

Chapter 1: Entering the World of Families of Missing People

1.1 Introduction

For most Australians the world of missing persons is a programme on the television (TV) or an article in the newspapers. These media events provide a fleeting glimpse into what is being experienced by those left behind, often through pleas for assistance in finding their loved one. The viewers or readers then move on to the next story that captures their attention. For the families involved, their world seems frozen at a moment in time, as they live with the ambiguity over the outcome of the missing family member. The world of the family of a missing person is shattered by this experience. Roles change, relationships change, and literally their world as they knew it ceases to exist (Kauffman, 2002). The family find themselves endeavouring to make meaning of the situation even when it may appear hopeless.

This is the experience that many families of missing persons live with when they have a long-term missing person in their family. They need to find a new way to understand the composition of their family. Meaning-making is an existential challenge families discover when confronted with the disappearance of a loved one. This challenge is experienced differently by each family member, making the traumatic situation even more complex across the intimate relationships between members of the family group.

1.1.1 A Cultural History of Missing Persons

The incidence of people going missing has been documented in the pages of history over many centuries. One of the early documented stories is in the pages of the Old Testament (Genesis chapters 37–50) when Joseph went missing. The story revealed the emotional impact of Joseph's disappearance on his father Jacob as well as on his brothers who were implicated in his disappearance. The story of Joseph has been

popularised by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* (Webber, 1968).

Australia had a particular cultural history of missing persons during early settlement. For example, during the nineteenth century the idea of losing one's child in a strange and silent country reflected the depth of the non-Aboriginal settlers' distrust of their new land and its Aboriginal inhabitants. Pierce (1999) explored this loss experience in *The Country of Lost children—An Australian Anxiety*. In this book, Pierce (1999) drew on a wide range of sources from poetry, fiction and newspaper reports to paintings and films. Paintings such as those by Fred McCubbin entitled 'Lost' (depicting a little girl) and 'Little Boy Lost' portray images of children alone in bushland settings. This reinforced in the minds of the Europeans the notion of the bush being a dangerous place for innocent children. Missing Anglo-Australian children have been the subject of books and films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* set on the outskirts of Melbourne, Victoria and *Evil Angels*, which explores the plight of a baby allegedly taken by dingoes (native dogs) at Uluru (Ayers Rock, Central Australia).

In highlighting the cultural and moral implications of the lost child in Australian history, Pierce (1999) illuminates a crucial aspect of our present condition. Hearing about a lost child in the news raises the level of anxiety and fear in the hearts and minds of parents. The image of a helpless, vulnerable lost child is horrific but for the public today it is a passing news item. For the family of the lost child, it is a state of constant agony, overwhelming anxiety, sadness and despair. The lost child of modern urban Australia is a victim of non-Aboriginal society through abuse, abandonment or abduction. Each of these situations is associated with some of the horror involved in cases of missing children. It is not only in Australia that children become the victims of abuse, abandonment and abduction. Trafficking of children and adolescents, who are lost to their parents, is an international problem. The International Social Service Australia (ISS) is active in this field and defends children's rights and connect families across the world.

Irrespective of the century, the country or the circumstances that caused a child or adult to be missing, the emotional impact of this kind of loss can be overwhelming for the families involved. While missing children are often portrayed in the media, there are numerous stories of families as in the Second World War who received the telegram, ‘missing—presumed dead’. Families tell of their unwillingness to give up the hope that their loved one is still alive somewhere—though when the war ended, the hope faded, but the pain of that unresolved loss continued (Boss, 1999). Searching, it would seem, is the primary response to find people who are lost or even things that go missing. In the past, there were no opportunities to search widely for missing family members, but today with modern technology and communication systems, the search process can extend beyond national boundaries.

1.1.2 The Media’s Influence

Whenever there is concern for the safety or general well-being of a missing person, family members in New South Wales (NSW) are likely to notify the Police Missing Persons Unit. This sets in motion a chain of events aimed at finding the missing person. Frequently, this can involve the media supporting the police by reporting the details on TV, radio and in the press. This is particularly the case where a child or young person is involved. The Australian media’s active involvement has been demonstrated in cases such as the most recent disappearance of Kiesha Abrahams from her home in a Sydney NSW outer metropolitan suburb (Cuneo, 2010). Such stories frequently report on the time and energy of families spent searching for their missing person.

1.1.3 Studies on the Population of Missing Persons

The international and national data on missing persons has been informed by the families who have responded to researchers in their attempts to build a picture of who goes missing, how, when and why. These findings have helped service providers become aware of the risk factors associated with people going missing. The focus of the studies has been on the population of missing persons (Biehal & Wade, 2004; Henderson & Henderson, 1998).

Little is known about the experience of families whose loved one has gone missing. This lack of understanding is shared by many healthcare providers with whom the family is likely to come in contact with, such as counsellors and other support service providers, which leads to instances of inadequate provision of support to families. This research seeks to address this deficit by understanding how they make meaning in their lives with the experience of a missing family member. To understand something of this experience, a trauma, loss and grief perspective is used to explore the familial world of missing people.

1.2 Purpose of the Research

The Australian and international research has not explored the lived experience of families experiencing loss, and death-focused bereavement models are not adequate where a death has not been confirmed. This thesis aims to directly address this gap by specifically exploring the experiences of those who have a family member who is missing. The following research question guides this study: *How do you as a family member (or friend) live with the experience of a loved one who is or has been missing?*

1.2.1 Definitions

Early literature on missing persons noted that the definition of a missing person differed between Australian State and Territory jurisdictions and between the key agencies involved in investigating or searching for missing persons. This added to the complexity of the task for the researchers, both those working in the field and those attempting to understand it. Thus, a decision was made by the National Advisory Committee on Missing Persons (NACMP) to provide a national definition. There are three definitions requiring explanation here: missing persons, missingness and the criteria used for this study as presented below.

1.2.1.1 *The Constitution of Long-Term Missing Persons for This Study*

In this research, the families who will be interviewed are those with someone who is a long-term missing person for more than six months. The long-term missing person will have been missing for more than six months. In that period, there has been no contact between the family and the missing person. The police will have listed them as a missing person. Not every missing person is reported to the police or the other non-government tracing agencies.

There are various definitions of who constitutes a missing person and a report *Missing People* (Henderson and Henderson, 1998) describes the law enforcement definition:

A missing person is anyone who has been reported to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and where there are concerns for the safety or concerns for the welfare of that person. (p, 2)

The second is a 'milder' definition Missing ... is when you are concerned because you cannot find someone (NACMP,2002, p.1).

A further definition arose from the work of Boss (2006) in her development of the ambiguous loss model where she explained:

If family members are physically absent but psychologically present, or physically present but psychologically absent, we label the situation as one of ambiguous loss. (p. 7)

The experience of the families of missing persons can be defined as having someone physically absent but psychologically present. The missing person is in the hearts and minds of the family. Boss's definition is a statement of fact and allows for the ambiguity over the missing person's status, i.e. not knowing whether the missing person is alive or dead.

While missing person describes the action of the individual, Biehal et al. (2003) (cited in James et al., 2008) describe a continuum of missingness. This was developed to overcome a problem encountered in the United Kingdom (UK) using the terms 'voluntary' missing and 'involuntary missing'. The continuum of missingness that Biehal et al., proposed 'ranges from intentional to unintentional

absence with intervals spanning unintentional absence and forced' (James et al., 2008, p. 18). This term missingness has been chosen as a generic word to describe the overall experience of families with a missing person. Therefore the definition used in this study is:

Long-term missing ... is when people are concerned because they have not been able to find someone who has disappeared for at least six months and that person is still physically absent but psychologically present to the family.

Generally, in Australia terms like 'go missing', 'gone missing' and 'went missing' are likely to be used to describe the behaviour of the person who disappears. Some people may think of these terms as slang, but they have tended to become part of everyday speech and as such will find expression in this thesis.

1.3 Overview of Thesis

The research reported in this thesis sets out to examine the impact of the missing person on families and how they live with and make meaning of this experience. Making meaning of the family's experience of a person missing can involve complicated, ambiguous and traumatic loss, providing a framework for the stories of the participants.

1.4 Overview of the Chapters

The current chapter provides the background to the research and overview of what is covered. It reveals why this particular study on families of missing persons was undertaken. The chapter also defines the population of long-term missing persons whose families are the subject of this research.

Chapter 2 will discuss the international and national studies on missing persons, beginning with missing children. The chapter explores the overseas statistics and the government policies that have been implemented both overseas and in Australia. It then goes into more detail with the major Australian statistics and reports. This includes the Commonwealth Government reports as well as those from the various

state jurisdictions and non-government organisations. The chapter highlights the many initiatives that have occurred especially in NSW with the Police Force and the Department of Justice and Attorney General Missing Persons Unit.

The studies on trauma, loss, grief and bereavement will be reviewed in Chapter 3. The chapter examines the changing emphasis that has occurred with the early grief stage or phase models being called into question. The chapter explores the concept of ambiguous loss as a framework for the loss related to missing persons as well as the other recent developments that might be applied to the grieving families. This chapter will reveal the lack of research on trauma, loss and grief from the perspective of families of missing people.

Chapter 4 presents the qualitative research design and methods chosen for this work. The choice of narrative inquiry as the overall methodology for the research, with a particular emphasis on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as the framework to shape the study, is explained. The chapter includes a description of the methods, the analysis techniques as well as the limitations of the study.

Each of the participants is introduced in Chapter 5. The aim is to provide a picture of the family from which the person disappeared to get a sense of the environment in which the participants were met and where the interview took place. It also provides a snapshot of the relationship that developed as the interview unfolded and I entered their world for a short time. From these stories emerged narrative themes and threads that tell of the lived experience of families of missing persons that provided the data for analysis.

In Chapter 6, the analysis will report on understanding the universal experience of families of missing people using three themes. The first theme is the common elements, which are common to all families of missing people. The second theme reveals the cost factor, and in this section, a number of threads examine the toll of having a person missing from the family. Family members found themselves on an emotional rollercoaster and many suffered severe physical and emotional health problems. The third theme explores Coping styles and how some people make

meaning out of their experience, while others seem to be frozen in their reaction and unable to move on. The chapter also explores the way government agencies have helped or hindered families in managing their loss.

In Chapter 7, two themes are explored: known outcomes and unknown outcomes. From the known outcomes, there are those that are expected and unexpected. A number of threads make up the picture of families in what is the most painful section of the stories presented by the participants and particularly those with an unknown outcome. When there was a known outcome and the remains of the missing person were discovered, this frequently raised more concerns for the family than it solved. Uncovering information about what had probably occurred to a family member left participants, years later, still affected by these memories.

The concluding Chapter 8 draws together the themes of the narratives and examines how families are living with the experience of a missing person. The chapter identifies how this study can inform policies and therapeutic practice to assist this population. Limitations of the study are also presented, along with future directions for research. This final chapter raises the possibility of developing a grief of missingness model to be investigated further, which explores and addresses the needs of those who work with this population.

A number of suggestions are made as to future research possibilities. This study has highlighted the physical and emotional cost to the family, and this dimension could be investigated further. A focused study on the reactions of the families where the remains have been discovered is important. The impact on the family where the Coroner pronounces the missing person dead is another area of investigation.

Embarking on a journey with people whose lives have been shattered by the loss of someone they love who is missing causes one to realise we all live with ambiguity. How the families of missing people have lived with that experience is what they have shared with me in the conduct of this research. At the outset, I want to honour and respect their stories, acknowledge their pain and hope, in the telling of their story, they found new meaning in their experience

Chapter 2: Studies of Missing People

2.1 Introduction

Throughout history and throughout cultures people have been reported as missing. However, this has not been matched by a concern to understand why this occurs, and the impact this event will have on family and friends of the missing person. The kind of questions exercising the minds of families of missing persons, as well as the police, are why and when the person had gone missing, and where are they now. Understanding the nature of the questions and trying to make meaning of such a traumatic event is an ongoing experience until some resolution occurs. Trying to fit this into a coherent picture is like trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle when some of the parts are missing. The aim of this research is to add further pieces to the puzzle of missingness by understanding the lived experience of families with a long-term missing person. These are people who have been missing for six months or more and there has been no contact with the family.

2.2 Chapter Outline

This chapter will explore the studies in relation to missing persons. This will provide a backdrop to the primary focus of this study, the lived experience of families of missing persons. To understand the experience of the families a broad survey of the studies on missing persons internationally and nationally will give an appreciation of the settings from which missing people come. It will also report on the current service provision within Australia to meet the needs of families.

As a prelude to the primary focus of this research—the lived experience of families of long-term missing persons—the studies relating to missing persons are examined. The section will show how the research process on missing people has gathered momentum since the 1980s. In reviewing the studies, it will reveal the gaps in relation to the topic under investigation.

2.3 Entering the World of Missing People

This review commences where the research interest on missing persons began: with missing children. This reflects both an international and then national perspective. More recently, there has been a growing concern for missing adults primarily through terrorist attacks and natural disasters. In exploring the Australian literature on missing adults and the research findings published in this area, the questions of who, when, why and how people go missing will frame the discussion. This is the context in which the family embarks on the experience of living with a person who is missing. The research undertaken on missing persons in Australia will then be critiqued. Finally, an exploration of services available to family and friends is presented including the limitation of current models. This will be followed by a discussion of some of the risk factors found to be important in trying to prevent people becoming a missing person. The review will conclude with some of the lessons learned and why this particular research is a response to an expressed need.

2.3.1 Missing Children: An Identified Concern

An examination of overseas research demonstrated that historically and chronologically the development of the issues surrounding missing persons and their families began with missing children. While missing children are not the focus of this research, the interest in and concern for missing children initiated the broader investigation of adult missing persons. When a child goes missing, the impact of that loss can be overwhelming and the grief unrelenting for the families involved. These intense reactions are similar to those experienced by families when a child dies (Rando, 1986). The need for understanding the reasons why children went missing prompted government bodies and non-government agencies in the Western world to explore this phenomenon. What might seem to be a fairly straightforward concept to investigate was discovered to be a far more complex topic.

The research on missing children began in the United States of America (USA), which followed by the UK and to a lesser extent by Australia, since the 1980s (Swanton, 1988). In 1988, the USA made significant changes in the juvenile justice

system to manage the problem of missing children. Their first national report on missing children in the USA was the *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway and Thrownaway Children* (NISMART 1) (Finkelhor, 1990), which reported the number of children who go missing, by year, who are still missing and those who were recovered. They were able to indicate the major categories of missing child episodes and found that children to be missing for many reasons. The American researchers were hampered in their reporting because there was no standard definition of what constituted a missing child. The problem of definition for both children and adults who are missing has been an ongoing difficulty for national and international jurisdictions.

To overcome this deficit a further and more comprehensive American national study was undertaken (NISMART 2). This study defined a number of categories describing the circumstances in which children go missing. The researchers recognised that since not all missing children or young people are reported to police or other non-government agencies, they needed a broader representative sample, which the methodology provided (Sedlak, 2002, p. 2). Defining the categories of missing children was a goal of the study. Wilson (cited in Hanson, 2000), the Acting Administrator, writing in the *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, stated that the second NISMART study (Sedlak, 2002):

Will provide vital data on the incidence of missing children in eight categories: runaway/throwaway, nonfamily abduction, family abduction, custodial interference, lost and involuntarily missing, missing due to injury, missing due to false alarm situations and sexually assaulted while missing. (Wilson, 2000, p. 1)

This second study was a major project that involved surveying approximately 16,111 households ‘using computer-assisted telephone methodology to collect information on missing child episodes from both adults and youths’ (Sedlak, 2002, p. 2) in the 10–18 year old age range. The researchers recognised that there were limitations to this type of study as there could be other children who go missing who were living in homes without telephones. Other undercounted children may not have been living in the home at the time of study; amongst these could be homeless families or street children whose numbers were unknown.

Despite the limitations of this study, a wealth of information was collected from these national household surveys of adults and youths. The researchers were able to estimate the number of missing children by combining this data with a law enforcement study and one with the juvenile facilities caring for children and young people. The aim was with this breadth of coverage they would better understand the problem of the missing children in America. The NISMART 2 study then defined a missing child in two ways. First in terms of those who went missing from their caretakers ('caretaker missing') and second, in terms of those who were missing from their caretakers and reported to an agency for help in locating them ('reported missing') (Sedlak, 2002, p. 3).

What was of interest in this research was how short a time a child was considered missing from the caretaker's perspective and as defined in this study. The child was deemed missing if they were absent for at least one hour or more and the parent/caretaker was concerned. This definition included young people up to the age of 18 years. However, to be included in these 'caretaker missing' categories they had to fit the missing 'episode type' criteria, which they defined as:

- Non-family abduction,
- Family abduction,
- Runaway/throwaway,
- Missing involuntary lost or injured and
- Missing benign explanation (Sedlak, 2002, p. 3).

2.3.2 Missing and Exploited Children

A more disturbing category of children are those who went missing or were abducted for purposes of exploitation. In the USA, a not-for-profit organisation known as the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* (NCMEC) was established in 1984 and has operated under a Congressional mandate in cooperation with the Office of Juvenile Justice. The focus of activity for this private, not-for-profit organisation is 'to find missing children, reduce the incidence of sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimisation' (NCMEC, 2011, p. 1). The practical expression of this mission is through NCMEC's 24-hour multilingual hotline and child pornography tipline. It soon became clear that this was a global problem involving children, and the USA

discovered that steps were already being taken to coordinate a plan of action to deal with this. The European Union many years prior had raised concerns about the plight of missing persons and developed preliminary policies for dealing with it.

2.3.3 European Union Recommendation

As far back as 1971, the European Union recognised a lack of a unifying database on missing persons as an international problem. In 2005 representatives from twenty countries in the United Nations, European Union institutions and the Council of Europe participated in the first-ever U.S./European Summit on Missing and Exploited Children. This was reported in the newsletter of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (2006). This centre is an important link in the search for children and young people who are missing and are forced into the network of human trafficking. The centre in Europe is called Child Focus (2006) and is a Belgian foundation. For the past seven years, they have provided a 24-hour, seven days a week service. The centre actively supports investigations into disappearance, abduction, or sexual exploitation of children. As with most websites, they post details of missing children and young people, giving details of when and where they disappeared and showing a photograph. These young people from parts of Europe, countries of the former Russian Communist bloc, Asia and Africa are often transported across national borders making the search more difficult.

2.3.4 Missing Children in the UK

Concern for children, which prompted action in the USA, was being expressed in the UK where the government took action to investigate the problem.

The Government in the UK was expressing concern for children who are missing, and they commissioned a report that was undertaken by Utting (1997). Their brief was to review the safeguards that were in place for children living away from home. These children could have been in foster care or residential care or homeless.

In response to this review, the UK Government through the Department of Health commissioned further research from the University of York's Social Exclusion Unit.

The aim of the research was to provide an evidence base on which to develop guidelines for local authorities, police and their partner agencies (Biehal, 2004).

This team's work involved conducting a survey of all English local authorities and voluntary agencies. The survey comprised 60 local agencies and six voluntary agencies 'that provide or are developing services for under 16s away from home' (2004, p. 6). For the purposes of the study they defined running away as young people under sixteen (from the family home) or under eighteen (in care/accommodation) 'who spend time away from home either without permission or having been forced to leave by their parents or carers' (Biehal, 2004). This definition is similar to that used in *Young Runaways in the UK* (Stein, 2002) and that used in the American NISMART 2 study.

The Police Research Unit in the UK expressed concern about the issue of missing persons and the way the reporting was handled by the various forces and initiated a research project, *Missing Presumed ...? The Police Response to Missing Persons* (Newiss, 1999). There was the suggestion that while people are reported missing regularly, it was not seen as having a high priority as a police function. The foreword to the report said:

It [the report] comes at a time when many forces are recognising the need to review missing person policy and to have in place procedures to ensure the appropriate response to each disappearance. The research examines the common elements of the police response to the report of a missing person, and raises important strategic issues which need to be considered by all forces. (Newiss, 1999, p. iii)

A questionnaire was sent to the 46 police forces throughout the UK. From these, nine forces were selected and an interview conducted with key personnel in each area, which included the London Metropolitan Police Force. By far the greatest number of people who were missing was from the metropolitan (Greater London) area and was similar to the statistics from the larger cities in the USA (Newiss, 1999).

It was clear from the report that the repeat runaways were given lower priority by the police. The research noted that police were faced with a number of key considerations when responding to a report of a missing person. When reporting they must consider:

The wellbeing of the missing person; respect for the right of an individual to go missing; compassionate treatment of the relatives and friends of missing persons; likelihood that the missing person may have been the victim of serious crime; preservation and management of evidence in suspicious cases; and appropriate level of resources for each individual report. (Newiss, 1999, p. 9)

The report revealed that there was a lack of training for staff and that front-line civilian counter staff were often ill-prepared for the decisions they made, or more regularly did not make, in relation to the reporting of a missing person. Interviews discovered that there were marked differences in how the various police forces throughout the country responded to missing person reports.

The Newiss (1999) report found there was often confusion in the ranks of the police forces as to who was administratively responsible for recording the details of a missing person and then initiating a response to that notification. They recommended that there be a designated officer who is responsible. It was thought that such a designated police person would be able to develop positive relationships with appropriate authorities in the community as well as with the units in the force such as child protection units, domestic violence teams, etc. While this report was a research project examining police procedures in reporting and responding to missing persons, if correct protocols were in place those families affected by a missing person would have had greater confidence in the police service and some of their anxiety would be alleviated. Reporting a person missing to the police is in itself mentally and emotionally challenging. The recognition of these reactions by the authorities and the possibility of a person designated to assist the families of missing people would be a major step forward.

2.3.5 Summary of Children's Issues

This literature review began by describing the research and support services with the most vulnerable—children. What is clear from these studies is that the problem of missing children is something that affects people internationally and nationally. The reports give the reader an understanding of the complexity of the problem in relation to these children. What has been highlighted in most of the studies is that there is not

any uniformity in reporting procedures or consultation between state jurisdictions about missing people. The numerous reasons as to why children go missing revealed that there is not just one solution to the problem. In the main, children do not voluntarily go missing whereas the reports suggest teenagers are more likely to do so. The literature on youth homelessness has shown that many young people elect to leave home to escape violence and abuse. This is seen as one of the major risk factors for missing young people in the reports from the USA, the UK and within Australia.

Children who are missing, however, are the victims of situations beyond their control, and the problem is initiated mostly by adults. Reports of abductions, procurement of children for sexual gratification, or for work as child labourers are illustrations of the problem. The reasons that may force a family to give up a child may be different depending on the country of origin of the child and perhaps the impoverished circumstances of the family, but there is limited reference as to how this impacts on the families involved. As has been shown, most of the studies reported on in this study have been conducted in the developed countries of the West. It is interesting that the concern for missing people began with missing children. Does this suggest that children from Western society are more highly valued than elsewhere on the globe? It may be that there are different priorities in underdeveloped countries where adverse economic conditions mean many people are impoverished. Anecdotally and from observation of TV programs where children are reported missing as in natural disasters, the pain of the families irrespective of country of origin is clearly manifest.

The findings from these studies have been obtained mainly from families of missing people and important as that is, the gap in the studies exploring the impact that having a missing minor on the families involved is apparent. This will also be shown to be the case with missing adults. Government initiatives and non-government agencies in the USA, the UK and Australia have sought to understand the reasons why children and young people go missing. This knowledge has raised the level of awareness of why they go missing, but unfortunately, it has not stopped this practice involving children who are the most vulnerable in society. This awareness raising has prompted the need to understand why adults go missing. Catastrophic natural

disasters and man-made disasters have impacted many communities, and these introduce another dimension to the world of missing people generally. In America, two of these disasters were the New York terrorist attack of 9/11 and Hurricane Tracey (2005), which brought the plight of families of missing persons to the forefront of people's thinking both in North America and worldwide.

2.3.5.1 World Trade Center and Missing Persons

After the September 11, 2001 (9/11) disaster at the World Trade Center in New York City, groups formed spontaneously to support each other and the families of those who had a loved one reported missing. There were a number of websites that also appeared—some of which referred to missing persons. One such website was the New Jersey State Police site, which listed 539 missing persons. Some months after the 9/11 tragedy, the police authorities in New Jersey decided to leave the names on the website after it had closed as a memorial to these missing persons. The names on this list were just one of a number that was compiled by other New York organisations both government and non- government. There have been various estimates about the number of people missing, and it may be that we will never know the exact numbers. Boss (2006) talked of her own experience of the September 11th disaster:

After 9/11 I studied ambiguous loss from terrorism and the agony caused by loved ones' vanishing physically without a trace. Nearly 3,000 innocent people disappeared that September morning while the nation looked on in disbelief. But the relatives and friends of loved ones who never came home that night were numb with shock and helplessness. (Boss, 2006)2006, p. 37)

In this disaster, if the person had been in the World Trade Center at the time, families and friends probably knew what had happened to their loved one in the attack. What was missing was the body of the person to confirm their death. This is in contrast to the many children and adults who go missing around the world whose whereabouts are unknown.

Tragic though the terrorist attacks in 2001 were, the horror of the event did raise the awareness of the public to families of missing persons. One article talked of The Long Funeral—How 9/11 gave way to a grief culture, 'and there were the dead, their

faces on posters when everyone knew they would never be found' (Homans, 2006). This grief culture in New York was an attempt to come to terms with catastrophic losses of so many missing people. The reactions of people in New York were reminiscent of the outpouring of grief worldwide over the tragic death of Princess Diana (31/8/1997) and the shooting of John F. Kennedy (22/11/1963) years earlier. Despite the impact of the 9/11 event it did not lead U.S. authorities to develop a national strategy for managing the aftermath of such disasters. This lack of preparedness added to the stress that many families experienced who suffered dislocation following Hurricane Katrina (2005) and searching for missing family members and friends. Both 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina were a grim reminder that missingness not only affects individuals but communities with dire consequences. It also reminds us that for families affected by any form of disaster, that in preparation for such an event, a management plan is a necessity.

2.3.5.2 Natural Disasters

Australia discovered how not knowing where loved ones were located adversely affected individuals and communities in 1974 when Cyclone Tracey devastated Darwin, Northern Territory (NT). The impact was so severe that 'most of the population of 45,000 had been left homeless' (Raphael, 1986, p. 16). The effects of the cyclone meant that more than 35,000 were evacuated to southern cities, and a problem arose when surviving family members were evacuated to different parts of the country. This was frequently accompanied with severe traumatic reactions, 'death, destruction, loss and grief were compounded by the loss of the familiar environment, which is part of the individual identity and the fabric of the social system' (Raphael, 1986, p. 19).

For the families knowing who was alive and who was missing was made more difficult because virtually all communications systems were destroyed. Natural disasters like fire, floods, cyclones and hurricanes occur regularly in various parts of Australia. The Darwin disaster revealed the lack of preparedness for such an event and prompted governmental action at the national, state and territory level. Natural disasters and man-made disasters where large numbers of people are involved add a

different organisational dimension to the whole concept of missing people and require appropriate policies and procedures to manage them. Since Cyclone Tracey, Australia has been impacted by a whole series of natural and man-made disasters and on each occasion the lessons learned have improved the effectiveness of the preparedness. A Disaster Preparedness Plan has been developed to manage the situation, and training in Psychological First Aid for all emergency service personnel has been implemented. One of the results of any disaster is the possibility of the loss of life and in certain instances the damage sustained may mean that missing people may never be found.

In the USA the National Center for Missing Adults (NCMA) located in Arizona played a significant role in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, (2005), in assisting and supporting the 13,000 displaced people affected by the hurricane. The NCMA website reported that in November 2005 there were still 6644 missing people. In 2006 this not-for-profit organisation was in a precarious financial position and the work in Arizona closed its doors. However, a merger between a group called 'Let's bring them home' and NCMA has meant the work for and with missing adults has continued. The problem for many people with Hurricane Katrina was the not knowing whether family members and friends were alive or dead. This is always the major problem in the aftermath of a natural disaster where communities have been devastated. The notion of a loved one being missing and presumed dead takes a tremendous emotional toll on families.

In an effort to discover some of the reasons for people going missing and how the police can best manage the situation when this occurs led to a research project being undertaken in the UK.

2.3.6 National Missing Persons Helpline UK

The research that the National Missing Persons Helpline (NMPH) conducted in association with the University of York was able to utilise the NMPH database, which records all types of missing persons. This report, *Lost from View—A Study of Missing People in the UK* (Biehal, Mitchell & Wade, 2003), gathered a sample of

nearly 2000 cases of adults and young people reported missing to try and understand the reasons why people go missing. The authors reported that for adults, generally men are more likely to go missing than women. However, in the 13–17 years age bracket girls are more likely to go missing (Biehal et al., 2003). Further findings from the 2003 report suggested that males in their late twenties are more likely to disappear than any other group of adults. The most common reason for those people aged 60 years and over going missing is dementia, or mental health problems. The adult sample of 28 per cent who go missing sleep rough on the streets or in parks, as do two-fifths of young runaways. Adults are more likely to go missing if they are going through a crisis or a difficult transition, or if they are vulnerable due to chronic difficulties.

On the NMPH (2005) website, there is a reminder that people over the age of 18 years may choose to go away and break off contact with family and friends. Many of these people purposely leave abusive and often violent situations and have no desire for contact with anyone from the family or place they had left. The NMPH is bound by confidentiality and privacy laws not to reveal any details of these people other than the fact that they are still alive. These laws present particular problems for workers in the field adhering to confidentiality legislation.

One problem that was highlighted (Biehal et al., 2003) was the lack of a complete national database of all missing persons. At least one of the police forces, Gloucestershire, UK, had developed a joint protocol with the NMPH in that they agreed to share information on missing persons in their force area. This was particularly significant because some missing persons are not reported to police and yet may have been listed with the NMPH. In spite of the excellent work the NMPH had done over the years, problems arose and in 2005 it appeared as though the service would close, which caused some consternation with the public. The media announced that it was to close, and this caused broad-scale community dissatisfaction and the UK Home Office announced emergency funding would be provided (NMPH, 2005 online). In May 2007 the charity was relaunched as 'Missing People UK'. Since 2007 major policy changes in the organisation have occurred, and services have expanded. The media has been constructively involved in promoting

the work of and for missing people. In the process charitable organisations have become financially supportive. The website of missing people provided a wealth of information and links to other sites nationally and internationally.

This brief survey revealed how the research interest in missing people began in the USA and the UK and steps taken to understand whom and to some extent why people went missing. The knowledge gained was beneficial to the police and other government agencies in their endeavour to be of assistance to families of missing persons. They tended to deal only with organisational and practical issues that could be implemented through the development of policies and procedures. The support services for families tended to be limited to telephone help lines and websites and there was minimal face-to-face support.

We learned the facts associated with people going missing but little about the lived experience of these families of the long-term missing. The Missing Persons sector in Australia has moved in a different direction implementing a range of programs, which we will discover as we explore the developments in this country.

2.3.7 Missing People in Australia

While the studies from the USA and the UK show that this problem of missing people is not an isolated problem but universal in occurrence, understanding this from a local perspective is a necessity. The next section will provide more details on the Australian studies, particularly the work of Henderson and Henderson (1998) and James et al., (2008), the role of the federal and state police forces, as well as three PhD projects relating to missing people recently undertaken at local universities. The major developments for the benefit of families and friends of missing people that have occurred in NSW will also be reported on.

When the research was beginning overseas there was at the same time a growing interest in missing people in Australia. The first study on missing people in this country was gathered from police files (Swanton et al., 1988) and reported that the police investigated 23,783 incidents of people going missing. Seven years later in

1995 as part of the services of the Australian Federal Police, the National Missing Persons Unit (NMPU) was established primarily to provide a policy and coordination function. The NMPU, Canberra, commissioned a report to examine the ‘incidence, and the causes and consequences of people going missing’ (Henderson & Henderson, 1998, p. 2) and to assist in developing a benchmark of the issue. This seminal work by Henderson and Henderson was the first independent and comprehensive Australian study of missing people. Their work laid the foundation for much of what has followed in the sector. Their study entitled *Missing People—Issues for the Australian Community* randomly sampled 270 people who were reported missing to various state and territory police departments ‘over a six month period, September 1996–February 1997’ (Henderson & Henderson, 1998, p. 3). The interviews were conducted nationally by telephone with the aim of ‘examining the impacts of missing persons on the Australian community through a representative sample of families and friends’ (Henderson & Henderson, 1998, p. 1). The researchers found from their literature review that there was almost no information on missing persons, with the exception of teenagers, and the research available on missing persons was primarily from the USA and the UK. They therefore set about an in-depth exploration of a number of factors in relation to missing persons in Australia. The first of these being how many people go missing, followed by their defining characteristics. Australia, with its federal, state and territory governments, made the task of getting information difficult. There was no nationally uniform way of collecting data on missing persons, which they acknowledged limited the accuracy of their statistics. Similarly, without a national definition of what constitutes a missing person, their work was made more complex.

2.4 Why People Go Missing

Henderson and Henderson (1998, p. 6) in their report gave a list of possible reasons why people go missing. They included:

1. Missing presumed dead—people missing for many years even when there has been an extensive police investigation
2. Missing without reason—long-term missing people who simply disappear

3. Missing by design and missing to escape—mainly young people who intentionally go missing to escape abuse or some other negative school or family situation
4. Missing for adventure and missing—Who me?—people who fail to tell others of their intentions
5. Missing to suicide, missing again, missing to establish independence
6. Missing—lost or forgetful, missing—mental health issues
7. Missing—lost at sea, missing—overseas and parental abduction
8. Missing—separated by war.

These categories of missing remain the only categorisation of characteristics relating to missing people and are therefore referred to throughout this thesis.

The importance of this seminal Australian report for this study was that it introduced the varied costs to the family and the community when people go missing. They reported that:

For every case of a missing person an average of at least 12 people are affected in some way, either emotionally, by health or employment related impacts, effects on quality of life or on relationships, or a combination of some or all of these. (Henderson & Henderson, 1998, p. 1)

These are some of the hidden consequences and costs of someone going missing. They also indicated there was an economic cost to the family and the government when a person goes missing, which is often not taken into account. They are additional stressors to the already traumatic experience of a family living with a person who is missing.

In the fifteen years since its formation, circumstances nationally and internationally have meant that the NMPU has been enabled to expand its role significantly. The Australian Government provided an injection of an additional \$3.9m over four years, which commenced in 2006. The main purpose of the funding was to establish a National Missing Persons Coordinating Centre (NMPCC) to support a range of national activities, the aim being to improve responses to incidents of missing persons across all jurisdictions in Australia. In June 2006 the Australasian (Australia and New Zealand) Police Ministers' Council 'endorsed the national missing persons

policy which provides a framework for the progression of a range of initiatives' (James XVIII, 2008). In the 1988 report it was estimated that approximately 30,000 people go missing in Australia every year (Henderson, 1998). The most recent report *Missing Persons in Australia* (James et al., 2008, p. 13) estimated that there was an increase in that number and it is now approximately 35,000 people that go missing annually.

2.4.1 Who Goes Missing?

The James et al. (2008) report revealed the gender and age of people who go missing up to the age of 18 years. There are different reporting procedures about people who go missing from psychiatric hospitals and other hospitals, juvenile homes and detention centres. During the one-week period the national sample was conducted, 32 per cent of the 505 cases reported missing were from some kind of institution such as a children's home or a juvenile justice facility. The patterns in Australia are similar to those that occurred in the UK where teenagers who go missing from juvenile facilities are likely to abscond on a number of occasions. The report indicated that more children and young people go missing than adults.

The Australian statistics for the period 2005–06 showed that of those missing persons reported to police the majority were from the metropolitan areas of the larger states, NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Similar to the UK study more males aged 20–24 years went missing by design, and for those people 65 years and over going missing could be unintentional due to Alzheimer's, senile dementia, or other mental health problems. Twice as many young females in NSW went missing as young males (James, 2008). This number included young Aboriginal women who are amongst those most at risk.

James et al. (2008) commented 'that different reporting practices across jurisdictions make comparisons problematic' (2008, p. 14). While these statistics relate to reported missing persons there was still a proportion of the population of missing people who for various reasons were not reported to police. James et al. (2008) suggested that these people could be amongst the homeless in the community, or

people with mental health problems, Indigenous people, or people from culturally and linguistically different (CALD) backgrounds. There are a number of possible reasons why this group is not reported to police. One possibility could be that if an Indigenous family has had difficult dealings with the police, they may not feel comfortable making a report to them (Robertson, 2004; James et al., 2008). In a similar way people from non-English speaking backgrounds may not be aware of being able to report a person missing. The James report (2008) suggested one reason 'that people from CALD backgrounds with mental health problems may feel the associated stigma means that they just want to disappear' (James et al., 2008, p. 36) A series of pamphlets in the major languages of the major CALD group in Australia has been produced to address this problem and provide information to this population.

2.5 Defining Missing Persons

Prior to 2004 one of the problems confronting people working in this field was the definition of the term 'missing persons'. Law enforcement agencies and non-police tracing agencies such as the Salvation Army, Australian Red Cross, Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation and ISSs have no universally accepted definition. This is partly due to the fact non-government agencies deal with different groups of missing persons. For example, the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service is quite specific. Their aim is to 'locate family members, over 18 years of age, whose current whereabouts are unknown and who are being sought for purposes of re-uniting the family' (James, 2008, p. 4).

The definition used in Australia from 1998 is the law enforcement statement that has been accepted by the other agencies: 'a missing person is anyone who has been reported missing to police, whose whereabouts are unknown, and where there are concerns for the safety or concerns for the welfare of that person' (Henderson et al, 1998,p 2 James, 2008, p. 5). It was thought by the National Advisory Committee on Missing Persons (2002) that this definition was not 'consumer friendly', and a simpler shorter definition would be more accessible to the public. Therefore, while the formal definition is used by service agencies, the simpler 'consumer-friendly'

definition is 'Missing ... is when you are concerned because you can't find someone'. The committee came up with five elements of missing that expand on that consumer-friendly short definition. These are:

'Knowingly' missing ... when a person needs to disconnect; 'Unknowingly' missing ... when a person is unaware that someone is looking for them; 'At risk' missing ... when a person is at risk through suspicious/dangerous circumstances; 'Lost' and missing ... when a person is accidentally separated; 'Removed' and missing ... when a person is separated through policy, disaster or conflict. (NACMP, 2002, p, 2)

These elements of missing provide a number of categories into which a family reporting a person who has disappeared can be placed. These elements are useful; for instance, to the police because they then know where the responsibility for the investigation lies, since the disappearance of the person may not be a police matter. In NSW the counsellors in the Family and Friends of Missing Persons Unit (FFMPU) in the counselling unit are aided in the service they deliver to clients by knowing what element of missing person they are dealing with. While each of these elements of missing is an ambiguous loss, there are different issues raised by each one that need to be addressed to meet the therapeutic needs of the person seeking help.

2.6 NSW: Leading the Way for Australia

In Australia the most populated state, NSW, has been most actively involved in the plight of missing persons. The work of and for the families of missing persons has benefited greatly from three people who were awarded Churchill Fellowships. The first of these was Leonie Jacques (2002), then Senior Project Officer for the FFMPU. The title of her report was 'to study the international social policy response and provision of services for families, friends and significant others of people who are missing' (2002). Jacques (2002) reported:

Internationally there is a dearth of research into, and service delivery directed to, the families and friends of missing persons. However the issues which families and friends are to receive heightened attention at a state, national and international level. (p. 7)

The most significant development nationally was the establishment of a designated counselling service for families and friends of missing persons located in the NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General. In 2005, Sarah Wayland was the second

recipient in the sector to gain a Churchill Fellowship. At the time of the fellowship she was the counsellor at the FFMPU and the focus of her study tour ‘was to begin the development of a support framework to assist counsellors in understanding ways in which they could work with families of missing persons’ (2005, p. 8). The outcome of her study was the publication of a counselling framework entitled *Supporting Those Who Are Left Behind* (NMPCC, 2007). Wayland acknowledged the time spent with Professor Pauline Boss, herself a therapist, whose understanding of ambiguous loss (1999) in relation to missing people provided the basis of the five themes for working with families of missing persons.

The third person to be a recipient was Mark Samways (2006) from the NSW Police Force MPU. His focus was on risk assessment models, investigation methods, missing persons procedures and communication between law enforcement and non-government agencies. From the knowledge gained and shared by these three people nationally and in NSW the sector has been able to progress to the benefit of families and friends of missing people.

The NSW Police Force MPU, the MP Counselling Unit and the NSW Families and Friends of Missing Persons Committee (FFMPC) have worked constructively together to develop policies and procedures that are beneficial to all concerned. The FFMPC had been vocal in expressing concerns and this has led to a number of projects being initiated and the publication of literature relevant to their needs.

A problem facing some family members involved the legal implications that arise when a person goes missing, and this was brought to the attention of the FFMPC and action followed.

2.6.1 Legal Hurdles Families Face

At times family members are left financially embarrassed if money is in the name of the person who went missing, and for instance, the partner has no legal right to access the account. Up until recently it could take seven years before the family could gain access to things like money and property. Action by the FFMPC was

instrumental in getting the NSW government to respond to this expressed need. When a person goes missing, for whatever reason bills, school fees and mortgages have to be paid. These are some regular, everyday stressors for families whose loved one has gone missing. Knowing what to do and where to go for help on these kinds of matters prompted action from the committee. The particular problems associated with legal matters saw the FFMPC publish a booklet, *Missing Persons—A Map of Legal Issues for Family and Friends* (FFMPC, 2002). The NSW government has now reduced the time to three years when a person can be pronounced ‘missing presumed dead’ (JAGD, 2004). With additional legislative changes (2007) it is now possible for family members to gain access within a few months to the missing person’s finances and property. These legislative changes have been brought about by the FFMPC who have advocated on behalf of distressed families. The steps taken have minimised the stress on families.

2.6.2 Mental Health Association of NSW

The relationship between mental health issues and missing persons has been evident in all of the reports nationally and internationally. Having mental health problems is a recognised risk factor for people going missing, and this known need prompted action by the FFMPC. The Mental Health Association of NSW as a member of the FFMPC jointly initiated a project entitled, *Mental Health Information Project* funded by the NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General. They produced a book called *Someone is Missing—An Emotional Resource for the Families and Friends of Missing Persons* (Dadich, 2003). This was the first book aimed directly at meeting the needs of families and friends of missing persons. It was conceived as a resource and offered a guide to the common mental health problems people might experience when a person goes missing and what reactions to expect if a loved one is found.

The book is now out of print as much of the information provided became outdated and lacked the current trends in meeting the needs of families of missing persons. The new understandings of grief were not developed in any significant way partly I suspect because the authors were not familiar with the emerging trends in loss and grief research and clinical practice. Wayland’s (2007) book is now the preferred

model for the sector and for use by practitioners as it is based on a sound theoretical model (*ambiguous loss*, Boss, 2006) and is relevant to the emotional needs of the families of missing people.

A booklet prepared by Wayland (2005), *A Glimmer of Hope—Stories of Courage from Families of Missing Persons*, provided some insight into the emotional turmoil that loved ones experience. Five people who have a missing person told something of their story and as such, the booklet speaks to the hearts and minds of people sharing the same traumatic experience.

These actions on the part of the committee in cooperation with the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit and AFP NMPCC have meant that progress has been made for the benefit of the families and friends of missing persons. Apart from the stories in the *Glimmer of Hope* book we have learned little of the lived experience of families of missing persons. The research has provided us with a great deal of important information on missing persons, nationally and internationally. The FFMPC aims to focus on the families and their needs and make the public aware of this group in the population. The work they have undertaken has been supported by the AFP NMPCC. Additional federal government funding provided to the Coordination Centre has meant that it has been able to extend its services and to promote work in other states similar to what has been achieved in NSW. The aim of the centre is ‘to coordinate and promote a national integrated approach to reduce the incidence and impact of missing persons’ (NMPCC, 2007, p 1). That is still a work in progress.

At another level, progress has been made by individual researchers in Australia to explore different aspects of the work relating to missing persons.

2.7 Australian Research Projects

2.7.1 A Profile of Missing Persons in NSW

In recent years there have been three Australian research projects on the subject of missing persons, two in NSW and one in Queensland. Each will be explored as follows.

Foy (2004) completed her PhD entitled, *A Profile of Missing Persons in New South Wales* based on information within NSW police records. As a forensic psychologist her research was an in-depth examination describing three distinct groupings of missing persons. In her sample she identified these as the runaway group, the suicide group and the foul play group. In her discussion of these groups she explored the demographic factors, social background, personality and behavioural and mental health factors and some circumstantial details for each group. For instance, the runaway group were more likely to be in the younger age group with reports of rebellious behaviour. The suicide group tended to be middle-aged adults. Foy (2004) highlights that relying on police records alone could bias the accuracy of the information of the person reporting, how the police officer interprets this information, and the possibility of the report being changed in some way. In examining the differences between the three categories of missing persons, Foy (2004) reports this study could help police identify risk factors and possible preventative strategies when dealing with missing person's cases. The families and friends of her population were not mentioned in any specific way as they were outside the scope of her study.

2.7.2 Wanting to Hope

This was not the case with the second PhD, *Wanting to Hope: The Experience of Adult Siblings of Long-Term Missing People*. Clark (2006) broke new ground in looking at missing persons from the perspective of the siblings of those reported missing. One of the aims of her study was to discover the impact on adults having a sibling go missing and how this knowledge might inform practice and service responses to these adults. Clark (2006) conducted in-depth interviews with nine people who had a sibling formally listed as missing with the police for more than one year and less than ten years. Clark (2006) developed a model to represent the experience of missingness as reported in her sample, whereby elements of missingness identified were finding out, emotional reaction, loss, speculation, changed relationships, ways of coping, wanting to know, revised assumptions, secondary grieving and unending not knowing' (2006, p. vi). She stressed the need for greater understanding of missingness as a social problem. Clark's use of a mixed

methodology allowed the qualitative aspect of her work to explore the lived experience of the siblings in her sample.

2.7.3 Role of Depression and Anxiety

The third study conducted by Lorang (2007), *Exploratory Study on the Role of Depression and Anxiety as Contributing Factors to People Going Missing*, involved 336 persons in a population with mood and affective disorders. The pilot study she conducted was with people who had been located and were shown to suffer from high levels of depression and anxiety using three standard psychometric tests DASS, EPQ-R; & Zung (Lorang 2007, p. 1). When reporting on her second population of 292 participants, accessed through websites relating to depression and anxiety, 36 were identified as having gone missing or are still missing. People who are thinking of going missing had high depression and stress levels but only moderate anxiety. People who have gone missing or are missing had higher levels of depression but their stress levels are far greater and anxiety had a minimal effect. The particular benefit of this research was to alert mental health practitioners managing people with mood and affective disorders of the need to question their clients on their attitude to going missing.

Each of these three Australian studies on missing persons has contributed to a greater understanding of the sector from their different perspectives. The authors have been involved in the ongoing dialogue between the families, the authorities and service providers by sharing the information gained from their respective studies.

2.7.4 Services for Families of Missing Persons

Apart from the national and state government agencies involved in the work of missing persons the non-government sector contributes significantly. There are four organisations that have a concern for the welfare of families of missing persons and are involved in the search for missing people within Australia and across the world. Each of these agencies Link-Up, Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and ISS has a particular focus and responsibility in this sector.

2.7.5 Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation

This voluntary organisation was founded in 1980 when two people working in Canberra, Coral Edwards and Peter Read, were trying in different ways to trace the recent history of NSW Aboriginals. Following an address to a National Aboriginal Conference, they were given a grant for the work of the fledgling Link-Up. The impetus for this voluntary organisation's beginning (1980) was to work with the Stolen Generation. They were a group of Aboriginal people who were forcibly removed due to previous government policies. They were not only the stolen generation; they were also the lost generation who lived with the experience of missingness. This population of mainly children were fostered, adopted, or institutionalised and Link-Up's role was to assist in re-uniting them with their families and tribal groups. It was not until 1983 that the Department of Aboriginal Affairs gave them \$66,000.00 to establish a Link-Up office and in 1985 the organisation was formally incorporated under the Aboriginal Associations Act. Link-Up now has a national profile and operates in each state of Australia.

Link-Up has expanded its service delivery to provide for the Link-Up Reunification service supported by a counselling service. They also have the Link-Up Family Services—Foster Care Agency as well as the Family Link Program.

Link-Up's history is of a group of people where missingness is the legacy of lost and stolen children searching for their roots. Going missing is still a problem for young Aboriginal women in particular prompting action by the NSW government. In recognition of this the NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General funded a project by the Gumurrii Centre, Griffith University, Queensland. The project considered the particular problems of Aboriginal females who go missing. The report, *Young Aboriginal Females Reported Missing to Police, 'Which Way for Prevention and Service'* (Robertson & Demosthenous, 2004), is especially important because it was a group of Aboriginal women who undertook the research.

The database they used recorded that in 2002 there were 133 missing Aboriginal females reported to police in NSW. Of these almost half were aged between twelve and fifteen years. Indigenous Australians specifically and Australians generally needed education and raised awareness about missing persons and how to identify those 'at risk'. This led to an excellent DVD called *Missing* being produced in 2006, which focused on the problem for the Aboriginal population. The value of this DVD is that it is also being used for the wider community, amongst the 'at-risk' populations like the homeless and street people as well as being utilised by school counsellors.

2.7.6 Salvation Army Family Tracing Services

Of all the tracing services the Salvation Army is probably the oldest, having its beginnings in England in 1885. The Industrial Revolution was accompanied by many people seeking work in London and other cities. At particular risk of exploitation were young girls. This prompted Mrs Booth to commence an Investigations Department, and 20 years after the Salvation Army's commencement William Booth, the founder, sought to assist parents in tracing the whereabouts of their daughters. The Salvation Army magazine, *War Cry* contained letters asking readers if they knew of these girls and other missing people. From those beginnings the Salvation Army Tracing Service is now established in most Western countries.

In Australia the service seeks 'to locate family members whose current whereabouts is unknown and who are being sought for the purpose of re-uniting the family' (SAFTS, 2010, p. 1). They are very specific about what the service can offer and it restricts itself to finding a relative or reconciling any past differences and re-uniting the family.

The website accessed just after Missing Persons Week 2010 showed a number of photos of missing people whose families were asking for help in finding them.

2.7.7 Australian Red Cross

The Australian Red Cross tracing service has international links through the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements. They endeavour to locate and reunite missing persons with humanitarian needs separated as a result of war, natural or man-made disasters and exodus. Pony Films (Blowen, 2004) produced four documentaries showing the work of the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit, Link-Up, the Long Term Missing and the Australian Red Cross. The latter one told of the experience of a Sudanese woman and her family, now living in Melbourne who wanted help in finding her siblings. They all escaped from the Sudan into Uganda but were separated somewhere near the border. The film showed the methodical way in which the search occurred recognising the potential danger to the family depending on where they were found. The film revealed the ‘rollercoaster’ of emotions the women experienced as the search progressed. For her there was a happy reunion. The documentary was a valuable educational resource especially alerting other refugees with missing family members on how they might get help through the Red Cross.

2.7.8 ISS Australia

The ISS is a member of the international network. This organisation, founded in 1924, was in response to the migration of displaced persons after World War 1. Since that time the need to coordinate activities across several countries with people separated by national borders prompted the international social work network. ISS Australia still works across borders with those in vulnerable situations with a special emphasis on children.

2.8 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief sketch of why people go missing. The NACMP in its user-friendly definition suggested five elements of missing. These reasons combined have also provided the sector with an understanding of the risk factors at various stages in the life cycle for people to go missing. It has to be acknowledged that so much of the information gleaned from the reports has been gained from the

families whose loved one has gone missing. Similarly, the kinds of services that have been developed have arisen from an expressed need by families. The cooperation that has been achieved between law enforcement, other government organisations and non-government agencies in consultation with families has proved a workable model in NSW. This is a model that other states could be persuaded to develop.

What has been neglected in these studies is the human impact on those families that having a missing person. This was also expressed by James et al. (2008) when in their report they made mention of future research and commented:

Much of the research undertaken to date has focussed on definitional issues. Moving beyond simply categorising types of missing people may provide the data to understand better the social conditions of missingness. While missingness links with social problems such as substance abuse, separation and divorce, mental health, suicide, crime and social exclusion, the fields of study into grief, loss, trauma and coping rarely consider missingness. (p. 205)

More than two years later, the situation remains much the same and gives greater impetus for undertaking this study of the lived experience of families of missing persons.

Reference has been made to the range of services at a national and state level aimed at the families of missing people. The work in NSW has been highlighted, as this is where most of the action in the sector has been located. The non-government services for particular populations in the missing persons sector have been a valuable addition to what the police and other government agencies have provided.

A limitation to the work currently being provided has been making the services known to the public. This appears to be an ongoing problem particularly for the counselling unit. What has been developed in NSW was as a result of families of missing persons getting together and being able to make a difference. This is a model that is worth emulating.

Chapter 3: Exploring the Trauma, Loss and Grief Studies

The impetus for this study came as a result of an invitation to speak to the NSW FFMPC day conference in 2003 on the subject of the grief of families of missing persons. It was at that point that I discovered that this was not a subject that found expression in the grief and bereavement literature or research (Waring, 2001). Listening to the comments from the families and friends on that day prompted a need to explore this further and understand from their perspective what it means to live with a long-term missing person within a trauma, loss and grief framework. The literature relating to missing persons is now reviewed.

3.1 Loss and Grief: A Change in Focus

The approach to understanding loss and grief has changed considerably over the last 20 years. One development has been the way the use of words and terminology has changed over recent years. For instance, the words closure, acceptance and resolution along with the term grief work have virtually disappeared or have been used in a different way in the current grief lexicon. The emergence of terms like disenfranchised grief, continuing bonds and meaning-making are now resonating with the experience of grieving people and becoming the focus of researchers. The notion of disenfranchised grief has shown that many of the losses people experience have a grief outcome that often is not recognised. Simos (1979) in *A Time to Grieve* recognised loss as a universal human experience. However, it was not until 1999 that Boss used the term ambiguous loss to more accurately describe the experience of families of missing persons. What families of missing people experience when someone they love disappears can be understood as traumatic, and it is this trauma that creates the loss and grief.

To discover that a family member or close friend has gone missing is in itself a traumatic loss (Boss, 2006, 1999). It would seem therefore that trauma is an appropriate starting point to begin this review. The work on trauma and its impact on

individuals and communities where missingness has occurred will lead to a discussion about loss and grief.

3.2 A Traumatizing Experience

The initial shock and disbelief the family feels when the discovery is made that a loved one has gone missing leads to a range of new and different psychological and emotional reactions. Trauma studies have revealed these and other reactions are comparable to those experienced by people and communities when there is a sudden and unexpected death, man-made or natural disasters, especially when the outcome for the people involved is not known (Figley, 1999; Harvey & Miller, 2000; van der Kolk, McFarlane & Weisaeth 1996, Raphael, 1986).

People can be totally unprepared for such an event and this leads to a feeling of being overwhelmed because a traumatic loss shatters the assumptions we make about our world. In the foreword to Kauffman's (2002) book, Janoff-Bulman (2002) commented:

We are psychologically unprepared for traumatic losses, because our fundamental assumptions about the world and ourselves, assumptions embracing benevolence, meaning and self worth, generally afford us a sense of relative invulnerability. (p. XII)

Traumatic loss, as experienced by families of a missing person, the way in which the self is violated and fragmented, is distinctly different from a non-traumatic loss. The degree to which this occurs will depend on the severity of the loss experience and therefore the degree of psychological traumatization. Kauffman talked about traumatic grief, which he said was 'characterized by fragmentation of the self' (2002, p. 205). The sense of cohesion a family might have felt prior to a member going missing is likely to become shattered by that experience. An individual's fragmented sense of self in a family now lacking cohesion is likely to lead to complicated grief (Rando, 1993). The world of the missing person's family has been shattered by the traumatic event, and they begin to search for answers, to make meaning of the event, before any kind of normality can be re-established.

3.3 Crisis of Meaning

Traumatic events or incidents, particularly those that are unexpected led Landsman (2002) to report, ‘when we experience events that don’t fit our schemas, or violate our assumptions, or shatter our illusions, we experience a crisis of meaning’ (p. 4). ‘Why?’ is the dominant thought on people’s minds when someone goes missing (Boss, 2006; Kauffman, 2002). A variant on the theme is ‘How could this happen?’ as people seek for answers to what has happened. People literally search for answers to make sense out of something that seems to defy logic (Neimeyer, 2001; Wayland, 2007). As people cognitively seek for answers, meaning-making is an internal quest; they are also actively going about searching. This is both time-consuming and energy-demanding as families discover. Boss (2006) links stress and trauma together and thinks the stress of ambiguous loss:

Can traumatise a child or adult physically and emotionally just as a critical incident might. Having a loved one missing is like a continuously bleeding wound in the couple or family. (p. 36)

Apart from the work of Boss (1999, 2006) the general literature on traumatic loss does not address this particular aspect of the psychological impact on families of missing people. This lack of recognition of missing persons as a traumatic experience raises the question that is covered next.

3.4 Where Do Loss and Grief Fit in the Experience of Missing Persons?

Since the early years of the last century there has been the development of a body of knowledge that has deepened our understanding of loss and grief (Stroebe et al., 2002, p. 4). In the series on trauma and loss, Jacobs suggested that ‘Theories and models provide an important framework for understanding and investigating the nature of loss, grief, and the clinical complications of bereavement’ (1999, p. xiv). In the literature the two terms, loss and grief, are used synonymously; however, it is necessary to make a distinction as they are conceptually different. As Weiss (cited in Stroebe et al 2002 .) explained, ‘[By] the term grief I mean the severe and prolonged distress that is a response to the *loss* of an emotionally important figure’ (p 47).

3.4.1 Grief Work—the Way of Resolution?

Freud (1917) published a classical study of ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ and from this beginning the theoretical analysis of grief commenced. Parkes (2002) indicated that Freud ‘coined the term grief work on the supposition that grief is a job of psychological work that we neglect at our peril’ (p. 27). This grief work involves the successful adaptation to loss by relinquishing his or her attachment to the bereaved. Freud’s position, like that of other psychoanalytically-oriented theorists, ‘maintained that relinquishing the strong affective bond to the deceased person is necessary for adaptation to bereavement’ (Schut et al., 2006, p. 758). This perspective ‘went on to dominate scientific thinking in subsequent decades until the recent shift toward the continuing bonds perspective’ (Schut et al., 2006, p. 758).

The notion of relinquishing the bonds to the deceased, that is, terminating a relationship with that person, and moving on, is a reflection of the modernist thinking that predominated in most of the twentieth century. In the humanities, like psychology, the scientific paradigm was found by some to be wanting as it failed to understand and allow for the human condition. Since the 1980s the loss and grief research focus has broadened (Doka, 1989; Klass et al., 1996; Neimeyer, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2002). There is now an acknowledgment of the importance of understanding loss, grief and bereavement from the person’s perspective. The person becomes central in the picture of grief and bereavement rather than being externally considered as a statistic in the scientific paradigm.

For the family of a missing person the thought of adaptation to loss by relinquishing attachment to the lost person removed any thread of hope that the missing person may still be alive. It should also be noted that the relinquishing of bonds was not emotionally congruent for families where the death of a loved one from natural causes had occurred (Parkes, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1996). This idea of relinquishing attachment to the lost person, however that loss had occurred, prompted a renewed interest in Bowlby’s work, for example, Mikulincer (2008). The current research has stressed the importance of continuing bonds with the deceased person (Klass et al., 1996) to which I will refer in more detail later in this chapter. When a family is

living with a long-term missing person, the grief they are experiencing could be described as acute and the mourning long-lasting. The next section considers this as a possibility from the work that Lindemann (1944) conducted.

3.5 Acute Grief and Mourning

Lindemann reported of the 1942 Coconut Grove Fire, Boston, U.S.A. where his work with grieving families and survivors helped to pioneer grief investigation of mourning as well as grief using these two words interchangeably. Lindemann's (1944) study set the scene for a growing body of research that focused not only on the grief experience, but also on the consequences for people involved in the incident. In this he noted five characteristics: somatic distress, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostile reactions and loss of patterns of conduct. With these characteristics he described three stages of grief: shock and disbelief, acute mourning, resolution of the grief process.

Bereavement has also been used in a similar way. According to Stroebe et al., (2002) bereavement tends to be understood as the objective situation of having lost someone significant. The reaction to bereavement is grief, which refers to a complex set of mainly emotional reactions to the death of a loved one that include cognitive and social aspects. There may also be physical or somatic reactions. An associated term, mourning has been defined by Stroebe and her colleagues (2006) 'as the social expressions or acts expressive of grief that are shaped by the practices of a given society or cultural group' (p. 6). For instance, when a death occurs the social expression of grief in Western society has usually been mediated through a culturally appropriate ritual in the form of a funeral with a burial or cremation of the body.

3.6 Early Grief Models

Another pioneer who opened up the discussion of death and dying to the community at large was Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969). Her research findings and the workshops she ran for the helping professions lead to far more open and honest expressions about death. Her book, *On Death and Dying* (1969), provided a catalyst for others to

enter the discussion and begin more systematic research. In Kubler–Ross’s clinical work with dying patients she observed a pattern of responses in the way people cope with imminent death. In her model five stages were identified: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages could also refer to the experience that family members of a dying person were likely to go through as they came to terms with the impending death of a loved one. Kubler–Ross and other pioneers in this emerging field were criticised for being too prescriptive and for suggesting a linear development through the phases or stages (Klass et al., 1996; Stroebe et al., 2008). Kubler–Ross’ model became popular and at times was used inappropriately (Parkes, 2003). Some have described it as an anticipatory grief model as it relates to the dying, not one for after the death event. However, Parkes (2003) stated:

The sequence was never intended to be more than a rough guide, and it was recognized from the start that people would move back and forth through the sequences rather than following a fixed passage. (p. 30)

This suggests a more flexible understanding in the way Kubler–Ross’ model should be applied.

Engel (1961) proposed a model with a different emphasis altogether. His medical model described grief as a healing process that incorporates shock and disbelief, developing awareness, restitution, resolving the loss and idealisation. Others who have attempted to provide a theoretical understanding of the process of grief were Bowlby (1971, 1975, 1981) and Parkes (1974). They suggested there were certain phases that could be described and through that a bereaved individual goes. They are a phase of numbness, phase of yearning and searching, phase of disorientation and a phase of reorientation. The work of these pioneers provided theoretical grief platforms from which other models of grief could develop. Worden (2009, 1991, 1982) was one such person whose work has benefited grief counsellors in many parts of the world.

This notion of needing to complete grief work to achieve a satisfactory resolution was the basis of Worden’s first book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy* (1983). In this book he described four tasks of mourning: to accept the reality of the loss; to experience the pain of grief; to adjust to an environment in which the deceased

person is missing; to withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship. Worden responded positively to criticism of the last task, IV. This task is an illustration on the emergence of grief theories. The revised wording in the second edition (Worden 1991) states that grief was a way 'to emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life' (p. 16) He went on to explain:

The way Task IV was worded previously was easily misunderstood. It sounded too mechanical, like one could pull a plug and reattach it someplace else. One never loses memories of a significant relationship. (Worden 1991, p. 16)

This publication became a grief counsellor's handbook as it provided a guide to enable grieving people to accomplish the four tasks. It became required reading for psychologists, social workers, nurses and clergy. The wide acceptance of this book and Worden's work generally provided a newly emerging group of specialist grief counselling practitioners with the confidence to work therapeutically in this area. In his discussion on the determinants of grief, Worden (1991, p. 32) reported on the Harvard Bereavement Study in which Parkes and Weiss (1983) were involved. They were trying to predict how a person would respond to loss and what would they need to know. They found that there were four types of risk factors that could be identified: the personal vulnerability of the bereaved person; the kinship to the deceased; the events and circumstances leading up to and including the death; and the social supports and other circumstances obtaining after the death.

These risk factors were associated with who the person was, the relationship between the grieving person and the deceased, and the nature of death. One of the common ways of classifying deaths is by the use of the following categories: natural, accidental, suicidal and homicidal (NASH) (Worden, 1991, p. 31). He indicated that each of these modes of death brings about quite different grief reactions. These categories are relevant to this study as a person going missing is likely to be sudden and unexpected as with accidental deaths. Suicide would also be an example as Maple (2005) found in her study, Parental Portraits of Suicide, when discussing the loss of a young adult child. Suicide and murder are modes of death that have direct relevance to families of missing persons.

Just as the notion of phases or stages was called into question by other researchers so too were Worden's four tasks of the grief counselling model. The foundation of these early workers in the field encouraged researchers in the late twentieth century:

To recognize and investigate more complex phenomena of (grief and) bereavement on various bio-, psycho-, social levels, using more sophisticated methodologies and applying finer-grained theorizing. (Stroebe et al., 2002, p. 4)

A recent publication by Worden (2009) revealed a changing emphasis in his work and the incorporation of the emerging research on disenfranchised grief, continuing bonds, meaning-making, resilience as well as trauma and grief. He briefly discussed these and acknowledged their importance in broadening the understanding of the grieving process, but Worden retained his four tasks of mourning. In task four there was recognition of the importance of continuing bonds, which he stated was 'to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life' (2009, p. 50). Worden maintained that the task theory provided more flexibility in acknowledging individual differences in the grieving process than the dual process model of Stroebe et al., (2002).

3.7 The Relationship Between Loss and Grief

I realised that many people speak of grief and loss, and I considered that logically this sequence was not correct. It was the loss of a person who dies or goes missing that created the grief response in the heart and mind of the family members. This would appear to be closer to the idea that John Bowlby put forward in his trilogy, *Attachment, Separation and Loss* (1969; 1973; 1980). In his early work Bowlby looked at the effect on a child when separated from his/her mother. This was probably best expressed in his early book *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953). In this book Bowlby (1953) studied the effects of maternal deprivation. From this initial experience of observing the negative effects on the child separated from its mother or mother substitute Bowlby's life-long work unfolded.

In recent years, it has been reported that the patterns of attachment, or lack of it, that children experience in their formative years affect their capacity to handle loss and grief as adults (Raphael, 1984). There is growing evidence that parents who lose a

child also experience separation anxiety. This loss of the cherished object (the child) created for many an overwhelming sense of loss and grief. We can see the effects on parents with the loss of a child in the work of The Compassionate Friends, an organisation that specialises in support of these parents (Stebbins, 2007). The loss of an adult child can have equally devastating consequences. Families who lose an adult child or when they go missing find the severing of that physical attachment bond emotionally devastating. Families of missing persons live with uncertainty or as Boss described it as living with ambiguity (1999). The question the families wrestle with is, are they still attached to their missing adult child or detached? It is this confusion that makes the grief experience problematic and provided the ambiguity about which Boss speaks. Her work and that of other researchers have introduced concepts and modified theories that have greater resonance for families of missing people.

A new generation of researchers has changed the focus and emphasis in loss, grief and bereavement research. The post-modern era in Western society and the evolution of social constructionism can be seen metaphorically to have taken away the bars from the window and allowed a greater amount of light to filter in. This has been accompanied by a broadening of the research focus from being mainly in a quantitative form to a greater use of qualitative methods. This infusion of light has had positive consequences for families of missing persons as they try to come to terms with their own experience. The following section shows the way in which viewing loss and grief from different perspectives sheds greater light on the subject.

3.8 New Perspectives on Loss and Grief

Mention was made earlier to the fact that the prevailing models of grief in the twentieth century were questioned by a number researchers (Stroebe, Hanson, Stroebe & Schut 2002). From the perspective of families of missing persons, the emerging streams of thought more accurately spoke to the problem of grief for these families. Whilst conceptually they were different, together they gave new light and new opportunities for these families.

A group of bereavement researchers who came together in the 1980s following Worden produced four scholarly works in the form of the *Handbook of Bereavement Research* with different subtitles. The third edition with the subtitle *Consequences, Coping and Care* (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe & Schut, 2002) took a different focus to the previous ones, but nevertheless built on the strong foundation they provided. Each of these authors has been at the forefront of study in grief-related topics. The fourth edition continued to explore the new perspectives on grief and bereavement with the subtitle, *Advances in Theory and Intervention*. With the exception of one chapter Stroebe et al., (2008) commented ‘all the chapters in this volume are new’ (p. 4), further demonstrating the movement of new knowledge and understanding in this area.

This provided evidence that researchers had been more aware of the changing emphasis that has occurred over time in relation to loss, grief and bereavement. While none of the work discussed in these volumes actually focused specifically on the topic of families of missing persons, aspects of their work can be applied to this particular grieving population. The work of Stroebe and Schut (1999) and the Dual Process Model they have developed is discussed below.

3.8.1 Dual Process Model

The grief work hypothesis that was the foremost model of grief and bereavement for most of the twentieth century was ultimately found to have limitations. Stroebe and Schut (2001) in developing the dual process model provided ‘an analytical framework for understanding how people adapt to the loss of a significant person in their lives’ (p. 57). In this model they propose two types of stressors, loss orientation and restoration orientation. Bereaved people have to cope with the loss of the loved one and also make adjustments in their lives in order to move on. Stroebe and Schut (2001) suggested people oscillate between these two. It is this oscillation that has been conceptualised as the dual process. Bonanno (2009) acknowledged the importance of this oscillation process when he commented:

Probably the most striking implication of the oscillation of mourning is that it bears so little resemblance to the conventional idea that grief unfold in a predictable sequence of stages. (2009,40)

People focus for a time on the loss, and the pain associated with the loss may become overwhelming. When this occurs they find the need to take time out and consider moving forward. This is reported to be when they move to the restoration-oriented side and seek to deal with life changes and assume new roles. Stroebe and Schut (2001) used the term grief work, but it is more comprehensive in recognising people grieve in their own ways, even though they may be grieving over the same loss. They talk of the confrontation-avoidance coping dimension and see confrontation being associated with grief work (2001, p. 60). In the dual process model this process of oscillation could be viewed as a protective psychological mechanism that when the pressure builds up exploring the loss aspects, the psyche moves the person to the other dimension. Cognition and affect were both recognised as integral to the dual process model. Families who vacillated between hope and despair in their search for the missing person could act out the elements of the dual process model without using the researcher's language.

3.8.2 Disenfranchised Grief

Stroebe and Schut's (2001) dual process model provides some guidance for understanding the experience of families of missing persons. To further this, Doka's work adds more depth. The term 'disenfranchised grievers' was an outcome of Doka's (1989) work with groups of people whose loss experience was not socially sanctioned. As indicated by Worden (1991) four modes of death, natural, accidental, suicidal and homicidal, the grief reactions of the latter three frequently did not fit the cultural norms. A wide variety of people came into this category, one group notably in the 1980s were predominantly men who had human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and/or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). This was a discrete group who suffered discrimination initially because of their sexuality and then from a diagnosis of HIV/AIDS creating an additional burden. When the death of a person with AIDS occurred, the partner and the family of the deceased person frequently

found themselves unable to grieve openly. The cause of death was deemed not a socially acceptable one therefore their grief was not socially sanctioned. They were disenfranchised grievers.

In the fifteen years since Doka (2002) wrote his first book, he noted in the foreword to his second book, the way the concept of Disenfranchised Grief: Recognising Hidden Sorrow 'has gained a life of its own. It has been applied to a range of losses wider than I initially considered' (p. xiv). Later, he described it as:

The concept of disenfranchised grief integrates psychological, biological, and sociological perspectives on grief and loss ... research has demonstrated the myriad affective, physical, cognitive, behavioural and spiritual ways grief is manifested. (Doka, 2002, p. 5)

Doka's concept of Recognising hidden sorrow was expressed somewhat differently by Susan Roos (2002) when she talked of Chronic sorrow – a living loss. Her work grew out of a personal experience of eight miscarriages and one traumatic infant death at three years of age and the birth of a daughter who is severely retarded, autistic and has a seizure disorder. She states:

Chronic sorrow is often both unrecognised and misunderstood by professionals in the mental health field as well as other fields that touch the lives of persons affected by a living loss. Chronic sorrow is not about endings; it is about living with unremovable loss and unending wounds.

(Roos, 2002, XV)

What Roos discovered from her series of traumatic loss experiences then culminating in the birth of a child with severe disabilities led to this notion of a living loss as describing chronic sorrow. Families with a missing person while the context of the loss is different experience chronic sorrow as they too experience a living loss.

It could also be said of families of missing persons that they too are disenfranchised grievers, partly because of the ambiguity of their particular situation. There have been few rituals that encompass this population, even when the person has been missing for some considerable time. A funeral is not appropriate for a missing person, yet this is the common loss ritual for our society. Similarly, a memorial service is usually in memory of someone who is deceased. Doka's (2002) work described the problem families of missing persons face without mentioning the topic,

and as a consequence did not provide an adequate answer to the problem of missingness. Families of missing people remained disenfranchised grievers.

3.9 Continuing Bonds

Reference has already been made to the work of John Bowlby and the resurgence of interest in attachment theory. In most adults attachment behaviour is not aroused until or unless something traumatic occurs when the need for an attachment figure is felt. According to Bowlby (1980) acute attachment behaviour in adults was induced by serious illness affecting the self and family members and losses of intimate relationships. As with the child, when the attachment figure is not present the yearning and searching begins. The same response is found in the adult.

The yearning and searching is both an internal emotional reaction associated with meaning-making of the event (Neimeyer, 2001) as well as the physical act of searching. The severing of the attachment bond as a way of moving on when the death of a loved one occurs has been called into question and has given rise to the notion of continuing bonds. Neimeyer (2006) cited that Bowlby:

Was ambiguous in his argument for whether detachment from or continued attachment to the deceased was the more adaptive course for the bereaved, ultimately acknowledging that change in the nature of the bond rather than its severance. (p. 717)

Contemporary theorists talk of maintaining the psychological presence of the loved one even though they are physically absent. This continuing bond with the deceased can be comforting in times of difficulty and a constructive presence to the grieving person.

When Peter Berger (1969) a sociologist of religion suggested we no longer live under a sacred canopy, he was acknowledging that many of the patterns of the past were discarded. Industrialisation of Western society saw major changes, one of which was the role and function of institutional religion. In traditional society, religious traditions had long recognised the communion of saints, which illustrated the notion of continuing bonds with people who have died. In the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches as well as the Orthodox traditions the prayer books have featured All Saints

Day and All Souls Day as recognition that there has always been the belief that there is an ongoing relationship with those who have died. In a similar way the narrative therapist Michael White (1989) wrote about the incorporation of the lost relationship in the resolution of grief. The notion of continuing bonds showed that the combination of secularism and modernism in the last century seemed to lose sight of the importance of this relationship for the human psyche. Silverman and Nickman in the final chapter of *Continuing Bonds* (Klass et al., 1996) state:

The central theme of this book is that survivors hold the deceased in loving memory for long periods, often forever, and that maintaining an inner representation of the deceased is normal rather than abnormal. It is more central to survivors' experience than commonly recognized. We suggest that these relationships can be described as interactive, even though the other person is physically absent.

(p. 349)

There is no clear or common definition of what is meant by an inner representation or an interactive relationship. However, the literature in describing this new understanding of grief reveals that researchers and practitioners coming from slightly differing perspectives came to very similar conclusions:

There are many dimensions to the continuing bond phenomena, some of which focus on the inner conversation where the deceased is assigned an active role, and others in which the deceased is passive. (Silverman & Nickman 1996, p. 350).

Keeping memories of the deceased person alive is very important in most cultures; people may talk of ongoing conversations with the dead.

Klass has explored in-depth the reality of continuing bonds (1982; 1984; 1987; 1988; 1993a; 1993b; 2001). Among populations of bereaved people what is important for this research is that from a grief perspective, the families can experience a continuing bond with their missing person, ambiguous as that loss might be. Maintaining a continuing bond with the missing person is possible whether the person is alive or dead.

3.10 Meaning Reconstruction

Earlier reference was made of the need for individuals and families to make meaning of traumatic and/or unpredictable events to understand what has happened. In her

study of Family Bereavement and Construction of Meaning, Nadeau's (1998) work with families who were trying to make sense of death reports:

Few life events have greater impact on a family than the death of a family member. Most of what we know about grief is from an individual perspective, because most studies focus on individuals. (p. 1)

One such event is with families of missing persons where there is no conclusive evidence of death, then the meaning-making takes on a whole new dimension. Nadeau (1998) recommended the need to further explore grief in a familial context. Families have an innate desire to understand the why factor in relation to a family member going missing. When the assumptive world is shattered by such an event as a person going missing, moving to a new assumptive world requires meaning reconstruction. Neimeyer (2001) commented on the disenchantment with the modernist framework:

The limitations of conceiving of mourning as the relinquishing of emotional ties and the stagic progression toward recovery being recognized by grief scholars, researchers and counsellors. (p. 3)

Scholars, researchers and therapists who have wide experience in trauma, loss and grief from across the lifespan have reported meaning-making as being fundamental to the human psyche. Very frequently people find it difficult to move on when they have experienced a traumatic loss, if they do not have some understanding of the why or how it happened. Expression of the painful feelings is very important, but if this is not accompanied by some cognitive response that intellectually speaks to the situation in a meaningful way the person is left with the painful feelings and no sense of resolution. My experience has affirmed these conclusions.

In the normal course of everyday life all of us shape our world and our activities by making certain assumptions. Kauffman (2002) reported that the notion of assumptive worlds was introduced by Bulman (1992) and Parkes (1971; 1988). Kauffman (2002) reported that 'the concept of the assumptive world is a psychological principle of the conservation of the human reality or culture' (p. 2). In social psychology the literature described this process, which operates in our lives as schemas, illusions, or meanings (Landsman, 2002). However, it is described, when things happen that disrupt or even shatter those assumptions or schemas, we experience a crisis of

meaning. A traumatic event that shatters our assumptive world potentially calls into question our identity—who we are, our sense of security—and the world is no longer a safe place.

Parkes (1971) introduced the notion of assumptive worlds to the field of grief and bereavement research led him to a new field of study, which he called psycho-social transitions. His participants who were separating or divorcing, or people who were given the diagnosis of a life-limiting or life-threatening disease, were confronted with major changes in their lives. Whether the change was a chosen one or accidental, or one over which the person had no choice, such as natural disasters, the change brought with it a number of losses. What was not recognised was that the loss they experienced led to the grief they were experiencing. This would express itself in shock, sadness, anger and depression to name a few reactions—all classical symptoms of grief. To express it in another way the assumptive world as they knew it was shattered by the change.

What is it that changes? The change itself takes place in that part of the world that impinges on the self. Parkes (1971) suggests that ‘the assumptive world is the only world we know and it includes everything we know or think we know. Any or all of these may need to change as a result of changes in the life space’ (p. 102). It is these major changes in the life space that impact the self and the environment of which the person is a part that affect his/her assumptive world. This is where Parkes (1971) introduced the term psycho-social transitions. If a person’s psychological world and social environment is shattered by some traumatic experience, the world as they knew it has gone. In traumatic loss situations the psycho-social transition could be described as the grieving period. It is the movement from what was the old assumptive world to the new assumptive world. The positive aspect of this assumptive world concept is that in order to move to a new assumptive world the person has to come to terms with and make meaning of what caused the previous assumptive world to shatter. A person cannot deny that reality because it is part of their history, their past, even though they may still question it.

The review of the research to the end of 2010 revealed an absence of studies that specifically related to the trauma, loss and grief of missing persons. While it is acknowledged that some of the models of grief have an application in part to the field of missing persons, they are still not dealing with the experience of these particular families. What has shed light on to the loss and grief experience of families of missing persons are the insights provided by Boss (1999) in her work on ambiguous loss that is now discussed.

3.11 Ambiguous Loss

Boss' (1999; 2006) research has been an integral part of her work with missing persons as a compassionate family therapist. As a creative researcher her work in many ways had grown out of her own family story. She reported:

I grew up in Mid Western immigrant community where everyone I looked up to came from someplace else ... Homesickness became a central part of my family's culture. I never really knew who was in or out of our family—or where home really was. Was it in the old country or the new. (Boss, 1999, p. 1)

Boss talked of this experience of living with this all-pervasive sadness of immigrant families in her community as frozen grief. For many of the first generation immigrants the lure that moving to the new world was where they would find a better life did not eventuate. Often limited resources and then World War II stopped people from going back to Europe, so the loss of their family members back home 'were never resolved and so those who lived with them also experienced the ambiguity of absence and presence' (Boss, 1999, p. 2).

Boss revealed the anguish she felt when she finally made the move to a larger city in Minnesota and although this was minor compared to her parents' experience of migration, she confessed that she too became confused about where home was. Boss (1999) explains: 'Not only did I think a lot about the folks back home, but I refused to sell my house there and kept it furnished—as if I were coming back at any moment' (p. 2).

First generation and second-generation immigrants live in two worlds with often the language of the old country spoken at home with all the attendant customs of that culture while learning the language of the host country. These people were trying to integrate into a new and different environment, but it was extremely difficult. This experience was often compounded by the fact that the women did not go out to work so had limited opportunity to learn the language of the host country, further giving them a sense of isolation and loneliness. Both the young and the old struggled with that perplexing question: Who am I when they are not sure where they belong? Boss (1999) comments on this issue:

[P]ersonal narratives illustrate the bittersweet legacy of ambiguity about psychological presence and absence for immigrant families, especially when the psychological family is not in accord with the physically present family. (p. 3)

When part of a family is still in the old country and circumstances occur that are beyond the immigrant's control limiting the ability to maintain contact with family members 'the ambiguity of waiting and wondering ... is always stressful and tormenting' (Boss, 1999, p. 5). Boss (1999) reminds the reader that:

Although the clinical literature has been mostly silent on ambiguous loss, the phenomenon has always been the stuff of opera, literature and theatre. In these genres, losses that remain vague and uncertain are embellished.

(p 5)

From the literature on loss and grief it would appear that Boss (1999) was the first person to name or label this phenomenon as ambiguous loss when she introduced it to clinical research. She reported that this kind of loss was one of the most difficult for people to bear because everything is uncertain and people find it difficult to make- meaning on what is going on in their lives. Nowhere does this uncertainty have greater resonance than with families of missing persons where the notion of ambiguous loss can be applied directly.

Five reasons have been identified why people are impacted physically and emotionally by ambiguous loss. First, because the loss is confusing ...they cannot problem-solve because they do not know whether the problem (the loss) is final or temporary. Second, the uncertainty prevents people from adjusting to the ambiguity of their loss by reorganising the roles and rules of their relationship with the loved one. Third, people are denied the symbolic rituals that ordinarily support a clear

loss—few if any supportive rituals exist for people experiencing ambiguous loss. Fourth, the absurdity of ambiguous loss reminds people that life is not always rational and just. Fifth, because ambiguous loss is a loss that goes on and on, people who experience it become physically and emotionally exhausted from the relentless uncertainty (Boss, 1999, pp. 7–8).

In theatres of war the fighting can leave many in the armed services unaccounted for. This occurred in the Second World War when families often received a telegram stating ‘Missing in Action’. This type of ambiguous loss is where the family member is physically absent, but psychologically present, because it is unclear whether they are alive or dead. The second group who would fit into the category of ambiguous loss is where the person is physically present but psychologically absent. This is best demonstrated by people with Alzheimer’s disease or other mental illnesses (Boss, 1999, p. 10, 2006, p. 7). The notion of frozen grief arises because of the uncertainty or ambiguity of the loss and this in turn complicates the mourning process. The grief is on hold or literally frozen.

Boss (2006) revealed she began developing a research base as early as the 1970s when she worked with families of the American soldiers missing in action in Vietnam and Laos (Boss, 1975; 1977; 1980a; 1980c). This work led on to research with colleagues where she studied families of missing children, families with adolescents leaving home and families of immigrants who were uprooted (Boss, 2006, p. 8). These groups of missing persons fit into the category above where the missing person is physically absent while psychologically present. In the introductory chapter to her book *Loss, Trauma and Resilience*, Boss (2006) made the following observation:

When I first began working with families of the missing in 1973, I thought that getting rid of ambiguity was the goal. I quickly realised that this was impossible. My goal shifted to trying to understand how people live well with ambiguity. (p. 10)

The ambiguous loss model has as its base family stress theory. Acknowledging that it is not possible to take away the ambiguity or the fact that as a powerful stressor it led the researcher to resilience as a way cognitively and emotionally to manage the stress:

We cannot get rid of the ambiguity, but we can increase our tolerance of ambiguity. Our therapeutic goals then are not about closure, as they are in classic grief therapies, nor do we view unresolved grief as an individual pathology as in the medical model. The focus on the stress of ambiguity allows us to go beyond symptom treatment to build on people's individual strengths. (Boss, 2006, p. 11)

Boss's work on ambiguous loss provided the initial conceptual framework for understanding the plight of families of missing persons from the perspective of traumatic loss. This framework has since been applied to the Australian population (Wayland, 2006). The outcome of which was for Wayland to develop a national counselling model for health professionals, entitled 'Supporting Those Left Behind' (Wayland, 2007).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted that while the trauma, loss and grief literature has relevance to the missing persons sector, links between the two have been previously largely unacknowledged. Having someone go missing has always been a traumatic experience for the families involved but the trauma research has not specifically dealt with it.

An incident like the disappearance of a loved one can shatter the family's assumptive world as Kaufmann's (2002) work showed, and is devastating. For the families of missing people to reframe their thinking with this in mind may allow them to make sense of what often seems senseless and come to terms with the ambiguity of the loss. Boss (2006) whose focus has been on the ambiguity on the loss of a missing person created a framework for making meaning of the loss reactions people experience. The reality of an ambiguous loss helped people to understand some of the problems associated with the grief experience for these families. They are, in Doka's (2002) terms, disenfranchised, in that their grief does not find a way to enable them to move on. Like the shame, guilt and blame often associated with suicide death (Maple, 2005), families of missing people experience a sense of being disenfranchised. They too appear to remain caught in the seesaw experience that Stroebe et al. (1999) described in the dual process model. The discussion on

continuing bonds (Klass et al., 1996) is now finding a prominent place in the grief literature and with grief counsellors. As with any other grieving person they can experience a feeling of consolation that the relationship is present and continuous with their missing person. Each of these new understandings of grief has reminded us that something as painful as having a family member disappear required them to make meaning (Neimeyer, 2001) so they are able to move on constructively. The combination of these insights when applied to the families of missing persons suggests that there is a unique area that I describe as the grief of missingness throughout this thesis.

The focus of this research is to understand the lived experience of families of missing persons from a grief perspective and how they make meaning of missingness. To fulfil this goal it was necessary to choose a qualitative methodology that enabled people to tell their story. The next chapter will show how and why narrative inquiry was the preferred methodology to allow the voice of families of missing persons to be heard.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

The aim of this research is to understand the lived experience of Australian families who have a long-term missing person. Families living with a missing person have reported this as a traumatic experience with an ongoing sense of loss and grief. To gain as accurate a picture as possible of that lived experience it was necessary to find a methodology that allowed people to be free enough to tell their story in an open and frank manner. This led to the theoretical orientation of narrative inquiry, as the qualitative approach selected to inform this research. Because of my interest in the trauma, loss and grief experience of families of the long-term missing, I was further persuaded of the merits of the narrative inquiry choice in Gilbert's (2002) research.

This chapter will provide a background on the decision to use qualitative methodology and details on the research design, including the sampling methods. The reader will then be introduced to the participants followed by the interview process and data collection procedures. Any research of this nature, where story-telling is involved, brings together the participants and the researcher. Methodology is important to ground the study, and of equal importance is the relationship between narrator and listener (participant and researcher) and the factors that motivated the researcher to undertake the research. To acknowledge whom I am as the researcher enables transparency in the process. I also explain how, from a personal and professional perspective, missingness has impacted me. Before I embark on the discussion of the research design in detail I will introduce myself as the researcher.

4.1 Positioning as Researcher

My role as a researcher is shaped by the fact that I am a counselling psychologist with a focus on trauma, loss and grief; a tertiary educator; and an Anglican priest. In many ways the fact that I am doing this research arises from personal experience and the professional roles I have played in these areas of responsibility.

I began to reflect on my autobiography and wondered when I entered the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly 2000), where from a narrative perspective the subject is missing persons. I went back to childhood and an early ongoing experience of people going missing. I grew up in London during the Second World War. Soon after the outbreak of the war my sister and I were evacuated to rural England and billeted with extended family. That did not last long as my parents saw our unhappiness and decided to take us home. We returned to London as the Battle of Britain began in earnest.

Schooling was a series of interruptions from the unexploded bombs in the playground, which meant at times the class was held in a fellow student's lounge room. In the school building we had a morning assembly when prayers were said, naming the list of school children that were missing from the previous night's air raid. We often did not know for some time whether they were dead or alive in one of the casualty units of the hospitals. A number of Rovers and Rangers from our Scout Troop and Guide Company were killed while attending a birthday party. As a Cub I recall being part of a guard of honour standing by the pathway of the cemetery as the line of coffins passed to their respective burial sites. Family members and friends went off to war, some were captured and imprisoned, but often we did not know their fate.

My mother's ritual each night, having said prayers, was to say 'Goodnight, God bless' to which I would reply 'See you in the morning'. Her reply was always the same, 'I hope so'. I think on an unconscious level she prepared me for the work I have done in loss and grief, death and dying. Hope in the face of adversity is a natural response for me. Missing persons are an unfortunate by-product of war. Years later I still enter that space of missing persons again in a different place and context.

4.2 Stolen Generation

Some years ago I was invited to work with a group of Aboriginal Australians who were part of the stolen generation. The stolen generation is the name given to those

Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their families by government officials. Succeeding governments, both state and federal, indicated that it was in the best interest of the children that they be taken care of and educated by Anglo-Australian people. The result, however, was quite different. These children who thought their parents had abandoned them, suffered abuse and deprivation in what was for them an alien environment. It was not until 2009 that the Commonwealth Government under Kevin Rudd's leadership was willing to make an apology (Rudd, 2009) to the Aboriginal people.

The experience of loss by the Aboriginal people was a new dimension to the concept of missingness that I began to embrace as I worked beside them. The organisation Link-Up asked me to run a workshop that tapped into the grief these people had experienced. Realising that it was Anglo-Australians who were the instigators of the stolen generation I was highly sensitive that what I did in the workshop would not cause further pain. I therefore used a workshop process where participants were asked to work in small groups to talk of the changes they had experienced. It was purposely open-ended so they could choose what they wished to share or divulge. They talked of their experiences and how they coped constructively, or sometimes destructively. I merely facilitated a way for them to understand some of the feelings and thoughts they were experiencing as a member of the stolen generation. The pain of so many elements of loss and missingness were evident in the discussion.

4.3 Families and Friends of Missing Persons

I became involved with the FFMPC as a result of my role in loss and grief counselling and education when I conducted a seminar for them on grief issues. At that time I was the Acting Rector of St. John's Anglican Church, Darlinghurst. The church has a strong social justice focus associated with its Outreach Service and Coffee Shop called Rough Edges. It was a member of the FFMPC, but no one from the organisation had ever attended meetings. As the person ultimately responsible for Rough Edges I began representing it at the meetings. The issues that were raised in my discussions with family members and friends stimulated the psychologist in me. At the time I was supervising the Counsellor for the Missing Persons Unit

(Department of Justice and Attorney General NSW) and together we struggled to identify an appropriate counselling model to use with families (Waring, 2001). It was the combination of these things that ultimately led me to this research and to ask families about their experience when a family member went missing.

4.4 Priest and Psychologist Embracing the Lost

Reflecting on my role as a priest I began to see that in a different arena I was still seeking the lost—the missing. My ministry experience has been varied, including university and hospital chaplaincies, working for a considerable time in palliative care. I have been a Naval chaplain and a Navy psychologist and worked extensively with Vietnam Veterans in a psycho-educational role. I have worked in the UK, USA, South Africa and India in various roles in both church-related and secular roles as a psychologist or educator/trainer.

As a psychologist working with families who had relatives missing as a result of the Bali bombing in 2004 and the Asian Tsunami of 2005 has meant that I have moved in and out of the space of missing persons over time. As I did the interviews I acknowledged that I had brought these parts of who I was into the research arena. For me, acknowledging the breadth of life and professional experience that I brought to the project, and the ways in which these experiences assisted me in my research, helped shape the analysis and develop a new narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2005).

4.5 Exploring Qualitative Research

Among my first tasks was to discover a method that would allow the narrator to tell her/his story and then a framework to analyse the data appropriately. From the outset of the research I knew I was going to use a method that focused on the stories of people, and like many other qualitative researchers new to the field it was challenging to narrow the search to meet the goal of this project. I was conscious that Boeije (2010, p. 24) had said that qualitative inquiry allowed one to answer questions about the nature of social phenomena under study rather than the prevalence of phenomena. Others had studied the prevalence of people going missing, expressed in

numerical terms. This study explored the social phenomena of families living with the experience of someone being missing. Because the experience of having someone go missing is a traumatic event that involves a loss, I wanted to view the lived experience from a loss and grief perspective. This ultimately led me to narrative inquiry as the method to achieve my goals and respect the people and the stories they told. I also considered the philosophical and psychological underpinning of this type of qualitative research, which will lead to the specific narrative inquiry method chosen.

The research on missing persons has in the main used quantitative methods to explain significant issues relating to this sector as Henderson and Henderson (1998) and James et al. (2008) have revealed. Quantitative methods provide important insight into facts; they can deal with large numbers and provide for the researcher a way of explaining cause and effect. The quantitative researcher using the scientific paradigm sees what is true in absolute black and white terms, and the world can be understood in terms of grand theories (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). They are imbued with the philosophy of the enlightenment, often termed modernism, whereas qualitative methods such as narrative inquiry does not see truth in absolute terms and are associated more with a post-modern view of the world. Postmodernists believe that human experience is socially constructed. Burr (2003), for example, commented that 'social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be' (p. 3). She also indicated that 'the very word discover presupposes an existing stable reality that can be revealed by observation and analysis, an idea quite opposed to social constructionism' (Burr, 2003, p. 12). Narrative inquiry, a qualitative research methodology with an emphasis on human stories as a different way of knowing and understanding experience, finds a ready place in social constructionism. This is the philosophical and psychological underpinning of the narrative inquiry methodology of this research.

The current research arose out of a desire to move beyond the factual data that seems to dominate the focus of the research interest on missing persons. I have noted that this research on missing people has not, to this point, been concerned with the families of missing persons. These family members live in a state of uncertainty, not

knowing whether their family member is alive or dead as described in the booklet ‘*Someone is Missing*’ (Mental Health Association, NSW, Inc., 2003). As shown in the previous chapter, what limited literature was available on loss and grief did not discuss the experience of families of missing persons. The recent developments in grief and bereavement research indicate the relevance to this study as noted by Carverhill (2002):

These contemporary grief theories are in large part attempting to reflect more accurately the lived experience of bereaved persons—the phenomenologies of loss—than their predecessors did. As such they are essentially more descriptive than prescriptive. (p. 198)

There are a number of qualitative research methods where the focus is exploring experience (see McLeod, 2001; Minichiello et al., 2004; Reissman, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). From a broad perspective this literature review provided valuable insights into a range of methodologies. It also enabled me to be clear on the goal I had for my research and that narrative inquiry was the method that would best capture the experience of these families. Moving from the general qualitative inquiry research to a particular form of narrative inquiry could also be viewed from a number of different perspectives. The next section describes the way in which narrative inquiry has developed within the social sciences and the way in which I have used narrative inquiry in this study, as alluded to in Chase (2005):

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterised as an amalgam of interdisciplinary lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in the biographical particulars by the one who lives them. (p. 651)

This research aims to provide initial empirical evidence to this field of missing persons by hearing stories from families and friends who have experienced this. The aim was to let each person tell their own story about how having a family member going missing has impacted them. The research question aimed to answer the question, *How does a family member (or friend) live with the ongoing experience of a loved one having gone missing?*

To achieve this aim and gain an appreciation of what this experience meant for family members, I needed to engage with them in such a way that they could reveal their experience over the time since their loss. I needed to hear their interpretation of

living with the person prior to their going missing, what was happening for them in the present, and how they felt about the future. I needed to identify with them a safe space and place where they could share their story. The importance of a safe space and place to conduct the interview is an ethical requirement when one is dealing with a sensitive issue like the experience of someone close going missing.

4.6 Philosophical and Psychological Background

When choosing a methodology a number of factors come into play. The nature and purpose of the research is paramount, as is the need for it to resonate with the researcher's own values and beliefs. For me it was best expressed by Polkinghorne's (1988) statement about 'the importance of having research strategies that can work with the narratives people use to understand the human world' (p. xi). As a counselling psychologist helping people make sense of themselves and their world is the goal of therapy. In moving to the researcher role the method chosen needed to value people and their stories and help them in the process of giving meaning to their world. This is what led me to choose narrative inquiry as a method in that it was broad enough in scope to encapsulate the totality of the lived experience of these families (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The new developments in grief research have revealed a growing interest in qualitative methods to express the human experience of loss. This was supported by Carverhill's (2002) explanation that a 'story telling approach to grief research where narrative (i.e. story) is defined as a means to describe order and make meaning of our lives' (p. 201).

The first thing to recognise as one comes to narrative as a novice in this arena is that it does not fit into any one particular field of the human or social sciences. It is interdisciplinary and has grown out of dissatisfaction with the traditional or formal scientific methods for understanding human and social behaviour (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Dewey, 1934, 1938, 1961; Polkinghorne, 1988; Reissman, 1993).

It would appear that ever since earliest recorded history people make sense of their world through stories. Stories or narratives contain experiences that are constructed and reconstructed in the light of new experiences because they do not occur in

isolation from personal, social and cultural events. Narratives are concerned with a broad, longer term series of actions, experiences and human events. Narrative researchers (Bruner, 1994; Carr, 1986; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dyson & Genshi, 1994; Reissman, 2008) seemed to agree with Webster and Mertova (2007) when they commented:

That action, life and historical existence are themselves structured narratively and the concept of narrative is our way of experiencing, acting and living, both as individuals and as communities, and that narrative is our way of being and dealing with time. (p. 2)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was recognition of what could be termed an interest in the study of human beings as persons. As Polkinghorne (1988) explained:

Since the early application of formal science principles to the study of the human realm, authors have written about the inability of formal science methods to deal with the problems of human individuality. (p. 102)

A groundswell of authors in the human sciences at that time was calling for new methods, new sciences and new disciplines to study individual and personal character. One of the key people in this paradigm shift was William Stern (1911, cited in Polkinghorne, 1988). Whilst the first studies in what he termed individual psychology followed the pattern of a traditional scientific method:

He [Stern] was not content with merely noting the multiplicity of traits within a person, he added the study of personal biographies as a means to understanding the unity of personality. (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 102)

A personal biography is another way of saying that Stern was interested in the story or the narrative of the people studied. This in part gave rise to the notion of individual psychology, which was supported by Alfred Adler (1911, cited in Polkinghorne, 1988) and taken up in such places as the Psychology Clinic at Harvard. In a similar fashion when Sigmund Freud was developing his psychoanalytic theory, he published case notes of his patients, which were in essence individual stories or narratives. Others in the field thought there was a need for a major change of focus particularly in American studies. Gordon Allport according to Polkinghorne (1988) suggested 'drastic reorientation was necessary' and in demonstrating this he 'made significant contributions to the development of a narrative-based study of the individual' (p. 103).

A recent research report by Hjelmeldand and Knizek (2010) made the pertinent observation that there is a need to describe qualitative research. They saw the differentiation being based on the terms explanation and understanding. They suggested that quantitative research was mostly concerned with explanation, whereas the human face was revealed in qualitative research when there was understanding. At no point did they deny the importance of explanation—the why, what, how questions, but they did stress for the bigger picture to emerge there was a need for understanding. This allowed for probing in the search for meaning. The same could be said of the research on missing persons, as an important part of this research was to understand the experience of families and thus endeavour to make meaning of this event.

4.7 Narrative Turn

What was occurring in the field of psychology over the past 30 plus years was also happening with anthropology, sociology and psychiatry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provided examples of this discovery in each of these disciplines, and they concluded that their awareness had been increased by looking across disciplines ‘for insights into these changing inquiries and changing phenomena which resonate with and inform our own narrative inquiries’ (p. 5). Chase (2006) suggested the concept was a sub-type:

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterised as an amalgam of interdisciplinary lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them. (p. 397)

Narrative inquiry has become another way of doing research that is set in human stories, which Reissman (2008) referred to as the ‘narrative turn’ (p. 14), a concept that she suggested began in the mid-1980s.

From ancient times, humans have used the oral tradition of stories to both make sense of their world and to pass on the language, culture and tradition of their world. Narrative inquiry then was set in human stories of experience as Webster and Mertova (2007) explained:

Narrative records human experience through the construction and reconstruction of personal stories; it is well suited to addressing issues of complexity and cultural and human centredness because of its capacity to record and retell those events that have been of most influence on us. (p. 1)

The stories people tell and hear from others shape who they are and what they do. As Lysaght (2009) commented: ‘From a narrative perspective, we live our lives by the stories we tell’ (p. 35). This recognition that a person is a story-telling creature should be taken seriously and we as researchers ‘should pay close attention to the stories people tell’ (Smith & Sparkes, 2006, p. 170). The term narrative itself can carry many meanings and is frequently used synonymously with story. Riessman (2008) cautioned narrative researchers ‘not to expect a simple, clear definition of narrative that can cover all applications’ (p. 3). In this work, I will use the term narrative in an all-encompassing way—narrative as story, and story as narrative.

Narrative inquiry research provides a way of presenting experience holistically in all its complexity and richness. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) provided me with an understanding of how narrative inquiry treats the whole person in their social and cultural context. The way in which Clandinin and Connelly (2000) came to narrative inquiry, like so many before them, was through a realisation that the educational research and consultation in which they were engaged had something missing. The terms they eventually articulated whilst they were informed by the narratology literature came from ‘our concern for experience and from our purpose—which is to think through the doing of narrative inquiry’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Put simply in their terms, ‘Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience’ (2000, p. 19).

In their search for a way to express narrative inquiry, which honoured and respected the breadth and depth that was revealed in their participants’ stories, they describe the notion of a Metaphorical Three-Dimensional Inquiry Space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). They acknowledge this idea was ‘derived from the Deweyan view of experience’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Dewey’s research had been uppermost in their thinking as they began their own studies within education and the school environment. The work of social scientists at the time (such as Coles, Dewey, Geetz & Bateson; Johnson & Lakoff; MacIntyre; Polkinghorne) led them to see how

the concern for human experience was pivotal in their work (Clandinin & Connelly, 2001, p. 1).

4.7.1 Three-Dimensional Narrative Inquiry Space

Trying to capture the complexity of the experience of missingness for each person is what drew me to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Their three-dimensional inquiry space provided a metaphor for understanding the experience of the participants and framed a way to express it. The terms they used to describe these three dimensions were *personal and social* (interaction), *past, present and future* (continuity) and *place* (situation):

This set of terms creates the metaphorical three dimensional inquiry space with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension and place along the third. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

The notion of a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space could be seen to set defined limits on the experience, but this was not the case. There is no suggestion that the narrator was boxed in by this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. Quite the opposite; it allowed the narrators to chart their course in the process of the interview and let their story flow freely. It is a way of viewing with a wide-angle lens the landscape of missingness the narrator provided whilst giving expression to the personal and historical length and the breadth and depth of that experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

This concept for me provided an all-encompassing framework for the work I was seeking to do. It also emphasised the relational aspect of the work—myself as researcher and the person being interviewed were together in that narrative inquiry space. On reflection I realised my choice was influenced by who I am as counselling psychologist, where a positive relationship between therapist and client is fundamental to the ongoing therapy. As a therapist, I am comfortable with a non-directive, client-centred approach and that seemed to be equally important for my role as the researcher where I wanted as full and open disclosure as possible.

There was an implicit recognition that I was also caught up in the experience of the interviewee and at times their story resonated with some of my story. In this context of these stories of participant and researcher, our relationship was unique. I also recognised that in participants telling me their story it would not be the same if they were telling it to someone else. Similarly, if I met the participant at a later time for a further interview the story would also have changed.

4.7.2 Composing Narrative Beginnings

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have an expressive turn of phrase ‘Walking in the midst of stories’ (p. 63). To me this acknowledged the importance and centrality of my own experience and autobiography. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) used this phrase as they told what it was like for the researcher to go into the field and begin their research:

As we worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learned to see ourselves as always *in the midst*—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal and the social. But we see ourselves in the midst in another sense as well; that is we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories—ours and theirs. (p. 63)

Aware of these factors, the degree of apprehension I felt as the researcher going into the field and conducting the initial interviews was unexpected. I was surprised by this reaction because I have been involved in psychological counselling for over four decades and was used to relating to people on a personal intimate level. I was comfortable in that role. Going into the field as a researcher listening to but not analysing personal complex issues meant I had to redefine who I was and what my role was. Not only did I need to relinquish the counsellor role in this context, I needed to listen with a different focus as the researcher and facilitate the narrator in providing a rich and deep account of their unique experience. There seemed to me to be always that duality of their space and my space, and together we ultimately made a new story.

A timely reminder of this potential for the blurring of boundaries was provided by Lysaght (2009):

As researchers, we may walk a fine line between gathering data and engaging in therapeutic practice when we collect information through the stories of those who participate in our projects. Often through collaboration with our participants we move much closer to therapeutic practice than we may anticipate. (p. 36)

When embarking on a research project that involves the disclosure of very personal information from the participants there was a need for clear boundaries to protect both the narrator and the researcher (Lysaght, 2009). These boundaries were established in the protocols that gained ethics approval as a part of my research proposal, which were affirmed by Boeije's (2010) reminder that 'Social scientists follow ethical rules of behaviour to prevent them from doing harm to others and to protect themselves' (p. 43). Equally important were Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) comments that the researcher needs to remain aware of an ever-changing landscape that may require ongoing negotiations. They suggested 'there might be a need to negotiate relationships, purposes, transitions and a way to be useful' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). Building rapport with the narrator and listening to the story unfolding will with some people establish a strong bond. Skilfully negotiating that relationship particularly in transitioning the beginning and ending of the research period was a major responsibility for me as the researcher. It was also important to keep in the forefront of my thinking that the purpose of the interview was different from my professional role.

As a therapist I was used to picking up and dealing with the emotional pain of people, and when the participant said something that could suggest a therapeutic response this had to be resisted: this was not my role as the researcher. At times I felt in the process of the interview that just listening to the story was not enough and would like to have found a way to be useful. Lysaght (2009) refers to this tension that the researcher may feel as 'Riding the boundaries' (p. 37). However, the aim of the researcher was to allow the participant to tell their story and not actively engage therapeutically with them in one way or another. The integrity, flexibility and transparency of the interview process needed to be maintained for the study to be acknowledged as valid narrative inquiry and seen to be authentic.

4.7.3 Analysing Narrative Data

Clandinin and Huber (2006) described three commonplaces of narrative inquiry where they reiterated that it was a way of understanding and inquiring into experience. The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry provided a conceptual framework:

Within which different kinds of field texts and different analyses can be used. They are commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place. They believe that these three commonplaces ‘need to be simultaneously explored in narrative inquiry ... and in part (this) is what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other methodologies. (Clandinin & Huber, 2006, p. 3)

The analysis reflected these three commonplace themes and in so doing the voice of the inquirer aimed not to write over the voices of participants by using an overly dominant researcher signature.

Narrative inquiry provided a way for my participants to make meaning of the traumatic experience of a person going missing. As they told and retold their story, they shaped their world and their place in it. Using narrative inquiry Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed that one moves from the field text to the research texts in ‘which we ask questions of meaning and social significance’ (p. 131). This was the method I chose to guide this research as it allowed the participant’s voice to be heard and their story told in a way that would represent the complexity of person’s experience. It was answering these kinds of questions that formed the essence of analysis that at times seemed somewhat overwhelming. The richness of the stories that were told and the relationship established with the participants made me reluctant to select some aspects of their story for analysis and not others, but this was necessary.

There are a number of ways in which analysis of the data can be carried out. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) were not at all prescriptive, but rather recognised different stories needed different emphases. They cautioned against a simplistic approach that narrative inquiry ‘is merely a process of telling and writing down a story with perhaps some reflective comments by researchers and participants’ (2000, p. 131). Another option was found in Reissman’s (2008) description of four approaches to narrative analysis, which as they stated, ‘are broad groupings with

boundaries that are not always distinct, for they often overlap and blur' (p. 51). Her purpose in describing these four approaches was to inform researchers that particular aims will 'determine the kind of analysis that suits their questions'. Working from this perspective, researchers who were looking for a set of rules would be disappointed.

I documented my reflections following each interview and completed journal notes taken over time. What I found challenging was that in listening to the tapes, I was interpreting their story in one way, and then in reading the transcript a different emphasis could be implied from the same statement. Reading and re-reading the transcripts, going back to the audio tapes and registering the nuances in the text all needed to find articulation in this new narrative, the research text. The task was infinitely more complex and topics such as 'character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context and tone' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) were explored. Another way they described the analysis was looking for themes, narrative threads, patterns and tensions within or across an individual's experience and in the social setting. Reissman (2008) also explained that 'All narrative inquiry is, of course, concerned with content—"what" is said, written or visually shown—but in thematic analysis, content is the exclusive focus' (p. 53). She also indicated that thematic analysis and the use of four exemplars was to show the variety within this one form of analysis, as 'my objective is excavate concrete practices or ways of working with narrative data where primary attention is on 'what' is said, rather than 'how', 'to whom', or 'for what purpose' (Reissman, 2008, p. 54). I also used themes as the primary way of analysing my data.

In writing up the analysis there needed to be balance in the way the data was presented. The growing narrative literature has stressed the importance of there not being a dominant voice. In writing the research text there were a number of voices, the researcher, the participants and those who were portrayed as missing in the stories, all of who had a need to be heard (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 146). The aim was to structure the narrative of these various voices so that there was a blended harmony giving a new narrative voice. As with voice, so with signature as this was the danger that the research signature would speak too loudly and obscure the

participant's signatures. In contrast, there was the risk that being overly reliant on the participant's signature would leave the researcher with limited input (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Again, it was a question of balance in creating a harmonious voice and a dual signature 'which has rhythm, cadence and expression' allowing for a unique author style. 'The signature and its expression in discourse create an author identity' (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 148). Both voice and signature find their appropriate expression if the researcher is clear about the audience being addressed:

In writing narrative research texts, we must be mindful of balancing the tensions of writing within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, of writing in ways that narratively capture field experiences, and of balancing these with audience. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 154)

The framework provided by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) largely guided my analysis in the context of this research as my task was to paint a picture in words that described the experience of missingness as told by my participants. The picture needed to be expressive of the people, the places and circumstances captured in the ongoing experience of missingness by the families. The telling of the story was an attempt to make order out of disorder and find meaning in the meaningless, which was especially relevant to the study of loss and grief (Gilbert, 2002). The ultimate goal of the co-constructed story was to know that the narrative engaged with the audience in a meaningful way.

4.7.4 Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

Any methodology chosen for a research project will always be subject to some limitations. The reason for the choice of narrative inquiry was that it provided the means for this cohort of people to tell their story with the least number of impediments. While narrative inquiry has much to commend it as a qualitative research methodology there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. Unlike empirical research, narrative inquiry begins with experience as lived and told by the participants. This generally means the sample size is comparatively small. Small samples are necessary in qualitative research due to the analysis of large amounts of data that can become labour-intensive as the researcher seeks to uncover layers of meaning. For the transcriber, this task can also be emotionally draining, depending on the nature of the study being undertaken. When the sample size is

small there is no attempt to generalise to the total population. Carverhill, (2002) explained the appropriate terminology in the following way:

To use some terms from the positivist paradigm, the qualitative project does not include generalizability or external validity among its aims. Rather words like reliability and validity, the vocabulary of qualitative research includes expressions such as trustworthiness, member checking and credibility (p. 199).

In narrative inquiry the story is told by the participant and as a consequence this type of research is frequently criticised because of its subjective nature. This is made more subjective when narrative researchers readily acknowledge their part in the process by personally disclosing who they are. Critics of qualitative research who come from a quantitative background naturally ask questions about reliability and validity because their studies from a scientific standpoint require this. For the qualitative researcher Reissman (2008) has the following to say on the validity problem:

Charles Boch poses the central question: ‘field work done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?’ When applied to narrative projects, two levels of validity are important—the story told by a research participant and the validity of the analysis, or the story told by the researcher. (p. 184)

She wanted to underscore the trustworthiness of the project, not simply the truth of what had been said. In this study the sample chosen was to allow the participant to tell of their experience, which for that person at that time that was their truth. At another time the story may change, but the integrity and truth of the story remains. Carverhill (2002) reminded us that ‘qualitative research does not claim that there is only one way of interpreting an event, a person or a place. There is no “correct” or “ultimate” interpretation’ (p. 200). For some researchers, this can be disconcerting.

4.8 Selecting Participants

This research was to explore the lived experience of families of missing persons thus the parameters of the population of this study were clearly set. The pre-determined population for this study required a sampling process that would be representative of the families who fit the given criteria. In determining the criteria I was guided by Minichiello et al. (2004, p. 181) on non-probability sampling methods.

Understanding the advantages and disadvantages of each method led me to convenience sampling of families with a missing person to best fit the criteria I had set. The benefit of convenience sampling is that it is inexpensive and usually easy to access, whereas the disadvantage is that it may not be representative of the target population. I did not see this disadvantage as a problem because my goal was to hear the unique story of the individual's experience from a clearly identified population. An unexpected consequence of doing the interviews was that there was some snowballing as identification of one participant often led me to another person within the same family. This in fact was significant as it provided quite different perspectives on those individuals' experience of a family member going missing. Since this research was focused on families of missing persons there were additional criteria that governed the selection process. These are now described.

4.9 Defining Participant Criteria

The participant criteria were made up of four areas. The first was familial relationships where family member was defined as parents, sons and daughters, inclusive of parental figures or siblings who were not biologically related to the missing person, but who were part of the family structure in which the missing person had lived. Irrespective of the relationship to the missing person the second criteria was that any person from the one family who offered to tell their story would be interviewed separately. The third criteria were that unless there were mitigating circumstances each person being interviewed would be over the age of eighteen years. All in my sample were over eighteen years of age. The fourth criteria was that as the interview would be conducted in English, people from a non-English speaking background (NESB) needed to have a good command of the language. No one from a NESB made contact so this did not pose a problem.

The literature on missing persons has defined the long-term missing in reporting on people who have been absent for more than six months where there has been a concern for their safety (James, 2008). This study focused on people who fit this category of long-term missing. Studies on missing persons as shown in Chapter 2 revealed that people can be missing for many years with their details still kept on

file. No further parameters were set in terms of the length of time the person had been missing. I did not place any restrictions on whether the missing person had been found alive or dead. No one who contacted me failed to meet the criteria of the person being long-term missing.

Those who go missing come from a wide age range, and belong to many different backgrounds and occupations. This spread of people was reflected in the sample of participants who told the story of their missing person. The literature used in profiling missing persons has acknowledged that while the greater proportion of people who go missing are from metropolitan areas, a significant number are from an outer suburban or rural setting. The sample aimed to get a broad geographical representation of families who had a member who had been reported missing. The limited access to services, particularly in the area of mental health for families in the rural sector, may reflect quite different experiences to their urban counterparts. Two people from rural NSW who made contact with me for personal reasons could not be interviewed. The most important criteria for me was that all participants were willing to share their experience of a family member going missing in an interview, which was indicated through their agreement to participate.

4.10 Recruitment

There were two primary ways in which to recruit participants—through notices and/or newsletters and personal contact. Three organisational groups were targeted: non-government organisations (NGOs); government departments and professional sources. The NGOs published flyers in their newsletters and/or their notice boards (see Appendix 1). With the permission of the committee of the FFMP I was able to publicise the project in their newsletter. These organisations included the Salvation Army Family Tracing Bureau, the Red Cross Tracing Service, the Gay Counselling Service, the Wayside Chapel and Rough Edges. The latter two groups provide services to street people and the homeless in the Darlinghurst/Kings Cross area of Sydney. The government departments included the NSW and ACT Police Missing Persons Units.

4.11 Professional Sources

The professional sources came from two groups: loss and grief workshop participants and professional links. Workshop attendees shared their names and addresses with me and I forwarded detailed information on the research project to them. Each person recruited in this way was a willing participant. Some snowball sampling did occur when a work colleague who knew of my project mentioned this research to someone who had a person who was missing. The colleague sought permission of the person concerned to pass on their details. With the permission of the committee of the FFMP I was able to publicise the project in their newsletter and I then made contact with the family concerned and explained the study in more detail. When they indicated a willingness to participate I communicated by telephone before forwarding the information letter (see Appendix 2) and consent form (see Appendix 3).

4.12 Participants

This study embraced the stories surrounding seven males and five females who had disappeared, with ages ranging from eleven to 55 years. Two of the missing people were married and one other man had been in a relationship for some time. These three people all had children and their ages ranged from four years to early twenties. The youngest person who went missing was born in Scotland, and all the other missing people lived in Australia. The biographical details of the missing people, the outcome of their disappearance, and the family members who were interviewed, are shown in Table 1. All the people listed were de-identified and given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality and privacy. At the time of the interview the remains of two persons had been found. Subsequent to the interviews another person's remains were also recovered, and one missing person had made contact with his mother.

4.13 Interview Process

Prior research alerted me to the complexity associated with preparing for and planning the interviews. Consideration was given to the time and place of the

interview, the degree of formality or informality with participants, and the shape or structure the interview would take (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Given that my overall aim was to allow the participants to tell their story in a free and frank way, eliminating anything that might impede that process was a priority.

I reflected on what impact locating the interviews in different places might mean for the participants and myself. I noted that the notion of place was important in Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) research. I was conscious of being a guest of the people I visited in their homes, though I was not aware of this placing me at a disadvantage. Equally I was conscious that people coming to my office would/could create a power differential, but this was not reported by those specific participants.

The place of the interview appeared to be integral to the story that would unfold. Allowing people to be at ease in whatever environment they chose was the essential criteria. Because of the sensitive nature of the interviews and the possibility of the person becoming emotional I made the decision not to offer the option of a public place, such as a coffee shop. I respect the time participants were giving up to participate in this research, so I wanted to remain as flexible as possible in relation to both time and place. For those participants in the greater metropolitan area of Sydney negotiating time and place was relatively easy. I had access to counselling space in four locations in Central Sydney and suburban locations, at Burwood, Darlinghurst and Parramatta. I provided the addresses of these locations as one choice; the other choice was for me to visit their home. For participants from the metropolitan area the numbers were evenly divided between the office location and those for whom their home was a more suitable place.

I arranged to visit people who lived outside the greater Sydney metropolitan area at a mutually convenient time. For those people in the Australian Capital Territory I arranged overnight accommodation so that I could interview the three participants over two days. One in this group failed to turn up for the scheduled interview, despite attempts to contact her a number of times on that day, and subsequently I did not hear from her again.

Finding the balance between meeting in a formal versus an informal place was not an easy undertaking. Discovering where a person was most comfortable so that they were at ease for the interview was the important factor. As much as possible I left the decision as to where the interview would take place up to the participant. However, this preliminary task emerged as a helpful part of the rapport-building prior to actually meeting the person face-to-face. I had already gained a certain amount of information about the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of their family member in the telephone conversations or emails from the people involved.

From years of working with people in a counselling role I was happy with a non-directive model using an open-ended question to initiate the process. By endeavouring to be empathically attuned to the person and only ask clarifying questions, the focus was kept on the narrator and I was there as the facilitator. In order to maintain a consistency of approach I used the one open-ended question for all the participants.

The beginning of each interview was slightly different partly due to the place where it occurred. For instance, at most of the home visits I was offered refreshments, which in the case of long drive to the home were most welcome. This informal beginning to the interview also provided the opportunity to share additional background information about the family and more particularly the person who went missing. In the more formal surroundings of the counselling rooms I would offer coffee, tea, or a cold drink, but in the main people were happy to get started with the interview. The value of being in the counselling room was that I was able to have the tape recorder checked and ready to start once I had explained the process and had completed the paperwork.

In the preliminary discussion and the signing of the consent form in duplicate I indicated that this was their story and they were free to tell it in whatever way they wanted to. I would only interrupt if I did not understand and needed clarification. I also let them know what would be my initial question so that they had time to think about it while I was setting up the tape recorder and testing that it was recording

correctly. I reinforced the statement in the letter of invitation to participate that what was said was in confidence and the only other persons who would have access to tape recordings and or transcripts would be my university supervisors and the person who did the transcribing. I reminded the participants that further questions or concerns about the project could be addressed to my supervisors at the telephone number provided. I also said if at any time during the interview they were feeling uncomfortable or they needed to pause to please let me know. If there was something that came up in the interview that was causing them distress then I had the names of people they could contact for assistance.

The open-ended question referred to earlier was the starting point for each interview: *What can you tell me of your experience of [name of person] going missing?* Whatever and wherever the person chose to commence their story was the beginning of the narrative. The beginning point for each person was unpredictable and varied. Some began in the present, while others started with the day of the disappearance, or the message that came to say the family member was missing. As the narrative unfolded most participants went back to the missing person's childhood or highlighted something special about that period of their lives. They all tended to use the temporal landscape as a way of moving back and forward in time as one aspect of the experience occurred to them that then led on to something different. The sequence of events was not of importance, the experience was. I found that by allowing the narrator to tell their story, there was little for me to do except to ask the occasional clarifying question.

On the next page, the reader is introduced to the missing people's biographical details and their family members.

MISSING PEOPLE BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS, OUTCOME AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Missing Person	Gender	Age	Birthplace	Single/ Married	Work	Last known abode	Place last seen	Mental Health/ Substance abuse	Outcome	Family Members
Donald	Male	55	Aust	Married	Fire Service	Queensland	Home	PTSD	Remains found	Sandra
Sally	Female	19	Aust	Single	Enrolled Nurse	Caravan Park Victoria	Victoria	None	Reported alive	Elizabeth
Danny	Male	25	Aust	Single	Itinerant	Melbourne	Melbourne	Sub Abuse	Still missing	Isabel
Anna	Female	mid 20's	Aust	Single	Nurse	U.K.	Yacht	None	Drowned	Josephine
John	Male	51	Aust	Single	Nurse	Rural NSW	Home	Depression	Remains found	Lucy & Tracey
Alister	Male	mid 20's	Aust	Single	Journalist	Sydney	Sydney suburb	Depression	Still missing	Chloe
Michael	Male	23	Aust	Single	Pensioner	Rural NSW	Home	Schizophrenia & Sub abuse	Still missing	James & Kate
Linda	Female	11	Scotland	Single	Child	Glasgow	Bus stop	None	Still missing	Jocelyn
Sam	Male	22	Aust	Single	Itinerant	Redfern	Sydney suburb	Schizophrenia	Found alive	Paula & Julie
Susie	Female	34	Aust	Married	Home duties	Central Coast	Home	Depression	Remains found	Alan & Betty
Narelle	Female	23	Aust	Single	Backpacking	India	South India	None	Still missing	Frank & Audrey
Russell	Male	31	Aust	Single	Pensioner	Sydney	Sydney suburb	Sub abuse	Murdered	Brenda

As the researcher I gently facilitated the narrator in telling their story, aware of the importance of active or empathic listening was paramount. I used Meares' (2000) concept of empathic attunement to guide my role of researcher in listening to the narrative. It was this depth of relationship that provided the space for participants to share deeply sensitive and sometimes quite painful experiences. Sometimes when something significant (to me) was stated by the narrator and not elaborated on, I would refer back to that point to see if there was something further to be said about that experience. I found that by being comfortable with the silences that sometimes occurred, when the conversation started again, it was like opening up a new insight into the disappearance story or the courage to begin to tell of a painful episode in the journey with the missing person.

The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes with most just over an hour. At the conclusion of the interview I was conscious of the amount of emotional energy that the participant had used and suggested that they might feel physically drained as a result of talking so freely about their experience. One person, conscious of the journey I had to make back to my home, made me a snack and a drink. I think it was also her way of unwinding from what was a revealing interview. As I concluded the session, I cautioned people to be gentle with themselves and basically take it easy for the next couple of hours.

I gave people a general idea of the way in which the research would progress without trying to give an end date. I indicated that when the work was complete I would let them know and how and where the finished product could be accessed. I told them I would not be contacting them again, but if they had any questions they were free to contact me at any time. Most of the participants I did not anticipate meeting again. There were some people who I would be likely to encounter at the Service of Remembering in Canberra at the commencement of Missing Persons Week or at other meetings of families of missing persons. I said while I would acknowledge them and chat with them, anything about the research would be dealt with in a different forum. I have had no difficulties with the few participants I have met at official occasions.

The only telephone call I have had was from a mother who told me her son had been found and she had spoken with him. She telephoned me because she thought I would like to know. The same lady had given me a photograph of her son at the time of interview.

Being aware of my own mental health was important. I knew I would need to talk over my emotional responses to the interviews. Being used to clinical supervision and discussing cases I realised that my normal supervisor and my peer group would not be appropriate for this discussion. I was fortunate to be able to talk to another psychologist who had also completed research work to monitor my reactions on this research journey. I became conscious of an emotional response to the stories of the people who went missing and to the emotional intensity of some of the participants in the telling of their story. At least one story resonated with me on a deeper personal level in that my eldest grandson who from an early age had been missing from my life. Having the opportunity to talk over the interviews allowed for any possible blurring of boundaries to be identified as well as being able to articulate and deal with any personal pain that arose from what the participants disclosed.

4.14 Ethical Considerations

Before the interviews commenced the research project was approved by the University of New England Research Ethics Committee (Approval number HEO5/045, 12 April, 2005). Copies of the information brochure and consent form are attached in the Appendix section. Another ethical issue for me related to visiting participants in their homes. I was a stranger to them and I would not know whether the person to be interviewed would be on their own or not. This was particularly the case when interviewing women in their home. I was conscious of this with my first interview where I was going to the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast to meet with a lady whose husband had gone missing from the property where they lived. I had phoned the lady to let her know what time I would be arriving and then about fifteen minutes from the destination phoned her again to let her know what car I was driving and the colour shirt I was wearing. The property was quite isolated. The lady appreciated that I had phoned and provided those details. I did not have the same

concerns with any of the other homes that I visited, as other family members were present in the home.

4.15 Transcriptions

Analysis of the interviews began with the transcription. Prior narrative inquiry research, including Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Reissman (2008), suggested immersion of oneself in the interview material. As a consequence I attempted to do the transcription myself, but it proved not to be the most efficient use of my time. Instead I contracted a person to whom I downloaded the taped interview and received back in a matter of days the completed document. Immersing myself in the material came through another means of modern technology. I downloaded the tapes into an iPod and listened to the tapes as I travelled to work by bus. I was conscious of my emotional reactions as I entered into the narrative inquiry space of the participants again. A notepad allowed me to record those reactions. I discovered emerging themes that would provide the basis of the plots to shape the new narrative used when analysing and reporting on the experiences of the participants.

Looking at the themes in the transcripts meant I could follow the temporal flow through the narrative even though they appeared at different times in the story. Some of the themes featured frequently in the story and these were noted as they conveyed important dimensions of meaning and significance.

4.16 Analysing the Narrative Data

The key to the emerging narrative was experience, so Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) words were timely in stating, 'Experience is what we study and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it' (p. 18). Despite this categorical statement, they provided no fixed rules for analysing the narratives. Clandinin and Connelly, like other authors, appeared to be flexible about the analytic process. They are emphatic, however, on one thing: 'it is the responses to questions of meaning and social significance that ultimately shape field texts in research texts' (2000, p. 111). How to

do it is left up to the researcher. ‘All narrative inquiry is, of course concerned with content—‘what’ is said, written or visually shown—but in thematic analysis, content is the exclusive focus’ (Reissman, 2008, p. 53). She goes on to say that ‘the general approach is probably the most common method of narrative analysis and arguably the most straightforward and appealing’. One way is to look for the plots within the data and search for the narrative themes, threads, or patterns that link them into a new narrative co-constructed by the researcher and the participant so there is a seamless new story. Signature and voice of either party are not dominant in the new narrative. Narrative researchers ‘must always be aware that the finished report is a narrative created by the writer/researcher, that has come from the narratives of others’ (Gilbert, 2002, p. 228).

The method that ultimately shaped my analysis was that described by Reissman (2008)—thematic analysis. This decision came about from both listening to the early interviews and reading them and discovering themes emerging within the individual stories and across the narratives. Viewing the lived experience from a loss and grief perspective, Gilbert (2002) reinforced this decision with her statement, ‘the richness of loss and grief stories seen in narrative studies contributes to our understanding of the personal experience as well as the themes that transcend the individual stories’ (p. 237).

The interviews that were conducted ranged over a fifteen-month period. What was significant about that time span was the way themes and threads changed and what appeared to be a dominant theme in the early stages of the analytic process finally became less so. These initial threads did not disappear, but they became part of a more dominant theme. An example of this was that in my first exploration of a theme, I decided on ‘searching’ as a dominant theme. As time went on, other interviews took place and a fruitful brainstorming exercise enabled me to see emerging themes that ultimately became the ones by which I shaped the analysis.

From this listening, reading and re-reading and preliminary writing I came up with two overall themes that became chapters for exploring different themes. The first is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 as the universal experience of families of missing

persons. Chapter 7 presents in detail Living with the Known and the Unknown. These were the dominant themes that shaped the discussions, along with a number of other threads that were interwoven to give expression to the depth and richness of the experience of families of the long-term missing people. This study does not seek to be representative of all families of missing persons, rather it is a window opening into the world of missing persons and showing the unique life experiences of a group of seventeen people whose family member and for one person, a friend, went missing.

4.17 Summary

This chapter began by positioning me as the researcher, including my personal and professional background. Then the theoretical orientation of narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach was discussed within a social constructionist framework, which guided this research. The focus then moved to the research design, sampling and interview process used for the data collection. There was the acknowledgement of the need to be clear on my role as the researcher in the interviews and not allow the psychologist in me to blur the boundaries. A range of methods to analyse the data were explored leading to the identification of thematic approaches to give expression to the dominant themes. Thematic analysis shaped the co-constructed narratives, supported by a number of interwoven threads to develop an overall picture. A brief synopsis of the biographical details of the missing people was provided prior to the introduction of the participants in the next chapter. The limitations of a qualitative narrative inquiry research project were discussed and some solutions were addressed. Some of the content in the interviews was emotionally draining for the participants and confronting for me as the listener. I had a professional obligation to ensure the participants knew the sources of support if they were needed, though none to my knowledge did so. At a personal level to ensure continuing objectivity in interviewing I was able to gain professional supervision as needed. Out of respect for the participants I would have liked to include all the stories in full, but that was not possible due to word limit constraints. I want to acknowledge my gratitude to them as their stories unfold as part of new narratives in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 5: Introducing the Participants

This chapter is the introduction to the people I have interviewed. The focus now turns to the people who have experienced a family member or friend who has gone missing. At the start of each snapshot I have used a pseudonym for the family member and beside this bracketed the name of the person who went missing. The people I will introduce include husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, daughters, sisters, brothers and friends and how the missing person's disappearance affected their lives. Each person from the same family was interviewed separately and often at different times and in different places. The snapshots will try to capture some of the atmosphere of the interview and allow the reader to gain a picture of each person and their relationship to the person before and after they went missing. Each person will be introduced in the order I interviewed them.

5.1 Introducing Sandra (Donald)

I approached my first interview with a great deal of apprehension. Sandra had agreed to see me at her home in the hinterland of Southern Queensland so I was aware I was entering her physical and personal space. As the researcher I was also aware that I had no idea whether she would be alone so I phoned Sandra to tell her I was about fifteen minutes away. I also told her what car I was driving and what I was wearing. I think this was to alleviate my anxiety and also to exercise some responsibility associated with 'stranger danger'. When I drove in I discovered the house was on a large rural block and somewhat secluded. I turned off the car engine, and the front door opened and I was warmly greeted by Sandra.

Sandra invited me into an open plan living/dining room, and we sat down at the large dining table. She and Donald had been married for 39 years, and they had three children, two girls and a boy all of whom are adult and living away from home. Donald disappeared shortly after Christmas (29th December) the year prior to the interview. His remains were found about eight months later in his car in bushland close to a coastal town in northern NSW. This discovery was made approximately

two months prior to my meeting with Sandra. The interview was conducted after the funeral had been held, but this had not brought the peace Sandra sought. Donald had been in Vietnam as a National Serviceman and around the time of his disappearance he had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Sandra thought that because of his service in Vietnam he was a changed man from the person she married. Over the years he had suffered from frequent bouts of depression. Following his disappearance Sandra was to learn many new things about her husband when she spoke with Donald's counsellor at the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service (VVCS). She regretted not knowing these things and that her husband could not speak with her about it. Even though Donald's remains have been buried Sandra says she is left very confused about the man she loved yet in many ways did not know.

When I reflected on this interview the one image that stood out for me was the new set of boots standing near the front door. These boots were bought a few days before Donald disappeared and were not the right fit and needed changing. They have not been moved in the ten months since Donald left. In some ways the boots symbolised the feeling Sandra had of being unable to move at that time.

5.2 Introducing James and Kate (Michael)

I met with James in my counselling rooms in Parramatta as this was the most convenient location for him while he was visiting Sydney. James, a former primary school principal, lived with his wife Kate in a rural town in the Southern Highlands of NSW. Apart from Michael their youngest son who disappeared, they have four other adult children who are no longer living at home. Michael disappeared from his flat, which bordered on a National Park in the Southern Highlands of NSW. At the time of interview Michael had been missing just over three years.

James knew of my research from his involvement with the FFMP committee and responded promptly to the advertisement for participants. Since the time of Michael's disappearance in May 2003 James has been actively involved with the FFMP committee. James's professional background gave him the skills to be an

articulate and passionate advocate for families of missing persons. He reported that a number of families had problems with the authorities when dealing with legal and financial matters related to the missing family members. With other members of the FFMP committee James was able to arrange positive changes in those areas. James's behaviour in response to Michael going missing was to try and make meaning of their loss by actively seeking answers. His experience of Michael's anti-social behaviour and subsequent disappearance and his way of handling it was quite different to that of his wife Kate. What James found most distressing was that people whom he had known for many years could not talk with him about Michael's disappearance. James later reported how difficult it was to go to a court room and hear that their missing son was presumed dead. The lack of any form of ritual to mark the occasion created a sense of emptiness and for James it was like the final nail in the coffin of hope.

The interview with Kate took place in my office in Darlinghurst, an inner suburb of Sydney. I had learned from James that she was a private person and had not spoken to anyone professionally about Michael's disappearance. I was therefore pleasantly surprised by the way in which she opened up and talked freely from the start. She is a businesswoman and has a shop in the rural town in the Southern Highlands where they live. Much of her personal support has been with valued friends in that context. Her interview was very much from a maternal standpoint in which she recounted many stories of the little boy Michael. She felt she knew from an early age that Michael was different but knew that James did not see it that way.

The mental health problems that Michael experienced from his teens onwards meant his behaviour was often unpredictable and sometimes quite frightening and at times they feared for their lives. This behaviour was exacerbated by his use of marijuana. For Kate the issue of holding on and letting go of a young adult who was socially and emotionally adrift was a painful experience. Not knowing how to help Michael was for her extremely difficult, and Kate found her own ways for seeking answers. Kate like other women in this study consulted clairvoyants in the hope of gaining leads as to where their loved one might be. Both Kate and James expressed gratitude for a

close and supportive family, not only in the difficult times before Michael's disappearance, but also in the period afterwards.

5.3 Introducing Frank and Audrey (Narelle)

My interview with Frank and Audrey took place in their home in the suburbs of Canberra. I was warmly received by them and shown into a family room where I was offered a very welcome cup of coffee and some refreshments. This provided an opportunity to chat generally while setting up the recording apparatus. Audrey had another appointment to attend so at her request I interviewed her first while Frank remained in another part of the house. When I got back to Sydney the next day and began to download the interviews on to my desktop computer Audrey's interview could not be found and despite an extensive search it has remained a mystery as to what happened to that interview. The other three interviews completed during that period in Canberra were successfully downloaded but for some inexplicable reason Audrey's was lost. I could not help reflecting on my reactions to a missing tape—shock, panic, searching, retracing in my mind the steps I had taken at the time of the interview and subsequently all without success. These reactions shadow in comparison to a person going missing though some of the reactions may be similar.

Frank and Audrey and their three sons went to Phuket to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. Their daughter Narelle, who had been backpacking in various parts of Asia and Europe since she was eighteen, met them in Phuket for the celebrations. She was 23 years of age when she was with the family for the celebrations. At the time of the interview Narelle had been missing for fifteen years. When Frank, Audrey, and the boys left to return to Australia, Narelle continued her travels with a Swiss young man with whom she had become close and together they planned to travel to India. That visit to Phuket was the last time the family saw their daughter and sister.

The fact that their daughter went missing while overseas created many complications for Frank and the family. In reporting their daughter missing to the police they found that the police did not at that time have a policy for dealing with people missing

overseas. After some time had elapsed Frank went to India and searched in all the known places Narelle had visited or from where they had received letters. The police in India were not cooperative making the search more complicated and dangerous. The Swiss young man travelling with Narelle went missing at the same time. The family had some contact with the boy's mother but that has not continued. Frank said that his three boys did not speak about their sister to him, and he did not know whether they spoke about her amongst themselves.

At the conclusion of the interview I was taken to Frank's shed at Audrey's earlier suggestion. Frank is a collector, and his shed had a wide range of items all meticulously displayed that he had collected from many different places. The items were all catalogued, and the place was kept very neat and tidy. His searching for things to add to his collection was in stark contrast to his search for Narelle, which to this day has yielded little in the way of information.

5.4 Introducing Alan and Betty (Susie)

On my visit to Canberra I arranged to meet with Alan and Betty. The interviews were conducted at the end of the workday at their place of business in Canberra. They live some distance from Canberra so this was a more convenient location to meet for them and for me. I recall it was a particularly cold Canberra day and I discovered from Betty that the day before the interview it had been four years since their daughter Susie went missing.

In some ways I felt I knew a fair amount about Alan and Betty and their married daughter Susie's disappearance as they had been in a documentary on missing persons to which I had contributed. Having seen the documentary, I felt an affinity with them and knew a lot of the detail of Susie going missing. It was for this reason I have chosen to introduce them together though they were interviewed separately. I did not disclose to them my prior knowledge of their daughter's disappearance.

Alan and Betty had two children, Susie and a brother. Susie had two young children and lived with her husband Ben on the Central Coast. She was not happy living so far

from the family and had experienced regular bouts of depression. Betty went to see her as often as she could and talked to her regularly on the telephone. On the day she disappeared Susie took the children to school, returned home, and then disappeared. Betty said that was when the nightmare began. Groups of people arranged searches of the local area and some of this searching was out of desperation and not very constructive. They found the police in this period were extremely helpful. Alan had left his son in charge of the family business while he took part in the searching.

Where I was seated during the interview I noticed a calendar and when Alan saw me looking at it, he said he marks of the days and weeks since Susie went missing on that calendar. Whenever there was any report of a sighting of Susie, the couple took off in their caravan to search at that location, and they were dependent on their son to manage the business in their absence. The media at the outset had been very active in reporting Susie's story in the hope that someone might recall seeing her. The physical and emotional demands on Alan and Betty were evident in that their health suffered. Betty spoke of not knowing what it is like to feel normal again.

Betty more than Alan expressed a great deal of concern over the fact that Susie had been involved with a fringe church group, and she felt this group had a lot of power over her.

Betty had found a lot of support from her colleagues at work where mental health professionals were part of the team. She had been able to talk with them, but Alan had not spoken with anyone to seek any support.

5.5 Introducing Isabel (Danny)

After seeing this study advertised in the Salvation Army Tracing Service newsletter Isabel made contact with me. On the day of the interview in August 2006, I drove to a town about 90 minutes from Sydney on the Central Coast of NSW. Isabel and her second husband had moved from Sydney a few years previously and now felt settled in their new home. On arrival at their address I was met by Isabel and her husband,

and we went into the family room where once the recording apparatus was set up her husband left the room and we began the interview.

Of all the participants Isabel was the most difficult to engage. She seemed to want me to question her and once I reinforced I just wanted her to tell me her experience of Danny and his going missing she began to talk more freely. Isabel's son Danny went missing after an argument about eleven years earlier. He had two older sisters one of whom lives in the UK and the other in Sydney. Danny became difficult to manage in his early teens and Isabel discovered he was involved in underage drinking and drugs. By the time Danny was fifteen he wanted to leave school. A friend in Melbourne offered to give him a job so he went there to live. Isabel said they kept in contact and occasionally went to Melbourne to see him. For a time in Melbourne he lived with his biological father whom he only met in his teens. Danny had found out that the man to whom Isabel was married was not his real father and this disturbed him. He came home for his twenty-first birthday and they bought him a car. I found Isabel to be very hazy about dates and times concerning Danny. This was in contrast with her statements about them being close when he was young. Since his last appearance at Christmas some years back Danny has not been heard from and she has lost all contact with him. Attempts to make contact with his employer and the place where he was living did not produce results. She was highly ambivalent about her relationship with Danny. Since they had moved to the Central Coast from Sydney she said Danny would not know where they now lived. She had not sought any help from anyone and did not know there were support services for families of missing persons. She had not reported him missing to the police because a friend who was a policeman advised her that as he left voluntarily and with her knowledge the police would not help.

I had the impression that Isabel offered to be interviewed in hopes that it might be another lead in finding Danny. When I left I suggested she get in touch with the police and the missing persons counselling service.

5.6 Introducing Chloe (Alister)

I heard Chloe speak at the launch of the Missing Persons Week in Canberra where she told a little of her story. She is a journalist and talked of what it was like for her to have a colleague and friend go missing. Following her talk I spoke with her and she agreed to be interviewed when she was back in Sydney. Because of her other commitments this date was postponed and I met with her in January 2007. We finally arranged a time in my city office where the interview took place. After a few minor hitches with the recording apparatus, the interview began. Chloe is an articulate young lady who spoke of the friendship she had with Alister, a fellow journalist.

It was when Alister's mother telephoned her expressing concern that he had not been in contact nor was he answering his mobile that Chloe too became concerned. His disappearance was over a year prior to our meeting. Chloe said that most of the office thought Alister was having an off period and would be back, even though she discovered he had given his notice of termination to his manager. Like other people I interviewed, Chloe found out more about Alister's life after he disappeared than he shared with her in their workplace discussions. The mother reported Alister going missing to the police about a week after his last contact. Chloe found his disappearance confusing as he had bought a unit and was paying off a mortgage. She said he was a private person and had a limited social life. She began questioning herself as to whether she could have done anything different. Her boyfriend was supportive of her, and she did seek some counselling assistance. She did express the thought that probably Alister had gone somewhere and taken his own life—though he never said he was contemplating ending his life. Chloe continued occasional contact with Alister's mother, but at the time of the interview thought she needed to finish that interaction. She felt she needed to move on with her life.

5.7 Introducing Brenda (Russell)

Brenda was the only person I interviewed at my home in January 2006, as she lived locally and it was more convenient location for her. She came to me through the church I was then attending and was the sister of one of the parishioners who had

confided in me about her nephew going missing. Brenda readily agreed to be interviewed and other than knowing of Russell going missing I had no other details about him or his disappearance. Brenda described that the last time she saw Russell, 15 years previously, she had been angry with him and said a number of inappropriate things to him as she was so annoyed. She had gone to pick him up from the hospital and was anxious about his health. He had similar renal and other symptoms from which his father had died. There was a long history of drug abuse, encounters with the law, and possible a mental health condition that was never diagnosed. At the time, Russell first went missing Brenda thought she was in denial as he had often disappeared for a few days, so even though this was a longer time she was not overly concerned. Some weeks after he left Sydney he telephoned Brenda from South Australia (SA). He would give no details or a telephone number and that was the last time she spoke to him. Following a family discussion Brenda decided to report Russell missing to the local police.

The SA police had been investigating a drug ring growing marihuana on a farm near Murray Bridge and had tracked Brenda down from Russell's last phone call. They eventually made contact with her when she learned what probably happened to Russell. I got the impression that in some ways she was not surprised by his death, but this did not minimise the intensity of the grief she felt about a son whose short life was such a painful one.

5.8 Introducing Josephine (Anna)

I met Josephine at a National Association for Loss and Grief (NALAG) meeting at which I had been speaking. She introduced herself and told me about her sister Anna going missing in late 1986. I arranged to meet with her at her home after the Christmas holidays, and the interview took place in January 2007. Anna and her fiancé Harry were sailing back to Australia from the UK to be married when Josephine received the news from a friend in England that the couple were missing and feared drowned. Josephine's brother was staying with her and together with their other sister they went to tell their parents. Josephine said they heard nothing from December to February and then realised it was serious. Just before a memorial

service they had planned at the mother's request, the trunks arrived in Sydney, which contained memorabilia and items in preparation for Anna and Harry's wedding. Josephine said the family had great difficulty speaking about Anna and all the family reacted differently to her disappearance. Josephine recounted experiences in her loss and grief counsellor training, which were both confronting and liberating.

Around the time of the interview her daughter was going overseas to study, and this created a lot of tension for Josephine. Apparently her daughter looked very similar to Anna and when people remarked on this Josephine felt quite uncomfortable. Josephine said her own experience of having to deal with the trauma of losing Anna has meant that she is much more able to enter into the pain of others whom she counsels.

5.9 Introducing Julie and Paula (Sam)

I met with Julie and her mother Paula one Saturday morning in August 2006 as her work commitments made this the most convenient time for them. They lived on the outskirts of Sydney in a semi-rural area. They found out about my research through the Salvation Army Tracing Service newsletter and made contact with me. Julie asked to be interviewed first as she was due to go out later that morning.

She told of how Sam voluntarily went missing. Julie last saw him on Boxing Day four years prior to our meeting. When he first left home the family had regular telephone contact with him, but when he sent the mobile phone back to his mother the contact ceased. Sam suffered from bipolar and frequently had bouts of quite severe depression, which was something she worried about.

Julie and Sam were both overseas at the same time, but they did not have much contact with each other. As children they did not get on very well. When he returned from overseas Sam acknowledged his sexuality and came out gay, but he did not tell Julie directly either about his sexuality or his mental illness. Paula and Julie had reported Sam to the police but found there was little they could do as he had left voluntarily.

When Sam was feeling okay he would go off his medication, and this caused many problems. Julie expressed a lot of anger about Sam for leaving. She seemed to move between hoping he was okay and wondering if was he dead.

When Julie and her partner moved to live in the family home they had to reorganise the rooms, and this involved cleaning out Sam's room. She felt angry with Sam for disappearing and the pain it has caused their mother and leaving her to deal with her all the problems. She found a number of letters and post cards Sam had received and had written to family. She worried about her mother's driving especially after her being involved in a minor accident. She thinks they are more anxious around each other, which has strained the relationship. Following my interview with Julie I began the interview with Paula.

Life had not been easy for Paula. When her marriage failed she was left to cope with a business debt and two children, one of who changed from a happy child to a difficult teenager. His eventual diagnosis with bipolar gave Paula some understanding as to why Sam had behaved in the way he did.

When his mental condition had stabilised his father who was going to England suggested Sam go with him. He got a few jobs in England and was doing fine and always kept in touch. Paula went to Europe to see him and found him quite distressed. Paula was aware that Sam was on soft drugs and had another depressive episode following his friend's accidental death. Shortly after this Paula received a call from London saying he was at the airport and needed money for a ticket to get home. Sam returned home and was fine for two days and then a complete communication breakdown went on for some weeks. Shortly after this he left home to live in the inner city. Each time he returned home for a visit, he became more abusive and overly demanding. Paula recalled how as younger boy he was very attractive, garrulous and outgoing, and everyone loved him and she had high hopes for him because he was so special. Paula's experience with counsellors was mixed. She found GROW (peer support for mental health) helpful and particularly understanding about bipolar and mental illness generally. She says she watches the TV series on Missing Persons as a way of trying to understand what happened to

other people in a similar situation. She fears for Sam's safety and the possibility that with his gay lifestyle he might have contracted HIV/AIDS.

5.10 Introducing Elizabeth (Sally)

Elizabeth was someone who approached me after speaking at a loss and grief conference in November of 2006 in the Blue Mountains of NSW. She explained that her youngest daughter had gone missing and she would be happy to be interviewed. She said her background as a professional in the mental health field prompted her interest as well.

We made contact with each other by email, and I arranged a time to meet with her in January in her home a few weeks later.

Elizabeth lives in the upper Blue Mountains, and she has been in the same area for many years, though, as she explained, she downsized her property when all the children moved out and she retired. Elizabeth was a psychiatrist who worked for many years in the public health system. I found an easy rapport with her, and she spoke openly and freely about her daughter Sally's disappearance, which was just about twenty years earlier. Sally was the only girl in the family of four with a brother younger. She lived at home while modifying her car for an around Australia trip. While on the trip Sally kept in contact with her mother, and this continued for two years and then abruptly stopped. Elizabeth and her son Peter decided to search for her visiting the places Sally had been to. When they returned to Sydney Elizabeth reported Sally as a missing person, and the police did their own search. The Victorian police found her alive and well, but she did not want contact with the family.

Elizabeth had a sister with whom she had a strained relationship and who was not at all supportive. The other children were angry with Sally going missing over how it had affected their mother. A number of people in the area had told Elizabeth that they had seen Sally in the area, and this unexpected turn of events left Elizabeth very confused.

Talking about Sally's disappearance triggered an amazing story of Elizabeth's own parents disappearing and having no contact with their respective Hungarian families from whom they had run away. This all came to light with the death of her mother. Elizabeth had always wondered why she had no grandparents, aunts, or uncles—no family. She was so different from other girls she grew up with as peers. Her visit to Hungary gave the answer to the questions her parents would never answer. Elizabeth said when they arrived in Australia the Nuns anglicised her name and suggested to her parents they have elocution lessons to get rid of their accents. The family in Hungary could not understand how two sisters could be so completely different.

As Elizabeth was telling me this part of the story she stopped at one point and said 'Do you believe me—it's such a story?' Although I was feeling gob smacked by the story I certainly believed her and she concluded that she was trying to fit Sally into this jigsaw of people going missing. She wonders whether she will ever see Sally again and if she did would she recognise her?

5.11 Introducing Lucy and Tracey (John)

From December 2006 to January 2007 I agreed to do a chaplaincy locum in an outer western Sydney Palliative Care hospital at which I had previously worked. During the lunch break, one of the senior nurses who knew of my research project with families of missing persons asked me whether I knew that one of the staff, Lucy, had a brother who went missing. I did not so the nurse approached Lucy about the possibility of being interviewed by me. She readily agreed and also mentioned her sister Tracey might be interested in being interviewed too. A month later Lucy and I met in her office, which was private and in a secluded part of the hospital. She arranged for all telephone calls to be diverted to other staff during our meeting.

John was Lucy's only brother, and on the day the interview took place it was six years less a month from the date he went missing. John had a history of depression. He had a partner and a son (Max) who was five at the time of his father's disappearance. The couple did not live together. John, a psychiatric nurse, lived

independently on a semi-rural property opposite a state forest some distance from a major NSW country town where his parents lived. John was being cared for by a friend following a major depressive episode when he disappeared from the property. Friends came and began a search in the state forest and surrounding district.

Three years after he went missing the family received a call from the police that some skeletal remains had been found adjacent to the state forest. The police had completed a dental recognition and found that it was John. Apparently at the site they found some of his belongings and empty packets of tablets. The parents decided there was to be no funeral, and John's remains were cremated. Lucy reminisced about their childhood and the things they did together and how as an adult he became a much more private person. John and his son regularly stayed with the family. This again was part of the confusion for Lucy—if he loved his son Max so much how could he do this to him?

Lucy did seek out some bereavement counselling for herself, before John was found. Whilst she found this mainly helpful she did not appreciate the counsellor talking about her brother being dead when this outcome was not yet known. Lucy sees the world differently now, and the relationships in the family have changed. She also realised she has become more protective of her children John was found on Anzac Day, and she commented about going to the site where he was found probably with her sister, but she is still uncertain as to when that might be.

I arranged to meet Tracey at her home in an inner riverside suburb of Sydney. I had only spoken to Tracey on the telephone previously to arrange the interview so this was our first person-to-person encounter. Tracey introduced me to her husband, and we had a cup of coffee together before Tracey and I went upstairs to a bright airy room overlooking the Parramatta River. There was a relaxed and friendly atmosphere as we began the interview.

Tracey commenced her story about ten days before John went missing when her parents telephoned her concerned about him. Tracey's aim was to get John medical help. He was admitted to a psychiatric clinic but checked himself out after one night.

A friend, Naomi, agreed to stay with him, and Tracey felt reassured by this arrangement. A telephone call came from Naomi on the following Saturday saying John had disappeared. Tracey said how she had never seen her father so emotional, and she found that after about a week she wanted to escape from it all. Tracey found she was on an emotional roller coaster, though she commented she was not as upset as Lucy.

With John's disappearance and the family's involvement with the police she discovered just how many people went missing. Whenever a report appeared of a body being found Tracey would contact the police to see if that was her brother. She found so many people offering advice, telling her what she should or should not do, and it was frustrating and annoying. Tracey had heard on the local news of remains being found and was at her parents' home when the police telephoned to say there had been a positive identification and that it was John. This is when the reality of what had happened really hit home. The family decided to have a private cremation, and Tracey talking about how strange it felt for her having to collect John's ashes. The hospital where John worked organised a memorial service.

At this point in our discussion Tracey pointed to a box full of John's personal papers reminding her of the need to see the accountant again. Tracey and Lucy were made executors of John's estate. Once John's body was found and death certificate was issued they were able to deal with the property and organise things financially for Max and his mother.

Tracey said she sought counselling because she thought she was not grieving enough, though she was not certain what that meant. Tracey's daughter, who is 35-years-old, suffers from depression, which is of concern to her. Tracey concluded the interview by saying that the previous Sunday the family and John's partner finished cleaning out his things from the garage. She said she never wanted to visit the place again. The relationship with John's partner and the family is not good, yet communication must be maintained by Tracey and Lucy with Max and his mother as they now have a legal obligation for their financial welfare.

5.12 Introducing Jocelyn (Linda)

My introduction to Jocelyn was when we both appeared on a TV program on issues relating to missing persons. After the TV session finished I explained my research and asked Jocelyn if she was prepared to give me a more in-depth interview. She readily agreed. The day I arrived at her home in suburban Sydney for the interview it was the 50th anniversary of her sister Linda going missing. When I discovered this, I checked with Jocelyn whether she was still happy for the interview to continue, and she indicated that it was quite alright. Jocelyn was the older of the two sisters by eleven months.

The setting for Jocelyn's story was in the suburbs of Glasgow in Scotland on the 23rd of February 1957. The girls had arranged for Linda to go to the shops to buy a birthday present for their mother. To do so she took the local bus. She was the only remaining passenger on the bus. This was last time she was seen alive.

The discovery of Linda going missing was not made until about 9 pm that night. Jocelyn found out the next morning when the police arrived at her grandmother's home where she was staying for the weekend and spoke to her grandmother. Linda returned to her parent's home which she found chaotic.

Over the 50 years that Linda had been missing the search continued and it seemed as though important information that people had was not disclosed to the family or the authorities at the time of Linda's disappearance. The family eventually discovered there was a conspiracy of silence by the authorities in Scotland, which kept the truth hidden.

Her mother's wish was that someone would just carry Linda home so that she could have a Christian burial. That wish was never to be fulfilled. Jocelyn said her father never got over it, and he shut down verbally and emotionally. Jocelyn felt guilty leaving her father when with her family she migrated to Australia.

There was a dramatic turn of events that began at their father's funeral. Sandra Brown who attended the funeral was the daughter of the bus driver who had been driving the bus the day Linda disappeared. The relationship that developed between Jocelyn and Sandra meant that a number of things were uncovered about Linda going missing as Sandra knew details of events that Jocelyn had not known. The knowledge about Linda was not appreciated by other members of Jocelyn's family, and this had led to a deterioration in their relationships. Linda's aim was to search for the truth regarding her sister's whereabouts.

The loss of Linda has had a huge impact on Jocelyn emotionally and physically. Most of this has come about because of all the information that has been uncovered, and they still do not have real answers. A detective who had been on the case came to Australia and visited Jocelyn. He had been side-lined, demoted, and taken off the case. It was possible he had found out about the things that had been kept quiet.

The day the interview took place there was a memorial service at the church they attended in Glasgow. It was a memorial for all missing persons. Sandra Brown has established a foundation, and all proceeds of her book, *Where There is Evil*, go to the foundation to help assist families of missing persons in their search for answers. The interview flowed freely, though I was conscious of it moving backwards and forwards in time as the story unfolded over a 50-year period.

While this is the story of Linda going missing, it is also the story of Sandra needing to find answers for herself as well as Linda's family. I felt in listening to the stories I was involved in the untangling of a web of intrigue, and there are still many loose ends which they are exploring..

5.13 Conclusion

My aim in introducing the participants in this chapter was to provide a thumbnail sketch of the family and some of the circumstances surrounding the person who went missing. Situating the missing person in his or her life space contextualises the narratives of the family members. It is from the myriad of stories that the participants told that a number of themes formed. The focus of this thesis on the lived experience of families of missing persons will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7. The next chapter

explores the first of these themes—the common elements, the cost factor and the coping. From these three themes a number of threads will begin to form the picture of the experience of the families of missing persons.

Chapter 6: Missingness: A Universal Experience

Having someone go missing is outside the range of experience for most people in our society. A missing person is a difficult concept for people outside the situation to grasp. Being allowed to enter into their world and listen to their stories provided me with the unique opportunity to understand something of their experience. This chapter takes us to the heart of the experience of families of missing persons and how I, as a privileged temporary participant in their world, made meaning of that shared experience. To encapsulate this experience, I present the view of the world of these families through three themes. These themes paint a picture of living with a person who was physically out of the frame of that picture. The three themes, the common elements, the cost factor and the coping, are how I began to paint a picture of missingness.

The first of these themes explores the common elements in the stories, those things that all participants had in common. There is in fact something universal about this common element experience that was expressed by these particular participants. The second theme moves to what kind of impact a missing person had on those families. This theme I have called the cost factor. The toll on families was revealed at a personal level and a relational level as the intensity of the trauma associated with their loss found expression in grief responses. The third theme revealed the ways of coping. Some participants were able to make meaning of their experience of loss by showing a great deal of resilience.

6.1 Common Elements

In this section on the Common Elements I explored three threads that families of missing persons had in common. The first of these was the common experience of all families experiencing a missing person. The second thread was that all families had an ongoing relationship with a missing person, and the third thread was that all families searched for their missing person, and this search has a dual focus.

6.2 Experiencing a Missing Person

When a person went missing, irrespective of where in the world they disappeared from, the families of those missing people shared a common experience. Every one of them had a missing person. The international and national research discussed in Chapter 2 on missing persons provided documentary evidence of the universality of that element. Efforts have been made by many government authorities that have set up organisations to assist in understanding how, why, where and what makes people go missing, and these organisations help search for them. The police are most often the first place families go to when the discovery of a missing person is made, and in NSW they are referred to the state police's Missing Persons Unit. In a similar fashion, organisations like the Salvation Army, the Red Cross and Red Crescent all have tracing services that operate across international borders to assist the families who share this experience of a family member going missing. It would appear that with these provisions in place when a person went missing overseas getting assistance would be relatively easy, but this was not the case for Frank and Audrey.

6.3 International Experience

The disappearance of Narelle overseas while backpacking in India created confusion for Frank and his family. The shock reaction when confronted with something as traumatic as this tends to lead to this confused state. Knowing where to start and who to contact in Australia was the experience Frank and Audrey had when Narelle vanished:

As the weeks went on, we started to get a bit stressed out about it, no communication, no phone calls you know—so we went to the police and they didn't seem to have a system and then we had to report it to Interpol. We didn't get anywhere, no response, no nothing sort of thing so I got in touch with Foreign Affairs. They advised us not to go to India—so we postponed it for a year, which was a mistake. (Frank, daughter Narelle)

The need to search and the need for assistance and/or collaboration in the process and the family's part as contributors were often not appreciated by the police. Some families felt the police did not take time to listen to them or take their concerns seriously. These kinds of responses by the authorities leave the families feeling

helpless and unsupported. In Frank's case his family sought assistance from the police who referred them to Interpol and then to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT). At that point in time there was no clarity about who was responsible for Australian citizens missing overseas. That has now changed and DFAT, and the Australian Federal Police have protocols in place to assist these families.

A different kind of overseas situation one family experienced was when a sister went missing at sea. The search for people missing on land allowed for the families and friends to visit places and to follow up on possible sightings of the person. None of this is possible when a family member goes missing while at sea. There are no markers to indicate the spot where they disappeared or any compass coordinates to show their position, and this is made more complicated when it occurs in a storm:

I got the phone call from England saying 'We fear the worst, that Anna and Harry are missing, presumed drowned or taken by pirates. (Josephine, sister Anna)

When Josephine was informed that her sister Anna was missing and presumed drowned in the Mediterranean Sea she reported, 'we notified Red Cross straight away'. It seemed the most obvious solution to her as she knew they operated across borders and dealt with disasters. They were sympathetic to her situation, and she understood that they passed the information on, but other than that, there was little else they could do.

The friends who feared the worst about what might have happened to Anna and Harry spoke to Josephine. Josephine was not upset when her friends verbalised those fears. In her opinion drowning was the most plausible answer. This brief statement did raise the question of the appropriateness of comments made by well-meaning friends and how they might be received by the family of a missing person.

Family members spoke of the searching in these circumstances as all-consuming of time and energy. They also acknowledged the financial ramifications of the searching, especially when it was associated with a person going missing while overseas as Frank ultimately discovered. People reported missing in Australia were

not under the same kind of pressure as those disappearing overseas, but the impact was just as great.

6.4 National Experience

Australian research by Henderson (1998) and James (2008) profiled the population of missing persons. Much of this information was gained from the families, all of whom were part of a discrete group of people who could report on having someone in their family who was missing. In NSW some of these families were able to join together and eventually formed a group called the FFMP in 2000. Sharing their common experience they found a voice through FFMP to plead the cause of families of missing persons. A number of important initiatives in the Missing Persons sector have taken place, both nationally and in the states and territories partly due to the activity of this group. NSW is the only state in Australia that has a designated counsellor for families of missing persons, and it is the most active state in this field. Three researchers from NSW, Leonie Jacques (2002), Sarah Wayland (2005) from the Department of Justice and Attorney General and Mark Samways (2006) from the NSW Police Missing Persons Unit, have been at the forefront of the work in NSW and in cooperation with the developments that have occurred at the NMPCC. The backdrop to all this work, important as it is, has been shaped by a group of people who have shared the common experience of a person going missing. The fact that they were able to join together to share their experiences and offset their sense of helplessness and despair made them a minority group. To know that there were others in a similar situation was comforting and took away some of the feelings of isolation and loneliness. These families, while having a person missing, also found they had additional common experience, which is described in the next section.

6.5 An Ongoing Relationship

When a family is shattered by the absence of the physical presence of one of their own, it does not mean that person is forgotten. When a family member, for example, goes overseas for work or on an extended holiday, they still remain a part of the family. That feeling of connectedness is reinforced with the opportunity to write to or

email the family or converse with them. When a family member goes missing this kind of physical connection is not possible. The missing people are however still part of what Pauline Boss (2006) calls the psychological family:

To understand the families in Lower Manhattan after 9/11 was to know that without evidence of death, they were going to keep the lost person present. (2006, p. 26)

Boss stressed the importance of this psychological family as she recounted that for the families whose loved ones were missing after 9/11, the treatment given by medical practitioners and counsellors was grief-related and for PTSD. Those providing the treatment failed to take into account the ambiguous loss the families were experiencing occasioned by the person being missing:

The psychological family is intrinsic in the human psyche. It compensates for loss, a basic feature of human experience. More than simply a collection of remembered ties, the psychological family is an active and affective bond that helps people live with loss and trauma in the present. (Boss, 2006, p. 26)

This notion of the psychological family retaining the bonds with the missing person is one that families of missing persons share. The renewed interest in the work of Bowlby (Mikulincer, 2008) who pioneered attachment theory (1971; 1975; 1980) recognised that from infancy children develop a strong attachment bond to their primary caregiver, usually the mother figure. The sense of security that this provides allows the developing child to take risks enabling them to move into the wider world. This attachment, this sense of belonging, remains throughout life. When a person dies or goes missing that attachment is not severed. The early grief models thought that for the resolution of grief this attachment should be severed.

Bowlby himself in the early days suggested that the bonds with the deceased should be broken. Stroebe et al. (1996) defined this as the breaking bonds hypothesis (1996):

Principles of grief counselling and therapy follow the view that in the course of time, bereaved persons need to break their ties with the deceased, give up their attachments, form a new identity in which the departed person has no part, and reinvest in other relationships. (p. 34)

People working in the field of grief and bereavement have researched new ways of understanding the grieving process and have moved away from the severing of the

bonds to the deceased (Neimeyer, 2001; Stroebe & Schut, 1999, Klass, 1996). Worden (1991; 2009), for instance, who supported the grief work principles with the four tasks of the mourning model, is now aligned with the new understandings of grief. Klass et al. (1996) identified what bereaved people have always known and what families of missing persons have found consoling is that there is a continuing bond with the deceased and or the missing person. A relationship exists with the missing person who is physically absent but still psychologically present as part of that family.

My experience with the families of missing persons began in 2003 when I was asked to speak to the FFMP conference on the grief of missing persons. In stating that the grief models were problematic for families of missing persons I found this statement resonated with them. I then tapped into the stories of their experiences with counsellors who suggested in therapy they relinquish the attachment bond to their missing person. This did two things to the families. The counsellor in using a grief model that was death-related was unwittingly suggesting that the missing person was dead. The families did not want to hear or contemplate that. Words like ‘closure’ were to be avoided at all costs. In the current study Lucy found she reacted angrily to the counsellor she saw briefly when she inferred her brother was dead. She then went on to tell how she responded when people, thinking they were being kind said:

Oh it’ll be nice if they found him because you will have closure. This word closure—when someone started to talk to me I’d think, Oh my God, they’re going to say that word closure any minute now ... It was just that word because I don’t think you ever have closure. Because closure to me means that you actually think that’s finished, that episode’s finished, we can cut them off and put that away. (Lucy, brother John)

The work on continuing bonds (Klass, 1996), while not applied specifically in the literature to the families of missing person, has I believe a direct application to this group of people. It adds another dimension to the ongoing relationship within the psychological family of the missing person. The continuing bond relationship does not make a statement about whether the person is dead or alive, because for many families with a long-term missing person, this is not known. A question that some people have raised is whether a continuing bond has a religious connotation. That may be true for some people whose religious belief system contains those elements

of life after death. A continuing bond, however, is a recognised phenomenon in most people's grief experience and for many a part of their spirituality, however that is expressed.

Incorporating these twin concepts of continuing bonds and being part of a psychological family into the therapeutic models counsellors might use with families of missing persons is something to be promoted. The experience of having a missing person and continuing an ongoing relationship with them is the motivation for the searching that the families undertake.

6.6 All Families Search

The most natural human response to the fact that someone has gone missing is to search for that person. This active searching however seemed to bring to the surface a different form of searching, an internal searching or a quest for meaning (Neimeyer, 2001). What was discovered with these participants is that searching was experienced by the families of missing persons in two ways. The first of these threads and possibly the most obvious is what I have called searching without or the action-oriented search. The second thread is that of searching within or the searching for answers theme. The common experience of families is that this dual act of searching seemed to go hand in hand. While the searching theme was common to all people who go missing, the context surrounding each missing person's disappearance and their families was different. The common elements associated with the families of missing persons discussed in this chapter suggest they are a homogenous group, and that is true up to a point. Where these families lack homogeneity was when the story of each missing person was explored and the uniqueness of each family's story was told. What was common to all was the searching; what was different was the reason for it.

Whenever a significant sudden and unexpected loss occurs as with a person going missing, a natural response is to ask oneself questions such as 'why?', 'how?', 'when?' and where? (Landsman, 2002). In the current study this was almost an

instantaneous response from those left behind as they tried to recall events leading up to the disappearance. Betty the mother of Susie explained it in this way:

Possibly one week prior to Susie's disappearance we were aware that she was distressed in one way and things were not going well for her ... Susie went missing on a Tuesday and on the Sunday prior she said she had had enough, that she couldn't take anymore ... and then she said 'Oh Mum what's happening to me' (Betty, daughter Susie)

Having this information and living some distance from her daughter, Betty and Alan felt helpless and were deeply concerned about her. They could only advise her husband Ben to get help for Susie. Knowing about Susie's emotional state from that telephone call, when she disappeared, increased internal questioning and their feelings of guilt.

While the searching process was going on, this internal dialogue continued. James was active in his search for Michael, following up every lead that he heard about. This internal questioning continued as he expressed both thoughts and feelings about Michael's disappearance:

One of the emotions that you feel ... is that you do go through a lot of guilt ... there are all the 'what ifs'. What if I had done this or perhaps gone back to Michael the day after we thought something was wrong instead of delaying it a couple of days and you certainly don't need anyone else to be putting more guilt on you. (James, son Michael)

This was an internal searching for understanding or for answers. In essence, families were endeavouring to make meaning of what had transpired when information was sparse. This frequently led the participants to reflect back on anything that might provide a clue to the mystery of the person going missing. This was the case for Sandra when she told of her experience when Donald, her husband, went missing:

The first thing was disbelief and I didn't want to accept that anything could possibly have been this wrong. And of course my first instinct was to go outside and check for maybe a piece of hose that might have gone missing ... and while I did not want to think along those lines it has to cross your mind. (Sandra, husband Donald)

This internal quest assisted the people in both physically searching for their loved one and helped them to try and make sense of what was happening within their family.

The memory of what transpired when her younger sister went missing 50 years ago was still fresh in Jocelyn's mind. Some of what she heard and saw around that time was quite traumatic and no help was provided, as was the case with all the other members of the family:

All I can remember, my first thoughts were, why is my sister's name always in the papers? She's been sighted in Doncaster with a lorry driver—we had spiritualists come—that was my first recollection: I thought what on earth is happening to this family? We had people that were deranged saying that they had sighted her, spiritualists saying we know where she is, and I started having nightmares. (Jocelyn, sister Linda)

For some families even years after the person went missing, they were still looking for answers, still trying to make meaning of the event, as was Jocelyn (Boss, 2006).

These brief cameos illustrate the way in which families try to come to terms with their loved one going missing. They have described the searching aspect that was common to all but acted out in different places for different reasons. What is also common to all families of missing persons is the cost factor and how this impacted them. This theme is the subject of the next part of this chapter.

6.7 Cost Factors

When a person is involved in a traumatic incident and suffers physical injuries, these are evident to all with whom they come in contact. The evidence of the trauma is there for all to see, and people respond accordingly with words of sympathy and encouragement. But there are other traumas that are less obvious but are still impacting on the family and friends. All families of missing persons find themselves in this category with the public at large having no knowledge of the trauma they are experiencing because there are no visible indicators. Within this theme, the cost factor, the aim is to bring to light the impact of a traumatic loss on these families. There are a number of threads that impact these families as they live with the effects of a person who has gone missing.

It was reported that for every one person who goes missing at least twelve people are impacted (Henderson, 1998). Of this group the greatest number of those who

experience this kind of traumatic loss are the families of the missing person. The six threads that families experienced are the physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and economic impacts. These threads are like a ripple effect emanating from the traumatic impact of a person going missing. It is possible to think of them as grief responses to the trauma but to phrase them in those terms is not the most therapeutic. These threads clearly arise from the experience of the families and need to be taken into account by service providers when dealing with them. I think it is fair to say that all families will find these threads impacting them. The difference will be the degree to which the six threads impact individual families, because each story is unique.

6.8 Physical Impact

The stress and tension that family members experience living with a person who has disappeared can have far-reaching physical consequences. The association between ongoing major stressors and physical illness has been well documented (Holmes, 1967; van der Kolk, 1996).

Amongst the participants in this study, Jocelyn had discovered a great deal about Linda's disappearance from the daughter (Sarah) of the bus driver implicated in Linda's disappearance. Some of the information Jocelyn gleaned was very distressing and even though it was nearly 50 years since Linda went missing the emotional impact at that stage in Jocelyn's life was still intense. She discovered on a flight to Perth in Western Australia that the stress impacted on her physically in quite a dramatic way as she recalled:

I don't know what happened. Maybe the emotions got the better of me and there were two businessmen, and apparently I completely blacked out and when I woke up I was covered in sickness ... They had a doctor on board and I'd got oxygen. I'd been out for an hour and a half. I didn't know where I was. So I was taken off when they landed at Perth in a wheel chair. And of course they had got my daughter who had come to the airport to pick me ... they had me in the neurological ward for about a week. I was fine. It was almost a mini stroke and I was fine. They did the MRI scans.
(Jocelyn, sister Linda)

Having a person go missing is traumatic in and of itself and for many families other adverse incidents occur making the stress involved cumulative. If the family

members as a whole or individually do not have the opportunity to externalise their thoughts and feelings about the traumatic loss they can suffer physically as well as emotionally.

The disappearance of Susie leaving two young children had a major impact on both Alan and Betty. For Betty in the early stages of Susie leaving she recalled:

I became more and more stressed, because I thought she was perishing out there and I suppose it was like an inner sickness, you know it was really deep sorrow and stress I suppose. ... I couldn't eat and I felt ill, and I couldn't sleep it was terrible and I think Alan felt the same and – and at that stage because everything was so full on. (Betty, daughter Susie)

Later on was when the pressure really built up Betty goes on to reveal how she and Alan were severely affected physically. Betty found that the antidepressants she was prescribed were not very satisfactory as they prevented her from sleeping and she put on weight as she was always hungry:

We began to suffer high blood pressure, I know my blood pressure was really high and I had a TIA ... Alan broke his, um I'm just trying to think of the physical things that happened to us, and then probably after about three months Susie had left I broke my foot um—and then Alan got pneumonia and had to go to hospital... I think because our immune system was so low and we were so vulnerable and we weren't really in control no, we had lost control sort of you know, we did really silly things. Yes depression, just feeling low and really not just feeling as though you were in a void, it was like a roller coaster, sort of up and down and up and down. (Betty, daughter Susie)

Betty's story revealed the interplay between the physical and the emotional for both herself and Alan. Their experience like so many others in the same situation helps us realise that people requiring support have to be treated holistically. Any therapeutic model that fails to do that is not in the best interest of the client population.

6.8 Mental and Emotional Impacts

The act of someone going missing does not occur in isolation to other adverse life events in the individual or family member. Very often families, while having the ever-present backdrop of a missing person, experience a higher occurrence of other traumatic events. The cumulative effect of these events may have serious emotional

consequences. The ripple effect of one traumatic incident after another impacting a person was described by Brenda and what it was like for her:

Not only had I been made redundant from my job at the age of 60 and I knew I would never get back to that kind of job again, and I was recovering from my partner, he was having an affair while I was going through all this grief and stuff ...and on top of that I lost Russell so I had a triple not a double – a triple whammy. (Brenda, son Russell)

A few weeks before the interview with me took place Brenda reported that she had to go to hospital for a computed tomography (CT) scan. The receptionist she had contact with at the hospital reminded Brenda that she had been in the hospital before. The intensity of these multiple losses had sufficient impact on her for to attempt ending her life:

I tried to commit suicide. Well I don't know whether I threatened or I did it but one of my friends took me to the hospital. I was in the RPA hospital and they put me on to this counsellor ... I had completely blacked it out of my mind.

People experiencing extreme stress like the families of missing persons were often preoccupied with the searching or just coping with their loss. This preoccupation can mean that they failed to recognise the stress they were under until their body provided the warning signs.

It has been recognised that most men often find it difficult to both ask for medical or psychological help and accept it when it was offered (Doka, 2000; Staudacher, 1991) as Alan demonstrated:

No, support was offered, and once again, and I don't know why, it's just my makeup and I didn't seek support ... I'm not comfortable showing my emotions, I've always bottled it up. But deep down it's churning away ... Well all my life I've always prided myself on being a brilliant sleeper, but not anymore ... I've got a dental problem because of it, because of grinding my teeth and I've now got severe face pain mostly when I wake up in the morning. (Alan, daughter Susie)

What was being expressed by each of these participants and experienced by all families of missing persons was that their assumptive world was shattered by the loss of their loved one and that had far-reaching effects (Kauffman, 2002).

6.9 Social Impact

The way in which the family as a whole or individuals within are impacted when a loved one disappears is dependent on a number of factors. The preoccupation with the searching can mean that social contact with friends occurs less often. Sometimes it seemed that this was a deliberate act on the part of a family member as was felt by James when visiting his elderly father. He felt his father had no appreciation of what his son was going through and therefore did not receive the support or understanding he was seeking. In fairness to the elderly father not knowing what to say or do is a common experience for people grieving generally and not just the experience of families of missing persons. James also found that strangers were often more supportive and understanding than people he had known for years. For those families who live in the major cities there is some degree of safety in the anonymity it provides. For families in rural communities or small country towns that kind of anonymity is not possible. Maintaining a modicum of privacy about personal issues is not always possible except by isolating oneself from the community to some degree.

The world of the family is often seen only through the problem associated with a family member going missing. The siblings, in the case of a brother or a sister who disappears, can feel abandoned by parents whose preoccupation is with the absent child. This is a similar pattern as when a child has a life-threatening illness and needs an inordinate amount of attention by the parents, especially when that child moves to the end stage shortly before their death. The siblings can feel isolated and alone.

Adult children can express frustration and anger when the parents are spending time and money in their search at the expense of time with other children and perhaps grandchildren. When a partner goes missing the person who is left is often uncertain about who they are and who they should relate to and what level of intimacy should be allowed. It takes considerable time to adjust, and in the case of long-term missing, for the partner to enter again into close relationships again.

The economic impact when a person goes missing is often not recognised. This thread can have far-reaching consequences.

6.10 Economic Impact

Of all the threads that impact families the economic one is probably the most difficult one to gauge and probably the one most often disguised. The Henderson report (1998) and the James report (2008) both told of the economic cost to the Australian nation when people go missing. There has been little recognition of this impact on the families involved. In this cohort of participants there were people like Alan and Betty with a business to run and the need to take time off to search when another sighting of Susie was reported. They had a caravan that they towed as far as Queensland as Betty said:

There was one good sighting and we followed it up quite extensively, mmm, but it came to nothing. I spent some time in lower Queensland, putting out posters, and talking to people at shopping areas where she was [reportedly] seen. We have been everywhere. (Betty, daughter Susie)

Apart from the economic cost of taking time off from the business there were the hidden costs of petrol and printing for this couple.

The need to search was probably the most costly impact on most families and their friends. The hiring of a helicopter in the search for John was an illustration of the lengths to which people go in their desperation to find the missing person. There was an economic cost to the NSW government in putting the Polair helicopter at the disposal of the team searching for Susie. The sad thing about these extraordinary efforts on the part of family and the authorities was that they seldom yielded a positive result.

When a person goes missing overseas only those families with sufficient economic resources can make the journey to the place from which their loved one disappeared. Frank was fortunate in this regard as he was able to visit India on two occasions, though the second time it was with the financial support of a women's magazine.

Josephine had some very good friends in England who took it upon themselves to drive thousands of kilometres along the Atlantic and Mediterranean coastline to see if any wreckage had washed up on the shoreline.

Other economic impacts for these families of missing persons included people taking early retirement as the demands of their professional role took their toll and they found it hard to cope. When a parent goes missing, especially those with young children, this can cause major economic stressors and in some instances require a complete change of residence and lifestyle to manage the situation. Susie left not only her husband Ben but two young children and for him his world was turned upside down as Betty recalled:

He [Ben] was totally devastated poor man—he gave up his job and stayed with the children for twelve months—which was good. He moved to where his mother lives and has rented a house nearby. The children miss Susie terribly and the little one thinks she went for a walk and got lost ... the older one has never said but you don't really know what affect it is having on children, do you? (Betty, daughter Susie)

Lucy and Tracey were confronted with a difficult set of circumstances when their brother John went missing leaving Max, a five-year-old son. There was the need to pay maintenance to Max's mother and as Lucy reported, 'they couldn't access John's back account, his hospital superannuation and all that stuff had to be sorted out'. All of John's assets were frozen and at that time it would take seven years before they could gain access to them. The child and his mother still needed housing and sustenance. They reported that their problem was compounded by a solicitor who gave them bad advice, which fortunately they did not try to follow. On a more positive note they were allowed to rent out John's house, which assisted them in providing for Max.

It is only when we gain access to the world of the families of the long-term missing that we get a picture of the cost to them. Behind the closed doors of these families we discover something of the impact on them and how it expresses itself in quite devastating ways. Doka (1989) talked of disenfranchised grievers, those people whose loss was not socially sanctioned or recognised. This is an apt description of

families of missing persons. Their world is shattered, and this raises all kinds of existential concerns, not the least of them is where spirituality fits within their world.

6.11 Spiritual Impact

In the post-modern era where the interest in spirituality has occurred and the belief that knowledge is socially constructed there is a search for moral frameworks and a fear of anarchy and chaos (McLeod, 1997). In the West, the declining interest in institutional religion has in part prompted this interest. However, it has long been recognised that the term ‘spirituality’ is a fuzzy term, lacking specificity in its definition (Fisher, 2011).

It is my belief that everyone has a spiritual dimension, something or someone they believe in. For some people that belief system may involve belonging to a particular religion that shapes their view of the world and the order it provides. Those not linked to a religious tradition still have a belief system that shapes their world. I discovered something of the importance of this spiritual dimension when working with another group of disenfranchised people—men with HIV/AIDS and their partners.

I tried to understand their world from a different perspective than the medical model and considered a wellness model. The wellness wheel was developed and had many spokes. The one that I explored was the spiritual dimension. In the process of running focus groups in Australia, South Africa and the UK, I proposed that spirituality has four components. The first of these is identity issues. In both being gay and diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, these men needed to rediscover who they were. Love and Relatedness issues described the situation many gay men found themselves in, abandoned by their parents and family. Their sense of belonging and connectedness was with the gay community and their partner. Meaning and Purpose issues told of how and where they found meaning and purpose in life. Transcendence was their view of the universe, life and death. Looking at the experience of families of missing persons I think these components have a strong application. When a person goes missing roles and identities change and love and

relationships also change. The whole question of meaning and purpose in life is re-examined and the idea of the transcendent—someone out there watching over us—becomes questionable. As with any other aspect of the assumptive world, what spiritual assumptions were made prior to a person going missing are either shattered or definitely called into question. James whose son went missing, expressed his experience in this way:

I don't think Michael's disappearance has done a great deal for my religious faith. ... In the early stages I prayed a lot and everyday and so did my wife and I think I used the phrase before I'm a bit of an 'L' plate Christian so I'm still going to church and I'm still seeking ... so I guess I'm tinkering on the fringe.

It's a difficult one to try and reconcile religious faith with an event like this that occurs in your life. (James, son Michael)

James felt that his religious convictions had taken a hammering as a result. He also expressed what he saw as a fundamental need when such things happen: 'we need to make the most of our time here, and we certainly need to let our loved ones know that they are loved'.

People like Lucy found that her upbringing as a committed Roman Catholic did not prepare her for such an event, and she found herself questioning a lot of things that previously she had taken for granted. Lucy's experience was expressed by Doka (2002) when he said:

Loss sometimes challenges these assumptions as well, causing bereaved persons to question earlier beliefs, challenging faith and philosophy and complicating the search to find meaning in the loss (2002, p. 49).

As human beings we like to see order in the universe at large and our part of it in particular. Natural disasters and other traumatic events call into question this underlying assumption, and we are frequently left floundering. A spiritual dimension to life provides a sense of security when people are trying to deal with traumatic losses like a person we love going missing. The spiritual element is like an anchor providing a hold on reality when there is turbulence all around. The counsellor who is aware of this dimension can assist the person on the path to healing and wholeness (Rothschild, 2000). Many families in NSW have found A Service of Remembering

held at the beginning of Missing Persons Week to be a positive experience in giving expression to their feelings about their missing person.

The public hear and see the news of someone going missing, but what they do not see is the cost to those families and the toll it takes on them in a variety of different ways. The third theme of coping will demonstrate that not all families or individuals are frozen in their grief but can find ways of finding meaning in missingness.

6.12 Coping

Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, there are abundant stories of people who make meaning out of their horrendous experiences. In 2004, Tedeschi and Calhoun wrote an article in the *Psychiatric Times*, 'A new perspective in psycho traumatology, Post trauma growth'. Since that time this concept has been implemented in clinical practice and reported on in the research. It is not the purpose of this chapter to deal with this work in detail but to alert practitioners and others to the importance of this understanding. What in essence is the basic premise is that people can make meaning of a traumatic incident by reframing the thinking around the incident and discovering that something positive can come out of that negative experience. A striking illustration of this was Viktor Frankl who when he became a prisoner of war in Auschwitz had his manuscript on Logotherapy taken from him. In the pocket of an overcoat he was handed he found a piece of paper containing a Hebrew prayer, and he reflected on what meaning he could make of this. He decided that in the prison camp he would live his theory and on his release he wrote the book, *Man's Search For Meaning* (Frankl, 1984).

It is interesting the way people all experiencing the same traumatic event can respond to it in several different ways. It is similar to the fight, flight, freeze response that can occur to people when confronted by something life-threatening or traumatic.

Another way of looking at these responses and how people cope is from the perspective of resilience. This was the focus that Boss (2006) took when she wrote about loss, trauma and resilience in relation to therapeutic work with ambiguous loss.

Frank's experience of visiting India on two occasions in search of Narelle taught him a great deal about the plight of missing persons and how in that time period limited resources were available to help families. He found it frustrating that government bodies seemed not to be aware of people going missing overseas, nor did they see it as their responsibility to do anything about it. Frank became proactive in getting information available to help other families who might suffer the same experience of someone go missing overseas:

I decided to write a book on the subject, just a small one, to give people a guide to what happens and doesn't happen, and as far as the Australian Government is concerned there is not a lot of interest and not a lot of help. Don't expect that if a person goes missing in a foreign country, Foreign Affairs are going to find them, because they are not. (Frank, daughter Narelle)

Since Narelle went missing the DFAT and the Australian Federal Police have been active in seeking to assist families of missing persons overseas. The natural disasters like the 2004 Asian Tsunami and earthquakes in the Asia Pacific region where Australians were missing prompted some of this positive action.

Sometimes the desire to be of help to others and promote awareness of the problem associated with people going missing takes a person out of their comfort zone as happened with Alan. He recalled how difficult it was for him when he was asked to do interviews about Susie's disappearance. He found each time he had to tell the story he became emotionally churned up. Alan and Betty produced brochures of Susie attaching a picture and contact details on their caravan, which they used when visiting places where Susie was supposedly sighted:

I had to do interviews with magazines and all that sort of stuff and it's very hard. Immediately after Susie disappeared we put out thousands of brochures and all that sort of stuff, so every time we had to talk to somebody about that, it just brings it straight back again ... I mean we did a story of 60 minutes and that was pretty hard going.

When Russell was living away from home Brenda made it a practice to visit him each week. She did this partly to see that he was still okay and also it provided her with an opportunity to give him food. So each week she prepared a small hamper of food essentials like, tea, eggs, tinned food, etc. Meeting some of Russell's friends at the memorial service reminded her of this simple task she had diligently done over

the last few years. This prompted Brenda to prepare a food hamper and take it to the Exodus Foundation at Christmas time. This led to her volunteering her assistance to help out there. She soon found herself being involved in the kitchen preparing meals for the disadvantaged and marginalised clients of the organisation:

The people who came to the Exodus Centre had been through similar experience to Russell. I recognised Russell in a lot of the young guys. ... you know the thing is while you're just standing there serving breakfast ... they would chat to you like it was quite a worthwhile experience (Brenda, son Russell)

It is often in the simplest of tasks that the greatest satisfaction is derived. Having had the experience of living with Russell she could understand and empathically relate to the young men at that foundation.

For Josephine the experience of losing her sister was tragic and at a time when life should have been opening up for Anna and her fiancé. Josephine was in counsellor training program and an innocent comment during a coffee break triggered off an intense emotional response that gave her greater insight into the grief experience of others. Josephine and Anna were often taken for each other so it was natural for her to comment about others sharing similar features:

If I didn't know any better I would say you two were sisters. With that they looked at each other ... and they said 'well as a matter of fact we are'. Then I was about to say 'Because you seem so close' and then I don't know what happened for me, right inside of me, it just welled up this sobbing, like a wailing.... I couldn't contain myself. (Josephine, sister Anna)

Fortunately for Josephine, the facilitator of the group provided an opportunity to talk about her sister's disappearance and that was the first time she had spoken publicly. The only friend in this group of participants was a journalist who thought she would write a novel with a missing person as the central figure in the plot.

Earlier in the chapter I referred to the ripple effect and how it was reported that approximately twelve people are affected when someone goes missing. It was quite remarkable the way Jocelyn's story of Linda became intertwined with the bus driver's daughter's story as she tried to make meaning of her family and her childhood. While Sandra was wanting to understand the disappearance of Linda and

what happened to her perhaps she also wanted to assuage the guilt and shame the father brought on the family name.

The people mentioned and many others learned from their trauma and loss and their world was expanded and life took on new meaning. This position was reflected in Lucy's final remark at the interview: 'For me it's been a very maturing process, in that I just see life quite differently'. The majority of the participants I found were proactive in trying to understand what had happened to their family member and why. This did not mean they were going to change the world as a result, but they had gained the ability to live with ambiguity, painful as that was. Other families would appear to be 'frozen in their grief' as (Boss, 2006) described it. One can speculate as to why this might be, a personality variable perhaps? Or could it be, tragically, a sense of relief, that they do not have to put up with anti-social behaviour, especially if there was violence associated with it. These people were found to be more passive in their attitudes towards their missing person.

The narrative from these families lacks the passion and intensity that characterises the other group. There would be value in trying to get behind the mask that I felt was limiting me from getting an in-depth encounter with them and their experience. At another time and in another place if the opportunity was provided a psychologist would want to discover what is behind that mask, but this researcher maintained a neutral stance.

6.13 Summary

This chapter has given the reader a glimpse into the common elements, the cost factor and the coping styles of families of missing persons. It has provided a valuable backdrop to what will be covered in the next chapter where the experience of families of missing persons add depth to the picture by considering the Known and the Unknown outcomes.

Chapter 7: The Space ‘in between’ Knowing and Not Knowing

7.1 Introduction

There is for the families of missing persons the need to know, to search for answers when a loved one disappears. Families living with uncertainty or ambiguity about the missing person are traumatised where the pain of missingness is strongly felt by them. Wayland (2007) commented in her counselling framework in support of families of missing persons: ‘The space between the person being here and not being here is the trauma, i.e. the space in between’ (p. 7).

This chapter will explore the space in between the trauma from the perspective of two themes, a known outcome and an unknown outcome. The plight of families of long-term missing persons live in this space, the in between, for perhaps years and sadly for some an answer is never known. The chapter makes reference to the five elements of missing, knowingly missing, unknowingly missing, ‘at risk’ missing, ‘lost’ and missing and ‘removed’ and missing (NACMP, 2002). I plan to use these as threads that tie together the themes of the known and unknown outcomes.

7.2 Known Outcome

The reasons for people going missing have been the subject of many reports, nationally and internationally, and it would be easy to slot people into such categories provided—but that is not necessarily the case. One of the complexities of people going missing that has emerged from this study is that for the families involved, the reason for the person leaving the home did not necessarily equate with the outcome that made them a missing person.

There are, in fact, many reasons people go missing, but those categories are from knowledge gained retrospectively from the families. In describing the experience of

families the expected or anticipated reason for leaving home was not the final outcome. Most of the people who go missing in this group of participants did so from ‘events that began from someone inside the family’ (Boss, 2002). What ultimately led to three of these people becoming missing persons came as a result of their planned departure, all for quite different reasons and in different circumstances. It is important to keep in mind that while the act of going missing is one event, the person concerned has been part of a family with a history and a background against which the leaving must be examined. For some people there are very positive and exciting reasons for leaving home, just as there are less pleasant circumstances causing people to absent themselves. This not-so-subtle difference between what one might call the positive and the negative reasons for leaving home was what impacted so forcefully on the families. This first section explores the case where a family member chooses to leave home and is supported by the family in this decision. They become after varying lengths of time by definition knowingly missing. The journey begins but the end is not what was anticipated or expected.

7.3 Knowingly Missing

The stories of three young women whose worlds were opening to new adventures with the blessing and support of their families are examined. Alas, that world was shattered for the families when the exciting news of their adventures turned to silence.

Sally had spent time preparing for an around-Australia trip. Her older brothers had both done something similar, and she wanted the same experience. Her brothers assisted her in ensuring the vehicle was properly fitted out so she could live in it. Before Sally left mother and daughter discussed how they would keep in contact as Elizabeth recalled:

There was an understanding she would ring me ... she would go so far and wherever she stopped she'd ring me ... or if she got a job she'd let me know where she was. Well this went on for almost two years then suddenly nothing, absolutely nothing and as time went on I got more and more concerned ... that was the end of 79 beginning of 1980. (Elizabeth, daughter Sally)

For two years, the family was kept informed by Sally, and they shared in the adventure with her. After two years the family began to share the pain over the loss of contact with Sally and without knowing why this occurred. This to me raised an important question in relation to missing persons and the impact their disappearance has on the family. At what point she became a missing person is open to question. As far as the police were concerned she had left voluntarily, and with the support of her family, so Sally did not fit their criteria as a missing person. For Elizabeth, Sally's disappearance created a movement in her thinking and feelings as she described 'suddenly nothing, absolutely nothing' from Sally to the point where personally she 'got more and more concerned'. This for Elizabeth was the space in between the beginning of the trauma. There was some light for Elizabeth when the police agreed to investigate because of the family's concern for Sally's safety and well-being. This investigation revealed that Sally was alive and working in another state, but she did not want any contact with the family nor her whereabouts disclosed. What appeared to be a ray of light for Elizabeth and the family turned to darkness and to some degree despair. At the time of the interview Sally had been in the category of the long-term missing for over 20 years. The family had lived with this experience of a daughter and sister disappearing, now without trace. There was the interminable quandary for the family; how do we mark the life or the death of Sally when they are still living in the space in between? The trauma of Sally disappearing and the cumulative grief that Elizabeth experienced was not a topic that found expression in either the trauma or the grief literature. Her experience could best be described as being permanently disenfranchised.

Narelle and Anna were the two other women who separated from their families with great expectations of their overseas experiences. Narelle had been backpacking around Europe and parts of Asia, and she shared the enjoyment of her experiences when she met with the family in Phuket for a special celebration. At that stage she was looking forward to the next phase of her journey in India. This experience of journeying abroad was so common among young Australians in that period that her parents were not overly concerned for Narelle. When other family members returned home, some weeks later mail began arriving from places where Narelle had been scheduled to visit:

Next thing we know a letter came back after a couple of months and then a parcel returned unopened, which we thought very strange because parcels don't come back unopened from India. (Frank, daughter Narelle)

The transition from being a backpacker to a being a missing person occurred between the last letter sent and not returned and the ones that were returned. This was the point at which the nightmare for the family started and the not knowing intensified by the day.

The excitement the family felt about Anna returning home was also evident in the story Josephine told of the preparations for her homecoming and marriage. Anna's disappearance with her fiancée was when they ran into a freak storm in the Mediterranean Sea whilst sailing to Australia. The family's expectations were shattered when they received the news—missing presumed drowned. Pinpointing the exact location where someone was last seen becomes problematic when a person goes missing in a foreign country or at sea, increasing the sense of helplessness. An expanse of ocean such as the Mediterranean, in which a boat goes missing, makes any kind of search difficult. Checking for wreckage on the surface of the sea or debris washed up on distant shores was unlikely to provide answers as they discovered:

From December to the end of February we hadn't heard anything and we thought maybe that's because they're on the open ocean and they haven't reached port or whatever. Then two weeks after we got the news, all her mail arrived back unopened from the destination in the Balearic Islands they were heading for so that was really the word they never even reached there. (Josephine, sister Anna)

These three excerpts illustrate people leaving home voluntarily for what were legitimate and positive reasons, but ultimately the families had to deal with their repositioning as missing person. All these girls, with no history of mental illness, had embarked on adventurous journeys, but there was an abrupt end to contact with their family. The reasons why this occurred were not clear except for Anna, where a natural disaster was the cause of her disappearance. In Sally's case the only consolation for Elizabeth was that at one point they knew she was still alive and she made the choice that she did not want any further contact with the family, which of course raised other problems where the searching for answers took a different turn.

The possibility of foul play was the likely cause of Narelle and her boyfriend's disappearance. When a person disappears in suspicious circumstances the searching mind often thinks of the worst scenario, and this can continue to haunt them. We also know that this can further complicate the grieving process (Rando, 1993).

The families of these three girls, when there was no further leads as to their whereabouts, were left with the dilemma of not knowing. These were families who offered to tell the stories of their daughters and a sister who disappeared. Would it be any different if it were a male who disappeared in similar circumstances? It might be assumed that with males going missing, given the macho image that is often portrayed about men, there would not be the same kind of response. My experience indicates that the males would be followed up in a similar way. For families of missing persons gender was not important—the relationship was. This is best illustrated by the response of the Rooney family of Milton southern NSW whose son Owen in August 2010 disappeared in Canada where he had been working. The family have been in Grand Forks, British Columbia and have now moved their search to Calgary, Alberta where sightings have been reported (McCauley, 2011). For most parents, children, irrespective of their age or gender, are precious and every effort is made to locate their whereabouts, and the not knowing is the driving motivation for the searching.

Where do these families and others in a similar situation fit on the grief and mourning spectrum or find a place within the current grief models? There is something to be said for those cultures where people grieving dress distinctively or do not cut their hair. In the Second World War, those families who had a family member missing in action wore a black armband. How do you tell that a family has a missing person? There are no visible indicators. While I am not suggesting they do something as dramatic as any of the visible grief symbols described, it may be possible perhaps to have a lapel badge for men and a brooch for women with a distinctive symbol. There are plenty of precedents with the rainbow flag and badge representing people with HIV/AIDS and the pink and pink ribbons to represent women with breast cancer. An outward sign may invite people to ask the meaning of badge, and in so doing the family member is able to tell their story. This action may

be empowering for the grieving families as well as an opportunity to educate the public at large. Where to locate the unique kind of grief of families of missing person has not as yet been discovered, but there are encouraging signs with the new understandings of grief (Doka, 2002; Klass, 1996; Stroebe & Schut, 1999; Worden, 2009). The theories generated by these writers have the potential to develop a model of the grief of the families of missing persons which speaks to their needs. This is a topic for further research.

7.4 Knowingly Departing

Alongside the group who voluntarily left home there exists in greater numbers people whose anti-social behaviour causes them to leave home. Young people in their early teens and early twenties, both male and female, leave home because of physical and sexual abuse issues, domestic violence and/or drug addiction. The reason for leaving was often because of events that occurred inside the family. In this regard, Australian young people follow a similar pattern to the overseas demographics of missing people in this age range.

What was reported by many of the families was a history of a young, loving and affectionate child who, as they reached puberty, simply changed. The dynamics of the family were severely affected, and the parents found their preferred way of disciplining the teenager met with violent and abusive objections. The puzzled parents in trying to understand what was happening to the teenager indicated they thought the behaviour was due to developmental issues or puberty blues. More often than not in this troubled state the teenagers began to take drugs, and the problems were compounded. In an attempt by the parents to help the young person conflict arose and the tensions in the family increased.

Sam was one young man who went missing. His mother Paula reported that in his early adolescence his behaviour changed. Her marriage had broken down and with it came serious financial consequences, requiring Paula to work full time. Balancing a full-time job and coping with Sam's unpredictable behaviour was physically and emotionally demanding. At one stage Sam went overseas where he ran out of money

and telephoned Paula to pay for his ticket home. She arranged this, and a couple of days later went to the airport to meet him:

And he was fine, but about two days after he changed. He wouldn't speak to me, he would walk past me. I said, 'we're living in the same house why won't you speak to me?' and said, 'You're not worth speaking to' and he kept this up for months and months. I was going mad because I couldn't deal with it. He said I was wicked, plotting against him. He was really around the bend with anger and hate. (Paula, son Sam)

Going missing does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in relationships, and as this comment from Paula suggests, both mother and son were in pain. They were powerless to help each other. When children do leave home and become part of the missing person's population, the families are left with the legacy of a broken relationship plus the ongoing anxiety about their family member. The concern does not stop when the son or daughter leaves but the relationship is broken. In Boss's (2006) terms the child is still part of the 'psychological family'. How do you mourn someone who is still alive in the memory and still emotionally present? For some families of missing persons having some kind of ritual to remember the missing person was tantamount to saying they were dead. For people like Frank and his family no ritual of any kind has been held for Narelle. It would be easy to infer this family is in denial, but labelling people in such a way is to glibly place them into some grief framework, without understanding the hidden reasons for their actions. All of the grief models speak of shock, denial and disbelief as primary reactions to a loss experience. There are times when it would appear the psyche seeks to protect the person from the reality with the thoughts of disbelief or denial. Landsman (2002) in her various definitions and functions of denial suggests a new concept:

We might use the term 'defensive denial' to indicate a traditional psychodynamic view of denial as a defense against internal wishes, fears, conflicts that are potentially threatening to one's sense of self. (p. 21)

There is a group who seemingly just disappears, and those who go missing by design. What appears to be significant and one of the major differences is how people go missing. Henderson (1998) uses this term when describing people who leave because of family conflict or for other reasons. Because leaving was a choice the person had made, the family did not actively go searching for them, at least in the initial stages. The police would not be involved in a search if the person was an adult

and voluntarily decided to leave, irrespective of the circumstances causing their departure. This was clearly demonstrated by Isabel when Danny went missing:

Well he actually never went missing, there was some conflict in the family—he was taking drugs and stuff like that ... yeah it must have been about eleven years ago, that was the last time I saw him, you know we just got into a bit of an argument up here and he just left and that was it. (Isabel, son Danny)

As I listened to this interview and reflected on it I was struck by the comment, ‘it must have been about eleven years ago, that was the last time I saw him’ following a bit of an argument. There was a lack of emotion in the interview as Isabel told her story. There was a sense of resignation, inevitability about what had happened. There did not appear to be anything that one might approximate to a grief reaction.

Isabel and Paula had not reported their sons missing to the police. They both contacted me after seeing the notice in the Salvation Army newsletter advertising the research project. Both parents indicated they felt a need to try and find their respective children some years after they left home. My impression was that they thought I might be able to assist them in their search. Paula gave me a photo of her son, in case I should come across him. At that time I was working in the area where she thought Sam was probably living. I reinforced to her that that was not my role and referred her to the letter about the purpose of the research.

These families were not able to report the person to the police’s Missing Persons Unit as their offspring left of their own volition. Some families sought assistance from the Salvation Army Tracing Service as they had grave fears for their safety. When these young people left home it was perhaps understandable that the parents and sometimes the siblings were pleased the tension was over. That was not to suggest they were not concerned about the son or daughter. They reported ongoing feelings of guilt and blame for not being more understanding.

Frequently many of the young people who went missing had multiple problems that exacerbated the situation at home. There were those who were unknowingly missing—that is, the person was unaware that someone was looking for them. This was especially true of young people who had developed a mental illness. The tension

expressed in the last section is magnified for the family when mental illness is added to the story.

7.5 Unknowingly Missing

The pain of someone going missing is intensely felt by all the families who have been exposed to this horrendous experience. To make comparisons between the reasons for people going missing is not helpful. That said, it would appear there are situations where the intensity of that pain is felt more acutely. Where mental health problems, drug abuse, suicide, or murder are combined the impact on the family can be very significant. National and international research has recognised that mental health problems are causally related to people going missing. To complicate the mental health problem, a number of young people take refuge in drugs as a temporary measure in ameliorating their symptoms. The result with particular illicit drugs can be that the mental health problem the young person was experiencing increased, which lead to irrational behaviour and occasional violent outbursts. The problem for many of the families was that the young person was never given a formal diagnosis that would have helped them understand the behaviour of their child.

To set the experience of these families in a meaningful context it is necessary to describe the developmental pattern of their sons that lead to the onset of the mental illness. This makes it easier to understand the families' experience after their sons went missing. Contextualising the experience of families of missing persons may assist in identifying young people at risk of going missing as well as assist the helping professions when a family member seeks their support. The next section, which I have called 'Children Who Are Different', reports on the experience of families living with these children prior to and following their disappearance.

7.6 Children Who Are Different

Some parents reported that one child appeared to be different from their siblings. Often this realisation occurred in childhood and became more pronounced in the

teenage years. These children may have had difficulties at school with their behaviour identifying them as problem children. This frequently became more pronounced in the teenage years. If they began to take illicit drugs their behaviour then became even more complicated and disturbing. One problem for families was that no definitive mental health disorder was ever diagnosed. Within families there were frequently differences of opinion as to whether the problems the child was displaying were purely a developmental stage they were going through or something more disturbing. Kate recalled her experience with Michael:

He was a dear little boy but he was very sensitive and I can remember going up to the Infant School and seeing other children playing ... I can remember saying to James, he's different from the others and he said 'No he's not' ... he was more blind I think to Michael than perhaps I was, there was always a difference. (Kate, son Michael)

When mothers who are the major carers for their children they may recognise behavioural and personality differences, especially when there are other children in the family with whom to compare. This was the case for Kate. The differences became more obvious as Michael grew up and his behaviour became more unpredictable and at times violent. In his teenage years he began using drugs, so both his parents found it difficult to sort out whether the behaviour was part of a developmental phase, a mental health problem, the effects of the marijuana, or a combination of everything. From their own research—not from a medical diagnosis, they realised Michael revealed symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia. Attempts to get him medical and psychological help over the years met with a negative response from Michael. The frustration Kate felt was expressed in the last encounter she had with Michael:

I knew he was really bad that day and I said 'Darling let's get you to a doctor, let's try and find someone that can help you' and he said, 'If that's all you're going to talk about then I'm going' ... And that was the last time I saw him. (Kate, son Michael)

The combination of mental illness and drugs created problems for the individual and the family. The sense of helplessness that these families felt in trying to both understand their child's behaviour and find appropriate assistance was evident. As with Kate and James, other parents and friends found that offers of assistance were rejected by their children. Brenda reported a similar pattern of rejection when she

tried once again to help Russell when he was discharged from hospital. The doctors had diagnosed Russell with a kidney disease, similar to what caused his father's death. He also had hepatitis B. Knowing the family history of kidney failure Brenda was quite anxious about Russell and when she went to pick him up said:

Grab your stuff and come home with me, you're sick and you need someone to look after you'. And he said, 'No these are great people here [at the house where he was then staying] I want to stay here'. And he wouldn't come. (Brenda, son Russell)

Brenda had refused to give Russell money to travel to SA and indicated she wanted to look after him while he was recuperating. He was adamant that he would not come with her. As well as a serious illness Russell was heavily into drugs. Brenda learned later that he was going to SA to work on a drug plantation:

The last time I saw him I was angry and I turned round and shouted at him and said something like, 'You're mad you know, you'll kill yourself' ... I know the last thing I said to him was in anger. (Brenda, son Russell)

Brenda's concern for Russell was that the problem that caused him to cease contact had been an issue between them for some years. His drug problem was then exacerbated by a kidney disease. She was powerless to help him.

Five of the men in this sample and one woman who went missing had pre-existing mental health problems. Of this number only one male was known to still be alive at the time of this study. Previous published research has documented mental health problems to be a high risk factor in people going missing (James, 2008). This is similar to the literature on suicide prevention where mental health issues are listed as a predictor of someone taking their own life (Maple, 2005). Other studies have shown that when a person with a mental health problem goes missing there is high probability that suicide will be the outcome (Foy, 2004; Newiss, 1999). None of the families interviewed knew this to be a risk factor at the time their child went missing. Even if they had known and attempted to do more to protect the person prior to their disappearance, it is unlikely they would have succeeded. The narratives recorded in this study tell of a communication breakdown between husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, and between work colleagues.

The accumulated level of frustration in trying to help someone with obvious mental health problems has frequently led people to say things they have later regretted. For example, it would appear that Russell's disappearance was motivated by the offer of the job in SA, and in that sense he left of his own accord. This did not help Brenda who was concerned with his physical and emotional well-being. Even though Russell was aware that his mother was always concerned about him it did not stop him from leaving. Going interstate he may have thought he was out of her reach and free therefore to do his own thing, which ultimately led to unexpected dire consequences.

7.7 Threats of Violence

Paula expressed that with Sam there were times when she feared for her own safety. This can be a pattern associated with certain types of mental illnesses like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, which some young men in this study were thought to have. The parents found they were unable to do anything about it as their sons would not cooperate in getting treatment.

The impact on the parents—concern that something was wrong with their child and then being captivated by their winning ways—created confusion for them. We will see how this is acted out as we share some of Kate's journey with Michael. The details provided paint a picture of a mother's experience of living with the growing seed of mental illness in her son, which came to fruition in adulthood and led to him going missing.

Kate found Michael's behaviour challenging from an early age:

You are powerless and when you are a mother you think I should be able to do something—You know you could see him going down this awful path, couldn't pull him back and that for me was devastating. (Kate, son Michael)

Kate voiced the pain of living with the unpredictable adolescent Michael, then reflected back with a change in her voice and a flicker of a smile: 'He was a dear little boy so sensitive' yet as she said 'so different to her other children'.

In this study the participants who were diagnosed as schizophrenic were reported by family members to have declined in their capacity to relate meaningfully over time. Their mental illness meant they operated in a different world where separating out fact from fiction was not an easy task. As a consequence there were times when the mental health issues of the person impacted the whole family in quite disturbing ways.

There were times in the lives of Kate and James when the pressure of living with Michael made them fear for their own safety. While they recognised much of his irrational behaviour was due to marijuana combined with a mental illness, the consequences were sometimes potentially devastating. Kate explained it this way:

I was sure, sure that time he went, he'd been awful, I can't tell you, but I thought he would kill us, he hated us so much, I really thought we could end up with a knife in our back and that was how much he hated us, he wouldn't eat with us wouldn't talk to us. ... it was like a black cloud.

At one stage Michael went to live with one of his brothers, and this was fine for a while because the relationship was a positive one. When the brother reported to Kate that Michael threatened him with a knife, he said he couldn't live there anymore. The degree of unpredictable behaviour that Michael displayed because of his mental illness was also experienced by other families like Paula and Brenda whose sons had similar mental health issues and drug use. When a mental illness was suspected because of the irrational behaviour, many families expressed concern about the possibility of suicide.

7.8 The Suicide Threat

When the person actually disappeared the participants reported mixed emotions and confusing thoughts. When families began to explore the reasons for their young adult's behaviour and compare their symptoms with what is in the literature, the thought of a possible suicide captured their thinking. James expressed it this way:

It was the worrying, particularly worrying time for us wondering what had happened to Michael and our initial thoughts were suicide was a possibility. There's been some good times when we thought he had turned the corner, but it never took on a permanent state, so I guess suicide was immediately in my mind. (James, son Michael)

Even though James had this initial thought of Michael having suicided, it did not stop the active searching in which he engaged in trying to locate his son. The publicity that Michael's disappearance created meant that like other families who go public they received messages saying he was sighted somewhere or clairvoyants telephoned telling where he was to be found. In spite of everything that had been done, the search for answers continued:

We've found it particularly difficult not knowing and I think all the families of missing persons would say that was the biggest problem, the not knowing, and really in spite of our best intents at trying to get clues as to what happened we haven't really made any progress. (James, son Michael)

The experience of James and Kate with Michael, an undiagnosed schizophrenic, was quite different to the two other known suicides in this group of participants.

It is often incorrectly assumed that in the discovery of the remains of a missing person, some resolution to the grief is found. That is definitely not the case, and for Sandra the discovery of Donald's remains posed more questions than they answered. Donald had been diagnosed with PTSD following his military service in Vietnam. Sandra had recognised he was a changed man when he returned from military service. He was diagnosed with depression. She thought they had a good marriage and that Donald loved her, but there were things she did not understand about him and he would not talk about. When he did disappear Sandra made contact with the VVCS where she gained some insight into aspects of Donald's behaviour.

Privacy laws and issues of confidentiality were a source of frustration for Sandra, and also it would appear for the counsellor who was seeing Donald at the VVCS. Donald's story was probably typical of many Vietnam Veterans (Peach, 2000) who kept their wartime experiences to themselves, making it very difficult for their families to respond. After Donald's bodily remains were discovered Sandra was able to get some information from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, as she explained:

I had no idea of what he was going through and that he wasn't coping and I took the whole lot and dumped it on the counsellor's desk and said 'Why didn't you tell me?' and she said 'I couldn't'. She [the counsellor] had begged him to tell me to let me be involved but he wouldn't allow it. But what I've read and also some of his stuff on his service in Vietnam and he had never spoke about that either it left me feeling really, really shattered

because I had no idea. How he wasn't coping or how he felt he wasn't coping. (Sandra, husband Donald)

The discovery of so much information about her husband after his death left Sandra in a confused state that has complicated the grieving process for her. When she was interviewed she was still searching for answers, 'I still don't know where his mind was at and I can't get it out of my head that he's done away with himself and I don't understand why he would get to that point without talking to me'. Sandra was very much aware of the position the counsellor was in, wanting to involve her, but being blocked by Donald. It was not clear whether the counsellor was aware of Donald's previous behaviour and of being at risk of potential suicide.

When a person is so engrossed in their own world they are totally unaware of how this impacts the family. It is well-known that partners and children of Vietnam Veterans have suffered greatly from living with a still-traumatised person. What echoed through these stories was a feeling of helplessness in the face of a person's challenging behaviour. When Sandra was able to speak with VVCS she discovered things about Donald that would have helped her understand his behaviour. In another way the information gained created problems for her that did not seem to assist in the grieving process. She went on to explain how little she really knew of her husband. Now she would never know:

I get frustrated because I can't get inside what he was thinking ... but then I hadn't always realised that I hadn't. Yes I knew about his depression and that he was being treated for depression after he had hepatitis. ... Not until now that I have discovered that he got out of the army medically unfit because he was not coping. Instinctively I knew he wasn't right, it was obvious that he did run in cycles but I had no idea that I never had any experience of anyone being depressed. It makes me feel inadequate that I could live with him for 39 years and not know all these things and that makes me feel I failed him because I didn't pick up on what he was going through. (Sandra, husband Donald)

The circumstances surrounding Donald going missing and the reasons for it had a profound effect on Sandra, and she sadly reported her feelings of inadequacy and failure. She was greatly helped by the counsellor from the VVCS who enabled her to understand some of the psychological effects of Donald's military service in Vietnam. She found it reassuring to learn that these problems occurred in many of

the defence personnel who served there. Getting effective help for a family member with a mental health condition was often not forthcoming, or if help was available getting the person to access it was not easy.

These stories have revealed how difficult it is for a family member to get their mentally ill relative to consider effective treatment and to get them to a mental health facility. Even if they can be persuaded to get treatment as a voluntary patient the psychiatric facility has no legal right to keep them if they wish to leave. John, who worked in a mental hospital himself, was adamant about not going to any place in close proximity to his workplace. Tracey, his sister, was able to get him to agree to go into a facility in Sydney, many kilometres from where he lived and worked. She did this because John had disclosed information to Tracey that caused her concern. This was one of the reasons why she wanted to get him psychiatric help. This information Tracey felt placed her in a bind as she revealed:

To me it was really serious because he did intimate that he'd been considering suicide, and actually said the ways he'd been considering, so I knew that it wasn't too good. At the same time, do you ruin his workplace by alerting them, or what do you do? (Tracey, brother John)

This statement illustrated how people can often be placed in a difficult position in knowing what to do for the person who needs help. This uncertainty about what to do was exacerbated as suicidal ideation was involved. Having this knowledge about John, Tracey anticipated getting him into a psychiatric facility where they would be able to manage him and his problem. The outcome of his admission to the clinic did not have the desired effect. He discharged himself and less than a week later he disappeared.

Each of these narratives ended in a person suiciding. A person going missing was one traumatic experience, and then discovering that they have suicided was like receiving a double gut-wrenching blow. If we take the suicide death of a missing person and look at it from a grief perspective there are a number of factors that need to be taken into account. The first of these would be that almost invariably associated with a suicide death there is for the family a problem of guilt, shame and blame. The second factor to be acknowledged is that there was no time for goodbyes. For counsellors to be effective in their treatment and support of the grieving relative of a

family member who has suicided, these issues would need to be dealt with. Suicide bereavement research has provided some positive guidelines in managing suicide grief, but as yet that has not been coupled with the grief resulting from the suicide death of a missing person. It is an area that needs further exploration.

7.9 A Friend's Story

All of the participants I interviewed were family members with the exception of Chloe who was a work colleague of Alister. I found her opening remarks quite different to all the other interviews. She began by giving me what her thoughts were on what Alister had probably done before she shared any other information about him:

I think it was what he chose to do. I don't suspect that there was any foul play or anything of that matter. (Chloe, friend Alister)

Chloe had been friendly with Alister, a work colleague for about four years prior to his disappearance. She was aware that he had not been happy for quite a while. Over lunch on many occasions the two of them had deep and meaningful conversations where he disclosed dissatisfaction with life. Chloe commented that Alister was:

So cynical about the world and seemed really depressed, upset and agitated. Then after I saw him that time he wasn't at work for a couple of days ... I didn't really worry too much. Obviously I did think 'I hope he's okay' but not enough to start calling him.

Alister had previously disappeared for about two months a couple of years earlier so as Chloe said:

This time when he went missing I guess people were thinking maybe it was the same sort of thing.

It was a few days later that Chloe learned that Alister had quit his job. The other members of the office staff thought this might be a repeat of the previous incident from which he returned. The first Chloe knew that there was concern for Alister's well-being was when she received a telephone call from his mother. She was ringing everyone on Alister's mobile telephone list to see if they had seen or heard from him. This was the mother's way of searching for Alister. Some days later Alister's mother made contact with the police and reported him missing as there was a concern for his safety. His mother initially kept in contact with Chloe, which had both positive and

negative consequences. For Chloe, ‘the realisation that he actually went missing and that we may or may not find out what had happened to him settled in’.

Of all the people who went missing it would appear from Chloe’s story that no one attempted to try and actively go searching for Alister. Chloe was a journalist, so writing and telling stories was her professional role. Her decision to participate in my research was I believe motivated from a different place. She was still trying to make sense of Alister going missing without a trace or unknowingly missing. I sensed she also wanted to move on with her life and to do this she needed to cease her association with the mother. She did not want to cause more stress for the mother, but she thought the relationship needed to end.

All of these families had a person who would have been categorised as unknowingly missing. The label is not always an apt description of the experience of these families as they endeavour to make meaning of their missing person. The situation becomes even more traumatic when the person is in that category of being ‘at-risk missing’, when a person is at risk through suspicious/dangerous circumstances. The likelihood of the missing person having been murdered is a serious at-risk situation.

7.10 At-Risk Missing and Murdered

The disappearance of a younger sister aged 11 still haunted Jocelyn as she recalled the events 50 years after Linda went missing from suburban Glasgow. Linda had gone to buy a birthday present for her mother. She was last seen getting on to the bus that would take her to the shops. The driver was known to the family and after everyone else had gotten off the bus Linda was the only passenger:

Linda was never seen again after she boarded that bus. It wasn’t till late that night about 9pm... when Linda didn’t come home my parents alerted my cousins. They hadn’t seen her, they hadn’t gone to the pictures as arranged with Linda because of the snow storm and the buses were called off.
(Jocelyn, sister Linda)

The disappearance of a child in circumstances like Linda’s is every parent’s nightmare. At the outset the parents and family were shielded from what was the likely fate of Linda. The fact that a young child had disappeared from a small

community and with little information available to the family apart from being on the bus made the search they began fraught with difficulties. The disappearance of this family member had a ripple effect and brought unexpected players into the search.

In the early 1990s Jocelyn was contacted in Sydney by a woman [Sandra Brown] from Glasgow who said she was the daughter of the bus driver when Linda disappeared. Jocelyn recalled:

The phone rang and our first communication was 'I don't know how to put this, but I believe that my father has actually murdered your sister' and I didn't know how to take it and I thought should I hate her because she is part of him—or should I join forces and try—she's coming out—she's very brave ... She said, 'I am very sorry for what happened' and I think she has taken on board the guilt of her father because she has gone out of her way and fought the establishment, politicians, she fought them and we got nowhere. (Jocelyn, sister Linda)

Sandra herself was trying to unravel a sequence of events in her family that occurred following Linda's disappearance. She told Jocelyn in her search for answers, she learned of a man in gaol for sex offences who made a confession just prior to his death, naming her father as part of the reason for Linda's disappearance. The two men were part of paedophile ring operating in the area. Apparently this man had been an elder of one of the local churches. Jocelyn wrote to this man asking if he knew anything more and hoped to visit him, but he died before this could be arranged.

This paedophile ring, Sandra discovered, involved the police, the organist of the church that Linda and Jocelyn had attended, as well as other males in positions of influence. They all had maintained a code of silence, and attempts to get information at the time and for some years afterwards were blocked. For Jocelyn the search for and about her sister Linda was thrust into the foreground again when Sandra made contact with her. Even on the other side of the world this disappearance of her sister was still haunting her. It was assumed by all concerned that Linda met with foul play and was murdered. Her body has never been recovered. The passage of time does not ease the pain or the need for answers.

Brenda's account of her experience with Russell was that after one telephone call from SA he was never heard of again. Brenda and the family reported Russell

missing to the police because she was concerned about him. Her memory of the time they reported Russell to the police was when a number of bodies were found in barrels in a former bank building (Snowtown) near Murray Bridge, SA. Brenda's comment was:

Anyway I think he would have been killed about that time. The SA Police came to see me a few months later, a while after we'd reported him missing and they told me they thought he had been murdered. They had records of the last phone call and they knew he had phoned me. They also checked social security and his last cheque was drawn about around that time. (Brenda, son Russell)

The SA police were able to report that he had been lured to the area to mind a farm where marijuana was grown. The police had completed a comprehensive search, and they were able to get information from one of Russell's associates about him being killed. At one point in our conversation Brenda made the statement that with Russell she had the 'impression that he was on a suicide mission right from an early age'. Was it easier for her to accept the words of the policeman because of this earlier suspicion or premonition? The person who gave the information to the police was deemed an unreliable witness, and they were unable to make a case. Brenda was quite convinced that Russell was murdered, and one got the impression that to her, his dying at the hands of another person was preferable to him possibly taking his own life. It was some weeks after receiving this information that she began to organise a memorial service for him. This was a positive experience for her as she saw Russell through the eyes of his friends in the comments they made about him at the service.

The final section of this chapter discusses the lingering pain of the families with long-term missing persons and the unknown outcome of their loved one. The notion of it being simply an unknown outcome fails to give a more comprehensive picture of what is discovered in the process. This is what the experience of some of the participants in this study encountered as they lived with the ambiguity of their lost loved one.

7.11 Unknown Outcome

The families living with a long-term missing person did not give up hope that one day they would receive news about their loved one. Living with the ambiguity of their loss and endeavouring to come to terms with it was required if the family was to get some sort of order back into their lives.

When John discharged himself from the psychiatric clinic in Sydney, a work colleague Naomi collected him and agreed to stay with him. On the day of his disappearance John had said to Naomi he was fine and she could take a break. She returned a couple of hours later to discover he had gone. At the outset, when the disappearance of John was so fresh in their minds, the expectation of the family was that he would be found. As time went on the hope lessened, but it was never extinguished.

As Naomi looked for clues as to John's whereabouts she noticed that a small backpack, a water bottle and some medication were gone. These findings raised the level of anxiety in the family and yet a short time later when the State Emergency Service started doing a search in the state forest opposite his property Lucy was more optimistic:

I sat with Mum and Dad and I just thought that they'd come back and say 'We've found him' I just thought that's how it was going to be. I thought he'd gone over there and they'd find him and they'd come back and say 'We've found him'. And they came back and said, 'We haven't found him, we didn't find anything' and I was like 'oh'. So it was a weird situation.
(Lucy, brother John)

In a situation like this no one is prepared for the changes in thinking and feeling from hope to despair that the family experience. When there is nothing to go on, no clear indication as to what has happened, it is a natural response to want to cling to some residue of hope. Just as no two people in the one family respond to loss or react to grief in the same way, so it is when a person goes missing. Within the person there can occur the vacillation of thoughts and feelings, between sadness and optimism, despair and hope. Where there is optimism and hope the family are more likely to explore new ways of searching. However, sadness and despair may lead to a feeling

of futility and lack of pursuit. One of the difficult tasks for police and other emergency service personnel involved in missing persons' work is to know when the search should be called off. This coming to terms with the inability to find them, for the families concerned, is hard to hear and harder to bear. A more complex situation arose for Elizabeth where knowing and not knowing was her experience.

7.12 Legal Complications

For Elizabeth complicating legal issues arose for her due to her parents setting up trust funds for each of her children that they could access when they were twenty-one. At the time of Sally's twenty-first birthday Elizabeth wrote a letter to her saying '*Don't forget the money*' to which there was no reply until she was contacted by the investment office:

Anyway about two years later, I got a letter from the investment company where the money was invested that she had turned up in Melbourne claiming this money, wanting this money, and of course legal things being what they are you can't just walk into the office and say 'That's mine', so they had written to my solicitor, thank goodness, I said, 'Well she can have her money' and then that was the next terrible thing that happened. The solicitor I went to see was in touch with her solicitor ... and nobody was going to let me know anything about what happened to her or where she was or anything like that. Well even though I understood legally that I had to accept that, it was pretty hard. (Elizabeth, daughter Sally)

This experience and what followed from it left Elizabeth questioning herself and like so many others wondering what she had done to her daughter with whom she thought she had a good relationship. Another letter from the solicitor opened up the wounds once again:

He said, 'I've got your money' I said, 'My money' He said that legally she [Sally] was only entitled to the money that my parents put in the trust fund originally, none of the interest—it has to come back to me. That really upset me because I didn't want it. I'd done the same for each of the other children. To me it got more and more horrible—it's the only word I can use. I became more and more confused, I think, in my thinking, trying to think it out. I went through a stage of blaming myself, I must have done something. I must have said something. I must have not met some of her needs. (Elizabeth, daughter Sally)

This lack of understanding of the reasons behind a person going missing creates a major stressor for the family. While the context of the person going missing in these

families is different, the quest for making meaning of their disappearance is strong in all of them. For people like Elizabeth it can raise feelings of guilt and self-blame because there seems to be no other explanation. Unhelpful experiences with the legal system and government instrumentalities frequently found family members blocked in their endeavours to deal with the fact of the person going missing.

The reading of their father's will caused a major split in Jocelyn's family. As adults they were back in Scotland for their father's funeral and as is often the practice in the UK after the funeral has been held there is the reading of the will. Jocelyn recalls the start of the tension between her and a younger sister:

When Dad died, at the reading of the will, the solicitor said, 'Was there anyone else in the family?' and I said, 'Yes, there is my sister Linda', and my other sister kicked me—she didn't want it mentioned. She just withdrew. She was five years younger though, she was six or seven at the time. That hurt me tremendously. So she didn't want to know about anything. But I did, and I thought there was this little girl, she was eleven, she was our sister, she lived. She lived a very happy life too. Why should we forget her? I didn't want her forgotten about. It caused a rift. We've never spoken to this day. (Jocelyn, sister Linda)

Living with an unknown outcome made people do things that were probably out of character in any other set of circumstances. Earlier in this chapter when discussing the unexpected outcomes and those missing family members we learned of searches going on as a result of clairvoyants suggesting where a missing person might be found. The sense of desperation meant that no stone could be left unturned. Clairvoyants were one source of information a number of the women had utilised.

7.13 Seeking Psychic Help From the Other Side

When anything unexpected occurs most people develop strategies for dealing with it. Coping mechanisms are in part learned from parents and other significant people in our lives, and as we mature we discover ways for ourselves. Having a person whom we know and love go missing is something that is outside the range of the normal, and learning how to cope is likely to mean we explore a whole range of new possibilities. The last chapter revealed that one way of coping was searching, and for most families this was the dominant way of exploring all possibilities. For a number

of the women who participated in the interviews another way of searching was using clairvoyants or psychics to assist them:

I went to clairvoyants that was just for something to do and three of them said he was alive camping near the water and the bush, which apparently they all do anyway and the fourth one said, 'No, he's dead and I didn't like her very much and it could be true and that's what I want to find out. She said her story was that he went missing, he lived near a National Park and he used to walk there a lot. And she said, 'oh he's gone into the bush, he's lost and he's hit his head and fallen and I didn't like that very much ... it would be very nice to find him and his body, we went and tried. (Kate, son Michael)

Kate's experience talking with the fourth clairvoyant did not provide the help she wanted, and in fact caused her some additional distress. Betty followed a similar pattern, and I suspect it was a mark of desperation when they had tried almost every other avenue of searching. Betty recalled what it was like for her talking to clairvoyants:

I've been to lots of clairvoyants, and one clairvoyant said that she is in Tasmania with a church group and that she doesn't want to be contacted, and that she is teaching Sunday School at um, ah, oh I can't remember now all the things—she is living in a group house and it is with women ... But if people are I mean religious people whatever they are ... to do something like this to a family and to two small children is totally dreadful and they have no idea of the torment and torture we are going through. (Betty, daughter Susie)

The plight of living with an unknown outcome regarding a loved one means that while it may not always be in the conscious mind of the family the reality sits just below the surface. There are times when the memories come to the fore as many of the participants experienced. They could be walking down the street and the gait of someone in front of them, the sight of someone who was similar in size or stature of the missing person, would bring the loved one back into conscious awareness. As with people who have lost someone through death find that a piece of music on the radio or something on the TV are reminders of the person who is missing, there are many ways in which memories of the missing person are triggered, and in so doing become sad reminders that person is no longer present.

At a more subliminal level, some people found the missing person was invading their sleeping hours. Participants responded that such experiences came through dreams

and were not disturbing but more often than not were consoling. It would seem that dreams provide another dimension of a continuing bond with the missing person.

After an experience with a woman who telephoned Kate, she had an unusual experience for her in a dream about Michael:

About 2 to 3 weeks later I dreamed, I don't usually, I have only had two dreams about Michael, the first one was that he was lying and that I wanted to get to him and I couldn't reach him, and the second one after this lady I'd forgotten about till now and I saw him and he was walking away from me and I knew it was Michael he was walking towards the light and I thought is he telling me he's dead or is this just a trick of people saying that's what happens after you die, so I don't know. But for a little while afterwards I felt he's told me he's OK and that it was a lovely light and it's great he was happy and he's OK but I couldn't catch him and then after a few weeks ... is it my wishful thinking? It's like the little bit of hope there that he might still be alive, that's the thing. (Kate, son Michael)

It is interesting that people are often reluctant to tell others of their dreams, believing they may think it a little odd, while for others it is a natural part of their experience as Brenda indicated:

He even got into my dreams, for the first year or so I had dreams about him, quite vivid dreams, some of them I recorded. I don't dream about him now, I don't see him on the streets now, For the first year or two just to mention his name I would burst into tears. (Brenda, son Russell)

Brenda's comment that she recorded her dreams prompted the psychologist in me to want to probe and find out what the dreams were about. When she went on to say 'I don't dream about him now' it seemed whatever the content of the dreams were, they had fulfilled their purpose. The value of the dream and the willingness to eventually express it was also of great benefit to Josephine and her family. It was about six months after the news of Anna going missing and presumed drowned that Josephine's mother called the family together and said:

Look I can't go on like this anymore. I need some closure. I don't think she is going to come back. And then she relayed a dream she'd had and the dream was about the time, because we didn't really have a fix on the date that they left England to set sail for the Balearic Islands except it was early December some time and she said, 'I had a dream, it was about the first or second week of December and all I heard was Anna calling out to me' but she said 'I didn't dare tell anyone, particularly you [meaning me] because you were heavily pregnant and I didn't want to worry you or upset you at that stage but' she said, 'I knew then something was not right' So that's when she said 'I need some closure' and Dad said 'I need some closure as well'. (Josephine, sister Anna)

The dream Anna's mother had and expressed her need for some kind of closure raised the question of an appropriate ritual for a missing person, presumed dead.

The unknown outcome for these families revealed that while the state of not knowing was still the experience for the majority of the participants, they might never know what it was for their loved one. Some responded to the unknown outcome in the way that is most appropriate for them as Jocelyn indicated. The day I interviewed coincided with the day that Linda went missing 50 years previously. Jocelyn expressed her needs as follows:

There's a memorial service today where we were christened. We were United Free Church in Scotland and it's a Baptist Church now and there's a service going on there at 1.30 pm. Now there's never been a service for Linda because there's never been any remains found. (Jocelyn, sister Linda)

7.14 Postscript

This research used a cross-sectional design (Minichiello, Sullivan, Greenwood, & Axford, 2004) where the participants were interviewed once. Thus a dilemma arose for me when some of the participants wanted to inform me about important additions to their story. These additions do not minimise the story that has been told but are a reminder that no narrative is static and frozen in time. I have chosen to insert these excerpts to honour the people whose lives have been dramatically affected by these events. They involve Paula and Sam, James, Kate and Michael, Betty and Alan with Susie.

7.15 A Voice from the Past

In February 2008 I received a telephone call from Paula to say she had heard from Sam and thought in my research I would like to hear some good news. She telephoned me shortly after receiving the news and was obviously bursting to tell someone. Her daughter Julie was living in close proximity to where I live and as Paula was baby-sitting there I arranged to visit her and hear her story. Paula recalled:

The telephone call came out of the blue. He indicated he had been in the Darlinghurst area all the time. He was happy to speak with her but at that time did not want to visit her. (Paula, son Sam)

From Paula's comments about the telephone call she did not want to probe and ask too many questions. This brief interview found Paula relieved and happy that Sam had contacted her, and she was hopeful that they would get together soon. The atmosphere in this interview was one of joy and anticipation. Hearing Sam's voice again seemed to take away Paula's pain of the years before and after he went missing. At the time of the interview Paula had not told Julie about her brother's call and was still working out what to say. I left her that day with a pleasant rather than a painful quandary. In writing this postscript and going through my file on Paula and Sam, I discovered again the photograph she had given me in case I should see him in the Darlington area where I was working at the time. I was surprised at my own emotional response in looking at Sam's face again. It was a reminder to me how in listening to these stories my own emotional antenna had picked up the signals of pain they experienced and in this instance the signal of joy.

7.16 A Sledgehammer Blow

At a meeting of the committee of the FFMP of which both James and I are members, James wanted to tell of the family's experience dealing with the coronial inquest for Michael. It is with his permission I include here how it happened and what transpired in the process of preparing for and participating in the inquest.

Some time after Michael's disappearance the investigating police officer raised the possibility of holding an inquest. For James and his family coming to terms with the notion that their son and brother was missing, presumed dead was highly confronting and emotionally traumatising. Preparing for the inquest, negotiating the date, time, and place as well as the family member's readiness for such an event takes time as well as emotional and physical energy. James recalls a statement made to the Missing Persons committee meeting:

When a date is set and the brief arrives it is a bit overwhelming to see such a weighty document with so many statements and a wealth of evidence. It takes a long time to peruse and absorb. There are factual errors that conflict with your own diarised record. There are surprises like a sighting about which you were never informed. (James, son Michael)

The preparation of the documentation is one thing, but how does one prepare for the actual inquest, and again, where are the signposts to assist the family along the way? This is why James felt it imperative to tell of his family's experience in that it might be of help to others:

As the date of the inquest approaches there is a build up of tension with potential consequent effects on sleep and general well-being and perhaps on relationships. On the day the Coroner's Court staff are well used to the predicament of family members attending the inquest and are admirably sensitive and understanding. But it remains slightly overwhelming and intimidating and certainly nothing prepares you for the eventual pronouncement that your son is deceased. When it comes it's a sledgehammer blow despite the fact that it was anticipated. A few days later the letter arrives formally advising the decision and refers to the registration of the death with the Registrar. This has such an air of finality that it's difficult to maintain a glimmer of hope. (James, son Michael)

At the time of the pronouncement there were no rituals that could accommodate the feelings expressed by the family. It was similar to the experience of couples that are divorcing and the judge gives the verdict that the marriage is over. The person is single again once the decree nisi is given and the decree absolute a month later. A marriage is accompanied with all sorts of rituals and celebrations, when it ends there is nothing to acknowledge this new reality of being single again. Living with a person for a number of years and having been involved in that person's life, perhaps giving birth to them, when they disappear often without trace the inquest is the shattering blow. The coroner makes that legal statement they were missing presumed dead. It was like the final nail in the coffin except there was no body to accompany that decision.

7.17 A Painful Discovery

A news report on July 13, 2009 (Welch, SMH) telling of skeletal remains being found on Kincumber Mountain provided the following information:

About 2.30pm on Saturday (11 July) a male bushwalker was photographing Aboriginal art along the Warri Warri track on Kincumber Mountain when he came across skeletal remains near a cave. Some items of clothing were found nearby. (Alan and Betty, daughter Susie)

The day before the discovery was made the NSW government announced a \$50,000.00 reward for information on Susie's disappearance. The (July 13) *Sydney Morning Herald* reported the police were examining any 'coincidence' between the reward being announced on Friday and the bones being discovered the following day. In that same article it was confirmed that the remains were those of Susie.

After reading this news item and then following up on it at the Missing Persons website, I was conscious of what Betty had said in the interview:

There was mountain behind Susie's house called Kincumber Mountain, quite a large mountain all bushy, but there were lots of walking tracks on that, and for some reason, I thought she was on that mountain—because Susie had left her bible open at a passage in Revelations and it talked about going to the mountains and she had underlined 'torment, torture but death will allude me' so all very strange. (Alan and Betty, Susie)

I have not had any contact with the family since this news was made public. I was conscious of what the family's reaction might be in the light of Betty's premonition. We read that they did search the mountain knowing that Susie went there, but at that stage did not find anything. Now with this new discovery one can surmise that there will be a lot of questioning again with 'what ifs'. For the family the finding of Susie's remains solved one mystery, but it left a lot of unanswered questions. The plight of this family in discovering the remains is similar to that experienced by Sandra in the discovery of Donald's remains.

7.18 Summary

This chapter has drawn together a number of different threads that has made up the experience of families of missing persons. In sitting with these family members as their stories unfolded I was conscious of the way past memories were triggered, painful reminders evoked, and the element of the unexpected was revealed. It was a privileged position for me to be in, and I was left with a profound sense of admiration for all of them.

The final chapter will consider the families of the long-term missing people—an ongoing journey.

Chapter 8: Families Living with Missingness: An Ongoing Journey

This research has examined the lived experience of families of missing persons and the meaning they make of having a loved missing. Narrative inquiry allowed participants to talk freely of their experience in a relaxed and non-threatening way. The experience of the families of missing persons was understood within a traumatic loss and grief perspective to capture the range of family experiences. This facilitated the participants to share their experience and the ways in which they have come to understand the events surrounding their loved one going missing. The research question guiding this work was, *How do you as a family member (or friend) live with the experience of a loved one having gone missing?*

This chapter reports on the dimensions of missingness as experienced by this group of participants. Missingness is an umbrella term used to capture the multi-dimensional nature of the experience of families living with a person missing. This study is of a group of people who were willing to share their experience of missingness and how it has impacted them as individuals and families. In-depth interviews with sixteen family members and one friend were collected and analysed. The findings of this research were then presented as narrative themes and narrative threads. These themes became evident as participants narrated their experience.

In the discussion chapter (Chapter 6) the theme of the universal experience of families of missing persons was analysed through the themes of the common elements, the cost factor, and ways of coping. The following chapter (Chapter 7) explored the theme of the known outcome and was narrated as threads involving the expected and unexpected outcomes. The unknown outcome threads were about lost and found and the long-term missing. As a way of conceptualising what has been experienced the concept of missingness was used to tell the stories of these families. This chapter then discusses the dimensions of missingness and some of the ways these impacted the family. The chapter highlights significant issues that families discovered as they reflected on their experience and how these relate to the literature

and prior research on the topic. The limitations to the work undertaken are also reported on, plus the implications for practice and education. Future directions for research of families of the long-term missing people are suggested.

8.1 Where Does Missingness Belong?

A recurring theme in the literature on missing persons and the experience of the families in this study defined where missingness belongs. The combination of trauma, loss and grief has been used as a way to conceptualise the experience of missingness. Each of these three topics has its own history and has been the subject of much research, yet there has been no mention of the phenomenon of families of missing persons in the research literature, with the exception of the studies by Boss (1999; 2006). This lack of specificity surrounding families' experience of missingness and the limited literature on the subject motivated this project. My role in the early years as supervisor of the Counsellor for the Missing Persons Unit in NSW led me and my colleagues to confront the question of what families experience who have someone missing. At a personal and professional level I wanted to make sense of missingness from the perspective of these families. Having worked for many years in the areas of trauma, loss and grief, death and dying across the life span, it seemed a logical place to begin the exploration of missingness as experienced by the participants. Previous research had shown that trauma, loss and grief all had a place in missingness yet they did not individually or collectively define fully the lived experience of these families. The next section provides a current picture of the dimensions of missingness as experienced by this group of families of the long-term missing persons and the impact it has on them.

8.2 Dimensions of Missingness

8.2.1 Initial Impact: Active Searching

Going missing is not a new phenomenon and has been reported throughout history and across cultures. However, the repercussions of a person going missing can have traumatic consequences for the family while they are trying to make meaning of an

ambiguous loss. Boss (2006) talked of this kind of loss as the most stressful of any forms because of its incomprehensibility.

Participants in this study revealed that when the discovery was made of the person being missing, active searching began. At this point families found they were without any clear idea of what to do, where to go, or from whom to seek assistance. The expectation that government instrumentalities such as the police would be the source of information and assistance was not something always experienced by those families who sought their help. It was discovered that in the initial stages of reporting someone missing the concerns of the family were not always responded to appropriately. The participants in this study found the response by authorities often hindered their active searching, at least in the early stages of the person going missing. When after some weeks there had been no trace of the missing person, some families reported they found the authorities tended to make assumptions that they were probably dead. This was something that the families did not want to hear as it was experienced by them as taking away any thread of hope. Families reported that the authorities that discounted their loss or minimised their obvious concerns for the welfare and safety of their missing family member increased the trauma associated with the person's disappearance. This initial unhelpful response was seen in some cases to lead to later problems with the grieving process. The literature revealed that in NSW families of missing persons have regularly been invited to the Police Academy to talk of their experience with the police to the trainees. This did not appear to be replicated in other Australian states.

The active searching in which most families became involved was accompanied by another form of searching.

8.3 Searching Within

The second kind of searching that found expression in the stories of the participants was that of searching within as a way of trying to make meaning of the event. It was the natural response to the knowing, not knowing predicament in which the families found themselves. The need to make meaning of what had happened to their loved

one was a present-continuance experience of the families. In this kind of searching families were trying to understand the why, the how and when the person went missing. This often shaped and informed the active searching.

As a family reflected back on the past behaviour of the missing person, the telling of their story did help to shed light on the person's actions. Family members found that by telling their story they were able to articulate a range of thoughts and emotional responses to the disappearance of their son, daughter, or friend who was missing. Many had kept these thoughts and feelings hidden because people had failed to appreciate or understand what it meant for them to live with this kind of ambiguous loss. The narrative that gradually unfolded for families as they lived with ambiguity, served to affirm the therapeutic value of storytelling (Boss, 2006; Neimeyer, 2001; White, 1989).

The narratives of searching revealed that for each missing person the act of searching was shaped by the individual circumstances of that family. Age, gender and stage in the life cycle of the person who went missing revealed quite different reactions and responses from the family members in this study. While missingness is a universal problem, the circumstances that cause a person to disappear are unique. This suggests that support offered to families of the long-term missing needs to be flexible to meet their particular needs. In this study the differing circumstances that caused a person to disappear and the consequent reactions of the families to that loss reinforced this. Those families who did seek help from counselling agencies tended to find these helping professionals were ill-equipped to meet their needs.

8.4 Predicting Missingness

In the search for meaning families reflected on whether they could have predicted their loved one would go missing. In the trauma, loss and grief literature it has been recognised that there is a difference in response by families who lose someone through a natural disaster in comparison to a man-made disaster. This phenomenon is also true for families who have someone missing from a natural disaster—there is an explanation for the person disappearing. It does not however remove the need for

meaning-making, nor the pain associated with the loss of the person. In this study only one person was the victim of what appeared to be a natural disaster. This was something that it was not possible for the family to predict. In contrast other families in this study were frequently aware that their family member had problems, but they did not see this as a prediction of them becoming a missing person. The literature and the research have shown that people with certain behavioural characteristics are at risk of going missing.

8.5 Missingness and Mental Health

The families in this study showed that persons with a mental illness were at a greater risk of going missing. The literature on missing persons in Chapter 2 made reference to this as a risk factor (James et al., 2008). Lorang's (2007) online study examined the role mental health might play in people going missing but restricted her focus to those with depression, anxiety and stress. She reported that depression and high levels of stress were associated with thoughts of going missing. Anxiety for Lorang's group did not appear to be significant at all. Her findings were different to the families interviewed in this study, where the presenting mental health problem revealed other symptoms.

Family members in this study describing the mental illness of the person who was missing revealed they were more likely to be suffering from schizophrenia, though symptoms of depression were also evident. Families, whose missing person had a mental illness, described the disappearance of the person as being traumatic. The trauma they experienced had been cumulative, with the mental illness of the missing person identified as being the main causal factor. These families reported that they had lived with the missing person on a downward spiral as the effects of mental illness changed their personality. This prior knowledge did not prepare them for the disappearance of their family member. These families reported a sense of powerlessness and helplessness as the mental illness became more pronounced.

The dynamics of the family in which a young non-compliant child's behaviour was increasingly problematic became virtually intolerable in the teenage years. The

family identified their feelings of desperation where substance abuse was combined with a mental illness. This created major stressors for all involved. Families felt isolated and alone with some fearing for their own safety in the face of violent outbursts by their young adult who was mentally ill.

When such a disturbed person is missing, families have a major problem knowing whom they can turn to for assistance. When the missing person had previously come to the attention of the police from some families there was a reluctance to speak to police. Mental health facilities would be a logical place to seek support, but if the missing person was not a registered client of that facility, staff were limited in what they could offer either in terms of dealing with the mental illness or the substance abuse. Families in this cohort with missing persons found that government departments both at the federal and state level were often less than cooperative. When requests for assistance went unanswered or answers given were factually incorrect, stress levels increased dramatically leading for some to create complicated, delayed, or distorted grief.

8.6 Missingness and Suicide

The study has revealed a close association between going missing and suicide, which affirmed previous research that had suggested that going missing was a significant risk that people would take their own lives (Foy, 2004; Dadich 2003, James, 2008). Four of the people involved who went missing did provide some warning to the families by either talking of suicide or having made previous attempts to disappear with that in mind. Even when this warning was heard, knowing what to do and how to help left families perplexed and uncertain. This prior knowledge did not prepare them for the news that their family member or friend was missing. It was expressed as an increased feeling of guilt such as '*We should have seen it coming*'. For some families the realisation of the person being sufficiently desperate or disturbed to go missing only became obvious as they reflected back on the person's life leading up to their disappearance. This part of their searching within to make meaning gave rise to feelings of blame.

8.7 Shattered Assumptions

A major dimension of missingness was that the traumatic and often unexpected nature of a person disappearing shattered the assumptions the families had of their world (Kauffman, 2002). The act of someone going missing had radical consequences for individual family members and families as a whole. There was also a ripple effect to the community of which that missing person was a part. The world as the family has known it has been shattered by someone close being missing and with this shattering the assumptions they made about their world have gone. For parents any expectations about the future of their missing child were also shattered.

Making meaning of a changed worldview becomes problematic when the family did not have answers to the questions that would allow for understanding of missingness. Having a family member go missing lead the participants to live in two worlds. In order to provide some normality, most family members continued to live and work in the world they knew, which provided a sense of security. The other world was one where they adjusted to the absence of the missing person. Roles and relationships changed, and personal and professional identities were often affected, with possible economic consequences for the family. There was clear evidence that family members suffered physical and psychological problems as the reality of missingness impacted them. These are some of the consequences for the families. These changes involve secondary losses, adding yet another layer to the grief already felt.

8.8 Continuing Bonds

There was a marked opposition by family members to the use of the term *closure* being used to describe an end to their relationship with the missing person. Family members thought and felt this terminology was not an accurate description of their experience. Families in this study felt that counsellors and others who suggested they needed to find closure were discounting the strong attachment bond they still had with the missing person. A continuing bond with the missing person was an important source of consolation for families so that while the missing person might be physically absent they were still psychologically present (Boss 2006; Klass,

1996). A continuing bond with the missing person was not dependent on whether the person was dead or alive—it was just that they are missing. They still had a place in the heart and mind of the family. Bereaved families talked of an ongoing relationship with their dead family member as has been reported in other bereavement studies (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996, Neimeyer, 2001). They maintained an attachment to the dead person, though no longer a physical relationship, was nevertheless real and important to them. To move on with life did not mean severing that relationship. This notion of a continuing bond also provided a context for Services of Remembering, which are now held at the beginning of Missing Persons Week each year.

Participants in this study who were introduced to the concept of a continuing bond to the family member who was missing indicated that it had provided them with a sense of consolation. The notion of a continuing bond with the missing person legitimised the families' thoughts and normalised their feelings. The continuing bond helped the families come to terms with a new assumptive world that living with a person being missing requires.

8.9 Limitations of the Study

The people in this study were self selected and chose to participate in this research. At that point in time they had a need to tell their story and responded accordingly. A different cohort would provide different narratives, though there would be many similarities to these families. The benefit of storytelling was that in the telling and re-telling the participants gained new understanding. The participants reported that they valued the opportunity to tell their story and that they found a therapeutic benefit in voicing their experience and talking about their missing person.

The narrative method chosen for this study provided for an in-depth investigation of the experiences of these families. Being familiar with in-depth interviewing made this choice a practical and rewarding one for me. My personal and professional background influenced the choice. Using the framework of trauma, loss and grief for

this study has opened a new area of investigation involving families of missing persons and those who work with them.

An in-depth study of a small group of participants as in this qualitative study means that it is not possible to generalise to the total population of families of missing people. However, the voices heard in this study tell a story that health care providers and mental health practitioners need to hear to further inform their practice with this group of the population.

A further limitation of the study was that all the participants were of Anglo-Australian background. Attempts were made to include Aboriginal people in the study by advertising through Link-Up, but no contact was made. This is an important area for future research.

An attempt through advertising to involve families from the rural sector resulted in two persons responding, but in following up with them to arrange an interview, one had moved and left no forwarding details and the other did not follow-up after the initial contact. The increase in the rate of depression in rural and remote Australia and the number of male suicides occurring is a story waiting to be told. Is it reflected in people going missing from these communities?

8.10 Contributions of this Research

A trauma, loss and grief framework was used in this study to understand the lived experience of families with a long-term missing person. Situating the phenomena of missing persons in a loss and grief context is not something that has been discussed in the field of grief and bereavement to this point. The word grief was only used very occasionally in the interviews, and the term bereavement was avoided. The emphasis for most people appeared to be on the many elements of missingness and not specifically on the loss and grief experience associated with people going missing. The narratives from these families show that the element of missingness is a broad concept and that the people affected are a heterogeneous group. This has implications for people seeking to provide assistance and support to families, suggesting that any one counselling model will not meet the diverse needs of this population.

8.10.1 Implications for Practice

The research findings from this study have revealed the variability of the lived experience of families of missing persons prior to their loved one going missing and following their disappearance. This highlights the need for practitioners to narrow the focus on the individual family's experience rather than placing them all in a global category of missing and seeking to deal with them collectively. A single counselling model does not fit all families of missing people. There was a wide spectrum of individual differences both in the life of the person who went missing and the family of which he or she was a part.

The families in this study appeared to be evenly divided between those who sought assistance and those who did not. Those who received help from the Missing Persons Counselling Unit were very appreciative of this support. What was significant however was that not everyone from the same family made use of such services. There was a preference for one-to-one support, rather than formal group support. Families appreciated the opportunity to get together with other families in an informal way and share their stories and be mutually supportive of each other. When a family member did make an appointment to see a counsellor, they frequently found this was less than satisfactory, as the health professional did not seem to have the skills for dealing with their kind of loss experience. For those who did not make contact with support services they indicated it was due to a lack of knowledge of the services being available. The need to respect the different experiences of individual family members was also necessary.

The experience of the families interviewed revealed that there are a number of different agencies from which they needed assistance. The limited understanding of the nature of missingness families reported that they found government authorities, such as Centrecare and Legal personnel, were often not equipped to answer their questions or to give appropriate support. There was often a lack of communication between service providers, which added to the frustration of the families involved.

8.10.2 Implications for Education

The heterogeneous nature of the families of missing persons revealed that while they might have a missing person in common, there were major differences. There is a need for federal and state governments to continue to encourage the development of educational programs. The counselling model developed by Wayland (2007) has provided a framework for managing ambiguous loss with missing people. Every attempt should be made to ensure health care professionals are made aware of this in their training or through professional development programs.

The NSW Police Academy in recent times has raised awareness amongst recruits of the problems of families of missing persons. The value of this educational program is that it has been provided by family members that have had a person reported as missing. This first-hand experience from family members has highlighted the positive and negative experiences people have had, answered questions of the trainees, and suggested helpful ways of assisting this population.

8.10.3 Promoting a National Voice

This project revealed the wide discrepancies that exist between the state jurisdictions for managing missing persons generally and their families in particular. There should be significant benefits to the sector if the planned national database on missing persons is implemented as soon as possible. What NSW has developed in support of families of missing persons is a model that could be adapted to suit the needs of other states and territories. The NMPCC roundtable discussion of people working in the missing persons sector now places a greater emphasis on the issues affecting families of missing persons. This is to be applauded and extended.

A recent forum in Canberra recommended that a national conference be held. There are now tentative plans by the NMPCC to hold a national conference in 2012 on missing persons. This would provide an opportunity for a major public awareness campaign through the media in which families of missing people could be featured.

It would also provide an opportunity for networking between service providers who work in the missing persons sector.

8.10.4 Implications for Future Research Directions

The references made above to practice and education suggests there are opportunities for research in both of these areas. The FFMPU has undertaken pilot studies on the effectiveness of the counselling provided by their unit, and this could be further expanded as a research project. Similarly, an evaluation project on the effectiveness of small groups for counselling families of missing persons could be undertaken. A survey could be undertaken to discover whether counsellors are aware of the counselling model (Wayland, 2007) and how effective they have found it.

Research projects could also target the identified at-risk groups of people going missing in the population. One such group would be people with mental illness. This could include working with mental health practitioners and mental health facilities in assisting them to identify those people they deem to be at risk. There has been growing concern that people in the rural sector are at risk of mental illness and suicide. Men appear to be most at risk. A joint project between the FFMP counselling unit and an organisation such as the NALAG through their Dubbo Centre could be a way of targeting the rural population.

In the suicide prevention literature there has been little reference to missing persons being at risk of taking their own life. This would be another significant research project that could involve a joint project between NMPCC and the organisation SANE, which has become more actively associated with the missing persons sector.

Where programs are run in the community or within organisations, evaluating their effectiveness is an important component of the work they undertake. Research efforts could explore in more depth the subtleties of living with the person prior to and post their disappearance.

There is also a need to explore in more detail the grief of missingness. In this study the grief of missingness has highlighted that families living in the space between knowing and not knowing actively search in two different ways. I have described this as the searching without (active searching) and searching within (meaning making) and this is an area which needs further exploration. Families of long-term missing persons are a unique group in the population with specific needs in the area of loss and grief. Some of the themes which were developed from the narratives warrant further research such as the financial costs to families of missing persons. Other topics could involve the flow on effect of the social, emotional, physical and mental health costs to the families. This study has highlighted some of the issues that now require an in-depth investigation to lead to the development of a model of the grief of missingness.

8.11 Summary

This study has discussed the way in which families seek to make meaning of a loved one disappearing through the concept of missingness. The narrative themes and threads that emerged have shown missingness to be a multi-dimensional concept and that families formed a heterogeneous group. Their narratives indicated that having a family member go missing was a traumatic loss experience; however, to this point it has not found expression in the trauma, loss and grief literature. The study revealed that families of missing persons live with ambiguity or the space between knowing and not knowing. It has impacted families and individuals both physically and psychologically as they struggle to make meaning of a changed worldview. Previous assumptions they made about their world no longer hold true. Families found positive reassurance in the way the new understandings of grief reinforce the notion of continuing bonds.

The active searching and the searching within for meaning characterised these families. Some of the service providers and counsellors they encountered had been ill equipped to support the needs of this population. Families found it difficult to predict that their loved one was at risk of disappearing. The research has shown that a person with a mental health problem is at risk of going missing and is more likely to commit

suicide. Finding ways to both detect and prevent this from happening would benefit families and service providers.

The findings were limited by the relatively narrow base of the sample, as all participants were from an Anglo-Australian background and most were residents in large urban cities. There is potential for future researchers to examine similar issues amongst other cultural groups and those living in rural and remote locations. Such data would have implications for practice and education. The need to promote a national voice was also expressed. This research should provide a springboard for others to find new directions.

The narratives reported here were indicative of an ongoing journey for families with a person missing, who live with ambiguity, in the 'space in between', knowing and not knowing as they endeavour to make meaning of the experience.

I honour these people and the stories they have told as I have shared a part of that journey through this research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

SCHOOL OF HEALTH
Armidale 2351
Australia



WANTED

FAMILIES OF MISSING PERSONS

TO PARTICIPATE IN A

RESEARCH PROJECT

TO HELP IN UNDERSTANDING

THE GRIEF EXPERIENCED

BY FAMILIES

For further details please contact:

Dr Geoffrey Glassock, mobile 0408 436 676

Email: glassock@bigpond.net.au

Appendix 2

SCHOOL OF HEALTH

Armidale 2351

Australia



Letter of Invitation

PhD Research Project:

Traumatic Loss: Understanding the Grieving Experience of Families of Missing Persons

You are invited to participate in this study, which aims to understand the ‘lived experience’ of families of missing persons.

My name is Geoffrey Glassock and I am conducting this research for the award of PhD in Counselling at the University of New England, Armidale, NSW, under the supervision of Dr Frances Mackay and Dr Myfanwy Maple.

I am interested in trying to understand the way in which different family members experience and express their grief at the loss of a family member. To this end I would like to interview all family members over the age of 13 years who are willing to participate. Young people 13 to 18 years will need written parental permission before being allowed to participate in an interview.

What is involved?

If you agree to be interviewed, I will contact you to discuss further what is involved and answer any questions you may have. We then can arrange a mutually convenient time to meet for the interview. I am happy to come to your home if this is acceptable to you. The interview for each person will probably last about one hour and this will be audio-tape recorded. Participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time with no adverse consequences.

Confidentiality

It is important for you to know that all information in the study will remain confidential and only accessible to myself and my supervisors. Audio tapes will be identified by an identification number only and will be erased following transcription. Transcripts will be kept securely, without identification and will be destroyed after five years. Complete anonymity will be maintained in research reports and other publications that may result from this study. Your identity will not be disclosed at any time.

In the unlikely event that the interview raises emotional issues for you, it is advised that you seek assistance from a trained counsellor such as the Counsellor at Family Friends Missing Persons Unit (02 9374 3023), your local Community Health Centre of Lifeline (13 11 13). I will not be able to provide a counselling service.

Questions concerning this research project can be directed to Geoffrey Glassock using the contact information listed below. Alternately, you may contact my Principal Supervisor, Dr Frances Mackay via email fmackay@une.edu.au or telephone 02 6773 3659 or my Secondary Supervisor, Dr Myfanwy Maple via email maplem@une.edu.au or telephone 02 6773 3661.

This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (Approval No HEO 5/045).

If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, or the manner in which the research is conducted, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer at the following address:

Research Services
University of New England
Armidale NSW 2351
Telephone: 02 6773 3449 Facsimile: 02 6773 3543
Email: ethics@une.edu.au

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Geoffrey Glassock MAPS
Life Change Management
Counselling Psychologist
PO Box 394
Five Dock
NSW 2046
Ph: 02 9713 5561
Mob: 0408 436 676
Email: glassock@bigpond.net.au

Appendix 3



SCHOOL OF HEALTH
Armidale 2351
Australia

Client Consent Form

PhD Research Project:

Traumatic Loss: Understanding the Grieving Experience of Families of Missing Persons

I am willing to participate in this study conducted by Geoffrey Glassock and realise that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time.

I have read and understood the information contained in the letter of invitation for participants.

PART 1

I agree to be interviewed and for the interview to be tape recorded.

YES ___ NO ___

I understand that I will be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Phone number: _____