THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN HEALING AND GRIEF PROCESSES
OF BEREAVED ADULT LEARNERS

A Dissertation in
Adult Education

By
Francesca Albergato-Muterspaw

© 2009 Francesca Albergato-Muterspaw

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

May 2009
This dissertation of Francesca Albergato-Muterspaw was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Elizabeth J. Tisdell  
Associate Professor of Adult Education  
Dissertation Advisor  
Chair of Committee

Patricia A. Cranton  
Professor of Adult Education

Felicia L. Brown-Haywood  
Affiliate Assistant Professor of Adult Education

Glen Mazis  
Professor of Humanities and Philosophy

Ian Baptiste  
Associate Professor of Adult Education  
In Charge of Graduate Program in Adult Education

* Signatures are on file in Graduate School
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore how music facilitated the learning and healing for those who have lost a loved one. Set within a post hospice bereavement program context, this research pursued how these bereaved adults, who identified music as a critical component to their grief process, came to understand and accept their loss through musical means.

This qualitative study was grounded in a constructivist learning theory, informed by Kubler Ross’s stages of grief and music as a way of knowing. Constructivism offered a strong basis for understanding the individual and social learning which occurred during the grief processes of the participants. Additionally, consideration of factors such as spirituality, culture, emotion, identity and context, which are part of musical knowing and important to the participants of this study, were considered and included within the larger learning theory.

Data collection was completed through two individual interviews, a music elicitation exercise, and field notes and journaling completed by the researcher. The combination of the interviews with the music elicitation exercise created a wonderful opportunity to capture perceptions of the past and combine them with new thoughts about how the music impacted and continued to aid in their healing and coping. The resulting narratives provided rich descriptions of their individual stories and specific ways in which music played a role in their learning during the grief process.

Consideration of the data revealed that there are three main areas which have implications for the fields of adult education, hospice bereavement, grief counseling,
music therapy and related disciplines. The first described the significant relationship between music and emotion, and how it facilitated the expression of, distraction from and reflection on the emotional aspects of the grieving of these participants. Additionally, music’s role in the changed identity of the participants was noted. The second area addressed the interconnection of music with the participant’s sense of community, culture and spirituality, and how that impacted the grief process. The final area relayed the importance of paying tribute to the deceased. It also noted how participation with music and with this research project created new understandings for the six people who shared their stories, and how that impacted their on-going grief processes.

Following these findings is a detailed description of how music as a way of knowing, especially in relation to the strong link between musical form and emotion, facilitated the learning in this group of participants. The meaning –making described has implications for constructivist learning theory, as well as how this type of knowing may be included into formal, informal and nonformal settings and practices to help aid the learning, healing, and/or coping of adults who identify music as important to how they know and understand.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE
Introduction.............................................................................................................1
An Application: Music in a Hospice Setting..........................................................3
Purpose of the Study.............................................................................................7
Guiding Research Questions...............................................................................9
Overview of Theoretical Framework.................................................................9
Overview of Methodology...............................................................................12
Significance of the Study.................................................................................14
Assumptions, Strengths, Limitations...............................................................18
Organization of the Study.............................................................................19
Definition of Terms......................................................................................20

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW
Theoretical Framework......................................................................................22
Constructivism..................................................................................................23
Music as a Way of Knowing............................................................................33
Kubler Ross’s Stages of Grief..........................................................................42
Music’s Role in Adult Education and Learning..............................................46
Music in Adult Education in a Historical Context.........................................47
Musical Communication.................................................................................53
The Relationship Between Music and Identity.............................................56
Music as an Educational Device.................................................................59
Music as a Pathway to Emotions in Learning..............................................61
Music in Therapeutic, Hospice and Palliative Care.....................................66
Addressing Physical Symptoms.................................................................68
Emotional and Spiritual Expression.........................................................71
Active and Passive Participation.................................................................73
Bereavement Care.......................................................................................74
Chapter Summary.....................................................................................77

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.............................................................................80
Qualitative Research......................................................................................81
Narrative Inquiry............................................................................................84
Researcher’s Background............................................................................86
Participant Selection....................................................................................88
Data Collection..............................................................................................92
   Individual Interview................................................................................92
   Music Elicitation/ Field Notes.............................................................94
Data Analysis..............................................................................................95
Trustworthiness of the Study.....................................................................100
   Confirmability.....................................................................................100
   Credibility.........................................................................................102
   Dependability....................................................................................103
Transferability.................................................................104

CHAPTER 4: THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY.................................................107
AVA.................................................................................108
Remembrance: We Sang a Song for Every Day..........................108
Reflection: Continuing Family Tradition.................................116

CHAPTER 5: ADRIAN........................................................................121
Remembrance: Losing My Mirror Image....................................121
Reflection: Moving Beyond Orange...........................................130

CHAPTER 6: MEREDITH.................................................................134
Remembrance: Communion Through Loss...............................134
Reflection: Transition of the Spirit............................................140

CHAPTER 7: BETTY........................................................................143
Remembrance: The Sister I Never Had......................................143
Reflection: Time in the Past, Preparing for the Future...............153

CHAPTER 8: CRAIG.......................................................................156
Remembrance: The Power of Piano........................................156
Reflection: Music Shared......................................................163

CHAPTER 9: JAMES.....................................................................169
Remembrance: A Mother’s Love..............................................169
Reflection: reintegrating Silent Night......................................176

CHAPTER 10: The Song Goes On..................................................182
Summarizing the Findings: Living Memory from Fading Notes....182
Navigating the Grief...............................................................184
Community, Culture and Spirituality......................................195
Echoes of the Past, Moving to the Future:
Honoring, Including and New Ideas.................................202
From Sound to Meaning to Educating:
Implications for Theory Practice and Future Research..............206
Music as a Way of Knowing................................................207
Implications for Adult Education Constructivist Learning Theory208
Adult Learning in a Grief Context: Implications for Practice......212
Suggestions for Future Research.........................................222
Final Reflections.................................................................223

REFERENCES........................................................................225
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has been a tremendous undertaking, and its completion would not have possible without the love, support and expertise of so many wonderful people. I was quite fortunate in, and am grateful for the guidance of Dr. Elizabeth Tisdell, whose energy and spirit lent me strength throughout. I am also very appreciative for the perspective of Dr. Patricia Cranton, who helped me organize all this information while keeping the essence of purpose intact. I further wish to thank Dr. Felicia Brown-Haywood, whose passion for music and love of the human condition brought grace and joy to this project. I am also very indebted to Dr. Glen Mazis, for challenging me to always think beyond what I thought I knew, and for insights that helped me look beyond what was right in front of me.

Grazie to my parents, for your example, love, support and hours of proofreading. Many of the lessons I learned early on have new meaning at the end of this process, not the least of which is when to choose tea over coffee! I am looking forward to our next great undertaking. Love you!

Thank you Cohort 2004, for sharing this journey with me- your humor and support has been integral to this process. Special thanks Tom Reilly, Becky Timmons, Dave Eichler and Karen Milheim for all the reading (and re-reading) you have done. The evolution of this topic couldn’t have happened without you.

Lastly, I wish to thank all the people who have informed and inspired this research: the patients and families who have shared their end-of-life journeys with me. Each interaction has added to my understanding of life, death, loss and grief and helped prepare for the magnitude and intensity of this experience.
DEDICATION

This entire process has been intensely personal for me. Words cannot express the appreciation and love I have for those most responsible for my success in this endeavor, my family. Amidst several private losses was the joyous arrival of my beautiful son Duncan, who added a layer of complexity unimagined but created space in my soul to truly understand. His blissful presence and spirit offered balance to the intensity of this process.

However, it was the perspective, love, support and encouragement of my husband Marc which truly enabled me to complete this study. His sacrifice of time and on-going patience made this possible. The effort to bring this to fruition was truly a joint effort. Thank you Marc, for believing in me and giving me the time to see how it would all come together- I love you.
CHAPTER 1: PRELUDE

As we sit in our car, waiting for the cavalcade to begin its slow journey from the church to the gravesite, the small space is filled with the sounds of Frank Sinatra’s ‘Fly Me to the Moon.’ With tears in his eyes, my husband turns up the volume and presses repeat, replaying his ode to Alexis “Duke” Ryan, big-band drummer, Notre Dame fan, friend and surrogate grandfather. The slight smile on his face offers a glimpse of fond memories, but his countenance bears witness to the profound sense of loss. A void now exists, one which hopefully, in time, will be filled with new joys and the acceptance of old sorrows. But for today, we apply the salve of Sinatra to this grievous wound, thankful for the brief respite it offers, allowing us to regroup and forge ahead.

It has been five years since we buried our dear Duke. Many events leading up to and immediately after his death are a blur; yet the memory of those few minutes in the car are as clear as the proverbial bell. Fly Me to the Moon has irrevocably been linked with the life and death of a loved one. Experiencing the song has evolved from the simple consumption of popular media to the complex association of the memory, love, grief and survival of our loss. Inexplicably, this piece of music became a foundational element in the transition from acute sorrow to gradual acceptance. As I considered the undeniable impact of music in this situation, my curiosity was piqued. Why has this memory crystallized in my consciousness as a landmark in my mourning? And, what in the nature of music (or the musical experience) lends itself to the experience? These are questions that I’ve pondered since then, as well as in my experience over the past nine years in working with patients and their caregivers in a hospice setting.
Music occupies a rare and special place in the world. It has the power to entertain, share ideas, create community and speak to the soul. Its presence is noted, both historically and socially (Mark, 2002; Blacking, 1995) as an integral element of the customs, celebrations and everyday lives of most cultures. Many modern scholars remark on music’s versatility in the cultural realm, enhancing cultural identity and ritual while enabling intercultural communication and understandings (Lems, 2005; Olson, 2003; Scott, 2005). This formulation of understandings and meanings indicates that there is a correlation between learning and music.

The idea of music in an educational arena is not a new one. Stemming from the ancient Greek belief that music was vital to the development of ideal citizens, our Western, liberal educational tradition has routinely incorporated musical study as part of the curriculum. However, this inclusion usually relegated music to either the study of an aesthetic practice or the subjugation of another area of expertise. Whether employed by the medieval scholars to teach morality or by modern educators to support math, history, health, English or social issues (Karjala & White, 1983; Lems, 2001; Tinari & Khandke, 2000; Stephens, Braithwaite & Taylor, 1998; and Ungerleider, 1987), music has been utilized to augment the understanding of other subjects. It has proven itself to be an invaluable teaching tool, a manner of learning; but for many, it is also a way of knowing.

Howard Gardner’s (1983; 2003) delineation of nine intelligences includes music as one of the ways that people can learn. Expanding on this, many scholars have begun to explore how music is a way of knowing. Additionally, their work (Custodero, 2005; Kaltoft, 1990; Kopiez, 2002; Lawrence, 2005; Ludemann, 1999; McMillan, 2005;
Montello, 2002; Olson, 2003, 2005; Saliers & Saliers, 2005; Sherman, 2006) describes this knowing outside of the traditional classroom, and beyond the confines of the rational mind.

For some learners, music has a symbiotic relationship with the formation of knowledge and the creation of understanding. It moves musical presence beyond that of a useful learning tool into the realm of an inextricable knowing agent. Widely accepted as a powerful means of communication, and rooted in culture and personal experience, musical knowing impacts our understanding of identity, self and community (Lems, 2005; Olson, 2003; Saliers & Saliers, 2005). It is also the means by which many access and express their spirituality (Goldman, 2002; Montello, 2002; Tisdell, 2003).

As a musician, it seems rather intuitive to me that music, which is historically and systemically notable in almost every realm of society, should be embraced as an important means of forming personal understanding and knowledge of those parts of our lives it touches. Further, for those of us whose souls are sensitive to musical stirrings, it is a natural way to bring sense to many of situations and interactions which influence our daily lives.

An Application: Music in Hospice Settings

After acknowledging musical knowing, we can look to areas where this knowing may occur to gain further insight and clarification. Hospice care is one of those areas. Begun in England in the 1970’s and formalized in the United States as a Medicare benefit in 1980’s, hospice is a holistic approach to end-of-life care. Designed as a palliative mode of treatment, hospice care is delivered by an interdisciplinary team of professionals trained to address the physiological, psychological and spiritual needs of terminal patients.
and their families.

In addition to clinical staff such as nurses, social workers and nursing assistants, there are psychosocial counselors and alternative therapies which provide support to the patients and families. The goal of the entire team is to treat whatever symptoms occur during the end of life’s journey, be they physical, emotional or spiritual. One of the most profound symptoms is grief.

With its ability to influence physical, psychological and spiritual aspects of self, ineffective coping and unresolved grief can have detrimental and devastating effects on those who suffer from it. Because of this, Medicare has mandated that every hospice program offer bereavement support to each case. Title 42, vol.2 of the Code of Federal Regulations, part 418, subpart D, section 418.88, p. 789 states:

Standard: Bereavement counseling. There must be an organized program for the provision of bereavement services under the supervision of a qualified professional. The plan of care for these services should reflect family needs, as well as a clear delineation of services to be provided and the frequency of service delivery.

Informed largely by Kubler-Ross’s (1969) stages of grief, the bereavement plan of care is designed to identify and meet the needs of each individual who chooses to participate. The interventions are based upon the characteristics displayed and our knowledge of the person who is grieving.

One of the interventions often employed is the use of music and musical therapy as a means of expressing grief and coping. By intentionally incorporating music, either in passive listening or the performance/production of it, the counselor hopes to facilitate the
expression of emotions and the promotion of healing. There is a substantial body of literature, predominantly conceptual, delineating the use of music (especially music therapy) in hospice and palliative care. Quality of life is an important aspect in end-of-life care. Ruud (1997) offers perspective on music’s role in this endeavor, from the music therapy perspective. Other literature focuses attention particularly in the realms of pain and symptom management, (Magill, 2001; O’Callaghan, 1996, 2001) patient and family support (Clements-Cortes, 2004; Hilliard, 2001; Krout, 2003; Murrant, 2000), and pediatric care and bereavement (Aasgaard, 2001; Hilliard, 2003). Of the pieces which specifically address adult grief, most focus on the anticipatory grief of terminally ill patients and their families/caregiver. Creagh (2005), Smeijsters and Hurk (1999) and Mohan-VanHeerdan (2003) are among the few who offer research relating to role of music (and the arts and creativity) in mourning. Their findings support this writer’s supposition that music can be an effective tool in understanding one’s own grief experience.

However, I believe that this understanding does not necessarily need to be a result of the intentional, focused inclusion of music in a careplan. Berger (1993), Goldman (2002), Kessler and Kubler-Ross (2003), Montello (2002), and Saliers and Saliers (2005), all offer descriptions of unguided musical occurrences in daily life which can connect us with our grief processes and promote healing. Singing in church, listening to birdsong, writing lyrics and attending a concert have the same potential to strike a personal chord as a session of music therapy.

Unfortunately, there is little empirical research in this area. There are countless conceptual pieces which discuss the positive attributes of music, especially as they
pertain to individual elements (such as spirituality), as well as studies relaying the positive effect music can have on physiological elements, such as pain and heart rate. However, attention to some of the psychosocial areas, such as grief and loss, is lacking. This is especially true when considering the use of music beyond its inclusion in intentional music therapy.

Some supportive data can be gathered from related research in the fields of art, drama, creative writing and humor, but there is a scarcity here as well. Grief literature provides the majority of the foundation, (Kalweit, 1988; Kubler-Ross, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2005; Moody, 2001). Literature from the fields of music and education also offer useful perspectives, filling in areas of specialty and nuance, and contributing to the overall picture.

Understanding the relationship of music with the grief process offers significant insights for many fields. The medical field, especially hospice workers, psychologists, grief counselors and music therapists would benefit from this understanding. Additionally, musicians, clergy, volunteers, and those working in related therapies might benefit from such information.

Educators, especially those training grief counselors, medical staff and music therapists, could also be influenced by this research. A greater understanding of grief as a phenomenon, as well as the development of coping mechanisms and healing through a specific catalyst (like music) can greatly impact the approach to care and treatment of those looking for support. By incorporating this knowledge in the initial training of those providing the help can only enhance the level of care and likelihood they will utilize these findings in their care.
This research also has implications for the field of adult education. In addition to adding to the body of literature surrounding informal and nonformal learning of adults, it offers another layer to music (and other arts) as a way of knowing. Because of the holistic nature of music, and of the grief experience, this data connects with other areas influencing adult education, like spirituality, embodiment and the role of culture in learning.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, this study provides information and support to those needing it most—those individuals actively grieving and the families who support them. Grief itself is overwhelming. Add to that the piles of information and misinformation provided as resource material, and the situation may seem unbearable. The narratives contained in this study provide a clear, descriptive, helpful view of cases where music was an integral component in the understanding and resolution of grief.

Purpose and Research Questions

Death is part of life, and grief is often the response to death. "Everyone experiences many losses throughout life, but the death of a loved one is unmatched for its emptiness and profound sadness" (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005, p 29). Understanding this loss is an individual process. Coping and healing does not follow a simple series of steps which result in acceptance; there is no formula which makes the hurt disappear. Instead, it is a journey. Each person finds his or her own way, at his or her own pace. There are countless paths that can be taken on the road to healing. Mourners often turn to loved ones and personal practices which have brought them strength and comfort in the past.

Although often overlooked, music is often intimately involved in these scenarios.
Music has had a place in the traditions and rituals surrounding grief in many cultures throughout history. It is a means of celebrating the life and giving voice to the loss. In addition to its expressive capabilities, within music lies the innate potential for insight and knowledge. More concisely, for some, music is a way of knowing and understanding. Whether as a means to communicate, as an element in spirituality, or a link to self, cultural, or community, music offers a mechanism for learning and knowing.

Scholars such as Dirkx (2001), Montello (2002), Olson (2003, 2005) and Tisdell (2006) reinforce the role of music in learning and knowing. Their writings illustrate how adults have applied music in personal, educational and social scenarios to create new understandings and connections. Their words reflect the important interaction of self and the medium of music, as well as the interactions between music and aspects of identity, community, spirituality, and imagination. Consideration of each element, and its relationship to the learning process, is foundational to this study; the combination elements and sum of the interrelationships among them is where I was able to discover about the learning and knowing which takes place.

Purpose of the Study

Little research has been done to reveal the role and nature of musical knowing within the realm of grief and mourning. Berger (1993), Creagh (2005), and Mohan-Van Heerden (2003) provide some description of how music (and other arts-based therapies) can impact grief and healing, but there are still many questions to be answered. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how music facilitated the learning and healing for those who have lost a loved one. Set within a post hospice bereavement program context, this research pursued how these bereaved adults came to understand
and accept their loss through musical means.

*Guiding Research Questions*

Given the goal of this research project, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did the participants describe music's role in the understanding of their grief process?

2. How did the participants identify a meaningful musical episode or moment? How important was context to this determination?

3. Given that grieving and healing are both ongoing processes, does music continue to have a role in the understanding and acceptance of the loss for these participants?

4. What are the implications for hospice bereavement programs and counselors?

*Conceptual/Theoretical Framework*

This study was designed to explore the relationship between music and the resolution of grief. Consideration of these two factors, music and grief, led to the development of a theoretical framework designed to explore how we come to know and understand these arenas. Personal and professional experiences have influenced my belief that both elements are navigated through personal and social realms, and that our conception of each results from the nuances of our cultural selves. Thus, our creation of knowledge, both in general and through musical means, is constructivist in nature. Therefore, this study utilized a framework of musical knowing as a specific form of the constructivist paradigm. It is my belief that these concepts have meshed to not only inform the study, but also how each is considered and used.

The conception of constructivism is vast, laden with theories, thoughts and
interpretations from thinkers across many disciplines. And like its most basic tenet, that “learning is a process of constructing meaning...how people make meaning of their experience” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261), the development of this learning theory has been a process. Writers differ on the role of experience, knowledge, the multitude of influencers and what impacts meaning making. The largest debate, however, continually circles the questions of whether the process is primarily individual or social in nature.

Cognitive constructivists, who are principally influenced by Piaget, hold the perspective that learning is an individual process. It is an internal process which is driven by the past experiences of the learner. (Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, & Scott, 1994; von Glaserfeld, 1996). Social constructivism, on the other hand, contends that all knowledge is culturally and socially mediated, and that language and context are critical to the learning process (Prawat, 1996; Shor, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986)

Given the nature of grief, and having experienced such loss on numerous occasions, I do not think that it is an either/or situation. Instead, it is a process, which, like grief, encompasses meanings which are motivated by both internal and external factors (Bruner, 1966; Phillips, 1995). Additionally, I believe that mourners learn to cope and reconcile their grief within the five tenets of constructivism delineated by Phillips (1995): knowledge is a human construct; the educational situation must be congruent with the individual learner’s level of intellectual development (Renger, 1980/1992); new knowledge must be built on previous knowledge; learners must be active agents, responsible for the construction of their own knowledge; and knowledge may be socially
or individually constructed (although more seem to indicate a belief in the socially constructed theory).

After reflecting on the general characteristics of constructivism, and in consideration of the qualities of music and role that it frequently plays in palliative care, death rituals and personal expression, I posit that one avenue by which the bereaved may find resolution is via musical means. "The songs and tunes we hear serve as a unique companion. In offering comfort, music makes no demands on us at all...music helps us turn a flood of emotions into something more manageable." (Lynn & Harrold, 1999, p. 188). As described earlier, music is a way of knowing. The experience can be connected to a person’s sense of self, community and spirituality. It is a means of communicating, of understanding and of sharing. The effects can be measured in the body and felt in the soul.

Allen (1995), Greene (1995) and Lawrence (2005), are strong proponents of music’s ability to help people learn, express and form understandings about occurrences in life. Allen (1995) specifically references the ability to use creative means to understand life’s challenges, including grief, fear and the unknown, while Greene (1995) focuses on music as a catalyst of meaning-making. Lawrence (2005) echoes these sentiments, and adds that music and the arts enable a learning of self, of others and of the unknown.

Thus, music’s place within communication, spirituality, self and community creates the perfect opportunity for those facing a fear, loss and/or unknown, like grief, to come to learn and understand the process through musical means. Whether someone is an active creator of the music (Allen, 1995; Danforth, 1995; Greene, 1995; Olson, 2003) or uses imagination, reflection and self-awareness to learn, (Dirkx, 2001; Goldman,
music is a powerful way for mourners to face, learn and overcome the devastating loss of a loved one.

Methodology Overview

Since the purpose of this research was to investigate the lived grief experiences of individuals within a specific context, a qualitative research method has been the most appropriate. The goal of this basic research project was to gain an understanding of how music facilitates healing after the significant loss of a loved one. The qualitative paradigm, concerned with meanings, context, processes, and uniqueness (Maxwell, 2004), left room for interpretation and input from the researcher.

This study required a paradigm that could capture the details, emotions and highly personal nature of the grief process. It was also necessary to have the flexibility to adapt to the needs of each participant and the nature of the data being collected. Equally important was the need for a type of inquiry that was not constrained by predetermined groups or categories. The descriptions offered by Patton (2002), Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicated a qualitative research design which enabled this author to explore, modify and adjust during the course of the investigation of music and its relationship with the coping and healing during the grief process.

The characteristics of the topic of the study also contributed to the specific type of research employed: narrative inquiry. Given the holistic disposition of hospice, the highly individual experiences of grief and the myriad of factors which impact the grief process, it was important for the participants to be able to share and express in their own words, at their own pace. The retelling of the story was a natural continuation of the process begun in the bereavement program. Although varied in actual execution, bereavement support,
whether individual or group, creates space for dialogue, voice and each person’s unique journey. There is growth and learning that occurs with the process of the narrative. Within the sharing of this study’s tales were rich, descriptive accounts that reveal the experiences and healing during the participants’ grief processes.

“Understanding these experiences narratively” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 191) involves the recording of body language, emotion, posture, and other non-verbal cues and data. Data was gathered through two open-ended, semi-structured narrative interviews. The sessions, which ranged from 90-120 minutes each, occurred at sites of the participants choosing. Field notes, the researcher’s personal journal and audio recordings were also employed in the data collection.

One specific focus of the data collection was to include a music elicitation exercise, designed around a piece or type of music identified by the participant in the first session. The goal was to reflect on the role and importance of the music during their bereavement period, and then explore its role now. While there are no specific sources which describe music’s use in this manner, several accounts, including Loeffler (2005), Clark-Ibanez (2004) and Smith and Woodward (1999) delineate clear and successful use of photography for similar purposes.

A purposeful, criterion selection approach was employed to gather participants. Although initially eight elected to participate, the findings are reflective of the experiences of six self-selecting adults. They were recruited through hospice bereavement coordinators, since one of the criteria requires that each person must have completed a hospice bereavement program. Given that this study only addressed the experiences of bereaved adults, it was important that each person was at least 25 years of
age prior to beginning their bereavement program. Determination of minimum age parameters resulted from consideration of adult development literature and the general adult education description of the adult learner. It was also necessary that participants identify music as a crucial component of their grief process. Analysis of the transcriptions, field notes and my personal journal entries highlighted areas of significance revealed in the data. All interviews were transcribed and underwent member-checks in between sessions to ensure accuracy and to assist in follow-up questions. Triangulation, audit trails and rich descriptions were employed for the purpose of trustworthiness.

“In telling a story, the past as remembered and retold sheds light on the present and implicates the future” (Braud & Anderson, 1998, p.23). Grief remembered, grief shared, grief healed through music; there is much to be learned from the story to be told.

Significance

Death, I have seen come on slowly as rust sand, or suddenly as when someone leaving a room, finds the doorknob come loose in his hand.” (John Stone, from In All This Rain).

Death is an inevitable fact of life; one of the few facts which transcends age, race, class or culture. It is one of only a few truly unifying factors which binds all of humankind, all of life, together. Inherent in the process of dying and death is the sense of loss. Most often described by the terms grief and grieving, the sense of loss can be anticipatory or occur post death. It has the power to affect the physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive realms of life, incapacitating some and causing heartache in many.

Despite our advances in science, medicine and technology, it is impossible to stop death. Instead, we learn to cope, to move on. But how do we do it? Kubler-Ross’s
description of the stages of grief was designed with the “hope that with these stages comes the knowledge of grief’s terrain, making us better equipped to cope with life and loss” (Kubler-Ross & Kessler 2005, p. 7).

The intent of this study was to provide insight about music helps mourners traverse the tricky terrain of grief and loss to reach more steady emotional ground. The pain, the fear, the anger, the denial, the desire to move, the unwillingness to let go, the hope for something…else; each person hits bumps like these, but in their own way. Some hit deep pot-holes, others minor divots. For some, the companionship of music helps them navigate the trip with a little more comfort.

Globally, this is significant because death, grief and loss touch us all. It impacts the personal, professional, and social lives of everyone at some point, both consciously and unconsciously. Music presence can be noted in a similar fashion. A component of the activities and traditions of most cultures, (Blacking, 1995), music has the ability to significantly effect or just subtly coexist within the different realms of life and living. It is also commonly found in the rituals of death and dying. The interrelationship of the two elements, music and grief, seems intuitive to this researcher, and could have far-reaching implications for many seeking a handhold on their journey.

Understanding how that handhold actually provides assistance leads us into the realm of adult education. Beginning with Gardner’s (1983, 2003) theory of multiple intelligences and fleshed out by the works of scholars like Kaltoft (1990), Kopiez (2002), Montello (2002), Olson (2003, 2005), and Tisdell (2006), this study was informed by “other” ways of knowing; specifically, music. The literature surrounding art, spirituality and somatic knowing were also supportive. In my analysis of the findings, I was pleased
to note that this study provides further insight to a growing (but still limited) body of literature and provides greater validation for music as a true way of knowing, rather than an adjunct to a grander theory.

Moreover, since the purpose of this research was to explore how music helped the bereaved adults *learn* to cope with their loss and develop tools to facilitate grief resolution, interpretation of the findings also supported the notion that music is a way of teaching as well. Such findings validate the assertion that music can be the primary intention, instead of always being relegated as the tool to teach the “better” subject.

However, the greatest significance this study offers the field of adult education involves the learners themselves. It is well documented that adult learners are balancing many aspects of self and life as they pursue their studies. In addition to grief, death and dying, which can impact any one of us at any time, there are a myriad of losses which can affect the course of one’s education. A divorce, health concerns, caring for an aging parent—all of these can represent a loss which can profoundly change the learning landscape for educators and students alike. A great accomplishment of this study is a discussion of how some adults assign significance to music, lending insight for ways to utilize music to develop coping mechanisms for situations beyond the scope of the research.

The experiences of the participants also have considerable consequences for the fields of hospice, palliative care, grief and bereavement counseling, music therapy, and other related practitioners. Field staff involved in the care of the patients, bereaved, and their caregivers (including other medical professionals) have another perspective available in the arsenal to fight psychosocial symptoms in those who suffer from their
loss. These findings also have implications for tangentially related medical disciplines, like oncology, which routinely use music to calm and distract patients during treatments.

This study offers new areas for discussion in the classrooms of the upcoming medical, musical and counseling professionals who may in some way be connected with end-of-life care. Teachers could introduce these findings for discussion, and as a practice-based example of how and why music can be used in such a setting to affect more positive outcomes. Music in medicine, even more so than in education, needs the recognition as something more than just background static.

As a practicing musician, hospice professional and adult educator, this study is near and dear to my heart. Not only does it represent an amalgamation of my professional and educational experiences to this point, it is an area that means much to my personal life. Each person I have encountered in my professional life has taught me something that helped in my personal life. Like many, I have experienced the loss of loved ones, and traveled the road of grief. But my music, and the experiences shared by those that I have known, helped (and helps) me deal with the pain.

In recognizing this, I wanted to explore the experiences of others who identified music as their means of understanding and coping with their loss so that I could learn more. Each story, each insight, was a gift. The knowledge that I gained here will be there when the next patient, family or friend needs it. This research has been the practical realization of my responsibility, and my gratitude, for all those who taught me, and for those I have yet to pass it on to. The true significance of this work lies not in the words, but in the people it will come from, and the people it will pass to.
Assumptions, Strengths and Limitations

There were several major assumptions which guided this research. They were:

1. That there is a relationship between the presence/use of music and the development of coping mechanisms and healing during grieving.
2. That music will facilitate a positive outcome for the bereaved while grieving.
3. That the acceptance and healing of grief is a desirable outcome.
4. That music and musical knowing are a valid form of knowing and knowledge.
5. That there is equal potential for healing in the performance of and the audience and/or passive participation with music.

Every research study has both strengths and limitations. Some of the notable limitations intrinsic to this study were:

1. As a qualitative study that made use of a relatively small number of participants, the study is not generalizable, but may have applications in other areas. Studies dealing with children’s grief, non-death losses, or those seeking to understand other application of musical knowing are some examples.
2. The research employed a retrospective look at the bereavement process. It did not capture the essence of grief-in-progress. There was a concern that some of the nuances important during the acute mourning period were missed, represented as less important, or changed with the retelling in a way that indicates the now rather than the past.
3. The study only looked at the process of adults who had participated in a hospice bereavement program, as opposed to adults who had not participated in grief programs, children and those still receiving support from a bereavement
counselor.

4. Due to the nature of narrative inquiry, the sample size was small and was limited in its reflection of multiple cultures or grief practices.

In spite of the limitations, the study also has some important strengths as noted below:

1. The context of the study (hospice) often incorporates music into end-of-life care and the bereavement program. This study is a natural extension of that experience.

2. The post bereavement program status of participants created a high likelihood of rich, descriptive interviews, which were obtained. A bereavement program involves the telling and retelling of the story, reflection and an awareness of self in relation to others, activity and society. As a result, these participants were more comfortable sharing their personal background details, allowing for a more thoughtful exploration of the specific role of music.

3. This broad approach to style, type and involvement with music provided a greater understanding of music’s role in coping and healing during the grief process.

4. The researcher has professional experiences as both a musician and hospice professional.

Organization of the Study

The ensuing chapters are organized to relate the philosophical grounding, execution and summation of this research. Chapter 2 contains an in-depth review of the literature which informed this study, followed a description of the methodology employed in chapter 3. Chapters 4-9 share the individual narratives of each participant, concluded in the final chapter by a delineation of the findings, implications and
discussion of the potential for future research.

Definition of Terms

There are several key terms which were used consistently throughout this study. In an effort to facilitate greater understanding of the research, they have been defined below.

*Anticipatory Bereavement* describes the commencement of professional bereavement support prior to the death of the patient. It also refers to the development of coping mechanisms which occurs prior to the death.

*Anticipatory Grief* is any grief felt by the bereaved prior to the actual death.

*Bereaved* is the term used to describe those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

*Bereavement Program* refers to a grief counseling program offered as a part of the Medicare Hospice Benefit. Participation by the families is completely voluntary.

*Grief* is one of the natural emotions described by Kubler-Ross (1982), and serves to describe the feeling of loss and sorrow experienced by the bereaved.

*Grieving* refers to both the emotional aspects of loss and the process that an individual goes through while experiencing the emotions.

*Healing* can be considered the reinterpretation and reintegration of aspects of a mourner’s existence into a new/changed understanding of self and life.

*Hospice* refers to the palliative approach to end-of-life care pioneered by Dame Cicely Saunders, shaped by the work of Dr. Kubler-Ross and regulated as a Medicare benefit in the United States. It is an interdisciplinary, holistic program which cares for the patient and their families during the end of life’s journey.
Music, within the confines of this research, shall refer to any series of pitches or sounds, rhythms and/or compositions identified by the participants as music.

Musical Knowing shall be used to describe the physical, emotional, spiritual, rational, and/or embodied manner by which music helps facilitate knowledge and learning.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was an examination of how music helped facilitate the healing of grief in bereaved adults. It was a foray into the stories and experiences of the participants willing to share their memories, reflections and emotions of this highly personal journey. In order to truly hear and understand the voices which have spoken, I first considered those words shared prior to this research. A careful, thorough inspection of the literature provided insight and illumination into the areas most vital to this study.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. First, is a discussion of the theoretical framework. Next is a consideration of music's role in adult education and adult learning. Third is a consideration of music's role in therapeutic and hospice or palliative care settings. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summation of the significant concepts and areas of interest identified by an intensive review of the literature, as well as attention to the gaps in research related to the study.

Theoretical Framework:

Constructivism, Music as a Way of Knowing, and Grief

Overcoming the loss of a loved one is very difficult, highly individual process. Each person navigates the challenge according to their emotions, beliefs, history, abilities, and needs. However, learning to cope and making sense of the loss often involves reconciling the changes to every aspect of life that the deceased used to inhabit. This, combined with the communal nature of many aspects of knowledge and knowing, adds a social layer to an often solitary situation.
This study required a framework which allowed for both an individual and socially informed way of knowing and understanding grief and loss. Further, this structure needed to support the type of knowing which occurs through the use and presence of music. I assume that music is a valid way of knowing and understanding, and that music, like grief, has both individual and social elements to it. Therefore, this research was theoretically grounded in the intersections of constructivism, music as a way of knowing, and the stages of grief literature. This section will provide a brief overview of each of these aspects of the theoretical framework.

Constructivism

It is clear that human beings come to know, learn, and make sense of their lives by building on their prior experiences; in essence, they construct new meaning and learning by evaluating it in light of past learning and experience. “The word constructivism serves as a summary label that conceals myriad complex differences and diverse arguments among its variations” (Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons 1998, p 36). Because of this, constructivism draws from many other theories, including critical theory, experiential learning and feminist epistemology. Thus, the very essence of the theory reflects the Gestalt belief held by many constructivists—the whole is greater than the sum of its many parts.

Continuing in this vein is the commonly held constructivist belief that every theory allows for multiple alterations (Chrenka, 2001); therefore there can be multiple approaches to constructivism. This idea is supported by the works of many, including Hodson and Hodson (1998), Airasian and Walsh (1998) and Geelan (1997), the latter of whom actually denotes a minimum of six categories of constructivism. For the purposes
of this discussion however, I will follow the literature and deal with the two main camps: cognitive-developmental or Piagetian constructivism and sociocultural or social constructivism.

Cognitive constructivism is based on the belief that learning is an individual, cognitive construct; "knowledge does not exist outside the student's mind" (von Glasersfeld 1996, p. 5). In other words, individuals create knowledge from the interaction between their existing knowledge or beliefs and the new ideas or situations they encounter. Driver, Asoko, Leach, Mortimer, and Scott, (1994) address the debate of individual versus social constructivism. Drawing heavily from the works of Piaget, learning framed in this perspective is a personal activity that involves a continually adaptation of the person’s cognitive scheme to the context/ environment around them. “Meaning is made by the individual and is dependent on the individual’s previous and current knowledge structure. Learning is thus an internal cognitive activity (Driver et al 1994, p.6). Activities, like self-conceiving and self-organizing, are a way of understanding human behavior (Neimeyer, 1995). From this perspective, learning to deal with grief revolves completely around the individual’s ideas about loss, and not what that means in relation to their cultural or community norms.

Coined from the words of John Dewey (1963), the term social constructivism describes the interrelationship between the psychological and social sides of education. The role of a community, be that a school or a hospice bereavement group, is to help learners construct knowledge so that they may “participate in the social consciousness of the race.” (p. 26). In the case of mourning, there is the implied belief that everyone must come to accept their loss and return to participate in society.
Unlike cognitive constructivism, socially constructed knowledge involves many influences in its production. As Hodson and Hodson (1998, p. 37) note, "Individual development is shaped as much by cultural as by biological factors, as much by social factors as by individual effort." In other words, knowledge is not merely constructed independently by the individual learner; rather, it is co-constructed through social interaction. This is achieved through learning exercises, with language serving as the foundation. Construction, or building of knowledge, occurs as a result of reflection and making meaning of experiences (Shor, 1992). Vygotsky (1986) describes our learning in socially mediated situations as crucial to our learning; learning built upon communication, a practice steeped in social contact.

Dewey posited that learning was idea-based, and that the generation of new ideas was a product of a group anticipating knowledge together (1925/1981). Playing with, or negotiating these ideas, is central to social constructivism (Prawat, 2000, 2002). By this description, an individual's experience and ability to name grief is a result of a socially constructed sense of the phenomenon. Moreover, how the bereaved and others make sense of the situation is based on what grief means within that community or context; “community sets the public criteria of meaning” (Wittgenstein, 1958).

While Piaget (1972) placed more emphasis on the individual cognitive process, Vygotsky (1978) interjected the relevance of context and the knowledge and meanings of everyday life. Language, dialogue and shared understanding are all important components of the individual learner’s process. Phillips (1995) discusses the presence of both in learning, depending on the context. Learning is based on an experience; the knowledge does not pre-exist nor is it given by an expert. Instead, it is the result of the
learner. By participating with learning on three levels, as an active learner, a social learner and a creative learner, students are able to make meaning of their cognitive conflict and form an understanding.

Bruner (1966) also combines Piagetian and Vygotskyian perspectives in his description of discovery learning. Essentially, his theory contends that students learn better and retain concepts to a greater degree if they discover on their own, as opposed to learning passively through rote learning and lecture. So, bereaved adults will learn from their experiences more if they seek answers on their own, in areas that interest them, rather than by sitting in a room full of others being told what they must do to move on.

Whether cognitive or socially constructed, all strains of this theory share the notion that reality can only be known subjectively. Generally, the term knowledge is used to indicate the meaning that people make out of their experiences in this reality, (Merriam & Brockett, 1997) or their cognitive conflict (Savery & Duffy, 1995).

Phillips (1995) denotes five major tenets of all constructivism:

- knowledge is a human construct
- the educational situation must be congruent with the individual student’s level of intellectual development (Renger, 1980/1992)
- new knowledge must be built on previous knowledge
- students must be active agents, responsible for the construction of their own knowledge
- knowledge may be socially or individually constructed (although more seem to indicate a belief in the socially constructed theory)
Similarly, Jaworski (1994) in Stage et al. (1998) demarcates four key elements of social constructivism:

- Active construction of knowledge based on experience with and previous knowledge of the physical and social worlds;
- An emphasis on the influence of human culture, where individuals construct the rules and conventions of language;
- Recognition of social construction of knowledge through dialogue
- Emphasis on the intersubjective construction of knowledge, in that knowledge is socially negotiated between significant others who are able to share meanings and social perspectives of a common lifeworld. (p. 39).

Despite these central themes, there are some important distinctions within the constructivist literature. An important one relates to the actual terminology employed in some of the literature. Raskin (2002) indicates that many social constructivists prefer to use the term *constructionism*, rather than *constructivism*. The distinction lies in the singularity of the constructivism viewpoint; specifically, that learners exist in an isolated, interior space, rather than learn through their interaction with others (Gergen, 1995). This viewpoint is favored by in the psychological field, and is not generally concerned with elements of power, culture or context. Constructionism accepts the relationship between knowledge, context, time and space, and assume that there will be shifts which result from changes in interpersonal dynamics. Additionally, constructionists like Burr (1995) and Gergen (1991, 1995, 1999) emphasize the importance of language, symbol and the fluidity of human identity.
Although these differences can carry very important implications in specific circles, I do not separate the terms within the confines of this paper. This decision is based, in part, by my assumption that the learning and knowledge gained through the grief process is influenced by both cognitive and social aspects. I am also influenced by the reality that not all the literature discussed differentiates the terminology to the same degree, or in the same way. Therefore, I am guided by the concepts present in the literature, rather than by subjective definitions of certain terms.

The strength of constructivism (especially social constructivism), as a learning theory relating to healing and grief resolution, is that it accounts for how individuals have constructed meaning in light of their social context, and the role of culture, spirituality, community, dialogue, and the importance of interaction in these contexts. How a person perceives the loss of a loved one, and the meanings that they attach to that, as well their goals as a bereaved person are definitely influenced by their culture, faith, community and individual disposition.

Whether social or individual, the points of this learning theory address several areas important in mourning, including the interaction between individuals, the cultural variability among hospice families and professional caregivers, the presence and value of lived experience and the holistic philosophy which is in the grid work of the entire hospice approach to care.

Specific to learning, “social constructivists stress the social nature of knowledge, maintaining the meaningful social exchanges between individuals are the primary sources of cognitive growth and construction of knowledge” (Stage et al. 1998, p. 38). This statement indicates that the interactions between the bereavement coordinator and the
bereaved are most likely what spurs the subsequent learning which takes place. This fits nicely with the counselor’s role as a facilitator and the individualistic, self-directed nature of the learning inherent in the healing of grief. Healing occurs as the bereaved finds meaning in their loss, and gains understandings that help them cope with that loss. This also blends nicely with the learning that takes place post bereavement care as the grief process continued.

To clarify, this means that any of the social exchanges which occur between the two parties (visits, phone calls, support groups, e-mails, memorial services, etc) can be the catalyst for learning. The determination of what is “meaningful” is highly subjective. “Definitions are affected by their past experiences with such events, their emotional socialization and current health, their gender and personality style, their spiritual and cultural beliefs, and the nature of both the relationship and the event itself” (Martin & Elder, 1993). These factors greatly affect the ability of both the counselor and the participant to meet on common ground and create new understandings of the loss. These understandings are tied to the persons, contexts and events of each interaction, and are not fixed or final. They are instead a part of the process. This development becomes more complex in the case of a group interaction, where the likelihood of greater diversity makes the learning a little more challenging. Fortunately, all participants start out with at least one piece of shared experience—the loss of a loved one.

Reiterating that the bereavement program is intended to assist those choosing to participate (active learners) in it with the development of coping mechanisms, healthy expression of grief and the transition through the acute stages of loss, it is possible to
identify how the strengths and weaknesses of this learning theory can both help and hinder the learning process, and the healing which occurs as a result of it.

For example, I consider the role of the educator as a facilitator to be a strength both because of the compatibility between the learning theory and the hospice bereavement program (assuming a critical/humanist perspective). However, this same strength is a weakness when trying to interact with those whose socially informed construct of culture has different expectations of this role (be it teacher or learner), or of the grief experience. Morgan (1993) addresses this tension in his discussion of the relationships between the individual, their grief and society. Using Lindemann’s (1944) five elements of grief: somatic distress, preoccupation with loss, feelings of guilt, loss of affect, and disorientation, Morgan discusses the frequent conflict between the individual’s sense of loss and the social pressure to “get over it”. He concludes that society (which includes bereavement workers) needs to readjust its perspective about the death of a loved one. The bereaved person not only suffers from the absence of the physical person, but also from the loss of the relationship with that person. Since a relationship is the interaction between people, a mourner suffers the additional loss of the part of themselves which existed in that relationship.

Additionally, this expectation may be influenced by the age of the person, and how their lived experiences and/or manner of dialogue functions in that setting (Loria, 1995). An emphasis on language and dialogue may be problematic. First, there is a great opportunity for misunderstanding or lack of support if a language barrier exists. Since the words, concepts and understandings are socially constructed, it is important that the counselor helping the bereaved to move beyond the word and focus on perception and
expectation. Hearing a translation of words does not ensure an understanding of the meaning.

Disease process can also influence this type of learning scenario. According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organizations statistics for 2005, 76% of hospice patients are over the age of 65. It stands to reason that their spouses will be of similar age and physical status. So, in addition to the normal changes of aging, it is likely that at least some of the patients participating in a bereavement program will be suffering from assorted ailments. This can greatly affect the dialogue and ability to participate in and successful complete the course of bereavement care.

Another area of concern is the lack of attention to the power relations which influence the situation. “Because people with power tend to be more active in the construction of knowledge, they exert greater influence in what is constructed.” (Stage et al., p. 48). Examination of the power structure inevitably raises questions about race, class and access to information. (Brookfield, 2003; hooks, 2003). Theorists on the far end of the social spectrum, like Gergen (1995, 1999) actively address power relations, while followers of Piagetian, individualistic thought generally do not. Like many, I find myself in the middle. I am drawn to Piaget’s supposition that individuals do create new knowledge based on the interaction of new information with understandings that are already present and that a person often adapts themselves to fit into a new context. However, it is impossible for me to ignore the role that power, culture and history play in knowledge and knowing, especially in consideration of my belief that much of our learning does occur through socially constructed means. It is also impossible for me to conceive of grief or music as wholly individualistic or motivated. Fortuitously, social
constructionism offers a framework which can sway the focus of the power and create situations more conducive to learning.

A critique of many discourses of constructivism is that they seem to lean in the cognitive, rational direction. Although there is some room in social and cultural constructs for other ways of knowing and forms of knowledge (such as story, song and dance), the theory seems predominantly concerned with how learners think through their experiences. This could be problematic for the mourners who experience physical and spiritual symptoms of grief as a part of their process.

Lastly, constructivism seems incompatible with more objective ways of knowing and learning. It is often criticized by scientists (Osborne, 1996) for failing to acknowledge their approach to knowledge and for attempting to validate every subjective experience as equally important socially constructed knowledge. Although contested by social constructivists such as von Glasersfeld and Hodson and Hodson, researchers on both sides should be aware of the implications of the debate.

Clearly, approaching grief education from a social constructivism standpoint is a complicated undertaking which requires consideration of both the counselor’s and the participant’s personal, cultural, and experiential factors, as well as their educational expectations and approach to language and dialogue. However, it is precisely because these elements are included that it is compatible with the hospice philosophy and the learning which can occur during grief. Their presence also validates the inclusion of creative means of knowing and learning in grief reconciliation. Socially constructed and culturally informed ways of knowing, like music, are integral parts of the grieving process and offer powerful ways to approach and understand mourning and healing.
Music as a Way of Knowing

Music is present in our culture. We participate, individually and in concert with others, in musical experiences on a daily basis. Listening to music alone in the car, singing in church, attending concerts, playing an instrument and singing along to a favorite jingle on the radio all present opportunities for knowing and understanding through music. The act of knowing is often described in terms of making sense or meaning out of something. “Music’s ability to affect individuals through a variety of stimuli makes it a particularly effective means of transmitting meaning” (Olson, 2003, p. 60). In some people, it can also facilitate deeper levels of self-awareness and transformation, leading to a connection with all the aspects of self (Montello, 2002). Thus, the knowing may involve the meaning behind an event or information or revolve around a knowing of self.

So how exactly does one know via musical means? While the body of literature has grown in the last few years, there is still no definitive answer to this. However, based on the research and conceptual work that is available, it is clear that this musical knowing is not isolated to one form or method. Instead, this writer posits that there are several avenues by which one can arrive at musical knowing. Very broadly, they can be described in terms of music’s relationship with: communication; and identity, culture and community; spirituality and the holistic self. This is important, as they fill some of the void uncovered in the previous discussion about meaning-making.

Based on the nature of these categories, it is important to anticipate the inter-relationship between the elements and the factors which influence them. Therefore, I preface the forthcoming discussion with recognition that the concepts and practices
related to communication, identity, community, spirituality and self are all influenced by the culture(s) and cultural constructs of the individual and/or group. Further, there should be the expectation that certain realms (such as community and spirituality) will overlap.

It is often said that music is the universal language; that it can speak to us on a level that creates shared meanings. While clearly such exchanges don’t occur every time, there can be little doubt that it is possible to communicate ideas through musical means. Examination of the literature about communication through musical means reveals that it is generally described in three main areas: communication through language, communication through emotion and communication through musical structure.

Musical communication through language involves the literal transfer of ideas via actual words or relationship of the topic. Identification of content and meaning is tangible through listening, performance and/or analysis of text. Knowledge of academic, moral, cultural and social information can be gleaned, or reinforced, in this manner. Moreover, given the constructivist nature of these realms, music’s role in the learning serves not only to increase the knowledge base of the specific topic, but also to further embed itself in the society which generates the information and the language which transmits it.

Musical communication via the emotional route is a less-tangible, yet can be highly effective as well. Allen (1995), Confer-Owens (1992), Lawrence (2005), Montello (2002), Olson (2003) and Northington, Wilkerson, Fisher and Schenk (2005) are among some of those describing this phenomenon. Set in formal, informal and nonformal settings, the writings of these scholars describe how both the performance and consumption of music can facilitate an understanding through an appeal to the emotions. Montello (2002) offers,
Through your engagement with music, you can naturally experience and integrate the complete range of emotions. These experiences can help you create a more cohesive sense of self, resulting in increased coherence in your bodily processes and within your social environment. (p. 97)

Thus, a communication of idea or sentiment through emotional routes can translate into musical understanding. It is possible to experience and give voice to profound sorrow that cannot be articulated, or that may not even been understood consciously, yet exists and affects the bereaved person or group.

Some genres of music lend themselves particularly well to this concept. Lullabies are regarded as one of the most universal ties to childhood and/or motherhood. However, they represent more than just an emotional appeal; they also reflect the ability to communicate through musical structure. The writings of Goldman (2002), Montello (2002), Xia and Alexander (1987) and Saliers and Saliers (2005) describe how the elements, forms and sounds of music can themselves be a means of communicating ideas. The use of rhythm, pitch, familiar forms and specific intonation can relay meanings on a level which is very effective (and often unnoticed). In the example of a lullaby, the inclusion of soothing sounds at a lower tempo, structured around relatively close pitches and sounds usually elicits a calming effect and transmits the message of quiet, peace or slumber.

The knowing that results through musical communication is threefold. First, on the surface, the “language” of a lullaby, be it words or sounds, is intended to convey a specific idea. Taken literally, the words or music can be analyzed to reveal meanings on
both surface and underlying levels. Proceeding further, the words, sounds or “feel” of the musical exchange may result in a powerful understanding via emotion. Sometimes, the knowing is a shared one, like the feeling of rocking a child to sleep. Other times, it is highly subjective and dependent on the life experiences of the individual. The emotions surrounding childhood and interactions with parents may not always fall into the pleasant and calming category.

Lastly, understanding gained through the use of structure(s) or supported foundationally by structure(s), results in a cohesive, grounded, sense of the information. Musically, this is reflected practices like word painting (where the pitches represent what is happening in the music), program music, choice of genre and attention to harmonies, rhythm, volume and other musical elements. It is the opinion of this writer that the knowing through musical communication is strongest when all three modes of communication are employed and/or received in the transmission of the information.

Acceptance of the role of music in communication expands the potential for dialogic moments, as described in the previous section. The capacity to communicate in through a medium not limited by specific words or language creates a space for meanings and connections to be made in a different way, for grief to be shared and understood.

Another important relation between communication and music involves a knowing that can inform a person’s sense of culture, community or identity. “Some music can become and be used as a symbol of group identity, regardless of its structure” (Blacking, 1995, p. 198). Ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and sociologists have been studying the relationship between music and culture for decades. Their efforts have
revealed a definite correlation between music as a way of knowing and expressing identity, culture and community (Kaltoft, 1990; Olson, 2003; Tisdell, 2003; 2006).

Clearly, the relationship between identity, culture and community is a complex one. Individual and social constructs inform and shape identity, which is intertwined with one’s culture and interaction in the community. The purpose of this is not to dissect these intersections, but rather to discuss music’s place among them. We have become accustomed to, and in fact expect music’s presence in certain settings. When those settings become associated with specific individuals, groups, events or customs, the expectation translates into a desire, need, or sense of belonging. This phenomenon is the result of the personal and social histories which create a community. An understanding of this also enables us to create parallels between music and the relationship of identity in meaning-making. It offers a means to understand why a bagpiper’s rendition of Danny Boy may be absolutely critical to the grief process of an Irish widow or refusing to play “their song” on the first wedding anniversary alone can impact the course of healing.

There are many references which describe how music assists in the development and expression of identity. Often these examples are culturally specific, as illustrated in Danforth (1995) and Purdue (2004). Others scholars, like Montello (2002) and Goldman (2002) describe finding one’s essential being through music; a process which involves time and deep reflection. Floyd’s (1995) book proffers several examples as well, like the tradition of call and responsorial singing within the African American community. Traversing continents and history, this genre of work song has evolved into a strong singing tradition in spiritual choirs. The lead singer, who sets the pace for the rest of the group, assumes the responsibility of guiding the rest of the group. The leader and the
other singers each have a sense of identity; as individuals, as members of the choir, and as peoples of a larger group strongly influenced by their musical and social history.

Identification to and through music is an important part of musical knowing. White and White (2005) and Floyd (1995) offer many other powerful examples of how music helped form and express the identities of black slaves in America. They also offer a clear view of the relationship between identity, culture, and community. For some, like the slaves, these factors are absolutely inseparable. In other cases, like those described by Olson (2003) Saliers and Saliers (2005), Lems (2005), Connell and Gibson (2004), Sandwardker (2003) and Kaltoft (1990), music “bonds people together…. [by] appealing to a commonality of people” (Olson 2003 ), crossing areas of difference by facilitating empathy and respecting the feelings and expressions of others. This then presents the opportunity for creating new communities, (like a bereavement group or others who have lost someone), expanded cultures and sometimes, a deeper realization of self.

Another conduit for musical knowing lays within the individual— the musical awareness of self and spirituality. Specifically, I refer to a musical knowledge of the whole self. Although these ideas can be discussed in terms of culture and cultural imagination (Tisdell, 2005) and the embodied nature of music and learning (Bowman, 2004), this section focuses more on the generation of knowledge through musical means.

Bonny (2002), Goldman (2002) and Montello (2002) provide in-depth discussions of the use of music and sound as a means to learn about oneself, as well as access and express spirituality. Montello’s concept of Essential Musical Intelligence (EMI) relates music to physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of self, as does Bonny’s process of guided imagery and music. These exercises in self-awareness and reflection tap into the
spiritual nature of the human being, and enable a level of realization and wholeness that ultimately can lead to healing. (This is one example of how a reflective practice through music can assist in meaning-making.)

Others, like Saliers and Saliers (2005) and Tisdell (2003) offer personal testimonial about music as a spiritual practice, and the knowledge it brings them. Whether it is a means to know and touch God, an expression of the spirit or the essence of the moment, music is a potent mechanism for spiritual experiences and the learning they bring.

This sense of interconnectedness through music, as a spiritual practice or as a way of knowing and learning about one’s self and relationship within (and without) another is an embodied experience. “The entire range of musical action is grounded in the body: perception of musical gesture is invariably a fundamental part of what the music, fully perceived, is” (Bowman, 2004, pg. 38). Music, like perception, is inexhaustible, and, like an object, is different in different space. It is at once a way to be in the moment while at the same time an accumulation of all that has been before it. Mind, body, emotion, culture, experience; music is a way to express, to inhabit and to know. Grief is much the same. The time and space of grief are not fixed, nor is it easily compartmentalized. Grief, and the process of healing, is part of the entire person, and her or his life. For some, music is a part of that life, and thus, part of their grief. Hopefully, it is also a part of the healing.

Often described as becoming whole, healthy or sound, the act of healing is not in fact, a singular event. Instead, healing, like grief and bereavement, is a process. Berger’s (2006) offering on the subject is profoundly simple and quite apt for the purposes of this
study. She understands healing

“to be a guide toward knowledge, understanding, and wisdom-towards finding [her]way. Not a magical pill, but a seeking and finding, a searching and learning, a dissonance resolving into a harmony, even with its blue notes. Such healing goes into one’s depths of being, whether they are physically sculpted like an Olympian, or physically fragile and dying, or somewhere in between. Healing can be for the wounded body, mind, emotion or spirit.” (p. 74).

Thus, the nature of healing is like the nature of the injury. In the case of mourning a loss, it is finding one’s own path by moving through it all, and at times, remaining still. By considering all the whats and hows, finding new meanings, and sometimes, relearning oneself. It is finding ways to reattach fragments that are integral to life and being brave enough to let go of what no longer fits. Healing is coming through the thoughts, emotions and questions with understandings that work for you, in your life, allowing your spirit to continue on. Beyond just existing is the hope that healing will bring increased quality of life. Described by Rudd (1997), this is when life is felt comprehensible (predictable), manageable (conceivable) and meaningful, people feel coherence and continuity in life.

The combination of sound and silence, motion and stillness, familiarity and wonder-all encourage reflection and learning through the musical experience. It can be solitary or in a group, the result is the same: music resonates with life. We learn by living, and can know through music. However, it is equally true that not every person learns musically, or that each person within the “musical knowers” learns the same way. There is a call for more research to explore the nuances of this form of knowing and learning, as
well as the practical use and application of the findings.

In addition to music as a way of knowing, music can also be a way of “doing:” a deliberate action that is designed to help make sense of something, like grief and loss. For example, music therapy is “the controlled use of music, its elements, and their influences on human beings to aid in the physiologic, psychologic and emotional integration of the individual during the treatment of an illness or disability” (Hogan, 2001, p. 275). This is quite different from incidental experiences, which involve the unintentional learning/meaning-making through musical interaction (like hearing a song on the radio which starts a series of thoughts or feelings that lead to an understanding). Music therapy is facilitated under the supervision of and by a licensed professional. The intent is to effect change; sometimes this causes emotional, physical or psychological discomfort. However, in consideration of the previous discussion, that discomfort is part of the meaning-making process.

Musical healing through self-directed efforts (Montello, 2002; Goldman, 2002) involves the intentional use of music or sound to promote health and wellness. Centered on ideas about sound, resonance, vibration, self and body awareness, spirituality, creativity etc, this practice nurtures the holistic self and seeks to connect the entire being in wholeness (as opposed to systems, like in biomedicine). Participants may be performers, audience members, or those who intentionally seek a musical interaction, like meditation through music.

In either case, intentional musical activity is a specific action designed to address or resolve the conflict or emotional dissonances which require resolution. In the case of a death, this may manifest itself in grief, anger, frustration over finances, loss of identity,
feeling disconnected from everything, etc. Understanding music as a way of knowing, and the purposeful inclusion of it in the grief process, hold great potential for meaning-making and eventual acceptance and healing of the loss.

Grief is a physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, all-consuming experience. To understand it, to survive it, to move on, one must find a way to make meaning of it all. For some, music is that way. It is a way to communicate, to understand, to share; a way of knowing oneself in terms of culture and community. Music can help many get in touch with their body, their soul, their spirituality. It is a process, like grief and meaning-making. There is space for dialogue with self and others, for reflection, for questions, for the realization of the conflict and the barriers of resolution. And there is room for hope, for harmony, for healing.

Clearly adults come to know through music in many settings. But central to this study was comprehending how bereaved adults come to understand and cope with their grief through music and musical knowing. Accordingly, it is important to realize how adults move through the grief process. Thus, a third component of the theoretical framework of this study is Kubler-Ross’s stages of grief. This will be discussed next.

*Kubler-Ross’s Stages of Grief*

From a hospice point-of-view, all discussions about grief begin with Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. Her seminal work *On Death and Dying* (1969) is the foundation upon which hospice and palliative care is built. Within her book, Kubler-Ross identifies five main stages of grief and grieving: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Although commonly misconstrued as a linear progression, these stages often overlap, occur out of sequence and reoccur as one works through their loss. Additionally,
since there is no temporal norm or limit for a stage, the actual transition through and between phases is difficult to measure. Lastly, it is important to note that the onset of grief is often prior to death and experienced by both patients and families.

Fortunately, the intent of this study was concerned with elements of the process, rather than the length of it. Kubler-Ross's stages offer a good framework on which to build. Each stage presents the opportunity to discover where and how music assists the participants in the resolution of their grief. Situated in the psychological arena, Kubler-Ross's stages offer a window into the defense/coping mechanisms which occur during grief, and examples of how they may manifest.

Also of great importance is Kubler-Ross's inclusion of hope as a component of the stages of grief. Rather than present it as a stage, hope is described as "the feeling that all this must have some meaning, will pay off eventually if they [the patient] can only endure it for a little while longer" (1969, p 148). This concept quite easily extends to those bearing the anguish of a loss and looking forward to its easement. Hope coexists and persists through the stages. Moreover, hope creates space for discovery and exploration of ideas which are unanticipated at the onset of the process. Many mourners are looking for more than merely surviving their losses; they seek to emerge from the other side of their pain with a greater understanding of the loss, life, and purpose. Kubler-Ross’s redefinition of hope reminds us that hope doesn’t need to mean a cure or miracle, hope can be, and often is a reflexive component of the grief process which helps the bereaved engage within the other stages to create new understandings from their loss.

Despite the inclusion of hope, scholars have noted the absence of other, more positive emotions which still occur while the bereaved live their daily lives. This writer is
also concerned with relying solely on a Western framework of grief when it is clearly a phenomenon which affects the entire world. However, since no separate stage-type idea has been advanced, Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages will be the basis of this study, but shall be informed by and expanded upon by the philosophies and practices represented in other practices. This includes shamanism (Kalwaeit, 1984), Eastern thoughts and traditions, and insights offered by spiritual humanitarians like Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama (Elliott, 1995).

Consideration of Wolfelt’s (1997) six reconciliation needs to complete the grief process and Worden’s (2001) four tasks to complete in order to successfully mourn the loss of a loved one also informed this area. These noted grief authors present ideas complimentary to Kubler-Ross’s concepts in a more prescriptive and task-oriented manner. Wolfelt (1997) identifies that mourners need to:

- Acknowledge the reality of the loss or death
- Embrace the pain of the loss
- Find ways to remember the person who died
- Develop a new self-identity without the lost person
- Search for (and find) new meaning to life
- Receive on-going support from others

Worden’s (2001) tasks encapsulate similar ideas, requiring mourners to:

- Accept the reality of loss
- Walk through the pain of grief
- Adjust to the environment where the deceased is missing
- Emotionally “relocate” the deceased
Each set of recommendations appears simple, but this would be deceptive. There is nothing easy about accepting or acknowledging loss and death. These projected lessons or tasks to complete map easily into the stages that Kubler-Ross described and are direct in their focus. Additionally, my experience working with grieving and bereaved individuals validate that a person’s ability to successfully develop skills like finding ways to remember the person have a major role in their ability to heal.

To strengthen other areas of Kubler-Ross's stages, Schoenberg (1974), Parks (2006) and Walsh-Burke (2006) contribute thoughts about anticipatory grief, anticipatory bereavement and the social nature of grief and mourning. These works solidify and reinforce some of the realities of grieving that were not presented as strongly in her discussion of death and dying. They also continue to dissect grief from a purely rational standpoint, offering little explanation for how resolution actually occurs. Also notable is the dual process model of bereavement put forth by Margaret Stroebe and Hank Schut which is reinforced by the work of Parkes (2002). Stroebe and Shut (1999) identify two periods (patterns really) which occur throughout the grieving process: loss orientation and restoration orientation. Essentially, it is the facing of the loss, and the turning away from it, both of which are part of a more usual grief process. The ebb and flow of these periods are accompanied by all the stages of grief described by Kubler-Ross, and are a natural part of healing. It is only when one remains in a period for too long that coping and healing is halted, either due to avoided grief or chronic grief.

Grief, in a very general way, may be described as the response to loss (Kubler-Ross, 2005). There is no such thing as a typical loss, or a typical response—our loss and our grief is as individual as we are. The use of Kubler-Ross’s (1969) stages in this study
serves as a way to consider the differences, and possible similarities, among the grief experiences of the participants. It also creates the opportunity to explore grief and the stages, from a new perspective. Those grieving over the loss of a loved one find healing and hope, and live the stages on different paths. The view from each course has something to contribute to the definitions and ideas about loss, grief and how to survive it.

Our perceptions of grief, as well as our expectations for our grief responses, are a product our individual and social constructs. In our Western society, we place a unique focus on value and knowledge, one which emphasizes the individual person. Death is the loss of uniqueness (Morgan, 1993). But it is not a loss of all of the knowledge. What is shared between individuals and others resides in both, therefore, it is impossible to eradicate. When music is a part of or the way of knowing or learning, we create another conduit for knowledge to be shared. Part of music’s role in the grief process is its ability to reconnect the bereaved with knowledge shared with his or her lost loved one.

Music’s Role in Adult Education and Learning

Although not often framed in an educational context, the development of coping mechanisms and the survival of loss are indicative of learning and the acquisition of new skills. Consideration of music in this context reveals the necessity of exploring music as a learning tool and discussing how facilitators employ it as a device in the process. This area is significant for two reasons: first, it helps identify the current, general uses of music in the educational arena, and second, it may assist bereavement counselors, hospice workers and other professionals who are not “musical knowers” with their development and/or understanding of how to create or understand significant musical
interactions.

Although there is some overlap between music as a way of knowing and the role of music in education, there are some definite distinctions. Mainly, those difference lie in the philosophy and understanding of the nature of music. Review of music’s function in education, especially higher education, indicates that music (outside of music related majors) serves mainly as a tool in the teaching of another subject. Facilitators in formal, nonformal and informal learning environments employ music as a means to transmit information and encourage learning. However, some scholars, such as Lems (2005), Olson (2003; 2005), Rendón (2000), Stephens, Braithwaite, & Taylor (1998), and Tisdell (2003; 2006; 2007) explore music as a means to tend to cultural, spiritual and communal aspects of learning and teaching. This section addresses the current place music holds in adult education and discusses how this may inform the learning during grief through musical means. In so doing, I provide a brief overview of music in adult education in historical context. Next, I consider music as a cultural experience.

Music and Adult Education in Historical Context

To date, there is no significant body of literature which denotes the history or role of music in the field of adult education. In the effort to establish the significance of music in the adult arena, I have included a brief history of the treatment of music in education. By revealing music’s consistent historical presence in learning, (of both children and adults), one begins to realize its impact on learning and its potential to contributing to future learning endeavors.

Music is an integral part of every human society (Mark, 2002; Blacking, 1995). It can be found in everything from religious ceremonies to entertainment to education.
Traditionally, in Western culture, music has been included as a standard part of a liberal arts education. This stems from the ancient Greek belief that music played a vital role in the shaping of ideal citizens. Plato included it as a key element in his educational plan for an utopist society, necessary for the development and maintenance of the moral self. Later, Charlemagne required that all literate males, especially clerics and monks, needed to have the Psalm, notation and chant included in their education. Thus, music became one of the mandatory liberal arts in Roman society, establishing its role in religious education. With the advent and solidification of the Roman Catholic Church came an onslaught of musical composition designed to educate the illiterate masses.

The Roman tradition of mandatory liberal arts was carried into higher education by the medieval and Renaissance universities. Morality was still the principle goal of music education, but aspects of performance, composition and mentorship began to emerge. This tradition has persisted in Western educational practices, reflected in the continuation of the liberal arts model in higher education. By the late 19th century, educators began to reflect on the role of music education in both institutional and community environments. John Dewey, one of the preeminent educational philosophers of his generation, often acknowledged music as an important mechanism in the learning process. This was reflected by his contemporaries as well:

The development of a fine character and of the desire to be of service to humanity are results that lie uppermost in the minds of the leaders of educational thought…Music, because of its powerful influence upon the very innermost recesses of our subject life, because of its wonderfully stimulating effect upon our physical, mental and spiritual nature…contributes directly to both of the
fundamental purposes of education. (Parker, McConathy & Miessner (1916) in Mark, 2002, p 1047)

This statement reflects an understanding of music’s potential to enhance the learning of a non-musical concept.

Throughout the 20th, and now in the 21st century, educational philosophers and researchers have expanded educational goals beyond the binary focus of Dewey and his peers, thereby increasing the potential scope of music as an educational resource. Theoretical concepts, like Howard Gardner’s 1983/2003 proposal of the multiple intelligence theory, have spurred the consideration of music as a practicable way of knowing, and by extension, a viable way of teaching. Some, like Brougher (1997) and Ludemann (1999) expand on Gardner’s ideas and offer additional theoretical concepts, while others, like Beardsley (1998), Kaltoft (1990), Lambdin (1994), Rowland (1998), and Stephens, Braithwaite, and Taylor (1998) offer tangible realizations of these ideas. These examples clearly outline the successful use of music in adult educational scenarios and lay the groundwork for continued applications.

Before one can assess the role music currently plays in adult education, there needs to be an understanding of where this learning take place and what types of factors can influence the situation. Due to the nature of research, and perhaps more importantly, the funding of the researchers, a number of the studies described below exploring music’s place in education described formal settings. There is, however, a representation of nonformal and informal scenarios as well, especially in the realms of community building and health education. In the formal arena, Adkins (1997), Christopher (1998), Lems (2001) and Xia and Alexander (1987) all indicate the successful integration of music into
their curriculum, mainly assisting with word discrimination and as mnemonic tools. Beardsley (1998) and Karjala and White (1983) offer strong examples illustrating the positive learning outcomes due to the integration of student performance of, analysis of and reflection on period related music in their history lessons. Karjala and White are particularly notable because of their inclusion of student feedback in their discussion, reinforcing the success of this method. Ahlkvist (2001), Lambdin (1994), Mazza (1986), Seguin (1984), Tinari and Khandke (2000) and Northington at al. (2005), and Wise (1979), offer similar insights on their use of music in formal education, as they apply to their respective practices of social theory, social work, geography, math, English, economics, and nursing.

However, more than the subject matter impacts how music is utilized in a formal context. The type of music to be included (or excluded) is highly dependent on the political, cultural and economic disposition of the organization offering the program. The literature surrounding this area focuses on curriculum, program development, implementation and evaluation, and presents instructors with creative and practical methods of this practice. Unfortunately, there is little insight on how the music is chosen (beyond relevance to subject/area of information). Adult educators need to consider the culture of the learners when choosing music, as well as what other messages are being conveyed in the chosen pieces. Just as it can enhance learning, music can diminish the experience and erect barriers.

The learning occurrences outlined in the studies of Kaltoft (1990), Olson (2003), Rowland (1998) and Stephens et al. (1998) fit neatly into the nonformal education category. Occurring in community oriented institutions; each case outlines educational
practices focused on social issues specific to their target group. Kaltoft’s (1990) successful use of music for emancipatory education and Olson’s (2003) research investigating music’s role in community building revealed significant findings relating to identity, communication, rapport building and meaning-making and provide insight into other successful community programs. For example, Stephen et al. (1998) present a conceptual effort designed to provide HIV/AIDS prevention education for African American adolescents and young adults through the use of hip-hop music. The goal of this method is to incorporate a medium originating within the social environment (hip-hop) in the hope that the target population will respond more positively to the educational material, thus participating more in the learning process. (p. 131).

Hip-hop was used in a similar fashion in Purdue’s (2004) study of how the cultural medium was used as education in the nonformal setting of a Brazilian juvenile prison. In addition to the location, and the agenda of social reform, this study focuses on the incidental education which occurs through hip-hop interactions outside of the prison, emphasizing the large role culture and economic class play in the learning. It also illustrates the potential for multiple learning situations to occur simultaneously. (i.e.: informal and nonformal).

Descriptions of this context reveal attention to sociocultural and political elements, requiring educators to understand the needs of their students prior to implementation of the program. These writings focus on why programs are instituted, and what can be learned, but do not address formal development of content. They are more illustrative than formulaic, offering insight but no ground-floor recommendations. Facilitators of these programs should consider how they will shape (or not) their activity,
and take special measures to balance the culture of the community with the goal of the program. Guy (2004) offers an excellent scholarly piece to assist this situation. His work explores the relationship of gangsta rap and hip-hop culture on black adult learners. In addition to addressing the interconnection of the sociocultural elements which influence learning (and the barriers), he presents several specific recommendations for educators, including the use of the city as an educational agent and a call for the inclusion of critical media literacy to create a sense of agency to combat racist effects of media in adult education.

Lastly, are two informal examples of learning situations. Both are related to the construction of identity, described by generalized findings concerning the likes, dislikes and boundaries of musical preferences. Bryson (1997) and Relish (1997) tender related studies which present conclusions relating general survey results about musical preferences to educational levels and cultural influences. While neither is specific to an educational model or institution, this research does allude to knowledge transferred by informal means. It also indicates an area of consideration for adult educators seeking to employ music in their curriculum.

These categories illuminate the fact that music accompanies learning in many ways. Within each framework, formal, nonformal and informal, are characteristics which shape the manner in which music is employed and validated. Organizational demands, evaluation requirements, community needs, cultural influences, politics, space, finances and learner individuality are just some of the factors which influence these learning situations. Adult educators need to assess the elements present in their context and choose music that will be appropriate and complimentary to their goals. This includes the
recognition that adults can and will learn through music in each context, and may be learning from more than one simultaneously.

Analysis of the aforementioned works reveals that music’s place in adult education falls neatly in line with the concepts driving music as a way of knowing. Educators are employing music as a means of communication and as an avenue in community building and music’s relationship with identity. Scholars recognize the impact that culture, community, spirituality and other ways of knowing play in learning. However, as this last section of the discussion reveals, music is mainly used as a learning device, rather than recognized as a way of knowing.

Musical Communication

As described earlier, for many, music is a way to express and share thoughts, similarities and differences. Academians like Erickson (1995), Kopiez (2002), and Blacking (1995) discuss many aspects of how music experiences translate into understanding, including culture, language, and musical structure. Educators have recognized the inherent potential of relaying information via musical message and have incorporated into their teaching. For the sake of cohesion, methods in the classroom will be discussed utilizing the same categories as described in music as a way of knowing.

Simplest to use and found most commonly, is the literal use of music and musical lyrics. Beardsley (1998), Karjala and White (1983), Wise (1979), Danforth (1995), Rowland (1998), Purdue (2004), Stephens et al. (1998) and Tinari and Khandke (2000) all employ music in a literal fashion. Representing learning in formal, nonformal and informal contexts, these studies illustrate the effective transmission of academic, moral, cultural, and social information through music. For example, Karjala and White (1983)
required students to read and sing period songs as part of a United States History class. Reflection on the lyrics and nature of the music helped students gain perspective on their area of study. Wise (1979) on the other hand, chose to incorporate orchestral program music in his classroom. In one instance, he had the students listen to Smetana’s *Vltava (or Die Moldau)* while studying Czech geography. As the song played, he traced the path of the river on an overhead transparency, noting how the music reflected the course of the river, and augmenting the experience with color slides to provide visual reinforcement. Each instance relied on the music’s ability to inform their students on a simple, surface level.

Counter-Owens (1992) and Northington, Wilkerson, Fisher, and Schenk (2005) relied on music to assist them in a far less-tangible method: by communicating to their students emotionally. While it can be argued that it is impossible to separate the emotional aspect of music from the rest of the experience, it is possible to focus on the emotional facet as the primary source of influence. For example, Northington et al. incorporated music, books and movies in the lessons to foster empathy in their students’ developing nursing practice. This was a direct appeal to the emotional self, not the rational self. Confer-Owens (1992) offered a comparative study examining the effectiveness of two teaching methods involved in the education of under prepared college freshman. One of the methods was the Suggestive-Accelerative Learning technique (SALT), a holistic approach involving music and relaxation. The hope of this researcher was to influence the mood/anxiety levels of the students in such a way that would allow for a more conducive learning environment.
Xia and Alexander (1987) also incorporated the SALT method in their teaching of English as a second language (ESL). However, their research also focuses on the use of mnemonic devices, like language songs. Language songs “are generally based on the intonation of natural speech, as are the rhythmic patterns. Another feature of a language song is its application of imitative words and repetition” (p. 97). This reflects the third theme of musical communication involving structure. The combination of musical elements is such that the structure lends itself to the educational activity.

Because of the limited number and nature of the included studies, no contrary opinions were noted. These pieces indicate that music is effective in the education of adults and children because it communicates on at least one level with the learners. Examination of the literature also reveals areas of omission that can be expanded on in future studies.

First, the actual process of communication was never described. Although cognitive studies were excluded from this search, some mention of how sound is perceived or processed could have been included. Additionally, there is no mention of consideration for students that have difficulty hearing or speaking, and how the design of these programs influences them. Likewise, there is no discussion of how students who prefer not to sing or include music perceived or achieved in these programs. Lastly, there are no concrete recommendations for instructors seeking to utilize this method. How can one communicate effectively if you don’t know how or what to say musically? Similar concerns relate to the work that bereavement counselors and music therapists engage in with their clients. Loss and grief are often difficult to discuss; it is imperative that a
person intentionally facilitating musical communication be knowledgeable of the musical vocabulary and use it appropriately.

Consequently, future researchers have many avenues to pursue. Research relating to direct or indirect miscommunication could be very informative. Studies addressing student comfort/discomfort with the method and its impact on their educational process would also be very valuable. Adult educators could also benefit from a study comparing musical and non-musical methods of the same subject matter.

*The Relationship between Music and Identity*

In most cultures, music can be heard in everything from daily entertainment to sacred rituals. It speaks to and during the events of life, and for many, is fully integrated into those social and cultural norms by which they define themselves. Thus, music is linked with identity. The personal and social expectations and associations a community holds for music can be very significant, which has important implications for adult educators who employ music as a means of teaching.

Many of the factors which contribute to the formation of identity fall well beyond the scope of the review. However, responsible educators utilizing music as an educational tool need to be aware that some groups (and individuals) identify with and respond (positively and negatively) to specific musical genres. This relationship is highlighted in many studies, including those conducted by Bryson (1997), Purdue (2004), Relish (1997), and Stephens et al. (1998).

Kaltoft (1990) and Olson (2003) discuss this concept in more general, structural terms, while Danforth (1995), Rowland (1998), Stephens et al. (1998) and Purdue (2004) offer specific, concrete examples. For instance, Rowland’s dissertation delineates the
historical and contemporary significance of music as a means of education in some African American churches. He outlines the strong influence of the vocal/oral tradition within these communities and denotes specific musical genres, like Gospel, that community members identify with. Similar parallels were noted in Danforth’s (1995) dissertation concerning learning around the woodland Indian social drum. In his discussion of music as a catalyst for community building, Olson (2003) illuminates that sometimes culture is less about ethnography and more about the soul of a group of people. The description of Pierre’s Christmas choir, comprised of homeless individuals, speaks to the import of shared experience and the power of a shared purpose. The magnitude of assembling groups of people traditionally viewed as vagrants and crossing boundaries of despair to create a community of celebration is profound, inspiring, and an important reminder for adult educators to look past commonly held misconceptions about certain groups and their learning potential.

The reviewed studies reflect the intentional use of particular genres to educate specific populations about social issues through a medium they identify with. The choice of genre reflects a desire to appeal to learners’ preferences and perceptions of self. The musical preferences of people were the focus of Bryson’s (1997) and Relish’s (1997) research. Both based on the 1993 General Society Survey, the results indicate that a person’s level of education plays a significant role with the dislikes and identification with musical genres. Relish contends that geographic mobility and network variables also have a significant, if not a greater impact on determining these preferences than education does. (p. 134). This is significant for adult educators seeking to reach their students through musical means.
It was important to separate the latter studies from those in the first part of this theme because the approach to the idea is different. Researchers like Purdue (2004) approached education through music from an identity perspective, assuming that the target audience would respond to a genre they selected and listened to. Bryson (1997) and Relish (1997) contend that musical preference and identity is determined by educational and sociocultural factors. Although the end result is that adults can learn through the use of music they identify with, the variance in perspective indicates differences which can influence actual educational process.

The danger in trying to appeal to a population though musical identity is the possibility of stereotyping or projecting personal biases onto the group. Danforth (1995) discusses the importance of trust and the semantics of being someone outside of the culture, but no one mentions the damage that assumptions can do to an educational environment. For example, it is unfair to assume that every African-American male identifies with Rap music. This concept also assumes that every learner does in fact identify with a musical genre. It is possible that a learner may not have a preference, or, may not like music at all! These studies also fail to highlight the value of incorporating genres that students do not identify with to illustrate important details.

Each of these studies creates parallels between culture and identity, yet none mention a person who functions in a bi-cultural environment. Do these people identify with any specific genre? Do they have multiple musical identities, reflecting their relationship within each culture? These questions could guide a very useful study for adult educators working with these individuals. Instructors and students could also
benefit from a study which evaluates the long-term effectiveness of programs which intentionally appeal to musical identity to achieve learning.

*Music as an Educational Device*

In addition to knowledge about music as a communicative device and as an aspect of social, cultural and personal identity, adult educators need to consider music in terms of its use as an educational device. Proper use of music as an educational tool cannot occur haphazardly; it requires a definite commitment on the part of the educator. “Unless one truly feels the need for music to be used in teaching and is enthusiastically careful in its choice and classroom implementation, it is better avoided completely” (Wise 1979, p.3).

The simplest and most prevalent use of music in adult education can be described as “literally referential” (Erickson 1995, p. 20) or “subservient integration” (Bresler 1995 in Mark 2002, p.1056). This practice includes music that directly refers to the content area, like Wise’s (1979) use of *Vltava*. Next is the use of music which involves higher cognitive and analytical skills, sometimes referred to as the “co-equal, cognitive integration style” (Bresler 1995 in Mark 2002, p.1057). This practice was reflected in Karjala and White’s (1983) use of analysis and performance to learn history units, Northington et al’s (2005) call for nursing students to infer from media, and Tinari and Khandke’s (2000) analysis of lyrics to reveal economic concepts.

Another style, coined the “affective style of integration” (Bresler 1995 in Mark 2002, p.1056), indicates the use of music to set a mood or to stimulate creativity. Confer-Owens’s (1992) attempt to calm students and Xia and Alexander’s (1987) creative ESL reflect this practice. The final style, “social integration” (Bresler 1995 in Mark 2002,
p.1057) utilizes music as a means to create a community. Kaltoft (1990), Danforth (1995), Rowland (1998), Olson (2003), Purdue (2004), Stephens et al. (1998), and Ungerleider (1987) all discussed music in terms of community. Kaltoft illustrates how group performance built a sense of community, while Rowland, Purdue and Stephen’s et al. demonstrate how the use of music can strengthen and unite communities over important social issues like HIV/AIDS.

The demarcation of educational styles incorporating music in adult education establishes that this practice is present in and can be successful in adult learning. It can be used in a variety of contexts and address many educational goals. It does, however, require a commitment on the part of the educator to be responsible and discriminating in their choice and use of music. What are lacking in these writings are general guidelines or a framework for instructors interested in this style of teaching.

Conscientious novices to this practice may understand that there are many things to consider and multiple methods of execution, but there is still a gaping hole in the planning process. Where do they find the correct music? What if they aren’t musically inclined? How much time does this really take? Understanding each component is necessary to the successful implantation of this type of program.

Analysis of each study reveals the symbiotic relationship between the subject matter learned and the type of music employed. As adult educators integrate music into their practice, they should endeavor to balance their educational goals with the appropriate style of teaching/learning and fit the musical aspect accordingly. Although there are not a plethora of studies indicating the use and role of music in adult education, those reviewed in this paper have provided useful insights relating to music’s current
Research clearly illustrates that music is an effective form of communication, enabling educators to share knowledge through the use of language, musical structure or by appeal to emotion.

These studies also establish the relationship between music and personal and cultural identity. This area offers great potential for adult educators to create more culturally inclusive, student-centered learning situations. It also can provide valuable insight into the perspectives and values of learners who do identify with specific genres, as well as a great educational tool for interacting with the learners.

Most importantly, it can be extrapolated that people can and do learn from music on a daily basis. Teaching with music is effective with those who already respond to musical influence, and who are willing to participate. It is also fair to state that other topics and areas of interest can be taught, learned or understood through music. This translates directly into my assumption that life events, like love, loss and grief can be navigated and understood through music.

**Music as a Pathway to Emotions in Learning**

There’s been much discussion in recent years in the field of adult education and related areas on the role of emotions in learning. Feminist writers such as Belenky et al. (1986), and Hayes and Flannery (2000) have discussed the important role of affect and emotion in women’s learning. Dirkx (2006) has discussed the importance of emotion in transformative learning, while Tisdell (2003) has discussed the importance of attending to multiple ways of knowing in educating adults. Several of the participants in her study noted the importance of music to their spirituality, highlighting the role of emotion attached to it. Thus it is clear that music can serve as a gateway to drawing on emotions
American philosopher and musician Suzanne Langer, writing in the middle of the 20th century, discussed the relationship of music and emotions. Her work, and those who have drawn on it have significant implications for understanding the interconnection of music and emotion and what it suggests for learning. Langer (1953) defined music as a “tonal analogue of emotive life” (p. 22). Her works (1957, 1953) advance a theory that explains the correlation between emotional experience and musical sound, describing shared properties which present in both areas. Eloquently her 1953 piece explained:

The tonal structures we call music bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feeling-forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm or subtle activation and dreamy lapses—not joy or sorrow perhaps, but the poignancy of either and both—the greatness and brevity and eternal passing of everything vitally felt. (p. 27).

Emotion and all of the embodied aspects of it are vitally felt. Music, and emotion, are related by form. Music, as a significant form, is the symbol for the articulation of feeling. She explains that a discursive symbol encompasses dialogic speakable thought, and the art symbol, (music in this case) by necessity “embraces the leftovers, because everything that is not speakable thought, is feeling” (Reichling, 2004, p. 21). Feeling, like music, is indicative of process, as are the meanings we attach to them. The musical form is not the literal form of the feeling, but is instead a metaphor. A feeling doesn’t exist as a symbiote within a musical body; rather music is the symbolic expression of ideas or images of things.
A composer’s gift is the creation of a piece that understands and encompasses the potential for emotion. A piece may or may not also be an expression of his/her own personal state. Its true expression of “feeling” is in the perspective that others may perceive that state, or something quite different. *Fly Me to the Moon* is experienced by many as an upbeat love song. But for my husband and me, it is a tribute and mechanism of grieving bound up in our own lives. Yes, there is the “love”, but it functions differently in our space, bound to our experiences and understood through our context.

Price (2004), drawing on the work of Langer, explains it this way: “The form that music presents also presents the emotions, albeit implicitly. And music, since it presents the form of emotions, means the emotions” (p. 39). For example, aspects like tension, resolution, expectation and fulfillment can be discussed in terms of how the musical progression and emotional process occur through the senses and time. According to Price (2004), Langer proposed that emotion and music both occupy time and that this time is duration, or passage. Additionally, he highlights that in each feeling (of music or emotion) is the anticipation of what is to come and that the intensity is determined by foresight of conditions affecting that emotion or song. In terms of this study, grief and all the emotions associated with it, occupy time. As described before, grief is not linear, nor does it have a finite boundary-its duration exists on many levels for extended periods, not measured in the ticking of the hands on a clock. Depending on the mourners progress, the anticipation was sometimes of what was known to follow, other times was the hope of a more positive outcome, such as acceptance. And truly, intensity was determined by the context and conditions surrounding each day, and in some cases, each moment.
Music, like emotion, occurs in the spaces created by each interaction. Music exists in time as an element of expression, and enables the listener to perceive time in an audible fashion and realize its form and continuity through the senses. For many, emotion can be felt, sensed and understood in a similar manner. But each experience will not be exactly the same. Reichling (2004) explains Langer’s concept of vital form, in that the memory or impression of a previous interaction will remain, and may inform the next episode, but that the content is not exactly the same, so it is likely the perception will be at least slightly different. This is significant to learning while grieving, since the repetition of an identical scenario would do little to advance understanding or coping.

Moreover, music and emotion are both dynamic and are constantly changing. The rise and fall within create an emotional movement which, in light of new and varied presentations, drives the formation of meaning. Beyond its perceptive potential, the vivacity of music presents opportunity for participants to explore meanings, thus leading to heightened understandings. Within the context of this study, the vital import of music is that it creates a vehicle through which mourners can perceive, form meanings and learn to cope with their losses.

Other authors such as Elliott (2005), Kivy (2001, 1990), Addis (1999), and Davies (2003, 2001) also build on Langer’s ideas and offer additional thoughts on the interrelationship of emotion and music. These contemporary music philosophers hold that the communicative nature of music lies in listener’s ability to find meaning in music by responding emotionally to the expressive qualities they hear(Woody, 2002). There is also a general consensus that music can be expressive of specific emotions. However, controversy surrounds the actual perception of the emotion. Some hold to the belief that
listeners feel the emotion that the music (and musician) intends to convey. Others, such as Kivy (2001) for instance, believe that the expression of an emotion (like sadness) is a property of the sounds themselves, and that musical patterns and elements themselves have an inherent potential to convey emotions. He strongly insets however, that sad sounding music does not necessarily elicit a sad response from a listener. Elliott (2005) and Davies (2003) reinforce this standpoint.

Davies (2001) further posits that the kind of emotions expressed in music go beyond simples gestures (like sad) and move into more complex emotions, like grief and hope. This is due to the dynamic nature of music, which, like emotions, unfolds over time. Grewe, Nagel, Kopiez and Altenmüller (2007) discuss this in terms of recreation; music is both the recreation of the musician and the listener. “It is not the music as a physical stimulus that manipulates our moods, but it is as we using the music as a communicative offering to influence our feelings in a recreative process….based on the heightened attention of the listener.” (p. 313).

The intangible and highly subjective nature of the interrelationship between music and emotion is one that is difficult for many to articulate. Langer provided a fluent and comprehensive description of how this relationship occurs. Price (2004) acknowledges a relationship between music and emotion, but does not support Langer’s explanation of the phenomenon. His critique of Langer (1957,1953) is primarily philosophical. He agrees with Langer’s basic premise: “music seems to be emotional…the seeming emotionality of music is an absolute, unfathomable mystery on par, almost, with the Trinity” (p 41). However, his concerns with Langer’s work lie in the nature of her argument and how she drew her conclusions. Coming from a very rational orientation, he
uses literal logic to undermine her assertion that the form of music and its presentational symbols are adequate to make it mean emotion. This perspective can logically be appreciated by this writer; however, much about music, and emotion, especially while grieving, is not logical. My professional experiences and personal intuition align more closely to Langer’s (1957) statement that “creative work always produces an actual excitement, which is colored by the feeling to be projected, and is sometimes more massive than the intended import.” (p.213). Langer’s philosophy accounts for the unexpected emotion, greater intensity of feeling, and meaning gained metaphorically or literally through music during the grief process, and for other learning scenarios as well.

In terms of this study, these theories suggest that, based on where and when the listener is in their own world, they may interpret emotions (or sense some within themselves) based on their recreation of the music. Thus, how and what music may mean will differ in each presentation of it. What may bring poignant reminiscence one time can evoke anger at a different point. Music’s greatest strength is in the potential of what may happen in those spaces/times. Beyond just the chance to feel or express, these moments offer the opportunity to reflect and learn about oneself in the midst of the sentiment, rather than separate from it.

Music in Therapeutic, Hospice and Palliative Care

Clearly, some of those people seeking to understand loss and death are involved with a hospice or palliative care program. Hospice is an interdisciplinary mode of treatment focused on the terminally ill. It is palliative in nature, meaning that the focus is symptom management rather than aggressive treatment. Some hospice patients are enrolled in palliative care programs before becoming hospice patients. Although the
philosophy is the same, there is one important distinction: hospice patients are all terminally ill, palliative care patients have symptoms to manage, but they may not yet have a life expectancy of less than six months. Thus, desire to manage symptoms like pain, nausea, depression, spiritual distress and fear is mutual, but attention to specific areas, like bereavement and end-of-life planning, is more hospice specific.

One of the mutual approaches to the management of physical, psychosocial and spiritual issues is through the use of music. Due to the highly regulated and litigious nature of healthcare, all musical intervention is the result of assessment and documented need, and occurs by or under the supervision of a licensed music therapist. That is not to say that patients and families cannot or do not have personal musical interactions; it is just to clarify that medical practice is dictated by goals, interventions and careplans. That includes music therapy.

Most of the literature touting the benefits and successful techniques of music and music therapy in the hospice and palliative care setting has been written during the last twenty years. The preponderance of these writings is conceptual in nature, describing successful cases, helpful techniques and varied applications of music therapy. For the purpose of this review, only articles involving patients and bereaved individuals will be discussed. Pieces which focus on the history or music therapy or which speak to the therapist about techniques or self-care will be excluded. As stated above, there are countless articles delineating the benefits and uses of music therapy in the hospice or palliative care setting. Those chosen for this review are the available research and/or are representative of scholarly writing and the current use of music in a hospice or palliative care setting.
The consideration of the use of music in bereavement contexts is most typically grounded in the music therapy field or literature. As Krout (2003) notes “Music therapy is a complementary treatment modality which increasingly is being recognized as an important adjunct within hospice and palliative care organizations” (p. 129.) Examination of the literature indicates four important aspects of music therapy in the hospice and palliative care setting: music therapy as a means to address physical symptoms; music therapy’s role in emotional and spiritual expression; passive and active music participation, and music therapy in bereavement care.

*Addressing Physical Symptoms*

The first priority in hospice and palliative care is to identify and address a patient’s discomfort. Usually, the physical needs are the first to be tended to. Growing out of a large body of literature describing music’s role in easing discomfort, including headaches (Linoff & West, 1982), chronic pain (Nicholas, 1989; Sharp & Nicholas, 2000; Shor, 1993), pre and post-operative pain (Good, Stanton-Hicks, Grass, Cranston-Anderson, Choi, Schoolmeesters, & Salman, 1999; Koch, Kain, Ayoub & Rosenbaum, 1998), and cancer pain (Burns, Sledge, Fuller, Daggy, & Monahan, 2005; Kenny & Faunce, 2004; Hilliard, 2003; Magill, 2001), pain management in hospice and palliative care describes music’s ability to aid in the alleviation of physiological symptoms.

Before proceeding, I think that it is important to note that it is quite impossible to separate the physical, emotional and spiritual self. Music therapy is designed to address integrated symptoms. Krout (2001) states that the use of music therapy in a hospice or palliative setting has been designed to:
“decrease pain perception, provide distraction from and increase verbalizations about the illness, express feelings and emotions, decrease fear and agitation or restlessness, provide comfort, promote a framework for spiritual exploration and validation and to help the patient wok through issues relating to his or her illness and dying process (p. 384).

Physical pain is influenced and can influence emotional distress, either or both of which may impact the spiritual well-being. This reality is reflected in the literature as well. However, for the sake of this section, each area is discussed as separate entities, based on findings in the literature.

Physical symptom management describes an intervention which addresses any physical discomfort. For hospice and palliative care patients, those symptoms are commonly pain, nausea, physical agitation, shortness of breath, terminal restlessness, difficulty sleeping and physical stress levels. Many scholars, including Freeman, Caserta, Lund, Rossa, Dowdy and Partenheimer (2006), Halstead and Roscoe (2002), and Magill (2001) provide examples of how music can be used in a therapeutic manner to provide distraction, assist in pain management, induce sleep, reduce anxiety, lessen nausea and change physical stress levels. Changes in blood pressure, heart rate and respirations support patient reports of changes in condition. O’Callaghan (1996) adds to this with her discussion of music’s ability to stimulate brain activity to stimulate spinal mechanisms and endorphin production to alleviate physical pain.

Distraction is also a powerful way that music therapists contribute to the physical (and psychosocial and spiritual) well-being of patients and their families. Brown, (1992), Colwell (1997), Gaberson (1995), Hilliard (2003), Krout, (2001) and Trauger-Querry and
Haghighi (1991) are among those who reinforce the impact of musically facilitated
distraction. As a cognitive coping strategy (O’Callaghan, 1996), effective distortion is
based on the premise that when faced with competing stimuli (like music and pain), one
must choose which stimuli to attend to and which to filter out. Patients and caregivers
who choose music are able to temporarily create space from the physical situation
frequently report lessened levels of pain, discomfort and difficulty with treatments.
Described by Magill (2001) as “entraining”, music would provide stimuli to lock with
and influence a person’s response to pain, enabling them to “transport” in therapeutically
meaningful ways. (p. 170).

Developed by Helen Bonny around 1978, the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery
and Music (BMGIM) is one of the most frequently used and researched cognitive coping
mechanisms. Employed by music therapists around the world, this method involves the
careful assessment and selection of music, which, when combined with guided imagery,
can result in the alleviation of physical, psychological and spiritual distress. (Bonny,
1978, 2002; Grocke, 2005; Nicholson, 2001). This method also has proven effectiveness
in the realm of bereavement. Recently, Mohan van Heerdan (2003) completed research
with children utilizing the BMGIM with children. She found that by participating with
the method, children were able to not only access and express difficult emotions (anger,
fear, sadness), but they were able to discuss and develop ways of recognizing and coping
with their grief. Similar findings were reflected in Creagh’s (2005) study employing the
BMGIM with bereaved widows.
Emotional and Spiritual Expression

Emotional recognition, expression and resolution are recurring themes throughout the literature concerning music therapy in the hospice and palliative care arena. Songwriting, singing, improvisation, lyric analysis and discussion and playing instruments are just a few of the applications used to help people express themselves (Aasgaard, 2001; Clements-Cortés, 2004; Montello & Coons, 1998).

Musical exchanges also help facilitate life review, bonding, communication, and enhance coping skills among patients and families. (Krumhansl, 1997; Mramor, 2001; O’Callaghan, 2001; Starr, 1999; White, 1999). This was particularly true in Krout’s (2003) use of music therapy with imminently dying patients and their families. The inclusion of music enabled the active expression of grief and loss for those involved. It created an individualized atmosphere of comfort, safety and validation. Similar successes were noted in the improvements of mood and coping for chronic pain patients (Kenny & Faunce, 2004) and in preadolescents’ ability to affect and cope with emotional and behavioral issues, especially aggression and hostility (Montello & Coons, 1998).

Interestingly, in the case of the chronic pain patients, a comparison between patients who participated and patients who did not revealed that those who allowed music therapy showed lower levels of pain and discomfort, and better moods, than those who declined to participate. Specifically, patients who sang while listening and exercising tended to show more active coping responses and were less likely to make pre-intervention complaints about symptoms than those patients who failed to attend their singing sessions.
Ruud (1997) encapsulates these findings in his discussion about the relationship between music and quality of life. He suggests that:

- music may increase our feelings of vitality and awareness of feelings
- music provides an opportunity for increased sense of agency
- music-making provides a sense of community and belonging
- experiences of music creates a sense of meaning and coherence in life.

Meaning, well-being and happiness are subjective states, as is the reporting of things like lower pain levels and decreased moodiness. Ideally, healing and quality of life go hand in hand. Rudd explained this in relation to patient’s having a “strong, flexible, differentiated identity”, determined by affective awareness, agency, belonging and meaning. (p. 91).

Essentially, having a strong identity empowers and motivates patients to participate in therapeutic sessions to a greater degree because music is a resource in the performance of quality of life. Of particular note is the category of belonging, which related to aspects of time, place, attachment to other people, gender, identity, social positions, ethnicity and/or a feeling of belonging.

Belonging lends itself well to the findings relating to spirituality as well, which were also significant in this review. Since spirituality is linked with the psychosocial aspect of an interdisciplinary team, I was not surprised to find it discussed within the emotional sphere. Salman (2001) offers a look at the spiritual nature of the bond between a music therapist and his or her client, as well as discussion about the enhanced experiences which can occur in this “scared space”. In addition to a fuller sense of self, music therapy can facilitate personal and existential meaning, peace, relatedness to self, others or the Divine, acceptance, love, awareness, understanding and creativity. (p. 145).
Krout (2001), Hilliard, (2004), Magill (2001), Mramor (2001), and O’Callaghan, (1996) support this in their writings, using case studies as examples, while Bonny (2002), Grocke (2005) and Nicholson (2001) illustrate the nurturing of spirituality through the BMGIM process. While written in a more clinical style, these authors reinforce the important elements of music and spirituality as discussed in the previous discussion of music as a way of knowing.

*Active and Passive Participation*

Within any musical interaction, especially in the highly individualized realm of music therapy, is the choice of active or passive activity. Commentary within this body of literature reinforced my decision to include both passive and active musical experiences within the study. Playing recordings, listening to someone else playing and declining choice are all forms of passive participation. Songwriting, singing, playing, analysis, and choosing are all considered active participation. In some cases, (Krout, 2003) families were active participants, singing hymns and songs, while the patient, actively dying, passively listened. For both parties, the music was helpful in addressing the needs of each participant; physical, emotional and spiritual.

Hill (2004), Krout (2001), Montello and Coons, (1998) and O’Callaghan (1996) share similar accounts of both active and passive participation. Of particular note is Montello and Coon (1998) description of active and passive participation with the emotionally and behaviorally disturbed preadolescents in their study. Their research indicated that the combination of both active and passive listening had a significant impact on attention, motivation and hostility. Further, those students who participated in active therapy first displayed lower levels of hostility than the group that began with
passive therapy. They also noted that in choosing the type of therapy to begin with, personality type and clinical diagnosis were important factors.

The need for individual evaluation and input was echoed in O’Callaghan’s (1996) work. Participants should not only be consulted about whether they want to be active or passive in their interactions, but also about volume preferences, and familiar vs. nonfamiliar music. This includes performer, instrumentation, specific instrument, sounds on a relation tape and awareness of physical responses of patients who cannot verbalize or choose for themselves.

Bereavement Care

The last area of literature to be explored is that which specifically deals with music and loss and bereavement. When I searched for these studies, many pieces dealing with anticipatory grief, patients’ sense of loss and professional caregiver strategies were uncovered. However, the goal of this section was to determine what has been learned about the role of music in post-death grief and bereavement. As with previous searches, general commentary articles and books were not included; only studies and scholarly conceptual pieces were included. The search revealed four conceptual articles, one grief scale, five studies and one significant book. Three of the studies involve pediatric/adolescent bereavement, as does the grief scale and two of the conceptual articles. All the pieces except one conceptual and the book are therapy based.

Despite the limited range and availability of scholarly material available post-death bereavement and music, these key pieces do provide a great basis for understanding what is currently accepted and realized about music’s role in the grieving and healing
process. These areas can be described in three general themes: emotional expression, belonging, and physicality.

The universal message in each work reviewed was that music helped enable the expression of emotions. Smeijsters and Hurk (1999) present a single-case study describing how vocal and piano improvisation helped one woman tap into and convey years of suppressed grief and loss. Like so many, this participant mourned not only her husband, but also the aspects of self and relationships she had lost. Her improvisation allowed her to convey things that she was not able to when in a nonmusical setting. Literally, her blocked emotions were reflected in her singing; when her singing broke through, her emotional blockade crumbled. Her difficulty identifying and initially breaking through feelings is similar to the stories of participants in Dalton and Krout (2006), Hilliard (2001), Mohan VanHeerdan (2003) and Creagh (2005).

The evocation and articulation of emotion credited to music was enhanced within the works of Berger (2006), Creagh (2005) and Mohan VanHeerdan (2003) by other means, including dance, art and guided imagery. Music is multidimensional, and so it follows that its use and inclusion should be also. Creagh (2005) found that the combination of imagery and music induced emotional responses and stimulated symbolic representation that positively assisted bereaved widows in their grief process. The use of poetry, arts, dance, music and other creative outlets produced comparable results in the children of Mohan Van Heerdan’s (2003) study.

Perhaps it is music’s compatibility with other arenas that facilitated the second category, belonging. It is not uncommon for those who have lost a loved one to feel alone. Even in a group designed for music therapy or bereavement support, it is possible
to feel cut-off from those around you. Berger (2006) indicates that the first step to belonging is reconnecting with oneself. She provides several practical examples, such as making an audio scrapbook, to help reestablish links to self, others, and one’s memories. She, like Hilliard (2001), Smeijsters and Hurk (1999), Krout (2005) Dalton and Krout (2006) and Davies, Collins, Steele, Cook, Distler, and Brenner (2007), note how singing like lyrics, listening, improvisation, playing a drum, conversation and/or other creative means can help someone forge bonds with mourners within a group, and to diminish the sense of isolation.

The most dramatic example of this comes from Krout’s (2005) study, which describes this phenomenon occurring during one-time bereavement support groups and programs. Working with groups ranging from 20-50 participants, this study illustrates how the lyric metaphors within songs are used to “facilitate the participants’ feelings of connectedness and group identity, as well as to enable the participants’ identification, reflection, normalizing, sharing and exploration of feelings.” (p 120)

The power of connecting with others and palpating buried emotion is grounded in the physical self, a self who is inseparable from its culture, spirituality or experience. This third theme is born of the first two; it is the relationship of music to the physical aspects of grief and coping. With its ability to evoke a physiological response, and as a sensory stimulant, music can create a synthesis of the other senses. (Creagh, 2005). As we consciously and unconsciously act on the input from these senses, our bodies react to the sum of the messages. Thus, Ingrid’s agitated improvisation (Smeijsters and Hurk, 1999), Berger’s (2006) description of music soothing dyspnea and Hilliard’s (2001)
report of decreased behaviors in participants all represent different ways that the body processes and reacts to signals being processed in the moment.

Remembering that we are interconnected beings, and that music and grief are both embodied experiences, it makes the measurable physical findings of these studies very important. The decreased reports of headaches, stomach aches, withdrawing, overactivity and other behaviors in the participants of Hilliard’s (2001) study related to unresolved grief and the physical outcomes of Mr. Jones’ crying and laughing (Hilliard, Autumn 2001) to nostalgic music indicate the important role which music can and does have when included in the bereavement process. The physical markers are signposts to influences and healing occurring in other realms.

Chapter Summary

The review of literature in this chapter provided a firm foundation for this study to build upon, and highlighted areas where research can still inform the field. This comprehensive exploration of scholarly writings justified the compatibility of constructivism and music as a way of knowing as the theoretical framework for this study. Informed by Kubler-Ross’ works on grief and loss, it is possible to understand how music’s role in communication, community, identity, spirituality, learning and healing can help some bereaved adults develop coping mechanisms and move towards a more resolved grief process. Of high importance also was the discussion surrounding the relationship between music and emotion, which addressed the space between the cognitive constructivist approach and music as a way of knowing. This important area lends weight to my argument about the knowing and learning which took place within the confines of this study.
The recognition of this potential was also noted in the discussion of the therapeutic benefits and uses of music, especially in the hospice setting. The successful incorporation of music and music therapy in hospice, palliative and bereavement care, to alleviate physical discomfort, facilitate emotional expression, and assist with community-building and belonging, speaks to the powerful impact that music can have on those in painful and profound situations. Whether passive or active, the literature shows that music can have a commanding role in a person’s sense of wellness during the grief process.

Although the available literature offers erudite, thoughtful and practical applications of music therapy in hospice and palliative care, there are some significant gaps which are notable. First, the available research favors conceptual pieces over empirical works. There are few studies involving music and hospice care, and fewer still which address music and bereavement. Secondly, with the exception of a few memoirs and personal tales, the literature only discusses music from the perspective of music therapy. There is no discussion of individual, unstructured or spontaneous music making and its relationship to hospice and palliative care or bereavement.

Another important area lacking relates specifically to bereavement pieces. The limited numbers of works reviewed are focused primarily on patients, or patients with their families. There are few studies of music or music therapy involving post-death bereavement of families, friends and caregivers. Compounding this is an almost absolute void of bereavement studies addressing adults; this area focuses mainly on the needs of children and adolescents.
Also, I was unable to locate relevant studies from ecclesiastical or spiritual sources which discussed the role of music in grief, healing or bereavement after death. There were pieces that mentioned rituals, specific liturgy and the presence of music, but nothing which spoke about music as an agent of healing. Lastly, while there was a lot of discussion about creating a safe space, and rapport building, only one article reviewed, O’Callaghan (1996) specifically advised to watch for adverse effects. Given the highly sensitive nature of the work, and the often complex and fragile state of the participants, I would think that more emphasis on this facet of assessment would be warranted.

Clearly there is a need for more research about the different and important roles that music can play in loss, grief and healing. This research enabled me to address some of the vacancies illustrated in this literature review. Significant findings contributed to bridging the huge chasm between theory and practice, loss and healing, and life after death.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The task of exploring how music facilitates the resolution of grief is not a simple one. Set within a post hospice bereavement program context, the purpose of this qualitative, narrative analysis was to examine how music facilitated the development of coping mechanisms and healing during the grief process in those who have lost a loved one. This research pursued how these bereaved adults came to understand and accept their loss through musical means. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did the participants describe music's role in the understanding of their grief process?
2. How did the participants identify a meaningful musical episode or moment? How important was context to this determination?
3. Given that grieving and healing are both on-going processes, did music continue to have a role in the understanding and acceptance of the loss for these participants?
4. What are the implications for hospice bereavement programs and counselors?

Investigation of this highly personal, extremely subjective phenomenon calls for a research paradigm capable of revealing the layers and nuances of the grief process. Since this study was designed to explore and describe these experiences, the most suitable match was a qualitative methodology. This chapter provides an overview of the chosen methodology, why it was chosen, and a brief discussion of the background of the researcher. A delineation of participant selection, data collection and analytical methods follows, concluding with the establishment of credibility and verification practices.
Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, also known as naturalistic or descriptive inquiry, focuses on lived experiences and the meanings people make and attach to them. It can be characterized by “a concern with lives in their historical, social and cultural context, with an emphasis on the particularity of experience rather than a search for universal laws or general processes” (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 147) and as “inquiry aimed at describing and clarifying human experience as it appears in people’s lives” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 138). The purpose of qualitative research is, generally, to capture the meaning or essence of the phenomenon and relationships among its elements and variables as they occur naturally (as opposed to an intentional, controlled, lab-type scenario), or to understand the culture of a group (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2002; Smith, 2003).

Informed and employed by many fields, including psychology, sociology, history, anthropology and education, qualitative research seeks to “describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives…hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Unlike quantitative research, which looks for findings which are can be generalized and duplicated, qualitative findings are often context specific and represent what is unique in a situation, rather than “truths” which can be applied across the board.

That being said, authors such as Crabtree and Miller (1992) and Osborne (1994) urge that researchers take a qualitative approach when the topic or phenomenon is investigated and shared which could spur further interest among varied/larger populations. Although findings usually represent only one view of a particular
phenomenon or topic, their description, when combined with analysis, can add layers to the depth of our understanding and perception(s) of meaning and knowledge pertaining to the area of interest. And so, while the findings of this study can only relay the meanings and understandings gained from the unique grief experiences of the participants involved, the information provides a valuable resource and level of insight to other individuals, groups or researchers.

However, before being concerned with findings, the researcher must first be concerned with the design of the study. Streubert-Speziale and Carpenter (2003) denote six imperatives of qualitative research: a belief in multiple realities; a commitment to identifying an approach to understanding that supports the phenomenon studied; a commitment to the participant’s viewpoint; a conduct of inquiry which limits the disruption of the natural context of the phenomenon of interest; acknowledged participation of the researcher in the research; and the conveyance of an understanding of the phenomena by reporting in a literary style using participant commentaries.

Simply conceptualizing a study is not enough; the research must translate into a realistic representation of the perceptions, ideas, and the culture of those who participate in the study. For example, an important tenant of a qualitative methodology is the researcher’s acceptance of multiple perceptions or realities relating to a given phenomenon. As I explored the role of music in the healing and coping of the grieving among my participants, I encountered highly unique stories recounting personalized definitions and understandings about their individual processes. The chosen methodology needed to accommodate the possibility of little or no commonality between the tales of the individual participants. The *life-world* (Schwandt, 2001) of each person offered a
distinct set of parameters and influences which affected the way the phenomenon, grief, was experienced and the role that music played in it.

My own life world also affected the outcome of the research. My history, as a female hospice educator, administrator and musician influenced the questions asked and my understanding of the answers. The qualitative paradigm gave me an opportunity to participate in the research as an instrument (Patton, 2002) who listened and observed through query, immersion and sometimes, through deliberate activity, and offered analysis of the data in light of my theoretical framework.

On a grander scale, the facets of my experience affected my role as researcher, which enabled me to shape the design and implementation of the project in a unique way. Every day I listen to patients and families share their tales of diagnosis, treatment, and care. With each recounting, they express joys, fears, anger, frustrations and a host of other sentiments, often jumbled together in an onslaught of verbal energy. Other times, all I hear is silence, a sound far more revealing. In every case, it is in the telling, and the retelling, of the story that I come to know and understand the families that I serve.

It was through the nature of the work that I do everyday that I came to recognize that the very essence of my study lay in the stories of the participants. I decided to incorporate narrative analysis as the means to gain understanding about the area of my interest. Through listening and reflecting upon their words and offerings, I uncovered how music influenced their coping and healing. Braud and Anderson (1998) believe that “each telling brings new elements and joins different elements together in advancing the saga of telling the important stories of one’s life.” (p. 23).
Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a particular type of qualitative research. Described in Patton (2002), narrative inquiry is concerned with what the story or narrative can reveal about a person, world, life and/or culture that created it. The “story” can take on the form of interview transcripts, life history narratives, historical memoirs and creative non-fiction. Other forms of imaginative expression also fit in this research design, like journals, personal narratives, graffiti, and scrap books. The extension of “story” beyond simple words dovetails very neatly with the focus of this study, the role that music plays in the facilitation of grief. Since music can function as a means of expression, communication and understanding, it blends nicely with narrative inquiry’s position that stories can be heard and told through a variety of avenues.

Knowledge and understandings gained through narrative are linked to identity (Clandinin & Huber, 2002). The identity of the participants, and of the researcher, and in this study, music’s relationship with that identity, was reflected in the words and silences of the stories, and how they were heard. It is important to remember that these stories do not exist in a vacuum. Like identity, they were inextricably linked to the other stories of the participants’ lives, and the factors which affected and shaped them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Thus, the relationship between music, grief and healing must be considered in relation to the rest of the story: “…experience is narratively constructed and narratively lived.” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 162).

Typically situated in the social sciences, narrative inquiry treats people’s stories as data that represents the distinctive elements and dimensions of the experience being studied. Because this study involved the process of grief and its relationship to music, and
assumed that music as a form of knowing involves a holistic perspective about knowledge and learning, I chose to incorporate some of the concepts narrative inquiry from a transpersonal perspective.

Many authors offer ideas about transpersonal research, ranging from the explanation of exceptional experiences (like near-death) and transgenic development. Lahore and Shapiro (1992) envision this approach as one centered on the study of humanity’s highest potential. Although interesting, and perhaps applicable, it seemed a bit involved for the purposes of this project. Instead, keeping in mind the layers and possibilities of musical knowing, I was guided by Braud and Anderson’s (1998) description of transpersonal psychology: “It seeks to learn how people become more whole through integrating the somatic, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, creative-expressive, and relationship and community aspects of their lives” (p. 37).

Within a discussion of integral inquiry, which includes story telling, story listening and alternative ways of knowing, is an appropriate, applicable definition of transpersonal. It was my belief at the onset that this perspective would be applicable to the project. After analysis, this research highlighted the interrelationship of personal facets with musical (and by extension, physiological, spiritual and social) knowing, realized in the coping and healing of grief. It is important to note that I did not utilize a transpersonal paradigm the way that it’s typically described, as also focusing on integral or intuitive inquiry. Instead, I incorporated some of the foundational ideas into my approach of interpreting narrative inquiry.

The choice to use narrative inquiry was also informed and structured around the approach described by Conley (2002). Specifically relating to the use of narrative in arts-
based inquiry, she presents three main components of narrative inquiry: tensions with a history, tacit tells, and inquiry dynamic, all of which influence and are subject to the underlying structural processes. A specific connection is made with the thesis process. Further, she enumerates five main categories to guide the process: phases in the inquiry, form and method of the inquiry, outcomes, practical and intellectual usefulness of the inquiry, and literature of narrative inquiry.

Essentially, Conley (2002) describes the momentum which drives the research from the researcher’s perspective in terms of tension. The tensions related to my personal history with death, dying, grief and music, the desire to explore this interest without a preset agenda, the willingness to surrender to the stories-they all have helped guide the choice of methodology. Each story was unique and impacted the study. The participant’s tales provided the data, and mine affected the interpretation.

Researcher’s Background

My choice to conduct research with bereaved adults who identify music as a crucial part of grief process was based on elements of my personal experiences and disposition. As mentioned earlier, I am a hospice professional responsible for patient, family, physician, staff, facility and community education. I accept death as part of life and grief as part of death. The knowledge I possess is an accumulation of the gifts and lessons others have shared with me, growing and changing with every interaction. Additionally, I am a trained musician who is privileged to share music with the terminally ill and their families. I have felt the power of a thousand voices raised in song, cried at a simple melody and have been held still by profound silence. I believe in music’s ability to touch the soul, to give voice to the unspeakable, to heal the heart and
create understanding.

I believe that my experience and familiarity with the subject matter, from the perspective of a hospice worker and musician, was very important to this study. I have knowledge in dealing with grief, and with music, and am comfortable with the wide range of emotions that people express in dealing with grief. I am also quite used to the interview process and feel confident that this was significant in my establishment of rapport with the participants and helped facilitate the expression of the personal story. However, this could also have been a potential weakness. My experiences could have resulted in pre-conceived notions of the role of music in the grief process, and its relevance. There was also a danger that I failed to notice or explore certain statements because the language or situation expressed were ones that I associated as a routine part of the grief (or musical) process. To help safeguard against this, I asked for advisor and peer review of my interview questions prior to meeting with the participants, with a particular emphasis on verbiage. And, as will be discussed later in this chapter, I also requested similar review of the interview transcripts to help ensure that I pursued important areas to the appropriate extent. Finally, I worked to focus my listening and assessment skills before each interaction, hoping that intent and skill balanced the weight of any misconception I carry.

Humans are complex beings with multiple, intermingled facets. Grief, especially due to the loss of a loved one, is an equally complicated entity. I hold the conviction that the best way to uncover the different elements is to let them be revealed through narrative. In telling their stories, these mourners revealed what affected their individual situation, how they felt and what they did. The exposition of these details provided
valuable insight for the study and new perceptions for the participants.

My interaction with the participants impacted the situation as well. Although the focus of the study was to understand the participant’s experiences with music and grief, the conversations between myself and the participants resulted in the creation of further meaning together (Gergen, 1991; Shor, 1992; Vygotsky, 1986). Aspects of my personal and professional life came out in the course of discussion but were tempered by the nature and tone of my relationship with each.

Participant Selection

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization recently announced that approximately one third of all deaths in the United States in 2005 were under the care of a hospice program. This translates into roughly 1.2 million bereaved families and loved ones who have access to hospice bereavement care. Because of the magnitude of the potential pool, and the intent to explore this study via narrative inquiry, approaching participant selection through a purposeful sampling seemed wise.

Purposeful, criterion sampling is a strategy focused on gathering information-rich cases for in-depth study. The participants in a purposeful sample are those whose lived experiences, perceptions and knowledge are of interest to the researcher (Merriam, 2002; Ospina and Dodge, 2005; Patton, 2002; Riley and Hawe, 2005). Keeping in mind the goal of this study, participant selection was guided by the following criteria:

1. Individuals must have completed a 12-13 month hospice bereavement program.
2. Individuals must have been at least 25 years of age at the beginning of their participation in the bereavement program.
3. Participants could not currently be undergoing psychiatric or psychosocial counseling or treatment for severe emotional or behavioral health issues (such as depression, bi-polar disorder or attempted suicide) at the time of the study.

4. Participants needed to identify music as an integral component to their process of grieving and healing.

One of the driving forces behind the criteria delineated above was my concern for those who were participating in it. It was of paramount importance that any person involved be emotionally and mentally sound before embarking on this journey with me. Therefore, I sought these persons through established hospice bereavement programs. Having worked with a hospice counselor, the participants were more accustomed to sharing their stories and were comfortable with the retelling of them. Initial information was relayed via letter through the bereavement coordinator of the program. Interested parties then indicated their desire to participate and were interviewed to discern their current level of grief, appropriateness for the study and overall well-being. Due to the therapeutic and personal relationship between hospice patient, families and their interdisciplinary team, I did not recruit participants from any hospice site I have worked for within the last seven years, as having a prior professional relationship with some participants and not others might have had an undesirable effect on the study.

This was also reflected in the informed consent. Prior to the initiation of data collection, I reviewed and obtained signatures on informed consents. Participants were notified that their participation was completely voluntary and that they had the right to decline answering questions and/or could withdraw from the project at any time. Furthermore, all conversation and information shared was kept completely confidential;
pseudonyms were chosen or assigned to protect the identity of any party involved in the
depend study. Lastly, I took this opportunity to discuss the highly emotive nature of the study and
the probability of discomfort or heightened grief during the resurrection of the memories
associated with the loss. All participants were notified that the researcher could ask them
to withdraw from the study if their words or behaviors indicated an unsafe level of
physical, mental or emotional reaction. A referral to the proper professional service
would accompany such an incident. Thankfully, there was not that need.

The size of my sample ended up being six, which was the lower half of my
anticipated range of six to eight. The study generated the interest of fourteen people, but
after an initial meeting, only eight met the criteria. Four of the other six thought that the
study was a music therapy group to join and two were under the age of 25 at the time of
interview. Sadly, two of the participants needed to withdraw due to personal, family
emergency, leaving six to complete the project. Although small, the population was
relatively diverse, balanced in gender, and representative of varied age, musical
style/interface, approach to religion and spirituality, and culture. It was geographically
limited to central and eastern Pennsylvania and central New Jersey, and was reflective of
limited religiosity: five of the participants were Christian and one did not identify a
religion. He did not state whether he was agnostic, atheist or following a different
philosophy.

Included below is a brief synopsis of the individuals involved in this study; more
detailed descriptions are provided in their respective chapters 4-9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ETHNICITY</th>
<th>DECEASED</th>
<th>RELIGION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AVA</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Mother in law</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADRIAN</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Half Cuban Half Korean American</td>
<td>Twin Brother</td>
<td>None stated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEREDITH</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Irish born moved to America</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETTY</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Best Friend</td>
<td>Methodist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRAIG</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Protestant-not practicing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMES</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Culturally, this group is primarily reflective of a Western culture. Adrian’s upbringing was focused on “Americanizing” him, thus filtering some of the diverse cultural practices of his parents. Meredith experienced a similar upbringing, trying to blend into a new country. James and Ava also brought a wonderful perspective to the study, sharing the importance and interconnection of their culture, religion and race to their entire process. Additionally, as a married couple mourning the loss of the same person, they added an unexpected dimension to the study.

It is also important to note that not all of the participants have survived this study through the final writing stages. Both Meredith and Betty made a passed away in the fall of 2008, finally succumbing to their respective diseases. Both died peacefully, at home, as they desired.
Data Collection

“Stories to live by are shaped in places and lived in places. They live in actions, in relationships with others, in language, including silences, in gaps and vacancies, in continuities and discontinuities” (Clandinin & Huber, 2002, p. 161-162). The loss of a loved one creates a situation for a specific type of story to exist; one of devastation, survival, hope and healing. In order to hear each tale, the teller must claim a voice. To facilitate this claiming of voice, I conducted two semi-structured interview sessions with each participant. I also incorporated a music elicitation into the second interview, which was relayed to the participants at the outset of the study, and again at the end of the first interview. Lastly, there was the possibility of engaging in creative projects, in light of what they have learned through making meaning of their grieving process. Completion of a project was not a part of the design of the study, however, any works created during the bereavement process of the participant would have been included as part of their personal narrative if they opted to. While several of the participants did identify engaging in other practices, like quilting and model building, none wanted to include them. However, their important as adjuvant in the grief process will be discussed in the final chapter. The primary means of data collection were of course the narrative interviews themselves. A musical elicitation technique was also used in the second interview which served as an additional means of data collection.

Individual Interviews

In order to gain rich, meaningful information from the stories of the participants, I utilized interview as a means of data collection. “The purpose of an interview is to obtain descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning
of the described phenomenon” (Kale, 1996, p. 5-6). The dyadic interviews consisted of semi-structured, opened questions designed to explore the many facets of the grief process. Conceptually, these interviews represented a combination of strategies: the interview guide approach and the standard open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). The interview guide approach fit very well with the nature of narrative inquiry, allowing for the natural flow of a story, while the standard open-ended interview created the opportunity for greater comparison between stories and helped eliminate the loss of important information. Considering the dynamic of loss and the complexity of the recollections of the participants, I conducted two interviews. Sideman (1991) recommends multiple interviews so that researchers and participants can ruminate over the details of the phenomenon and the interview and revisit them in another sitting. Given the nature of grief and the anticipated density of the personal narratives, I considered multiple sessions a necessity of this study.

Each interview was recorded by two audio devices to help ensure a comprehensive transcript. Two digital audio recorders were placed, one by myself and one by the participant, during each interview session to lessen the possibility of unclear responses. To help ensure that the interviews unfolded at the participant’s own pace and rhythm, it was critical that the physical space be one the participant feels comfortable in; it must be private, comfortable and feel safe. Each participant chose to host the interviews in their personal homes, which I traveled to at times designated to be convenient for them. The first meeting was primarily a telling of the story, and a gathering of the initial information which described their journey through grief and how music helped them. Lasting between 1.5 to 2.0 hours, this session followed more of the interview guide
approach, enabling participants to share their story in their own rhythm. Questions here for the most part, followed the natural cadence of the story. However, I did specifically ask participants to identify a genre, specific piece, and/or style of musical expression or presentation which was important to the coping and healing of their grief and explored specific details relating to that relationship. This was also the opportunity for the participants to identify and discuss other creative or expressive means they utilized during their acute bereavement period.

After reviewing the data from the first session, more specific questions were developed to clarify points from the previous meeting and flesh out any additional areas that may have been uncovered. These interviews were more structured, in light of what was shared in the prior interview, similar to the standardized, open-ended interview, and required the same amount of time as the first meeting. Of significance was the inclusion of a follow-up conversation pertaining to the attributes of the important musical experiences, which created the opportunity for participants to share new insights and thoughts since the previous session.

Music Elicitation/Field Notes

In addition, a music-elicitation component was be used this second interview. No sources describe the use of music in this fashion, but Clark-Ibanez (2004), Loeffler (2005) and Taylor (2002) describe the use of elicitation through use of photographs. Elicitation describes the practice of employing specific media to reveal a person’s reaction and often spontaneous input. This exercise explored the specific pieces or types of music identified during the first interview. Following a reflective discussion about the role of the music (emotional, spiritual, uses, etc.), the music was be played gain. The
ensuing conversations revolved around their thoughts, feelings and perceptions now, and if/how they differed from before. The purpose of this exercise was be twofold: first, it allowed for a more current perspective in an otherwise retrospective study; and second, it provided greater perspective on grief, grieving and the changes in perception over time.

In consideration of the highly emotive, very complex nature of this topic, it was imperative that good, observation-based field notes accompany the recordings of the interviews. Field notes are the researcher’s thoughts and description written during and after interviews and activities that capture aspects of the data collection that may not be attainable via audio recording (Patton, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Body language, gestures, attire, atmosphere, changes in continence, etc. are all crucial to a thorough investigation and evaluation of the phenomenon in question. Notes were taken immediately after each interview, not during, in respect to the sensitive nature of the topic. There was one exception to this, in which I chose to take notes during the interview to enable the participant the opportunity to take a break without emphasizing her illness. I kept a personal journal during the data collection process, to record my impressions, thoughts and other information as the study progressed. This was also a helpful tool for tracking contacts, locations, times, and other general details.

Data Analysis

Wolcott (2001) refers to narrative analysis as a “pondering of the data” (p. 33). In this case, the data was found in the stories, and in order to ponder, I needed to be exceedingly familiar with each line and character. To achieve this, I collected, recorded and transcribed all data myself. However, a research project is not comprised solely of data collection; there must also be analysis. In order to gain insight from the data, I
needed uncover the nuances, tensions, interconnections, gaps, silences and structures within the stories I heard (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Because I was looking for elements that would tie the experiences together, I chose to incorporate inductive analysis. By approaching the data from an inductive standpoint, I discovered similarities which bound the stories together. “The researcher’s role to interpret the stories in order to analyze the underlying narrative that the storytellers may not be able to give voice to themselves” (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p. 227).

Since the data were gathered in two sessions, it was important that the approach to analysis be compatible with the type of data to be collected, as well as the volume of information accrued. This narrative analysis was tailored to get inside the unique focus of this study. Adapting Riley and Haw’s (2005) approach from health care promotion to grief, this analysis examined the manner in which the story was told by the bereaved, in consideration of the teller, their context, the nature of their grief, the sequencing and tension between events, interpersonal and social interactions, and the relationship between grief and music. Narrative analysis presented an opportunity for greater understanding of the individual and how they constructed understandings of grief through music. The significance of this approach was that it not only provided information about the specific area of interest (music and grief), but it also provided valuable information about the “world” of the bereaved and how musical knowing and learning occurs in those different settings.

Because the narrative themselves are the principal data, and in light of the fact that the second interview serves to address any new ideas and readdress areas requiring clarification, a content analysis of the interview transcriptions, field notes, my personal
journal and any included creative projects offered by the participants has been the primary means to illuminate patterns within the data. Generally, “content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton 2002, p. 453).

This effort to identify patterns, as well as unique characteristics, was enhanced by review of the interviews as they were completed, rather than as a total group at the end of the round. Recognition of emerging concepts and/or patterns allowed me to improve the interview portion with each initial meeting and greatly impacted the concentration of the second interview. It also assisted with some preliminary coding and realization of relationships among areas of significance.

However, it was important to be wary of the dangers of too much analysis before the completion of data collection. I anticipated that there would be similarities between the stories of the participants, but also found that there were notable differences. To help insulate myself from the potential pitfall of premature analysis, I concentrated on the nature of narrative analysis and its relationship to my research purpose, rather than the resulting product. Polkinghorne (1995) delineates several guidelines which reiterate the key elements of a narrative and the researcher’s role:

1. Gather a description of the cultural context in which the storied case study takes place. The researcher needs to take cognizance of the contextual feature of generating the story.

2. Identify the nature of the protagonist, both physical and cognitive.
3. Identify important significant others in affecting actions and goals for the protagonist. An explanation of the relationships between the main character and other people is required in the development of the plot.

4. Concentrate on the choices and actions of the main character and movement towards an outcome.

5. Pay attention to previous experiences as these manifest themselves in the present.

6. Make sure the production of a story is within “a bounded temporal period; that is, a beginning, middle and end.” The story needs to focus on the context, presenting the characters as unique individuals.

7. Lastly, as a researcher, you need to “provide a storyline or plot that serves to configure or compose the disparate data elements into a meaningful explanation of the protagonist’s responses and actions”

Consideration of these points was integral to my approach to the analysis. Most of the participants chose to start with a description of the person, prior to their death, then moved into painting the picture of their death and the impact of their lives afterwards. The interview questions were designed to create space for each individual to describe their grief and the role of music in it from their own perspective and in light of individual context. I then asked additional questions as areas of interest emerged or to gain more information about areas not specifically mentioned.

After the interviews, I cross-referenced my field notes and journals with the transcriptions, using colors to visually mark central elements, like emotion, spirituality, culture, etc., to aid in the cross-analysis between narratives. Upon completion of all the
interviews, transcriptions and due diligence to maintain the trustworthiness of the study, I began sifting through the tremendous amount of data looking for the best manner to organize each narrative. After briefly introducing each participant, I followed with an introduction of the person who passed, from the words of those who loved them. These initial descriptions created a strong sense of the background and context which fostered the specific inclusion of music in their grief processes.

I then reviewed the color coded sections from the data and used that as a guide to make sure that areas of similarity, or great difference, were included. Very often, the participants answered multiple interview questions throughout one section of dialogue; I left many of those statements intact, wanting their personality and manner of speaking to be as authentic as possible. Thus, the flow of each individual narrative differs in sequencing, but maintains the integrity of the information and is indicative of the actions and momentum on each tale.

The ultimate organization of the narratives as a group was driven from the content within. Ava was the first interview I completed and was truly in the spirit of this study. She also offered a very personal and comprehensive view into her grief and relationship with music. Intuitively, I felt she was the best to begin the section with. The others were arranged in consideration of similarities and differences; I wanted readers to experience contrast in a way that would encourage questions and appreciation for the individual perspectives. The choice to end the chapters with James was motivated by the same things that led to choosing Ava first. As a couple, they offered balance and soul to this project. His narrative was equally compelling and offered a strong summation of the potential and realization of music as a learning, coping and healing mechanism in grief.
While the purpose of narrative analysis is primarily to have each narrative stand on its own as a story, in the final chapter I do discuss some important areas of significance which emerged from the narratives, and discuss them in relation to the literature which informed the study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Maintaining the integrity of this research project went far beyond staying true to the philosophy of narrative inquiry. It required an unwavering attention to the details of confirmability, credibility, dependability and transferability. These areas indicate to other scholars, researchers and consumers of the study the relevance and reliability of the findings. Consideration of these elements is of particular importance to qualitative research because it is highly subjective and is prized for its orientation within the unique, not the generalizable. This was especially true for this project because of its potential significance for the field of medicine, known as a bastion for quantitative, not qualitative research.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the results of a research study can be confirmed by others. Those others may be fellow researchers, participants, or committee members. It is imperative that a researcher explore multiple avenues and keep fastidious records to ensure that their work can be corroborated. (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002; Trochum, 2002).

One of the simplest methods employed to achieve this was the completion of an audit trail. As mentioned previously, I kept a personal journal during the study. By recording the details of each encounter, including who, where, when and what phase of
the study, an accounting now exists to reinforce the gathering of the data. I was sure to document specific or personal descriptions that could be verified if necessary.

Another important practice I utilized was the exploration of any contradictory information gathered. Since there was not complete homogeneity among the narratives, additional questions were asked to explore and clarify points that differed between tellings. Nonconformities were discovered, so the follow-up questions were important to assure proper representation as a finding or correction to an error.

Patton (2002), Creswell (1998) and Trochum (2002) also champion the use of triangulation as a means of confirmability. Triangulation is the inclusion of multiple methods of data analysis and collection to help minimize the chance of error and bias. Patton (2002, p. 556) identifies four types of triangulation for qualitative research: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation. Given the limited research relating to my study, and the highly personal and emotive nature of grief and loss, I used the triangulation of data sources and analyst triangulation to reinforce my confirmability. Interview transcripts, field notes and journal entries were all compared by the researcher, and then were reviewed by my committee chair and/or peers for bias, error and non-conformities.

The triangulation of data sources aligned neatly with my review of the interviews during data collection. By cross-checking different information gathered at different times, like interview with observation notes, or consistency in the telling and retelling of the story, I was aware of and account for any differences in the data. Triangulation via analyst offered another layer of support to the trustworthiness of the study. Utilizing multiple analysts could have negatively affected the rapport building necessary for this
research, so I included participant review and expert audit to ensure accuracy. Participant review, sometimes called member checks, involves the respondents’ review, verification and/or correction of the transcribed interview. Each participant was mailed a copy of the transcript in a self-addressed stamped envelope for review, comment and correction. It was an excellent way to confirm perspectives, as well as highlights potential problems or further areas to investigate (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 2005). It proved to be needed for clarification in one narrative, wherein I initially identified the wrong Opus number as the important piece of music for Craig.

Expert audits, completed after each interview session was transcribed, performed by my committee chair, served to monitor and measure the quality of the data collection, analysis and findings. Members of my committee and certain fellow doctoral candidates also assisted in the recognition of concerns or weaknesses during the project that require attention. Most often, it was a recommendation of areas to follow-up on or additional questions to include.

Credibility

Continuing in a similar vein to confirmability, credibility is concerned with establishing the truth value or believability of the data from the perspective of the participants in the research. It is necessary that the research represents the total input of the participant, not just the data which appeals to or supports the researcher’s assumptions (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Patton, 2002; Struebert-Speziale& Carpenter, 2003).

To accomplish this, I employed many of the same strategies described in the previous section. Member checks by the participants occurred after the transcription of
each interview, and throughout the analysis if clarification was needed. My understanding and representation of this information was further enhanced through the use of the triangulation of data sources and analyst perspective. The readings by my peers and committee assisted in revealing any bias on the part of this researcher which could interfere with the dissemination of the “true” data.

The use of the field notes, personal journal and multiple interviews was also important for reinforcing the credibility of this research. It is not uncommon for personal reactions, distractions and the passage of time to distort recollections and impressions of conversations. Keeping (and then re-referencing) field notes and journal entries allowed me to capture information that was accessed clearly at a later times. The fact that I did two interviews with each participant provided the opportunity to clarify any nebulous areas from the first discussion, as well as reinforce the important points of each individual narrative

*Dependability*

Dependability relates specifically to the reliability of the information gathered. The use of the journal, field notes and transcripts also contributed to the dependability of the study. Having an accessible and organized adult trail helped illuminate the reliability of the research. It was the responsibility of this researcher to provide a clear description of the procedures which resulted in data and findings. It was also necessary to present a thorough description of the research methods. “Keeping findings in context is a cardinal principal of qualitative analysis.” (Patton, 2002, p. 563). Therefore, it has been important that the data collection and analysis were compatible with the intent of the study and the needs of the participants. A description of how the final participants were chosen is
previously provided, as was a description of how interview sites were selected, questions
designed, and the investigation of the music identified. Finally, as in each other area of
verification, data and analytical triangulation were included to limit the chances of
unclear or intangible descriptions of design, procedure or execution of the study.

*Transferability*

Building off of dependability, transferability describes how well the study could be replicated or map to other studies or related practices. Although the essence of this research is highly individualistic and is not expected to be completely transferable to other settings, I believe that at least some of the major findings can be applied to other settings. Certainly, I feel that these results can apply to practices in other hospice bereavement programs, as well as palliative care programs, some medical specialties and some music therapy settings. For that reason, it was vital that the chosen sample, data collection methods and description of data be as inclusive and clear as possible.

The use of purposeful sampling in this study was essential in helping establish transferability of the research. By choosing participants who meet the afore-mentioned criteria, there was a greater likelihood of discovering the similarities and differences in their narratives. The more specific the description of the sample, the better the chance of recreating similar findings or applications. Additionally, it could assist future researchers with establishing other selection criteria to either expand these findings or explore in a new direction.

Likewise, a dense description of the context and findings will help determine the generalizability of the research. It was important for me to describe the general hospice bereavement context, as well as the individual factors of each participant. The provision
of these details will enable interested parties to create parallels and recognize differences between the context of this study and any other settings.

The types of music, presence of spiritual practice, history with the hospice, backgrounds of the participants, and relationship with the deceased are just a few of the factors which may have a significant impact on the findings and transferability of the study. Thus, it was imperative that this and the narrative sections contain rich descriptions of all the data gathered. Derived from the transcripts, field notes, journal and any contributions of the participants, the picture presented needed capture the most complete representation possible. Often, as was the case in this study, it is in the nuances and subtle areas that major findings are made. This may also be where other researchers may recognize a similarity or transferable facet which informs their setting.

Rather than mince the narratives of each person into tiny snippets of quotes, each participant has been allotted a small chapter for their voice to be heard alone. I believe that this enables the reader to gain a fuller sense of the person and their story. This also serves to reinforce the appropriateness of narrative inquiry as a methodology for this study. The use of individual chapters creates an opportunity to paint a more complete picture, and illustrate the essence of the experience.

The challenge of course, has been in choosing which aspects of each story are to be shared. Since it is impractical to impart every detail, I relied on practices like member checks, triangulations, audit trails and personal judgment to assist in the determination of the most significant information. This attention to detail, description and method has resulted in a study which not only provides reliable, credible and conformable insight into
how people use music to heal grief, but also how the findings can relate to and inform other contexts.

The next six chapters are the result of very careful transcription and attention to the details described above. These stories are the soul of this study, and are structured around emphasis and impressions that I received during the course of the interview process. The participant expended as much energy in their narration of their journeys as I did recording and analyzing them, for which I am very grateful.
THEIR SIDE OF THE STORY

The remaining chapters of this dissertation describe the findings of this study. Chapters 4-9 present the narratives of each of the participants, while chapter 10 contains a cross case analysis of the narratives in light of the themes that emerged. This chapter also serves as a conclusion, summarizing the study and highlighting the implications of this research and potential areas for future research.

The intent of this study was to uncover and explore how music was a part of these people’s grieving, and to look deeper into its relationship with their coping. Death, and the grief that follows in its wake, are indiscriminate, and so it was important to me that the participants of this project not be a homogenous group. The resulting six interviewees represent both genders (equally), span more than four decades in age, come from diverse cultural backgrounds and lost loved ones from different parts of their lives. Each narrative reveals a highly personal process, colored by each person’s experiences and beliefs. Their stories provide rich descriptions of music’s role in their learning and coping while grieving, as well as the interconnection between music and other significant factors, like culture, spirituality and emotional outlet.

Although each participant was ultimately asked the same questions, the flow of each interview was quite unique. Most chose to begin with the person they lost, and the sequence of events that mattered to them during that time. When left to speak at their own pace, some of the participants brought up areas highlighted in the questions, such as culture and spirituality, while others needed to be asked. I felt it most important that they create space in their story for my questions, rather than shape the telling by a mandatory sequence of questioning.
As Polkinghorne reminds us, “The purpose of the exploration of remembered events is not to produce accurate recalls, but to provide an occasion for the reflection in the meaning these events had for the participant” (p. 143). In the reading of the next few chapters, it will be clear that for these participants, music did have, and continues to have, great meaning in their grieving, and in their lives. The arrangement of their stories is a result of the rhythms of the narratives. Within each is a different energy and focus

CHAPTER FOUR: AVA

In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter’s night that was so deep

Ava is a 51 year old black woman currently residing in Seattle, WA. Until recently, she had lived in central Pennsylvania, where she was born and raised. She moved to Seattle with her husband, a government contractor who was transferred with his job. Although currently middle-class, Ava describes herself as an “urban diva” that grew up poor. She is a musical minister and youth leader in her Black Baptist Church. She has been Baptist all of her life and feels it is at the core of her being. Music also resides in this place, and was fundamental in helping her cope with the loss of mother-in-law, Bel.

Remembrance: We Sang a Song for Every Day

Ava took time to meet with me at her home one afternoon. We spoke for almost two hours, before she went to bible study. She began with a loving description of Bel:

She was one of those ladies, and I do mean ladies, that could make you feel better right away. It didn’t matter what was wrong with me, or life, or my car...she just had that way. Nothin was as bad as it seemed around her. I met her at church about 15 years ago, right after my ex and I split. I hadn’t been to church in a while, but found I needed it, so one day, I just made myself go. There she was,
sittin’ up front in the choir section. I don’t know why I noticed her, guess I was meant to. I don’t remember much about the preacher’s words that day, but the moment that woman started to sing, I started to cry. And let me tell you, it wasn’t that pretty, Hollywood type cry! I was all a snottin and stuff. Don’t you know after the song was done, she came down and took me out into the back room…gave me some tissues, showed me where the bathroom was, and then she waited for me. After I came out the room, she just kinda looked at me and asked “so was my singing that bad, or that good” I laughed and told her “that good!”…Bel said that everyone could sing, but not everyone should be heard at the same volume; she always had something funny to say…she helped me a lot. She taught me that there’s this place here (gestures by stomach) that lets you find the strength to pull stuff from here (gestures to her heart) and here (gestures to her head) and sometimes from all the way down here (leans and pulls up from her toes). Its not always pretty, but it’s real, ya know?

Ava also indicated that singing helps her express her feelings:

>You can tell what kind of mood I’m in by how I sing, especially when I am really anything. (She clarified this).really happy, sad, you know, whatever.

In particular, singing was important during Bel’s sickness, and to Ava’s ability to cope after her death Bel was diagnosed with lung cancer that had metastasized to her bones and brain. At the time of diagnosis, she was given a very poor prognosis by her physician, months at most.

>I honestly don’t think I could have survived it without my songs… I was mad. Of all the good people to get sick, and in her lungs?! Her gift, well one of them, was
singing...I asked her why God would make it so hard for to sing at the end of her life and she told me that it must mean its someone else's turn. I took that to mean me. And then we sang. And every time I saw her, which was all the time, we sang. Sometimes we were happy, sometimes we got so choked up we couldn’t finish, but it was our thing.

Specifically, they sang:

_Hymns, of course, Christmas carols...she loved Christmas carols, songs on the radio. One day we even played a music trivia game of old commercials. The day she died, I was sitting by her, just holding her hand...I was torn, between wanting her to be with God and wanting to keep her here. She really wanted to make it to Christmas, but it was only the middle of September and I knew, I knew it just wasn’t gonna happen for her. So I made myself reach deep, and I sang ‘The First Noel’. It was her favorite, and I thought it made sense, since this would be her first Christmas in Heaven. And do ya know, she mouthed some of the words with me. She never opened her eyes, didn’t make a sound, but she was there with me. I don’t know if it was Bel or God, but it was my message that all was going to be alright._

Clearly, in Ava’s remark’s, God is important to her. She made several references about her faith and singing. When asked if she felt there was a relationship between her spirituality and singing she replied:

_Without a doubt! To me, for me, God is in everything. He’s in life, he knows my joys, my sorrows my dream; all the things my songs are made of. So really, there is no singing without God. It’s His gift to me to share with others._
And about the relationship between her faith and spirituality:

*God is everywhere, in everything! How could I have spirituality without His spirit? It was His spirit in my spirit that helped me get through Bel’s death.*

Ava is clearly not one those people who segments aspects of her life into neat little categories. Each element is integrated and coexists in her space. In order to focus this part of the conversation, she was asked about how music has been a part of her grieving. She responded:

*Like I said before, music has just been so much an everyday thing in my life, so it figures it would be a part of the sadness and loss I feel in my life. It’s always been my way to make sense of things; I’m a feeler first, thinker second. That’s not always a great thing, but hey, it’s me. Music, mostly singing, but sometimes just hearing others, helps me figure it all out. Sometimes you gotta lay it all out before you, see it, then figure it out…singing lets me get it out, kinda tire myself out, then I could look at it.*

Confirming that music is way for her to understand things, Ava says:

*I talk about getting the bad things out because that is what I think of when I lost Bel, but its there for the good stuff too. It took me weeks of realizing every time I left seeing James (Bel’s son), I was singing and skippen like a school girl. I was like, girl, you got it bad. That’s how I knew I really loved him; he got under my skin then into my songs.*

During part of this conversation, Ava talked about how she’s always moving while singing. This related to two important areas. First, that although moving while singing enhanced the musical experience, Ava really didn’t employ any other creative
measures or practices to help with her grief. Second, that her movement while singing, was deeply rooted in her person, which is inextricable from her culture.

*Well, the person I am comes from the culture that brought me forth. I don’t really see how it could be a personal choice. I mean, everyone does it, but it’s not like you have to. There’s no rule, no one says you must, but it would be obvious if you didn’t.*

When asked to clarify if she though of her music and singing as personal or cultural, Ava replied:

*It’s everything. It’s personal to me, I am singing it, I am feeling it. But I am doing it because of God. So, it’s not mine alone. I never really thought about it, but I’m kinda thinking that the way I want to sing, the songs I go to, are things I’ve learned from others. And what I go to when I need to reach deep down are songs from my church or childhood, but then I pour myself into them. So, it’s kinda of culture and kinda me. So I guess it’s blended, you know? Besides, I am part of the community, so what I do is part of the culture, right? I mean, I listen to whatever I want, I know some Celine Dion stuff, but I sing it my way, not hers. Actually, you know that song she sang in ‘Titanic’? I heard it a while back, and it really made sense. I mean, before, you knew the story and it was sad, but after losing Bel, it was something a bit more...in here (gestures to her chest).*

This segued smoothly into a conversation about her grief, and more discussion about music’s place in it.

*In the beginning, it was so unreal. First, I didn’t believe it. I mean, I was sitting right there when she died. I opened the window, held her hand, I actually got to
say goodbye, tell her how much I loved her...she was so still, so calm, more at peace than she had been over the last few months...those first few days are kind of foggy. My one brother-in-law, the preacher, took charge of planning her service...I remember him wanting all of us to sing a song for Bel, just the family. It was the first time I was scared about singing. I wanted it to be perfect! I wasn’t sure that I wouldn’t be crying, I hated the thought of it not honoring her the right way. Then Jonas, the preacher, reminded me that God would be there, and if we were singing it with love, it would be exactly as is should be. It sounded just like something she would have said. So we sang, and it was fine, but I wasn’t...I kept singing; some days it helped, some days it was just a way to let it out. It didn’t change, ya know?

Honoring Bel’s memory was very important to Ava’s process, even beyond the initial days. This honoring, through music and action, was instrumental in helping her cope and heal.

Sometimes I was sad, or depressed or lonely for her in my space. Oh, and I got mad too! Then I felt really guilty. No one ever told me that feeling mad would be part of it so often...I was just stuck...Now, I know that there wasn’t going to be a day where I just woke up and all was fine, but I can remember a day that seemed to move things a bit. I was in the house, putting up decorations. I didn’t really feel in the mood, but it was her favorite holiday and I wasn’t going to let it go by without effort, in memory of her. I had just put this glass star candle thing out...and I just stopped. The room smelled like the box of ornaments, kinda atticy and cold, and it was really calm. Out of nowhere, I just sang ‘The First Noel’, and
it felt good. I was sad, but it was like all of a sudden, it felt o.k. to be sad...I felt bad about still missing her and was wondering what was wrong with me. Then I realized it wasn’t wrong, it just was, and I needed to stop feeling badly about feeling badly and focus on how to move through it...its been a few years, I still have days where I miss her fresh as when she died, but mostly I have gotten used to not having her here. I focus on helping out where she did, but in my own way, kind of a legacy, if that doesn’t sound too cheesy. Plus, I feel closer to her that way.

In an effort to understand music’s role here, it is important to discuss how music is identified or chosen. I asked Ava to reflect on the music that has been in her life over the past few years, and to share any pieces or styles that were important to her.

Well, for sure, church hymns, they are right at the core of me. They were for her too. But you know, it wasn’t a particular type, it was more the tone or words, or certain songs on the day I heard them. Anything that was from her time always touches me, but sometimes, it’s just what fits the day, ya know?

I asked if ‘The First Noel’ was important in relation to her grief:

Yes! On so many levels! It was her favorite, so it always reminds me of her. Plus, like I said before, that day it just came out. I’m not sure what I would have made it through all of that if it hadn’t come to me. I truly think she was my angel that day, nudging me to let it out.

And to reiterate how music helped her:

You know, like I said before, my whole life, it’s how I dealt with anything. It is a way to let it out, and never did I need that more than after Bel died.
Throughout this interview, it was clear that Ava was very aware of the emotional aspect of her grief. When asked about this she described her grief as feelings.

*I noticed I felt blah some days, and didn’t always want to do stuff, sometimes didn’t want to eat, sometimes ate too much, but what I remember the most was feeling something. The negatives stand out more. It was the same was leaving my ex, I mean, I went through similar kinds of stuff; being mad, sad, lonely. I sang then too. It wasn’t easy then either, but then, I chose to go, here I didn’t want her to leave, so it was different.*

And when asked to elaborate the period where, due to her feelings of grief, music was difficult for her, she explained:

*It was about a month, maybe a month and a half. I mean I sang at the funeral and I sang at church, and like we said, I sang little stuff during the day. But it wasn’t the same. I couldn’t put my whole self into it. I couldn’t pour myself out in the song, I just didn’t have the energy or whatever. So yeah, I sang, but not the way I usually do, and certainly not in the way that lets me get stuff out. Thinking about it, I don’t think I wanted to really understand it or focus on it. I wanted it to go away, so I didn’t deal with it. But you can only do that for so long.*

Before concluding the first interview, Ava shared a final element that she felt was critical to her ability to move on, her husband.

*You know, what I didn’t mention is that my James sings too. He really was my rock. Most of the time, I sing alone, except for church of course. You know, I sing while I do the dishes, sing while I drive whatever. But sometimes, he joins in. He*
hums, does back-up, adds to it. When I am really bad, he even starts it, knowing I
won’t let him sing like that. He will actually sing the harmony only—now you know
you have to sing the melody then, otherwise it’s just not right. He is a blessing, my
James, one of the few great ones.

Reflection: Continuing Family Tradition

The primary purpose of this second interview was to discuss how and why
specific types of music were important to the bereaved. It was also the time designated
for the music elicitation activity. In the previous interview, Ava had identified that ‘The
First Noel’ had special significance to her. But, like in the first session, we opened with a
general area and allowed the conversation to progress to the more specific. Our initial
discussion involved Ava’s thoughts in between interviews.

This has been such a great experience for both James and me. Since we talked
last time, James got transferred for work and I’ve gotten to start my work in a
new area. I’ve set up a youth group and I do music ministering in my community.
I go to people’s homes, community events, all over, singing the word and helping
build community. Bel would be so proud. It likes every time I help someone, I’m
paying her back, and what’s more, I am passing along the example to someone
else. She lives on. But do you know what I really started noticing? The many ways
that music really is with me. After you started asking me those questions, I started
paying attention to more particular types of things…like what kind of music I go to
first when I am in a particular mood, or how it helps me in my day. You know
what I realized? It’s with me all the time. Music not only helps me get what other
people are trying to tell me, it helps me get my point across to the people I minister. We communicate with music. It is truly awesome.

Ava also noticed how the retelling of her story helped with her grieving.

You know, after you left, I felt, better in a way. Glad that I could tell someone else about Bel. And ya know, I noticed that I was less sad about it. Of course I still miss her, but I was able to tell you things, and remember things I hadn’t thought of before then. I really appreciated that.

Most importantly to Ava, she is paying it forward.

More than anything though, I am glad for what meeting you did for me in how I can help others. In realizing and thinking about how my music and family and church helped me move on, I have begun to help others with their journey. I must say though, although I help some of the folk at church who have lost a loved one, I don’t want to step on toes. Mainly where I use this is at the kids’ shelter in town. One of my sisters at church volunteers at this place that takes care of kids with absent parents. Those kids not in the system, but really in need. They get fed, help with stuff, you know, support before they get really messed up. Anyway, I’ve started doing choir groups, playing music, even have some writing lyrics. Its amazing, some of these kids come out with really profound stuff. I figure I can give them a safe place to let it out, and hope that it helps.

Thinking about “letting it out” and how music helps her do this, I asked her to think about her special piece of music, ‘The First Noel’. Specifically, I wanted to know what about that piece had such an impact on her.
Well, like I told you last time, the fact that it was Bel’s favorite had a lot to do with it. In my head, that was her Christmas song. But also, there is this, I don’t know, feel about it. I go to this place within myself, especially when I sing it. The sound, especially with harmony, is angelic. It is one of those songs that, when sung with grace, is truly of God. I think Bel was also truly of God, an angel on Earth.

She revealed that it was the composition of the music itself, the combination of sound and lyrics that moved her so. She was then asked to close her eyes and think for a moment about the piece. And when she was ready, I asked her to share what she remembers about the song from that time.

Mostly, I remember it being the turning point for me. The point when I knew I would be able to get through one of the worst times of my life. Losing her was like losing part of myself, and you are never sure you will be the same. And do you want to know the truth? I realized that you aren’t the same, ever. And it’s not just having someone die that does that to you, it’s lots of things in life. My divorce, getting remarried, you are never the same. You are always changing. It’s crazy thinking you are going to be the same after something major that makes you who you are is gone. I just wish I would have known that before, ya know?! And I think because I sang it in that moment it had more of an effect on me. Hearing it on the radio, yeah it may have seemed like a sign. But to be able to retouch that part of myself that seemed so hard to get to, that’s what really made all the difference.

We then played a recording of the song, brought by Ava. Originally, she had planned on singing it, but a sore throat altered that plan. Instead, she brought a version that a church
soloist performed a few years ago. After listening, I asked her to take a moment, and then tell me what the song means to her today.

Gosh, that’s a hard question. I feel so many things when I listen to it, think of so many things. All the memories from before, all the places I’ve been since. This may sound a little strange, but I almost feel like its more my song now. I mean, I think of Bel and all that I miss about her, and I am still sad. But I also am glad. I feel, blessed. And when I hear that, and I think back, I always thought about her dyin, and it being her first Christmas with God, but you know, it was a first for us too. And not that I wouldn’t take her back in a instant, but I wouldn’t be on this path now if she were still here. I tried so hard to live what she taught me and to follow in her footsteps. I am not sure that I’d have done things the same way if she were here. Before she led and I helped. Now, I am the one who steps first. I do it in memory and honor of her, but also because I should. So it’s a double-edge song. Still sad and makes me miss her, but also kind of my new chapter.

In the last session, she had mentioned that the music had brought her to a place. I asked her to speak about that again.

Yeah, I still go there every time, like I can with a lot of songs. But the words mean more now. That part about the shepherds keeping watch, that means something more to me now. I realize that after Bel left, I am now the shepherd. Not so much for our family, because Jonas really does that now, especially since we moved. But I take care of the people in my church and those kids. I think of the winter’s night as the bad times. I’ve been there, I know how cold it is. And if I can help anyone, I will.
Finally, knowing how important music was in Ava’s grieving before, I wanted to know what role, if any, it played now.

*I think music is more impotents to my life now than it was before, and you know it was big then. I think the difference is I am healed enough from that hurt, a little wiser, I know myself better, that I can enjoy more of it. I can hear a song, think of Bel, or a specific thing we did, and not break down. It helps me reach feelings now that celebrate her, not just mourn her. And in the bigger picture, I am more aware of how it helps me, and how it can help others. It’s unbelievable how I can have a room full of white kids, black kids, loners, whatever, and they can all come together with music. No, they won’t be best friends when they leave, but in that moment, in that place, they are together in a way that wouldn’t have happened otherwise. Music is a way for me to help myself and help others that’s real. And when I go through things, like the anniversary of Bel’s death, or moving away from my hometown, which was harder than I thought, I know I can sing to let it out. I can make a place where I can feel without having to think about it. And in the end, I know I’ll be fine. If losing Bel taught me anything, it’s that if I try, I will be fine.*
CHAPTER FIVE

ADRIAN

Picture yourself on a boat on a river, with tangerine trees and marmalade skies.

Adrian is a 39 year old computer programmer, specializing in interface technologies. Born to a Korean mother and a Cuban father, Adrian grew up in an upper class family and neighborhood in southern Florida. Music was never more than entertainment in his life, until he lost Peter, his identical twin. The chasm left by the loss created space for Adrian to interact with music in a whole new way, one that would lead to a greater understanding of death, life and self.

Remembrance: Losing My Mirror Image

Adrian was initially hesitant to share his story. He was concerned that because his experience was not like what he thought it would or should be, something was wrong with him. This feeling had persisted since the death of his brother. I assured him that he didn’t need to filter or justify any aspect of himself or his story during the interview.

I’ve rarely had the chance to be open in life, especially since Peter died. He was always the one person I never had to think about stuff with. (laughs) Actually, most of the time, it was like we shared a brain; or half of one if you asked my father! It’s an amazing thing, being loved by someone you never have to explain thing to. (He was) my twin, we were identical…anyway, those things you hear about twins, they were true for us. As kids, we had our own language, with hand gestures and everything. It’s not that we didn’t have other friends, but he was always my best friend, by choice, not just birth.
Early in adulthood, the brothers tried leading separate lives, but found that they preferred being Adrian and Peter, not Adrian or Peter. Adrian described in vivid detail how he and his brother could always feel what was going on with the other, recalling a time during college where he woke out of a sound sleep in pain and panic. His experience was a sympathetic reaction to his brother’s car accident, occurring more than over 1000 miles away. This link, which not only connected but affected each man, is what lead to one of the most traumatic events of Adrian’s life.

*It's how I knew when he got sick. I knew way before he told anyone, even his wife.*

*At first (I felt) just kind of off balance I guess. Not in the physical sense, like dizziness, but more like something was wrong, but I couldn’t figure out the feeling. You ever know there is something you want or need to remember, but can’t? It’s right there, but not, you know? It was like that (for) about a week or so. Then one day Peter just shows up at my house, at like 5:30 in the morning. I woke up to find him sitting in my living room, just looking at that fish tank over there. When he looked at me, I knew it was something really bad. His eyes were dark and he looked more scared than I ever thought he could be. I mean, he was the brave one, the one willing to try anything. If it had spooked him, how was I going to deal with it?*

“It” turned out to be Lou Gehrig’s Disease (ALS). The brothers created a plan about how to tell the rest of their family, based on research. Peter began a regime of vitamins, therapy, medications, anything and everything they could try.

*You know, at the beginning, I actually thought that everything would be fine.*

*When he was diagnosed, he had some weakness, but none of the really terrible*
things. After a few months of therapy and taking the new medicine, he really
seemed to be doing fine. We all started to think it was like a regular chronic
illness, like allergies, not some deadly killer. But eventually it got worse again.
Then I started to hope he’d be one of the outliers...did you know that Stephen has
been living with ALS for over 40 years?...Peter said even if he was in a chair,
alive and aware was better than dead. But it didn’t happen that way. We had
barely 18 months. The doctor said Peter’s rapid change was really unusual, that
he’d only seen degeneration like that in a few Gulf War veterans before. Every
day I watched as he wasted, little by little. Towards the end, he couldn’t eat
because he would choke on his food. He wouldn’t allow a feeding tube, or to be
put in the hospital on a machine. He wanted to be at home. We had all sorts of
equipment to help with everything-breathing, lifting, even peeing. And I think the
worst part was that he was aware of it all, all the way to the end. I felt more
horrible than I can ever explain, not just because he was dying, but because I
wasn’t.

For Adrian, Peter’s death was not just a loss of his best friend and brother, but
also a loss of his own sense of self.

I don’t want to sound narcissistic-his death was not about me at all. But at the
same time it was. Literally, I could feel what it would be like if it were me. And
worse, I was losing the one person who got me...truly, I think I never will be
whole again. There is not anyone or anything that can fix that pain. I’m o.k., I’m
not suicidal or mad at the world, but I am sadder than I ever thought I could be,
and I am not sure that will change...right after he died, I was lost. I felt empty,
desolate, but more than that. I don’t mean to sound dramatic, but I really had lost
my sense of everything except my grief and anger.

Knowing that Adrian’s parents were still alive, and that his sister in law was a part of this
process, I was struck by how little he mentioned them. When I asked about his interaction
with them during and after Peter’s death, he replied:

This is going to sound really bad. I mean, Ellen was losing her husband, and I
guess by extension the life they had planned. And my mom, well, she was a mess.
But I kinda shut all of them out. Dad and I have been a little distant, for years.
And mom just doesn’t get me. I tried helping Ellen out afterwards, but it was just
weird for both of us. So now, it’s just me. Used to be me and Peter, now its just
me.

Adrian’s tone clearly indicated this was not an area he wanted to discuss, so we moved
into how music was important to this period of his life.

O.k., so please don’t think I’m nuts, but during this time, music became something
all-together new for me. Like everyone else, I’ve always listened to music-
concerts, radio, whatever. But after Peter passed, things got...different. Certain
sounds, mostly in music, but not always, would be orange. To clarify, he didn’t
see orange but some things sounded orange. I can’t really explain it. Saying it was
an impression is too vague, but it wasn’t like I actually could see the color.

There was no prior significance to the color, but orange became good. Seriously, I
never had any special bond to the color, and neither did Peter, and music was
never a big deal. But as he was getting close, and definitely after he passed, I felt,
different. And that’s when the color thing started to happen. I noticed it one day
when I was going through stuff in my parent’s attic. I brought the radio up and
was going through some old boxes of magazines, not really paying attention to the
songs. But I started to notice this feeling when certain parts of songs would come
on.

Unable to identify what exactly was significant about these “parts” (tone, word,
sound, etc.), Adrian attempted to explain how it affected him.

Well honestly, it took me a while to figure out what was going on. I thought I was
going nuts- some hallucination or paranoid thing. But eventually, a few weeks
later, it kinda came to me that crazy or not, this sense of orange made me feel
better. So, especially when I was having a low point, I would flip like crazy
through the radio to find the feeling. One night, I literally stayed up all night
through my CD collection, trying to find orange...sometimes it was something I
knew, sometimes it was classical, and a few times, it was just sound, like my
neighbor’s wind chimes. But it would come and go, not like I could just listen to a
set of chimes and it would always be there.

Adrian and I spent quite a bit of time just discussing the possibilities of this phenomenon.
One possibility is that he is experiencing synesthesia, a perceptual experience where one
sense is accompanied by another. Although it can manifest in several ways, I am most
familiar with the visual aspect, where the perceiver can see color when certain tones are
played or spoken. He immediately stopped the interview to look it up on-line. After a bit,
we resumed discussion. We began again with music’s relationship to his emotional status
and how it has helped with his grief.
I am not sure I can really explain it. I mean like I said earlier, I am not really a ‘music’ person. Seriously, I don’t even sing ‘Happy Birthday’. I only notice it now because it has been a survival thing. It never really mattered to me in my life until Peter was sick. And if it weren’t for the way I experience it now, I probably never would have turned to it. I mean, it was never something I turned to before. But then again, I never had my life ripped to shreds before either. Now though, I go to it. Some days it doesn’t matter, I don’t go looking for anything to help, but then other days, when it’s bad, I will stop whatever I am doing until I find what I need. Kinda sounds like a junkie with a fix, but then, some days I really do need it. So, I guess to answer your question, I go to music to feel better. It soothes me and helps me reconnect to myself. What’s so strange is that I like things to be orderly and predictable, but this is neither. It’s a weird duality, to find comfort in something that makes me uncomfortable. But things don’t always make sense, so whatever, you just have to go with it sometimes. What I can tell you is that I know I never would have been able to cope if it hadn’t been me finding this thing with music—I don’t know what to call it—but it has been a God-send.

This led very naturally into my queries about a possible relationship between music and his spiritual practice.

Well, I never was really much of a church person. And since Peter died (pause), it’s hard to believe that there could be a God that would let someone die like that, with no dignity. So church and God isn’t really a thing for me. Probably the closest thing for me is the ocean. I can go there, listen to the waves, and just feel…grounded. Sometimes music can help me do that too, when I find the right
song, and the right feel, it helps me do the same thing. I don’t think that there is any connection between the two, there’s just a similarity to how they can help me feel. I can find this calm, quiet kind of place within myself, lets me drown out everything else for a while. It helps me find silence in the boom of life.

I was curious if there was anything besides the orange aspect of music played a role in its use as a coping mechanism. Were there other elements of the music that had become important during this time? Did it help him express or communicate emotions?

As far as expression, not in the verbal sense. I’m a very private person, so my music is private too. And like I said before, I don’t really do music, I just play it. But I guess it does help me, besides just making me feel better. I mean, sometimes I turn the volume up really loud and just get into it, let some of the pissed off steam out. More recently though, I have started to listen to specific things for specific reasons. Some songs, especially slower, simple, pretty songs just help me relax. I really try to pay attention to how I’m breathing, what I am doing with myself. My mom is always on me about not being grounded to anything, or connected to anyone, that I am too into my computers and don’t care about people. She’s from Korea and is still very into the old ways. I know she’s trying to help me, so I give some things a shot. But most of it really isn’t me.

Knowing that his mother is Korean and that his father is Cuban, and that both cultures have very distinct and strong musical traditions, I was curious to know if he felt that there was a connection between his culture and music.

Well, I can tell you that there will always be certain songs that make me think of my father. He is a very passionate man, loves to dance and sing and celebrate life.
He probably never would have left Cuba if it hadn’t been for Castro. And, of course, because he fell in love with my mom. I can remember songs that he sang when I was little, and this little flute my mom played when she could, but I think my parents tried so hard to make us American that I didn’t really learn a lot of that stuff. Food was more important to me. So I guess while music is a part of my heritage, it really isn’t a cultural thing for me. You know though, some of that music was hard for me when Peter died. I mean as different as the food was, my parents approach to death was really different. My father is Catholic and my mom converted to marry him, but still had her own beliefs inside. The whole thing was really surreal- should we wear white, do we sing, pray, wail, remain silent? And all the relatives came with their own ideas. I can’t tell you how many times I had to leave during that week because I couldn’t handle all the noise and confusion. I like quiet. And to this day, any time I hear part of a mass of church choir, I have to leave. It just hurts too much. Brings back memories of things that I can’t fix.

Wanting to “fix things” about Peter’s death was something Adrian mentioned several times during our meeting. I noted that it was always in relation to his brother though, not any other relationship in his life. I truly felt that this was large part of his difficulty with the loss, and by extension, why he still struggles to define himself; he can’t resolve the fact that the human system and human experience are not predictable, logical or, sadly, always repairable.

Moving back to his positive interaction with music, I inquired about specific pieces of music. Was Adrian able to identify any particular type or piece of music that was important to his coping?
Finding that feeling was always the first priority, then, if I had some to choose from, I went to what kind of mood I was in. If I was angry, I went to something louder and faster, when I was sad or lonely, I went to something slower. For some reason stuff by the Beatles seemed to show up a lot. The sounds they used, especially the electronics, just cut right to me. I think more than any other song ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ was good for me. Besides the feeling I got, I was able to really lose myself in it. The lyrics were so descriptive. You know the first line, ‘picture yourself on a boat on a river with tangerine trees and marmalade skies’? I could always close my eyes, see myself in that little boat and just float away from whatever. It was great for escaping. The whole thing has so much detail, you can visualize being there, and the sounds just carried you along. Losing myself in for a little while always helped me calm down, regroup, find the strength to move ahead.

I followed up with questions about other forms of creativity. Did he participate with other forms of creative expression? How did they compare with music? Did any of them enhance his musical experiences?

I don’t know if you would think of this as creative, but I started designing a game right after Peter died. Mostly, I just worked on character development. I have over 200 characters right now. No real story or anything, just characters and the features you can earn or add. It was a great distraction mechanism. I could lose hours of time working on these things, so it really helped me get through some days. The difference between that and the songs is that I didn’t feel any different when I was done with a character. I got away from myself, but when I came back,
I was in the same place. Music helped me work through things. I’d find that sense of orange and just stick with it. I’ve also learned to pay attention to what helps me work through things when I can’t completely disengage. I can’t do both at the same time though. I am the type of person who focuses on one thing and put all of myself in it. So I don’t mix them, otherwise I’m likely to miss the boat with both.

Reflection: Moving Beyond Orange

Two months passed before Adrian and I met again. We spoke on the phone several times, mostly about his schedule, changes in his life, and the research he was doing about synthesia. When we were finally able to find time to meet, he seemed to be a different person. There was a more positive air about him; he was less intense about some things and far less critical of himself. My comment to that effect was met with a smile.

I really thought about so many things differently since I met you and started doing this. Talking with you felt a lot like talking with Peter. I miss that the most I think. He was a balance for me, the perspective I was always missing. Some of the things you said were the type of things he would have. It got me thinking about myself, my life, and how I was really going to move on. I realized that I needed to find a way to balance myself, that I couldn’t rely on someone or something else to do it. You’d be proud of me, I started meeting with my mom at least once a week to do tai chi and da-da-da-da-da, I started taking piano lessons. (laughs). You knew I would only go to something with a keyboard. Seriously though, it’s hard, but I hope that I can stick with it. It’s weird to not have everything analyzed and perfect, and I have a hard time being free with it, but I’m trying, I really am.

You’ll still never hear me sing though.
So I knew not to expect a personal rendition of Adrian’s identified song, *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds*, but I wanted to revisit it with him before playing the recording he chose to bring. Considering his new perspective on life and self, I was particularly interested to know if he perceived any differences in its relationship to his physical, emotional or spiritual self.

*You know that the song became important after Peter died, and now will always have a special meaning for me. It was one of many that brought on that healing sense of orange, which truly is why I think music saved my life. But besides that, the sound, lyrics, the speed, all help me find a space to re-center in. It’s funny that you ask about my emotions and body and stuff. I’ve really started paying attention to my breathing, how I hold tension in my body, how I feel. I don’t know with this song, because I haven’t listened to it in a while. But I can tell you that other music, especially when I am trying to let something out, definitely helps me focus my emotions, although sometimes they have to get a little crazy before they are better. And physically, I notice that I really watch how I breathe, especially if I am listening to something to help me calm down. I try to match my breathing to the beat. Overall, I feel better when I use music in my life. I have more energy, I fell, well, just better.*

He chose not to comment on spirituality, and when asked about it really didn’t elaborate much. So we moved into the music elicitation exercise. He had brought along a copy of the Beatles *Sergeant Pepper’s album*. While listening to the song, he kept his gaze focused in the space over my shoulder. Although his face didn’t change much during the playing, his body posture changed several times, anticipating changes in tempo.
and timbre in the music. As the last notes of the song faded, he re-focused on my face.

Taking his time, he finally shared:

> It’s so strange. Hearing it, I can clearly remember every thing about the day Peter died and how shitty I felt. But I’m not so...devastated. The pain is there, but it isn’t as disabling as it was before. Before, I would literally have left the place where we are and been somewhere else. This time, I was in that same place as the pain, but I don’t feel like I have to avoid it. And you know what’s really odd? I knew that you were there, watching, and it didn’t bother me. I don’t know if it’s because I’m in a better place in life or what, but I can think about things that before I would just shut out. Do you know how hard it is to not think about the person who mattered most to you because you were afraid you’d have a mental breakdown? Peter was such an amazing person and part of every major thing in my life. I was so messed up that I couldn’t even think about things we did as kids because I would lose it. I pretty much avoided talking to people to avoid the possibility of being asked questions. And my job really enabled that. I could work from home, work at night. My boss didn’t care, as long the work was done.

> Hearing this song now really reinforces how far I’ve come. When we first met, I thought I was fine, but I think I found a better place to be.

Knowing that Adrian was expanding his musical borders, I inquired about music’s status in his grief process, and if ‘Lucy’ would still have a role in it.

> This song will always mean something to me. I will never be able to hear it and not think of Peter. And since I’ll never get over missing him, I feel pretty confident in saying it will always have a place in my coping with his death. As for other
music, I'm not sure. I mean, other songs, especially with orange sounds, will be important. But if the last few months are any judge, I think other music may become important too. I mean, my emotional self is very changed, and grief is part of my emotions, so it just follows that as I go through other things in life, it (music) will be there. The main advantage I have now is that I know how it can help me and how to use it. It’s one of the greatest tools ever. Music will never replace Peter, but it can really help in things that he used to help me with. I can help myself. I can heal myself. And it won’t ever leave me. I take great comfort in that.
CHAPTER SIX

MEREDITH

And He will raise you up on eagles’ wings, bear you on the breath of dawn

At 88 years of age, this gentle lady wants nothing more than to join her late husband Joseph in heaven. Born in Ireland as the youngest of 7 children in a poor neighborhood, she values what she feels many Americans neglect: family, community and God. Grounded strongly in her Catholic faith, Meredith communes daily with her priest. She lives three doors down from the church she and her husband were married in and finds comfort within the familiar walls and rituals. This has been particularly important in the four years since Joe’s death. She finds that it is the Word that brings her the greatest peace, more often in the hymns than the mass itself.

Remembrance: Communion through Loss

Seated at a small round table in Meredith’s Philadelphia home, it was clear that she was an orderly sort of woman. Everything, including her conversation, was structured in a very specific manner. Her hair was pinned, her sweater held by a praying hands clasp and the handles of the teacups all faced to the right. She briefly mentioned, in a tone that did not encourage additional conversation, that she had no children or family anymore. But her face and countenance completely softened when I asked about her cat, Marshall, a stray she adopted shortly after Joe’s death.

Ah, this one is a lovey. He is up as soon as I am. Waits in the window while I am at Mass and always has his bit of milk when I take my tea. Truly, he is no replacement for my Joe, but he is a friend to me as I need one and a good housemate. He just showed up on the stoop about a week after Joe died, all wet
and dirty. At first I didn’t pay him any mind, but he wouldn’t leave. So I brought him in and he’s been here ever since.

Her discussion about Joe’s death was very difficult. His lifelong occupation was carpentry. He worked a lot in construction to pay the bills, but his true passion was hand-carved furniture. Several pieces in the home attested to his gift and attention to detail. After retirement, he began teaching his craft to a young man a few blocks over. Tragically, a wood pile collapsed on him, crushing his rib cage and puncturing his lungs and heart. Although he survived the initial trauma, his body was never able to really recover. Meredith brought him home after two months in the hospital and called in hospice for his remaining three weeks. She did not wish to rehash those details, stating only that he died peacefully, in his home, as he wished. Her only regret was not bringing him home with hospice sooner, rather than waste so much time in the hospital.

It’s easy to say that looking back now, but at the time, we still had hopes he would get better than he did. But you can’t stop God’s will, and I wouldn’t want to try. It was Joe’s time. Knowing that he is with the Lord helps, but it doesn’t replace him being here. I remember meeting with Father Rhona right before the funeral, and he asked if there was anything special I wanted him to say. How can you pick just one thing about a man you knew for so long? I told him that, and to say what came to him, because what I had in me was too private to share. I remember that the service was fine, as far as funerals go, but the details are not really that sharp. I can distinctly remember a song though, that really helped me. We have this lovely girl that sings at church, beautiful voice. She sang ‘On Eagles’ Wings’. It was amazing really, I was kneeling, closing my eyes, and when she started to
I asked how she felt she was doing with her grief now, especially in comparison to
before, and also if she could talk about if music had been important to her before
Joseph’s passing.

You keep going, that’s all any person can do. In the beginning, it was strange to
not have him here. To not share morning toast or tea with him, or have
conversation with. But you move on. You can’t fight the inevitable, and he was a
good man, so I know he is in heaven, I can’t be angry at that. I had many good
years with him, and know I will see him again. Am I glad he’s gone? Of course
not! But every day is a day closer to my death, and that thought is a good one. I
am sure that sounds to strange to a young person like yourself, but when you get
to be my age, and all of your people have gone before you, death is something to
look forward to. It will be a reunion for me, not an end. As far as the other, music
has always been there, but was not more important than anything else. Really,
I’ve always turned to the Church when I needed support. But the songs are part of
the faith, so I guess in that sense, they have always been there. But I never noticed
them the same way until Joe’s passing. It’s strange, because songs were at all of
the funerals I’ve been to, siblings included, but they never really spoke to me that
way before. God must have known this would be different for me and helped me a bit.

So how exactly did the songs help?

Well, besides just that day, I pay attention to the words of the hymns more. The music is beautiful, but it’s also built to help get the point across. Did you ever notice that? How many times important things are louder or how the sound of the music paints the picture of what is going on? It has helped me gain a greater understanding of my faith. I also feel that I am closer to divinity, like the music brings my soul just a little closer. (pauses for a moment) I can also take time to feel a little bit more. I am not someone who mopes around trying to change what she can’t, and private things should be kept private, but between God and me, there can’t be that divide. So when I am in the pew, listening to the hymns, I let all of my feelings come to the surface. So God will know what’s in me when I come to meet Him...yes, it helps. I probably would have had a much harder time if I couldn’t do that. I am not a talker, I don’t shout, I don’t sing, not even in church, but I listen.

Meredith clearly drew a connection between the songs which aided her and her religion. I asked if she felt this connection was spiritual as well.

I am not sure I understand. How can something be part of my religion and not my spirituality? I am not one of those Catholics who mouths empty phrases and kneels because everyone else is. I hear the message, I kneel in gratitude and I respect that Christ is King. So yes, these songs, the words, the fact that I hear them and that someone wrote them, they are all a part of God’s will. And I am a
servant of that will. There is no way that song would have meant anything to me the day of Joe’s funeral if God did not let it speak to my soul and touch me with it’s peace.

Agitated by this question, Meredith took a moment to put the kettle on for some tea. While it boiled, I asked some general questions about her childhood, how she grew up, gradually leading to some general questions about if and how music maybe related to her cultural upbringing.

We were poor. We didn’t have the time or money to squander on concert halls. I didn’t even own a radio until years after Joe and I married. My family moved from Ireland when I was about eight. We went to New York first, but moved here after about a year. It was too crowded at my cousin’s house and new work was coming here. My mother, sisters and I did laundry and repairs for money while the boys and my father worked factory jobs. They worked for a while making string, then moved into steel parts. We worked whatever we could whenever we could. Mother tried to teach us basic schooling. Four of us could read, and we all knew our prayers. We sang sometimes while we worked, and once in a while someone would play some dance tunes for a good time, but growing up was about work. Music was for people with idle time, and we had none of that. Church was the only time I really heard it. It was beautiful. I don’t know if that answers your question. The way I was brought up really didn’t lend itself too much to that sort of thing, so I can’t really say much about it.

Curious, I asked what else Meredith did in her spare time. Did she listen to any other types of music? Were there any other activities that helped her after she lost Joe?
I read, take walks outside and visit with some of the other ladies at church. We meet once a week to go through the donation bin and make bags for some of the families. I am a simple woman. I enjoy what I can in each day, but don’t need to be putting on airs or sticking my nose into business that is not my own. I don’t really listen to much music really, outside of the occasional program on television. Really, it was going to church every day and hearing the hymns that helped me deal with losing my Joseph. I kept with my daily routine, doing laundry and the like, but that was just busy work. Getting over the main hurt was all between God and me. There wasn’t a single day I didn’t thank him for the blessing of the Church right there and the musical offering of the day.

Meredith confirmed that there has never been a time since Joe’s death when she avoided church or music because it caused her pain. Moreover, she feels that she is able to prepare herself spiritually for her eventual demise through daily participation in these activities. Wanting to avoid upsetting her again, I asked more questions about the relationship between music and her emotional state, hoping to get some more specific examples of how music actually helps her.

Let me think on that while I make us some more tea. It’s seems like such an odd thing to talk about. Let me see if I can say it plainly for you. Hearing and thinking about the hymns in church get me thinking about my own life. When you get to be my age, you’ve known a lot of people and made a lot of choices. With those choices come feelings, some good, some not. I take that time during those songs and almost have an emotional confessional with God. This is how I feel about the thing and this is why. I don’t try to explain it or deny it; it just is. It’s different
than my confessions with Father Rhona, because it’s not sins, but it is things inside me that I don’t look at any other time. I don’t give any outward appearances and there is no carrying on. And some of it is pleasant. So I am not sure that expression as you said it is really right. It’s more of a really close knowing of myself that happens, that I share with God. As far as the other, it definitely helped me get through losing Joe. I knew I had those times to look forward to every day. Hearing the music, thinking with God. So I suppose the two best things that have happened is that I have gotten to know myself and God a little bit better, which is all any person can ask for out of a terrible thing like the death of a spouse.

We chatted for a bit more, but nothing really significant surfaced. When asked if she had anything else to add, Meredith stated that she was pretty much talked out. I encouraged her to think about our conversation in between sessions and to write down any thoughts that may come up. I thanked her for the six cups of tea and promised to be in touch.

Reflection: Transition of the Spirit

Before returning to Meredith’s for our second interview, I had received a phone call from Father Rhona. Meredith had shared some of our interview with him and he wanted to touch base with me. Apparently, Meredith’s behavior had been a bit erratic lately and he wanted to warn me. He had suspected that she was experiencing dementia, but she in fact had been having mini-strokes for quite a while. He asked if he could be present for the next interview, provided that Meredith agreed, just to observe. With Meredith’s consent, he sat on the couch in the next room while we met. Her appearance
was as fastidious as our previous encounter, but her body language different, and I made
the tea.

*We will need to talk softly dear. Father Rhona worries about me, but I am fine.*

*I am an old woman, things are bound to break down. He found a copy of the song
for me, for us to listen to. I waited though. I wasn’t sure if I could listen to it or
not...what do I remember? Well, ‘on Eagles’ Wings’ was song at Joe’s funeral
sung by a sweet young girl. It transported me to a place where I could see him
and I knew everything would be fine. The words of the song spoke to me when I
needed them to help me. God lifted me up, let me know that we were both o.k. It
was a bright spot in a terrible time, but it gave me hope to know that if I could feel
something that wonderful on such a dark day, that I would be fine.*

When you listen to it, can you tell me how it affects you emotionally, physically and/or
spiritually?

*I feel calm, and well. Whether it is just feeling closer to God, or Joe, or just being
able to see his face that way, I feel better. I am not sad, I am not tense, I feel hope.
And like we talked about last time, without God, none of the rest would be, so
there is nothing else to say about that. Can we play it now?*

Sitting on the edge of her chair, Meredith pushed play. She immediately shut her eyes,
folded her hands in prayer and bowed her head. I didn’t want to breathe too loud, for fear
of disturbing such a devout moment. Father Rhona, clearly used to this pose, smiled and
nodded his head. I felt relief to know that he truly was looking out for her. As the song
ended, she unfolded herself and resumed sitting like before. She wore a slight smile, but
also had a fragile air about her that had not been present previously.
When I hear that now, I can see myself, not just Joe. I am getting closer to my time. I know I will be able to walk the same path to Him. Can you see it? The eagle’s wings lift more than the bird; each stroke creates a flow that can carry the spirit upward. I need not fear arrows or evil now. There is no hurt, just waiting. Clearly, there were some differences in her interpretation of the song now. I asked her to please elaborate on what was the same and what was new.

The sameness is in God’s presence and the way I can see the process. What is different is that now, I see myself there too. No, I am not having some delusion or hallucination or whatever. I believe it is a vision from God that when my time comes, I will be able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven the same way Joe did. I still feel the same way, a little bit sad, but mostly, I just am waiting. I am not far from death, and that is a good thing. Few things matter on this earth any more. I will continue to do my best every day, but I will not fight death. Father Rhona here will care for Marshall. There are few here who will miss me, compared to the entire family I have that awaits me. It is hard to be concerned when you go to meet those who love you.

After this, Meredith didn’t really want to talk much. She confirmed that the hymns are still important to her, and that she will take her quiet time with them for as many days as she has left, but really had nothing else to say. It is hard to describe the atmosphere during this meeting; it was like being caught in that quiet pause in between conversations, not awkward but not quite comfortable. Father Rhona walked me out. I am not sure if Meredith heard my final good-bye. She had pushed play again on the CD and resumed her inward journey.
CHAPTER SEVEN

BETTY

Hearing that music brings me right back to a time where everything seemed possible and impossible at the same time, but we threw it all to the wind and tried anyway.

Betty considers herself to be a young heart dressed in old lady’s wrinkles. At 84 years old, she has lived life all over the world, but still considers herself a Philadelphia girl at heart. Born into a lower-middle class family which divided during the depression, a war bride at the age of 17 and one who has had a “bird’s eye view of the most amazing century in American history”, Betty feels that her life has been blessed by a great family, good friends and the ability to survive it all. Integral to it all was Ruth, her best friend since the age of 4. They shared every major moment, and most of the day to day ones as well. Her passing shifted Betty’s life more profoundly than anything else ever had, including the death of her husband. She describes music as her “saving grace” in an ugly time; her way to remember and forget.

Remembrance: The Sister I Never Had

Our first meeting was instantly very personal. Betty was wrapped in a quilt on the couch, with the steady of hum of an oxygen concentrator accompany the insistent meowing of her cat. In truth, she did not look well. When I offered to come back at a later date, she laughed, coughed, and said that she may not be around for a future date. And while that thought didn’t particularly bother her, she wanted to make sure that she had a chance to participate in this study. It was, to her, the last important thing she would do, and it was nice to be able to include Ruth in it.
Where do you start when you’ve known someone for a lifetime? Her name was
Ruth. She and I were classmates all through school, and best friends through life.
I never had a sister, but I never missed one because I had her. She was the most
marvelous person...we married brothers. Not that we planned it that way, but
things just have a way of happening. I still remember the day she came to tell me
she was going to be a mother. She came bursting through my kitchen door at six
something in the morning and said “You’ll never what Frank has gone and done
now!” They were so in love. It was the first of three for her. Honestly, I was
surprised that it took her so long.

I asked if they had been married long. No, but they acted like it, if you know what
I mean! Do you know how many girls were itching to marry a military man? I
won’t even begin to tell you what used to go on in he hallways of the
dances...anyway, her Frank was in the Navy and my Alan was Army. We met
them at a dance. We used to go at least one Saturday a month. They were always
so much fun. We would get all dressed up; nothing too much, or too little, like
some of the other girls. We always had a plan, or signal, in case one of us got into
a situation we didn’t like. The other would come up with an awful headache and
need the other to come help. Anyway, it was one of those Saturdays late spring
and we came in to a full house. It was hard to find a place to sit there were so
many folks there. After about ten minutes of just mingling, we headed towards the
back of the room, hoping to find a place to put our things, but all the tables were
full. At of nowhere, Frank appeared and asked us if we wanted to join him and his
brother. I don’t mind telling you he cut quite a figure in that uniform; something
Ruth noticed too! We accepted and went on to have a lovely evening. Turns out Frank and Alan were home on leave for a few weeks and then would be shipping out a few days a part in June. Well let me tell you, it was clear right from the start that Ruth and Frank would be spending a lot of that time together. Alan and I got along just fine, but it wasn’t the same immediate spark. But ours grew. We went out a lot over those few weeks. Honestly, it was one of the most wonderful times of my life. It wasn’t that we always were doing something fantastic, mostly we just walked, had picnics, went to shows. But I have seldom felt as special as I did in that time. The four of us became fast friends. But the time went quickly. Frank was being sent to the Pacific corridor and Alan was going for more training. We were all scared; war was scary. I don’t care what anyone says. Those boys, those men went, but they were as scared as they were proud. Frank was in California for a few months that summer, then ended up going to Hawaii. Alan ended up doing communications training in New Jersey. So, while Ruth and Frank sent letters and has the occasional phone call, I was able to actually see Alan fairly frequently.

I know that my daddy worried a bit, since I was only 16, but Ruth was usually with me and he had met Alan and knew he was decent. Times were different. With money so tight and the war, my parents wanted me to be taken care of. So really, it was almost a relief to them when Alan came and asked for my hand. I didn’t know it, but he had met with them after church one day and told them of his plans. Mama was so happy.

So, after only about five months of knowing each other, we were engaged. We waited until after my birthday in September to marry. It was a beautiful day. Ruth
stood beside me and Frank was able to come home to stand by Alan. We didn’t know it then, but he was going to be spending a few months in a submarine, which was not his original plan. So he had already spoken to Ruth’s parents and had a ring for her. One week! We had one week to put together her wedding. Of course, it wasn’t like some of this monstrous balls that people have now; it was close family, friends, small, personal. But I wanted it to be special. We spent three solid days making a dress for her, it was the prettiest pink, and helping her pack. I was joyful and sad, because she was leaving me for the first time in our lives. I was afraid it would be a long time. Her wedding was lovely, but we had two more days, then they left. She had volunteered to help at one of the hospitals on base so she could be close to Frank whenever he ported. I went with Alan of course. He ended up staying in the states for most of the time. He did go to Italy for about a year, but I wasn’t able to go. Truly, that was a terrible year. I didn’t have Alan, I didn’t have Ruth. But we managed. I started quilting blankets and selling them for extra money, and for something to keep me busy.

Ruth and I wrote all the time. She was lonely too, and was seeing some pretty hard things where she was. But we were married women now, life was no longer about fun and dances.

We paused for a while, so that Betty could do a nebulizer treatment and catch her breath. I made her a tea and took the opportunity to look through one of the photo albums she had brought out for me. What struck me most was the genuine emotion present in all of them. The pictures, mostly combinations of Betty, Ruth, Alan and Frank, contained real
moments. There was no artifice, no staging; they were spontaneous, heartfelt, and clearly, there was love—a love grown over the shared moments of a lifetime.

Eventually, the war ended, and lucky for us, both our menfolk were still here. We settled back in Philadelphia, in adjacent houses and have stayed here every since. We shared everything. Ruth and Frank went on to have 3 beautiful kids. Alan and I never could, but we had plenty of time with theirs. It was a good life. Lots of ups and downs, but we always hung in there. But one by one they left me. Frank passed about ten years ago, with a stroke. He went to get up one evening to shut the door and collapsed—never got back up. Ruth took it real hard. They were two of the closest people you’d ever meet. No secrets, nothing between them. I mean, she and I talked women stuff, but they lived for each other. It took her almost two years to pull herself through it. Then my Alan died. He had a heart attack while shoveling the walk two days after Thanksgiving. Thank God for Ruth. I don’t remember whole days from that time. You’re alternately numb and in agony, not wanting either but unable to stop it. We would just cry together. I did the same when it was Frank, but at the end of the night, I had Alan. Then I didn’t. And I am not sure which was worse, eating alone or waking up alone. Funny though, after that, Ruth and I shared every meal, unless she and the kids had something special going on. We just filled in the space, without ever actually talking about it. But you know, we were so close, it just went that way. But now, I have all this space and no one to fill it with. (She takes a few minutes, with tears in her eyes, to just breathe.)
There are so many memories in this house, joyful memories, that I cling to, because the days that I have now are filled with nothing except my sickness and loss. I miss Alan, and I miss Frank, but I am so much less of myself without Ruth. And unlike the men, she didn’t leave me suddenly. I have months to say what I needed to, but it wasn’t enough time. I would sit everyday with her. Her girls came in and out and towards the end, so did the hospice, but it was my job to take care of her. I owed her that. We mostly talked, laughed, remembered. She had emphysema really bad, she always was a smoker, and sometimes we’d laugh so hard she’d turn blue. It was so hard, watching her just fade, watching her use every ounce of strength she had just to breathe. I would have taken her place if I could.

I remember a day, two days before she died. She took off her oxygen and leaned up to give me a hug. I asked her why she did that and she replied that she wanted me to feel her face, her smile, without the oxygen tube. She didn’t want my last memories of her to be as a sick old lady with tubing grooves in her cheeks, but instead, as a friend of 75 years who shared in the making of all those wrinkles and laugh lines. Then she kissed me and promised she’d keep the men in line until I made it to heaven. That was a Saturday and she died early on Monday morning. I never actually said goodbye, I couldn’t. Now I just keep waiting to die so I can say hello again.

We spoke for a few more minutes about the impact of Ruth’s death, which was significant, given the high daily interaction and presence that each had in the other’s life. We then moved the conversation into her grieving, and where music fit into that.
There were days where I could barely make myself get out of bed. What was the point? No one to talk to or share coffee with. But then I’d think of her, and him, and make myself move. I was so angry and sad, and well, mostly just lost. I couldn’t do anything without thinking of her. I literally wanted to be dead. I couldn’t eat, I lost weight. That’s probably when I started getting sick, I just didn’t realize it or care. One day, Ruth’s daughter Pam came over with a box of things. They were cleaning out the house to sell it—that ripped my heart out. I couldn’t imagine anyone but Ruth and Frank in that house. Thankfully, Barb, her middle girl, decided to buy it, so it stayed in the family. Anyway, the box was full of all sorts of knickknacks. Little statues, old brochures from trips. I realized it was some of the things from Ruth’s keepsake trunk. The funny thing was, I couldn’t tell you what half of it was. Some of it was really junky stuff. But towards the bottom was an old record. It was broken, but it had the song ‘Chattanooga Choo-Choo’ on it. And I began to smile thinking about how much we used to love to dance. So I went through some of the tapes and discs that Alan had bought before he died, and I found some of our old songs, and I played them. All of a sudden I was back there, at those dances. I was 16, with Ruth, getting dressed up, making a plan, not burdened by responsibility or sickness. It was a lovely place to be. Someplace I hadn’t been in a really long time. So every day, I started playing some of the songs. Sometimes it was to make me feel better, other times it was just for company. Now don’t think I am a crazy old gal, but it really felt like they were with me, that we were together again, some of those times.
At this point, Betty had become quite winded, so I instituted a break. I gave her a few questions to think about while she rested for about ten minutes, to speak on when we resumed. Mainly, I asked her to think about what role music had in her life before Ruth’s death, especially in relation to Alan’s and Frank’s deaths, as well as any relationship between music and her emotional state.

*Thinking on it, music was never anything really special in my life. I mean, it was there all the time. We danced to it, had it at church, sang at ball games and holidays and stuff, but it was never something I was good at. I never played an instrument and I can’t sing. So I guess I enjoyed it but it never really was anything important. My quilting was probably more of my hobby than anything else, but really, people were my thing, especially Ruth. So, music didn’t really help me with things in life, my friends and family did. Until my friends and family were gone. Until that day when I realized our music was the only way I could get back to those feelings. To this day, it helps me get through the day. Especially songs by Goodman, Miller, the Dorsey Band, big band songs; they help me find those days. Its not that I hide from now, but I enjoy then more. The music helps me remember, lets me feel good for a little while, not sad or lonely. I am not hiding from life, I am just seeking peace in a better time of my life. Sometimes it makes me cry though, because I don’t go all the way back. But that’s o.k. too. I am a realist. Death is part of life. I am just the unlucky one who is last. I cry, I laugh, I curse. Music helps me take a break once in a while, from my thoughts and from this part of life. I can’t imagine how horrible most days would be if I didn’t have that break to look forward to.*
In Betty’s routine, there are daily reminders of her losses. Her grief is still evident, and clearly affects her desire to be well, but she tries, and she believes she is coping far better than she was two years ago. Sensing she was beginning to fatigue again, I asked Betty for a few minutes to take some notes, during which time I wanted her to consider if there was any relationship between music and her cultural or spiritual practices, especially in relation to her grief. I also asked her to decide if one of the songs she listened to had a special significance to her, and how she recognized music as a critical element to her coping.

*Those are some strange questions. I don’t know about all that, but I do think that some music is spiritual and some is cultural. The National Anthem is as American as you can get and Holy Holy is spiritual, but I am not sure that all music is that way. And you know, some songs just make you feel good. And that’s pretty individual. Thinking about all the music I’ve been listening to over the past couple of years, I can think of two songs that always get me ‘Moonlight Serenade’ and ‘String of Pearls’. Two different songs, but both always catch me where it counts. And I guess thinking about them like the other questions, I guess they catch me because of the time in my life and how I grew up, so that’s a culture thing. They aren’t spiritual, have nothing to do with church, but they make me feel good, sometimes sad, but mostly good. Especially ‘Moonlight Serenade’. It’s so pretty; it was a great song to dance to. I can close my eyes and still smell Alan’s cologne. He was such a good dancer, such a good husband. You know honey, nothing ever prepares you to lose the ones you love. It wasn’t until after I lost Ruth that I realized I never really let go of Alan’s death. She distracted me and helped me*
deal, but hers was made extra hard by remembering his. That’s probably why those songs matter so much, they are about both of them. All the people that mattered in my life were so caught up in the same events, you can’t separate it. So the songs that fit those great times are what help. No other songs really help me the same way. I mean, sometimes one will catch you a certain way, and hearing the songs at church can lift you up some times, but these are different. They are personal and have my history attached with them.

I asked if there was a time since Ruth’s death that she avoided music for any reason, or if there were any other things that helped her cope?

No, never avoided anything in life, especially not the thing that helps. Once I figured out to listen to them, I clung to them. Sometimes I quilt, but mostly I just listen. I don’t really have the strength to do too much nowadays anyway. Shortly after Ruth’s passing, I started getting sick, so I spent a lot of time back and forth to the different doctors; that distracted me a bit. But sitting in a doctor’s office also brings up lots of bad thoughts too, so it isn’t really a great way to go. I have never been a television person, but lately I have begun watching some programs, mostly nonsense to keep me occupied. I watch Jeopardy a lot. All those people think Alex is so smart. Personally, I think if he didn’t have the answers on the cards he’d be a complete dope.

I asked Betty if she had any other thoughts she wanted to share at this time:

Just that I was fortunate enough to have three wonderful people in my life. Frank was a dear, Alan was my life and Ruth was the best friend and companion anyone could ever be blessed with. If I do nothing else before I die, I want someone to
understand how special she was. I take time every day to think about, remember and appreciate her and all that she brought to my life. I want you to listen to the Serenade and try to think of the person who matters most to you, and you’ll know what I mean.

Reflection: Time in the Past, Preparing for the Future

Our second meeting was rescheduled twice due to Betty’s failing health. We had spoken on the phone several times, in between her bypass surgery and stay at the rehab center. Despite her decline, she insisted on completing our conversations, in person. Our final meeting occurred in the same living room as before, only now, she lay in a hospital bed and had a private duty aide present to help with her needs. Her dedication to finishing this project for Ruth both touched and honored me.

You know, I’ve had a lot of close calls lately. I keep telling my doctor to let me go, but he’s young and doesn’t understand why I am so tired of fighting. If he weren’t so obstinate, I would be happily dead by now. But I did want to see you again, so it’s not all bad. I have been thinking so much about them lately. I had a dream a few nights ago about Alan. He told me we would be spending our anniversary together this year. Do you believe in those dreams? I cried, out of relief. I don’t want to be here anymore. I have lived all of this life, have all of these thoughts, and no one to share them with. You are the first person to just hug me and hold my hand in months. I see nurses, doctors, all these people all the time. But no one sees me. They just see an old lady with a bad heart. I don’t even have my cat anymore. I had to find her a home while I was in the nursing home. I miss her.

Betty became quiet for a little while, then reached over and pointed at a little CD player.
Over there, I have a song for you to hear. Remember we talked about my music? I tried to think of anything else that I wanted to say. There really wasn’t anything, except that I hope you are able to find a song that speaks about the important people in your life. When I hear this song, I remember, and I feel, and I know that my life was more than this. I am brought back to Ruth and Alan and Frank. To that time where everything seemed possible and impossible at the same time, but we threw it all to the wind and tried anyway. I listen every day, as a little gift to myself. It helps calm me down, takes me away for a little bit. I don’t need to do it for the reasons as before, but I still feel the same connection to them. Knowing that my time is close, it’s more like a communion now, instead of a pathway to the past.

I pushed play and listened with Betty. She closed her eyes and sat there with a slight smile on her face. Once in a while, she’d hum, but mostly, she just let the music wash over her. I tried to picture her as I saw her in the photos, young and energetic, dancing with a uniformed Alan and laughing with Ruth. As the song ended, Betty remained still, with her eyes closed. Her smile got a little bigger and she laughed.

So what do you think? The Serenade is not an old song, not to me. It’s a young song, full of life and joy. It’s when my life had promise and possibility. Mostly, it was when life was full. It was when Ruth and I were at our best. Before marriage, before life’s challenges.

And how does listening now compare with right after Ruth’s death?

When I listen now, it feels more like a celebration. I still miss her, a lot, and Alan and Frank, but now I am not trying to hang on or learn to cope. Now, knowing I
am dying, I don’t care about how to make it through the day. I will be glad for the
day that I don’t. I close my eyes and listen, and pray that I may go while
remembering those I loved. I listen because I choose to, not because I need to. I
still struggle with being alone; I miss them all so much. But I know that I will
soon see them, and so now I wait. The pain is not so bad when you know that it
will soon be resolved.

Clearly, Betty was accepting of her pending death; but I asked for her to elaborate on the
status of her grief. Had she obtained acceptance of Ruth’s death? And if so, what role did
music still have in her grief process?

You could say that I accept it. I am no longer angry or depressed or sad. I am
lonesome as a result of her death, but that is really it. I miss her, and I would be
lying if I said I wouldn’t want her here, but I will see her soon. So, listening to my
songs is more about remembering now, and waiting. I have no fear, no regret.

They just help me be a little less lonely. I can share a part of every day with a
friend in death that I got to share most of life with. It’s a truly beautiful thing.

Before leaving, I thanked Betty. She held my hand for a long time, smiled and said
goodbye. Before releasing me, she offered one thought:

When you listen to my Moonlight Serenade, think of me, and of Ruth, and of
friendship. But more importantly, find your own song. Something that will make
you think of those that matter most to you. So that when you are at the end of your
days, you know you will never be alone.
CHAPTER EIGHT

CRAIG

Mother’s piano is a beautiful piece, meant to play beautiful music...

that little one is more like a friend. It knows me and I know it.

Raised the only child of a Navy navigator and a piano teacher, Craig began life in a middle-class suburb of North Carolina. Now, at age 60, this successful architect resides in Easton, PA. He describes himself as a “middle of the road WASP” who has lost many loved ones in his life. In addition to his mother’s death, which is the focus of this interview, he lost his father suddenly at the age of 24, and had been distant from his two adult daughters since he divorced his wife about 12 years ago. This plainspoken man shares much of himself in the interview, and indicates very clearly that music has been an integral part of his life, his relationship with his mother and how he has dealt with the blows dealt to him in life.

Remembrance: The Power of Piano

Craig was eager to begin our conversation. Anticipation of our meeting had triggered many fond memories and, as was the case with many participants, his initial thoughts are for the person he lost, rather than the loss itself.

Ruth Eleanor. She was always a proper woman; dresses always pressed, hair always neat. She met my father when she was 17. She had just started going to school in Boston, at the conservatory. She wanted to be a concert pianist. He was in the Navy, specializing in navigation. They were such an unusual match. I can always remember Dad was funny. He laughed easily, unless you made him mad. Mother, she was reserved. There were very few times that I can remember her
really laughing or joking. Don’t get me wrong, she was a very caring, dedicated parent, but she wasn’t very soft...they were married for 26 years. Dad died of a heart attack right before Mother’s 45th birthday... (I was) almost 24.

Although the loss of his father was not what triggered our contact, I felt it very important to explore his historical experience with grief. Certainly what influenced him at the time of his father’s death would be significant in his coping with the later loss of his mother, as well as his perception of her death. He was asked to talk about how they dealt with his father’s sudden heart attack.

Well, we were living in North Carolina at the time. I was working as a draft assistant for an architect and Mother had always kept a few students through the years, so she just started teaching more and I sort of filled in where I could. It’s kind of odd, but after the day of my Dad’s funeral, we never talked about his death, not for years...Mother didn’t seem to want to and I wasn’t going to push.

And how did he cope? (laughs) Stupidly at first. I drank too much, pushed the envelope a bit, tried to keep it to myself. But that didn’t last too long. I’m too much like my Dad. I like to joke, to talk. I’m no good at keeping it in...Mother was a piano player, and she was really good. She could have gone to Carnegie Hall. But she married Dad and got pregnant with me pretty quickly, and life changed for her. It’s not like now, where you women have families and careers. She quit school and became a Navy wife. But she always played, and she always had a few students, mostly Navy kids and sometimes other moms. Naturally, I took lessons (laughs), not that I really had a choice! I remember wanting to learn the electric guitar when I was 16; you’d think I wanted to burn the church down...it was one
of the few times I can recall her getting really irate. Anyway, as I grew older, it was kind of our thing. We’d play together, I’d even teach some of the younger kids if she had to run out. So, after Dad died, that was how we spent time. I could always tell what kind of mood she was in by what she was playing and how she was playing it. I imagine it was the same for her for me…it was time I could spend with Mother. I don’t know if I’m going to say this right, but it’s the closest we came to sharing feelings. We could feel by what or how we played. Sometimes sitting there, not even playing, the same thing was there. You could almost touch the sadness, the loneliness, even anger. I couldn’t speak of it because she wouldn’t.

Understanding music’s daily presence in his early life, and its natural weaving into his relationship with his mother, I asked Craig to talk about how exactly music has been integrated with his life and coping.

It's kind a way of situating myself. I guess playing helps me work things out. I get so caught up in emotions I can’t see the forest for the trees. So playing helps me get it out, to calm myself so I can look at it later. I almost have to tire myself out before I can deal with whatever is bothering me…I actually have a second piano just for that…that little upright over there…that’s the one that takes all the abuse. I have to tune it twice as often because that’s where I go to work out the inside stuff. Now that one in the solarium, the baby grand, that was Mother’s Steinway. I only touch that when I’m playing something for playing’s sake…that upright is a little number I bought from the church about twenty years ago. I tuned it up, did some repairs and it holds a tune pretty nicely. Mother’s piano is a beautiful piece,
meant to play beautiful music. I can’t, or rather I shouldn’t, pound away like it’s a player in the saloon. It seems disrespectful to the purpose of its creation, and to Mother. The little one, it’s more like a friend. It knows me, I know it. I know it can handle my bad days, my impish days. Truly, I play it more often and more freely. It’s where I can go to work things out. The Steinway I don’t touch until I have everything in hand (laughs) or under hand, as Mother would say.

Immediately, I was struck with how Craig’s description of his relationship with the pianos mirrored his relationship with his parents. He called his father “Dad” while the parent he had spent the most time with was “Mother”; his mother was more reserved and formal, like the Steinway, while his father was more open with his emotions, and approachable like the upright. Although unsure of what his reaction might be, I shared my thoughts and waited for his response. I didn’t wait long.

Oh my God! I never thought of this. It’s true. I play that little piano like I used to talk to my dad, pretty much without a filter. And Mother’s piano, it has to be more finished, more practiced. That is so true. Oh my God. You know, I loved my Mother, I don’t want to misrepresent her. She helped others every chance she got. But sometimes I felt like she wished she wasn’t a mother. Not that she wished I wasn’t her son, but that she had wanted her life to be something else. The piano lessons, after Dad died, playing with her, was the closest I ever felt with her...after Dad died, she never remarried. And after a year of me hanging around, she encouraged me to start living my life. I stayed in architecture, gradually working my way to my own firm. I moved to Philadelphia for a while, then up this way. She moved to Philadelphia a few years after I did, when the
grandkids started being born, but didn’t move again when I moved up here. She loved her little house, and her students. I came down every Sunday for dinner. Sometimes I’d bring my family, sometimes it was just the two of us. And always, after dinner, we’d play for a bit. (laughs) And always, she’d correct my posture. Do you know hard it is to sit straight when you spend all day either over a drafting table or at the computer? Anyway, one night, after dinner, we were sitting there on the bench and she looked over at me and said ‘I want you to make arrangements to take my piano to your home’. Shocked, I asked why. And she responded that she had sold her house and would be moving there within the next two weeks. Now keep in mind, my mother had resisted for years, even the thought of moving near me. And now, with no warning, and no request for help, she had sold her home and made all sorts of arrangements I knew nothing about. Even at 77, Mother was private and things were just so...she closed the lid, turned to me and said ‘I want to have a chance to tune it before I go. I will not die and leave you a useless instrument!’ She then gave me a very matter-of-fact synopsis of the tumor that she had in her brain, the treatment she had been going to for several months, and the doctor’s unfortunate conclusion that, despite the treatment, it was getting worse. I felt horrible-horrible that she was sick, horrible that I didn’t know, and really terrible that she hadn’t told me anything before it was that bad.

Craig shared that his Mother’s prognosis raised things in him he didn’t expect. He felt like a kid again, losing his dad. And, more surprising, he was suddenly very emotional about a woman he was never emotional with. Sadly, for both of them, once she
moved to Craig’s home, she never played the piano again. But music, and the piano, was still an integral part of her final days, and Craig’s ability to mourn her and move on.

Even though she wasn’t playing, Mother listened to a lot of things. Some of it was sounds, she loved the sound of bells, chimes, musical things that weren’t recorded, but more than anything, she would ask me to play. Sometimes she had a request, sometimes it would be my choice…I played some things just to cork her, you know? Most of the time though, I played her favorites. She loved Brahms, Bach, Mozart and Chopin…there is one song, a Chopin that was really important for me. He has a group of songs, Opus 28…there is one song in there, No. 15, that is just amazing. Mother asked me one day to play it for her. It was about three days before she died. I warned her that it wouldn’t be pretty, and she joked that my playing never was. A joke! 50 some odd years, and Mother finally cracked a joke—then again, maybe she wasn’t. Anyway, I played it. Turns out it was the last thing that I’d play for her. She took a real turn later that week. She was only there with me for a little over two weeks, but it was more amazing, more close than I had ever been with her.

This closeness is something that Craig continues to cherish. Having lost his father, divorced his wife and separated from his children by over 3000 miles, those precious moments, both in sound and silence, forged a bond between mother and son that he will carry close to his heart for the remainder of his days. It has also had a notable impact on his approach to grieving her loss.

All I kept thinking about was how great it would have been to play that song better. She deserved that. So I started playing it, and playing it. I could hear it all
the time. My hands actually ached sometimes, from playing so much. Every time I played it, I thought of her. I missed her more than I thought I would. I realized I loved her more than I thought too. I wish I would have told her that. But I have to hope that wherever she is up there, probably next to Beethoven or somebody, that she hears my songs and know what they mean.

“What they mean” is as complex as the woman they are intended for. First and foremost, they are a tribute.

A way to express and keep expressing my gratitude and appreciation for the woman, the mother that she was to me.

Craig’s songs are also his approach to dealing with his loss and grief, a coping skill he head learned shortly after the death of his father.

It was, and is, a way to get stuff out, to remember, even to create a new feeling. It sounds weird, but every time I played, I felt different, better. I started out in a mood and would end in another. Nothing else does it for me that way...I’ve had a lot of hard times, and I really think that if I couldn’t play, I would have shit the bed a long time ago, pardon the phrase. Or, in the very least, had one heck of an ulcer...I can’t remember a time where I didn’t play...it helps me work things out. Music is alive; sometimes I feel like I’m running the show, and other times, it’s like its all I can do to keep up with where the music takes me. I am always involved, never separate from it. But sometimes I have a plan or a need that I am focused on. I am thinking about it, with direction, like playing a certain piece for Mother. Other times, there is no thinking at all, or at least until afterwards. Like
when I need to just get it out. I don’t think at all, I just go with the music. There is no plan of where to start or what to do, it just goes until it is done.

Ultimately, music is a vehicle of understanding for Craig, understanding of what he feels and why he feels it. It also facilitates a connection with something more fundamental. Although he doesn’t consider himself to be a spiritual or religious person, his statements reflect how deeply music is ingrained in personal existence.

Music brings me to a place that I can’t describe, but I know that I can’t live without. If I am honest with myself, I probably wouldn’t be alive without it...sometimes, like with my parents, it’s a way just to get in touch with something elemental...it’s a way for me to feel connected to the things that matter, to life. My whole self is a part of the music I play. Those times where I have no plan, they usually end up being the best.

Reflection: Music Shared

In the time between interviews, Craig began occasionally playing as the third in a local trio. We spoke twice on the phone, mainly about the logistics of our next meeting, but he did share some of his personal progress. He took a three week trip to Africa which significantly impacted his perceptions of self, need and community. Some of his thoughts dealt with the musical experiences he had during the trip. After our initial greeting in this second interview, I asked him to readdress these comments.

It’s hard to articulate exactly what I felt, but the whole trip was so very moving. I’ve never seen so much real poverty or suffering before. But these people, they still lived with such grace, and treated each other with real kindness. It brought home that community is far more about action and interaction than where you
live or who you live like. And what really amazed me is how music is part of the everyday for those people. There was always someone singing or playing some little thing. It wasn’t formal, wasn’t practiced, but it cut right to me. And you know what I noticed the most? It was so personal, sung or played right from the life of that person, but it everyone around shared it. I didn’t have a clue what was being said or sung, but it was impossible to be around it and not be a part of it. People would just spontaneously dance, sway, sing, clap, whatever, as they went through their day. It really reminded me that music is something to do with others, to share with others.

This insight was very important for Craig because his music was historically something private, either between himself and his mother, or just as an individual. It was in direct response to his African trip that he began playing with others again; something he had not done since his mother’s illness. It made him feel more alive, and more a part of “something” than he had for a long time. I was interested to know how this would influence his relationship with the Chopin piece we had spoken of in the first interview. However, before going there, I wanted to revisit how and why this piece was important to him.

It boils down to three things. It was one of Mother’s favorites throughout life, and so close to death. I was touched that she asked me to play it for her. It also was really the way I got through her death. I could lose myself in it every time, and at the same time, start to work through my feelings. It was my crutch. It was also the greatest homage I could pay to the woman who brought me up. I have probably never worked so hard at anything in my life so consistently, with the
intent of perfection and respect. There aren’t many people that I would have tried that hard for. Every time I play it or hear of it, I think of her. At first, I was always brought back to how she died, and how I felt afterwards. It’s been a few years now, so when I think of her, I can remember other times in our lives, like these little crystal crosses she used to keep on the windowsill by the kitchen sink, or the first time that I got her to ride a roller coaster. I don’t immediately go to the bad stuff. But I have to say, I am more aware of the fact that the music in my life, in general, but definitely this piece, helps me feel things and express things about a time in my life that was full of change. Losing Mother, and the hours I spent re-playing those last days in my head, really helped me re-organize my life. I am not one who apologizes for the decisions I’ve made, but I’ve kind of made room for things that weren’t there so much before…I’m still not a church guy, never will be, but I really starting thinking about all the wonderful things that are part of life. Spending time outside, just listening to the sounds of nature, has become a nightly ritual for me. And I am not always in such a rush. (laughs) Now, that could also be my age sneaking up on me, but I find I really take time with things now. I can appreciate aspects of others that I was too busy to do before. When I play now, I let things ruminate a bit. I’m not so caught up in ‘perfection’ as it were. I think the real beauty, the true meaning, comes from letting the innate potential of the composition combine with my mood or approach that day. Truly, the music is different every time. Sometimes it’s a slight pause here, or a faster tempo there…but each time, it’s something amazing.
What I heard in this description was a very mature, very interactive approach to music. With his new attitude had come new understandings about himself, his music and the world around him. Did he think that his musical experiences were embodied?

*If by embodied you mean I can feel them physically, then yes. I notice that sometimes I have more energy, sometimes, I’m exhausted afterwards. The faster and harder I play, the faster my heart pounds. I get carried away by music, or really, in the music, no matter what type. I go to that place we talked about last time, in myself and yet not bound to all the stuff in my head. I don’t always feel happy when I’m done, but I always feel! Life isn’t always great, so I don’t expect happiness to rain down all the time. But knowing that I can alter how I feel if I work at it, if I choose, is true grace. That more than anything else is the best thing I learned after Mother died. I always played, but I never understood why it helped.*

For Craig, the participation in this study was part of this process. He described a “reverberation of conversation”, meaning that parts of our conversations or reflections on questions kept reoccurring, adding new layers, thoughts and questions to his acceptance and comprehension of a self post-loss. Sometime in between interviews, Craig decided that an important of his process was for me to understand him, for someone else to share his mother’s song with him. I was delighted, and touched, when he invited me to listen to his performance of the Chopin piece.

Just as he found the African music to be communal and interactive, so was his rendition. The movement of his fingers was foreshadowed by facial expression, body posture and an intimacy with the instrument under hand. The juxtaposition of emotional
intensity and relaxed familiarity produced an exquisite combination of poignancy and polish. As the final notes faded, neither of us made a move to fill the air talk. There was a weight of emotion still hanging around the moment that I did not want to intrude upon. Finally, he wagged his eyebrows in my direction, laughed and said, “Not bad for an old man.”

True to his form, Craig attempted to cover a very personal moment with a joke. Once he had settled back onto the couch however, he was willing to continue. Mainly, I wanted to explore how he felt about the piece, both in the moment and in reflection. I also wondered if he noticed anything different in how he interacted with it now, versus shortly after his mother’s death.

Well, like I told you, before, playing it was, well, necessary for me. I played that piano to work through everything. It wasn’t always that song, but it was always with that one in mind. It was very raw, very emotional, and it had to be right. Now, I still want it to be right, and it’s still emotional, but it’s just different. I am more at peace with losing my mother, and much more at peace with myself as a person. So now, it is more playful when I play. I am willing to try new things, not just do it by the book. ‘Right’ isn’t about what’s on paper, it’s about the spirit. The piece will always mean my mother; her life, her death, and our relationship. But it also symbolizes the next stage of myself. Case in point, I would never have shared my playing of it with anyone, not even my kids. But I realize that sharing it means sharing her, sharing the gifts she gave me. Mostly though, I realized that music, and memories, grow with each telling. And different people, different times, mean different aspects come out. How I remember her, how I honor her,
how I grieve her, is now both personal and communal. The person hearing my
music may not know the story or reason, but every time, in some way, she is there.
At 53 years of age, James considers himself a successful man. He describes himself as a happily married man whose foundation was built on family and the church. Raised in a black Baptist home, he is the second oldest of four children. James was born and raised in a lower-middle class family in central Pennsylvania, but is currently residing with his wife Ava (from chapter 4), in Seattle, WA. Although he works as a government contractor, James feels that his person has been shaped wholly by the home and teachings of his mother. Her manner of living, and dying, had a great impact on him.

*Remembrance: A Mother’s Love*

Open and congenial, James moved easily into our interview. I was pleased to know that he and Ava did not discuss her interview at all, so his responses would not be influenced by her recollections. He gave me a brief background of his family, including an explanation of his mother’s remarriage (hence the different name), and how her interactions with all of them taught him how to treat others. Even in her final days, she taught him by example, with dignity.

*I’m much better now, I miss her, but I’m fine. But I can honestly say that losing Mama was the worst pain I ever felt in my whole life. I mean, I remember my father pretty much walking out, I’ve lost friends, and my step-dad, but she was the center of my family, the head honcho. I talked to her every day, saw her at church, we always had dinner with her afterwards; my whole way of life changed, ya know? And she and Ava were like best friends, always yakking away, shopping*
together, singing, practicing, whatever. I’m sure Ava told you that we met because of Mama…I knew my mother had kinda taken her under her wing. She always did that her whole life. She’d just reach out and scoop up people needing some extra love. I never would have made it through losing Mama if it weren’t for Ava. She took care of things I couldn’t. When Mama got the cancer it was bad. She never complained or nothing, but you could tell it hurt sometimes. But there was good too. She and Ava would be in the kitchen doin’ something, laughin’, cookin’, singin’…and it felt good. But then things got worse. The hospice nurses came in, made sure she had medicines and oxygen and staff. The chaplain came…my Uncle Jonas was upset by that at first, until he realized it was just extra prayers and support. My uncle is Mama’s brother, and the head of our church. Between him and Mama, we always had a lot of religion around. Anyway, the hospice kept her real comfortable, but they couldn’t stop what had to come. She just kinda faded, you know. Got weaker and weaker, stopped eatin’ and then one day, just let go. I remember, towards the end, when she was still talking, she took my hand, smiled, and told me how proud she was to be my Mama. (pauses for a moment, voice thick with emotion)That I was a good man, a good son, and that she would miss me. I miss her too.

These words brought him great comfort in the months that followed.

The day she died, Ava was in with Mama, so I laid down to take a quick nap. I had been up most of the night, making sure she got her morphine and lettin’ her know I was there and stuff. Next thing I knew, Ava was sittin’ by my bed. I knew as soon as I saw her that she had been crying, and that meant Mama was gone.
The next few days after that were just so exhausting. I mean, there was so much family around. You know, as I get older, the only time I see half my family is at funerals anymore.

He did a little more remembering, then the conversation moved into how music, especially choir, helped him honor his mother, cope with the tough moments, and eventually, heal.

Ava and I did a lot of remembering, a lot of talking, and we focused on the choir. Singing was Mama’s thing, and mine and Ava’s too. It was like when we were doing that, part of Mama was there with us. You know, Mama touched a lot of people with her singing and choirs. She really inspired Ava to pick up that kind of ministry. Music is like magic sometimes…it heals the soul, can bring you back from some very bad places. It helped me for sure, the singing, prayer, church, all helped me.

Specifically:

It was familiar. Losing a parent is bad, especially when you are close. It’s like all of a sudden, your world shifts and nothing feels right. Little things in my day just weren’t the same and it left me feeling, well, off. So singing, at Sunday services mostly, made things feel more normal. I knew the music, the place in the service where we all sing, all of it is automatic. Not having Mama up there was awful, but it felt way better than not having her at dinner afterwards. It was also a great way to reach out to Ava. There were days that she was so sad. She didn’t talk too much or just wasn’t herself. Singing helped us share times and feelings without actually talking about it. Like one time, she was doing the dishes and was
obviously upset. I asked her about it, but she wasn’t giving much back. So I started singing. At first, she didn’t do nothin’ but then she joined in. And man was I glad. There is nothing worse than knowing someone you love is hurtin’ and not being able to help them. We did that a lot, to feel better. You know, I sing all the time. There’s church singing and then radio singing, so lots of times I just turn it up while I’m driving and flow with it, you know? Music just helps. Puts me in a better mood. I pick stuff that’s more upbeat to lift it up a bit…it’s worked pretty much my whole life. I don’t dwell on stuff either. I like to figure it out and be done with it. It’s hard, losing Mama. She was a real special woman. But she’s with God and she had a good life, so I can’t be sad all the time. I miss her, sure, but we all die sometime. She got to do it in a nice place, with family there and the promise of heaven.

Religion and faith are very important in James’ life, as is music. I asked about the relationship between music and his spirituality.

*Song is a great gift in my life. It is a bond between my wife and I, like it was with Mama. It is a vehicle that I can offer praise, joy, sorrow and thanks through. It is a way to add my voice to the community, to feel the feelings of my brothers and sisters, and to know that I am part of something much greater than just myself...music has a powerful presence in my life and for my life.*

I wanted to explore the relationship between music and community more.

*It’s hard to explain it exactly, but music is everywhere in my life. Besides in my home and at church, it’s a part of everything. You hear it at birthday parties, friends’ houses, in the car. Most folks I know have the music in their lives the
same way. Sure it is not always the same tunes, but it’s the same feelin’ you know? You hear a good rhythm and your body starts moving. You voice picks up the tune and the next thing you know, your day just got better. Sometimes there are others around, so you get to share the mood. Makes us stronger. I remember when I was young, I worked in a shipping warehouse, while I was in school, worked second shift. Nothin’ worse than humpin’ boxes late on a Friday night when you’d rather be out with your friends. Me and some of the other guys, we’d goof off. One guy did great impressions! We’d tell jokes…but mostly, we’d just turn up the radio and just sing along, like we were the Temptations or something! Helped pass the time…we just did it. Black people always just did it. Now, don’t take that the wrong way, I’m not saying white people don’t sing but it’s different. Singing while working, or really just during the day in general, is definitely a black thing.

Clearly, for James, there is a link between his music and culture. He took some time to discuss that, as well as his mother’s influence on his perception of culture.

My music, my church, my community, they are a result of the culture that I am proud to be a part of. Being a black American is part of that, but also being raised where I was and by the great lady that my mother was. You know, I’ve never tried to break this stuff up before. I mean my family, the community, my race, they are all different faces of the same thing for me. I grew up in this family, with this community. Our schools, church, friends, all come from the same people. There are no divisions like that. So I guess my culture is one that comes from the people that I know, from the people of my past, and through the grace of
God...some people think that all black folks are alike. They make these stupid stereotypes. I mean seriously, fried chicken and watermelon, come on! (laughs) Although between you and me, I do love the chicken! Anyway, my mother raised me to be more...to respect and be respected. To always remember where you come from but be willing to change to something else. To remember family and God always, and not let anyone put you down. You know, even in black America, there are differences. Mama always wanted us to be the best we could be. You help yourself and the people around you, but don’t own something that had nothin’ to do with you. You know, I never even smoked a joint for fear of what my mother would think! I am the type of man, the type of black man I am because of my mother. I am a role model to others because that is how she raised me to be. To help others, to raise them up, to help them when they fall. It is a ministry of doing, not talking.

Moving back to the doing, I asked James to rethink about how music mattered after his mother passed.

As Mama was dying, we sang a lot of hymns together, and some old Mo-town.

And do you know who she loved? Lady Ella...one thing I know, real music comes from within. No matter if it sounds you thought it should, once you find that spot, that’s when music can be powerful...most of the time I can find it. But right after mama died, I had a hard time. I mean, I could sing the words and all, but I just didn’t have the energy to dig deep. And really, if I’m honest with myself, I didn’t want to, ’cause down deep was pain. I didn’t want to have to let her go. Day by
day, you just get more used to it. I remember finding happy thoughts first, then moving into the other feelings, like missing her and being mad.

I asked if there was a particular song or type of music that helped.

_Not really anything specific. I mean playing and singing music has always been my stand-by...it’s always been part of my family, my community, so growing up, it was part of all my comings and goings. My siblings and I used to put on shows for my parents, little plays and variety type things...it’s been there through everything in my life. Singing especially is a way for me to share things and work through them sometimes...I usually think about things. Music is more of a tool really, that is there when you need it. Every time I hear the ‘Old Rugged Cross’ I think of her. Not to mention any Christmas carol...Mama loved Christmas. She would have the house decorated by the Saturday after Thanksgiving and keep it up until after New Year’s. You know, there were two songs that I remember really thinking about the first Christmas without her... ‘Silent Night’ and ‘The First Noel’. She and I always sang ‘Silent Night’ together in harmony—it was my favorite to sing with her, and ‘The First Noel’ was her favorite. So they really stood out during the season, make me think of her every time. Sometimes I’m sad, but sometimes it would just remind me of good things from growing up._

Did they sing them that year?

_Yeah actually. Ava picked up Mama’s part of ‘Silent Night’. It was kind of odd the first time, but also a beautiful thing. Kinda like a cycle of life thing. Similar, but different. So really, back to your earlier question about a song, that would be the_
one. I carry it in my heart with love for her. It was a part of life before her, and continues after her, but could never be just any other song to me.

Did he have any other tools that he used to cope?

I write poems sometimes, and I like to make models. There are so many details in those darn things. It’s a great way to focus, or distract yourself, when you need to.

Feeling that the interview was drawing to a close, I asked James if he had any final thoughts, either about music and his grieving, or about its relationship to his learning and coping.

That sounds so formal. (laughs) No, really, music is just important to me for all of the reasons we talked about before. It has always been a major part of my relationship with my mother, my wife God and my church. I am quite certain that losing her, and getting over that pain would have been much worse without music as an outlet. It helped me get stuff out and to feel connected with everyone, and to honor a terrific person. I never thought about until we started talking about these interviews. I’ve always just known how to use music in my life, and that it was there. Probably because my mother was always there. My ‘relationship’ with music is a direct result of my relationship with my mother. Now it continues on. I miss her, but I am o.k., because life, like the music, goes on.

Reflection: Reintegrating Silent Night

James experienced a lot of changes in between our first and second interview. He and Ava moved to Seattle, WA so that he could implement a new phase of a work project. Although the move is intended to be a short-term transition, it has meant a
significant shift in several aspects that have been foundational to James’ life. Most keenly, he feels an absence of the familiar; his family, his church and his mother’s home are not part of his regular routine. He seems to be adjusting well to the change, but clearly looks forward to the day when he can move back home. I asked if there was anything in particular that was helping him adapt to the changes, as well as any thoughts that had come up after our first interview.

Settling into the new place, both here and work has taken a lot of time and energy. Ava helps find things for me to do in what little spare time I do have. She has started working a lot with a youth shelter, she got connected through the church that we have started going to. It’s funny, some things are exactly the same, but it’s the first time it hasn’t been my family in charge of the service. You know, it’s a different feeling altogether. It’s freeing, just being able to come and go, but it’s also sad, and a bit hard. It has also really driven home that life happens, whether you want it to or not. You can either choose to move ahead, or fight against it, but it will happen. Standing in a new place, with new people, really brings home Mama is gone and my life is different. I had a spell there, for about two weeks, where I really struggled. But I got through it. Ava really knows how to help. (laughs) Actually, she just kept giving me stuff to do, wouldn’t let me wallow. Mostly, she had me moving the same furniture over and over and helping her plan the music activities for her group.

Got a new piano too, so we’ve been singin’ a lot. You know that always helps! ‘Bout the other question, well, once we got done talking last time, I really thought a lot about things. Did some remembering about Mama, and really started paying
attention to things. Especially the music. After all those questions, it got me thinking about all sorts of stuff. What was it about music that really helped me? And you know, I realized it was a few things. Sometimes, the words really are what lift me up, other times, it’s the sound of the music or the way it helps you get feelings out. But for me, most of the time, it’s the feeling I get in. That way you feel when you sing with someone and it just is right, or just the feeling you get in the moment. It’s hard to explain, but it is so powerful. There is just this energy that touches you right to the soul, one of God’s wondrous gifts to us.

Bringing James back to the end of previous session, I asked him to please discuss Silent Night again, specifically how the song was important for him and what role it played in his physical, emotional and spiritual self.

*It was our song, Mama’s and mine, to sing at Christmas. We always shared a love of it, and of the holiday. It was the song that I learned to sing harmony with. It was the song that I really learned to share a song with. Does that make sense? When you sing a solo, it’s yours, even though others hear it, and when you sing in a group, you share, but it’s bigger, different. But a duet, it’s very personal. You have to listen to the other, be aware of their breathing, their volume, their sound. So all music, but especially that song, makes me think about how my body produces the sound, my spirit infuses it and my emotions carry it. I know, that sounds kind of cheesy, but it is such a profound thing, the way it affects my whole self. I feel closer to God, closer to man, and always closer to Mama in those moments than in any other time. I realize I sing for two reasons: to help myself, a*
little every day, and, to offer that to any other who might need the same thing, like at church.

And specifically *Silent Night*, what do you remember about it from the time around and after you lost Bel?

*At first, all I remember feeling was pain. There is such an overwhelming sense of loss and wrongness about death. But it also brought her peace, and for that, I was grateful. I would not have wanted her to suffer anymore. I remember as we got closer to that first Christmas season, which was only a few months after she died, it was tough. And it’s not like I forgot the song, but I didn’t think about it at all until the time had come that we would sing it and obviously, she and I couldn’t. That was real hard for me to take. But every chance it came up, I sang, whether it was on the radio or with the choir. It was a way to remember Mama, and to keep her in the holiday, not that we had much spirit for it the first year. I do remember though, the first time I sang it as a duet again, it was with Ava; it just happened naturally. It was kinda weird. I sang it like I always did with Mama, but realized pretty quick that Ava and I had to learn to sing it together. So it really mattered in two big areas: it helped me remember and keep Mama in my heart in a really tough time and it helped me and Ava get through something difficult together. We were both really close to Mama, so it was healing for us to sing together. We knew why it was important and how it helped without always having to talk about it.*
James brought something special for the elicitation aspect of the interview. Rather than sing it with Ava, which was his original plan, he brought a rendition featuring him and Bel.

We listened in quiet companionship for about two and a half minutes, during which time James’s face clearly reflected the myriad of emotions that is only associated with intense loss. His concentration was directed at some inner place, a memory or feeling that comes from sharing a moment with another being. We were quiet for a bit after the song, then he turned back to me with a huge smile.

*Wasn’t she beautiful? The way she sang, it’s the way she lived her life, honestly.*

*She was grace and strength and love and joy, with the ability to put the fear of God into ya with just a look. I miss having her in my life, but am grateful to have known her. Not many people like her in the world. When I hear the song,*

*especially that version, I am filled with a joy that can’t be described. I still remember every terrible moment of losing her, but the pain isn’t as sharp, and now there is room for the other feelings that were part of life, the good stuff.*

*Before I never got there. I’d get stuck in the hurt and the missin’ her. But now, I can move to the other stuff, the good stuff. A lifetime of memories shouldn’t be blocked up by a few rough months.*

I asked for final reflections, on those “rough months” and those that have come after.

*I guess what I have realized the most is that even with death, it isn’t the end. Life goes on, it’s just different. If you are lucky, you have someone who really touches you, makes a difference. Mama was an amazing lady. And God has blessed me*
with Ava too. I have more gifts than most, and thank God know it. Having my family, my music and God are great things to me. Losing Mama was bad, but it is a trial I have lived through and learned from and have come out wiser because of. I know more about myself, my faith and how to deal with things. And I know, through Mama’s last lesson to me, that I can overcome terrible times through song, prayer, family and the power of God. Knowing that carries me every day. And I am thankful for it.
CHAPTER TEN: THE SONG GOES ON

The intent from the beginning of this study was to explore the ways in which music has helped bereaved adults cope, understand and ultimately navigate their grief process. As part of the selection process, all of the participants identified that music had been important in their ability to deal with their tragic losses. My expectation was that through the telling of stories and interpretation of the narratives, aspects of this phenomenon would be revealed and a greater understanding of music as a bereavement and learning mechanism could be had. What I was pleased and privileged to experience were profoundly personal, deeply moving and amazingly detailed descriptions of the paths these participants have walked. The result has been a far more comprehensive exposition of the interconnection between music and its many roles in the grief process.

This final section of the research project is dedicated to encapsulating the amazing details of the interviews and relating them back to the theories and literature which informed this author’s efforts. The chapter begins with a summary and an identification of the areas of significance uncovered in the analysis of the narratives, then moves into a discussion of the implications of these areas in relation to the areas of adult education and hospice bereavement and grief counseling. Related medical practices and music therapy are also included in this section. A delineation of how the participant’s assigned significance to their chosen pieces is included, to assist practitioners with perspective for consideration.

Summarizing Significance: Living Memory from Fading Notes

Three significant areas emerged from the recollections of the people I spoke with. Although represented in varied manners, the first area relates to music’s role in learning
and understanding the grief process. Universally, this study found a strong relationship between knowing and learning how to embrace music as a coping device and as a means to rebuild identity. This is of particular note to this author because not all of the participants were musicians, nor did they all report having a lifelong awareness of music as a coping or learning tool.

The next major area involves music’s enmeshment with the spiritual, cultural and community aspects of the individuals in the study. The depth to which each element mattered and the degree to which music was involved differed from story to story, but it was clear that for each teller, music not only had a place among this aspect of their lives, but that the connection between each and their grief process was integral to their healing. My choice to discuss these in tandem, rather than treat as independent themes derives from belief held by several of my participants that they are, in fact, inseparable, and should not be isolated as sterile, disconnected items.

Finally, these stories uncover the ways that music can give voice to both the bereaved and the deceased. These narratives remind us that the substance of a loved one may not disappear with their death. In fact, the magnitude of their being is sometimes noted more in their absence than was during life. Music enabled Ava, Adrian, Meredith, Betty, Craig and James a means to honor and include their loved ones in their daily lives. It was also a means for accessing and sharing the memories of their loved one, and the grief they felt. Lastly, it played a substantial role in the evolution of the grief process, and how each was able to move forward.

Grief is neither bad nor good. It is simply a response to change and loss, and it is
energy. It is how we receive and process this energy that makes all the difference in the world. We can brace against the wind, or we can dance with it.

(Breitenbach, 2002, p. 6)

Those who shared their stories in the preceding chapters chose to dance, with music to help guide their motion. For each, the presence of music helped them come to understand the loss they suffered and how to reorganize themselves and events of daily life.

*Navigating the Grief*

There are few occurrences in life as immediately devastating as the death of a loved one. Those left behind often struggle to find the means to cope with the vacancies and changes that suddenly alter their sense of self and normalcy. These acute feelings of loss and grief were echoed across all the narratives shared in this study. Thankfully though, this group of participants realized that they did in fact have an anchor in the storm of grief, music. For each, music presented a tangible, accessible resource for navigating grief. As Ava explained:

> Like I said before, music has just been so much an everyday thing in my life, so it figures it would be a part of the sadness and loss I feel in my life. It’s always been my way to make sense of things; I’m a feeler first, thinker second. That’s not always a great thing, but hey, it’s me. Music, mostly singing, but sometimes just hearing others, helps me figure it all out. (Chapter 4)

It is often hard to articulate why or how things have importance to our life or learning, but that doesn’t lessen the impact. For Ava, the decision to utilize music as a way to survive her loss was not a process of selection from available resources or the
conscious choice of one method over another; it was the intuitive inclusion of a force
second nature to her way of existence.

By her own account, music had always been a means of understanding the events
in Ava’s life. Mainly through performance, but sometimes through listening, she was able
to analyze and critique life experiences, as Olson (2003) also discusses in regard to the
participants of his study. She articulated the embodied nature of this knowing, citing how
music affected her physical, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and social self. She drew
comfort from the presence of song, and its connection to all the things in life she valued.

Interestingly, the two other performers of the group, James and Craig, also
verbalized a lifelong relationship with music as a way of understanding, particularly in
the emotional arena. As was the case with Ava, music’s significance in their grieving was
a result of music’s import throughout their entire life. Craig described how playing the
piano with his mother was integral to their understanding of each other, and was often the
way they shared time and feelings without verbal expression.

The non-performers of the group, Adrian, Betty and Meredith, also experienced a
close emotional link with their chosen music. However, it was a bond formed out of new
necessity, not lifelong familiarity with music as a learning or coping mechanism. Prior to
the deaths linked with this study, music had been entertainment or occupied a background
presence in their lives. Afterwards however, music was discovered by each to have
healing properties which helped them learn to cope with their loss. Each attached
significance to their found music as the days progressed; they learned with and through
their experiences. Unlike James, who was secure in the knowledge that music was a way
for him to understand things, Adrian struggled with this new form of perception. His
sense of orange equated to a sense of well-being. Unsure and uncomfortable with this new practice, Adrian taught himself how to recognize and incorporate music that elicited orange into his grief process, effectively learning a new life skill as well as a new way for himself to know.

Music, form, and emotions. The role of both form and emotions evoked by music was discussed by the participants. The form, or physical matrix of the music enabled activity that assisted some of the participants in healing. Craig focused his efforts on the technical execution of the piece first, guided by tempo markings and dynamics, while both Meredith and Adrian described visualizing themselves in relation to the lyrics of the song. James also found musical form important, as his choice of Silent Night was based on the song being a duet shared with his mother. In Ava’s life, song as a form carried the greatest weight in her musical knowing, which carried through in dealing with the emotions of her loss of Bel. Her ability to literally give voice to her hurt facilitated the expression she required to cope with her loss. This realization of music’s capacity to give her grief embodiment in dynamic form is reflective of Langer’s (1953) supposition that art, or music in this case, is expressive of human feeling. Drawing on Langer’s work, Reichling (2004) notes:

Art abstracts in some way from the human condition and expresses that abstraction in a single, concrete expression, be it music, painting or whatever, as the formulation of human experience. It is as if these forms or feelings or truths are freed, abstracted from their common use, and put to new roles, functions, uses, capacities in the arts. (p 20).
Music, in this case as an expressive tool for Ava’s grief, became an agent of healing and understanding, rather than just maintaining the position of vocal art form.

This need to express leads us to one of two major areas I feel stand out in this area of the study. Particular to learning and specifically to the grief felt by these participants, one of music’s greatest strengths as a means of coping and understanding loss is the tremendous role it plays in creating space for an individual and his or her feelings and emotions. As discussed in chapter 2, philosopher Suzanne Langer (1953, 1957) made this point in her foundational works of the 1950’s. More recently, Reichling (2004), Addis (1999), Davies (2001) and Price (2004) have detailed this through the expansion of the ideas about music, feeling, form and time. I believe that the interconnection between these elements enabled the participants to create and find the space so crucial to their healing. Price’s (2004) position, although contradictory of much of Langer’s arguments, does provide a succinct description of the synergy described within the narratives; the perception of time, like the perception of emotion, is due to the form of music: music means emotion and felt time.

Described in great degree by every person in this study are consistent examples of how music facilitates distraction, emotional outlet, expression, and recognition of important personal clues necessary to cope with the loss of a loved one. Of particular significance to navigating grief is the connection between music and emotion, and its role in developing a new sense of identity.

As evident in the narratives from chapters 4-9, all of the participants in the study indicated the substantial role of music in helping them negotiate the general emotions of grief. For example, in speaking to music’s specific part in this, Craig shared:
Its kind a way of situating myself. I guess playing helps me work things out. I get so caught up in emotions I can’t see the forest for the trees. So playing helps me get it out, to calm myself so I can look at it later. I almost have to tire myself out before I can deal with whatever is bothering me. (Craig, Chapter 8).

Without fail, each person in this study relied on, and continues to include music as an important coping mechanism for them. Craig’s description above is not unlike Ava’s, James’s or Adrian’s. The relationship between music and the emotional aspects of self and life are proof positive of Langer’s (1953) contention that music is the communication of the life of emotion. Each participant consistently sought refuge in the space that music created-space in which they could embrace or avoid the turbulence of grief.

Avoidance, or distraction, is a common element in grief and bereavement. Music therapy literature often describes its successful use in mitigating physical, emotional and spiritual distress, for both patients and their families. (Krout, 2001; Hilliard, 2003; O’Callaghan, 1996.) Grieving and healing absorb tremendous amounts of personal energy. The flow of raw emotion must ebb to enable perspective and time to regroup. Craig’s interludes “working it out” on the player piano, Betty’s escape into Moonlight Serenade and Adrian’s active search for music that would elicit a more pleasant state illuminate the use of music to remove oneself from having to feel the pain of loss or address other related emotions, like anger, loneliness and fear.

Similarly, the use of music to express emotion was present in the experiences of our storytellers. Ava and James describe how song helped them articulate emotion musically, to “get it out” or share what was difficult to speak. Krout (2003) describes this practice in his work with the families of actively dying patients, and Montello and Coons
(1998) indicate how some of the adolescents in their study benefited physically and emotionally from their ability to express via music. The physical act of singing is often a catalyst for their emotional interactions. By contrast, it is the listening that helps others, like Adrian and Meredith. Meredith permits suppressed feelings to surface only when ensorcelled by hymn. For her, expression is not an overt practice; it is the allowance of her innermost thoughts to be unguarded while in the presence of God. The import of unfettered expression was as critical for these participants as the ability to distance themselves from those same sentiments.

But expression and avoidance alone were not sufficient for long-lasting coping. Integral to this process was an examination piece. After expression or separation came a period of inspection; a combination of fatigue and taking the edge off helped these mourners approach their feelings, memories and challenges from a more positive place. This area is critical to the grief process—without understanding, there can be no healing. (Montello, 2002). Each participant verbalized, especially in the second interview session, how continuous reflection on events and emotions brought about increased knowledge about themselves and the losses they suffered. It also revealed how each navigated their course through decisive inclusion and use of their musical choices.

Clearly, as discussed in chapter 2, music therapists support and understand the connection of music and emotions, and make use of that connection all the time in facilitating healing. Ruud (1997) relays that in the narratives of some music therapy participants, that music is often the source of activation of feelings, clarification and expression. Additionally, the ability to become emotionally aware reflects upon and expresses emotions which may help the person to not close in on themselves. Although
stemming from a music therapy perspective, his description of emotional awareness compliments the process depicted by the participants in this study. The reflective piece necessary for emotional well-being from Ruud’s perspective mirrors the course which evolved intuitively for these undirected participants.

*Developing a new identity.* The second region of high import to this area relates to each participant’s need to relearn themselves or develop a new sense of identity in the wake of their loss. Betty explained:

*There were days where I could barely make myself get out of bed. What was the point? No one to talk to, or share coffee with. But then I’d think of her, and him, and make myself move. I was so angry and sad, and well, mostly just lost.*

Her description in Chapter 7 of the days after Ruth’s death resonates across all of the tales shared within these pages. The death of a loved one is more than just a loss of the person; it involves changes in life routine, identity and knowing exactly where one fits and how to act, feel or be in a lifeworld that has suddenly and irrevocably shifted.

Everhart (2007) identifies that “…our grief is more honestly self-centered. We grieve our loss” (p 297). The sum of the relationships between the bereaved and their loved ones was more than just one individual plus another; they are the Gestalt of all that was created and shared between them. Memories and emotions intertwined with physical places, shared activities, family traditions and the seemingly unimportant daily rituals can enhance the sense of loss in unanticipated ways, thus explaining the intense upheaval that impacted the participants of this study. Each went through significant periods of adjustment and recovery as they sought to regain some sense of personal balance.

Assisted by music, reclamation of identity was accomplished in three major ways by
these participants: reformulation of self, reconnecting with self and others in new ways and relocating self.

Probably the most difficult transition during grief is the feeling of complete separation from everything “normal” and comfortable. While it is not the case for everyone, personal experience and the details of this study indicate that it does occur with a fair frequency. Within the confines of this study, Adrian and Craig expressed the greatest degree of distance from their sense of self, and intentional efforts to reformulate their sense of identity.

_I think I will never be whole again…there is not anyone or anything that can fix that pain…after he died, I was lost, empty... I really had lost my sense of everything except my grief and anger._ (Adrian, Chapter 5)

The loss of his twin altered Adrian’s sense of balance, and self, drastically. Throughout the more intense periods of his grieving, his use of sound and song helped dull the pain, create space for reflection and gain understanding about himself and loss. Later, the combination of distance from the loss and the willingness to try new things led to a new version of self. No longer just Peter’s twin, Adrian had embraced other aspects of his life. The inclusion of piano lessons and weekly tai-chi with his mother are indicative of his change of self-perception; his willingness to embrace perspectives and practices vastly different from his previous way of being illustrate building blocks in the recreation of who and how he considered himself to be.

Craig on the other hand, would not have described his identity in relation to his mother’s prior to her death. It was only after she fell ill and passed that he began to realize the extent to which he defined himself by their relationship, and by extension,
how changed he was by her death. Unlike Adrian, who felt completely adrift, Craig found himself compelled to fill in spaces left by his mother’s departure. His restructuring of self involved learning how to play with living through the playing of music. The countless hours spent polishing the Chopin piece to perfection for her are a dramatic backdrop to the less refined intermezzos with the upright dedicated to his emotional process and self-healing. The result of these two highly different musical dialogues is a man who has graduated from technically accurate to one interested in the spirit of things. His participation in ensemble performance and evolution of perception of music as a communal experience reflect significant changes in a man who preferred isolation and things being right. This indeed relates to his development of a new identity, as he explained, “The piece will always mean my mother; her life, her death and our relationship. But it also symbolizes the next stage of myself.” Ruud (1997) described this in terms of historical identity and musical identity. Historical identity is rooted in the past as well as the contemporary, whereas musical identity “results from the way the person narrates the story of his life, drawing from the memories of significant life events as they are experienced through music” (p 95).

Perhaps it is due to their relationship as a couple, close ties to family and community or just individual nature, but Ava and James did not indicate a strong disorientation of self with Bel’s passing. It is conceivable that they had a strong sense of identity as a couple and as individuals. However, they were each still greatly affected by her loss. Description of changes in their daily lives, like singing in church, family dinners and holiday celebrations were irrevocably altered by her absence. It was in the changes that each learned new ways to relate to self and others. Ava’s assumption of Bel’s
ministry practices and part in *Silent Night* was more than just additions of responsibility; with them came the integration of complex concepts of self, interactions within the family and community and the expectations from all.

Similarly for James, the loss of such a beloved matriarch and his approach to healing involved relearning his own self in relation to all the shared circles of their lives. So, he still attended the same church, ate with the same family and sang the same songs, but others sang her lines, sat in her chair and took over her responsibilities. He had to adjust who he was in relation to these changes. Moving away from the home and taking on a new lifestyle are just continued evidence of his growth, although his plan to move back to the area indicates a strong desire to participate with those daily rituals that helped shape his perception of self.

Musically, the presence of song in their lives helped each to not only reintegrate the changes into new elements of identity, it helped them redesign themselves as a couple, and within the family unit. James having to relearn how to sing *Silent Night* with another person not only changed the song as a performance piece, but also his personal relationship with the work and its singer. This is another example of Ruud’s (1997) description of musical and historical identity. Conversely, Ava confronted strong emotions in the singing of that song, knowing full well its significance to James and the family. The implications were beyond just the singing of simple lyrics; the song, like all of the other changed rituals, was wrought with expectations, emotions and the need to show respect. For both, but especially Ava, the courage to step onto a new path guided by the memory of old shoes was indicative of the types of reformation that occurred during this time.
Interestingly, although both Meredith and Betty verbalized feeling the same type of loss and its impact on their daily routines, neither really made attempts to adjust themselves to the imposed changes in their lives. While I am unclear if this was due to failing health, a stronger sense of identity due to advanced age or a combination of life’s many factors, it was evident that both women used music as a way to remove themselves from their current situation. Rather than redefine themselves or make efforts towards significant change, each took the opportunity to use the space created by music to relocate their energy elsewhere. This was akin to the safe space described by Montello (2002), created within so that one can contemplate emotions, memories and images rather than be overwhelmed by them.

Betty accomplished this by transporting herself back to a time when she was at her happiest. She actually sought a less mature version of her identity, one unburdened by war, death and the challenges of adult life. She describes not only the pleasant memory of times gone by, but the ability to recall sharply elements of the people that mattered most. Alan’s cologne, Ruth’s laughter-she sought memories that contained all of the people she held dear, and with that, the person she loved being most. In her mind’s eye, she was still the younger version of herself, trapped in a failing body. She had neither the desire nor the impetus to recreate herself after Ruth’s death. Music was her survival tool, but was she did not wish to move ahead.

This was also the case for Meredith, although I believe for different reasons. Each woman expected and embraced their pending death. But while Betty enjoyed reminiscence, Meredith’s musical interludes were more of a commune with God, and a preparation of her soul. In her case, the relocation of self was more of a visualization of
things to come. She wanted to meet God and rejoin her husband exactly as she was. Her focus during the hymns at church, and with each listening of On Eagles’ Wings was to conceptualize her destination and open herself up for inspection by God. She would make no changes because she wanted to be accepted as she was known. There would be no alterations or adjustments of behavior; she had a system of living endorsed by her priest and she would not do anything to jeopardize her heavenly ascent.

For each person, navigating their own grief was a highly emotional, complex process yielding the development of new identity and sense of well-being. Their intentional use of music in their personal realms is reflective of the possibilities of outcomes being currently being measured in music therapy (Krout, 2001; Montello & Coons, 1998; Hilliard, 2003) and gives clear examples of the interrelationship between music, emotion, and meaning, as described by Langer (1953), Elliot (2005) and Ruud (1997).

Community, Culture and Spirituality

Throughout the interviews, direct and indirect references about music and its relationship to community, culture and spirituality were present. For some participants, namely James and Ava, all three areas were not only present, but intersected on many levels with each other and in their daily lives. Ava explains music is “everything. It’s personal to me, I am singing it, I am feeling it. But I am doing it because of God. So, it’s not mine alone…the way I want to sing, the songs I go to, are things I’ve learned from others…so its kinda culture, kinda me…its blended.” This experience was not the same for all of the participants; narratives indicate some elements were perceived but not
others. This section is a discussion of how each area impacted the grief process of this group.

Recognizing the importance and impact of the interrelationship between culture, community, identity and spirituality is of great significance to understanding the healing and learning which occurred within the confines of this study. Literature from healthcare (Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001) has begun to explore and discuss the role of spirituality, and some of the interrelated aspects, as they pertain to healing, beginning the acknowledging of the importance of spirituality in Western medicine. Teaching and learning literature attends to its place among education in a similar manner, but to greater degree. Work from recent decades have generated comprehensive discussion exploring the relationship between spirituality and culture, and their significance to learning, knowing and education. (Curry & Cunningham, 2000; Dillard, 2006; Tisdell, 2003).

For James and Ava, more so than any of the other participants in this study, the bond between the elements of identity, community and spirituality is foundational to who they are, how they understand the world and how they understood their grief and loss. To comprehend this better, I turned to works which specifically addressed this from the perspective of the African American. Hecht, Jackson and Ribeau (2003) present a comprehensive analysis of this topic, finding great interrelationship between culture, spirituality, and identity, noting music’s place among them. Essentially, each item is bound together by strong ties of shared history, experiences and identification through the overlap of arenas. Stewart (1997) offers that spirituality is actually the force which shapes the character, culture and destiny of African Americans. The music, which was so important to Ava and James, was successful because of its integration with their
spirituality, and by extension, the other major aspects of self, identity, culture and community.

Although more overt in the dialogues of Craig, Ava and James, there was most definitely a communal aspect to music in the lives of these participants. In each case music was a point of contact with the deceased. It was also a way to connect with others around them, especially when words failed. For James and Ava, the entire process, from physical production of sound to performance was communal. Whether they were singing with each other, at church, or by themselves, there was also a sense or thought of others present, especially Bel. This was also true for the other participants. Betty traveled to the past, Meredith toward the future and Adrian, like Craig, evolved from solitary to more interactive as a result of his musical exchanges.

There is always a cultural element to music since it is always expressed culturally, and often in so far as it is played in community settings, there is also a communal aspect of it. We are all culturally informed beings whose ideas and experiences are informed as much from the community around us as from our own ideas. Additionally, at least for the participants of this study, there are composers and performers to consider, as well as others who may be in proximity of the exchange. Olson’s (2003) depiction of community building through music reiterated how non-performers, be they large audiences or individual listeners, have a role in the co-creation of knowledge and meaning. Both were present within the context of this study. However, the strongest indication of the communal aspect of music for these participants was that each intentionally included others in the process.
Although initially James and Ava were the only ones who performed with and for others, Craig and Adrian later included this practice. Meredith’s participation with music generally happens in a church setting, where others are present and sharing her space, even if she was not including them in her internal process. Father Rhona was also consistently witness to her musical moments. Betty’s practice however, is one that all the participants employed: each included the deceased love one in their process. Even as people sought to escape the pain of loss, the person they grieved was always a part of their process.

Finally, each person graciously included me as a part of their grief process, and, their private musical interactions. Even if at no other time had they sought this, my presence added a communal dimension not only to the musical experience, but also to the larger process of grief as a whole. Moreover, I was not simply a bystander. I asked questions, shared personal perceptions and gave feedback on what was shared with me.

Tied to a sense of community is also a sense of culture. During the course of the interviews, I did specifically inquire about the relationship between music and culture for each person. Interestingly, several participants struggled with this question. Craig really had no sense of personal culture in relation to music, and didn’t really begin to consider that until after his trip to Africa. Meredith was able to discuss it more in relation to its absence due to her poor upbringing than its influence, and Betty thought mostly in terms of how it had mattered to her life. This disconnect mirrors the observation made by many adult educators that white people often do not think of themselves as having culture. Many authors (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Shore, 2001; Tisdell, 2003) explain that white or European Americans often have less of a sense of what it means to be white,
than those, for example, who are African American, know what it means to be black. By extension, understanding music in relation to a culture that one has little cognizance of can be problematic.

Surprisingly Adrian, who came from two culturally diverse parents, almost avoided the Korean and Cuban music that had been a part of his childhood. James and Ava however, both not only recognized but embraced the strong role that culture plays for them in relation to their music. Contrary to the experiences described in the previous paragraph, James and Ava were raised in a society “where their race or cultural identity is inscribed within a context where white culture is the dominant norm” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 59). Additionally, for each, culture was bound to personal identity, enmeshed in community, church and family. The Black Baptist Church is more than just a practice or faith, it is an institution by which they define themselves, their cultural standards, their expectations of community and their very strong association with music. (Stewart, 1997).

Standing back and surveying the narratives, it is clear to me that culture does have a relationship with the music present in the lives of these people, even if they did not articulate it as such. Craig’s choice not only of instrument, but of music and style are clearly influenced by his WASP, middle-class, musical upbringing. Betty’s affiliation with *Moonlight Serenade* had every bit as much to do with being a war bride as it did with the friends she remembered with it. Meredith’s choice of music was bound to her faith, which is tied to her culture and education. Even Adrian, whose musical choices were influenced by the perception of color, could not separate himself from the cultural aspect. The music he went through to find orange was music chosen by him. His
collection would be representative of his age, social class, childhood and lifestyle choices.

The strong role culture played in the musical choices and grief processes of Ava and James is due to the large role that it plays in all of the other major elements of life for them as well. They identify themselves as middle-class, middle-aged African Americans closely knit with the Black Baptist Church. Each area of life weaves with the others to form a cohesive sense of self within community, as was described by Hecht, Jackson and Ribeau (2003). There is also the inextricable relationship to their faith. For this couple, spirituality and religion are synonymous. Everything in their life, including music, is a gift from God. The fact that Bel was active in the church, and that it was through this venue they met adds additional layers to the interrelationship between their music, faith, and grieving. It is also the faith/music relationship which has propelled Ava’s participation as a musical minister, which has also assisted in her coping with Bel’s loss. Rowland’s (1998) study describes the interplay between these elements at length, especially the vocal tradition, and the relationship to identity. Learning as individuals and as community through these elements aided James and Ava in their course to deal with their grief.

Meredith, and to a lesser degree Betty, also reverberated the inseparable nature of spirituality and religion. In Meredith’s case, the music which helped her cope was absolutely linked with her faith. As she described,

*These songs, the words, the fact that I hear them and that someone wrote them, they are all a part of God’s will. And I am a servant of that will. There is no way*
that song would have meant anything to me the day of Joe’s funeral if God did not let it speak to my soul and touch me with it’s peace

The context in which she listened, considered and reflected upon her grief was bound up in the practices of her religion and ritual. Betty was also religious, and referenced a relationship to some music and church, but the music which influenced her was not of this category. There was definitely a spiritual aspect to her musical interactions though. Her healing through accessing Moonlight Serenade was indicative of Ruud’s (1997) description of well-being, in relation to spirituality, and in her case, a close relationship with a historical identity with the song. The sense of peace that each episode brought and the “place” she went to speak to the special bond between her and the Moonlight Serenade. It helped her feel whole again.

Neither Craig nor Adrian considered themselves religious, but both discussed music in spiritual terms as well. Their spirituality is reflective of a connection to nature, wholeness and the interconnectedness of life, as well as their psychological healing experiences. As Craig explained:

Music brings me to a place I can’t describe…it’s a way just to get in touch with something elemental…for me to feel connected to the things that matter, to life.

My whole self is a part of the music I play. (Chapter 8)

Adrian described how music helps him feel grounded, calm, and able to withstand the storms of life. For both men, the spiritual aspect of music enabled the development of critical coping skills to relieve their grief. It also has been helpful in their personal development and expansion of relationship with others.
Echoes of the Past, Moving to the Future: Honoring, Including and New Ideas

An unexpected aspect of this process was the reflection and creation of new understanding that took place among the participants as a result of being involved in this study. Through the course of our conversations, the process of member-checking and the very personal interactions during the music elicitation aspects of the project, the participants continued to make further meaning of their grief, and their relationship with music as a healing and learning mechanism. They constructed new knowledge, formed new ideas, informed by their individual perceptions and socially mediated situations, like the interview sessions and conversations with others during the course of the study, and through reflective practice. The arrival at new meaning is indicative of the type of knowledge construction through reflective practice described by Merriam and Caffarella (1999) and Shor (1992), as well as a combined socially and cognitively informed paradigm, as indicated Hodson and Hodson (1998).

This last section contains insights gleaned from the recollections of loss and how the process continues into the present. As discussed earlier, grief is a highly complex phenomenon which impacts each person in different ways. Examination of the role of music in the grief processes of this six individuals uncovers that grief in relation to death is never just about the individual; the deceased remains an active part of the process long after their physical departure.

Paying homage and honoring the dead was imperative to the participants of this study. For each, the telling of the story and the sharing of the music was a tribute to those they loved, a sign of respect. Included as part of her discussion on styles of doing and being, Berger (2006) shares her observations of memorial services for 9/11 victims at
ground zero, courthouse plaza and Shanksville, PA. She describes attendees in a duality of doing and being in commemoration, of participating and witnessing their grief. Music provided background support as well as focused musical moments for remembrance and displays of emotion and respect.

For Ava, James and Craig, attention to the performances of the music, as well as the relationship of the deceased mothers to music, was of utmost importance to them. The care and energy put into the creation of each presentation was evidence of the regard that the deceased were held in. In their efforts to honor and embrace the spirit of those who had passed, they were able to heal their own. For Betty, sharing the music and story of Ruth was an urgent component of her healing. As she neared the end of her life, it became quite important that she pass along the details of her remarkable friend. Furthermore, the music she chose was reflective of what she perceived as the greatest time of their lives, a time when they were at their best. She wanted me to know the smiling Ruth of that time, to see them as vibrant women not unwell older ladies.

Meredith’s musical experiences are indicative of a different esteem. She was as proud of her perception of Joe’s death as she was of his life. By her account, her visualization of the culmination of his celestial ascent deserves praise, as it indicated the greatness of the man he was in life. Her focus on becoming nearer to God in her own life was with the goal of rejoining him. Thus every time she participated in a musical interaction to aid her healing, she paid her respects to the man who had achieved what she was still working towards.

Adrian’s narrative clearly extolled the virtues of his twin, and how deeply he cared for him. But his choice and use of music really didn’t. However it did reflect the
practice of inclusion, another vital part to moving through the grief. The need to find the
color orange was driven by an emptiness left by Peter’s passing. Each time Adrian was
able to alleviate his grief, he would reflect on who Peter was and what he meant to his
life. Adrian yearned for his presence, but had to adjust to memories instead.

Betty actively sought to include Ruth (as well as Alan and Frank) into her
process. Her choice of music revolved around times of shared interaction. Her ability to
cope with the compounded losses relied heavily on her ability to keep them close in her
heart and mind. Her frequent journeys to the past, facilitated by music reflective of the
time, allowed her to navigate the moments in present when she was alone. It was similar
for Meredith, although her inclusion of Joe always involved consideration of God and her
own death.

For James and Ava, the inclusion of Bel manifested itself in two significant ways.
First, Ava’s choice to follow in Bel’s steps of musical ministry was driven by a
compulsion to keep her spirit alive. Ava felt very strongly that it was her responsibility to
pay it forward, so to speak. She thinks and speaks often of Bel, and her influence over the
well-being of so many lives. These thoughts are echoed by James, who also participates
in the youth ministry because of his mother’s teachings. Secondly, there is intentional
effort, especially at Christmas, to include memories and rituals of Bel into the
celebration. James especially considers this every time he sings the songs he shared with
her. His thoughts are celebratory and his attitude grateful for the gifts and wisdom his
mother imparted to him.

Craig’s inclusion is reflected on several planes as well. Physically, the presence of
his mother’s piano, as well as the deference to what type of music is played on it, clearly
resonates a continued regard for her influence and preferences in his musical participation. Further, as his own personal musical style matures, he has realized more about the nature of his mother and his relationship with her. In some ways, he is closer to her in death than he was in life. His realization of this has enhanced his coping skills and has lead to an evolution of his grief process. In more recent months, Craig’s ensemble work, which is an outgrowth of the time spent playing with his mother, has become about, in his words, “sharing her, sharing the gifts she gave me.” In this sharing, something the man I first met was not ready to do, Craig has learned that each time, the sharing is different. Highly dependent on the time, audience and context, different aspects of the music and his mood come out. In reflecting on this process, he noted, “How I remember her, how I honor her, how I grieve her, is now both personal and communal. The person hearing my music may not know the story or reason, but every time, in some way, she is there.”

The others experienced similar advancements in coping through music. Already discussed is Ava’s and James’ incorporation of the musical ministry and continued reliance on music to move through the emotional upheavals that occasionally reassert themselves. Adrian showed remarkable resilience through his process. His willingness to venture outside of himself and reenter life was facilitated by his newfound coexistence with music. Personal growth has led to other supportive coping mechanisms, including a relationship with his mother, tai chi and learning the piano. His use of recorded music is still important, but now there are other avenues that encourage interactive outlet of energy and emphasize creation of new types of musical memories.
In the cases of Betty and Meredith, there changes over time were to a lesser degree than the other participants. Both had already reached a point of acceptance, guided largely by their expectation of impending death. Once past the more critical stage of their respective grieving processes, each assumed a holding pattern, altering little in their daily routine as they waited for the end. The must have been some wisdom in those decisions, as each woman was reported to have died very peacefully.

From Sound to Meaning to Educating:

Implications for Theory, Practice, and Future Research

*Losing Mama was bad, but it is a trial I have lived through and learned from and have come out wiser because of. I know more about myself, my faith and how to deal with things. And I know, through Mama’s last lesson to me, that I can overcome terrible times through song, prayer, family and the power of God. Knowing that carries me every day. And I am thankful for it.* (James, Chapter 9)

Consideration of the wonderfully rich and personal narratives and the areas of significance uncovered in this study brings me back full circle to the impetus which started the process. I seek, for personal and professional reasons, to understand how music is able to help those upended by the loss of a loved one. With gratitude I acknowledge that the willingness of James, Ava, Meredith, Betty, Adrian and Craig to share their journeys has provided a level of insight which only comes from authentic experience. In this final section, I readdress music as a way of knowing, and then discuss the implications of what has been uncovered in relation to this study, in light of what it suggests for adult education theory, and then what it implies for practice. Finally, I end with suggestions for further research.
Music as a Way of Knowing

From its onset, this study has been grounded theoretically in constructivism and music as a way of knowing. It is a knowing understood through individual and social constructs, like community, identity, culture, spirituality and communication, and music’s presence among them. However, as the narratives unfolded, a new dimension about this type of knowing asserted itself; the participants in this study consistently referred to music as a way to understand their grief and as a way to find meaning. The attributes of music which lent themselves to this understanding and assignment of meaning align neatly with the ways in which music is a way of knowing. Based on analysis of the narratives, and in light of the literature, I contend that the musical meaning-making process of these participants is synonymous with music as a way of knowing.

Meaning making is often discussed in relation to the domain of constructivism. “A constructivist stance maintains that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261). Music, also discussed in light of constructivism within this study, was the critical catalyst that helped the participants make meaning of their loss and learn to cope with the grief. Each area of significance, emotion, identity, community, culture, spirituality and coming to new understandings through reflective practice, can be described in terms of the meaning making process. Rather than rehash examples of each, I consider how, through music, they truly integrate with one another, resulting in real meaning, real knowing.

In discussion of Essential Musical Intelligence (EMI), as it relates to health and well-being, Montello (2002) explains that it is possible to experience and integrate the full spectrum of emotions via music. These experiences help you “create a more cohesive
sense of self, resulting in increased coherence of your bodily processes and within your social environment.” (p. 97). Music especially in terms of identity, community and culture, is often a reminder of a sense of one’s coherence and purpose according to Ruud (1997). Consider his description of culture in light of the process the participants of this study underwent:

Culture could be seen as a certain strategy to interpret symbols or signs, a way to give meaning to the world around us. Culture is not a specific artifact or general way of living informed by a special group. Cultural performance is linked to the individual’s situatedness, a way of perceiving and giving meaning to the world informed by a certain perspective. And this perspective is rooted in the private life-world of the person. (p. 88)

Keeping in mind the established relationship between culture and music as a way of knowing, it is easy to understand its similar relationship with meaning-making. Think of Ava, whose identity is strongly linked with her culture (and the inseparable aspects of spirituality, community, race, etc). Her ability to interpret the symbol of music in a meaningful way and have that meaning impact her life, is driven by her cultural self and the context in which she exists. Her perception of music as a communicative device, its relationship with her redevelopment of identity and the creation of new ways to cope all stem from this process.

Implications for Adult Education Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism is a complex learning theory, grand in that under its large umbrella fall many ideas which explain how knowledge can and is individually constructed. Certainly, it accounts for the presence and potential of culture, spirituality,
identity and other ways of knowing. However, while it allows space for arts based knowing to be understood, its relationship is more like a fleeting kiss than a true embrace. The literature does not really deal specifically with the role of either music or emotions to a degree which matches the output of this study’s narratives, nor does it deal with the specific application of learning from and through the human experience of grief. These important aspects of knowledge construction have important implications for the role of both, music and emotion, in constructivist learning theory.

Langer’s (1953, 1957) philosophy asserts itself as a strong structure against which to describe the meaning which is constructed through music and emotion. It is important to note that her theories are arts based, and so while this application was driven musically, the sentiments fit arts-based knowing from other disciplines as well. Additionally, the specific context of grief does highlight the interrelationship between music and emotion and provides a clear context for this type of knowing. Music (and the arts) as a way of making meaning is a natural extension of the constructivist paradigm; the intersections of spirituality, culture, and identity both inform and are informed by constructivism. They are also, as discussed in this study and the literature therein, integral to the musical experience, especially as it relates to constructing meaning and understanding. The dimension that Langer (1953, 1957), and subsequent proponents such as Reichling (2004), Elliot (2005) and Addis (1999) adds is the interconnection between music’s form and emotion, and it is significant, filling a void in the constructivist learning theory and contributing to an understanding of and incorporation of music and the arts in more formal educational settings.
The space in which the learning occurs is a result of the interplay between emotion and musical form. To comprehend this, both from a theoretical perspective and in practice, and for meaning-making to occur, there must also be an aspect of imagination. Imagination, in its own right, is way of knowing and learning, through which new ideas and possibilities can be received and integrated. Like emotion, it happens outside of music/arts-based learning situations, but is, in my opinion inseparable from the musical process.

To understand the musical process, as it relates to the learning in this study, and to meaning through music in more general terms, there must be sense of the symbol of music and its relationship to the emotional aspect of meaning making. Dirkx (2001) suggests that meaning making involves an imaginal component (in addition to rational and reflective pieces). This imaginal component encompasses emotion, the soul and imagination, and reflects that “meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and derived from the adult’s emotional, imaginative connection with self and the broader social world” (p. 64). From this perspective, Ava would not have been able to create meanings from her musical experiences that helped her accept the loss of Bel or find new ways to heal and honor her.

This imaginal element is integral to the Langerian discussion concerning music and emotion. Langer (1953) contended that the art symbol (music) is an expressive form. Reichling (2004) succinctly explains that form, in relation to the work of art (music), is a sonorous appearance of feeling in an imaginatively perceptible projection; a projection as an “extraorganic structure that conveys the movement of emotive and perceptive processes.” (p. 20). Through her imaginative capabilities, Ava was able to perceive the
symbol of music. Additionally, through this perception and emotive process, she was able to reflect and make meaning of the feelings she expressed while singing and create new understandings for her grieving and healing.

Description of making meaning by listening to music can also be found in this study. An explanation of how Adrian, Betty and Meredith were able to convert musical sound into ways of understanding their loss can be found in Elliot (2005):

Music listening as a covert (mental) form of procedural knowing, in which a listener’s brain-mind ‘adds’ structure and meaning (based on the listener’s formal and informal experiences) to the sonic information that arrives at her ear by means of music makers (p. 101).

Again, based on the context of the individual, the structure and meaning derived from the musical interaction helped participants such as Meredith understand, know, and make meaning of her grief, and how she could use it to help her cope with difficult times.

Looking back on the narratives of the study, one could easily replace the words meaning with knowing and vice versa in each of the stories and be left with the same impression, that music is a way to make meaning and a way of knowing. Because knowing is so intertwined with the facets of identity, culture, spirituality, and community, it is difficult to separate it from meaning which is understood in the same way. In this case, the inclusion of music in the construction of the knowledge or meaning only tightens the weave between them, convincing me that they fundamentally coexist, and that music is a strong way for some adults to know and make meaning.
Adult Learning in a Grief Context: Implications for Practice

There are a number of practical implications that can be offered in regard to the use of music in adult education settings, generally, and/or in the grief context. This study focused on what these adults learned through music in the grief process. It was part of their life context or a nonformal learning setting. It is also completely part of their adult development process, and as many have discussed (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), adult learning and development are interrelated. Obviously, grief can potentially be part of everyone’s life experience: we will all die, and some of us will experience the death or loss of a loved one. Each of us is also likely to suffer or come in contact with others who struggle a significant loss, such as divorce or serious illness. Clearly, music has a role in facilitating dealing with grief. So those adult educators (in the general sense) who deal with adults in facilitating their development or their resolution of grief, such as counselors and hospice workers and therapists can glean new ideas for practice from the journeys of the participants of this study, as can those educators functioning in more formal educational environments.

Certainly, from a practice standpoint, hospice bereavement care, grief counseling and music therapy create space for informal and nonformal learning through music to occur. The highly personal nature of the interaction and the holistic design integrated into end-of-life care create room and climate for music to be included to its fullest potential. Since there is little in the way of empirical research addressing bereaved adults and the use of music, this study accomplished the goal of adding a new level of insight and perspective to a growing body of literature. Professionals providing services and facilitating counseling or therapy for terminal patients and families have another
perspective to consider as they approach their care, as will professionals from
tangentially related fields or disciplines.

From a physical standpoint, this study did little to add to the literature or understanding about the effect of music on the body. There were no measurements of blood pressure, heart rate or brain wave activity. But the comments of Ava, Adrian, Craig and James indicated an awareness of an embodied interaction with the music. Additionally, each reported a greater sense of well-being as a result of their musical interludes. This interconnection of elements of self is indicative of something that is talked about often, even careplanned, but is often lost as disciplines focus on specialty. Music therapists can not forget the emotional or spiritual piece any more than counselors can disregard the physical. Exacerbation or healing in one area generally promotes continued issues or improvements in the others. Therefore one recommendation of practice would be to begin with a thorough initial assessment of the patient’s existing relationship with music. As established at the onset of this research, not every person may feel connected to or identify with music as a way of knowing, coping or healing. Understanding if there is an established bond with a particular piece or type of music or performance type can greatly enhance the therapeutic process. Likewise, uncovering a lack of interest or negative reaction to a specific area can help direct efforts either towards a different musical arena or away from the practice entirely.

For example, the participants of this study assigned significance to their identified pieces of music for specific reasons. “Human consciousness ‘adds’ information from personal learning and experience to recognize, identify, or understand something to be something” (Gruhn as cited by Elliot, 2005, p. 100). The something about the music was
determined by personal, emotional, cultural and contextual elements affecting these
individuals as they learned to cope. For some, such as James and Betty, a major
determining factor was their own personal history with the song. Directly linked to this is
the association of the music with the deceased, and the intentional inclusion or
remembrance of them. This healthy grief practice is reflective of Wolfelt’s (1997)
recommendation to remember the deceased and was certainly an ingredient in their
ability to come to accept their losses (Kubler-Ross, 1969, 1991; Worden, 2001).

Musical elements, such as timbre, form, and structure also were important. Practitioners providing an assessment or facilitating the teaching or execution of a
musical interaction should specifically inquire about preferences in this area. Lyrical song
differs significantly from African drums or pipe organ, and lack of consideration to this
area would have detrimental effects on the intended outcome.

Unanimously, the space, and for Adrian color as well, were extremely important.
Each spoke in terms of place, space and feeling, and how they would not have survived
their grieving if it weren’t for this aspect of the process. This intangible yet phenomenally
important element of their grieving process is best understood in terms of Langer’s
(1953,1957) description music, virtual time and its relationship to emotion. The nature of
music is not unlike the nature of life itself, and by extension, grief. “Music has import
and this import is the pattern of sentience-the pattern of life itself, as it is felt and directly
known.” (1953, p 31) The space created in virtual time is what enabled Betty to drift
back, Craig to work it out, Adrian to avoid, Ava to express, James to remember and
Meredith to bare her soul. For each, it helped regulate the flow of emotions, let them
work it out in a time and manner that fit their process, and their needs.
Once understood, a practitioner should prepare the bereaved for the emotional energy which will be consumed, as well as monitor, or, if these are self-directed efforts, have a caregiver check, the overall well-being of the person. The physical condition of a bereaved person is not always attended to with the same degree as that of a hospice patient. This study was based on 6 participants, two of whom have since died. It was clear that during our interviews their compromised health impacted their grief and that their grief had impacted their approach to self-care. Providers must be mindful of this relationship, as well as the status and functionality of those we try to serve.

A very important area to focus on is the power to distract through music. The results of this study indicate that it is more than just a mechanism for decreasing awareness of physical pain or taking a break from difficult emotion (Brown, 1992; Colwell, 1997; Hilliard, 2003; Krout, 2001) it is a critical component in how these adults learned to deal with their loss. It was imperative that each of them have the ability to initiate and rely on music as a means to distance themselves from their loss. Without the space, they would not have been able to examine and learn to cope with their losses. Discussion about this type of use should occur early on in the grief process, initiated by anyone on the care team of the bereaved, but especially by the bereavement counselor, spiritual care coordinator, social worker or music therapist. As these narrative indicated, the greatest need for distraction arises when a mourner is alone, surrounded by memories of a life altered. Helping them identify and learn how to employ music this way can help them work through difficult times and provide them with a sense of hope in dark moments.
Related to that is the effectiveness that guided imagery played in the healing of some of this group. Like the works of Bonny, (1978, 2002), Groke (2005), Mohan van Heerdan, (2003) and Nicholson (2001), this research found that the combination of music and guided imagery was very helpful in alleviated emotional, physical and spiritual distress. It is important to note that no guided imagery was facilitated or provided to these participants, but rather it was discussed in relation to their grief process. The significance for this is two-fold. First, these adults self-directed their efforts; there was no facilitator or guidance whatsoever. Secondly, for each, it was a very private activity. I think that recognition of the abilities of non-professionals to guide themselves successfully and perhaps less self-consciously is something that should be considered when helping mourners work through their loss. Encouraging people to try or to continue musically guided imagery can have very positive outcomes, and may offer an additional support to a person who may not participate in a facilitated session. Bolstering this with practical recommendations, like the use of photographs, and physical objects, can help strengthen the impact of the process, and encourage beginners to engage at a different level.

Continuing in the emotional vein, I think that there can be little doubt that music helped with the expression, recognition and coping with grief and high emotion of the participants. Listening, performance and reflection on the music and their emotions helped with the understanding of the loss, life review, bonding, communication and enhanced coping skills. (Krout, 2003; Krumhansl, 1997; Mramor, 2001; O’Callaghan, 2001; Starr, 1999). It also helped some strengthen ties to existing spiritual practices while assisting others with uncovering them. In some cases, the interaction with the music was
in itself a spiritual moment. I believe this relates back to the “sacred space” (Salman, 2001) created, which was key for the entire group.

A final area for consideration and practice is music’s complimentary status to other practices, like guided imagery, and the presence of other coping mechanisms in this study. Although identified as having a significant role in the grief process and healing of the participants, music was by no means the only means used by these people to cope. The bereaved of the study were complex individuals, and their grief was multifaceted. It stands to reason that other activities would be important avenues of expression, distraction, recognition and reflection. In addition to regular daily rituals, quilting, television watching, model construction and computer character creation were advanced as helpful additions to aid the healing. As practitioners, it is important to include questions about interests and activities to assessments and conversations, so that more comprehensive careplans and support can be given.

From a formal (and informal) educational standpoint, the findings of this study have a lot to offer adult education. The two main regions for discussion in relation to adult education from an academic perspective are constructivism and music as a way of knowing. Identified in the literature review as foundational areas for this study, it was gratifying to uncover multiple nuances threaded throughout the narratives which validated these concepts as supposed at the onset of the project.

The accountings of these articulate mourners tender another layer to the very comprehensive literature surrounding constructivism. As posited early in the study, both individual and socially constructed learning occurred during the grief period. The creation of knowledge from interactions between existing knowledge and new situations
(Von Glaserfeld, 1995) occurred as these mourners learned to cope with the vacancy left by the passing of a loved one and the subsequent alterations to many life patterns and behaviors. Adrian’s experience with music and grief was highly internal and individual; this, paired with his personal history of cognitive focus, presents a clear illustration of constructivism in the vein of Piaget (1972).

However, Adrian’s case (like everyone else’s) was also indicative of many socially constructed learning situations. The narratives and findings detail practices of reflection leading to understanding and meaning, (Shor, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978), as well as music as a viable, important way of knowing and making meaning across many plains. (Olson, 2005,2003; Kaltoft, 1990; Montello, 2002). James, Ava and Meredith offered compelling descriptions of the role of their religion and by extension faith community played in their expectations and participation with music as a coping mechanism in their grief process. The significance of song, especially Gospel to James and Ava, speaks to Purdue’s (2004), Rowland’s (1998) and Stephens et al. (1998) practices of utilizing a medium originating from within a social environment to encourage learning.

Inherent in institution of religion and in being a member of any community is a sense of history, expectation and understanding of how a process is supposed to happen and how one is expected to behave. For Meredith, her Irish Catholic upbringing and life within the community fostered a behavioral standard that she was expected to and herself expected to function within. The advent of Joe’s death tested these beliefs and created a scenario that her vision did not quite match. The spiritual nature of her religiosity, her use and comfort in the rituals of the church (especially hymns) reflect aspects of spiritual development that were significant for her healing. Her use of music during this time
created space for her to reflect, from both perspectives (the woman who was a solid member of the community and the woman who felt adrift from her sense of normalcy), and create meaning and understanding from her loss.

Truly, the learning which occurred in this study was individually and socially constructed. Additionally, context, identity, spirituality, culture and personal preferences all had a significant impact on the learning and coping which occurred for these participants. The parameters of this study created a powerful scenario in which to observe constructed meaning. Few experiences in life will affect people at such a fundamental level, challenging what and how they think about things, and more importantly, creating a setting which demands a means of learning to cope and understand the loss to be able to survive.

A facet for consideration, especially in light of the constructivist nature of the study, was that I asked the participants to perform or share their music with me as a part of the study. I was not formally acting as an educator or counselor in my role as researcher, but the process was quite healing for the participants, resulting in an educational or healing facilitating role that became a part of the research process, and a part of a mutually constructed knowledge. This was not designed or intended as an action research project, but did in fact facilitate changing. I believe this resulted from nature of narrative inquiry and story telling, and the communal aspects of the study.

As can be gleaned from the above example, in this study, constructivism created space for a specific type of knowing, also created and understood individually and socially: music. Driven by a perspective that knowing is related to making sense or meaning of something (Olson, 2003), the analysis of the descriptive tales highlighted
many ideas discussed in the literature of music as a way of knowing and learning. Continuing from the previous discussion surrounding constructivism, the expansion of this theoretical paradigm to include a greater understanding of meaning making through music and emotion offers adult educators another way to reach their students. From a formal standpoint, this not only adds another layer to the literature available for scholarly critique and comment, but it also can be intentionally incorporated to as a means of connecting with and attending to the different aspects of the learner. In may also be a means for creating a community formally or informally, to illustrate a particular element of their learning, or, in itself, be the point.

The importance of the emotional aspect of music, especially in relation to learning and coping during grief was extremely important. Beyond just reinforcing ideas presented by other authors, (Allen, 1995; Confer-Owens, 1992; Elliot, 2005; Montello, 2002; Langer, 1957, 1953; Olson, 2003), this study provided specific areas that impact not only how the learning happened, but areas for teachers to consider. For example, the discussion surrounding the use of music for expression, distraction and as a catalyst for reflection is very important. Not only is it a way that music facilitated coping and subsequent learning about the death and grief, it has the potential to be expanded as a mechanism for other types of losses which occur to adult learners. Additionally, for educators sharing knowledge on the topic with adult educators, musicians, therapists or other learners, it is important to realize the qualities and relationships music has with life and its events.

Identity, community, culture and spirituality need to be thought of in a similar fashion. James and Ava were the penultimate example of the interconnectedness and
possibilities that music can have in the life, loss and learning of an individual. They each verbalized strong connections with music, and verbalized how it helped them after the loss of Bel, and in times throughout life. The present a compelling case of how music not only helped them communicate with each other, but also to express their culture (Kaltoft, 1990; Olson, 2003; Tisdell, 2003, 2006), spirituality (Hecht et al, 2003; Stewart, 1997; Tisdell, 2003) and identity. They, as well as the other participants, gave a multitude of examples which outline how their experience can be extrapolated to illustrate an innate knowing and learning through music.

A specific point to note, especially in relation to the education of grief counselors concerns Morgan’s (1993) assertion that the bereaved suffers from the absence of the relationship and mourns the loss of a part of themselves as much as the loss of the deceased. The findings relating to identity discussed earlier in this chapter absolutely support this observation and raise a highly significant area for all educators; it is far more than just a sense of loss that impacts a learner who has experienced the death of a loved one. There is a measurable shockwave that pervades almost every aspect of the bereaved, on physical, emotional, and psychosocial levels, manifesting in disruptions in unimagined places. We must all have understanding of this, as death and other major losses will not influence professionals being trained to provide support, but also learners that we encounter every day. The power that music had in the lives of my participants, especially in overcoming the intensity of identity displacement should not be overlooked or relegated to a secondary position. Music may not be the content matter of the educator reading this, but we each should be aware that it can be a vital element in the learning and healing of a profound loss.
In the end, each participant realized that there is no end. Grief changes as life changes. For each, by our last conversations, and for some, in death, they had reached a place of celebration. The pain never completely fades, it just recedes enough to allow life to reenter again. Music was part of that pain, part of the joy and definitely, part of the healing.

Suggestions for Future Research

Immersing myself in the literature which informed this study, especially within the area of music and adult bereavement, helped identify several key areas to be addressed by future research. Additionally, the process and findings of this study uncovered several new areas to investigate. Certainly, empirical studies of bereaved adults are needed. Most studies focus on children and adolescents or on patients and families prior to death. More research, with narrowed participant pools designed to capture important variances among age, gender, social class, etc. could also help provide information helpful in serving specific bereaved populations. Additionally, attention to areas intentionally left out of this research, such as families as a unit, adults currently enrolled in a bereavement program, adults that never had an affiliation with a hospice or bereavement support and those who may suffer from exaggerated mental or emotional disturbance could offer great insight to the literature.

Another area of focus could be the exploration of music or another arts-based practice on the grieving which results from a non-death loss. Divorce, bankruptcy, empty nest syndrome, illness, unemployment and debilitating illness are just a few of the major losses that people mourn in their daily lives. A greater understanding of the dynamics of the processes that affect these people, and if music and the arts intersect with their coping
and learning, could be largely significant for educators and facilitators of therapy and counseling alike.

Approaching this type of research from a different paradigm and methodology could also be largely influential, to both the literature of adult education as well as healthcare (hospice, music therapy, counseling, etc.). This project could have very easily been a longitudinal action research or heuristic study, or based in transformative learning or phenomenology. Different nuances could be vetted out or new/different finding uncovered which could add to the body of literature and add a new perspective to the theoretical grounding or the content areas of the study.

Lastly, an area of research that I have personal interest in is the relationship of the music and the musician, versus music for the non-musician. This study reinforces that learning through musical means can occur for musicians and non-musicians alike, through both performance and listening. But I am curious if there is a difference in expectation of music as a learning, or in this case, coping mechanism between those who have a high level of familiarity and fluency with music and those who don’t. And would the existence, or absence, of an expectation have significant impact on a previously identified learning activity, as opposed to the nonformal, survival tool it was in this study?

Final Reflections

This project has been of great significance to me. I have lost many loved ones in the past few years, some expected, some not. Working in hospice has helped me develop a healthy philosophy about death and dying, but each loss has left me changed, and to some degree, still changing. Participation in this research has afforded me a rare
opportunity to gain further insight into the worlds that I love: music, hospice and education. It has also enabled me to share in the deeply personal journeys of six wonderful people, who included me in private moments and reminded me that sometimes the threads that weave humanity together the tightest are the unspoken and unsung.

This study, like life and grief and music, is a process. There is no culmination, no final resting place. It is composed of the sounds and silences, rhythms and pauses, energy and quiet of all who were a part of it. Where it goes from here will depend largely on who it resonates with and what direction it moves them. For me, there is a deeper sense of rightness in the path that I have chosen in life. To hear and bear witness to the healing and learning that music can offer and to know its import in the quality of life, death and grieving of some of the families touched by hospice motivates me to continue in this vein. It is also my way to honor those who have taught, and continue to teach me, by sharing their daily song.
References


*Musik Therapy, 8*, 47-60


AAT 3162985


Freeman L; Caserta M; Lund D; Rossa S; Dowdy A; Partenheimer A. (2006). Music thanatology: Prescriptive harp music as palliative care for the dying patient. American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine, 23(2), 100-104.


Lawrence Erlbaum Associates


Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc.


Harvard University Press.


*New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 107*, 13-21.


*Death Studies, 26*, 367-385.


*Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 137-145.


Tisdell, E. (2005). In the new millennium: The role of spirituality and the cultural imagination in dealing with diversity and equity in the higher education classroom. *Teachers College Record*, retrieved from:

http://www.tcrecord.org/PrintContent.asp?ContentID=12223mime text.


VITA

Francesca Albergato-Muterspaw

Prior to her doctoral studies, Francesca earned her baccalaureate degree in music from Georgian Court University, with a secondary concentration in psychology. She earned her masters degree in music history from Rutgers University and has completed coursework in nursing.

She has practiced as a professional musician for the last 14 years and served as a private tutor and adjunct music professor and conductor for Georgian Court University. Additionally she has been a hospice educator and professional for the last ten years. Currently, she is the executive director for the local office of Odyssey HealthCare, the nation’s largest provider of hospice services. In addition to supervising the operations and clinical integrity of the program, she routinely provides end of life education for physicians, hospitals and long term care providers, as well as staff education and community in-services.

In 2007 she co-authored Passion and politics through song: Recalling music to arts-based debates in adult education, published in The arts and social justice: Re-crafting adult education and community cultural leadership (Clover and Stalker, Eds). She has also presented on the role of music in end of life care at the Pennsylvania Hospice and Palliative Care Conference in 2006 and at smaller regional conferences throughout New Jersey and Pennsylvania during 2007 and 2008.