

# Chapter Two: Of Love and Loss I

## Introduction

This chapter sets out the early ethical and methodological considerations in this research account as I begin to consider the meaning of 'love and loss', the words by the photo on the collage of the War Memorial in Russia within my personal life (Figure One).



I describe in more detail the methodology and ethics of narrative inquiry. As I engage with narrative, I consider the responsibility I hold towards others as a disposition of 'caring or being for' (Schwandt, 2000, p.205); and as a first step I show my understandings of care of the self using the work of Foucault (1986). This analysis sets the context for a first person inquiry into two of my early writings: the first is a letter written to my father after the funeral of his brother in February 1992; and the second is the speech I wrote and gave at my father's funeral in May 1999. These two writings form my initial interpretations of the unresolved grief and loss my father felt about the comrades he left behind and the events he witnessed as a prisoner of war. They were also profoundly influenced by my own reactions to grief, loss and change: despite being nearly 40 years old, Uncle Jack's was the first funeral I had attended; and when my father died of cancer, I had recently gone through a period of unprecedented loss and change in my own life. I show how my interpretations and reactions to these two events were influenced by my emotions at the time.

## Thinking narratively

So far I have laid out the foundation of my professional practice, but as we know there is much more to the self than the man or woman who walks into the office each day. It is far easier to talk about perceived professional successes, like promotions and publications, than personal failures or disappointments, and yet I have learnt perhaps most from the

times when my values were compromised or I cried those really deep sobs which signify massive loss and change in a life.

Morwenna Griffiths (1995) introduces the metaphor of a spider's web and draws on personal experiences – her own and others - to discuss what the consequences of 'being ourselves' might be:

The metaphor of the web can throw light on the idea of the self and its politics. It, too, is made of nearly invisible, very strong threads, attached to the circumstances of its making and under the control of the maker. It too, is made to suit the purposes of its maker, but the circumstances of the making are not under her control. It, too, can be thought of as fragments of a conglomeration, or as a unitary whole; though whether it is a whole, or which whole it is, depends on the viewer as much as on its own constitution. It, too, is intricate, entangled and interlaced, with each part connected to other parts. A value of this metaphor is its flexibility. Looked at some ways the self is like the whole web. Looked at in others, it is more like the nodes where the lines cross, or where the individual stitches resolve themselves into patterns and pictures as a result of the other individual stitches. (Griffiths, 1995, p. 2)

Thus I am conscious in using narrative in self study research that I am both in and of this web; I am also affected by the webs of others. This web, my web, has sometimes seemed intensely fragile, perhaps held by just one thread, and other times like one of those nature photographs taken of a spider's web on a frosty morning – well spun and almost perfect.

Moreover my experiences, reflected in the constantly evolving structure of the web, are storied because of the way we understand human actions as being organised in time, for example as time goes by, events happen, but these events form a chain of actions and counteractions with consequences. Thus human time is very much a storied affair (McAdams, 1993):

Stories help us organise our thoughts, providing a narrative for human intentions and interpersonal events that is remembered and readily told. In some instances, stories may also mend us when we are broken, heal us when we are sick, and even move us to psychological fulfilment and maturity. (McAdams, 1993, p. 31)

Clandinin and Connolly (2000, p. 49), building on the work of John Dewey, a preeminent thinker in education, pose the question, *What do narrative inquirers do?* In seeking to answer this question they introduce the notion of the *three dimensional inquiry space* and the directions this framework allows narratives to move in – *inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place*: any particular inquiry is defined by this three dimensional space : ' studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places' (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000, p. 50). In an earlier paper Clandinin and Connolly (1994) write about two of these interactive dimensions or directions in any inquiry: *inward* and *outward*, and *backward* and *forward*. To do research narratively, that is, into an experience, is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways, asking questions which point in each direction. Place assumes greater significance in their later work when it moves from just being within the environment to the third dimension, which focuses on the physical boundaries of inquiry landscapes.

I am mindful of this three dimensional space in the framing of this narrative inquiry which travels back and forth in time; moves inwards and outwards between personal reflection and inquiry with others; and travels to countries in Europe and Russia where my engagement with place is of paramount importance. It also considers places of importance to me in the UK such as the home of my childhood and the spaces which sustain me now.

## **Initial ethical considerations**

So where and how then do I begin this narrative inquiry? A time of transition or nodal moment offers a way in: often learning is at its most profound during such times so we'll start at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the usual clinking of champagne glasses, feelings of promise in the air and good wishes from family and friends; a few days later all this dissolved again in the darkness of the long winter evenings. I felt troubled: professionally I had climbed the career ladder to where I wanted to be, and yet something was not right.

The passion and creativity that had driven my writing in the 1990s had simply dried up. I was disillusioned. This feeling was not entirely new to me: when I was 18 years old I was studying all science A levels with the intention to train as a Pharmacist. In the final year of my A levels, I realised that I was no longer curious. Maths, Physics and Chemistry did not ignite the neural pathways in my brain or the fire in my belly. So I changed my Degree choice at University to Sociology, and when I started the course I knew that I had made the right choice. I was looking for something similar at this point in my career. William Bridges describes this period of transition as the neutral zone:

It is a season of dormancy when life withdraws back to the root to get ready for a long, cold season without whatever had given warmth and meaning to life-before-the-ending. It is a strange no man's land between one world and the next. It is a zone where you pick up mixed signals, some coming from the past and some from the future . . . It is a dark night of the heart – or, maybe, a long dark twilight that refuses to resolve itself into real day or true night. (Bridges 2001, p.156)

I had also gone through a number of life changes, including separation, divorce, the end of another relationship, two house moves, changes at work, the serious illness of my sister and the death of my father all in a three year period. I would say that this time was the most difficult in my life: Geertz (1995, p. 2), reflecting on his forty years of anthropological inquiry, captures how this instability and change felt to me: 'When everything changes . . . there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how'. If I had written a story about that period in my life then, it would have been very different from the narrative of this thesis, written several years later: using a term derived from Frank (1995, p. 97) I would have been a 'Wounded Storyteller', writing a chaos narrative about how readily any of us can be sucked under, where the teller of the story is deemed not to be living a decent or 'proper' life and where the story is hard to hear.

When you are that close to a chaos narrative, where emotions are still very raw, it is also hard to stand back and consider the ethical and personal considerations of putting your life on the line. The narrative in this thesis, although it draws on stories emanating from chaos in some instances, is written as a quest. Quest stories use suffering to show that something can be gained or learnt through the experiences (Frank, 1995).

This is where the web and my narrative start to become more interesting and far complex: what and how much of myself do I write about in a PhD thesis which will be in the public domain and potentially available to anyone in the world who wants to read it. Looking back over what I have written in the previous chapter I notice that I did not write about the times when I came home and cried about work or even cried at work, or when I could not sleep because I was agonising over something that had happened or I feared would happen. Most often that was when I encountered issues relating to grief, loss and change in the lives of the people I was working with, which were essentially chaos stories at that time. In some instances, people re-fashioned their lives; for others there was a downward spiral into yet more chaos.

Besides making decisions about what of both my personal and professional story I include in this narrative inquiry, I need to consider how much and what of other people's stories I include. In his discussion of ethical and political considerations, Schwandt (2000, p.203) argues that:

Social inquiry is a practice, not simply a way of knowing. Understanding what others are doing or saying and transforming that knowledge into a public form involves moral-political commitments. Moral issues arise from the fact that a theory of knowledge is supported by a particular view of human agency.

In particular I have to make choices about how I refer to people in my personal life, whether they are dead or still living and connected to me by family relationships. I cannot anonymise these people, because our lives and stories about our lives are inextricably bound up with each other. As I have loved or still love these people, I must do nothing that could potentially jeopardise those relationships: in saying this I am acknowledging that there will inevitably be many sides to the same story, my interpretation is mine at this point in my life.

How should I be towards myself, the people who are connected to me and my story in this way, and the people I inquire with, such as children and young people in need, their parents, practitioners or former Prisoners of War? Schwandt (2000, p. 205) describes this ethical orientation as 'Caring or being-for' which is 'a kind of responsibility that is prevoluntary, unremovable, non-contractual, non-reciprocal, and asymmetrical': in this way, I, as a social inquirer, am confronted with moral choices about whether and under what circumstances I set about inquiring with others (see, for example, Chapter Six where I describe my decision to not to use a phone interview with Gerd, a former German soldier, to discuss the deaths of close relatives in a bombing raid in 1943, when he was just 16 years old; see also Chapter Seven in which I discuss my response to Suzie when she asked to listen to the sound file of the interview).

## **Care of the self**

My first consideration is how I should be towards myself in inquiring with others and in writing this thesis: if I cannot care for myself then I will not be able to care for others. One of the first inquiries I did at Bath in May 2002 highlighted the importance of self care in the kind of work that I was involved in at that time. The group set me a challenging yet essential inquiry question:

**Extract from “How much did I love my self today?” Reflections on the task given at the April supervision group: Self Protection**

I listened to the tape [of the group session at Bath] two or three times in the car, and bought a beautiful book and raffia ribbons in complimentary colours – pale lilac and silver grey. So all I needed to do was start my inquiry. Simple. It could help me love myself more as I started to change my behaviour and practice the art of self-loving on a daily basis.

But there was a deep-seated fear, almost a terror, of even untying the ribbons. I was paralysed. I could complete the task, but it would be purely cosmetic with idyllic descriptions of candlelit baths, long walks in the woods, delicious meals, massages, whatever . . .

As the group identified, sometimes first person inquiry can be extremely difficult and painful, sending you into areas where more than the support of the group is needed. I was in one of the situations, and I needed help. I've experienced a lot of change in my life over the past six or so years and I'm a very different person to the one I was in early 1996. But there are some old coping strategies, ways of relating to the world, mindsets, call them what you will, that need to be understood and changed. They are holding me back, causing confusion, I don't know, but I need to move on.

This inquiry was the catalyst for my return to practising yoga after many years as I sought to take care of and, more recently, cultivate the self in my inquiry practice. Foucault (1986, p.43) in his essay 'The Cultivation of the Self' says that the art of existence is dominated by the principle that a person should take care of him or herself: 'It is this principle of the care of the self that establishes its necessity, presides over its development, and organizes its practice'. He uses Greek culture to show that this idea has developed from a very ancient theme, citing Apuleius, at the end of the *God of Socrates*:

All men should desire to live most happily, and should know that they cannot so live in any other way than by cultivating the soul, and yet leave the soul uncultivated [*animum suum non colunt*]. If, however, anyone wishes to see acutely, it is requisite that he should pay attention to his eyes, through which he sees; if you desire to run with celerity, attention must be paid to the feet, by which you run . . . in a similar manner, in all the other members, attention must be paid according to one's preferences. (p.45)

Citing other Greek philosophers such as Epictetus and Epicurus, Foucault argues that care of the self ensures freedom for the individual whilst requiring that s/he take her/himself as the object of all diligence, and there is no right age for attending to oneself: 'It is never too early or too late to care for the well-being of the soul' (Epicurus cited in Foucault, 1986, p. 48).

But as Foucault notes this practice takes time: How much of the day and of one's life should one devote to this? This 'retreat within oneself' is a time intensive activity:

There are . . . the talks that one has with a confidant, with friends, with a guide or director. Add to this the correspondence in which one reveals the state of one's soul, solicits advice, gives advice to anyone who needs it – which for that matter constitutes a beneficial exercise for the giver, who is called the preceptor, because he thereby reactualises it for himself. (Seneca cited in Foucault, 1986, p.51)

However this practice is not characterised as a solitary, navel gazing exercise but seen as a true social practice. Schools, lectures and professionals of a spiritual disposition provided support for this practice. However, this also operated at a more informal level as part of the customary relations of friendship, kinship, and obligation: as part of the care of oneself one had a right to seek guidance from a person with aptitude in the area in which help or advice was needed. Correspondingly, it was a duty to either offer that assistance to the other or to receive the wisdom of the helper. Foucault (1986, p. 53) rightly points out that it is sometimes the case that:

The interplay of the care of the self and the help of the other blends into pre-existing relations giving them a new coloration and greater warmth. The care of the self – or attention one devotes to the care that others should take of themselves – appears then as an intensification of social relations.

In this approach the care of the self can become a 'soul service', where there might be several rounds of exchanges with the other founded on reciprocity and a sense of obligation to the other. This could translate to a form of second person inquiry practice or co-operative inquiry (Reason and Torbert, 2001).

Besides the notion of a social and reciprocal practice in the care of the self, Foucault also identifies concern for the body in the practices of the self within ancient philosophical traditions, and within that the prevention of disease of both the body and the soul. In taking care of oneself, self knowledge occupies a central place. The ancient philosophers, such as Epicurus and Seneca, advocated practical tests where privation might make one begin to suffer. These were practical tests, but they were supplemented by a self-examination: rather than a person occupying the role of judge and accused to determine guilt or innocence, it is more like an act of inspection, where a piece of work is examined by the evaluator. Foucault uses the work of Epictetus to make this point:

The examination Epictetus talks about . . . deals with representations, [and] aims to "test" them, to "distinguish" (*diakrinein*) one from another and thus to prevent one from accepting the "first arrival." "We ought not to accept a mental representation unsubjected to examination, but should say, "Wait, allow me to see who you are and whence you came. (Foucault, 1986, pp. 63-4).

In practical terms this means that the relation of oneself to oneself and activities that support this should be the prime objective in cultivation of the self. This is a form of first person inquiry, defined as the ability of the researcher to deploy an inquiring orientation to her/his life, to act out of awareness and choice, and to examine the impacts or effects on the world while acting (Reason and Torbert, 2001). For Foucault 'the task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth – the truth concerning what one is capable of doing – central to the formation of the ethical subject' (1986, p.68); and it is to my own first person inquiry that I now turn.

## **Early inquiries into love and loss**

### ***Uncle Jack's funeral***

As a child my parents attempted to protect me from the sadness of death: although I was told that my grandparents had died I was not allowed to go to their funerals: it all happened very quietly in the background, perhaps when I was at school and nobody spoke much about the funerals in front of me.

My grandfather died in 1966 when I was 13. He was the local village Blacksmith and worked right up until a couple of months before he died, aged 86. I knew he was seriously ill, but unlike my older sister I did not see my grandparents when they were critically ill and close to dying. So I never went to a funeral until I was 39 years old when my uncle Jack, who was also a Blacksmith and who had lived and worked with my Grandfather at the Forge, died very suddenly at home in the same bed that he had been born into.

Although I was fond of Uncle Jack, I was aware that a lot of my feelings about his death related to my Grandfather. The letter written to my father the day after the funeral represents an early processing of those feelings (see Appendix One).

As I read the letter again, I am interested how as a family we used nature to ground and heal us after the funeral, and how the next morning I went for a run to 'make sense' of my feelings and the idea to write the letter came to me. As Abram (1996, p. 268) says, '. . . It is only at the scale of our direct, sensory interactions with the land around us that we can appropriately notice and respond to the immediate needs of the living world':

The letter gave my father great comfort and he kept it by his bedside until his own death seven years later. I was very moved by the fact that he treasured it so much and I wondered later whether the letter spoke to other losses that he had experienced, perhaps during the war when his comrades were killed and there was no proper funeral or burial. During that time we also cremated two more uncles and an aunt, leaving only my parents as the surviving siblings in their respective families. All the funerals were token affairs led by someone who had no knowledge of the deceased.

### ***Conducting my father's funeral***

In autumn 1998 my father became terminally ill with stomach cancer and was given six months to live. Because of my experiences as a child and of the impersonal and perfunctory funerals that I had attended, I was determined to do justice to my father's life and his death so I told him not to worry, that I would give him a "good send off". I knew at an experiential level the importance of doing death well, and wanted to conduct a good funeral for the family.

Just after he had received the diagnosis, my father and I drove out to the cliffs overlooking the Isle of Wight so that I could run back along the cliff tops to my parents' bungalow. We parked up next to the cliff path and sat quietly in the car overlooking the Needles, the chalk rocks that jut out of the sea at the western end of the Isle of Wight. My father then asked for "Red Sails in the Sunset", sung by Anne Shelton on the troop ship going out to North Africa in 1942, to be played at his funeral. And he just sobbed and sobbed as he described the journey in the dark across the Mediterranean as the troop ships turned off to their respective ports – Oran was one he mentioned. I distinctly remember coming in too quickly with my own story of crossing the Mediterranean from Gibraltar to Tangiers,

Morocco. Yes, there was a real feeling of the strangeness crossing from one continent to another: the Muslim crew kneeling and saying their prayers on deck against a spectacular sunset; and the beauty of a school of dolphins swimming through azure waters. But my father's choice of song was not at all related to my experience of crossing the Mediterranean to North Africa in peacetime some thirty five years later, nor was my interpretation of his choice of song quite correct as I found out later during further inquiry in 2006.

Another nodal moment was when he phoned on a Saturday morning at home, perhaps two months before his death. He was very matter of fact this time: "Joce, I'd like my ashes to go on the grave of a boy soldier, an orphan, Geoffrey Dunning, in the cemetery at Arnhem". I knew that he had been with or perhaps the phrase was "comforted" a young soldier when he died in Oosterbeek at the Battle of Arnhem in 1944, and I knew instinctively that this was the young man's grave.

Whilst it is impossible for me to understand my father's wartime experiences because they are his, not mine, the funeral speech I wrote in 1999 was my best effort at the time to put my father's life, a life lived through a very different historical period, into some sort of context. I was aware that I was influenced by my emotions at the time, and by history and tradition:

The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the commonality that binds us to tradition. But this commonality is constantly being formed in relation to tradition. Tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves. (Gadamer, 1989, p.293)

At this point it is timely to address the meaning of 'understanding', and the context I am using it at this point within the thesis. Drawing on the German language, Schwandt (2002, p. 78) argues that understanding, '*Verständnis*, means comprehension, insight, appreciation for something, to comprehend it – *für etwas Verständnis haben*' . . . in life we are engaged in trying to make something of whatever it is we seek to understand, that is we are always trying to construe the meaning of something. This is interpretative or hermeneutical understanding. The term *hermeneutics* means "the art and science of interpretation" and derives from Hermes, who was a Greek god and messenger to the gods, and was killed when he brought unwelcome news (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998). Thus we encounter things as already interpreted: 'this interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance – in a fore-having (*Vorhabe*)' (Heidegger, 1962, cited in Moran, 2000, p. 277). It is therefore impossible to transcend tradition and the historical epoch in which we find ourselves.

When I wrote my father's funeral speech, I had in the previous three years gone through unprecedented change in my own life and what I wrote was guided by the intense feelings I had about that loss and change: I did not really appreciate that at the time because everything was too close. Not only were my own emotions very much on the surface, but I wrote the speech within the post war tradition that I was born into and grew up in.

## **Vic's funeral speech**

**Thursday 13 May 1999 2.00pm at Oakley Wood Crematorium,  
near Leamington Spa, Warwickshire**

AS COFFIN COMES IN PLEASE PLAY<sup>4</sup>  
CD TRACK 2 'RED SAILS IN THE SUNSET' (2.56 TO 0.22)

DO NOT PLAY VERA LYNN TALKING WHICH STARTS AT 0.22

*Please sit down. Thank you for coming to Vic's funeral.*

*Firstly, I would like to say a few words about this service and to place Vic's death in the context of his life and recent national and international events.*

*Vic was 79 years old when he died of pneumonia, a natural and peaceful death for a very natural, brave and fulfilled person. The weather over the Bank Holiday weekend was glorious with the birds singing in the warm sunshine. Lynn, my sister Wendy, who isn't able to be with us today because of her operation last week (we miss you. Wend), Robbie, Vic's friend for 56 years, and I were able to enjoy the beautiful hospice gardens in between sitting with Vic. We also received tremendous support from the hospice staff. It was a very natural, gentle and beautiful way for a person to cease living.*

*When we knew of Vic's terminal illness in the autumn and he was given six months to live, it gave us an opportunity to talk in that very intimate way which so often eludes us in our daily pre-occupations of living. He told me that he wouldn't have missed the war for anything, and that he had looked upon the years since September 1944, when he was wounded and narrowly missed death from a sniper's bullet as added value in terms of living. Despite his, to us, quite hard childhood with his two brothers in Odiham in the depression which followed the First World War, the forfeiting of a grammar school place in order to go out to work in a mushroom farm when he was 14, and his wartime experiences, he said that he wouldn't have wanted any other life and wouldn't have wished to be anybody but himself.*

*Current events in former Yugoslavia serve as a constant reminder of the effects of war on generations of men, women and children. And given other recent deaths in London from bombing and shooting, we have to count ourselves fortunate to be here today saying good-bye to a dear husband, father, grandfather, relative, comrade and friend who was more than satisfied with his lot and who had lived well beyond the three score years and ten. And who was surrounded by family and friends when his body gently gave up on life. Unlike some of the relatives of his comrades who died at the ill-fated Battle of Arnhem in September 1944, we at least have had and now have the opportunity to say good-bye to him properly.*

*So how can and should we do this? In the course of my work, I have been fortunate to come across the work of an African American woman writer called Maya Angelou. One book entitled Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now is a collection of lessons in living.<sup>5</sup> When Vic went into hospital in October, I gave him my own copy which I had taken to Glenavon, my parents' home, to give me inner strength at that difficult time. Vic*

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<sup>4</sup> The guidance in capital letters is for the crematorium assistant who helped with the sound recordings.

<sup>5</sup> Angelou, M. 1995. *Wouldn't take nothing for my journey now*. London: Virago Press.

found inspiration and comfort from some of the essays, three of which I will refer to in this service.

*The first is entitled 'Death and the legacy' and it provides those of us who are still living with ideas on how we can employ the legacies of our loved ones to help us in the art of living. Maya Angelou writes '...When I sense myself filling with rage at the absence of my beloved, I try as soon as possible to remember that my concerns and questions, my efforts and answers should be focused on what I did or can learn from the departed love. What legacy was left which can help me in the art of living a good life?' So what messages from Vic's life can we the living take forward? The words of his own mother passed on to him and in turn to Wendy, me and our children provide a good starting point on the avoidance of complaining or whingeing.*

*'Here we suffer grief and pain. Up the road they suffer the same. Next door they suffer more. Oh isn't it awful, awful, awful?!*

*Maya Angelou too alerts us to the dangers of becoming a complainer, also through the words of her own grandmother who raised her. "Sister did you hear what Brother So-and-so or Sister Much to Do complained about? You heard that?" and I would nod. Mamma would continue, "Sister, there are people who went to sleep all over the world last night, rich and poor and white and black, but they will never wake again. Sister, those who expected to rise did not, their beds became their cooling boards and their blankets became their winding sheets. And those dead folks would give anything, anything at all for just five minutes of this weather or ten minutes of that plowing that person was grumbling about. So watch yourself about complaining, sister. What you're supposed to do when you don't like a thing is change it. If you can't change it then change the way you think about it. Don't complain."*

*When faced with situations which Vic could well have complained about, including some aspects of his own life such as the deprivation and malnourishment he experienced as a prisoner of war, he changed the way he thought about it by employing his wonderful and sometimes wicked sense of humour. One story which springs to mind is his release from prison camp and the long traiipse across Germany with his war-time friend Smudger into the hands of the Americans whose rich food they promptly sicked up after several months of semi-starvation. He then told of his so-called hero's journey back to England with a double delousing on both sides of the Channel just for good measure! How he walked down Odiham High St expecting the hero's welcome from the village only to be met by the mother of another prisoner of war who promptly told him "My Arthur was captured much earlier than you and so why have you been released before him! It isn't fair." So much for the hero's welcome!*

*It's undoubtedly true that some of his wartime experiences left their own psychological scars. Those of us who have not lived through war have difficulty relating to what happens when our own and others' lives are under threat and when we witness the deaths of those who were part of a closely knit group of comrades who ultimately relied on each other for survival. Although not wishing to exclude any of Vic's comrades, I think particularly of the three wireless operators Alec Reece, Don Collins and Alex Kean who worked alongside him in North Africa in his role as an electrician signals in J section of the 1st Parachute Brigade which was attached to 1st Battalion of the Parachute regiment. These comrades trained together at Bulford Camp in Wiltshire and worked together for about a year in North Africa, being responsible for communications between the front line and Brigade headquarters; their 'well deserved rest' was mentioned by their Captain George Rowland in the section's records now held in the Imperial War Museum in London. They also played together, skinny dipping in the warm waters off the Tunisian*

coast. Something which Vic continued to enjoy later in his life with holidays in Yugoslavia.

*Through the experience of these young men, I began to realise the closeness of the relationships formed at that age under those circumstances. I also remember my own father's grief in January 1982 at the death of his close friend Smudger with whom he ended up, by a sheer stroke of good fortune, sharing a cattle truck on the uncertain journey to prisoner of war camp in the Autumn of 1944. Vic and Smudger shared the deprivations of those camps and their liberation and eventual return to England. They experienced constant hunger, and shared rations and the contents of their Red Cross parcels. Just over the barbed wire they witnessed the starvation of the Russian POWs and the brutal treatment of political prisoners at the hands of one particular sadistic guard. These experiences went over and over in Vic's mind, who likened one middle-aged woman he saw tiring under slave-like conditions as just like his own mother.*

*These experiences taught him and us to be grateful for the opportunities and experiences in our own lives, to share and above all not to whinge.*

*It also taught us about taking pleasure from the simple and natural things in life like the sounds of the dawn chorus in Spring, Nature's natural alarm clock. When Wendy and I were children, he would insist about once a year on waking us up to hear it. Of course as sleepy teenagers we thought he was mad!*

START DAWN CHORUS MUSIC SOFTLY AND THEN TURN UP VOLUME OVER NEXT SENTENCE. PLAY FOR APPROXIMATELY 1 MINUTE AND 45 SECS UNTIL NATURAL PAUSE IN TAPE

*For my sister and I some thirty five years later, it was so beautiful and comforting to hear those birds in the hospice garden as we tossed around in the early hours waiting for death to embrace him.*

DAWN CHORUS MUSIC CONTINUED AS ABOVE

*During the last time Vic was conscious, Wendy and I shared a joke with him about getting us up to listen to those birds and to collect field mushrooms on the pretence that they disappeared into the ground again if we left any later than the crack of dawn! Anyhow, they certainly tasted delicious, fried maggots and all!*

*So there was the pleasure to be derived from the simple things in life, including Lynn our mother's excellent cooking and baking which was a course of constant enjoyment for Vic until he lost his sense of taste and smell nearly two years ago. Good food and plenty of it were very important to him, and stemmed from his experiences as a child in the decade following the First World War and from the prisoner of war camp where no scrap was wasted and where a loaf of bread was meticulously shared right down to the last crumb.*

*What then can we learn from these experiences? There is the power of not complaining, of thinking positively when a group of people with a sense of humour come together to share whatever food they have brought with them. There is also the power of forgiveness. Vic's temper was quick to ignite, but within minutes he either apologised or the matter was quickly forgotten. Maya Angelou's essay 'Living Well. Living Good' offers some guidance to us on the art of living well. She describes the emotionally impoverished life of a wealthy Californian couple and compares this to the simple joys, such as playing cards with friends, to be found in the very modest household of her Aunt Tee who was the housekeeper for this couple.*

*“...My dears, I draw the picture of the wealthy couple standing in a darkened hallway, peering into a lighted room where black servants were lifting their voices in merriment and comradery, and I realize that living well is an art which can be developed. Of course, you will need the basic talents to build upon: They are a love of life and an ability to take great pleasure from small offerings, an assurance that the world owes you nothing and that every gift is exactly that, a gift. That people who may differ from you in political stance, sexual persuasion, and racial inheritance can be founts of fun, and if you are lucky, they can become even convivial comrades.*

*Living life as an art requires a readiness to forgive. I do not mean that you should suffer fools gladly, but rather remember our own shortcomings, and when you encounter another with flaws, don't be eager to righteously seal yourself away from the offender forever. Take a few breaths and imagine yourself having just committed the action which has set you at odds.*

*Because of the routines we follow, we often forget that life is an ongoing adventure. We leave our homes for work, acting and even believing that we will reach our destinations with no unusual event startling us out of our set expectations. The truth is we know nothing, not where our cars will fail or when our buses will stall, whether our places of employment will be there when we arrive, or whether, in fact, we ourselves will arrive whole and alive at the end of our journeys. Life is pure adventure, and the sooner we realize that, the quicker we will be able to treat life as art: to bring all our energies to each encounter, to remain flexible enough to notice and admit when what we expected to happen did not happen. We need to remember that we are created creative and can invent new scenarios as frequently as they are needed.*

*Life seems to love the liver of it. Money and power can liberate only if they are used to do so. They can imprison and inhibit more finally than barred windows and iron chains.”*

*When I first read this essay some time ago, I realised that our own family shared these sentiments and the natural delights when a group of people who enjoy each others' company come together. I thought back to the days some forty years ago when Granddad Read would visit our house, Bellerophon' in North Warnborough, painted in the regimental colours of maroon and blue, and aptly named after the Greek warrior who rode Pegasus, the winged horse who is the symbol of the [Airborne Forces]. On Boxing Days Granddad Read would come down from his home 'The Forge' in Odiham, his silver topped walking stick carefully placed by the boiler in the kitchen, to join us in enjoying our Mum's carefully crafted lunch and tea. This would be followed by an evening of fun playing pontoon for pennies. A tradition developed of lively chatter, laughter and the occasional huff which carried on at Glenavon with the grandchildren and involved much consumption of chocolate in various forms. More recently we had the celebration of Lynn and Vic's birthday's, where we all made the most of the opportunity to be together at home in Glenavon with food that Vic could manage. What was interesting to both my sister and me was that it was the coming together of the family and the easy relationships between the grandchildren and their grandparents that was of importance not the venue and the price of the bill. Those birthdays were enjoyed probably even more than some of the earlier ones as we savoured the last times that we would all be together.*

*Vic was a very sensitive and caring person who was always there looking out for you, whether it was sharing in your success without a trace of envy or pressure, or ensuring the birthday card would arrive at least one day early before everybody else's, or waiting patiently for you, hands behind his back at the railway station or giving you directions in the minutest detail to ensure that you arrived from A to B safely to avoid whatever traffic jam there might be ready to ensnare you. In fact one of his excellent short cuts served us well on the evening of the Bank Holiday Monday, the day he died, when we returned*

home from New Milton and the M27 was slowing down ominously with the 50 signs flashing at us miles ahead of the junction with the M3. We were grateful to you, Dad. When we did the directions for the funeral today, I was mindful of the high standard Vic has set us in this department so Merlin, Rhiannon and I did your journey as if we were strangers with Rhiannon carefully noting down the signs as Merlin read them out. I'm glad you got here safely and that we at least don't have to eat all the puddings at Ryton Gardens!

So attention to detail, at times quite irritating when Vic could not accept another point of view, was a very important part of his watching out and caring for us. His detailed advice was offered and then action on it was monitored to see if it had been heeded. However, there were no sanctions or no withdrawal of support and love if you chose to ignore his advice or events overtook you. An example of this was a letter written to me last September on the important subject of shoe racks which I have to say are still not fixed to the wall! Fortunately I kept the letter because it struck me and the girls as quintessentially Vic, combining his sense of humour with practical details and his love for us. Robbie Robinson, one of Vic's closest friends and comrades, who was just behind him when he was wounded at Arnhem and who accompanied him on several reunions, is going to read it for us.

ROBBIE TO READ LETTER

YOU KNOW WHERE  
15/9/98

DEAR JOCE,

HERE AS PROMISED ARE 14 CLIPS & SCREWS TO FIX YOUR WIREWORK SHOE RACKS, YOU MAY ONLY NEED TWO TO SECURE THEM TO THE WALL, IT DEPENDS ON HOW GOOD THE FIXTURES ARE, THAT CAN BE LEFT UP TO THE PERSON WHO DOES THE FIXING.

THE SCREWS I AM SENDING ARE MADE OF BRASS AND THEN CHROMIUM PLATED SO DON'T JUST THROW THEM AWAY IF NOT USED, PUT THEM IN YOUR ODDS AND SODS BOX.

SORRY I DID NOT DROP IN ON THE WAY BACK FROM CAYTHORPE, ROBBY DID SAY HE WOULD LIKE TO MEET YOU AGAIN, IT WAS AT CAROLINE'S IN HOLLAND IN 1969 I THINK IT WAS MAYBE NEXT YEAR.

WE SHALL BE RINGING YOU TOMORROW WED TO GET ALL THE LATEST  
LOTS OF LOVE JOCE AND THE GIRLS  
DAD XXX ONE EACH

Thank you

Vic was a very bright man who used his mind and excellent memory to good effect for most of his life. From Odiham he went down to Barry Island in South Wales to train as an electrician, a trade which he used in the war and at which he excelled throughout his life. He spoke very fondly of his time in South Wales before the war and loved the sounds of the Gavioli fairground organ there which he wanted played today. The piece we have chosen is 'There's something about a soldier' which is very apt because it was whilst working in an aircraft hangar there as an electrician that he signed up.

GAVIOLI TAPE WHICH IS JUST OVER THREE MINUTES LONG TO THE END

*There was clearly something about him as a soldier which persuaded Lynn to share that bag of crisps in 1940 in Parkgate on the Wirral, and which began a relationship which lasted for 59 years. On his part there was something rather lovely about her gorgeous legs in those cycling shorts! Their marriage of 52 years holds many happy memories for Lynn, for which she is very thankful. One of his comrades last week remarked on Vic's sentimentality as he and Lynn would squeeze into their wedding clothes on each anniversary when we were children. Only three years ago Merlin, Rhiannon and I followed the unfolding of the romance with them, celebrating the spot with the sharing of a packet of Walkers Ready Salted. No little blue salt bags this time where the salt plops out in a damp ball and disappears to the bottom of the bag, I'm afraid!*

*So to return to the subject of Vic's memory which, on a lighter note, forced his exclusion from the weekly wartime 'Spot the Aircraft' competition on the grounds that he won it every week and that some other poor bloke deserved a win. More seriously his intelligence and attention to detail ensured that mistakes were kept to an absolute minimum. This was essential in the tricky business of wartime communications. It was also vital for his trade where he rose to becoming a master electrician. His electrical work was perfection itself, and much of it endures to this day in homes and farm buildings in Hampshire and in [our homes]. Provided he had a good lunch and the odd jam doughnut and cup of tea or two, Vic could undertake the most complex wiring job working from memory with no diagrams whatsoever.*

*We now need to move towards saying our final farewells to Vic, whose training to become a paratrooper began at Bulford Camp in Wiltshire and was followed by his memorable and mysterious trip by convoy through the Straights of Gibraltar to the North African coast in 1942, listening to the sounds of the ships' engines and Ann Shelton singing 'Red Sails in the Sunset', the song which began this service and which had touched Vic's emotions – love and fear – as he thought about the uncertainty ahead, our mother Lynn, and whether he would indeed return home to see her and his family again. Other memorable trips which fortunately he and those with him survived include the theft of a German motorbike in North Africa, (motorbikes were a passion for Vic) and riding it across a minefield, and throwing live grenades from the back of a lorry to see if they still worked!*

*Now is the time for Vic's last journey to come to an end so that he can be with his comrades from the Parachute Regiment in Oosterbeek Cemetery, near Arnhem in Holland. The place where he nearly lost his life in 1944. He particularly wanted his ashes to be sprinkled by the grave of a boy soldier [Geoffrey] Dunning<sup>6</sup> who was an orphan, and was described to me as a tall and thin man by one of Vic's comrades. [Geoffrey] Dunning's life was cut short in its prime. This gesture sums up the kind of man Vic was, variously described to us as a good chap, man or bloke by his comrades. My sister, Wendy, and I are very pleased and proud to carry out Vic's last wishes. To conclude this service and to offer comfort to those of us who are here, Robbie has kindly offered to read this short piece which may be familiar to many of us here today.*

*'Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room. I am I, and you are you. Whatever we were to each other, that we still are. Call me by my old familiar name, speak to me in the easy way you always used. Put no difference in your tone, wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow. Laugh as we always laughed at little jokes we enjoyed*

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<sup>6</sup> In the original text I had spelt Geoffrey as Jeffrey. I have altered the text here to use the correct spelling of his forename as indicated in the Register of Graves at Arnhem-Oosterbeek War Cemetery.

*together. Pray, smile, think of me, pray for me. Let my name be ever the household word that it always was, let it be spoken without effect, without the trace of a shadow on it. Life means all that it ever meant. It is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity. Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight? I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near, just round the corner. All is well.'*

*Henry Scott Holland  
1847 – 1918  
Canon of St Paul's Cathedral*

*Please stand. I would now like to call upon Corporal Pope from the 2nd Battalion, the Light Infantry, currently based at Bulford, where Vic, his comrades including Ray, Robbie's brother-in-law who was killed at Arnhem, and Robbie began their training, to play the Last Post. We say good-bye to Vic, loving husband, Dad, and Grandpa, Brother of Philip, Jack and Tom, Uncle, Cousin, Private Read, comrade, mate, friend, electrician signals and master electrician. We'll miss you and the inner strength you gave us from your experiences of life.*

*PUSH BUTTON TO COMMIT. THE LAST POST. 'RED SAILS IN THE SUNSET', QUIETLY TO BEGIN WITH FOR PEOPLE TO WALK OUTSIDE TO. APPROX 2 MINUTES AND 34 SECS. DO NOT PLAY VERA LYNN TALKING AT END (0.22 STOP!)*

As I have mentioned earlier, the funeral speech was influenced by the recent and unprecedented change which had taken place in my own life. What I wrote was guided by the intense feelings I had about that loss and change, which involved the indirect impact of the Holocaust on my life through my marriage to David and our divorce. His Jewish grandparents, our children's great grandparents' died in Dachau and Buchenwald Concentration Camps. I really wanted to include the poem at the beginning of Primo Levi's book *If this is a Man* (Levi, 1987, p.17), written by a survivor of Auschwitz Concentration Camp, to remember them and all the other people who were killed in those camps, but was persuaded that it did not really relate to my father's experiences so I left it out. But as part of this thesis I include the poem here because my father's stories were told in this spirit and influenced me as a child growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Primo Levi compels us not to forget:

You who live safe  
In your warm houses  
You who find, returning in the evening  
Hot food and friendly faces:  
    Consider if this is a man  
    Who works in the mud  
    Who does not know peace  
    Who fights for a scrap of bread  
    Who dies because of a yes or no  
    Consider if this is a woman,  
    Without hair and without name  
    With no more strength to remember,  
    Her eyes empty and her womb cold  
    Like a frog in winter.  
Meditate that this came about:  
I commend these words to you.

Carve them in your hearts  
At home, in the street,  
Going to bed, rising;  
Repeat them to your children,  
Or may your house fall apart,  
May illness impede you,  
May your children turn their faces from you.

© The Bodley Head, 1965

So when the champagne glasses chinked some seven months later at the beginning of the next millennium, I was still reflecting on the loss of my father: our first Christmas and New Year without him. Perhaps with my father's death I was beginning to face my own mortality during that transitional time? The next eight years were to offer a way of creating my own narrative from the influence of World War II on my life, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Five and Six.

## **To end**

This chapter has introduced how I conceive of 'self care' in inquiry practice, and shown my early understandings 'of love and loss' in the two writings I have presented and discussed. This analysis forms the seeds of a living theory of inquiry which I craft, using ideas from hermeneutics and phenomenology, in later chapters of the thesis. The impact of World War II on my life, through my father in particular and then in my decision to divorce, has been discussed within the ethical parameters I have set out regarding my past and present personal relationships with those still living.

During 2001, marking the end of a substantial period of upheaval in my life, I started a new job and found myself directing an action research study for the first time. I also had the opportunity to work in Russia, a country about which I knew little except from the stories my father had told me about starving Russian Prisoners of War. The next chapter explores these experiences and the deepening of my inquiry when I joined the programme at Bath in January 2002.