for calling was. She said that she needed some support, that she was feeling low and wanted to see me 'aangesig tot aangesig' ('face to face') to talk about the trouble in her life.

Her comment on the letter was: *'Dit het my baie lekker laat voel; ek kan amper nie dink dit is ek nie. Ek het nooit gedink ander kan my so sien nie. Ek het na myself gekyk met ander oë. Baie aande as ek niks het om te doen nie, dan lees ek so bietjie daaroor'* ('It made feel very good; I can almost not believe that it is me. I never thought that others could see me like this. I looked at myself through other eyes. Many evenings when I have nothing to do, then I take a little time to read over it.')

#### **3.4.4 'Doing community' - Galiema Solomons**

On the Wednesday following Mother's day, May 2002, I met Galiema Solomons, or Liema as she prefers to be called. She wanted to talk about the double sadness and loss that came with her brother's death. She had raised Lesley's son, Neil, from the age of three months but when Lesley died, his wife took Neil, then four years old, to live with her without even discussing her intention with Liema. She also barred the other children, Neil's siblings, from speaking about Liema or from trying to contact her. At Lesley's funeral - from which Liema's family were excluded in the planning and participation - Neil ignored Liema. She experienced enormous loss and sadness. After the conversation she said that she was glad she had come to talk. Often when I think of Liema, I marvel at the way she took action against what she called the '*probleempie*' ('little problem').

In this conversation we discussed why her brother chose to leave his son in Liema's care. Liema connected with the idea that he could see that she was reliable because he saw how she cared for her own son. Lesley would also have seen that Liema was a person who preferred to stay at home, that she also looked after her sisters' babies and young children during the day and that she helped them with their homework in the afternoons. I quote from the letter (Appendix F) I wrote her in May, 2003: *I understood that you live a quiet life, that you do not go out very often and that you also do not have funny habits because you believe that you have to be an example for your children.* Liema also realised that the care and love

she gave the little boy for the four years he lived with her would sustain him even though he was not with her. She said that she realised that he had learnt everything he knew from her, such as his manners and his language. It was with great joy that she received him home five months after our conversation and, when he left again she said she was calm about it. She said that this was because our very first conversation had helped her to realise that she had given her best to Neil. For most of 2003 Neil has lived with Liema.

From the age of fifteen Liema became the housekeeper and caregiver to her mother, sisters and their children. Liema said that she decided to drop out of school within the first two weeks because the school was in another suburb and she knew nobody at the new school, which was a very large one. She remembers standing on her own during breaks, feeling uncomfortable. She explained that fear also kept her from school, as the teachers would pounce on students in the class to read or answer questions. On the morning she realised that she was going to be pounced on, she stayed away from school – permanently. Added to the fear of being humiliated publicly, was the fear of abuse: there was a teacher in the school with the reputation that he ‘touched’ the girls.

In our conversations we investigated the qualities she believes are her strengths. She mentioned that, besides being responsible, reliable and straight talking, she is also a person who *‘brings a little bit of sunshine into people’s lives’* and who *‘will give everybody a friendly greeting, even if I don’t feel like it.’* She says that she prefers to *‘always be the same, because people will know where they stand with me.’*

Narrative therapy allows us to search a person’s history in those non-problematic life contexts in order to find resources or states of consciousness that will provide support and will help the person to access resourceful states. By finding these resources, ‘we think of such experiences as important life events that, through performance of meaning and connection with other such events, can alter problematic narratives in satisfying ways’ (Freedman & Combs 1996:100). Once Liema had re-viewed and re-connected through our first conversation with the meanings and values that she preferred as descriptions of her value and contribution to her family, it was remarkable how she was enabled to step out of the ‘framework’ of home and to embrace a much wider one - the community of Lourier Primary School.

Liema mentioned that she needed something to distract her from thinking about Neil all the time. I invited her to come to the school on the following Tuesday to attend the meeting for mothers. On that Tuesday I also asked her to come to school so as to read with some Grade

5 children who were hardly able to read. Liema said that she does not like to sit and wait for something to get done: she prefers to do things efficiently and immediately. The school really found a boon in her. From the moment she committed herself to the school, she was at the school every weekday. She stayed later than the teachers, sorting out the library, making the sandwiches for the children or doing other organizational chores. Liema's dream was to become a teacher of '*die kleintjies*,' ('the little ones') and she still hopes to complete an educare course. I was not very surprised when I learned that she was asked to teach (with guidance) a Grade 1 class for two weeks at the beginning of the year, 2003, until a full time teacher could be found for the class. In October of 2003 she was elected as the chairperson of the school's governing body. Liema said that she enjoyed being at the school and that she decided she would not sit around at home any longer. She enjoyed doing things and being part of the school community.

I have appreciated her willingness to take risks in the way of speaking out against teachers who shirk their duties and other helpers who take food donations given to the school for the children. Because she is a mother and aunt of pupils in the school who also lives in the community of Steenberg Liema is in touch with the attitudes towards the school. It was a relief to know Liema was 'doing care' somewhere in the school and that she would be willing to take the risk of speaking out against uncaring practices towards the children. Liema was taking a political stand. She has sided with the poor and marginalized because she understands what it means to be isolated from support and care. It took considerable courage to speak up, particularly as relationships in this school, as with most schools, are based on a strong pecking order and in which parents often rank the lowest next to the children. I believe that Liema has become empowered. This is a process she undertook for herself, and has certainly through her actions 'entered 'a new relationship with [her] context' (Lather 1991:4).

In the twenty-one years which Liema spent housekeeping, two of her sisters moved in and out of the two bedroom flat as their circumstances improved or became difficult. When I met Liema, she was keeping house for fifteen people living together in the small flat. I was surprised to hear that there were two women - and the following year three women - and their children living together in the flat with her Mom. Liema said they managed well for most of the time because they are a close family and they include each other in everything they do. Only one of the Liema's sisters earned money as a flower seller. Her mother, also a flower seller, retired when son her died, but receives a small pension. Liema mentioned that she learnt, as housekeeper, to stretch their resources and also to adapt to what is available.

Liema said that she knows that she is an important person to the family: she energises them to take responsibility, to finish chores and sees that the rent and bills are paid. She also told her sisters to take on some of chores, for instance, the cooking and encouraged them to finish their bungalows so that everybody could have more living space. Liema also started a tuck shop from her home which has been another source of income for her. It seemed that the appreciation and visibility she achieved in the school community spilled over into her home life. Rather than saying 'yes' or be the one taking responsibility, Liema has learnt to set limits and to ask for reciprocal action. Her mother often tells Liema that she can't do without her. Her family was taken by surprise when Liema decided to volunteer at the school as they had always expected her to be the 'housewife' for their benefit and because she herself always thought that housekeeping was her life.

After one conversation, which she said had helped her to move the sadness and the longing aside, she took on the career of school volunteer. The learners of the school know her well and will easily speak to her about concerns they may have in their lives. Liema has shown me tremendous support by encouraging persons who struggle with problems to see me. She also asked me to visit her mother and have a conversation with her, which I did. She reported to me that her mother really appreciated the conversation.

Liema expressed appreciation at receiving the letter (Appendix F) I wrote to her in May, 2003. I had realized that our relationship had moved to a place where she felt comfortable to share a joke with me and to offer me a place in her life, although she insisted on calling me Mrs Schoeman. This affirmation of friendship stood with me against the awareness of being outsider to this community. To illustrate how our relationship had moved from being 'strangers to friends' which allow us to 'gather personal knowledge from each other more easily' (Lather1991:57), I include the passage (translated from Afrikaans) from a transcript of a conversation:

*Liema: How I found the letter, I said heavens, Mummy, I had forgotten many of the things Mrs Schoeman and I said!*

*Helene: That's the thing, isn't it? And so, ... were there things you read in the letter that were useful to you?*

*Liema: Yes, and then I said, heavens, all of it, these things Mrs Schoeman and I said.*

*Helene: But ... when you...*

*Liema: But I like to speak to Mrs Schoeman; I take Mrs Schoeman as a friend, see, that is how I want to say it.*

*Helene: I am so glad about that ...*

*Liema: Yes, I take Mrs Schoeman like this because I have never had someone like Mrs Schoeman.*

*Helene: But you say you have never known someone such as me, so what is it that I bring you that you had not known before? So, what ... if I am your friend, what do I do that a friend would do for you?*

*Liema: No, I can speak about personal things to Mrs Schoeman. I don't speak about personal stuff ... I will talk nonsense ... But I won't say the things I say to you to just anybody.*

### 3.4.5 Still Standing - Wendy Matthews

I agreed with Wendy when she said that she owed her daughter special thanks because it was through her that we met in April 2002. I am grateful to her daughter too. Wendy's daughter, Jessica, was struggling against what she called 'the naughtiness' which embroiled her in arguments and rudeness at school and at home. Wendy came to school twice to ask for support against the rudeness and then she was referred to me. My life has been immeasurably enriched and my understanding of the value of connection and restorative listening has increased through the conversations I have had with this woman '*wat nie val om te bly lê nie*' ('who does not fall to stay down') (Appendix G). Wendy's story of school, medical, familial, religious and relationship marginalisation had tried to silence her. Yet there is still the spirit that tenaciously holds on to humour, care and her children.

Wendy is the youngest of twelve siblings. During her Grade 6 year the class teacher bullied Wendy mercilessly. Wendy never spoke about this at home and only her classmates knew about the bullying. Wendy said that she was not sure that she would have received support had she said anything. During her Grade 8 year (then Standard 6) she experienced what she described as a '*nervous breakdown*' and left school. Wendy was diagnosed as 'having' schizophrenia and her life has been taken over by this singular description of her. For a very long time she was on such strong medication that she said she was like a zombie, just staring in front of her. For most of her young adult life she lived quietly, hidden, with her parents.

Wendy is married and has three children. Wendy married Isaac at the age of eighteen and lived with him in a flat and then at his mother's place until they moved back to her own mother's house. At present she lives in a 'hokkie' in her mother's backyard. Isaac used to pinch and hurt her and she was unable to defend herself or be taken seriously by him and his family. She took a stand against this. She told her mother who went with her to lay a charge against Isaac. Isaac continued to treat Wendy to many abuses, a series of venereal infections and discredited her in the community – to such an extent that her experience is that nobody takes her seriously or treats her with respect. When she tries to stand up to these dismissive practices, particularly in her family context, she is silenced as 'showing off'.

Wendy tried to share the experience with trouble in this relationship with a pastor, but he ended up asking her not to attend the church any more. She almost lost hope of ever being 'heard' or of finding a supportive spiritual community. After we had spoken about her wish to find a place she would be accepted, Wendy decided to window-shop for a church that fits

her, rather than her trying to fit in with the church. Neuger (2001:65) warns that: '[I]t is often hard for pastoral caregivers to believe women's stories, much less to help them to gain voice and language with which to tell these stories.' Often, when I think about these words, I become overwhelmed by the urgency of taking women's stories and experiences seriously, the ethical commitments I have set myself as pastoral caregiver, and also with the realisation of how easily I could have missed the opportunity to witness this marvellous person 'hearing [herself] into speech' (Neuger 2001:68). Through restorative witnessing Wendy's voice grew stronger. As she described the abuses and named them for what they were, I related strongly with Neuger (2001:68) when she wrote: 'It is not just a matter of being able to tell one's story that I am emphasizing. It is the empowerment of hearing oneself speak and learning to believe in the truth of that long-denied voice, language and narrative.'

In their seventh year of marriage, Isaac moved out and lived with another woman for three years. During this time, Wendy went off the medication. She lived calmly, and in control of the illness, with her children. When Isaac decided to move back with Wendy for a while, schizophrenia flared up and landed Wendy in hospital for treatment. It was during the time of his return that Jessica, Wendy's daughter, experienced the pull of 'the naughtiness' at home and at school, and the need of some support. It also occurred that Wendy fell pregnant with her third child and experienced trouble settling down to the medication that had been given her to use during her pregnancy. At the beginning of 2003, Isaac moved out for three months leaving Wendy with the newborn baby and the two older children. He continued to come to visit, ostensibly to see the children but inevitably ended up upsetting Wendy with his disparaging attitude towards her. Both the older children found it difficult to settle down in the circumstances and were easily hooked in by rudeness and anger. Wendy bore the brunt of this.

Living with her mother has also not been easy for Wendy. She became the housekeeper for her mother and is often treated as a servant. Since Wendy's mother is frail and has a heart condition, Wendy is usually the person to 'baby-sit' her as the other adults leave the premises for work. Moema, as Wendy calls her, has a tendency to speak on Wendy's behalf, incessantly. This results in Wendy never being consulted about what she wants said about her or being allowed to say what she chooses to say at any given time. When Wendy tries to take a stand against these actions, she is ignored or hushed. Wendy's experience of living with her mother is that her movements are restricted, she has to give an account of her whereabouts at all times and her friendships are screened. Moema's wishes seem to have more influence on Wendy's life than her own. Moema expects Wendy to take care of her until

she dies and discourages Wendy to find a bigger living place for her family or one that is not falling apart like the 'hokkie' (shack) she is living in at present. Neuger's (2001:70) observation about the circumstances which many women endure in order to please others is fitting for the context Wendy lives in: 'Women and other members of non-dominant groups have thus learned to interpret their own stories and experiences, needs and goals, through the lenses of the other – those they have been taught to please and appease.'

Many of the conversations which Wendy and I shared together centred on the many ways in which Wendy's lived experience was shaped by oppressive discourses such as those of the dutiful daughter, religion, relationship and illness. These discourses imposed silence, marginalisation, totalisation and powerlessness on Wendy. Griffith and Griffith (1996:132) point out 'that it is one thing to enable a person to speak of his or her oppression; it is another thing to enable a person to speak when he or she has been only aware of the suffering, not of the oppression.' Often persons live with unrecognised stories, 'stories that are most malignant for the body' because they are oppressive but are often seen as 'how life is' by a person in their life's experience (Griffith & Griffith 1996:132). Our conversations were to enable Wendy to recognise and name the oppressive and abusive practices she had lived with, tolerated, and frequently even accommodated simply because she was 'mad'. Wendy engaged with small acts of resistance, trying out ideas and actions. Sometimes she felt proud of her achievements and other times she experienced fear and anxiety. Often she would say, '*Los dit maar net so*' ('Just leave it like this') but would tell me later how she had risked some action.

The electricity was cut off during the year and Wendy became very concerned about the situation. No one living in the yard did anything about it. She telephoned me about the situation twice. We then met at the school and spent an afternoon driving around trying to re-connect the electricity, which we eventually discovered could only be done in the city centre. Wendy decided that she would go to Town to organise the electricity and would take a neighbour with her. Before she left, we carefully spoke through the possible conversations she could have with the person behind the counter. I also explained that her signature was on behalf of her mother and that she would not be held accountable for the full amount. She left with her friend and was triumphant. Her triumphant words were: '*I signed my name and today I stepped out as an adult.*' Wendy had travelled beyond the known parameters within which she feels comfortable.

Once Wendy was diagnosed with schizophrenia, the diagnosis got her family's full attention.



The result was the marginalizing of Wendy's voice, experiences and personal knowledge about what she needed. Her family totalised Wendy's identity as 'a schizophrenic'. White (1995:22) says that '[o]ver time, persons come to believe that the problem speaks of their identity – so often problems present persons with what they take to be certain truths about their character, nature, purposes, and so on, and these truths have a totalising effect on their lives.' Wendy almost became convinced that this was her only identity.

Whenever Wendy experienced any anger or strong emotions, she became fearful that she was a 'mad thing', was 'going mad' and needed hospitalisation. During these times she would describe herself as the 'evil Wendy'. Over time, as we continued to address schizophrenia in externalising conversations, we started to challenge these notions (White 1995:22). Externalising conversations offer a way to identify the dominant narrative, thereby objectifying and splitting it from the person's selfhood (Griffith & Griffith 1994:138) so that:

...the problem is to an extent disempowered, as it no longer speaks to the persons of the truth about who they are as people, or about the very nature of their relationships. This opens new possibilities for action. In the evolution of these externalising conversations, persons continue to revise their relationships with their problem.

(White 1995:23)

Wendy discovered that the 'Evil Wendy' could also be regarded as a 'Spirited Wendy'. She also considered it possible that the 'Spirited Wendy' was brave and showed resistance to being spoken to and spoken about as if she was invisible. She also resisted abuse and bullying by her family and husband. In her own words: *'Ai tog, wanneer gaan die mense my aanvaar vir wat ek is en ophou spoke uitkrap uit my verlede, byvoorbeeld, my siekte. Almal het 'n siekte, nou waarvoor is skisofrenie so 'n groot uitsondering?'* ('Oh dear, when will people accept me for what I am and stop scratching ghosts from my past, my illness? Everybody has an illness, so why is schizophrenia such an exception?'). She tentatively started challenging the idea that she, or anybody else, should be ashamed about this illness that she had not chosen for her life.

In reflecting on the steps Wendy and I have taken through our restorative witnessing conversations to support her in the re-claiming of Wendy, however tentative, I was encouraged by Bons-Storm (1996:89):

...the outcome will be positive if women look at what they really need, affirming one another in solidarity (even across racial and class boundaries), developing their own small voice till it becomes a cry of anger, in its vulnerability and appeal for solidarity and change, or sometimes – in the oases of the desert – till it becomes laughter and song.

Wendy's mother and family controlled the medication management. Wendy expressed resistance to being treated like a child, being checked up and regimented. Here she was, herself a mother taking responsibility for her children – feeding, caring, nurturing, helping them with schoolwork, budgeting and planning to keep them clothed – and yet she is still being kept under surveillance. The physical discomfort that the tablets brought her was hardly acknowledged by anyone in the family. Wendy chose to experiment with the tablets. Sometimes she would stop using them, but at other times she would almost be tricked by sadness, anger and depression to overdose on the tablets: at times death seemed rather more bearable.

When Wendy decided that schizophrenia would not be her total identity and rather to regard it as only a part of her identity, she decided to take responsibility to keep schizophrenia under her control by using the medication (Feb 2003). She also resented the fact that the people in her community could decide on her behalf, without consulting her, to hospitalise her. She wanted to find out who had authority and what the process of admission to a hospital was. She was also interested to find out more about the schizophrenia.

We went to Valkenburg hospital together with the agreement that she could ask the sister the questions. Wendy asked the sister the questions but kept checking with me, 'Was it alright, Helene?' I kept asking her whether she was satisfied with the information she received. Asking about the disorder herself and thus discovering more about schizophrenia's nature and the conditions she had to maintain to help her manage it, was one way Wendy resisted people asking and knowing on her behalf. She also took the number of a support group near her community. Wendy hoped that, by spending time with other people living with schizophrenia she would be able to get other ideas of what works. She would also be given a wider network of encouragement and support. This, she said she would do when Shannon, the baby, was older.

Wendy's identity is woven into the ideas of a dutiful daughter and wife. From being 'owned' by her parents, kept a child and dependent, she was handed over to the 'ownership' of her husband. Isaac convinced Wendy that their marriage contract, signed and sealed in Pretoria, gave him the right to treat her body as he pleased, even if she was in a very deep sleep as a result of the tablets. Any resistance on her part was ignored. When she asked him to start using condoms, because of yet another infection he brought to her body, he refused. She connected with the idea that her body was her own and not owned by anyone else. She started taking small steps in resisting his advances and in choosing how she wants to relate

to him. This seemed to be a meaningful achievement for Wendy – the very body that was always ‘a problem’ became the embodiment of resistance. Wendy performed the new ideas and new meanings of ‘self’ she prefers in relationships, including a sexual relationship (Freedman and Combs 1996:235).

Religious discourse keeps many women in troubled and in abusive relationships: it keeps many women hanging in there and praying for the husband to change. Many of these ideas tie in with the ideas of ownership that men have of women and children. Added to this are the ideas that children will still benefit from having two parents living together – even if the relationship extends its abuse to the children. Also, there seems to be subtle shaming in the community of a woman not able to hold on to her husband. The responsibility to keep a husband from straying thus falls on the woman’s shoulders even when her husband is a cheating, lying person (see Chapter 1). These discourses kept trying to ensnare Wendy into allowing her husband to continue picking up and dropping the relationship as he pleased rather than becoming co-responsible for it and their children. Wendy has started challenging these ideas as she connects with her own value as a person and as the parent who has always, despite these challenges, taken responsibility throughout for the care and nurture of her family. For many years Isaac has blatantly undermined her confidence, mocked her, called her names, and implied that she had no sense. Wendy started resisting his treatment of her and insisted that he take responsibility for his actions; she was not to blame for his abusive practices.

Narrative practices places value on ‘a social community ... available to assist a person in the development of preferred stories and ways of thinking, acting and being’ (Monk 1997:151). Through restorative witnessing conversations we identified the persons who have supported Wendy and have meant a lot to her. Wendy acknowledges and values the support and friendship, which her mother always gave her, even though this relationship also brings conflict. She is close to her brother, Edward, who helped her by taking an interest in her children when Isaac left her. Wendy has learnt to value herself as a parent and appreciates her children as they keep her motivated to carry on. At times she can count on two of her sisters and has a special friend in a female pastor who lives in Worcester.

Restorative witnessing conversations created a space for Wendy’s voice, ideas and choices about her body to be taken seriously. We were voicing and acting in resistance to her experiences of the gaze of persons as judging and patronising (because of the way in which others speak of her, for her and about her). Neuger (2001:231) warns that women run the

risk of retribution and self-doubt when they start acting and making 'choices for themselves that are based on subjugated knowledge and new counterstories.' Wendy has certainly experienced such pressure.

During the last few months I have spent a lot of time using, and thinking about, words that describe ways in which one can weave things together: twisting, pleaching, plashing, entwining, enlacing, enmeshing, interweaving, in-weaving, twining, intertwining, twisting, wreathing, interlocking, tangling, untangling, plaiting. I was thinking about these words because I wanted words to help me speak about the ways in which one can take slender flexible boughs and weave them together to make a strong wreath that one can wear on one's head. I got this idea for a wreath from the school's name: Lourier. Many years ago people were given a crown made of the boughs from laurel tree to honour them. Laurel leaves dry well and last a long time. They are also used to flavour food. These ideas inspired me to write this letter to celebrate Wendy, and the ways in which she has touched my life.

*Dear Wendy*

*I thought of the tree you told me about in a conversation, when you and Liema and I were talking together. You said that sometimes, when you need some time for yourself, or when you need to think or need to find calmness, you sit under a tree in your garden and it has the sweetest smell. You also said that you enjoy sitting under that tree because you can enjoy pleasant daydreams there.*

*I wondered what it would be like if we took some of the twigs from the tree and twined a wreath for you head, a wreath of honour – maybe such a wreath will not last long. So, instead of using real branches I was thinking of words and sentences to make a wreath of honour for you. I decided to write a collection of words that came into our conversations and use them. Words on paper can last a long time, and I hoped it would flavour your memory with the ways you have already stepped out to take charge of your life and body. I also wanted you to see the words that I use when I think of you; these were the words that we found together to describe you. I hope you will find my word collection a little bit like your sweet-smelling tree, that it will bring you calmness and remind you of your dreams and help you to hold on to hope.*

Wendy:

person

human being, body, spirit, mind

woman, beauty, survivor, special gift, nobody's possession, humour, memories, pain

mother, protective, responsible, generous, loving, enjoyment, wise one, playful

cook, housekeeper, care giver, organiser

*speaking out, speaking out, hearing your own voice speaking out, saying who you are*

passionate, anger at injustice, determined, loving, compassion, care,

strong, reliable, brave, loyal, forgiving

***speaking out, speaking out, hearing your own voice speaking out, saying what you***

***want***

word-weaver; expressive, colourful, moving, imaginative, vision

***speaking out, speaking out, hearing your own voice speaking out, saying***

***what you choose***

taking your life back, won't let them push you down, naming abuse, standing your ground,

recognising your wisdom, using your voice, complimenting yourself

***speaking out, speaking out, hearing your own voice speaking out, saying***

***who you are***

stepping out, signing you name, on your own, finding information for yourself,

finding your own church, prayer, calm, joy, friendship, laughter, trust, appreciative

you're no child to be told, knowing what you need, choosing for yourself, finding support

***speaking out, stepping out, hearing your own voice speaking***

***out, saying how it is***

woman, survivor, will not stay down, special gift, hopeful

special, nobody's possession

spirited, spiritual

person

gift

*I want you to know that the person I think of in these words has cared for me in different ways as well:*

*You reminded me how important it is not to speak for another person. You showed me that the strength of your voice grew when you used it in different places (when we were at the hospital together and when you went to the electricity department, signing your name and demonstrating your adulthood).*

*I really appreciated the letter you wrote me. It was beautiful and your gift with words and ideas was a great discovery to me. When I told you how I appreciated this letter you decided to keep a journal.*

*One day you returned a telephone call and said that it was important to you to return the call in case I needed you. You have no idea how it touched me that you were ready to help me while your hands full with little Shannon and Moema.*

*I remember that you phoned me on Mother's Day to wish me Happy Mother's Day. It was a precious moment for me. Your phone call made me feel valued and noticed. I was so happy to be remembered because sometimes I have such a hard time being a mother, and not a mother.*

*Wendy, I am grateful for the chance to stand with you against bullying. I related to some of your experiences because I was bullied at school. While you and I were thinking of ways to stand up to bullying in your life and learning to speak about it out loud, I found courage to name the things that bully me in my life too.*

*Often, after a problem tried to keep you down and you stood up to it, instead of moaning about the trouble, you said to me: 'It is so good to be alive!' I am surprised every time you say this to me, and then I am reminded that I am grateful to be alive too. You wrote that our conversations brought hope back into your life. I have more hope because of the conversations we shared – it has been a joy to learn from your courage and determination that won't let you stay down.*

*I have enjoyed sharing stories with you and thinking of ways that we can outwit bullying – even laughing about some of our ideas. Most of all, Wendy, I appreciate your interest and encouragement.*

*Lots of love,*

*Helene Schoeman*

### **3.5 LOOKING AT PRACTICES IN SUPPORT OF RESTORATIVE WITNESSING**

#### **3.5.1 Listening**

At times I realized that the mere fact that women were given time and could ask for time, to be listened to was very meaningful for them. Some of the women pointed out that nobody 'hears' them. At least one of the women pointed out that her experience is that nobody takes her seriously. So much of their time is spent on caring for others, be it their families, parents

and extended family. As a narrative pastoral therapist my aim was to listen to the women's stories, 'asking them to become even more brightly than they already are' (Neuger 2001:71).

My growing relationship, friendship, with the women, has brought me a deeper understanding of what Bons-Storm (1996:81) speaks of:

...a person becomes aware of her or his own voice, possibilities, impossibilities and boundaries in connection with co-persons, who touch her or him, positively or negatively. This touch has as its base the literal touch of the skin, but it also takes the form of being touched by somebody's eyes in a positive or negative glance, in being mentioned, *taken seriously*, or *remembered*.

Through co-constructing with the women the possibilities and impossibilities of their community, I was profoundly impressed by the effect it has on a person's sense of worth and identity when they are taken seriously. Through our conversations and through taking small actions together, I have grown to appreciate the value of small steps that count for a lot. I have also experienced how small steps lead to many possibilities, surprising possibilities, as Antonio Porcia quoted in Nouwen (1990:XV) wrote: 'A door opens to me. I go in and am faced with a hundred closed doors.' I have grown to understand that through restorative witnessing - in effect willingness to become a friend - the resolve of persons to risk opening a door to yet more possibilities is strengthened.

Fiona Ross (2003:49) quoting Veena Das states that 'failure to recognise an affirmation of pain ('I am in pain') is to participate in and perpetuate violence.' When a person finds the courage to speak or risk finding the words to describe the effects of violence on their bodies, it often happens from a mesh of 'social and cultural locations from which to speak [that] may be fraught, saturated with discomforting customs that mould patterns of speech. They may render women vulnerable' (:163). She, Ross, goes on to say that 'language available to express pain may be limited, lacking or fractured.' Tied in with the risk of speaking one's abuse is the possibility that 'recounting harm does not guarantee that it will be received in ways testifiers might wish' (:163). I have become very aware that when I meet women for the first time I need to accept that I, as counsellor, will need to be researched first. It may well take a long time, as was the case with Wendy, for me to be seen as trustworthy and reliable. Wendy's community thrives on stories, often un-complimentary, that are remembered and retold at the expense of a particular person (see Chapter 1). She had no way of knowing that I might respond differently.

It is in considering these ideas that I can, through narrative practices, social construction ideas and the feminist stance, engage with persons from a position of solidarity and accept the inevitable: possible or probable action against injustice and oppression. It meant that I

was prepared to take a stand against oppressive actions perpetrated by people in the community, but it also means addressing those discourses that constrain persons to be 'docile bodies' and keeps active the 'normalizing gaze' (Foucault 1977:184).

### **3.5.2 Asking questions**

Questions have particular significance in my practice as a narrative pastoral therapist and are supportive of restorative witnessing. A 'questioning approach relates to a commitment to a collaborative way of working with persons' (White 1995:30) rather than to a position of the expert providing 'answers' and 'truths'. The questioning approach is a way to avoid an imposition of these truths in a context where a power imbalance is created when a person seeks help.

### **3.5.3 Writing letters**

I had made a commitment, at the outset, to write up our conversations and to send each person a letter about their individual stories. I tried to capture their story in as much detail as I had heard it. I intended the letters to be yet another re-telling of their stories, but also to be a way of taking back to them the effect of their story on my life. I hoped that the women would find value in receiving a letter that re-told their life's experiences in a way that highlighted their strengths that we had identified together, their solution knowledges and their ability to maintain relationships and care for the people in their lives.

It was also important to write in a way that reflected their turn of phrase and use of language. I believed that the letter had to be a way for them to hear their own voices and thoughts and to show that they had been heard.

Often during the writing of the letters I became curious about many other areas of their lives and asked more questions in the letters. I hoped that the questions would extend the conversation and remind them of other persons who were meaningful to them or skills and knowledges that they have. If, during the drafting of the letter, I was struck by something anew, I shared the thought as well. Some of the letters tended to be long documents – I felt that the women needed to see that I had really taken them seriously. In effect, I was trying to weave a wreath that was lush and full, with many boughs woven together.

I have come to appreciate letters as a way to support taking-it-back practices (White 1997:143). Taking-it-back practices provide a two-way account of a conversation between a person who seeks our help with a problem. This two-way account is important to narrative practices – it is also an ethical commitment - as it addresses the power imbalance that exists between the therapist and the 'client'. It also 'contributes significantly to the rich



descriptions of the lives of persons who consult us' and helps me take 'responsibility to identify and acknowledge the ways' in which my own life and praxis is re-authored by this work (:143).

Letter writing, as a way of extending remembering practices, can also be meaningful. A letter provides an opportunity for the addressee to be reminded of those people who were and are meaningful to their lives and whose voices they choose and allow to have a say in the matter of their identity. A letter provides a summary of the kinds of descriptions of their identity they prefer to have for their lives and the kinds of descriptions against which they have taken a stand. (White 1997:23)

#### **3.5.4 Asking for feedback**

As I had not seen some of the mothers in quite a while and I wondered what they had got out of the meetings of the 'group,' and what their experience had been of me, I decided to send each of them a simple reflection-task (Appendix H). I asked them to write back to me or to make an appointment. Three of the women responded: Wendy, Galiema and Salomé.

By requesting some form of 'critical' feedback, I hoped to remind them again of the meanings they had chosen for their lives. I had the idea that it could be a way of shifting power if I asked them to help me understand how they had experienced our meetings, what they thought could have been more useful and what else could be done. After all, I was sure that these mothers could really teach me a lot: in a way they had become my interlocutors to the community.

#### **3.5.5 Keeping in touch**

After the group disbanded, I tried to phone all the mothers at least once every two months. I was in regular contact with Wendy and Galiema. Shirley was difficult to contact, but I used to send her messages with Zane, her nephew at the school. Salomé and Mrs Summers walked past the school when shopping, so I kept a lookout for them and greeted them. I believed that keeping in touch would be ethical and honouring of the care each one of them showed me. I was especially concerned that, as they knew I was writing the dissertation, they would feel I had only used them for this purpose and then, so to speak, written them off.

#### **3.5.6 Steps toward creating new communities of care**

Wendy and Galiema decided to try support reading with some of the older learners. I had discovered that those children could hardly read, let alone make connections for the sound/symbol relationships of the alphabet. After I demonstrated paired reading to them they took over. Over the course of about three weeks they came in every day that I was there.

Wendy however, found the reading activities quite stressful; and her mother had become quite ill in that time. Galiema continued with the reading support.

Mr Kruger, the principal of the school, asked Wendy and Galiema to look after classes when the teachers were absent or had to be at a course. For the last part of 2003 they were at the school regularly. Mr Kruger valued Galiema's support, dedication and commitment so highly that he offered the school tuck shop to her to support her in raising funds for herself.

Liema was asked to assist with sorting out the school library. She took on the job and spent a huge amount of time and energy on the project. Within a few weeks the library was organised, and this year, 2003, she was the school librarian. Viva! the mother's group: we have gifted the school with a stalwart and reliable person.

### **3.5 IN CONCLUSION: CONNECTING WITH WREATHS OF HONOUR**

The women, mothers and care givers of children at Lourier Primary school and I engaged with each other in a group, as one possible way of creating opportunities for persons to be acknowledged and encouraged. We met both as a group and had individual conversations as well. Through my relationship and through the practices of restorative witnessing with them, I had constructed new meanings and understanding for myself and I also realized that it had been the same for them. Sharon Welch (1990:79) describes the value of groups of people gathering as 'communities of resistance when she says:

Such a community helps us to name and define the forces that marginalize us; it voices a definition of its members that affirms, supports, and includes us all in the whole body of human experience. And as the term "communities of resistance" so aptly suggests, resistance – whether to misfortune, marginalisation, or oppression – is most likely to be successful when undertaken in community. Standing alone, no one of us has the resources to resist a hurricane; together, we can create mutual shelter.

During the time I was doing the research, and especially when the group disbanded, I experienced despondency about the poverty, struggle, and violence in the lives of the people living in Steenberg. I also struggled with self-doubt. In **Chapter 4** I describe the community, Umnqophiso Pre-primary School, to which I was invited where I witnessed and worked with three teachers and their mentor and learnt about the ways in which they work in community.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FROM BITTERNESS COMES THE SWEETNESS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this Chapter I describe how I became involved in this community and how, through this involvement, I have become a witness to a group of women who are making a profound impact in their community. My intention here, as in Chapter 3, is to illustrate how restorative witnessing works itself out in praxis. By re-telling women's stories, I not only make these stories more visible – thus conscientising both myself and hopefully those who read this research report – but it is also a way of remaining accountable to those who shared their stories with me. My commitment to the ideas of participatory action research has kept me vigilant to the requirement that this research project will primarily be to the advantage of the participants, and not just an intellectual exercise. What surprised and delighted me was to discover how this process was mutually transformative. Through witnessing their stories of pain and perseverance, through acknowledging my own complicity in that pain and also its complexity, I discovered more about the transforming power of restorative witnessing. I recognized for myself what Welch (1990:135) describes as mutual transformation that takes place when 'there is the power of empathy and compassion, of delight in otherness, and strength in the solidarity of listening to others, bearing together stories of pain and resistance.'

#### **4.2 LOOKING OUT FOR WAYS TO GET THE BETTER OF DESPONDENCY**

My curiosity about Umnqophiso Pre-primary School grew out a desire to stand up to the despondency that had intertwined my ways of looking at Lourier Primary School. This despondency grew from a belief that I had 'failed' to deliver on the research when the women's group disbanded. It was also the response to an awareness of the tremendous need in this community. I longed, as a hopeful counterforce to despondency, to find a connection where I could see, and contribute to, community happening amongst a group of women and to learn from their determination and ways of taking hopeful action. I have to acknowledge that I would not have been able to recognize Umnqophiso Pre-primary School as one of my places of connection had it not been for my ongoing engagement with Lourier Primary School.

Over the course of the last few years I had learned about Umnqophiso Pre-primary School from my friend Hélène Rykaart. She often spoke of the teachers at the school - Victoria Nomaweza Mangqwengqwe, Patrolia Rala Rala, Somikaze Mtya - as amazing, caring and determined persons. She kept saying that these teachers have grown to mean so much to her that they have become like her friends and sisters.

It happened that Catherine Besteman, my friend, who was also a visiting social anthropologist from Colby College in Maine, USA, was particularly interested in community self-empowerment endeavours. I told her about Umnqophiso Pre-primary School and then arranged for her to visit the school. We met the teachers where they were teaching in corrugated iron structures at the time and then we were taken to the building site of their new school.

I wondered what it was about these teachers that had touched H el ene's life so profoundly. I wondered what it would be like for me to become a witness to this community - a restorative witness - and whether they believed that they could benefit from my participation in any way. I wondered what hope looked like for these women and what actions it motivated. I went along to see for myself and came away quite enthralled.

### **4.3 A VOICE WAS HEARD IN LWANDLE**

The primary school in Lwandle is called Umnqophiso Primary School. When the pre-school was created, Victoria chose to call it Umnqophiso Pre-primary School. Umnqophiso is the Xhosa word for covenant. To make the word more accessible for 'outsiders' (such as the many white visitors to the school) the community, the teachers, parents and co-workers at Umnqophiso Pre-primary School understand covenant as 'joining hands together'. This calls for their commitment to relationships and cooperating for the benefit of all involved in the school: teachers, parents and children. Or, as the teachers explained: *'when you struggle on your own it is like walking with a heavy pack on your shoulders and this brings heaviness and slowness. When you stand together it lightens the load, you learn together, you are encouraged to be open-minded and you are able to share ideas to others, like the community forum.'* This explanation connected with the main idea of Ubuntu as expressed in the saying: 'umntu unguntu ngabanya abantu – a person is only recognized through identification with, and by, other people' (Ramphela 2002:102). I connected this idea of Ubuntu with Graham's (1996:49) view of pastoral care 'as shared companionship in life's journey rather than the imbalance of client expert or sheep/shepherd.'

Umnqophiso Pre-primary School started out in a pre-fabricated structure on the premises of the Umnqophiso Primary School in 1997. Victoria, the principal of the pre-school, was doing the practicum for an educare course which she was completing. The teacher who was to be her supervisor took another post and, for six months, she was left in charge of seventy pre-schoolers. Instead of finding another placement, she took up the challenge to establish a pre-school that would serve the community. For the first year she worked without payment as the pre-school teacher. She explained that she knew that: *'there were no other pre-*

*schools in Lwandle and the children needed to be cared for during the day. I also wanted to use the training I got.’* She also said: *‘I wanted to be one of the two or three that make the difference – I wanted to build something up, not change the whole world. It’s about many people; one life touches another life and another life.’* She said that the best place to start was with the little children so that they could be given a better chance in life. Victoria’s purpose and vision moved me. She reminded me of what Anderson and Johnson (1994:131) said about a society’s outlook on the care of children:

When a society understands and is in sympathy with childhood, it will not wield power over others, valorise violence, practice discrimination, teach hate, destroy the environment, or preach materialism or indifference toward anyone. Children are not more important than the poor, the sick, the elderly, the environment, or other causes; but our compassion for childhood (and thus for children) is a life-sign. With it we take our pulse as humanity.

Her act of courage to continue establishing the pre-school had led to a community of care for children, for their parents and for the many people who were drawn in to work with the teachers.

The teachers who joined her - Somikaze in 1997 and Patroliia in 2001 - had worked as unpaid volunteer teachers at the school before they were appointed. By committing themselves to work as volunteers they were proving their commitment to the pre-school. When the principal of the Primary school indicated that the pre-school had to vacate the premises at very short notice, the pre-school was able to move to three corrugated iron structures that were used by three church groups in the community. The pre-school used the buildings during the day, but had to pack up everything because the community used it during the evenings and over weekends. Each morning, in order to set up for the school day, they first had to unpack the boxes they stored their materials in. This unsettled situation continued for two years while the school community and the teachers were raising funds for a deposit on purchasing land to build a school. By December 2002 the pre-school buildings were built and the school community were able to move in.

Their *‘shared companionship’* (Graham 1996:49) and mutual care was expressed when Victoria said: *‘It is important to us three to start meetings with appreciation. We notice the things that people do or the things that have happened to help us learn and move forward.’* Patroliia explained further that: *‘it is important for us three of us to say thank you to God for the way we are blessed to have this school. We are very lucky to have this school. We say thank you to the Lord each time before we say please.’* Somikaze observed that: *‘We always share everything, we share, every time something happens, we share.’* This mutual caring that they spoke of reminded me of feminist theologians’ concern with mutuality: *‘[Mutuality] is*

a relational process in which all persons, or parties, are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them' (Heyward 1996:155). Their work-in-community relationship has grown to include all aspects of their lives, so that they make time to support and encourage each other about experiences unrelated to the school. They practice Ubuntu - they are persons through identification with each other and their care for the community.

Hélène Rykaart had worked alongside the teachers for their school for five years. I wondered how she went about sharing her knowledge and experience, firstly, because the teachers spoke so highly of her and secondly, I was interested to learn from her practices as 'mentor'.

#### **4.4 LEARNING FROM ANOTHER WHITE WOMAN AT THE SCHOOL**

Hélène shared her considerable knowledge and experience - gained as a social worker, counsellor and human resource manager in the corporate world - with the teachers and the community of Lwandle. Hélène Rykaart had worked alongside the teachers for their school for five years. Honouring and acknowledging Hélène Rykaart's participation and commitment to the teachers of Umnqophiso Pre-primary School was a way to avoid making her invisible as 'just another do-gooder.' It is also an acknowledgment of Victoria's wisdom to find a person who could stay the course alongside the teachers, supporting them to make their 'vision practical.'

Victoria had first heard Hélène Rykaart speaking at an inter-church group at Lwandle Primary School. Afterwards, during tea, Victoria asked Hélène if she would help her at the school. Hélène gave Victoria her telephone number. Victoria phoned, met with Hélène at her home and their relationship started. I asked Victoria what Hélène had brought to her life and she replied: *'To me she brought everything – gave me the way of thinking. She will say, I will guide you doing it; I am not doing it for you. It is from her that I learn independence; she is a very independent person....She respected me very much.'*

Hélène described her engagement with Umnqophiso Pre-primary School as fascinating. She said that through her involvement she had become a *'voller, ryker mens en mens se horisonne verbreed so'* ('richer, fulfilled person and a person whose horizons are broadened'). I asked her what her ideas of community work/ development are. She describes her involvement as 'mentoring', which is about consultation, 'speaking with' and not 'to', and 'walking alongside' and not about 'taking over and deciding for' people. Smith, Willms and Johnson echo her ideas in the editors' note, when they comment that there is 'value of working within a team or with an accessible, experienced mentor who is able to

provide supportive guidance' (Seymour 1997:60).

Whenever a step had to be taken towards the building of a school, she described how the school community, teachers and parents, were involved. Decisions were not made unless the parents were informed and had an opportunity to give their views. She described how they would talk and talk over possibilities and the implication of these on their resources, generate possibilities for action and generate even more possibilities for action until everybody knew what was going on and was committed to take action. It was in this way that the school community, as poor as they are, had raised the first R9000 to build their pre-school.

Hélène's practice is contextual (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:2), consultative and about networking. She sees her involvement as practising restorative justice and restitution: she has had such a blessed life that she wants to do something in return. In working together with the teachers

the alienation of class [was] challenged....A genuine conversation between those who are privileged by way of class, gender, or race and those who have experienced oppression or discrimination on the basis of those characteristics is possible when the privileged work to end the oppression or discrimination they denounce.

(Welch 1990:136)

For Hélène, community work is about 'giving' your best (see Chapter 2 no. 2.5.2) rather than what you don't want (Debbink 1997:27); about commitment; about having a respectful attitude towards people and a willingness to work alongside the community you offer your support to. Many people who donate time and money have their own agendas and ideas about what they want from the investment. It is therefore imperative for us to realise that we need to 'grow' developers who are willing to commit, be open to possibilities and willing to work. For her, community development is about taking '*klein treetjies op 'n slag*' ('small steps at a time') and to keep on making 'small beginnings', laying good foundations.

It is from this position that Hélène would sew capes and make caps for the pre-schoolers' graduation ceremony. It is from this position that she offered her considerable experience of team building and goal setting strategies by facilitating workshops for the teachers and the mothers of the community. These enabled the teachers to say that they have learnt to 'speak out' when they have a problem; that problems are opportunities; and that they have grown to be deeply committed to their relationships with each other. I was surprised when Hélène explained that the 'outcomes' of the workshops were always guided by the participants' contribution and ideas. I was reminded of Davies (1991:45) who points out that assumption of 'moral rightness [or any kind of knowing] is defined by those in power and then used by them

to judge as lacking all those who do not share those definitions or have access to those discourses.’ According to Davies, white middle class males usually define moral rightness or authority. White middle class women may ‘gain it if sponsored by a male’ with the result that this moral rightness or authority is ‘not really one’s own ...but it is one’s sponsors’ rightness’ Davies (1991:45). H  l  ne challenged these assumptions of moral rightness by her centring of the wishes, wisdom and knowledge of the women, community and teachers. Only by agreement with the teachers, H  l  ne uses her considerable networking skills and has managed to convince an accountant to take the time to teach them about budgeting and accounting so that the school funds are administered ethically; and a dietician to help to plan a well-balanced diet with what budget the school had. A building contractor, also a white woman, who read an article H  l  ne had written for a local newspaper about the teacher’s commitment to the children of their community, offered to build the school for them.

I found talking to H  l  ne about her thinking about her relationship with Umnpoqhisso Pre-Primary School and with the women enormously encouraging, both for my work as a white woman in this community, but also in the community of Lourier Primary School. The encouragement was in what H  l  ne calls the ‘*invisible stuff that equals success*’: those small actions of care, taking time to talk and listen to each other. In no way did she pretend not to have certain skills and knowledges, but in no way did she impose these. Instead, she harnessed them to the skills and knowledges of the community of Umnqophiso Pre-primary School. I found Halperin’s (1995:83) comment a useful caution in terms of the care that needs to be taken when engaging in communities that have for so long borne the brunt of domination:

I don’t see where evil is in the practice of someone who, in a given game of truth, knowing more than another, tells him what he must do, teaches him, transmits knowledge to him, communicates skills to him. The problem is rather to know how you are to avoid in these practices ....the effects of domination.

Without her knowing, H  l  ne has been doing contextual pastoral care and participatory action research and the ideas of community were co-constructed in many different ways.

#### **4.5 GETTING CONNECTED**

H  l  ne had asked me initially for informative materials for use by the teachers because there was a dearth of resources and they had asked her to help them collect ideas. I lent her my teaching files, which she read and simplified for the teachers so that they could use them immediately. A year later, after the initial visit mentioned, H  l  ne said that the teachers had expressed a need for some support around teaching practice and planning. I offered to spend some time making teaching resources with them and to share some ideas with them.



De Jongh van Arkel (2000:18) puts forward the view that mutual care, as 'the original, essential form of pastoral care' (:14), includes the main aspects of pastoral work, such as: healing, sustaining, guiding and reconciling (:18). In mutual care, sustaining or support guides the caring activities and engagement between people. My offer to become involved stemmed from the idea of mutual care. Couture (1998:47) says mutual care becomes mutually empowering when '[o]ur caring with a person urges us to ask how we can mutually empower one another, not only to cure the ills of our lives, but to proactively create conditions for fullness of life.' I was convinced that through work-in-community we could create some conditions for 'fullness of life' and that in supporting teachers to support little children, I was doing pastoral care.

I looked forward to the idea of constructing equipment with the teachers, talking about teaching and sharing stories about our experiences as teachers. I had not taught for a while and really missed the hands on, creative engagement. I was really hoping to have fun. My intention was that once the teachers had indicated what they needed support with, I would then become the collector of ideas and materials. H el ene passed my offer on to the teachers and they invited me to join them at the school for a trial work session. This work session led to my travelling to the school weekly, for a period of two months. Over time, Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia found that it would be better to spend time constructing equipment, making posters and organising equipment on Saturdays because they would be less distracted by the various activities taking place at the school during the afternoons.

In my interest and passion for teaching and collecting teaching materials, I needed to be aware that the teachers might have a different idea about the aspects of teaching that I regarded as important and even obvious. I needed to be very careful about making assumptions about what they regarded as valuable for their teaching context. I connected with Hess' (1998:58) comment on what she calls 'distributive justice'. She cautions that:

Sharing goods is benevolent, but sharing the power for making decisions, defining culture, and shaping procedures is much more important. Those who share the goods they themselves value while holding onto the right to determine what is good still exercise domination over those toward whom they are benevolent.

With this caution in mind, I also believed that my support as 'scout' for information and ideas could be a way for the teachers to access the taken for granted 'knowledge' regarding teaching practices teachers in privileged communities' experience. I wanted my involvement to empower, rather than to put any pressure on the teachers to become 'like' or carbon copies of 'good, white, privileged teachers.' Foucault's (1980:123) notion, that the technologies of power seek to control and standardize people's ideas of self and knowledge,

motivated me to resist 'homogenizing' these teachers. Foucault also maintained that power relationships invariably co-exist with resistance that finds expression in many ways: I believed that the teachers and I could co-create resistance to these 'good teacher' discourses. I knew I would encourage them to choose creatively and critically those ideas that fitted their context and teaching styles. I undertook to support with them, their own decision-making, teaching styles and shaping of procedures. I was reminded, and refer again (Chapter 2, number 5) to the observation Hess (1998:60) makes that:

[c]ommunicative justice is not simply teaching people to adapt (play the master's game); it is also building on the skills, powers, experience, knowledge, and talents that people have which are unacknowledged in the power structures.

I knew that I would benefit from such engagement myself, as it would challenge me to think critically about the many discourses regarding what 'good teaching' was about.

Mamele Ramphela (2002:163) states strongly that the 'world-class education white people had access to during the apartheid years was bought at the expense of a good education for their fellow citizens who happened to be black.' She charges white people to acknowledge this discrimination, to work at banishing racial stereotyping and to work with others in order to broaden the skills base.

I committed myself to support the teachers of Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School to broaden their skills base. In the next section I describe some of the activities we engaged in. I also describe how my ideas of what a 'skills base' should be was challenged and stretched.

#### **4.6 'DOING WITH' EQUALS CARE AND WORK-IN-COMMUNITY**

Our first work sessions together included handwriting and letter formation activities, which the teachers found interesting. They were intrigued by the neat effect created by spacing, the evenness of letter-size and the 'tricks' in the formation (traditional foundation phase print) of letters.

Later, during another work session, we were preparing labels for the things in the classroom which the teachers could use as a reading activity. I had suggested to them, some weeks earlier, that they could make the labels for the furniture and work corners in the classroom, but this did not happen. I was puzzled about this – again wondering whether this was a useful idea for them. I was reassured that it was what they wanted, but they just wanted to see how I would do it. Again I found this puzzling as cutting strips of paper and writing on them did not seem such a problem to me. I got out a ruler and pencil and started measuring the lines, as I always did for my own classroom. The women responded with a general 'Aha!'

and started their own. Afterwards, they said they enjoyed the activity, chatting and working together. We discussed the ways in which we could use the labels. We also investigated and practiced using the guillotine that had been bought for the school. After the session, I found a sheet of cardboard with lines ruled on it in the cardboard container and Victoria said: 'This is what we tried, but we did not know how to do the lines.' Being able to rule lines on a paper is hardly a life saving skill, but it underscored apartheid's and patriarchy's effects on their lives and mine.

During the thirty-minute drive to my home, I recalled, that in one of our initial conversations I had mentioned to the teachers that I believed that it is always a good idea to prepare materials attractively and neatly for the children's sake. I believe that this not only is a reflection of respect for their learning but it also models planning and care. I also commented that it was worth the time and effort to prepare items and planning for long-term use. In addition, on some occasion, I had mentioned that cardboard was expensive nowadays and that one had to use it carefully.

Remembering these statements brought discomfort. I was flooded with embarrassment and I wondered how many of these kinds of remarks I had made that might have had the effect of keeping the teachers waiting to be told like children. I had brought the paper for their use and, like so many other 'givers', prescribed how the paper should be used. Had my practices merely affirmed the comment, quoted earlier, which Hess (1998:58) makes regarding distributive justice?

Those who share the goods they themselves value while holding onto the right to determine what is good still exercise domination over those toward whom they are benevolent.

Unthinkingly I had treated three teachers - for whom I had developed a deep admiration - like children. I had patronized three amazingly independent women, who were capable of organising and administering a school, managing a large group of children on a daily basis, planning budgets, raising children and motivating an impoverished community to raise funds to build a school. Each of these women has a remarkable story of struggle and survival to share. These are women who are able to solve an infinite number of problems on their own, and who did so for years before I arrived in their lives. I was reminded of Anglin (1996:25) who cautions that 'the distinction between research and intervention is not tenable, and that research involving persons is a significant form of intervention into lives.'

On reflecting on this experience in relation to my understanding of restorative witnessing and the way in which I hoped to be 'doing' support and care, I was again made aware of the

ubiquitousness of patriarchal thinking and actions - the 'colonisation of our minds' (Freire & Faundez, 1989:95-96). Freire explains how this 'colonisation' keeps us oppressed:

It has the power to dim people's awareness, and is thus not simply an idea; it is concrete reality. Thus, the shadow of the colonialist [*patriarchy and paternalism, the colonialist for this research report*] becomes his actual physical presence in the bodies of those colonized and in their behaviour.

I was brought again to the painful realisation - conscientised to the 'customary thinking' (Chamdon, Irving & Epstein 1999:14) - of the ways in which our lives, our smallest gestures and actions have been shaped by inequality and patriarchy. It was this 'customary thinking' that became 'unsettled' (:53) and brought me to self-reflection. Irving (Chamdon, Irving & Epstein 1999:53) speaks of the writings of Foucault as 'work that unsettles'. Given the spectres of patriarchy, I related strongly to his interpretation that:

Foucault took the stance that transformative knowledge is disturbing by nature. It disturbs commonly acceptable ways of doing and disturbs the person implementing it. It ruffles the smoothness of our habits, rattles our certainties, disorganizes and reorganises our understanding, shakes our complacency, unhinges us from secure moorings. It is serious and 'dangerous' work.

(Chamdon 1999:53)

This unsettledness also connected me to Foucault's ideas of power/knowledge:

[W]hen embodied in specific codes of knowledge and practice, give some people immediate practical power over others. This practical power involves not only the ability to direct that other but the willingness – even gratitude – of the other to be directed.

(Foote & Frank 1999:163)

I had stepped into the role of knower, expert and, on top of this, I am a privileged white woman who has taught for many years. I unconsciously transferred the patriarchal and authoritarian ideas of the 'boss' person who tells subservients, workers or children, what to think and do. Sharon Welch (1990:107) notices that our:

intent is certainly mixed: we often act out of accountability and love, yet this genuine openness may be tainted by unacknowledged ideological blinders – the influence of class, race or gender privilege. Our vision is always perspectival. The problems we see and the solutions we envision cannot be separated from our social location. Interest is always operative and does need to be checked.

I unwittingly made comments that could have silenced the teachers' creativity and solution-finding abilities. For instance, a casual statement of opinion, not intended to push or pressurize, could have had the effect of disabling agency in the women. I related strongly to Willms' (1997:11) observation that '[i]n situations of disturbing struggle for social participation and change, people come face-to-face with themselves: these are probably the most difficult moments of all.'

I vowed to be very careful with the way I stated what I believed. I offered my experience, but what I knew was not the only way to effective teaching and resource management. 'Living consciously' must be my motto. I found Paulo Freire's (1989:55) position on working with people a forceful reminder of how to 'live consciously':

... however eloquently I speak, whatever I declare, if I work simply *for* the people and not *with* them, I become more and more elitist. I begin to admit that the vision of the future must be translated into reality by competent, generous and heroic specialist workers, whose task it is – since they cannot effect change by themselves - to guide the masses until, at the appointed time, change takes place. In that case the future is *held out* to the people ... and they have no share in bringing it about.

In our next meeting I asked the women whether they would tell me when I offended them in any way – in manner or attitude or just by the way I spoke to them about topics. I shared with them that these visits were a special highlight for me and that I really enjoyed just being with them and working with them. I did not want to spoil this or forfeit the invitation or the experience of inclusion. They assured me that they would let me know if I behaved in disrespectful ways or overstepped any lines. I ensured that I first checked with them which times suited them, what they needed and what we should carry on with. As it worked out in practice, the work sessions fitted in with the times the teachers had available. Eventually, our gatherings moved to Saturdays, public holidays and school holidays, as these suited them best.

In the next section I continue to describe how we, the teachers and I, worked together. Our work-in-community created opportunities for us to learn about and from each other. Working together in this way reminded me that I preferred to relate to the teachers in a spirit of solidarity ('doing' solidarity) rather than charity.

#### **4.7 RUBBISH FROM RICHES**

The teachers and I also got together to sort through all the donated materials. As there were no display areas or shelving, the materials had remained in boxes for many months and thus were not very accessible. Although much of the materials were in good condition, I was horrified at the poor quality of some of the donations. No self-respecting person would give such donations to someone they cared about. I shared my indignation with the teachers and urged them to take a stand against the dumpsters. I loaded my car with the outdated, soiled and mouldy books and scrappy paper which I took for recycling.

I was reminded of what Debbink (1997:27) wrote regarding his view on charity: 'All my adult life I had worked for myself, and what I didn't need, I could give away. That is charity .... it

was all I knew.’ He also says that ‘charity [is] an act of giving, usually out of a feeling of guilt – guilt about seeing people live with too little’ (:28). Often people refrain from reflecting on *why* people live with too little. Debbink explains that, for him, ‘the true way of sharing’ is an ‘act of solidarity’ (:28): ‘Solidarity is an act, not of giving, but of common struggle – a fight for a common goal of social justice. Solidarity demands that you are one with the people.’ Sevenhuijsen (1998:147) refers to ‘caring solidarity’ where ‘[t]he notion of solidarity gives a political meaning to care and to mutual commitment.’ Caring solidarity reminds one that everyone, regardless of their race, gender or social position, needs care at some point in their lives (Sevenhuijsen 1998:147). Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:7) refers to pastoral care being participatory ethical care when one is not concerned with caring *for* but to care *with* people who are in need of care. What we give and how we give allows people to know that they are cared for, loved and that someone wants to share *with* them. My ideas regarding work-in-community (Chapter 2: 2.5.2) were confirmed when Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia started including me: they spoke of ‘us’ and ‘we’ in terms of planning and work.

On the whole we had sorted through the donations carefully: toys, arts and crafts, reference materials and pictures put into labelled envelopes. I discovered a shop that threw out tomato boxes. When I asked if I could have some of these I was promptly given as many as could fit in my car. On another occasion I was telephoned to say that there was more to be collected. The tomato boxes turned into an effective resource for sorting the teaching materials and toys – they became immediately accessible and organised.

Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia were very involved in running the school, the mother’s group, the administration and the daily planning and organisation of the classrooms. I came to understand that an aspect of my role was to give support (to ‘do’ solidarity) by providing the energy and momentum for the sorting of the donations and the organising of activities and games - to initiate activities and work alongside. Ornelas (1997:17) observes that:

[I]f you do not do manual work then you cannot be transformed yourself. Work is a source of transformation; it is also a source of knowledge. There is a sense of community when a group of people come together to work.

I would add to this the idea that a sense of community is nurtured when a group of people have the opportunity to play together, sharing enjoyment and laughter.

#### **4.8 PLAYING TOGETHER**

On one occasion I arrived at the school with a boot load of equipment for which an ex-teacher, a friend of my sister’s, wanted to find an appreciative home. My sister knew that I was on the lookout for resources and telephoned me when she heard that her friend wanted

to clear out her garage. She kept telephoning me to remind me to follow up on this opportunity. When I fetched the material from her she emphasised that it was important to her that the equipment and teaching aids should go to teachers in a struggling community. This was firstly, because this was for her an act of care for children with little opportunity and secondly, also because her teacher training was through the Montessori philosophy. She explained to me that Maria Montessori had developed these materials for the benefit of deprived children in order to provide concrete, aesthetically pleasing, experiential learning and discovery. They needed to be used in a particular way (a sentiment which ties in with the discussion of 4.5 of this chapter).

I loved the experience of witnessing the teachers' pleasure at receiving these resources – they continually commented on the durability and quality of the materials. I felt proud and grateful that I had had the opportunity to be a participatory witness to their enjoyment. We had a lot of fun investigating the many possible uses of the materials. I also showed them a memory game and a version of the children's game 'snap'. The teachers loved this. They had never played these card games before. We played the games surrounded by piles of equipment and sharing much laughter and excitement.

What struck me was that it seemed that the sharing of fun, which was provided by playing the games, was meaningful for all of us. In particular I noticed how spontaneously they were complimentary and encouraging of each other. I thought back to my experience as a teacher where sharing seldom happened and learning together playfully was often looked upon with blasé annoyance as a 'waste of time'. I believe that sharing this time playing together was another opportunity where we discovered something (our skills, memories, reactions, cooperation) about each other and ourselves. Our playing together was also a working together which gave us the 'option of a different sort of conversation, recognizing the wisdom of the use of the body and humour that often accompanies such material effort' (Welch 1990:136).

Driving home that afternoon I reflected on Couture's (1998:43) observation that practical theology 'also increasingly recognizes that embodied practices, especially acts of ministry, form our sense of who we are and who God is in non-verbal ways.' Our 'act of ministry' was playing games with 'attitudes of compassion, hospitality and generosity' (:38) which helped us to take care that the experience was meaningful and safe for all. Couture (1998:48) says that to engage with others and regularly practice 'compassion, hospitality and generosity' is 'to practice pastoral care as a spiritual discipline.'

When I arrived the following week, I was told that the children loved playing these games as much as the teachers had enjoyed them. It made sense to me that the teachers would have enjoyed sharing these games with their learners because they had enjoyed playing the games themselves.

It is through this interaction with the teachers of Umnqophiso Pre-primary School that I understood how much educational opportunity had been withheld from them through the technology of apartheid. Most schools were under-resourced, with inadequate facilities and with a lack of actual and adequately trained teachers (Wilson & Ramphela 1994:144). Whereas most white children had been provided with many things - including a variety of games - these women had played these kinds of games for the first time in their lives. Many of the injustices that they lived through during the apartheid era came to the fore in the following conversation we had.

#### **4.9 CONVERSATION**

Umnqophiso Pre-primary School has many visitors who come to see the development and progress of the school. Some institutions liked to see what they might be donating money to, and some institutions like to see how their money is spent. It came up in one of our group conversations that I, besides being an assistant to the teachers, had come to learn from them how they had gone about setting up the school. Somikaze told me that they have many visitors to the school, so it is easy for them to tell their success stories because they tell it so many times.

My interest was much more in their personal stories and those qualities that kept them committed to teaching, first without payment for a year and then to continue with the school, earning only a very small salary. Early in our association, I asked the teachers whether they were interested in engaging with me in conversations about their lives. Reinharz (1992:19) comments on the value of interviewing (I prefer to think of this as a conversation rather than an interview) women:

... interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.

I offered the women the opportunity for conversations with the idea that through witnessing their stories in a narrative conversation they would have the opportunity to hear each other in a re-telling (White 1997:95) of their life stories (and the meanings they attached to their experiences). Hopefully, this re-telling would enable much thicker descriptions (White



1995:95, 1997:63) than the ones visitors often hear. Even those re-tellings of their work-in-community cannot be undervalued as they continuously served to affirm their story of hope and self-empowerment. Epston (1998:14) states that when a person tells their story they engage in 'a performance of meaning' and that 'with every performance, persons are re-authoring their lives and relationships. And every telling encapsulates, but is more than the previous telling.'

Reinhild Traitler Espiritu (1996:75) reflects on Gerda Lerner's idea of 'self-authorization' and states that women need to 'become their own authorities on matters concerning their lives, and grant authority to each other and to their claims.' I believed that through conversations and restorative witnessing we would offer each other mutual support in our becoming authorities on matters concerning our lives. It is in 'hearing and engaging' with others' stories that we develop larger selves, and it is 'only when hearing and telling stories begins as a process of openness, vulnerability and mutual engagement that alienations of class, race and gender can be challenged' (Ackermann 1996:45). By making time and by listening and sharing in each other's stories we would engage in action that 'acknowledges the value of women's lives. It encourages identification among women through the recognition of common experience' (Reinharz 1992:135).

As with Lourier Primary School, my idea was to have a conversation with each one whilst the others were listening or witnessing as a reflecting team (White 1997:95-96). I decided on this approach as the effect that comes from the witnessing and responses from a significant audience is powerfully authenticating. This approach offers a way to challenge the isolation and dis-connection that struggles often bring (Carey 2003:5).

The ideas about restorative witnessing and narrative practices also persuaded me to scribe their stories. These written documents would serve as another telling and testimony to the values and ideas that keep them committed to the school. They would also be a way in which to honour them as persons, rather than just as 'the teachers' of the school. Epston (1994:31) says that 'words in a letter don't fade and disappear the way a conversation does; they endure through time and space' and can be read and re-read.

I felt it important that Victoria, Somikaze and Patroliya became visible as persons, not just a 'group' or 'team' or another 'they'. Given the patriarchal tradition of the South African context, across all cultural groups, many women have been the 'women behind the men' - invisible and voiceless and cast in the perpetual role of grateful and serving caregiver. Reinharz 1992:168 offers support for this view when she writes that: 'Traditionally, the presence of

women was limited to their being mentioned as 'there'. Women's 'being', when noted at all, was defined in terms of men's needs.' Black women, in addition to patriarchy's misogyny, have experienced devastating oppression in terms of race and class (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:62).

I have grown in the belief that for feminist pastoral counsellors, '[p]astoral care is understood as synonymous with emancipatory *praxis*' (Graham 1996:133) and that the maxim that 'the personal is political' is nowhere more true than when applied to Christian pastoral care' (Graham 1996:51). By creating opportunities for Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia to tell their stories and re-tell their stories to an audience that takes them seriously, I believed that their experience of themselves as people with worth, dignity, ability and agency would be supported. They would experience an 'acknowledgement that their distinctive identities are valued by the community' (Isherwood 1996:121). Our conversations challenged the ideas that only the values, standards and processes of the white people that were involved at the school defined the teachers' lives as 'successful' and 'empowered'. I realised that our conversations had supported emancipation from these oppressive notions when one of the teachers could say: *'I always thought that only the white people had the right way of doing things, but now I see that I had many skills and knowledge before they came to the school.'*

Our first conversation turned into a marathon. I was privileged to hear their stories. I was overawed at the openness with which they shared the hardships of their lives, especially those childhood experiences which has shaped their resolve to become educated and independent. I believe it is important to look at the themes (the variety of stories emerging from the dominant story) that flowed from the stories they told. One conversation, which in many ways is the theme for the lives of many of the black caregivers and children in our South-African society, touched me deeply. Through the stories of these teachers we engaged in what Welch (1990:124) calls 'communicative ethics' in which 'moral critique of structural forms of injustice emerges, rather, from the material interaction of different communities (:126).' I believed that this conversation was firstly, important for the acknowledgement of the struggle that shaped these women's lives and secondly, was crucial to the 'life-sustaining work' we were doing:

Morally transformative interaction requires far more than conversation between different groups of peoples ... "genuine" conversation presupposes prior material interaction, either political conflict or coalition, or joint involvement in life-sustaining work.

(Welch 1990:124)

When one meets women like Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia and one starts to understand

how trouble had meshed their lives, one can only marvel at the commitment to the task they have chosen for themselves – a task which they describe as ‘building a nation’. I invite the voice of Mamele Ramphela (2002), through her book ‘Steering by the stars’ to join the voices of Victoria, Somikaze and Patroliya to support my reflection on these themes. Her engagement with a group of children and their communities in New Crossroads finds echoes in many of the life experiences shared by Victoria, Somikaze and Patroliya, as well as her own. I focused on ‘the variety of their categories that do not fit with [mine]’ because I was concerned that ‘by not hearing, their worlds may be lost’ (Steier 1991:181) - I would not have acknowledged the ‘structural forms of injustice’ (Welch 1990:124) that shaped their lives in so many ways. I was also taking a stand against understanding too easily or skimming over their lived experiences. We are members from different groups, ‘but our groups are related to each other within networks of hierarchy and exploitation....[t]he collective telling of stories is the foundation for seeing and then challenging patterns of systemic injustice’ (Welch 1990:128).

#### **4.9.1 Amazing mothers**

I found it moving that these women honoured their mothers’ contributions to their lives. I have always felt a particular closeness to my own mother and have always admired her tenacity and spirit. My listening to their life stories made me a co-witness, so to speak, of their mothers’ stories. They spoke about the determination of their mothers to care and provide for them by whichever way they could and for the way in which they encouraged them to ‘*educate themselves*’. Their stories spoke of ongoing, faithful care and encouragement, despite lack of resources.

Victoria said that she grew up in the family which was the poorest in the village, but that her mother ‘*always told me to stand up and do something for myself. She is a wonderful mother, although she was so poor, she couldn’t do anything, she couldn’t pay school fees for me, she was standing up proud, ploughing and going out and ask for something and coming back home... she was always strong for her children.*’ Somikaze said her mother found work in Johannesburg and, for some time, worked two jobs to provide for her children who were staying with their grandmother. To assist with the supply of food she would buy bread in Johannesburg and post it to the Transkei: ‘*You know it was the case of you put a loaf of bread in the toaster so it can’t get mouldy. She sent it to Transkei while she was in Jo’burg.*’ Patroliya, one of six children, said that: ‘*I don’t want to let my mother down because she was working alone but she managed to get a home for us, she managed to get us through school, all of us, six children, alone.*’

Ramphela (2002:71) found that the young people she worked with all saw their mothers and

grandmothers as their primary support. According to her, most women survive and support their families because they are willing to take lowly jobs and have some form of income. It also seems that women are willing to lower their expectations and 'make the best of whatever comes their way.' This includes 'a tolerance of abusive relationships at the personal and employment levels' (:160). Ramphele (:161) believes that it is 'the strength of black, especially African, women in situations such as these ravaged areas of New Crossroads that has kept a semblance of normality in families under siege from the legacy of racism, sexism and poverty.'

#### **4.9.2 Absent Fathers**

The women shared stories of absent fathers: men who were forced to find work in other parts of the country, and who, through long absences became strangers to their children and wives. I witnessed stories of the hurt and shame that came with fathers' spending money on alcohol and other partners or who just abandoned their families. Victoria said that she did not know her father well as he worked on the mines and came home once a year. Somikaze told how painful it was for them to know that their father had spent his money on drink and took other partners even after his wife had joined him in Johannesburg and they were living in the 'maid's quarters' of a white family. Patroliia said that her father completely abandoned them – she knew him a little, but some of the younger siblings did not know him at all.

Ramphele (2003:158) says that 'many men "die" as parents and husbands by indulging in alcohol, drugs or becoming unresponsive to their families.' This desertion - be it physically or emotionally - is often the result of the burden of being 'primary providers.' Often, in the case of migrant workers, fathers saw their families once a year for a few weeks, and then had to return to work. During their visit the men would try and re-establish their authority in the household, which would create tension in the family (:65). Fathers, it appears, were set up by the apartheid system, migrant labour and financial constraints to become isolated and marginal to their family-community (:154). Very many remain positioned this way, even in the present South African context. Their children expressed their deep sense of loss at the absence and the betrayal of their mothers, but they also 'grew up with little knowledge of their fathers as important figures in their lives' (:154).

#### **4.9.3 Absent mothers**

Dreadful injustice was visited on young children whose mothers worked long hours - often far away from their children - and who only saw them for very short periods of time during holidays or when they came home for funerals. Patroliia and Somikaze's mothers had worked away from home and were given very little time off to visit with their children.

Somikaze's mother chose to find work in Johannesburg, leaving her children in the care of their grandmother, who already had eight other children to care for. Ramphele (2003:65) writes, 'mothers had to separate from their children because of the migrant labour system', joining their husbands (illegally) in the urban areas and leaving their children with relatives: 'Saving their marriages was seen as a long-term insurance policy for themselves and their children. In the short term children had to do without motherly love' (2003:65). Patroli's mother left her children with their grandparents until she was able to fetch them to live with her. They were part of a generation of children where mothers were the housekeepers and caregivers for privileged people and children.

#### **4.9.4 Disapproval of independent women**

Patroli said that a woman who goes out to work when she has a husband to provide for her goes against the norm that a woman should be at home tending her family when she is married. She said: *'People must see that I make it happen because some of the women say, ooh, you are going to school in a way that shows they don't understand what kicks you out of your home, to leave your things at home at the location if you are already married. They think you are playing you are married to you husband but you don't waste time. Instead you keep encouraging yourself ...now we are here at the new school. The people can see now.'*

Victoria said that men told her husband that she would not respect him because of her education and leadership position at the school. She said that, still, it poses a threat to men when a woman prefers *'to go out and make a job, to keep striving to improve her education, to want to be independent and to make a contribution.'* Ramphele (2002:160) writes that in the Limpopo province many women who thrive without the aid of a man are regarded with suspicion and blamed for their relations' misfortunes – some are even murdered for this reason. Nicholas (1998:167) writes that within patriarchal society women

...have not been encouraged to see themselves as moral agents. Expressing choice and accepting responsibility is not a virtue. Within a patriarchal tradition it is more likely to be seen as disobedience and rebellion.

According to Ramphele (2002), many households are female-headed, yet the idea of the family is heavily influenced by patriarchal values (:62): 'male-headed household is still held as the romantic ideal (:71) in which the "myth of male as primary provider and leader of the household" is perpetuated.' I recalled a comment Victoria made that *'having a husband gives a woman dignity in the eyes of the people.'*

Victoria, Somikaze and Patroli took a stand against these ideas and remind themselves of the ways in which they have brought dignity to the lives of the people – as moral agents -

involved in their school community. Through their empowerment – expressing choice and accepting responsibility - their families have also become empowered.

#### **4.9.5 Poverty**

Poverty has a grip on the lives of Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia. Through their stories it became clear that poverty was an intimate companion in their lives. Poverty brought with it crowdedness (too many bodies in too little living space); separation from their parents and later their husbands; dependency on handouts; forced communal living that intruded on personal needs; diminished opportunities for being visible as a person and to have any measure of choice or voice. Poverty was a silent - and sometimes a deadly - companion to their family experiences, their friendships and their opportunities.

Somikaze told us what it was like living with her grandmother and nine other children. She said when her mom posted food or clothes *'you couldn't say, this is mine, even if it is labelled. It is everyone's dress, everyone's panty as long as you had something to wear.'* Victoria's childhood memory of poverty was of the isolation it brought her as the children in the village looked down on her.

Ramphela (2002:162) expresses her concern that we, especially the whites who benefited, need to acknowledge the 'full extent of the legacy of apartheid and its socio-economic consequences.' The TRC focussed on gross violations of human rights, leaving unattended the enormous violation of socio-economic rights which has left many communities, families and schools disabled.

The church itself has benefited from and 'performed' apartheid and should have as its urgent mission the poor and marginalized in this country. The church – indeed, all faith communities - faces the challenge to 'do' solidarity, as their witness and activity, with the unemployed (Cochrane 1994:202). We need to understand that, while the unemployed may survive, but in order to be fully human, in God's image, they need empowerment and confirmation of the right of existence and of the meaningfulness of their lives (:201).

#### **4.9.6 Health issues**

People living with poverty did not have, and still lack, ready access to medical care. Both Patrolia and Victoria had suffered health conditions that they have overcome. Victoria had been hospitalised for a condition for which she still has no name, except that it lasted for six months and came into her life during the time of the boycotts and when her first husband was murdered. Patrolia was born with a heart condition. Her heart, as she said, was beating

under her skin for most of her life. She had undergone corrective cardiac surgery after her second child was born.

#### **4.9.7 Access to education**

All three of these amazing women had completed a Matric qualification under difficult circumstances. For many youngsters in South Africa, a Matric certificate was held out to be a passport into opportunity and employment. Victoria, already a mother of two, chose to repeat Standard Nine to help her catch up and Somikaze moved to Cape Town to live with her sister in a crowded house to be able to complete her schooling. Her mother was struggling against illness so her sister took her in to lighten her mother's load. She re-enrolled in Standard Nine because that was the only class in which the school could accommodate her.

Ramphele (2002:30) speaks of the non-literary culture that still prevails in black communities, due largely to lack of satisfying reading experiences, but further undermined by the effects of apartheid on schools: poor teachers, poor resources, poor parent support, and poor community interest in education. These three women have chosen 'life-long learning'. Somikaze said that her mother used to tell her to '*struggle for success*' and would ask, '*which is best, domestic worker or teacher?*'

#### **4.9.8 Commune-ity and community building**

During the conversation Victoria, Somikaze and Patrolia had commented on their commitment to serve the community. Listening to them I was reminded again that our lives are entirely relational and, when we become mutually responsible for our relationships, we are in community and doing care. Relationality within feminist theological thought includes concepts of interdependence and mutuality. With relationality as an ethic of care, 'individuals (women) define themselves as connected in relation to others, they understand relationships as response to another on his or her own terms, and they resolve moral problems with attention to maintaining the connections between interdependent individuals' (Hogan 1996:203). Patrolia said that when she arrived at the school to do her practical she was so impressed that she stayed. She observed that it is Victoria's spirit and vision that extended from person to person so that together, they eventually '*made that vision practical.*'

When Victoria asked Hélène for help the community started saying that the school was now a white woman's school, but they reminded the community that this is not a white woman's school – the school is the community's. Victoria said, '*We wanted to show the community that when you are doing for yourself – it will extend to the nation.*' This paragraph from a letter I wrote to them after the conversation reflects the way in which they explain how they

invite participation and support into their lives:

*You said that you have seen that when you are down, that is where you start, at the bottom. You build yourself first before you can make a change. This is why you invited H el ene into your community and asked for help. You also said that by voicing out your needs, no matter what they are, even if you think they are bad, the people who stand with you would rectify you and support you.*

The stories told by Victoria, Somikaze and Patroli a helped me to appreciate their courage and determination to make their ‘vision practical.’ In reflecting on their stories I was reminded of the powerful effect it has on a person when her story is received in ‘participatory consciousness’ (Heshusius 1995:121) (also see Chapter 2: 2.4.1.3.5).

#### **4.10 STORYTELLING**

During the conversation, which just flowed and flowed - as the one stopped talking, it moved to the next one - I was surprised that they shared so many of their very personal life stories. I had expected to hear a very edited version of their life stories. I was a stranger, yet they richly described their life journeys. Somikaze, who was struggling with flu’ at the time, said after the conversation that she felt a great deal better and energised.

I have discovered at Umnqophiso Pre-primary School, as I did at Lourier, that the stories of women cannot and should not be told in neat packages. Each time I come in with ideas of a ‘neat’ conversation, or, as H el ene put it, ‘*wees bereid dat die paadjies wat jy in jou kop loop dikwels nie so sal wees nie, maar dat die uitkomst gaan verander*’ (‘be prepared that the routes you plan in your mind will often not be the direction you take, but your outcomes will change’), I am led in a direction that brings an unexpected richness to the experience of a conversation.

I wondered if this was because we live in a country where storytelling is an important feature of South African culture groups. I have come to understand the importance of the story of childhood experiences, of growing up experiences, of entering the world of work and of entering partnerships are important especially when juxtaposed to the women’s ability to find ways to survive, often through much affliction. Women’s stories - the stories that describe their identity and self - have been undervalued. It seems to me that black and coloured women have their identity and story homogenised - as just another one of many women with similar stories and with the subtle comparison of whose struggle was worse. Fiona Ross (2003:163) writes that the ‘focus of apartheid’s spectacular dimensions undervalues, even disguises, the ordinary difficulties it caused, and the limitations it imposed on the possibilities of the everyday.’ Restorative witnessing through narrative practice is a way of making restitution and acknowledging a person’s subjectivity, voice and experiences.



Fiona Ross (2003:6) challenges the attitude that people's stories are 'intact, awaiting only the opportunity to be told, whereupon they offer release and catharsis.' When we engage in conversations where we take the time to continue speaking, using what language we have available to us, we acknowledge, we cry, we celebrate and we hear the story, from the beginning and in all its detail, we speak ourselves into being (Neuger, 2001:68).

After this conversation, many things came into the lives of these teachers. This meant that often we weren't all together at our work sessions. As the challenges came into the teachers' lives, I was challenged to decide how I positioned myself and how I would continue my engagement with them.

#### **4.11 CLARITY ABOUT COMMITMENT**

I was very keen to have more conversations with them, but felt that I needed to go carefully. I realised that they were very involved in the community and that their afternoons were full with planning and doing the administration for the school. As they have no secretary each one takes responsibility for a particular portfolio. Each of them had young children to care for at home. I felt that rather than wanting more from them, I needed to take the time to become known and trusted by them. My greatest fear was to present myself as a voyeur or vulture feeding off their life stories: 'collecting material'. I was very mindful of what Heshusius (1994:19) says about becoming involved in a community as a researcher:

When one forgets self and becomes embedded in what one wants to understand, there is an affirmative quality of kinship that no longer allows for privileged status. It renders the act of knowing an ethical act. The other you are studying is no longer someone you can bombard with questions, but someone....who can let you near.

I did only what we had agreed upon would be the most meaningful to them – and that was to arrive and bring ideas for their day-to-day teaching in the class. This was what I was there for in the first place. These times were wonderful for me – I always came away surprised at the amount of joy and energy I felt in my body, like love. I often thought with appreciation what Irigaray, quoted in Welch (1990:171) wrote about love:

[that] does not require sacrifice of "one" to "another"....[but] it emerges from plenitude....The love that emerges from plenitude enlarges the world, and the joy that is achieved in such love is not static: its movement is the product of pleasure.

It so happened that because of training courses, illness and death we were not able to get together for a few months. Somikaze had been struggling against illness, never fully recovering, and then had a number of deaths in her family that left her very low and also took her away from the school for quite a few weeks. Her mother, one of the most significant persons in her life, died and this was a considerable blow for her. This mother had been the

custodian of hope and determination for Somikaze. I telephoned her and we spoke for a long time about the qualities of her mother which can be seen in the person Somikaze chooses to be. The idea of re-remembering in narrative therapy 'suggests possibilities and provides opportunities for persons to more directly acknowledge the important and valued contributions that others have made to their lives' (White 1997:23).

Victoria's mother-in-law from her previous marriage died and she went to the Transkei for the funeral. On her way home on the Sunday night, her husband, who had been looking after the children, died in his sleep. She only heard the news when she got off the bus. She invited me to spend an afternoon with her talking about her husband and what meaning his death had on her life.

#### **4.12 CONNECTIONS IN A CAR OR EATING TOGETHER**

Victoria, Somikaze, Patrolia and I had some unexpected conversations journeying in a car or sharing a meal together. On a few occasions we had our work sessions on a Saturday and then would finish around lunchtime. After the very first Saturday workshop, I decided to take them all to lunch. While we were driving to the coffee shop I asked what churches they all belonged to, as church involvement had come up in our work session. I wondered whether they all worshipped at the same church, how involved they were in their church communities.

During the past two years I had developed a particular curiosity regarding women's beliefs about God's nature. This curiosity stemmed from my understanding that a person's spiritual journey is often interwoven with the story of his or her whole life (Lyll 1995:84). Our religious/spiritual ideas are constructed in particular historical and cultural contexts (Burr 1995:4). According to Raphael (Isherwood & McEwan 1996: 146-149) patriarchy created conditions for men to project their own image on God (:146) and design exclusively male models of God that:

sustained a political order which has deliberately alienated women from the powers of their own woman-being, silenced their witness, and excluded them from the workings of salvific economy.

(Raphael 1996:147)

Feminist theology engages in exposing and deconstructing the exclusive and oppressive man-modelled projections of God which is 'a political as well as a religious act (:147). These ideas led me to ask how they thought about God. Did they think of God as a man or a woman? Victoria said that she believed that God had to be both, because there were men and women: although she did not think God was a he or she, she spoke of God as a him because that is what she learnt to do from an early age.

At the restaurant I asked them what their association with H  l  ne had brought in their lives, apart from all the school developments. Somikaze's very touching comment was that she realised that all people, no matter what colour, found relationships difficult. She said that her ideas about the lives of white people had changed quite a bit. Victoria said that she has grown in her ways of working with people. In addition, that she says that the association with H  l  ne had brought her many experiences which she had never thought would come her way. She said that a few years ago she would not have thought of coming into a restaurant to eat and would have held back. Patroliia said that she thinks that it is important for them to start enjoying the fruits of their labour – that every now and then they should go out and treat themselves, even only with a piece of chicken - just for themselves - instead of thinking only of their children.

I gave Victoria a lift to the Strand one afternoon after our work session. I asked her what helped her, given the effects of apartheid on people's lives, to accommodate white people and even invite them into the life of the school. I explained that I was asking this question because I had the idea that there is always the risk of someone from the outside coming in and taking over and prescribing rather than working with what it was the school community and teachers needed. I asked her how she was able to risk this. I wrote a letter in response to this conversation. I feel it is necessary to include this letter as the conversation made a profound impact on me. Her ideas reflect much of what I have learnt around social construction and contextual theology – that we are co-constructed through our engagement with others. As Victoria says: '*while I am building my community I am also being built up at the same time*'.

*Dear Victoria*

*Thank you very much for allowing me to ask you about your ideas regarding white people who come into your school. I asked you what helps you to invite white people into your school especially as most white people also accepted apartheid.*

*You said that you needed to explain a bit more to me than just to say what you think about white people now. You said that from a very young age, about 11 or 12, you had discovered a way of dealing with people because you found that you could not trust people and that they did not always love you the way you hoped they would.*

*You shared that you did not have many friends as a young girl. You said that your family was so poor that the other children in the village looked down on you and so they would only be friendly with you for a little bit. It was very hard for you, but it was in these years that you decided that you would prove to people that you were not like they were thinking about you. You said that you also believed strongly that God would be helping you. You explained that this relationship with God, the trust and the believing, helped you to decide to love people, to be kind, to show love and respect even if they did not show any to you. You said that through your love you showed them that you were different from the way they spoke and thought about you. You got married, you said, at the age of 18. You were very young and you told me that your mother-in-law did not like you at the beginning and was not very kind to*

you. Over time, through your lovingness and the care you gave her in the way you did things, you proved to her that you were not how she saw you and she grew to accept and care about you. The same thing happened, you said, with your neighbours who said things about you and looked down on you. You said you just kept on greeting them and showing them respect. When it happened that trouble came into their lives they came for advice and apologised for their behaviour. They said that they knew they were wrong and that you were the one they could trust and that they knew you could give good advice.

I wondered how you got to know about God's care for you and you said that your Mother was in the church every day. You said that your Mother held on to praying very strongly and that she would go inside and pray any time of the day, even if there were people waiting or watching. You told me that your Mom, through all the struggles, when there was no money and no food, would encourage you to pray and prayed with you all the time. You said that the praying made a difference in your lives and helped you. You also said that even now you believe that God helps you get what you need, when you ask, maybe for new clothes or that you need money for something, that you believe it will happen and so you see: 'Oh, God has given me what I asked for, bit by bit.' You also said that you believe that you must do things and live as if this you asked for is happening, you keep on doing things for yourself. God, you said, sends the answers in many different ways, by sending people like Héléne and me to bring what they know or to find help.

Victoria, you explained that you have chosen to invite white people into your school to help because you say that you have seen that white people have experience of doing things that you want done; they have the way to decide to do something, to get on with it and do it well the first time. Have I understood this correctly? You decided to invite the white people in so that you could move forward. You also said that you noticed that white people have a lot of care for children, and this was something that you could use in your school. Is it that you notice the white people that care for children because you care for children yourself? You said it was that way of doing things that you wanted to learn from the people you invited into the school because you have seen that many times the people you have worked with were happy to just do something but not do it very well. You said that at the time you decided to invite the white people into you school it was because things were not going right and you wanted to find out and learn how to make things happen. This is when you decided to bring Héléne Rykaart on board. You say that from then on things moved and many people were brought into the school. When you say that things started to happen, I am wondering whether it is because you and your team chose to make the commitment to the school and your community and that you were prepared to work for it?

You said that trouble had come into your relationships at school and that the people who were involved did not want anybody to come in to help. What you noticed then, you said, is that the people working with you were concerned more about themselves and what they could get from the job. For you, you explained, it was always about the community and building on the community. Slowly, you said, slowly you have been guiding and gently teaching and loving your teachers, to think your way about getting help and support and to try and do things in the best possible way, so that your community is cared for and built up. You said that you know that while you are building your community you are also being built up at the same time. You said that all this loving that you give people to win them over takes time; you do it little by little. You agreed with me that you are teaching many more people than just the children, you teach everybody that comes your way.

I wonder if you also thought that you have opened the doors for white people to serve you in the way you want? Many white people, like me, feel sadness because they grew up in the apartheid years and did not see or understand or do enough about what was going on in the country, but as they learned about the injustices they want to do something to help build up our nation. Were you wise to see that now it is time for your community to get some of the

*opportunities that were kept from them – and that it is right that the white people bring it to you?*

*My heart was very touched by what you told me, Victoria. I can understand better what Patroliia meant when she said that you bring many things to them, because today you taught me about loving that wins people over. Do you think that you used all the suffering and sadness to work for you and make you wise and strong as a leader for your community? When I drove away I thought that you seem like the kind of person that Walter Sisulu was – someone who served with humility, sincerity and worked for the good of all the people around him. How would this country be if all the leaders of communities, teachers, the leaders and the church leaders could learn your loving ways, Victoria? How would people's relationships be if they were willing to take time to be loving and gentle and patient with other people's slowness to love and care?*

*Thank you also for making me welcome at your school. Thank you for assuring me that you will certainly tell me when you think I am bossy or disrespectful to you. Thank you, Victoria, for teaching me today.*

*Lots of love,  
Helene Schoeman*

On receiving this letter Victoria said that she really enjoyed reading it and, on reading her own thoughts and words, thought, *'Is it me?'* It was important to me to lift out the threads of her self and her community-empowering ways of thinking and the way in which, even in the face of adversity, her thinking is always about relationships. To find, in a country so racked by strife and oppression, a real, live person - not a famous Mr Mandela or Walter Sisulu or a Ghandi - whose life had been shaped by these very things, has been a gift and an inspiration to me. In the midst of the horror of retaliation and people thronging to find riches quickly, to find a person who chooses winning ways through love, has been very moving and inspiring.

#### **4.13 IN CONCLUSION: BUILDING A NATION AND HEALING THE WOUNDS**

Ending off our marathon conversation, I asked Victoria, Somikaze and Patroliia what the school means to them, what it had brought into their lives and what their vision was. The response to this question was very powerful. They were speaking the things that I had so longed for at Lourier Primary School. They were speaking me into hope.

When the building started, many people in the community wondered why the teachers were using so many bricks for a school. They could each have built a house for themselves instead. The teachers responded by saying that it was not their school: it was the community's. The people in the community speak of the teachers as the 'mothers at the crèche'.

Patroliia said that the school is a symbol that the time for doing healing together has arrived in the community. It allows them, the teachers, through their work with the community and

children, to give others a chance to speak of their struggles and pain, just like the TRC did. 'The mothers of the crèche' agreed that when they multiply goodness to the power of three then they are building a nation. Their goodness invites more goodness from others to join the power with their own brands of strength, determination and perseverance.

Somikaze explained that the school is like the aloe, the plant that one finds in the Transkei. Although the leaves are bitter, there is sweetness in the flowers. The school is the flower that grew from their lives of bitter struggle. The aloe has an abundance of little flowers on a stalk and there is a lot of sweetness to share. Celene Hunter, my editor, after reading this Chapter, commented that: 'Aloes are also well-known for their healing properties – especially for skin conditions. Could this school also be a symbol of hope for the healing and reconciliation possible in a country hitherto divided and damaged on the basis of their skin colour? I wonder!'

All three the teachers told me that they found the school a place of healing. Victoria said that she went back to school soon after her husband died because she experienced healing in the company of the school staff. A school superintendent regularly visits the school when she feels tired and despondent because the staff of the school creates an atmosphere of peace and joy. I have experienced the healing care of these teachers. I have been blessed to share in the sweetness and I am filled with hope – to persevere and have determination.

In **Chapter 5**, the final chapter of this document, I reflect on the ways in which the research has woven new meanings and action in the lives of the participants.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESTORATIVE WITNESSING: HOPE IN ACTION**

...healing for all of us, collectively and individually, lies in the recognition that although there is a way through, there is no way out.

(Welch 1990:93)

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

My hope, with transformative witnessing, was to celebrate the ways in which women had already empowered themselves. I hoped that this weaving together of ways of being, knowledges and actions that they themselves had chosen and lived would be one of many wreaths of honour co-created with them. I also hoped that their survival wisdoms would be affirmed through acknowledgement and honouring their sense of agency (Freedman & Combs 1996:97, White & Epston 1990:82). These women had, in many ways, chosen to resist oppressive and restrictive social, cultural and gendered descriptions and had been doing so all along. I believe that we managed to remember and co-create richer descriptions of this sense of agency through our conversations. Fitting with this achievement I am reminded of Lather (1991: 4):

empowerment is a process one undertakes for oneself; it is not something done “to” or “for” someone: The heart of the idea of empowerment involves people coming into a sense of their own power, a new relationship with their own contexts.

#### **5.2 LOOKING AGAIN AT THE BEGINNING**

I grew in admiration and compassion for the women I met at Lourier Primary School (Chapter 3) through the conversations I had with them. I had invited mothers from the community with the goal to start a support/witness group for women, hoping that over time more women would join. I wanted women in this community to find value in witnessing each other’s stories so that their lives could be celebrated and their sense of agency supported (Freedman & Combs 1996:97, White & Epston 1990:82). I also hoped that in listening to each other’s stories they would be able to circulate the knowledge and wisdom from their lived experience (Freedman & Combs 1996:286).

This compassion was fuelled further when the women, who were also the teachers at the school, and their ‘mentor’ invited me to Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School. We used the practice of restorative witnessing (Chapter 4) to acknowledge what they had achieved as persons-in-commune-ity.

Although both communities can be described, in the too easily used term, as ‘previously disadvantaged’ but there is little ‘previous’ in the lived experience of most of the women I have met. Their context is ‘still disadvantaged’. Despite the promising

legislation for gender equality and opportunity in the constitution of the 'new' South Africa, these have only made a slight difference to these women's lives.

I engaged with research as a narrative pastoral therapist. Participatory Action Research, interpreted through contextual and feminist theology perspectives, offered a rich source of ideas that supported a relationship-building way of co-researching. Where I had envisaged a spectacular anarchy - a huge *group* of women, with pots and pans encouraging resistance to dominating discourses and subjugation - a quiet, tiny relational revolution started happening instead, mostly in conversations with *individual persons*. Where I imagined high drama and wonderful celebration, mostly gentle, quiet conversations and meetings were appropriate for these women. I joined Michael White (1998:v) as he positions himself as 'always eager to 'co-research' the small miracles of everyday resistance.' We were co-researching the ways, however tentative, in which the women and I resisted and challenged the impositions patriarchy brings to women's lives. Wisdoms and knowledges were spoken simply and often with laughter. The following became true for the process we experienced, as this research can

...claim that feminist research on individual lives is a type of scholarship that begins with an insight about women's condition that requires further elaboration so as to solve the puzzle of one's own life ... it may begin with a hitherto ignored woman or trivialized aspects of women's competence that needs careful examination and then distribution.

(Reinharz 1992:127)

I therefore re-visited ideas of political consciousness-raising, the role of groups and the value of individual stories as strengthening these marginalized but strong women.

### **5.3 RE-VIEWING GROUPS**

Through this research and co-research with the women I re-imagined the idea of 'group'. At the beginning of the research, I understood 'group' to mean a regular gathering of people who support, encourage and take action together. These qualities were already present in the group of teachers I joined at Umnqophiso. But at Lourier Primary School, we formed a group who were effectively strangers to each other. The group I was trying to 'arrange' did not evolve over the long term, but I found myself invited to participate in groups of a different nature. Through our conversations, in the group and individually, we recognised and acknowledged the women's support groups or communities of concern (for instance, grandparents, parents, teachers, mothers, children, friends, church). It was with these groups that I joined.

Denise Ackermann (1998:87) speaks of the value of small groups to effect change and to



deal with the present pain of people, rather than waiting for the institutional church to transform itself to embrace contextual healing practices. She says that she believes that in

the present climate of truth-telling, small groups have much to offer people who are willing to share their stories. A commitment to hear 'the other' and to respect the validity of her or his story in a common search for healing, is the ground rule for such groups.

(Ackermann 1998:87)

I related to this idea of small groups that offer solidarity, healing and validity to the stories of those attending. This idea was reinforced by Reinharz's (1992:188) report that a 1982 Women's Task Force (USA) concluded in their report that 'women experienced support groups as more helpful than psychotherapy.' She also describes 'speak-outs' and 'tribunals' where large groups of women join and give public testimony about particular issues. These gatherings of women offered the opportunity for many women to hear the experience of persons in similar contexts and in so doing, they could 'deepen self-understandings and be moved to action' or prevention (Reinharz 1992:188). Graham (1998:139) writes that in England many women meet in small groups, in their sitting rooms and kitchens, creating 'kitchen table theology'. They are not only consumers of feminist theologies, but are also 'producers and originators of important and vital work ... they are spaces in which diverse experiences and ways of knowing may be articulated.'

In the conversations at Umnqophiso, it became clear that the women (the teachers and Hélène Rykaart) had built up a very supportive relationship, which extended into all areas of their lives, and was not just limited to the school context. Although the same could not be said of the women at Lourier Primary School, each of them enjoyed our meetings as none of them had previously been invited to meetings where people focussed attentively on their lives or invited them to share their ideas about their understanding of their lives. Each of the women appreciated the acknowledgement of their resilience and care that our conversations generated.

The idea that small groups of people, meeting outside of religious denomination, offer validation for each other's stories but also offer restorative healing permeated the practices we developed in this research project. Ackermann (1998:95) suggests that '[a]s these stories intersect, they change and we too are changed.' This idea that we are changed through witnessing stories - that stories change once they are witnessed, particularly when persons of a community witness them - is supported by the idea in narrative therapy:

we need critical reflection and, for critical reflection we need history. History is doubly important, because it is largely through history that unique outcomes or exceptions render alternative stories.... If the stories we have about lives are

negotiated and distributed within communities of persons, then it makes sense to engage communities of persons in the renegotiation of identity.

(White 1995:28)

The idea of the support and strengthening value of support groups is not new. A variety of support groups exist in South Africa (such as Alcoholics Anonymous, support groups for drug rehabilitation, schizophrenia, gambling, divorcees) on a local and national level (De Jongh van Arkel 2000:27). Support groups offer persons and their communities of concern support and care (sometimes mutual care) with a common 'problem'. The initiative of restorative witnessing groups, as mutual care, offers women a means of 'hearing themselves into speech' (Neuger 2001:68), acknowledgment of their pain, affirming their unheard stories of resilience and determination, sharing survival knowledge and encouragement to continue in the care of children.

Many of the ideas for restorative witnessing grew from an effort to weave together meaningful ideas I found in narrative therapy, contextual and feminist theology, social constructionist perspectives, and participatory action research. In the next section I reflect on the ways in which research was guided by participatory action research.

#### **5.4 REFLECTING ON THE WORDS: 'PARTICIPATORY', 'ACTION' AND 'RESEARCH'**

We use the word "validation" to bring value to our actions, in order to show our appreciation of our active efforts. We bring a value to everything.

(Ornelas 1997:150)

Reflecting on participatory action research, I realized that the words, participatory, action and research are of themselves a means to guide reflection on the research I have been engaged with. In the first Chapter (1.7.1 Research Paradigm) I highlighted, as important to this study, some premises of qualitative action research. Participatory action research endeavours to support practice and research so that it is: emancipatory, a way of improving practice, contextual, including the researcher as researched, a reflexive praxis and informative to participants.

In the following paragraphs I research the research by reflecting on the words participatory, action and research. Reflecting on research is a way to bring value and validate what the participants and I had co-constructed in our interactions.

##### **5.4.1 How 'participatory' has the research been?**

In grappling with the word 'participatory' I discovered that it implied relationship, flexibility, commitment, availability, solidarity, reciprocity and contextuality. It was important for me to clarify where I positioned myself as a researcher participant. I found the words of Paulo

Freire (1989:56) very motivating, but also cautioning:

I do claim a role in the struggle alongside the working classes precisely because I am convinced that my role as an intellectual gains shape and strength and meaning only to the extent that I fulfil that role *with* the working classes and not *for* them, nor (even worse) *upon* them.

Pamela Couture (2003) suggests that pastoral/practical theology is mostly about 'friendship' – about being with people in all contexts, keeping in touch and offering support. When doing pastoral care as relationship we are supported to work *with* people.

Relationships - like trust - take time to build. I experienced the value of 'taking' time for relationship building when I continued to connect with the women, long after the group ceased to exist. This led to more intimate connections between us. The word 'participatory' implies commitment and a willingness to take responsibility for the commitment to engage in people's lives.

This understanding of participation kept me committed to Lourier Primary School even when I would rather have terminated my involvement there when I had become overwhelmed by the poverty, violence and the seemingly endless struggles the children and people in the community lived with. The women also chose to participate when they committed to come to the first meeting to see if such gatherings would suit their needs. The women, at both school communities, had sent or made their apologies when they could not keep an appointment or attend the group meetings.

Participation, as I understood it, also implied availability. I offered the women assistance and support. How the women made use of the availability, as in friendships, was not something I could prescribe. I accepted that they knew that I was available to them when they needed me. This understanding was one of the most important ones for me, as it helped me, over time, not to feel solely responsible for the 'research' and obligated to keep trying to 'make it work'. I realised that the women at Lourier Primary School had made themselves available to meet as a group as a gesture of assistance and support to me and had committed themselves in terms of what they were able to give at that time.

Flexibility as part of participatory involvement or relationship implied that I needed to accept that the women were free to withdraw their participation from certain activities or to make themselves available as they saw fit. Flexibility also meant that when we realised that certain arrangements did not work, we could find others that that were more suitable. For instance, when we moved the times of working together at Umnqophiso. Flexibility also meant that we met at times that fitted around the women's daily commitments. Flexibility as an aspect of

'doing' participation helped me to use a telephone conversation, a chance meeting in the passage or on the road or a drive in the car as a way of 're-grouping' my ideas about a 'research group'. Davies (1991:52) says that '[a]gency is spoken into existence at any one time' and so, many spontaneous meetings could offer an opportunity for care and support.

I understood the word 'participatory' to imply solidarity, 'joining hands together'. In many psychotherapy approaches and pastoral care and counselling models, the therapist, counsellor or pastor takes a position outside the context (objective) of the client and 'their' problem and offers guidelines and insights from that position. Within such a context the therapists also edit and separate themselves and their 'private' world from the sessions, assuming the 'role' of therapist. Narrative pastoral therapy supports a different perspective in that the client and the therapist take up position together against 'the problem'. Narrative pastoral therapy offers the therapist a way of being participant in the context of people's lives, co-authoring with them, without taking over the insights and understanding of what is brought to a conversation (White 1995:19). Sevenhuijsen (1998:147) observes that caring solidarity 'gives a political meaning to care and to mutual commitment' because care is 'done with each other' in the understanding that we all need care. Care without solidarity can lead to a patronising, charitable care that invites the privileged to 'do care for' rather than 'doing care with' people.

Relationships are reciprocal. Davies (1991:49) says that we are continuously discursively constructed. Thus I too was available to be 'researched.' This meant that I was 'read' and 'studied' by everybody in the communities that had dealings with me. I offered myself to be researched by inviting people to ask questions about me, asking them to help me understand social actions or attitudes that were unfamiliar to me, by asking children and adults to hold me accountable, to remind me of what I had said, to verify whether I was respectful. I held myself accountable to them for my understanding. Also, by sharing my concerns or experiences from my daily living and my family life, I became 'a person' to their persons (Knudson-Martin 1997:431). In turn, the women demonstrated their care. For instance, when Wendy telephoned to find out if I needed help and when Salomé baked me some crumpets.

Participation also meant that I was there to learn from the participants and the community about the participants' context and the community. This learning constructed a richer understanding about a person or persons' survival, care, wisdoms and knowledges. It was equally important that the participants experienced that they were contributing to these meetings in terms of practical information, acknowledgement of their life and survival wisdom,

new insight in their own context and encouragement instead of being 'used' for the purpose of the research. I found support for this experience in the description Davies and Harré (1991:48) uses for the interaction between people:

We are thus agent (producer/director) as well as author and player and the other participants coauthor and coproduce the drama. But we are also the multiple audiences...

The women at Lourier Primary School gave me the opportunity to 'start' a group because we had already established our relationships through the conversations we had before. They created a space for my particular interests and for me. As the 'other' to the lives of these women and to the community of Steenberg, I had been affirmed and given an opportunity to 'break' into 'the self-gathering circle of the same' (Caputo 1997:116).

Participation meant that I, as researcher, followed the participants' lead and participated on their terms, at their pace and in their context. This meant visiting their homes and supporting them with what they needed; taking Wendy to the doctor when her child was ill; joining Salomé at a presentation for a nursing qualification and telephoning around to find donations of equipment. I offered knowledge, skills, insights and support tentatively, not as final 'truths', 'solutions' or 'expert' answers, but as possibilities from which they could choose when these suited.

As the focus of the research was to revisit the stories of the women and to afford them an opportunity to tell their stories, this meant that individuals and colleagues witnessed their stories. Some of these stories were witnessed for the first time. As participant in the women's stories, my task was to collect their stories as the 'remembrancer' or scribe. The recordings of the 'tellings' provided the women with one kind of long-term, concrete witness to their life achievement; it was a way of holding on to their stories for them and with them. Arratia and de la Maza (1997:112) affirm the value and enrichment people's stories bring to our understanding and knowing:

Whether oral or written, people's stories generally arouse a greater sense of texture, meaning and movement. Good use of narrative, capturing people's realities and vibrations, is a meaningful way of knowing: it gives vitality to our human experiences.

Considering the ideas and the position I preferred to take as research-participant, led to the question: had the women who participated in the research felt that our participation had helped them 'not to supply reasons or offer explanations, but to awaken compassion in each toward the other and toward the self' (Parry and Doan 1994:29)? It also led one to wonder whether the women also experienced our engagements and 'relationship' as authentic and

real. I found affirmation for the way in which I had participated in their lives when the women mentioned that they regarded me as a friend and requested not to be forgotten. However, I was still left with the question whether this research brought any substantial action.

#### **5.4.2 What 'action' did it bring about?**

...in our action is our knowing.... (Lather 1991:XV)

The purpose of our 'action together' had been to construct and re-construct and co-construct stories of celebration and honour for the women in both communities. We expressed our action together in a variety of ways. Some made an immediate difference - such as the labels we wrote for the classrooms at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary school; and some were as simple as sharing a hug.

The women at Lourier Primary School were the first to initiate action because of their concern for their children. It was their caring action that brought them into my life and allowed me an opportunity to co-'store' and witness their stories. After each meeting the women went away and engaged in caring actions for the children they were caring for. Often, they returned to a next meeting to tell me, or the group, what they had chosen to do. We could then be witness to their actions.

The women at Lourier Primary School took action to attend the meetings at my request. I regarded their choice to attend as a specific action of care for me - almost as a way of 'returning the favour' for my support with their children. The respectful and interested way in which they focussed on each other's stories was an act of care for each other. They took action by sharing their stories with each other, by showing a willingness to risk and contribute to the distribution of acknowledgement and affirmation of each other and themselves.

Each of the women responded positively to the letter I wrote them. They mentioned that they were touched and encouraged when they read their story, written up in such detail. Mrs Summers came back more than once because the letter reminded her of parts of her story she had not told. Mostly, the women expressed surprise at the way in which the letter offered them many new ways to see and appreciate themselves through their own words or ideas. Writing documents, capturing the stories of women who live seemingly ordinary lives in extraordinary ways is important, as Reinhartz (1992:131), points out: 'Oral history is useful for getting information about *people* less likely to engage in creating written records.... Relatively powerless groups are therefore especially good candidates for oral history research.' By capturing these stories, women's lives are made visible and their voices are made audible

(Reinharz 1992:48).

Galiema became the school's librarian, and was recently elected as the chairperson of the governing body of the school. Wendy started appreciating the ways in which she resisted abusive and oppressive acts from others and learnt to name the actions that others engaged in that were discrediting and disrespectful of her. Each woman grew to appreciate her ability to continue caring for others and her family under challenging circumstances; they realised that they brought a reliable stability to their families.

At Umnqophiso Pre-Primary school, the teachers took action by inviting me, through H  l  ne Rykaart, into their school to support their teaching practice. They invited me to commit time to support their preferred development as teachers.

The teachers took action with me by making time to have a marathon conversation with me. This time they spent in talking about the development of their school also helped them to appreciate their achievement and the caring connections they had built up amongst themselves. We took action to learn together when we prepared teaching resources, investigated uses for materials donated to the school and playing games. Their primary action was focussed on caring for the children on a daily basis and reaching out to the untrained and unemployed mothers of the children. After H  l  ne Rykaart had joined them, they were able to start a woman's group that joined the Women For Peace movement. They took action by 'sharing' their school with the community, the children and me.

H  l  ne Rykaart took action by teaching me collaborative ways of being and doing. Graham (1998:141) states that feminist theologians value care - pastoral care - as 'building relationships of mutuality and empowerment, being at the cutting edge of social change and solidarity with the marginalized.' H  l  ne Rykaart may not be a 'trained' theologian but she certainly was 'doing' pastoral care (Kotz   & Kotz   2001:6) in contextual ways. In a conversation she mentioned that she valued opportunities for reflecting on the ways in which the women at Umnqophiso had touched her life and invited her to care with them, to support their commitment, resilience and determination and to reach out to the local community in their 'nation building' project.

Taking action - performative transformative witnessing - was very important to me because this was the measure by which I saw how 'research' had changed me. It afforded me the opportunity to engage as a restorative witness, 'doing' restitution. I learnt to question the idea that a few neat hours in a place would be sufficient 'volunteer' work. Travelling on the highways and byways between Lwandle, Kenilworth and Steenberg taught me about extra

miles. In reflecting about the action I took, I was gratified to recognise that some actions fitted with the ideas I had about restorative witnessing:

#### **5.4.2.1 Availability**

Giving time and being available were actions I took to 'do' theology and care 'with' the women (Sevenhuijsen 1998:19). This meant that whenever I was called on to listen or to attend, I would drop what I was doing and listen or commit myself to immediate action if that was what was needed. I saw that this act of 'being there' as appropriate pastoral care. This care was translated in the presence of my physical body as 'embodiment' of care and hope (Davies 1991:50).

#### **5.4.2.2 Privileging participants' lives and stories**

I was mindful as a narrative pastoral therapist to privilege the lived experience, understandings and knowledges of persons as the basis from which to engage. This means that I engaged from a 'not knowing' position (Anderson 1995:35). I guarded against understanding too quickly and tried never to assume that what I had said was my right to say.

#### **5.4.2.3 Taking women's stories seriously**

I listened with attention. Such listening was not 'neutral concentration' but a political act to make visible the body that belonged to the words and voice (Bons-Storm 1996:81, Davies 1991:50). Listening meant that I could hear and witness stories that no one had asked to hear before. It was as if these women had taken out very fragile porcelain that had been locked away for me to hold. The honour and responsibility of this was enormous. I found the words of Couture (1998:38) a forceful reminder for respectful practice:

God is present and actively involved with every person we meet. Therefore, we must treat others with gentleness and respect, whether the other is a vulnerable child, a family on public assistance, a tyrant with political power, or a grandiose, dictatorial 'wannabe' whose only power is to irritate. When we begin to recognize God working with us, we begin to know ourselves.

#### **5.4.2.4 Learning from the participants**

I was learning: being present with any one of these women was my teaching. What I was learning from all of these women and their communities made me more conscious and more political in what I spoke in other communities that were privileged. I could take the wisdom, the survival skills from one context to another. Reinharz (1992:179) emphasises that '[f]eminist researchers are responsible to plan for the distribution of information in optimally helpful ways.'



#### **5.4.2.5 Doing what was needed**

Nothing happens in isolation. At Lourier Primary School the children drew me to stand with them against the effects of trouble and abuse. But I also connected with women, mothers and caregivers of children at the school, as well. I started connecting with women in conversations in a classroom, but I ended up accompanying women to various places. For instance, to a hospital so that a woman could find out about herself for herself. I mentioned in Chapter One that co-supporting self-care with the participants might mean finding a piece of bread. If supporting self-care meant that I attended a meeting with a person, or took another to a mental hospital to ask the first time in their life about concerns they wanted answers to, or driving to a home in order to take a woman for a drive so as to give them a break from a distressing situation, or to meet them at odd hours because it suited them, that was what I would do. Doing what was needed did not keep office hours, and at times, they became as important as my own family.

#### **5.4.2.6 Challenging injustice and oppressive ideas**

I took action against the discourses that kept women trapped in ideas that they were worth nothing by reminding them of the actions which they had taken against these discourses already. I took a stand against these discourses but

[n]ot ... in the sense of the one who claims and enforces knowledges, dictating to others what is 'really' the case, but as a speaker who mobilises existing discourses in new ways, inverting, inventing and breaking old patterns.

(Davies 1991:51)

#### **5.4.2.7 Celebrating**

Recognizing and celebrating little moments ('unique outcomes' White & Epston 1990:16) was a very important part of our relationships. These little moments become very meaningful because they are meaningful to the person concerned. For instance, when a woman of thirty, who had always believed that she would never be 'allowed' to be independent, realised with joy that she has '*stepped out as an adult and signed her own name.*'

#### **5.4.2.8 Avoiding assumptions**

Most of the women at Lourier Primary School were the primary care givers in their families. Most of the women had no doubts regarding their abilities to care for their families and to look after their children. Their constraints were mostly financial. Most of the women did not experience their lives as mediated by men. Through their own ability they had been able to plan and budget and care. Reinharz (1992:119) offers a powerful reminder to challenge patronising and paternalistic ideas when she says: 'One has to be very clear about who one thinks is subordinated ... Women who seemingly are subordinated in the researcher's eyes

are not necessarily subordinated in their own.'

All the participants, including myself, participated in a variety of ways and took action to achieve learning, self-empowerment or self-care. It brings one to the question of what research had brought the researcher/participant and the participants? The question could be framed as: Who benefited from the research?

### **5.4.3 What 'research' brought the participants as co-researchers?**

...we can only hope that our research will clarify our vision and improve our decisions.  
(Reinharz 1992:195)

In the discussion of 'participation' and 'action', I tried to describe the action, knowledge, honour, acknowledgment that we, the participants and I, had generated with each other. In effect, these were the 'outcomes' of our co-researching. I use this section as a broader reflection on research. I reflect on the 'way of being' that research invited us to connect with. I shall look specifically at the ways in which the research has deepened my understanding of research and myself, as researcher (See Chapter 1, 1.8.3 Ethical Considerations).

#### **5.4.3.1 Research as political action**

'the personal is the political' (Jakobsen 1994:151)

Reinharz (1992:195) comments that 'feminist criticism is a political act, whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read.' Although Reinharz refers to critical feminist publications or 'texts' when she speaks of 'what is read', I would like to open 'what' is read and 'who' is reading to include 'text' produced by persons in relationship: namely, conversations and actions. Research has brought me an opportunity to critically 'read' and interact with many texts. Although these 'texts' have included 'academic' and 'conscientising' literature, I also have to acknowledge the many conversations with participants in the research, co-students, lecturers and friends who have shared knowledge, experience and co-produced the 'text' of this research report.

This 'text' or knowledge produced amongst us, the participants and myself, has 'changed my consciousness' and challenged me to collaborate with others 'to change the world'. With this challenge to change the world, a 'moment of insertion' (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:17) was created: the suffering and oppression in persons or communities' lives had directly confronted me or included me as witness or participant in some way. Those moments of insertion 'can often have deep communal and social significance (that is, political

significance)' (:17).

Research as I understood it, was a political act which brought me to participate in solidarity and to care and counsel as narrative pastoral therapist. Research was political as it brought opportunities for each participant to re-author and remember their lives in ways that challenged discourses of 'women's worth', brought them acknowledgment and affirmation the 'knowledge' they have about the value of their lives and validated the actions they took for self-empowerment and caring-with-others. The participants and I, became co-researchers of their lives and stories (Chapters 3 and 4). We all grew 'larger selves' (Welch 1990:163) through our 'work' with people not familiar to us and by 'the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations' through which we could become our imaginations (Brueggemann 1993:20).

#### **5.4.3.2 Research as a conversation**

Steier (1991:6) quotes Becker who uses the idea of learning a 'new' language as a way of describing how we learn to engage in discursive production of our various selves: 'such an orientation to languaging that the self to whom our reflexivity refers is most clearly a social "self" and we become "that" self ... through participation with others, and allows research to become understood as a conversation.' I found this a particularly useful way to understand research as a narrative pastoral therapist. So much of the practice of narrative therapy focuses on the meanings people attach to their lives through language. Freedman and Combs (1996:287) made the observation that narrative therapy is co-research. When we engage with people, listening and asking questions and we trace with them the effects of certain practices on their lives, we are doing co-research:

In a very real sense, all narrative therapy is co-research. When we listen carefully to people's stories we are doing research. When we ask meaning questions and preference questions we are asking people to join us in research. When we reflect – with or without a team – on unique outcomes, on the effects of various practices, on preferred directions in life, or on any other aspect of therapy, we are doing co-research.

These conversations were not 'merely a social goal in response to shifting demographics' but were rather intended to confront debilitating discourses. Hess (1998:66) contends that '[j]ustice in conversation...[i]s an ethical and epistemological commitment to fight oppression and mobilize differentness on the way to knowing.'

### 5.4.3.3 Research as 'doing ethics'

As researchers, we construct a world that our reciprocators (and we) co-inhabit, and both that we do it and how we do it may indeed have consequences for them and for us. By not hearing the variety of their categories that do not fit with ours, their worlds may be lost.

(Steier 1991:181)

We cannot speak of research and not speak of knowledge/power (Foucault 1980: 131) or the ethics of research. All interaction or intervention has consequences: our ethical commitment is to discover who will benefit from the research. We ask questions such as: Who speaks for what and to whom? Who listens? Who is comfortable and confident and who is not? (Lather 1991:144). Research, as co-researching, was a way of keeping my engagement as researcher ethical and accountable to participants. I chose to position myself as participant-researcher. Co-researching offered a way to challenge actions on my part that could be marginalizing and silencing of the knowledges of the participants and leave them feeling disempowered. I avoided establishing myself as 'the recorder of a "true account" of another life', which implied a knowledge claim from an expert position (Söderqvist 1991:154).

The ethical posture I preferred was to do care/hope *with* people. This kept me positioned as apprentice: I could never assume to know what care/hope means for any person, unless they told me or described the actions they wanted me to engage in. Throughout the research I was pre-occupied with power relations and concerned about the ways in which I was, unwittingly, patronizing or paternalistic. I was aware that '[u]nbridled power thrives on lack of awareness and the unwillingness to accept historical responsibility' (Ackermann 1998:90).

When I checked the effect of my words or actions or apologized for possible disrespectful practice, I wondered whether this created a further sense of disempowerment for the participants. Was I putting people on the spot? I wondered how my 'outsider-ness' and my race pressurized the community to 'say nice things' to me. As I had become conscientised to the nature of oppression wrought on coloured and black people and the privilege I had enjoyed in this country, I was very attuned to what Eiesland (1998:109) suggests regarding the nature of oppression:

The common character of oppression experienced by a social group is the 'inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capabilities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings'. The 'faces' that oppression presents include: marginalisation, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

I often felt disheartened when a person asked to speak to me so that I could tell them what to do. This left me wondering what I had done to create the impression that I was the one to 'tell them'. Over time, I realised, after checking this understanding, that what was implied by 'the

telling' was rather the questions that I asked or sometimes a careful talking through possible scenarios.

#### **5.4.3.4 Research in reflexivity**

Research demands reflexivity, or as Steier (1991:6) comments:

Perhaps we need to think of research as constituted by processes of social reflexivity, and then, of self-reflexivity as social process. But we must remind ourselves that we tell our stories through others....

Social reflexivity demands that I engage with the ways I was 'newly' constituted through restorative witnessing. This reflection hinges on my participation in other's person's lives and stories and on how these had shaped me as researcher and informed the ways I could act for social justice. Reflexivity also demanded that I shared these understandings (for instance, via the letters or in a conversation) with the participants and learnt about the ways in which they benefited from the research and how they experienced my participation as researcher in their lives.

I discovered the value of keeping a journal for daily reflection, particularly to engage more reflexively with research. I also discovered the value of carrying a booklet and a pencil wherever I went because conversations and ideas were not confined to set times or places. I realised the value of making - 'doing' - time to have a conversation with myself in writing as a way of being accountable to the participants. These times gave me the opportunity to investigate for disempowering discourses and to remind myself of those successes which the research had brought already. Taking the impressions, ideas and insights that were rendered in these conversations with myself back to participants enabled many rich conversations to develop.

It is also important to reflect on what a researcher could have done differently 'to clarify vision and improve our decisions' (Reinharz 1992:195). I decided that these ideas, if employed, could have enriched research:

- To issue another invitation to invite more women to the group at Lourier Primary School.
- To be bold, but respectful. Sometimes I was so tentative that the women did not understand what it was I was asking of them. This created confusion.
- To plan celebrations, by inviting families together so that they could hear the women's stories.
- To journal in conversation with the 'theoretical' reading. In this way I could respond to the ideas from the texts and ideas they bring, rather than only reflecting on the

process or experience of the day. It would have been a way of inviting the 'academic' world into the context where pastoral care and counselling happened.

- To take care not to become too thinly spread. While taking on different kinds of participation is meaningful, it does take up much time in preparation. Couture's view of small, regular commitments helped me here:

Fundamental to the work of mercy, especially with children, is this: Do not rush to save the world. Begin small. Consider commitments carefully. Make only the commitments you can keep. Do not underestimate the accumulating value of small, regular commitments. Reflect on your experience; pray about it; learn from it; walk with God in it.

(Couture 2000:61)

- To keep in mind that there seems to be a different kind of attitude to commitment when one is *asked* to offer support than to when one *offers* support.
- To choose a different time of the day to meet. Since many women work, one could enquire which times would be better suited to the women.
- To have fun – playing. Rather than focusing exclusively on trouble and problems, maybe to have some sessions where women could just come and play.
- To network – to connect with the social workers in the area, other community outreach programmes, and with the various religious communities and learn to from them.

## 5.5 A CONVERSATION WITH OTHER RESEARCHERS

### 5.5.1 Beyond the possible

In South Africa women's lives are enmeshed by discourses of patriarchy. In particular black women in South Africa are 'triple oppressed in terms of sex, race and class and is the poorest, most marginalized person in our society' (Cochrane, De Gruchy and Petersen 1991:62). An author of the TRC report on women's hearings reported that a measure of the effects of apartheid is the many women who are disadvantaged and living in poverty, especially black women and particularly those living in rural areas (Ross 2003:17).

Women - both coloured and black - are still positioned as the main caregivers for the family. It seems that it is acceptable and even expected of men to neglect or abandon their children, whereas when women leave their children, they are regarded and treated as the lowest form of life. In many cases, due largely to absent men or uninvolved men, women are the organizers, workers, and coordinators who keep families together and systems going. Yet women, especially black women, are silenced by ideas of inferiority and internalised patriarchal views, and acquiesce to men's opinions. When life-changing or domestic decisions are taken, women usually have to implement them (Hemson 2002:11-14). This idea is supported by Reinharz (1992:168): '[t]raditionally, the presence of women was limited

to their being mentioned as 'there'. Women's 'being', when noted at all, was defined in terms of men's needs'. In addition, in South Africa women live in a society where violence against women has escalated and where HIV/Aids has become a woman's disease.

Religious practices further entrench the women's 'displacement' as equals. Many Christians are the 'product of a 'moralizing' ministry and have in turn internalised this – a kind of 'colonization of the mind' (Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:48). This colonization of the mind extends to Muslim religious practices and as well as other traditional religious and cultural practices. Patriarchy and sexism have marginalized women, physically, mentally and spiritually - to a such an extent that Reinhartz (1992:52) quoting George Simmel suggests: 'Almost all discussions of women deal only with what they are in relation to men in terms of real, ideal or value criteria. Nobody asks what they are for themselves.'

South Africa is in a liminal space. It needs restorative support to break with an abusive relationship, apartheid, which keeps inviting oppressors and oppressed to continue perpetrating oppressive acts and subjugating bodies through fear and anger. Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen (1991:6) remind us that to engage as a pastoral caregiver or as a narrative pastoral therapist we need to face up to the challenge, namely that:

Those who seek genuine reconstruction will have to live with the historical effects of apartheid, including the widespread destruction of respect for law, the baleful inheritance of malnutrition and of bad (or absent) schooling, the collapse in the norms and values of family life occasioned by migratory labour and similar policies, the legacy of suspicion and inculcated division among people, the long-standing inefficient use of human resources, the destruction of land assets by the forced over-crowding of Bantustans and the over-capitalization and ecologically destructive exploitation of white run farm land, and so on.

It is imperative that we do consider our commitments carefully and not add to the history of unreliability and lack of contextual care that has marginalized and isolated so many black brothers and sisters from those 'privileged' spiritual communities who could have held them fast, but chose not to. I believe that there is much value in what Couture (2000:69) says about mercy: 'Mercy is incomplete until it has found its home in justice'. Mercy, as a function of a theology of making, happens between people for the people by the people. For the achievement of mercy through justice, we need many people with a great deal of courage, determination and tenacity. We must recognise that the person with whom we do pastoral care:

is not an isolated individual being nor a mere soul separated from his or her body, but a being-in-community, a social being who, if separated from social or communal existence, would cease to be human.

(Cochrane, De Gruchy & Petersen 1991:2)

We need to find ways to carry on walking, of looking ahead with hope, but not forgetting what it is we are walking away from. For many black and coloured persons, after apartheid, there is no 'return to the ordinary' as that implies 'the *possible* ordinary or the *permissible* ordinary' (Ross 2003:141) which was available under apartheid. They have to construct and re-construct a new version of 'ordinary life', a 'desired or preferred' ordinary life (Ross 2003:141). For the privileged, a challenge exists to move beyond the boundaries of the possible, to 'do' the impossible by creatively engaging and re-constructing and co-constructing restorative hospitality, justice and commune-ity. This re-construction calls for solidarity, determination, support, compassion, healing and hope, much hope.

Hélène Rykaart said that, when it came to thinking of ways of finding a 'new' South Africa, she wondered why the ideas of development seemed to be an 'either/or' situation and not rather a both/and one. We need to find these both/and ways through taking time to talk and to find solutions together. This reminded me of how Reinharz (1992:122) interpreted the 'development' aims of well-meaning countries in other countries:

...development is a strange word with connotations of child-rearing. As the countries 'develop', will they grow up and become like their putative parents, the developed countries? The metaphors of growth, benevolence, nurturing and natural change that underlie this term seem inappropriate given the actual relations among countries.

If 'actual relations' continue in paternalistic, patronising and prescriptive ways and 'at a distance' and if the people the 'development' is intended for are not invited to state their needs and to co-structure and design their development, they are further disempowered. Ornelas in (Debbink & Ornelas 1997:27) says that development can benefit communities when 'it is the creation of the people' using 'their thinking, their decision-making powers, their resources, and their knowledge. Development must be the transformation of reality in harmony with the population's dreams.'

### **5.5.2 Engaging hope**

Denise Ackermann (1996:145) states that 'doing' hope is an act of resistance to 'the void of hopelessness ... Hope is our human response to evil, adversity, and destruction, and it claims accountability from the One who holds out promises of justice, peace, and wholeness' (:144). This resistance in hope is manifested by:

- living it – while we acknowledge the violence, poverty, anger and despair we commit ourselves to engaging with life 'in such a way that one's deeds express that which one hopes for' (Ackermann 1996:144).
- accepting that it is risky (Welch 1990:68) - choosing for life is to choose the risk of many



disappointments, of having to 'wrestle with all that seeks to deprive us of hope and thus disempower us.' It means that we keep on creatively imagining the impossible, whilst we live and 'do hope' in a lived reality of struggle.

- knowing that it is nurtured in community – by 'inviting each other into a counterstory about God, world, neighbour and self' (Brueggemann 1993:24), by commitment to 'intimacy and close relationships' (Sevenhuijsen 1998:27), 'sharing responsibility and resilience' (Couture 2000:16).
- learning to wait – not with resignation, but with patience and endurance. 'Expectant waiting is nurtured in community, and from it a spirituality of life can emerge' (Ackerman (1996:144).

When I became involved in the two communities - both schools - my focus was on the kinds of action I could cooperate in that would benefit children. My net widened to include the women involved in these communities as they all had heartbreakingly wonderful stories to tell.

- I wondered what the effect of honouring their stories would be on their ideas of their personhood.
- I wondered what kind of opportunities we could find to deconstruct the effects of dominant discourses together and take action.
- I wondered if opportunities for celebration, through restorative witnessing and narrative conversations, of women's wisdom, and survival knowledges in a group could be a way of 'circulating knowledge' and 'hope'.

It is this 'hope' that I kept meeting in the stories told about their lives by Wendy, Mrs Summers, Galiema, Shirley, Salomé, Victoria, Somikaze, Patroli and Hélène Rykaart. It is this 'hope' that I as narrative pastoral therapist have to keep alive and co-create with every person I meet. It is this 'hope' that each one has mentioned in various conversations that led them to care and 'commune-ing'.

### **5.5.3 Future hope?**

In the present South African context, where many people live with stories of struggle and survival - most which is unacknowledged even to themselves as phenomenal feats - it seems that gatherings of people telling and sharing their wisdom and experience could be one way of creating community and healing.

Although the research I participated in was a tentative step towards creating restorative witnessing gatherings, it is, nevertheless, a step in the direction I hoped for, as a 'theology of

making' (Deist 1994:258). I got the ideas for community gatherings from work done in Australia, with Aborigine and other groups. In some ways, these gatherings were a way of doing restorative witnessing for managing trouble as well as ways of witnessing the stories of the Stolen Generation (White 2003). By gathering together and learning from their experiences, we can start conversations in ways that may open doors to many struggling women, enabling them to find support for taking small steps towards independence and safety and where they can start taking a stand against abusive practices.

Instead of just reproducing the 'western' model of what women and mothers should be in terms of success or defining themselves in terms of men, I imagine that over time, 'making theology' through restorative witnessing, women - at the very least a few more women from Lourier Primary School - will choose the ways in which they want to be described as South African citizens and as women. I imagine that women will decide what care looks like for them and define the action they want to engage in to achieve restitution and restoration for their and for their children's lives.

I imagine that men - who become visible now only through their acts of abuse – could also be invited into relational and community responsibility through restorative gatherings. These could create forums for men to experience restorative witnessing and, collectively, to start taking charge of the contexts they live in and to challenge their overwhelming oppression by sexism and patriarchy.

The women at Lourier Primary School suggested these ideas for future engagement. We could extend an invitation to the mothers of the children at the school, trying again to start a 'gathering' of carers:

*'There are many things that could help, for example, how to communicate with others. Sometimes people are too shy to say what actually bothers them and feel there is nothing they can do about it.'*

*'We can go around to people and see what their circumstances are like and on a regular basis we can go to them to talk with them so that they know that there are still people in the community that cares, and this is also a way for them to find solutions to their problems.'*

*'I think, the thing that would support people the most would be a way to relieve people of joblessness that is at their doors. We could, for instance, ask Mr Kruger for a classroom where we could do needlework, or so, and the money we raise could go to people who struggle a lot.'*

*'Many children come to school hungry, some children hardly ever get more than one meal a day. Some of the mothers go hungry so that their children can eat. Maybe we could start a soup kitchen – we could invite mothers in the school and feed the children and families that arrive at school hungry.'*

I hope to stay involved in both the school communities of Lourier Primary School and

Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School. The two years I spent being involved at Lourier Primary School and doing this research was valuable in 'striking up an acquaintance' that has started moving toward relationship with the community.

The possibility of taking a teaching post at Lourier Primary School has opened up. If this does not materialise, then I hope to continue as the support/ counsellor at the school. I would, however, take time to network with other support institutions in the area and connect with the church leaders.

I hope to reach out to the women in the community again and find out if they would be interested in the kinds of information sessions that the women at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School had experienced. For instance, budgeting, input from a dietician, information regarding legal support and procedures and first aid. I wonder if activities and adult education classes of this kind would be a way of creating opportunities for women to get to know each other informally: it may also lead to closer and wider connections, even generate employment.

I have also been invited to be part of the board meetings at Umnqophiso Pre-Primary School and to continue supporting the teachers. The teachers, the after-care teacher, the two maintenance workers, Hélène Rykaart and I, spent a weekend together at a holiday house to plan the school's activities for next year, 2004. I was honoured by the offer of a much larger role as co-worker with the teachers.

## **5.6 IN CONCLUSION: APPRENTICESHIP TO WREATHING CONTINUES**

For me, as much as for the black and coloured women I worked with – and for countless others in this land who are engaged in the journey towards transformation – to return to the 'ordinary' (5.5.1) is no longer possible. Emily Dickenson suggests that 'the possible's slow fuse is lit by the imagination.' In listening to each other's stories, in hearing each other into speech, we wreath new ways of being: ways that do not deny the pain of our history nor remain imprisoned in it, but open up new possibilities. Brueggemann (1993:24-25) warns us that people don't change, or change much, through doctrinal argument, cognitive appeal or moralizing, but through the 'offer of new models, new images and pictures of how the pieces of life fit together.' Through 'wreathing' our stories, new possibilities emerged – possibilities that spoke of justice and mercy and healing and hope. The wreath is not complete, nor is my apprenticeship over, but I remain committed to this process, trusting that God, 'who is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine' (Eph 3:20) will make the impossible, possible.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ackermann, D M 1991. Postscript by a feminist practical theologian, in Cochrane, J R, De Gruchy, J W & Petersen, R (eds), *In word and deed. Towards a practical theology for social transformation*, 106-111. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Ackermann, D M 1994. Faith and feminism: Women doing theology, in De Gruchy, J W & Villa-Vicencio, C (eds), *Doing theology in context. South African perspectives*, 197-211. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Ackermann, D M 1996. Engaging freedom. A contextual feminist theology of praxis. *Journal of Theology for South Africa* 94, 32-49.
- Ackermann, D M 1996. The Alchemy of Risk, Struggle and Hope, in Manazan, M J, Oduyoye, M A, Tamez, E, Shannon Clarkson, J, Grey M C, Russell, L M (eds), *Women Resisting Violence, Spirituality for life*, 141-146. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Ackermann, D M 1998. A voice was heard in Ramah, in Ackermann, D M & Bons-Storm, R (eds), *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*, 75-100. Leuven: Peeters.
- Ackermann, D M 2003. *After the locusts. Letters from a landscape of faith*. Glosderry, South Africa: David Philip
- Anderson, H 1995. Collaborative language Systems: Towards a postmodern therapy, in Mikesell, R H, Lusteran, D D & McDaniel, S H (eds), *Integrating Family Therapy. A handbook of family psychology and systems theory*, 27-44. Washington: American Psychology.
- Anderson, H & Goolishian, H 1988. Human Systems as Linguistic Systems: Preliminary and Evolving Ideas about the Implications for Clinical Theory, in *Family Process* 27(4), 371-391.
- Anderson, H & Goolishian, H 1992. The client is the expert: a not-knowing approach to therapy, in McNamee, S & Gergen, K J (eds), *Therapy as a social construction*, 25-39. London: Sage.
- Anderson, H & Johnson, B W 1994. *Regarding children. A new respect for childhood and families*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Arratia, M & de la Maza, I 1997. Grounding a Long-Term Ideal: Working with the Aymara for Community Development, in Smith, S E, Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 111-137. New York: Apex Press.
- Bamberger, J & Schon, D A 1991. Learning as Reflective Conversation with Materials, in Steier, F (ed), *Research and reflexivity*, 186 -209. London: Sage.
- Bons-Storm, R 1996. *The incredible woman: Listening to women's silences in pastoral care and counseling*. Nashville: Abingdon.

- Bons-Storm, R 1998. Putting the little ones into the dialogue: a feminist practical theology, in Ackermann, D and Bons-Storm, R (eds), *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical theologies in Context*, 9 – 26. Leuven: Peeters.
- Bosch, D 1991. *Transforming mission. Paradigm shifts in theology of mission*. Maryknoll New York: Orbis Books.
- Brueggemann, W 1993. *Texts under negotiation: the Bible and postmodern negotiations*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Burr, V 1995. *An introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Caputo, F 1997. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell, A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Carey, M & Russell, S 2003. Outsider-witness practices: Some answers to commonly asked questions. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 2003(1). Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Chamdon, A S 1999. Foucault's Approach: Making the Familiar Visible, in Chamdon, A S, Irving, A, Epstein, L (eds), *Reading Foucault for social work*, 51-82. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cochrane, J R, De Gruchy, J W & Petersen, R (eds) 1991. *In word and deed. Towards a practical theology for social transformation*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Coll, C, Surrey, J L, Weingarten, K 1998. Conversation One in *Mothering against the odds – diverse voices of contemporary mothers*, 108-112. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Cooper-White, P 2000. Opening the Eyes, Understanding the impact of Trauma on Development, in Stevenson-Moessner (ed), *In Her Own Time, Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*, 87-102. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Couture, P D 2003. Conversation with ITD students in Cape Town.
- Couture, P D 2000. *Seeing children, seeing God. A practical theology of children and poverty*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Couture, P D 1998. Feminist, Wesleyan, practical theology and the practice of pastoral care, in Ackermann & Bons-Storm (eds), *Liberating faith practices: Feminist practical theologies in context*, 27-50. Leuven: Peeters.
- Davies, B 1991. The concept of Agency. A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Postmodern Critical Theorising* 30, 42-53
- Davies, B 1993. *Shards of glass: children reading and writing beyond gendered identities*. St Leonards: Allen & Unwin.
- Davies, B & Harré, R 1991. Positioning the Discursive Production of Selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 20(1), 43-63.
- De Gruchy, J W & Villa-Vicencio, C (eds) 1994. *Doing theology in context. South African perspectives*. Cape Town: David Philip.

- De Jongh van Arkel, J T 2000. *Caring for all, exploring the field of pastoral work*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Debbink, G & Ornelas, A 1997. Cows for Campesinos, in Smith, S E, Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 13-33. New York: Apex Press.
- Deist, F 1994. Post-modernism and the use of scripture in theological argument: Footnotes to the apartheid theology debate. *Neotestamentica* 28(3), 253-263. (special edition).
- Denzin, N K & Lincoln, Y S (eds) 1994. *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Dickinson, E 1924. *The Complete poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Eiesland, N L 1998. Things not seen: women with physical disabilities, oppression and practical theology, in Ackermann & Bons-Storm (eds), *Liberating faith practices: Feminist practical theologies in context*, 129-152. Leuven: Peeters.
- Eiesland, N L 1994. *The disabled God: Toward a liberatory theology of disability*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Epston, D 1998. *Catching up with David Epston, A collection of Narrative Practice-based Papers published between 1991 & 1996*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Epston, D 1994. Extending the Conversation, in Epston, D & White, M, *Experience, Contradiction, Narrative & Imagination*, Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Foote, A & Frank, B 1999. Foucault and Therapy: The Disciplining of Grief, in Chamdon, A S, Irving, A, Epstein, L (eds) *Reading Foucault for social work*, 157-188. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Foucault, M 1980. *Power/knowledge. Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M 1977. *Discipline and punish. The birth of the prison*. London: Penguin.
- Freedman, J & Combs, G 1996. *Narrative Therapy - The Social Construction of Preferred Realities*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Freire, P & Faundez, A 1989. *Learning to Question*. New York: Continuum.
- Gergen, K 1985. The Social Constructionist Movement in Modern Psychology. *American Psychologist*, March, 40(3), 266-275.
- Gibson, K 2002. Healing Relationships Between Psychologists and Communities: How can we tell them if they don't want to hear?, in Swartz, L, Gibson, K & Gelman, T (eds), *Reflective Practice, Psychodynamic ideas in the community*, 9-21. Cape Town: HRSC.
- Graham, E L 1998. A view from a room: feminist practical theology from academy, kitchen or sanctuary?, in Ackermann, D M & Bons-Storm, R (eds), *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*, 129-152. Leuven: Peeters.

- Graham, E L 1996. *Transforming practice. Pastoral theology in an age of uncertainty*. London: Mowbray.
- Grenz, S J 1995. Star Trek and the next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology in Dockery, DS (ed), *The Challenge of Postmodernism, An Evangelical Engagement*, 89-103. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Griffith, J L & Griffith, ME 1994. *The Body Speaks, Therapeutic dialogues for Mind-Body Problems*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Griffith, J L & Griffith, ME 2002. *Encountaring the Sacred in Psychotherapy, How to Talk with People About their spiritual lives*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Griffith, M E 1995. Opening therapy to conversations with a personal God, in Weingarten, K, *Cultural resistance. Challenging beliefs about men, women, and therapy*, 123-139. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Hall, S 1996. Reflexivity in Emancipatory Action Research: Illustrating the Researcher's Constitutiveness. in Zuber- Skerritt, O (ed), *New directions in Action Research*, 28 - 48. London: The Falmer Press.
- Halperin, D M 1995. *Saint Foucault, Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford Univerity Press.
- Hemson, D 2002. 'Women are weak when they are amongst men,' The participation of women in rural water committees in South Africa. Cape Town:HSRC.
- Heshusius, L 1994. Freeing ourselves from objectivity: managing subjectivity or turning towards a participatory consciousness? *Educational Researcher* 23(3), 15-22.
- Heshusius, L 1995. Listening to children: 'What could we possibly have in common?' From concerns with self to participatory consciousness. *Theory in practice* 34(2), 117-123.
- Heshusius, L & Ballard, K (eds) 1996. *From positivism to interpretivism and beyond. Tales of transformation in education and social research. (The mind-body connection)*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Hess, C 1998. Becoming midwives to justice: A feminist approach to practical theology, in Ackermann, D M & Bons-Storm, R (eds), *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*, 51-74. Leuven: Peeters.
- Heyward, C 1996. Mutuality, in Isherwood, L & McEwan, D, *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*. 155-156. Sheffield: Academic Press.
- Hogan, L 1996. Relationality, in Isherwood, L & McEwan, D (eds), *An A to Z of feminist theology*, 202-203. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- hooks, b 2000. *Feminism is for everybody, Passionate Politics*. London: Pluto Press.
- Irving, A 1999. Waiting for Foucault: Social Work and the Multitudinous Truth(s) of Life, in Chamdon, A S, Irving, A, Epstein, L (eds), *Reading Foucault for social work*, 27-50. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Isherwood, L & McEwan, D 1993. *Introducing feminist theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Isherwood, L 1996. *Liberation*, in Isherwood, L and McEwan, D (eds), *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, 121-122. Sheffield: Academic Press.
- Janesick, V J 1994. The dance of qualitative research design. Metaphor, methodology, and meaning, in Denzin, N K & Lincoln, Y S (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 209-219. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Jakobsen, W 1994. Ethics in Feminist Theology, in Villa-Vicencio, C & De Gruchy, J (eds), *Doing ethics in Context, South African perspectives*, 148-160. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Kenny, A (ed) 1997. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press
- Kincheloe J L & McLaren, P L 1994. Rethinking Critical Theory and Qualitative Research, in Denzin N & Lincoln Y (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 138-157. London: Sage publications.
- Kirkpatrick, E M (ed) 1994. *The Chambers Dictionary*, 949. Edinburgh: Chambers.
- Knudson-Martin, C 1997. The Politics of Gender in Family Therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 23(4), 421-437.
- Kotzé E & Kotzé D 2001. Telling narratives, doing spirituality, in Kotzé, E & Kotzé, D (eds), *Telling narratives: Spellbound Edition*, 1-14. Pretoria: Ethics Alive.
- Lather, P 1991. *Getting smart. Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern*. New York: Routledge.
- Lyll, D 1995. *Counselling in the pastoral and spiritual context*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Martin, Denis-Constant 2001. What's in the name 'Coloured', in Zegeye, A (ed), *Social Identities in the New South Africa, After Apartheid (1)*, 249-268. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- McTaggart, R 1996. Issues for participatory action researchers, in Zuber-Skeritt, O (ed), *New directions in action research*, 243-255. London: Falmer Press.
- McTaggart, R 1997. Reading the Collection, in Mc Taggart, R (ed), *Participatory Action Research, International Contexts and Consequences*. 1 – 24. New York: State University Press.
- Monk, G, Winslade, J, Crocket, K & Epston, D (eds) 1996. *Narrative therapy in practice. The archaeology of hope*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morgan, A 2000. *What is narrative therapy: An easy-to-read introduction*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Neuger, C 2001. *Counseling Women, A narrative Pastoral Approach*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.



- Nouwen, H J M 1990. *The Wounded Healer, Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York: Image Books Doubleday Press.
- Parker, I and Shotter, J (eds) 1990. *Deconstructing Social Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Parry, A & Doan, R E 1994. *Story Re-Visions: Narrative therapy in the postmodern world*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Poling, J & Miller, D 1985. *Foundations for a practical Theology of Ministry*, Nashville: Abingdon Press.
- Oden, T C 1995. The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Sprituality, in Dockery D S (ed), *The Challenge of Postmodernism: an evangelical Engagement*, 19-33. Grand Rapids: Baker Books
- Olesen, V 1994. Feminisms and models of qualitative research, in Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y S (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 158-174. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Ornelas, A 1997. Pasantías and social participation: Participatory action-research as a way of life, in Smith, S E, Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 138-172. New York: Apex Press.
- Ramphele, M 2002. *Steering by the Stars, Being young in South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Raphael, M 1996. Models of God, in Isherwood, L and McEwan, D (eds), *An A to Z of Feminist Theology*, 146 –149. Sheffield: Academic Press.
- Reinharz, S 1992. *Feminist methods in social research*. New York: Oxford University.
- Ross, F C 2003. *Bearing Witness, Women and the Truth and Reconciliation commission in South Africa*. London: Pluto Press.
- Russell, L M 1996. Sprituality, struggle and cultural violence, in Manazan, M J, Oduyoye, M A, Tamez, E, Shannon Clarkson, J, Grey M C, Russell, L M (eds), *Women Resisting Violence, Sprituality for life*, 20-26. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Sampson, E E 1989. Foundations for a Textual Analysis of Selfhood, in Parker, I & Shotter, J (eds), *Texts of Identity*, 1-19. London: Routledge.
- Schwandt, T A 1994. Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In Denzin, N K & Lincoln, Y S (eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 118-137. London: Sage.
- Sevenhuijsen, S 1998. *Citizenship and the ethics of care. Feminist considerations on justice, morality and politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Seymour, P 1997. Doctors, Dais, And Nurse-Midwives: Women's Health Service Utilization in Northern India, in Smith, S E, Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 59-85. New York: Apex Press.
- Shutte, A 1994. Philosophical Ethics, in Villa-Vicencio, C & De Gruchy, J (eds) *Doing ethics in Context, South African perspectives*, 24-35. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

- Smith, S E 1997. Deepening participatory action-research, in Smith, S E; Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 252-253. New York: Apex Press.
- Sparks, E 2001. Community Mental health in the USA: challenges to urban community mental health centres in Seedat, M (ed), *Community psychology theory, method and practice, South African and other perspectives*, 383-399. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Spittal, P, Nakuti, J, Sewankambo, N & Willms, D G 1997. "We are dying. It is finished!": Linking an ethnographic research design to an HIV/AIDS participatory approach in Uganda, in Smith, S E, Willms, D G & Johnson, NA (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*, 86-110. New York: Apex Press.
- Steier, F 1991. Reflexivity and Methodology: An Ecological Constructionism, in Steier, F (ed) *Research and Reflexivity*, 163 -185. London: Sage Publications.
- Stevenson-Moessner, J 2000. Incarnational Theology: Restructuring Developmental Theory, in Stevenson-Moessner, J (ed), *In Her Own Time, Women and Developmental Issues in Pastoral Care*, 7-18. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Söderqvist, T 1991. Biography or Ethnography or Both? Embodied Reflexivity and the Deconstruction of Knowledge-Power, in Steier, F (ed), *Research and Reflexivity*, 143-162. London: Sage Publications.
- Strebel, A 1999. Putting discourse analysis to work in AIDS prevention, in Levett, A, Kottler, A, Burman, E & Parker, I, *Culture, Power and Difference: Discourse analysis in South Africa*. 109-122. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Traitler-Espiritu, R 1996. Violence against women's bodies in Manazan, in M J, Oduyoye, M A, Tamez, E, Shannon Clarkson, J, Grey MC & Russell, L M (eds), *Women Resisting Violence, Spirituality for life*, 66-69. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Van Duuren, L 2003. Conversation and re-construction of hope, Mowbray.
- Van Wyk, G A 1998. *Beyond Modernism: Scholarship and "Servanthood"*. Paper read at the ASRS Annual Meeting, 21 November 1998, Orlando, U.S.A.
- Villa-Vicencio, C 1994. Political Ethics, in Villa-Vicencio, C & De Gruchy, J (eds), *Doing Ethics in context. South African perspectives. Theology and Praxis*, vol 2, 184-186. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Vol I. 1976. 460. Chicago: Merriam Co.
- Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Vol III. 1976. 2627, 2252. Chicago: Merriam Co.
- Weingarten, K 1997. Foreword, in White, C & Hales, J, *The personal is the professional. Therapists reflect on their families, lives and work*, xi-xiii. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- Weingarten, K 2000. Witnessing, wonder and hope. *Family Process* 39(4), 389-402.
- Welch, S D 1990. *A feminist ethic of risk*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

- White, M 1995. *Re-authoring Lives; The narrative perspective in therapy*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M 1997. *Narratives of Therapist's Lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications
- White, M & Epston, D 1990. *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: Norton.
- White, M 2000. *Reflections on Narrative Practice: Essays and interviews*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M 2003. Lecture series. Somerset West.
- Willms, D G 1997. " You start your research on your being", in Smith, S E Willms, D G & Johnson, N A (eds), *Nurtured by knowledge. Learning to do participatory action research*. New York: Apex Press.
- Wilson, F & Ramphela, M 1989. *Uprooting Poverty, The South African challenge*. Cape Town: David Phillip.