

I Have To Go On: The Effect of a Mother's Death On
Her Daughter's Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Parents die during the lives of their children. If the child is an adolescent, that death will impact the student's education immediately or in subsequent years. Findings show the death of a mother does impact the daughter's education. It is imperative educators are willing to work with the student at the time the death occurs as well as in the ensuing months.

Seidman's (2006) three-interview format was used as a template for the interviews of 11 women, ranging in age from 19 to 78 and whose mothers died when the women were adolescents. The interviews were primarily conducted in one sitting, transcribed, and then analyzed for common themes that connected to the research on the topic. Those themes include grieving, the role of caring in education, the role of teacher as the second mother, mother-daughter relationships, and the impact of parent death on schooling. These themes from the data cross cut with thematic strands within the study's theoretical framework: the nurturing and empathetic role of the mother, a desire of the daughter not to be different, and the ethics of caring.

Findings in this study reveal that the negative impacts of mother loss are felt in diffuse ways, such as a lack of academic or emotional encouragement. Many women discussed the need and availability of support groups including groups at colleges. One practical implication of these findings is schools need to become caring communities in which caring is the norm for all students and teachers, thereby providing all students with needed support in times of crisis.

The implications for further research include the impact of the mother death on the education of daughters, how volunteering with an organization related to the cause of the mother's death assists the daughter and types of programs most important to a student's success in post-secondary education. Adolescents are in a time of great change in their lives, and for a daughter, the loss of a mother has an everlasting, life-changing impact.

This and all of my academic work is dedicated to my mother
Annie Morrow McLuskey Ratti.
She was my first teacher and loved me unconditionally,
always encouraging me to be the best I could be.
You are my angel in heaven.
I love you and miss you always, Mom!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Our mother was there when we drifted into this world.

—M'Lynn Eatenton from *Steel Magnolias* (1986, p. 106, paraphrased)

July 13, 1978 is the day that I joined the sorority of women whose mothers died when we were teenagers still attending high school. That is the day my world changed forever, and it is one of those paramount events in my life's timeline by which all other things are judged. My mother Annie was an immigrant from Scotland who did not have a high school diploma. She was a member of the Women's Army Air Corps during World War II where she earned her General Education Diploma (GED). Her goal for me was to have the best education we could afford, so she sent me to parochial schools in elementary and high school. However, her desire to see me attend college was cut short by her not even being able to share in my attainment of a high school diploma. Knowing that my mom's spirit has been with me all the way and that she is still watching over me, I am motivated to make her proud by working toward my doctoral degree.

After my mother's death I wanted to go away to college but I was led to believe that was not a possibility for me. There was no one who I could plan with or who would speak to my father on my behalf to encourage my attendance at Northern Arizona University, which was the college of my choice. In spite of that personal roadblock, I attended Arizona State University (ASU), went to Mesa Community College, and returned to ASU where I finished my Bachelor of Arts

degree in 1983. I became the first in my immediate family and among the grandchildren of my Scottish immigrant grandparents to graduate from college.

My mother's expressed desires, while still alive, for me to obtain an education; my personal history of pursuing an education in obtaining a Bachelor of Arts degree; my subsequent work as an educator; and the desire to obtain an advanced degree are the impetus for the present study of understanding how a mother's death impacts the educational choices of her daughter. In the pursuit of obtaining an advanced degree, I am trying to comprehend even further the influence mothers have on the education of young women today, and how the experience of a mother's death impacts their choices in the pursuit of an education.

Research Questions

I began this study with the following overall research question: "How does the death of a mother impact her daughter's subsequent education?" As I investigated the literature on mother-daughter relationships, caring and education, and mother loss, I developed the following sub-questions:

1a. What role does the mother play in the life of the adolescent and her education?

1b. How does the adolescent's desire not to be different potentially prevent her from grieving?

1c. How do friends and teachers treat the young girl if they learn that her mother has died?

1d. How can schools be a place of caring and nurturing for all students?

Background

As a teacher in parochial and public high schools for the past 23 years, I have witnessed how teachers and other school personnel often ignore or are unaware of the death of a child's parent. If a teacher has a child in his or her class whose parent dies, the teacher might receive that information. However, in subsequent semesters, teachers generally may not be told about the student's loss. The desire to ignore death and its impact appears to be institutionalized within the school system. For example, I have had discussions with colleagues who remarked about a student's decline in grades from the ninth grade to the tenth grade. I mentioned to one teacher that her male student's father had died at the beginning of his ninth grade year and that currently his older brother was on a two-year church mission. The teacher responded that she did not think the father's death would impact the student's work or grades. This conversation made me realize that the knowledge of the impact of the death of a parent on a child is often unknown. Or, if it is known, the possible implications of the parent's death on the student are generally not discussed or considered by school personnel.

There is very little research literature on parental death and its educational consequences. The majority of literature relating to mothers and daughters had nothing to do with their daughters' education. The study conducted by Ogle and Damhorst, (2003) deals with body image. Ruebush (1994) deals in general terms with the relationship between a mother and an adolescent daughter. Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004) in a qualitative study discussed communication on issues of

sexuality between African American mothers and daughters. Luedeman et al. (2006) studied communication between mothers and daughters following divorce.

The majority of the research on mother-daughter relationships that did touch on education comes from a study of children in South Africa and Indonesia. There was only one study, by Lang and Zagorsky (2001) that examined mother-daughter relationships in the United States; this study did specifically discuss the mother's death and educational attainment.

The writing of Hope Edelman (1994), while not academic in nature, deals with the impact of the mother's death. Though Edelman did not speak extensively on the issue of education in her book *Motherless Daughters*, she did tell the story of being 17 years of age when her own mother died and the impact of her mother's death on her life. In interviews with many women whose mothers had died, the interviewees described the loss of their mother as being the pivotal event in their lives, that which surpassed all others.

Overview of the Study

In this study I used a mixed methods research design, which included a nine-question survey followed by an extensive three-part interview process. The survey was used to provide some baseline data about the number of people and their ages who have been touched by death. The survey also provided information as to the role of education in the lives of those individuals. The final page of the survey inquired of the respondents if they would be willing to participate in an extensive interview. There were no interviews done with the individuals who

completed the survey. The interviewees were recruited through snowballing and contacting Motherless Daughter organizations.

A letter (Appendix A) explaining the research project was attached to the survey (Appendix B); both were provided and administered at events that focused on breast cancer research/awareness. They were administered at the ASU Varsity Softball “Pink Out” in Tempe, Arizona and the Southern Arizona Race for the Cure in Tucson, Arizona. I also interviewed a total of 11 women in all, nine women whose mothers had died when they were adolescents in either middle or high school; one woman whose mother died when she was six years of age and another whose mother died when she was 18 just following her high school graduation. These in-depth interviews were based on Seidman’s writings on qualitative research (2006). The subjects were recruited via snowball sampling. While the interview questions (Appendix C) appear to be in three distinct pieces, they were of a circular nature. The questions were created to provide the interviewer a basis for the interview and to ensure consistency; in other words, the same questions were asked of all the interviewees.

I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews and then analyzed the transcriptions for common themes. A key focus of the interviews and my analysis were issues related to the women’s education. Questions asked and discussed in the interviews covered topics as to how they were treated at school, how important was their education to their mothers, and how much formal education had their mothers received.

Significance of the Study

I anticipate that this study will contribute to secondary schools' policy on recognition and work with students who have experienced a death, especially for the girls on the loss of a mother. It is my hope that the qualitative evidence will show the impact mothers have on their daughters' outlook on education. It is also possible that there may be a negative family attitude on education and that the mother's death freed up the daughter to pursue an education on her own. This would be beneficial information for schools as well to assist students in their future education.

As evidenced by the lack of literature on the topic, mother loss is an under-researched topic that needs much more empirical study. This dissertation is one contribution toward that goal. One reason for the dearth of research on the topic may be that it is an uncomfortable one for individuals to research. As in my case, there may need to be a personal connection to the topic to bring someone to it. This research and any subsequent writing that evolves from my study will bring new light to a topic that is little discussed – either in the scholarly literature or in school – and that is uncomfortable to discuss. This dissertation may not change attitudes about death and its impact on the living, but if it opens the eyes of one counselor, administrator, or teacher to the reality of these young women, then much has been accomplished.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study was organized into the following six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction and overview of the work that was completed; this chapter gives a

brief overview of the rationale for this study as well as my reasoning for taking on such a research topic.

The second chapter is my literature review and conceptual framework. My literature review may be a little unorthodox as it includes non-peer reviewed materials coming from an academic perspective as well as what one might term *pop* literature. While not necessarily contributing to the research in this area, these non-academic writings have significantly contributed to the discussion of motherless daughters. There is an extensive collection of academic literature included, ranging from mother-daughter relationships, mother impact on schooling, and mother death.

The third chapter is my methodology. In this chapter I discuss in more detail the use of mixed methods research, qualitative research, and the role of the interviewer. I have a unique perspective in this research as I have firsthand experience, which gives me the insider's view, but it also requires me to remain unbiased in hearing what my subjects have to say about education and their mothers' deaths. Additionally, having experienced my own mother's death provides me with the ability to be empathetic to their stories and struggles in dealing with the deaths of their mothers.

To provide readers with some background information about the lives of these women, I have provided in chapter 4 the biographies of the women who were interviewed. Chapter 5 is divided by themes, rather than dividing the women by age group; a comparison based on the overriding themes is more appropriate. Through the use of comparative analysis, I examined the commonalities and

disparities in their experiences of education and the deaths of their mothers, particularly covering similarities or differences in their life experiences? Have the schools improved, worsened, or remained the same in the way they deal with teens who have had a mother die while in school?

Chapter 6 draws out the study's conclusions and broader implications, and contains recommendations for further research and educational practice. Have school systems really learned anything in the last 60-plus years? How can this research be best utilized? I argue that this research will be valuable to school counseling programs as well as middle and high school administrators and teachers. How should we acknowledge a death in a student's family and how can we best help the student? Are there programs available that address this issue and do they acknowledge the variance of the loss of the same sex parent, especially acknowledging the relationship between the mother and daughter? Because adolescence is such a turbulent time between mother and daughter, how does the death of the mother additionally affect an adolescent daughter?

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the reader to my rationale for selecting this topic as the center of my research. The death of a mother impacts all segments of a child's life and this study specifically focuses on the motherless daughter and her education. You have been introduced to my research questions and to the outline of the document that follows. This takes us into the conceptual framework and the literature available on this topic—the focus of chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Rossman and Rallis (2003) describe a conceptual framework as being made up of three distinct parts. The first part is experience in practice; the second, what others have discovered; and the third, the theoretical base. Experience in practice as defined by Rossman and Rallis (2003) is the “researcher’s personal biography as the lens through which he/she sees the world” (p. 10). In terms of the present project, Rossman and Rallis state that my values and experiences as a teacher and as a motherless daughter provide “a unique perspective as a source of understanding rather than something to be cleansed from the study” (p. 10). The roots of qualitative inquiry are “empiricism: the philosophical tradition that argues that knowledge is obtained by direct experience” (p. 6). This supports the rationale for this study. Unlike Edelman (1994) who wrote on the impact of mother-loss with a broad perspective, I narrowed my focus to the secondary schools and the classrooms, where I have spent over 20 years.

As a motherless daughter myself at the age of 17, I have an understanding of what it means to not have your mother be a part of your educational experiences. She is not there for the high points, graduations or an “A” on the paper you worked on endlessly, or applying to or entering into the college of your dreams. She is not there for the low points either, not getting asked to the prom or a poor grade on an exam.

As a high school teacher I have observed for over 20 years how school personnel ignore death. Minimal information is shared with school staff when a death occurs in a student's family. Without the benefit of unofficial hallway chatter among teachers, it would be unlikely that a teacher would know of the death of a student's parent if the death did not occur the semester the student was in his or her classroom.

Literature Review

In this chapter is an analysis of the literature available in the area of death of a parent (mother), the role of caring in schools, and a mother's impact on her daughter's education. The first section of the chapter is a review of scholarly writing and the second section focuses on popular literature. Reviews of other academic writing on the issues of mother death, education, and the mother-daughter relationship are in the third section.

The literature in the area of the impact of the death of a mother on the daughter's education is extremely limited. The impact of the death of a mother on her children has not received much scholarly attention. I expanded the literature and contextual framework to include the role of the mother in the life of the adolescent daughter as well as the role a mother plays in the education of the daughter.

Scholarly Literature

Grieving

How do schools deal with children who are grieving? This is one area in which empirical research is available, though limited. Huss and Ritchie (1999),

for example, conducted a study using a two-way analysis of variance. Their study dealt with the impact of unresolved grief in children younger than 18 when a parent dies (p. 186). The specific purpose of their study was to investigate the effect of a support group for children who had experienced the death of a parent (p. 187). At the time of their study there was little experimental research on the consequences of unresolved grief. Their study used a group intervention model. In this group there were four goals: (a) relieve the child's sense of isolation; (b) provide opportunities for sharing common experiences; (c) provide a safe place to talk about the person who died; and (d) normalize the death experience (pp. 186-188). The children in the study were divided into four groups. Groups one and three participated in group sessions; groups two and four did not. Each group had additional tasks such as completing pre- and post-group assessments. Huss and Ritchie (1999) found that no statistically significant changes occurred in the treatment group's self-esteem, depression, behavior, or ability to cope with loss. What did prove beneficial to the children was that following the intervention they did not feel a sense of isolation. The children felt a sense of commonality. They realized they were not alone in the death of a parent, and the result was that the event had been normalized (p. 193).

Lenhardt and McCourt (2000) look at the grief tied to the death of a mother especially that which is unresolved. As they state, "the more composed adolescents appear, the greater their risk may be of experiencing a complicated grief known as unresolved grief" (p.189). They see adolescent daughters at an increased risk for complicated grief due to a mother's death.

A study by Marks, Jun, and Song (2008) studied the effect of the death of a parent on offspring who were over the age of 18 at the time of a parent's death. While the majority of those studied were middle aged, some of the adults included ranged from 19 years through 29 years of age. This study analyzed longitudinal data between 1987 and 1993. The aim of the study was to look at the psychological well-being and physical health of adults who had at least one parent who died. A second goal was to better understand how gender influences the effects of parental death on adults (p. 1612). The authors found that a mother's death led to more negative effects for daughters than sons (p. 1611).

The Role of Caring in Education

Nel Noddings is perhaps one of the best-known educational scholars who have studied the processes of caring in schools, and her work has greatly influenced this study. In her (2003b) book *Happiness and Education*, she stated, "Happiness should be the aim of education and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (p. 1). If students understand that their teachers care, will that make school a place of happiness? If students are to truly find happiness they must also experience unhappiness. It is the point, counter-point of life. Connected to this is the sharing of the sufferings of others; this sharing contributes to our own fulfillment as human beings. Noddings referred to C. S. Lewis pointing out that grief can sometimes bring joy in its wake (p. 15).

Noddings (2003a) discussed an ethic of caring as not merely a formal process, but also referred to it as a "moral agent to her own memory of caring and

her commitment to act in accordance with it” (p. 107). A moral agent provides a basis from the ethic of caring as one might determine an action based upon one’s conscience. The ethic of caring seeks to maintain caring in of itself (Nodding, 2003a).

To define the ethic of caring, Noddings (2003a) stated that the ethic of caring has its source in human caring and that the ethic of caring seeks the maintenance and enhancement of caring. Caring’s conservation of traditional values is a sign that is the wellspring of moral values and that moral deliberation may safely be referred to the ethic of caring, which returns to humility in its recognition of dependence, for if it is energetic. Caring is also energized by the reciprocal gifts of the cared-for. Caring is a proud ethic with a humble and wary heart (p. 108). Noddings (2010), in her most recent book, describes caring as something that in “every approach, involves attention, empathetic response and a commitment to respond to legitimate needs” (p. 28). If we see the grief that a student is working through as a state of life, should we not develop a caring attitude toward that student and teach other students in the class to do the same? A caring attitude would provide all in the classroom with the opportunity to respond to the legitimate needs of that student. A caring attitude will enable those within the classroom (a) to offer their recognition to the student that he or she has needs, (b) to protect the student in need from harm; and (c) to give the student in need a sense of being fully human, respected and comforted (Noddings, 2010, p.130). As previously stated, the act of offering care not only by the teacher but also by the

students will allow the grieving student to “become more vulnerable, for what hurts another will also hurt us” (p. 163).

It is possible to take Nodding’s (2003a) description of a student having difficulty with math and transform that into any teacher’s relationship with a student who has faced any difficulty:

If I care about students who are having difficulty with mathematics, I must do two things: I must make the problem my own, receive it intellectually, immerse myself in it; I must also bring the student having difficulty into proximity, receive such students personally. The second will impose special problems on me for the second area of concentration is a person. The student is my proximate other and must be met as the cared-for by me, one-caring. Teaching involves the meeting of the one-caring and cared for. To teach involves a giving of self and a receiving of other. It also requires the teacher to receive, reflect and act. As the one-caring the teacher has the obligation to maintain and enhance the ethical ideal of the cared-for. (p. 113)

There is the need for discussions about what was done and what might have been done. Emphasis always has to be placed on the maintenance of caring and how we might be better than we are. Dialogue is essential in nurturing the ideal of caring (p.121).

According to Noddings (2002), “We should be able to respond to the pain of strangers as well as that of friends”(p. 10). If that is the case, teachers should be

able to respond to the pain of students whether they would be defined as strangers or friends.

Caring and the Role of Teachers as the Second Mother

The concept of the caring nurturing teacher reaches beyond the boundaries of the educational system in the United States. Fischman (2007) explains that in Argentina the role of the normal school was the development of public school teachers as lay missionaries who must devote their life to nurturing new generations (p. 354). Training as future teachers in Argentina has included the concept that teachers are second mother/father figures (Fischman, 2000), resulting in schools becoming second homes to students by providing them with shelter and nutrition, and resulting in the feminization of the classroom (p. 68). During times in which teachers in Argentina have gone on strike, not only the idea of depriving the children of an education was invoked, but also denying the teachers of their vocation as second mothers was invoked.

The image of teachers as caring, by fulfilling a vocation in the classroom to provide emotional and intellectual guidance to the students (Fischman, 2000, p. 163), would also provide support to a student who had faced a death in the family. For the teacher who takes on the role of a caring individual, does s/he not also establish the role of a second mother/father?

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

The relationship between mothers and their adolescent daughters exhibits a variety of stages. Following is a review of a few studies in which the authors examined the relationship between the mother and daughter not specifically

relating to the issue of death or education. Rosenzweig (1991) described how in the late 19th and early 20th centuries the popular literature of that day discussed the tension and discord between mothers and daughters. That discord was seen as troublesome in the middle class family structure of the time (p. 9). However, through this discord the mother-daughter attachment fostered the development of daughters' positive capabilities. The daughters developed motivation for action and increased self-esteem and self-affirmation. It did not restrict the daughters' capacity to function independently (p. 17). Passing conflicts between adolescent daughters and their mothers represented a means of elaborating the continuity of connection. According to Kaplan and Klein (cited by Rosenzweig, 1991), passing conflicts were significant to others as an important mode of "intense and abiding engagement" (p. 18). Rosenzweig cited that in 1916 Clara Savage Little wrote in her journal, "I have no words to tell her [my mother] how she is, after all, the anchor of my life" (p. 18).

Pill and Zabin (1997) looked specifically at the death of the mother. They suggested that the death of the mother leaves the daughter without her primary role model and caregiver. The death and the grief associated with it resurfaces at each major event in the daughter's life from leaving home, to entering college, to getting married and having children. The group that they worked with for their study was made up of adult women whose mothers had died before they reached adulthood. The women in the group spoke of feeling alone as children and embarrassed because their mothers had died, making them different from everyone else. They also spoke of their fathers and other family members going

on as if nothing had occurred. Even today they are surrounded by a society that does not fathom that they still miss their mothers intensely (p. 188). They also speak of transitions and endings acting as a resurgence of the initial and greatest loss, that of their mother's death. The facilitators who worked with the women in these groups acknowledged that the pain of separation is normal and inevitable whenever there has been early mother loss (p. 188). Many of the women were more comfortable in the role of caretaker than one being cared for as they did not see themselves worthy of care. This placed several of the subjects in helping professions: teachers, nurses, and social workers. Many women while appearing outwardly strong felt difficulty in committing to long-term relationships because they directly connected to their fear of loss (p. 190).

Schultz (2007) in her qualitative study found that the daughter did not comprehend the reality that her mother was going to die, even though her mother was expected to die from an illness. The shock was present either in the case of death from an extended illness or from a sudden accident. Shultz stated in her study from one of her subjects that the death of the mother is the defining moment: "It splits your life in half from before and then after" (p. 25).

Additionally Shultz (2007) stated that bereaved adolescents may have limited opportunity to talk about their experience. They need safe environments and relationships established with individuals who will help them to process their grief (p. 39).

The qualitative study conducted by Ogle and Damhorst (2003) examined the relationship between mothers and teenage daughters from the perspective of

body image and dieting. The authors found that the mother-daughter interactions during the study shaped the participants' thoughts about self and their dieting behaviors, especially in the case of the daughters (p. 482).

A study conducted in Albuquerque, New Mexico, by Ruebush (1994) was conducted on the relationship between adolescent daughters and their mothers. This study was made up of middle class mothers to a group of girls who were highly motivated academically, yet the content of the survey data showed that they were struggling with issues of personal identity (p. 449).

The murky impact of the death of a mother is written about by Janna Malamud Smith (2008) who wrote about the death of her mother. She portrayed the death with images from Robinson Crusoe:

I found myself after her death mucking through strange, flickering, opposite states of mind where, at more than a few moments, a seemingly parallel grand confusion of terror and calm, desolation and thin hope, bereftness and bounty all commingled. (p. 77)

She suggested that each woman who loses her mother has a figure, a character, a vision from childhood that they identify with, to which they return in this time of grief. She connected to Robinson Crusoe because she connected the death of a mother with a shipwreck. She stated that mourning is not just a long good-bye; it is a hard labor of turning away and returning, of swimming free and then poling back (p. 79). It is a confusion that takes time to untangle.

Additional studies have been conducted about the relationship between the mother and the adolescent daughter in the areas of divorce and discussions of

sexuality. According to qualitative research by Pluhar and Kuriloff (2004), African American mothers often use storytelling to accomplish sexual socialization (p. 304). In addition, mother-daughter dyads frequently displayed positive emotions during the teenage years (p. 305). The results of this study, which dealt with African American mothers and their adolescent daughters discussing sexuality, also captured the affective qualities of the mother-daughter relationship (p. 309).

The mother-daughter relationship was also discussed by Luedemann et al. (2006). Important topics for the mother to discuss with her daughter are the mother's feelings of happiness about being a parent and/or the mother's hobbies. These conversations are beneficial to the daughter through the development of fostering shared interests and close mother-daughter bonds (p. 33).

Noddings (2003a), while discussing the issue of caring, also discussed the relationship between mother and child:

Women are somewhat better equipped for caring than men are. This is partly a result of the construction of psychological deep structures in the mother-child relationship. A girl can identify with the one caring for her and thus maintain relation while establishing identity (p. 97).

The mother-daughter relationship is one based on caring and that basis supports the daughter as she is establishing her own identity; she does not have to pull away from it. According to Noddings (2003a), mothering and caring are deeply related. Though mothering is not a role but a relationship, she does not explain

“why a woman mothers a child into adolescence or why she mothers other people’s half-grown children” (p. 128).

Leonard (1996) looked at the relationship of mother and child in the first 18 months of the child’s life. She connected mothering to the rich cultural traditions that need to be nurtured and continued in society. Nurturing and care are a part of the cultural fabric of most societies, and it is the mother that passes down those traditions. Because children are seen as the private property of their parents, it is the job of the parents to care for them and to share the valuable traditions of the society and culture. The greater community does not consider themselves as having responsibility to the child. To quote Leonard (1996),

Mothering as a practice seeks to reassert the moral value of commitment and connectedness, of the self who finds identity through being in relationships and finds moral significance in an ethic of care. . . . made an organizing principle for all human relationships. (p. 139)

According to the work of Linda Nielsen (2007), the mother-daughter relationship was more communicative than the relationship between fathers and daughters. Compared to the father-daughter relationship the mother-daughter relationship was emotionally intimate and more comfortable. Daughters and mothers knew one another better and were more involved in each others’ lives (p. 112). In addition, her research examined the communication between daughters and their fathers during college. Nielsen taught from 1990–2004 a college course on the father and daughter relationship. She collected survey data from the students in her class about the relationship between the daughters [her

students] and their fathers. Data were also collected through papers and written questionnaires. The papers were the result of three separate interviews conducted with their fathers over the 15-week course. The interviews were based on questions provided by the instructor.

It was found that the majority of young women in this study used their mothers as the means to communicate with their fathers. Only one third of the respondents told their fathers as much as they told their mothers about what was going on in their lives (Nielsen, 2007, p. 120). The majority of the daughters used their mothers as the “communication satellite” between themselves and their fathers. Without mom there to serve as “the communication satellite” (Nielsen, 2007, p. 120), how does the daughter communicate with her father? Also, who provides that more emotionally intimate relationship in the lives of the motherless daughters through her college years?

Some research has been conducted within the Latino culture on the impact of the mother on the life of the adolescent daughter, and specifically the daughter’s education. Jill Denner and Bianca Guzman (2006) collected articles about the lives of Latina girls and how they fit into the culture of the United States, as well as continued to exist within their families’ own heritage. According to the 2001 census, 77% of Latinas complete high school (p. 5). According to Suárez-Orosco (cited by Denner & Guzman, 2006), mothers positively influence the aspirations that Latina girls expect to accomplish. “Succeeding in school, is one of the best ways they can fulfill the duty to the family” (p. 60). The immigrant parent plays a critical role in their adolescents “staying on the good path,” which

includes valuing education and becoming well educated (p. 61). These authors also indicated that immigrant mothers often supported their daughters in understanding the need for good study habits, even if they themselves did not have a high school education (p. 68). Regardless of their educational background, Latina mothers believed it was important for their children to succeed academically (p. 70).

Within the population of daughters of the Dominican community (those who come from the Dominican Republic), the daughters seemed more geared toward reaching their educational goals and were more knowledgeable about the college application process than their male peers (Suarez-Orozco, 2006, p. 85, cited by Denner & Guzman, 2006). These girls spoke about their communities' legacies of coming from strong and independent women, many of whom ran families and households alone (Suarez-Orozco, 2006, p. 85, cited by Denner & Guzman, 2006, p. 84).

The educational ambition of the girls is driven by their parental aspirations for them as well as the girls' own desire to be more successful than their parents (Denner & Guzman, 2006, p. 125). In this same study, mothers emerged as the most important source of personal influence for educational and career advice (p. 130). Standardized measures accessing intellectual ability did not predict career success as much as maternal support and encouragement, personal persistence, and drive. Successful Latinas came from families in which reading and intellectual inquiry, hard work, and ambition were modeled and rewarded. The importance of maternal encouragement was vital (p. 133).

Parent Death: Impact on Schooling

One study looked at South Africa, specifically the KwaZulu-Natal region, to study the impact of parent death on the schooling of the children. This is an area of Africa that has high death rates from HIV/AIDS (Case & Ardington, 2006). This study examined elementary and secondary success; it did not address higher education. What has been found in the research from this study is that the loss of the child's mother is a strong predictor of poor schooling outcomes (p. 402). According to Case and Ardington (2006), maternal orphans have a schooling deficit because (a) the child falls behind in school from taking care of the ill mother, (b) the child may be taking care of the family after the mother fell ill, or (c) because mothers are the gatekeepers of their children's education and no one else is as vigilant to see that the children get to school or that the money for uniforms and supplies is found (p. 413).

In a study from Indonesia by Gertler et al. (2003), maternal death impacts the dropout rate substantiated by the fact that in 1993 the dropout rate for motherless children was placed at 15% (p. 13). Indonesian children with deceased mothers are less likely to even start school (p. 1).

Chen, Chen, and Liu (2009) in their study in Taiwan looked at parent death and the impact on education. They found that losing a mother has a dramatic impact on college enrollment. In comparison to two-parent families the children who have lost a parent to death are between 15% and 30% less likely to enroll in college. Their findings also suggest that college-going behaviors are driven primarily by the long-term effects of family nurturing rather than any

short-term financial constraints that may be the result of paternal death. It appears in their conclusions that the loss of the mother has a larger impact on children attaining a college degree than the loss of a father. If the mother dies unexpectedly then the college enrollment rate drops by four percentage points. Their findings seem to highlight that it is the non-financial role of support that is most lacking with the death of the mother that has the greatest impact.

Given the significant social, cultural, and economical differences between South Africa and the United States, it is unclear how applicable these findings are to maternal orphans in the United States. However, data does suggest the link between parental loss and schooling outcomes for children who are left behind. One study from the United States by Lang and Zagorsky (2001) suggested that a mother's absence due to death lowers educational attainment. The death is a disruption in the child's life, which is different than being raised by a single parent as the norm for the child (p. 267). Parental death is correlated with some factors such as low education that tends to produce worse adult outcomes (p. 268). These negative outcomes are related to the daughter's cognitive performance that is impacted by the mother's death (p. 272).

Silverman and Worden (1992) looked at students in the United States for their study on the early reactions after the death of a parent. According to their research if the mother died from an extended illness the children were more likely to be sent back to school the day after the funeral. In addition they looked directly at the adolescents who resolved to do better in school following the death of their

mother. In spite of the loss, most of the children in the study reported they were able to deal effectively in school.

In the journal *Educational Leadership*, Steven Schlozman (2003) wrote about the loss of a parent. He believed that all children require special support and comfort (p. 91). Due to the normal turmoil of adolescence when a parent dies, especially if it is a sudden death, the adolescent may feel sad at not being able to apologize for past arguments. Schools must balance understanding with the demands of curriculum and learning. It may be the place of the school to refer a student to mental health services either within the school or in the community.

Nel Noddings (2010) discussed the need for people to develop and keep alive the capacity for empathetic responses. We as an educational institution must be prepared to care. If we indeed do that we will connect various groups or webs of caring through the school community into the greater community. This will allow these groups to establish and keep lines of communication open to keep caring flowing from one to the other. Noddings (2006) emphasized that any discussion in the classroom must not intrude upon the student's privacy. She also discussed that the topics essential to human life, such as the death of a parent, if included in school, will be attacked by individuals who will respond with accusations of anti-intellectualism. There is no time in the school day for those discussions.

Popular Literature

The preeminent piece of popular literature on the topic of mother death is Hope Edelman's *Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss* (1994). As stated in

the introduction, “Her death [Hope’s mother’s] . . . marked me as someone different, an outsider, an orphan worthy of compassion at a time when I desperately longed for the anonymity of the crowd” (p. xviii). Edelman (1994) discovered while searching for answers to her place in the world that any books written about mother-daughter relationships when talking about the death of the mother assumed that the daughter was middle-aged (p. xix). When she read academic texts, she found the writing did not deal with children by gender who had lost parents (p. xix).

Another point that Edelman (1994) made is that once your mother has died things that rankled many of your peers did not really faze you, like a failing grade on a paper. However, the loss of any relationship, job, or object could send a motherless woman into a dangerous tailspin (p. xix). Relating to her college education, Edelman related an anecdote of being a member of a sorority. One evening the entire group was sharing on the topic of “Something my mother doesn’t know.” She asked to pass when the turn came to her, but her sorority sisters would not allow it. No one at this point knew her mother was dead. She stated, “I don’t have a mother, but I have a father and I’ll tell you something he doesn’t know” (pp. xx-xxi). Edelman concluded, “The loss of a mother is one of the most profound events that will occur in a woman’s life, and like a loud sound in an empty house, it echoes on and on” (p. xxvii).

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote another and equally significant piece of popular literature: *On Death and Dying: What the Dying Have to Teach Doctors, Nurses, Clergy and Their Own Family* in 1968. As Kubler-Ross (1968) stated,

“the children. They are often the forgotten ones. . . . few people feel comfortable talking to a child about death” (p. 184). With an adolescent, things are not that different from an adult. Adolescents need to be listened to and allowed to ventilate their feelings, whether they are guilt, anger, or sadness (p. 185).

Theoretical Base

As I examine the literature surrounding the subject of mother death or motherless daughters, there are several recurring themes: *the nurturing and empathetic role of the mother*, *a desire not to be different*, and *the ethics of caring*. These themes guide the analysis for this dissertation. How do each of these play into the life of the adolescent daughter and her education?

Role of the Mother

Leonard (1996) questioned, “What is the role of the mother in our society and how does that loss impact the child?” We see that mothering is revealed as potentially rich in moral content. Mothering is essential for the preservation of cultural traditions and to provide nurture and care (p. 124). When Smith (2008) wrote of her mother’s death, she described the grand confusion of terror and calm and of desolation and thin hope (p. 77). She spoke of mourning as being a hard labor of turning away and returning (p. 79).

Hope Edelman (1994) first coined the term “motherless daughter,” and Pill and Zabin (1997) used the term in their work on the legacy of maternal loss. Their article is based on research using a group model as a supportive environment for motherless daughters to discuss their mothers and their lives (p. 181). They first spoke about the loss of the daughter’s primary identification

object, her primary caregiver, but possibly more importantly, the silence that surrounds the mother's death (p. 179). No one wants to talk about it, and the daughter is rushed back into school and to her usual activities—the message being that we don't discuss this event anymore. This, ties to the idea that the relationship between mother and daughter is profoundly threatening to men (Rich, 1995, p. 226), in that it is often the father that sends the daughter back to school, possibly before she is ready. Pill and Zabin also discussed that there is a remaining mother-daughter relationship that survives internally in the daughter and it is integral to her healing process (p.181). Since a woman's sense of herself grows in a large part from her attachment to her mother, she loses her primary identification object.

The motherless woman may react by denying her own vulnerability, denying she felt any loss or absence of mothering. She may spend her life proving her strength in the “mothering” of others—mothering in roles such as a teacher, doctor, political activist, or psychotherapist (Rich, 1995, p. 243).

“I Don't Want to be Different”

For the adolescent there is the need not to be seen as different. Davey, Gulish, Askew, Godette, and Childs (2005) related that “most teenagers reported that they did not talk to the school counselor or to many schoolmates . . . they did not want to be asked about it on a regular basis” (p. 249). Even with that desire, the study by Davey et al. (2005) suggested that adolescents who are coping with a mother diagnosed and treated for breast cancer are a vulnerable population. While

the adolescent does not want to be seen as “different,” it is vital that there be some sort of social support, according to Brown et al. (2007).

Ethics of Caring

The concept of caring is drawn from the work of Nel Noddings (1996), who discussed the “cared-for,” in this case the student. The one being cared for is the student, and the caring should be performed by the teacher and the school. The act of caring by the teacher or school “maintains and enhances the relatedness that is fundamental to human reality” (p. 22). Caring establishes the relationship between teacher and student and has given students the permission to feel safe in asking for additional time for papers or assignments. This reveals the vital importance of building an educational strategy for the purposes of the child (p. 25).

According to Noddings (2003a), “When we care we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us” (p. 24). If teachers consider both what the student needs of us as well as what they expect of us we will be working with the humanity of that individual. “The teacher as one-caring needs to see from both her own perspective and that of the student in order to teach—in order to meet the needs of the student” (pp. 66-67). In Noddings’ (2003a) view there is the one-caring and the cared-for. Both must accept the other and the caring being given and received.

Noddings (2010) more recently stated, “Every human being wants to be recognized in some way—to be protected from harm, to be seen as fully human, to be respected, to be comforted, to be fed” (p. 130). Schools are special places in

the lives of children, according to Nel Noddings (2005) and as such they should be centers of stability. This is vital for a child who has lost a mother or any significant person in his or her life. The need for the school to be responsive to the child is at the heart of caring (p. xxv). Noddings (2005) stated,

If the school has one main goal, a goal that guides the establishment and priority of all others, it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy competent moral people. . . . We cannot ignore our children—their purposes, anxieties and relationships. (p. 12)

As Noddings (2002) suggested in her book, *Educating Moral People*, there should be an ethic of caring taught rather than character education. If we value an ethic of care for our children, we must teach them how to receive and give care (p. 15). Community service would be part of this educational format, as we have seen develop in public and private schools around the country. For some schools it is a requirement, for others an opportunity provided to the students. Community service enables students the opportunity to learn to care in relating to the other, whether that be a younger child, a senior citizen, or an animal in a shelter. The care for the other comes from the desire to be cared for in one's own life.

As we begin the 21st century, we must make human relations the first priority of our intellectual and moral efforts. Schools can contribute by helping students learn how to care and be cared for. (p. 38)

Chapter Summary

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, my conceptual framework begins by its basis in my own experience. The work of Hope Edelman (1994) gave me the first realization that I was not alone, and that was 16 years after the death of my own mother—I lived without her almost as long as I had lived with her. In the reading of her book I could see myself, and many of my own experiences. Even rereading Edelman’s book gives me again more insights into myself and my own experiences. The other reality is that the institution in which I work does not train faculty on the realities of grief in general terms. This ignorance on the part of school personnel about what has changed in the lives of these students after the death of a parent, especially the girls who have lost a mother, needs to be altered. While students must be held to an academic standard in order to earn their diplomas at the high school, teachers may need to be more understanding and open to reworking deadlines or topics of research. For example, teachers may need to know their students’ lives before they assign the students to write eulogies in an English class.

The existing literature focuses on the relationship between mother and daughter and on caring as a key element in education and in the mother-daughter relationship. The literature is sparse in the area of mother death and its impact on the adolescent daughter. Literature is now being written on the impact of the mother’s cancer or breast cancer diagnosis on the adolescent daughter (Davey et al., 2005). Even so, as a society we do not want to contemplate cancer and death—that is not comfortable for any of us. There are very limited resources on

the impact of mothers on their adolescent daughter's education in general terms as well. This dissertation thus fills a void in the scholarly literature that may lead to improved interventions for young girls dealing with mother loss. I turn now to a discussion of the study's methodology.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this chapter I discuss the methodology used in this study, by describing the process used in my research. The overarching question being how does the death of a mother impact her daughter's education. For the recruitment of study participants, I used a survey (Appendix B) at two events which focused on raising awareness and funds for breast cancer research. I discuss the lack of success in finding participants from the surveys and then discuss my next recruitment method of snowballing, which resulted in making contacts with motherless daughters support groups in California. The interview process is then discussed where I introduce the 11 women who participated in this study.

This study is a multiple qualitative case study focusing on 11 women of different ages and backgrounds, all of whom had lost their mothers as girls. The study used a mixed methods design that includes a short nine-question survey and in-depth three-part interviews based on Seidman's (2006) design of qualitative research, as stated in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. There is a bias in the survey data because of it being collected at events that recognize cancer survivors or victims in the local communities. The survey data (discussed below) were collected at these events because, although they draw people with an interest in cancer, or specifically breast cancer, they do draw a cross-section of the population.

As described in Rossman and Rallis (2003), phenomenological study is research through the lived experience of a small number of individuals (p. 97). A phenomenological study seeks to understand the deep meaning of the person's experience and how she articulates these experiences (p. 97). In this study my focus was on the experiences of education of the adolescent girl at the time of the mother's death and in subsequent years. However, as was evident in my interview protocol, I also included data from questions that deal with the family's attitude about education and educational materials in the home as well as the parents' education. There are limitations to the study due to the limited number of women interviewed, all raised in the culture of the United States in the post World War II era. There are gender assumptions present as to the role of the father in the family as well as the family relationships.

I used the three-interview format from Seidman (2006) for one of my interviews that allowed me to complete the transcription of one interview before sitting down for the next. The transcription was completed between interviews, which provided me with the opportunity to revisit issues or questions brought up in the prior interview. I had the ability to delve into my subject's thinking and analysis of their own lives. The design is recursive in the questions being asked.

Due to distance and time constraints of the interviewees, the other 10 interviews were each conducted in one longer interview session. Because this research focused on the experiences solely of women, this study would then be defined as a phenomenological study (p. 276). As Rossman and Rallis (2003)

offered, the quintessential meaning of the woman's experience will be revealed (p. 97).

The initial part of the interview was to place the participant's experience in context by asking her as much as possible about her family life and her family's attitude about education. I focused on asking "how" so as to open the answer to a narrative reply. The second part of the interview focused on the education of the daughter at the time of her mother's death, and the final portion of the interview focused on the daughter's education after high school. The Institutional Review Board at Arizona State University approved the survey and interview protocol (Appendix D).

Criteria and Process for Participant Selection

Pilot Recruitment Survey

A survey (Appendix B) was developed and was intended to be used as an instrument to recruit interview participants for the study. The survey includes basic demographic data as well as questions designed to elicit basic information about the nature of the individual's experience with mother-loss due to cancer. Specifically, I distributed the nine-question survey (Appendix B) at the Pink Out game of the Arizona State University softball team in Tempe, Arizona on March 27, 2010, and at the Southern Arizona Race for the Cure in Tucson, Arizona on April 11, 2010. These were events to raise funds and/or bring about awareness of breast cancer and cancer in general. The end of the survey included a statement inviting participants to provide contact information if they were interested in

being a part of the interview portion of the study. My goal was to find women whose mothers died while they were adolescents in either middle or high school. Unfortunately none of the survey respondents fit the criteria for this study. Because this was the case no contact was made with any of the individuals who completed the survey. Instead, interviewees were identified through a snowballing sample as described below.

Participant Selection

Because the survey yielded no participants, interview subjects were identified through a process of snowballing and contacting support groups for motherless daughters. Motherless daughter groups were contacted in New York City, Northern New Jersey, San Diego, California, and Los Angeles, California. The groups in San Diego and Los Angeles were eager to assist me in my research. The socio-economic status of most of these women's families would be defined as middle class. While two of the families could not afford medical insurance none of the women came from abject poverty. Women from both groups contacted me, allowing me to set up interviews with them. Due to distance the three-part Seidman interview format was condensed into a single longer interview session. Of the 11 interviews, four were recruited from the groups above. Two additional interviews took place in southern California, one interviewee was recruited by a mutual friend, and the other made contact with me via a message board announcement for the Breast Cancer 3-Day. Being involved in Motherless Daughter groups brought forth women who were willing to discuss their mothers as well as look at the impact their mothers death had on them especially in

relation to their education. Only the two eldest women were raised in the eastern United States, the remaining nine were raised in California and Arizona. Those locations having cultural variances of their own even within the United States.

Individuals selected for interviews fit the study criteria and indicated a willingness to be interviewed. The women selected for the interviews, while adolescents at the time of their mother's death, at the time of the interviews were in their 20s, 40s, early 50s, and 60s/70s. Being raised following World War II there are certain assumptions made relating to the role of the father in the home, the role of education in the lives of these women. The culture and the economic status of each of the women impact their responses as well as their vision of the roles of education, their fathers and their mothers. The decision to use these four age groups, were as follows: Women in their 20s were just beginning their careers and possibly their families, and completing their initial education following high school. I chose to interview women in their 20s because they were recently out of school and starting careers and families. My other focal groups were women in their 40s and early 50s; I chose these age groups because they were established in their careers, may be returning to school or careers, and could have a broader view of how the death of their mother's death impacted their lives. The women in their 40s and early 50s may also be at or nearing the age their mother was at her death. The women in their 60s and 70s lost their mothers in the 1940s; this too provided another perspective of communities and education as they were growing up.

Background information on each of the 11 participants is shown in Table 1.

Interview Protocol

Once contact was made, interview times were discussed. Because the interviewees would be, at times, discussing emotional issues, the next challenge was to find a location that could provide a quiet setting as well as some level of privacy. The identities of the subjects both in the survey as well as those who were interviewed remain confidential. Pseudonyms were used as well as alternate locations where the young woman grew up and/or resided at the time of the interview. The interviews and transcripts will be kept indefinitely but are in a secure location in an office at ASU. Additionally, the typed transcripts have been retained on a password-protected computer.

As stated above, I used Seidman's (2006) three-interview series of interviews, which were audio-taped (see Appendix C, Interview Questions). Due to constraints of time and distance all three interviews were completed in one longer interview. The goal of the first section of the interview was to gain as clear

Table 1

Participants

Name	Age at the time of the interview	Age at the time of mother's death	Level of education at the time of mother's death	Mother's level of education attained	Level of education attained	Current profession	Desired profession	Ethnicity	Number of children in the family
Bea	78 b. 1931	12	7 th grade	High school diploma	High School Diploma	Retired	Bookkeeper	Polish	Only child
Joan	67 b. 1943	6	Between 1 st and 2 nd grade	Bachelor of Arts	Masters	Retired teacher	Teacher	Russian & Romanian	Only child
Laura	51 b. 1959	17	Junior year of high school	Some college	Masters	High school teacher	Teacher	German and English	Only child
Jean Marie	51 b. 1959	15	Between freshman and sophomore year of high school	Bachelor of Arts in Education	Two years of college, no degree attained.	Accountant	Teacher	Mix of European ancestry	4
Diane	51 b. 1959	12	7 th grade	Some college	Masters	Producer in the entertainment industry	Nurse	Mix of European ancestry	3
Talia	40 b. 1970	18	Just completed high school	MD	Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and English Certifications in Yoga, Massage Therapy and Cranial and Polarity work	Massage therapist and Yoga instructor	Teacher actress	Armenian	3

Table 1 (continued)

Name	Age at the time of the interview	Age at the time of mother's death	Level of education at the time of mother's death	Mother's Level of Education attained	Level of education attained	Current profession	Desired profession	Ethnicity	Number of children in the family
Yvonne	39 b. 1971	16	Junior year in high school	High School Diploma	Bachelor and Teaching credential	Substitute Elementary school teacher	Lawyer	Mexican, Native American, & Caucasian	3
Martha	26 b. 1984	15	Freshman year in high school	Bachelor of Art in Elementary Education	Some college credits	Church Music Director	Musician	Mix of European Ancestry	7
Donna	23 b. 1987	12	Summer before 7 th grade	Some college	High School diploma, some college credits	Caregiver and Photographer	Emergency room nurse	German and Native American	5
Jessie	23 b. 1987	13	7 th grade	Master's of Art in Education	Bachelor, currently applying for Master Programs	Part Time retail	Sports trainer	African American and Mexican	Only child
Hailee	19 b. 1991	15	Sophomore in high school	Master's Degree	Currently attending Community College. Plans to transfer to a University	Childcare worker	Communications	European and Cherokee	Only child

and rich a description of the role education played in the family prior to the mother's illness. I asked questions of the participants in the second part of the interview to cover the education and the school setting at the time of the individual's mother's death, hoping to gain light on the impact the school or school personnel had on the young woman during that time. In the third part of the interview, I asked the women to reflect with hindsight on how their mother's death affected their decisions or goals in pursuing an education and how other life events were impacted by their mother's death.

The interview questions (Appendix C), recursive in nature, were in three distinct parts. My goal was to make sure that all questions were asked of each interviewee for consistency; but depending on the flow of the interview, they were not asked in exact order. With the emotions that were raised by the discussion of the death of a mother, there had to be a portion of fluidity to the interview process.

The interviews took place at locations that were convenient for the interviewees. For the women locally, the interviews were done at places of employment or in their homes. The response to my request for interviewees was well received by support groups for motherless daughters in both the San Diego and Los Angeles areas. I drove to California going between the two metropolitan areas to conduct my interviews. I was totally dependent on the interviewee making a recommendation for an interview location. Two of the women invited me into their homes; the others met me at local coffee shops. Because of the limited amount of time I had in California, it was paramount that I completed

each one of these interviews in one session. One of my concerns with the interview process was having a quiet place for the interviews to be conducted. There was a need for privacy as the discussion was based around an emotional topic. I wanted my interviewees to be comfortable.

The interviews were recorded using a digital recording device made by Sony. It was compatible with my computer, which allowed me to download the audio files. I then utilized both MacSpeech Scribe and MacSpeech Dictate to transcribe. Due to the variety of voices, I was unable to have the software complete the transcriptions, but it did provide me with the ability to listen and finish all the transcribing in short increments. As I was transcribing, I was able to identify commonalities. Some of the transcripts had a few gaps of inaudible speech. In these cases, I contacted the interviewee and asked if she had the time to look over the transcript and fill in the blanks. The women were happy to clarify what was missing. For at least two of the interviewees I had follow-up questions. The women assisted me by responding to those additional inquiries.

Analysis

The analysis of data was a four-step process. First, I tabulated the survey responses. Because none of the survey respondents met my initial criteria, I moved to a snowballing technique to find my interviewees. They also provided a broader database in which to situate the in-depth interviews. Second, I created participant profiles from the interviews (see Table 1). Third, I analyzed each profile for emerging themes. Finally, I examined the data for cross-cutting themes

across the four age groups. The second, third, and fourth steps in the analysis process are discussed more fully below.

Crafting Participant Profiles

In presenting my data, I represent each woman's distinctive case in narrative form. I strove for descriptive clarity such as that used by Gregory Michie in his (2005) *See You When We Get There*. It was his desire to give depth and texture to the anecdotes told to him by the teachers (p. 201). I did the same with what these women shared with me. I included information on their families socio-economic status as well as each woman's ethnic background. The specific ethnicities may impact their view of death and the role of the father and the family.

The methodology used is reflective of Seidman's (2006) approach to qualitative research. I followed Seidman's (2006) recommendation of creating a profile that has a beginning, middle, and an end (p. 119). Although the emphasis of these interviews was on the daughter's education, each interview included background information on the woman's life as a young child. It is through these interviews that I came to know each participant's individual story (Seidman, 2006, p, 119). The story is both the participant's and the interviewer's (p. 120). The interviewees have told me their stories and I have crafted them into the timeline that is appropriate for my research.

In creating a specific profile for each interviewee, according to Seidman (2006), it was imperative that I was faithful to the words of the participant and that I identified or distinguished between my words and the words of the

participant. It was my goal, as Seidman (2006) explained, that I make explicit what I have learned through the interviews and the individual perspectives of each of the participants. It was then my goal to connect the shared experiences of the women, no matter their present age, to commonalities with the other women in the study. By creating the profiles found in Chapter 4, I am setting the stage for the analysis of the research in Chapter 5 as well as the recommendations in Chapter 6.

Coding and Thematic Analysis

Once the participant profiles had been created, I conducted a two-step thematic analysis based on these profiles. The thematic approach to analysis means that I approached the text of the interviews with an open mind, not placing my personal bias on the material. I believe that, due to the topic being discussed, a thematic approach was of the greatest benefit. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated, this analysis typically comes from a deep familiarity with the data, which has come from a categorization of the data (p. 282).

Thematic analysis is open-ended so the themes emerge from the responses of the interviewees. I coded the transcripts and developed a list of themes. Rossman and Rallis (2003) recommend that the researcher create categories from which the themes would emerge (p. 282). I designated the categories in most cases based on the questions asked and the responses by the participants. For two of the women these categories resulted in follow-up questions. I was able to contact them and receive clarification. From the categories the thematic analysis

evolved due to deep familiarity with the categories and the text of the transcripts (p. 282).

I followed Seidman's (2006) recommendation of going through each transcription and in handwriting coding each transcript with comparable themes (p. 121). This was completed on hard copies of each of the transcripts. On a second reading of each transcript I made connections between the women's stories. Once that was completed I went to the transcripts on the computer. I then selected the sections, which I had marked in the hard copies, and they were copied and placed in a new document for each theme.

As I immersed myself in the transcripts, as suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003), I became deeply involved in the participants' words and impressions (p. 279). By allowing the text of the transcripts to incubate in my mind (p. 281), I found the following themes emerging: the caring teacher, the role the mother plays in her child's education and educational success, the way that fathers did not respond to the needs of the grieving daughter, and the desire of the daughters to not be seen as different from their peers. Once the documents were created for each of the themes I connected them to the existing research. What I discovered as I read the interviews several time was that the themes were not based on the current age of the women—that had been my hypothesis prior to conducting and analyzing the interviews. There were no specific themes that united certain age groups overall. I then decided to compare the women's experiences based on themes rather than their current age.

Researcher Role

A piece of documentation suggested by Lightfoot (1997) is a daily impressionistic record. I recorded regularly my reflections of the interviews and discoveries and any hypotheses I made as I compared the interview texts (p. 188). I looked for emergent themes in the impressionistic record as well as the interviews. These themes revealed patterns in the women's perspectives. I sought to understand the deep meaning of my interviewees' experiences in relation to their education and the death of their mothers.

I selected the interviewees by their interest in being part of a more extensive study. One thing I knew that was critical and as Seidman (2006) stated, I could not put my expectations from my own experiences on those whom I interviewed. There had to be enough detail in my presentation of the interviews to place the reader into the interview herself to be able to connect to her experience (p. 51).

The next issue I considered was the role of the interviewer in the process. Either I or the interviewee found a place for empathy in the context of the interview time. Because the subject matter of the interviews was the death of a mother, an emotional topic, it was important to be empathetic to the reactions of the interviewee. The most important aspect of empathy, as stated by Lightfoot (1997), is the realization of my own self-reflection and self-analysis. The more knowledgeable I am about the interviewee's reality, the more analytic I need to be about my own. That, ultimately, prepared me to be able to empathize more effectively (Lightfoot, 1997, p. 149).

Delimitations, Limitations, and Potential Benefits of the Study

This was a small-scale study so my goal was not to generalize but to delve in depth into these women's experiences and explore the implications for educational planning and services. The survey instrument was given to a variety of individuals with a common concern of cancer research and awareness, which was an additional limitation to the study, because the individuals who attended "Pink Out" games and the "Race for the Cure" have a vested or emotional interest in cancer and, specifically, breast cancer. The study was phenomenological and qualitative in nature, an approach through which the lived experiences of a small number of people were investigated (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 97).

The benefit of the study will be to individuals in the academic community both at the secondary level and post-secondary level. This study will give a vision as to the needs of adolescent girls whose mothers die as well as opening up the need for conversations about school beyond high school. The research will add to the limited body of research about the parent/mother impact on a daughter's education.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the process of the interview and analysis of the survey data collected. The work of Rossman and Rallis (2003) as well as Seidman (2006) influenced my work as the researcher. Initially I was unsuccessful in recruiting my "ideal" subject: women whose mothers died when they were adolescents who were currently in their 20s or 40s. This lack of success from my collected surveys caused me to reevaluate the current age of my subjects. I

expanded my vision to include women over 18 whose mother had died when the daughter was an adolescent. This yielded a sample of women of various ages. I still believed that the themes would be more generational and I needed additional women in the middle and youngest age group. After conducting an initial interview in three sittings, I realized that due to time and distance considerations, the three-interview model was not logistically feasible. After consulting with my dissertation Chair, it was decided I would continue to use the three-part Seidman (2006) format but in one longer interview session. The recruitment of subjects then widened to motherless daughter groups in southern California; this also required me to conduct interviews in one sitting. Although the initial vision was to interview six women, the stories of the 11 that I have been privileged to interview generated themes that cross the generations and age groups. Though this was not what I had planned, I believe it yielded both depth and breadth to the study. The next chapter introduces these 11 women's stories.

CHAPTER 4

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Eleven women, who in their adolescent lives lost their mothers through death, are portrayed in this chapter. The portrayals are in chronological order beginning with the eldest of my subjects, but center around the common experience of mother-loss and its effect on their education. The 11 women are grouped according to age ranges: late 60s to late 70s; early 50s; late 30s to early 40s; and late teens to mid 20s. The varied ages, ethnic groups, and communities and schools they attended not only reveal differences in their experiences, but also, as the analysis presented in this chapter shows, common themes within their experiences. Bea, age 78, and Joan, age 67, make up the first group. Diane, Laura, and Jean Marie, all age 51, the second group; Talia, age 40, and Yvonne, age 39, the third group; and Martha, age 26, Donna, age 23, and Hailee, age 19, the fourth group.

Late 60s to Late 70s

Bea, Age 78

At the time of the interview in Bea's home in Phoenix, Arizona, Bea was 78 years of age, a wife, mother, and a grandmother. She and her husband, both retired, enjoyed traveling, especially in the summers. Their three children were all college graduates, and the grandchildren who had completed high school had also gone on to college. Bea took pride in the success her children, their spouses, and her grandchildren had achieved.

Bea's parents were immigrants from Poland, arriving in the way many immigrants came to the United States. Her mother's father arrived first and worked and saved up for her grandmother and mother, at age one, to voyage to the United States. Her father immigrated at the age of 19 or 20 along with his brother. Bea was not sure if her dad attended high school at all. She believed her mother attended high school but did not graduate.

Bea grew up in a town in the northeastern United States in the 1940s, a time when neighbors looked out for each other. People spent time in good weather on their front porches. The men of the town worked in the local factories and many were first-generation United States citizens or new immigrants, especially from war-torn Europe. The mills in her town where her parents worked were the primary employers of the community.

Bea's husband, also an immigrant from Poland, met her after the War. He had served in the United States military and then attended college using benefits from the G.I. bill. They met in the early 1950s and were married in 1955; at the time of the interview, they had been married for 55 years.

Bea is a lifetime Roman Catholic. The Catholic church Bea attended was a Polish parish, where Polish culture and language were embraced. Bea spoke Polish as her first language, and this language as well as English was used in her parochial elementary school and her parish church. She related that "we learned our prayers and went to confession in Polish." From kindergarten through eighth grade, Bea attended a parochial school with religious nuns as teachers. There were

two classes for each grade, so though you could not choose your teacher, you could hope for one over the other.

In her neighborhood, there were four or five little girls, all “only children,” who grew up together. “These girls acted as if they were sisters, ate lunch together, and played together after school and on the weekends. The mothers of the other girls as well as other neighbors would have Bea over to do homework and then invite her to stay on for dinner. They would take her shopping with them and were surrogate mother’s to her throughout her life. She grew up in a town that was a community and “neighbors knew if mother was sick.” There was a shared responsibility for others in the neighborhood; the neighborhood and the parish were an extended family.

As she talked about her elementary school years, Bea related, “Sometimes the Sister was pretty flexible and friendly and sometimes she was strict, and it’s just the way it was. . . . One of the Sisters knew that my mother enjoyed dancing and choir so she encouraged me to become involved in both of those activities after my mom died.”

The board game Monopoly was a part of Bea’s growing up years, as were checkers and other card games. Often when families would come to visit, the children would play these games while the adults would be socializing. Bea loved walking to the public library with her mother in their town.

Bea was 12 at the time of her mother’s death at 43 years of age. Her mother had lost a lung, and the cold in the northeast was too much for her. She spent a great deal of time in bed during the last six months of her life, finally

taken to the hospital where she died in late December, close to Christmas. Bea was in a Catholic school at the time, and the nun who was her teacher was not nurturing to any of the students. She did not specifically acknowledge that Bea's mother had died, though the school community attended her mother's funeral. "She [the teacher] was not a sympathetic person; she would just say, 'I'm sorry but we work on, go on,' and she didn't dwell on things so."

Her high school education included classes in sewing, business, and bookkeeping as well as history, mathematics, science, and English. Her sewing teacher a mother figure for her; she talked also about a pair of older teachers that the students called "Ma Brown and Pa Brown," who taught fun and enjoyable classes. As far as sports for girls, her only memory was of volleyball and tennis. She graduated from high school in 1949.

In the post-war era, returning GIs were encouraged to attend college using the G.I. bill. Bea's cousin, one of those GIs, tried to convince her to go on to college, but she responded, "Why should I [go to college] if I can get a job with what education I've got?" Bea initially worked in an office where she received on-the-job training in accounting, which she enjoyed more than other office jobs. While her children were growing up, Bea was a stay-at-home mom. Once they all were in school, she worked for the state government, and it is from there she retired.

Joan, Age 67

When I first met Joan at her home, she looked like a woman in her 50s instead of being 67 years of age. She was preparing to travel to her daughter's

home for the birth of another grandchild. As a proud grandmother, in addition to the stories I heard of her life, I also heard about Joan's grandchildren, especially her precocious granddaughter, much like herself.

Like Bea, Joan is a woman with roots in Eastern Europe. All her grandparents had another first language as they were Jewish immigrants from Russia and Romania; however, Joan's parents were raised speaking English. She was raised in a Jewish family that supported and encouraged education. She described it as being culturally Jewish rather than a religious home. In her parents' generation, all the siblings had the minimum of a Bachelor's degree and most had become physicians. It was the desire of her grandparents that their children have more and achieve more than they had.

Because Joan's father had already gained his degree, he served in the United States military during World War II as a physician. He attained the rank of colonel, serving in the European Theatre. Once the war was over, Joan's parents were married and lived with her maternal grandparents. Joan's mother became pregnant on her honeymoon and three months into the pregnancy she was diagnosed with lupus, the cause of her death. Joan was an only child and became a motherless daughter at the age of six.

Joan was born in an east coast city and lived there until the second semester of her kindergarten year, living near her grandparents. After starting kindergarten in the city, Joan's family moved to a small town about 60 miles away following the winter holiday. Because her reading and verbal skills were so high it was decided to place her in first grade. So she jumped from the first

semester of kindergarten to the second semester of first grade. This, of course, made her the youngest in the class. Joan was rather independent even at a young age. She told the story of walking home from recess because she was cold:

We lived on a busy street, a truck route. I had gotten [home] from the school which I would guess was a mile or more from home. We hadn't lived in that home very long, but I got there and rang the doorbell to get in. When my mother answered the door she said, 'How did you cross the busy streets?' I told her I had asked a nice lady to cross me at the big streets.

During the summer between Joan's first and second grade, her mother died after spending a great deal of time in the hospital. Neither her father nor any family member ever told Joan of her mother's death. One day after school was back in session, while playing on the playground, another little girl, in a teasing manner, asked Joan if she knew where her mother was.

Following her mother's death, Joan's father initially wanted to place her for adoption, but the rest of the family would not hear of it. She was the replacement of her mother for her maternal grandparents, who made her mother into a kind of "deity." As for her father he never spoke again to Joan about her mother—no stories of their life together as a family, nothing as to how Joan's mother felt about her. It was as if her mother had never existed.

So my mother dying young was awful, but it wasn't the worst thing that happened to me. The worst thing that happened to me was that after she died my father turned abusive. That's the worst thing that happened to me. And completely, I think her dying affected him. I don't think he ever dealt

with it, or I don't know what his problem was. It was just screwed up. That's what screwed up my life more than if I had been dealing with a compassionate father who knew how to nurture a child who had lost her mother. He never talked to me about her. He never saved anything of hers to give to me. He, you know, it was like she never existed so I operated in a vacuum. He never told me anything she said about me, he never told me any stories about her, he never told me anything we did as a family, so the answers to a lot of your questions are "I don't know because nobody ever talked to me about her." My grandparents deified her, which wasn't helpful either, her mother and father. And I became her substitute, which wasn't so helpful either. So it was weird. She was either an angel or non-existent. And that's why my daughter's name is Madelyn; my mother's name was Madelyn, because from the moment she died I was told that my first child would be a girl named Madelyn. And low and behold so it came to pass.

Her father remarried and moved Joan, her stepmother, and new stepbrother to California. He had decided that he wanted to do research instead of having a private practice. She loved it there. The school she was able to attend was creative and hands on. She told of a unit about the west: "We made our clothes for the journey. They brought in a covered wagon and horses to pull it, in the culminating exercise." To this day she can describe the school and the activities they did in detail.

Several years later Joan and her family were back on the road again moving to the east coast. Because of Joan's high scores and abilities in reading and writing, the school officials and her father wanted to place her in sixth grade. Joan refused. That same year, the school faculty tested for reading ability, and Joan scored at the sophomore year of college. The principal announced her score over the school's PA system, which did not make Joan very happy. She was already having a difficult time being accepted, but the PA announcement sealed her lack of popularity with the other students.

Following elementary school, Joan attended an all-girls prep boarding school in Pennsylvania. It was here that she seemed to find her place in the world. She was challenged and encouraged to speak her mind. Joan was an excellent student as her father would have nothing less. During her senior year, the school forced her into physics, although she wanted to take biology.

So when I saw passing but a weak [in physics], I started crying and the Head personally called my father and told him 'she wanted biology, and she would have been fine in biology, but we pushed her into physics. She is trying very hard.

While Joan was in school, she would, at times, have to use a dictionary to look up words her father wrote in letters to her. She had teachers who were maternal and she gravitated toward them, something that she later "sought throughout her adult life in the mother-in-laws she had along the way—I was always looking for the mother."

At her boarding school her classmates, 12 to 15 girls per class, were from some of the most prominent families in the nation. Report cards were mailed out, and conferences with the students occurred every two weeks. In English class, the conference included going through three essays each student would have written in that two-week period. Algebra and geometry were not two separate courses; all aspects of mathematics were taught each year, becoming progressively more difficult.

After graduation from the boarding school, Joan “found her place” at a Midwestern university where the lecture classes were larger than her entire high school. Being smart was a good thing. She had tried to gain admittance to Northwestern, her father’s alma mater, but was told they already had their quota of Jewish students. She was trained as a teacher and spent over 40 years in high school classrooms in the midwest and southwestern United States. With a Master’s degree, she is the least educated of her generation of her family with the exception of a cousin who has special needs.

Joan is now a retired teacher, having taught in the Midwest and southwestern United States in both the English and World Language departments. She was a teacher who cared deeply about her students and would yearly administer to her students a pledge she created. This pledge was to encourage the students to not become sexually active until they had graduated from high school. It was a commitment seriously taken by Joan’s students, whose friends who wanted to be one of Joan’s kids had to be willing to take her pledge as well. A stern pledge originated from a huge heart for students.

Early 50s

Diane, Age 51

Diane is tall, thin, works in the entertainment industry, and holds a Master's degree in finance. She is the middle child between two brothers. She lives in approximately the same region in which she grew up. I made my connection with her through a Motherless Daughters group, and we met on a cold November evening at a local coffee shop. The Christmas decorations were already up, and the warmth of the shop made the evening feel less chilly.

Diane's parents were born in the northeast and Midwestern regions of the United States and moved west in their youth. Her maternal grandmother died when her mother was 12 or 13. As Diane said, "[Because of that] I think she [my mother] realized how precious every day is and really wanted us to live every day like it was very important; you can't get it back and do over." Following her maternal grandmother's death, Diane's mother lived in an orphanage until she was 18.

Diane's father earned an Associate's degree and was employed in the early days of the aerospace industry. Though the industry was not always stable, he was able to keep his job through the ups and downs of the industry. There were family difficulties going on when Diane was ten, which she did not realize until later were related to her mother's diagnosis with breast cancer. Her father was the provider and her mother was a stay-at-home mother, until about two years prior to her death.

Diane's mother would read to her, and her paternal grandmother would bring cases of books to them. Their home was filled with books, ranging from short stories, to classic fiction, to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In addition to the books, Diane also remembers reading *Mad Magazine* and the comic book *Archie*. As a family they often played board games, some educational in nature like Scrabble and Monopoly. These games and many others held such a place for Diane and her brothers that they wanted to be able to share them with their children and grandchildren. "My mother held the traditional role, guiding me, telling me what I needed to do, keeping me from hurting myself."

Her mother was the mother in the neighborhood who taught all the kids in the *cul-de-sac* to play baseball, volleyball, croquet, and how to play together as a team. In addition to the games, Diane said that her mother

made sure that at every opportunity we were out and learning about something, whether it was at a museum or a ball game. She tried to expose us to all different kinds of experiences and entertainment at the same time, including cultural events. It seemed to me that she had more drive than the other neighborhood moms.

Diane's mother died when she was 12 years of age, at Christmas time. She and her brothers did not even realize their mother was ill until she had already died, a victim of breast cancer. Following her mother's death, Diane took on several aspects of the traditional role her mother played by purchasing the groceries for her family, preparing dinner every night, caring for her younger brother immediately after school, and keeping the house in order. In a

conversation prior to my interview with her, she mentioned that she had just realized she never had a desk at home. Her father and brothers would tell her she was disorganized yet she just now realized from where that perception originated. She had her books and papers everywhere and that would cause her father and brothers to comment on her organizational skills.

During high school Diane was able to take courses leading to a Certificate in Nursing. When in college, she was preparing to sit for her Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) certificate when her nursing teacher suggested that she was not sensitive enough toward the patients, so she changed her major to business. She initially went into nursing because it was a “consistent occupation . . . that she would never have to worry about finding work.” The need for this type of occupation came when she realized at age 12 that she had to begin to plan her future and be able to provide for herself.

When my mother passed away, my father just told us, “You guys are on your own now. I have to go to work.” So it made me start thinking about college when I was 12: I was wondering, “What is my future?” I had no idea.

In her adult life, Diane was engaged to one man for ten years, and she spent all those years helping him raise his children. Yet, in the end, he cheated on her; she broke off the relationship and engagement. She is still searching for a permanent relationship, but is uncertain about finding this in her future.

Laura, Age 51

A high school performing arts teacher, Laura took pieces of the family business and made it her own. Both her father and paternal grandfather had worked in the entertainment industry, one in movies, and the other in television. Her father was born in Texas and as a child moved west with his family. His family's heritage was English though they immigrated several generations previous to her maternal relatives.

After moving west, her young maternal grandfather met Louis B. Mayer of MGM studios, who took a liking to him and hired him as a gopher. Her grandfather then progressed to being a property master. Following her father's discharge from the Army at the conclusion of World War II, he was employed at a television studio. He began working his way up the ranks, receiving a great deal of on-the-job training. In today's television industry you would not be hired without a college degree, but that was a different era. Her father's work in the television industry was with one of the major television networks, working with entertainers that many individuals in the United State watched daily or weekly on the television screen. Her family was prominent in both the entertainment industry and community politics in the mid-1900s. Her experiences were well rounded and varied.

Laura's mother, who was born in a large Midwestern city, also moved west with her family as a child. Laura's maternal grandparents and extended family lived nearby, so there were always large holiday gatherings and Sunday family dinners. She was close to her aunts, uncles, and cousins, spending a great

deal of time with them. Although her mother did not speak German, her maternal grandparents were immigrants from Germany and spoke German fluently.

Laura's parents grew up living next door to each other, and were later married in their hometown. Both of her parents graduated from high school, and her mother went to a local community college for a short time. Her mother worked as a secretary and held a full time job while Laura was growing up.

Laura, like Bea and Joan, was an only child. As with the other women previously discussed, books were an important part of Laura's home. Her mother read to her a great deal, and she became an avid independent reader as she "picked up more of a love of reading on my own." As for board games, that tried and true game of Monopoly was present.

Laura began her education with pre-school because her mother worked. She found a journal of her mother's with the notation that "Laura didn't drink her tomato juice." Laura does not know why her mother wrote this down other than the teacher may have shared this information because she was an only child. As she progressed through her education Laura was always in the gifted program. She attended four public schools from pre-school through the 12th grade. She remembers projects she had to complete and remembers in detail having to make a paper maché animal. Not being, as she says, "artsy-crafty," this was a true challenge. Yet her mother and father stayed up with her to complete her giraffe. It was often her mother who helped her or encouraged her to complete difficult projects.

Overall her family encouraged education. Her cousins graduated from college, including several lawyers and one Navy Admiral. Her uncle, an attorney, held a prominent position in their community as a result of his education. Among her immediate family, parents, and grandparents, she is the first to graduate from college. She went to a private college in the western United States.

Laura's mother died of a heart attack when she was 17 years of age. Her mother was diabetic but there was no illness per se that led up to her death. "My mom's diabetes, was just a way of life," according to Laura. "My mother worked full time, golfed, and played bridge with her friends." Only on occasion did Laura remember having to get her mother juice or a piece of candy when her glucose levels were low.

Throughout school Laura was active and involved. She was elected to student council, a member of school choirs, and a cheerleader at school games. Following a Christmas concert, Laura was having a hard time because of her mother's death, and her choir teacher sat with her afterwards to make sure she was okay. Because of her father's work schedule, Laura was home alone most evenings. Friends that Laura made over the years provided her with support after her mother's death, as they would come over and check on her each evening. She recalled, "My guy friends took turns on Thursday nights coming over for dinner; they just took turns rolling in to check on me."

Laura said that her experiences as a motherless daughter provide her with insight to the students in her classroom today who struggle with loss or an uncertain home life.

I hope times have changed. . . . I look at some of the kids I teach whose parents have passed away this past year. I hope they feel like I've tried to be there. It's not giving kids a way out, but maybe they just need somebody to just listen. Or offer a little help.

Jean Marie, Age 51

Jean Marie has participated in the Breast Cancer 3-Day (3-Day) for many years, but unfortunately she sustained an injury after her third event. Prior to the injury she *walked 60 miles for a world without breast cancer* and hundreds of miles training for those events. Since her injury, she has volunteered at the 3-Day and with her local Susan G. Komen affiliate to encourage awareness and education on breast cancer. She has helped the organization with expos, recruitment, and sign-up events, assisting the organization whenever she can. As a result of a message I posted on a message board at a 3-Day event, Jean Marie made contact with me. My meeting with her took place in her home in southern California.

Education was important in Jean Marie's family. Her great aunt was one of the first women to attend a major university in her state. Her maternal grandfather was a dentist, and in order to keep his sons out of Vietnam he encouraged them to both go to medical school and become physicians. This was extremely valuable when her mother was diagnosed with cancer as her uncles made sure that their sister was receiving the best cutting-edge treatment available at the time. She was diagnosed in 1968. On her father's side, he and his brothers all had college educations. She is unsure about her paternal grandparents as her

grandfather died when her father was only 18 and she does not believe her grandmother had much formal education. Her father was born in the Midwest and her mother in the northern Rockies, and both of their families moved to the western United States while they were children. Jean Marie's mother and father both graduated from college, her father with a business degree and her mother with a degree in English. Jean Marie's mother taught school before having children.

Jean Marie is one of four children, with two older sisters and a younger brother. Jean Marie and her sisters attended both parochial and public schools. The parochial school staff and community were more aware of her mother's health issues than the public school. In all, she attended five schools kindergarten through 12th grade. Her father was the reader in the family but Jean Marie has no memories of being read to or books being a part of their home. She has no memories of her family playing board games. Any games and childhood make-believe occurred only at the homes of her friends. Her maternal grandfather was an important person in that period of her life and lived nearby as she was growing up. Initially it was important for her mother to keep her cancer diagnosis from her father, Jean Marie's grandfather.

Jean Marie was nine years of age when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a radical mastectomy. She died when Jean Marie was 15 years of age. At the time when her mother was diagnosed, people did not even say the word *cancer*; it was "the big C." Her mother's illness overshadowed her childhood. From elementary school through high school, Jean Marie had to go

home right after school to help care for her younger brother who is seven years her junior. As her mother's illness progressed, she also had some responsibility to help her mother out at home.

When talking about her memories of her mother, it was difficult for her to formulate any memories before her mother was diagnosed with cancer. She stated that, "most of the memories start after cancer, isn't that amazing?" Her eldest sister was adopted, so her mother started an adoption guild. She worked alongside the wives of celebrities, all of whom shared the bond of being adoptive parents. She remembered her mother taking her younger brother to "Mommy and Me class with massive radiation burns on her neck." Many of her memories were ones of her mother supporting her, for example, getting her a tutor to help with schoolwork when she was diagnosed with mild dyslexia. Just a month before Jean Marie's mother died, her strength shone through. "A friend of mine was killed in a car accident 15 days before her 15th birthday. My mom was wheelchair bound and insisted on going to the funeral." Her mother's reaction to her initial diagnosis of breast cancer was one of fortitude: "My mom was given six months and she lived seven years. She said, 'I'll be damned, I have a two year old son as well as three daughters, I'm not dying yet.'"

Jean Marie married and has a daughter who is currently attending college. Jean Marie attended college for a few years but never attained a degree. She is currently employed in an accounting department.

Late 30s to Early 40s

Talia, Age 40

Talia is a member of a motherless daughters group. She was very willing and interested in being a part of this research. She lives in the western United States and is of Armenian descent. Her grandparents were immigrants to the United States. Her paternal grandmother still spoke Armenian to her father and Talia “would want to know what they were talking about.” That immigrant mentality is still a part of her and something she holds precious. She is a slight woman, with an athletic build, a Yoga instructor as well as a massage therapist, who also does craniosacral work. She invited me into her home for our interview.

Her home includes many treasures of her family history. The collection includes a photograph of her immigrant great-grandparents and grandmother as a child, looking very stoic in their sepia-toned photograph; a collection of her mother’s china dolls and dishes; her grandmother’s china and commemorative plate from the *Sound of Music*; and a lace tablecloth that had belonged to either her mother or grandmother. In the midst of her modern, simple-lined furniture are her history and her heart. Many women in the motherless daughter group envy the fact that she has so many of her mother’s possessions. Many of them had step mothers who threw things out, or fathers who discarded anything belonging to their mothers once they died, yet Talia seemed to have it all. Being connected with other women who lost their mothers, Talia realizes how lucky she is to have her mother’s and grandmother’s possessions. The women say to me,

You are so lucky to have all of that. I only have one photograph of my mother. My stepmother threw out this or that. Well, that didn't happen to me because I lived with my mom. I have pictures of my mom. I've got stuff of my mom. I've got stuff of my grandma.

Talia's mother was a pediatrician, and one of the first women admitted to her medical school. Her father was a high school teacher, so it was her father who was around more in her early years as he had the more flexible schedule. Her grandparents lived close enough that she would see them often on weekends.

Talia attended pre-school at age four. All of her schools were public schools. For the most part she was a good student, earning mostly A's and B's. She was skinny, having dark hair and olive complexion; because of these characteristics she did not fit in with the other girls. Additionally her mother was not truly concerned with clothing styles and her grandmother made her clothes: "Clothes weren't a big priority for my mom, so she didn't dress me the way the other younger moms were dressing their daughters. There was a stigma; my clothes weren't cool, they were funny." In high school she performed in school plays and was involved with the school newspaper, serving as editor-in-chief during her senior year.

Books were a huge part of her home. She was read to by her father and additionally by her grandparents and babysitters. Her grandfather would have her read to him, making sure to correct her pronunciation. She often had a babysitter and would bond with them in their role as caretaker and nurturer.

When I asked her about playing games, she brightened and talked about playing card games, Monopoly, SORRY, and Memory. “I actually remember cheating playing Memory with my aunt; we had a glass table so I would look underneath to find the matching cards.”

Talia’s sister was six-and-a-half years older and her brother was four years older than she was. Due to the age difference between her and her siblings, there were not many memories of common experiences.

I was the little sister who was bothersome. It was tolerated in my home that I was slapped across the face by both of my siblings. This occurred for the last time when I was 19 years of age and at that point I called the authorities. This behavior is also why I chose to live with my mother when my parents divorced as my siblings were going to remain with my father. Because I felt like there wasn’t a week that went by that I didn’t have a bruise somewhere on my body.

The emotional abuse by her brother continued through 2009, and she has not spoken with him since because she cannot handle being yelled at. “As I was told by other relatives, ‘He didn’t want her [our mother] to have the baby. He is jealous of you.’ So I’ve had to set boundaries for myself.”

College was important to her extended family. Her aunts, uncles, and cousins went to major universities in her state. Talia remembers that an education was praised. On a train trip, her mother talked to her about going to college; that she needed to apply her junior year, which she did. She had no desire to go to City

College; she wanted to go to one of the state universities as she had the grades for admission.

Once Talia moved with her mother she was often expected to be a young lady and act according to the rules of society. Her mother would often take her to the hospital when she had rounds and Talia was expected to read, color, and stay quiet and busy until her mother was finished. Her mother would also take her to several of her women's professional organization luncheons and events. "I was included in my mother's adult activities. She felt confident that I would act as a proper young lady; in a sense I was asked to be grown up."

Her mother was diagnosed with thyroid cancer at the age of 47, when Talia was about to begin her freshman year in high school. She now realizes that "I had a naiveté at the time toward the disease as I thought penicillin could get rid of the disease. It could get rid of anything." But even while battling thyroid cancer her mother continued to work. Talia did not realize what it meant because nothing in her world had really changed. It was her senior year in high school when reality struck; her mother began talking about selling her Practice and she was often in the hospital as a patient. The last three months of her mother's life Talia's grandmother came to live with them, and it is here that Talia feels her grandmother stole her sympathy.

I feel like she was making a bigger stink about losing a daughter. . . . She's an adult, you have your husband, you've lived your life, and mine is just beginning. . . . Yes, of course it would be difficult to lose a child, but is she still your child? You are not depending on her, I am!

Talia was responsible for the night shift in taking care of her mother. She had to make sure she took her medications and assisted her in getting to the commode. “One night all she wanted was to watch the sunrise so I made that happen.” Her mother’s illness had progressed to the point that she could not attend Talia’s high school graduation. Her father attended, but even her grandmother did not go. One thing that stuck out in her memory was how her mother signed her graduation card, “Love, Ruth, not even Love, Mom. . . . She was so out of it she didn’t even know. I remember it struck me, and it was hard.”

Her mother died in the summer after her high school graduation. Though she wanted to take a year off, her father immediately enrolled her in City College, the one place she did not want to attend. As far as he was concerned, she had to go to college, no matter which one. After a year there she was able to transfer to a university; based on her high school grades she was immediately accepted. Even when she struggled and considered leaving college behind she “invoked the spirit of my mom. I tried to step up a little bit and say ‘you can do it, you can finish!’” She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre and English. She has never directly used those degrees but has earned certifications in Yoga and Massage Therapy. She is also working on certifications for cranial work and polarity work.

Relationships with friends are also very important to Talia, and for many years she has placed her friends high on her priority list. Unfortunately, what she has discovered is that she is not as much a priority in their lives. So she has made some changes, to make herself her own first priority. She is not married and is still looking for that man, but she wonders how mother-loss has impacted her

ability to have a relationship. She knows she is not the only 40-year-old woman who is not married, “but not being married and having kids makes me a bit of an oddball. Many of the single women still have their mothers, and because they have their mom, their mom is the glue.” Since she was 18 years old she feels that all she has experienced are “raw emotions. Every time there is an end to a relationship it gets triggered again. . . . It is recapitulating the first and most difficult loss.”

Talia has been involved in two different motherless daughter groups and highly recommends them. She believes that there is something cathartic about being with women who have walked a similar road to one’s own. She saw one group from its inception and the other she joined after moving, as it was being reorganized. She believes in bringing people of similar experiences together to share those experiences, and in that way you can appreciate what you have. Talia also strongly believes in Hope Edelman’s book, *Motherless Daughters*, and looks to Edelman who is not only an accomplished author, but also a mother and a wife. “I believe there is something about a person’s constitution that helps them move on.” Talia explained, “When you lose a major player in your life at that young age, depending on the kind of relationship you had with them, it really colors the rest of your life.”

Yvonne, Age 39

I met with Yvonne at a local breakfast spot near her home. She is outgoing and bubbly. Yvonne enjoys reading and when I joined her, she was reading a book titled *Rapunzel's Daughters*, a book about women’s hair in society. She is

also a member of a motherless daughters group. Yvonne has beautiful long straight dark brown hair and is of mixed race: Mexican-American, Caucasian, and Native American. She is the middle child and has two sisters, one older by five years and one younger by two years. Of the three, Yvonne is the only one to have attained a college degree. Yvonne was born in the area of the state in which she currently resides, only leaving the area to go to college in the Midwest.

Yvonne's mother was born in the Midwest and moved west with her entire family when she was a girl. To Yvonne's memory, there were no relatives of her mother's as she was growing up in the Midwest. Her father was born and grew up in the same area that Yvonne did. Her paternal great-grandparents immigrated to the United States from Mexico in approximately 1925.

Her mother died when she was 16 and in the 11th grade. She attended the same high school that both her parents attended. Yvonne's mother actually completed high school through the continuation school as she was pregnant with Yvonne's older sister when she was a senior in high school. Her father had hoped to be an architect but dropped out of college to work full time and was not able to go back later in life.

Yvonne's mother was an avid reader; she had stacks of books all over her room. Yvonne believes her love of reading came from her mother. Initially, her books were hand-me-downs from her older sister, or as she described them, "the sets of books you would get at the grocery store, one book a week." Her older sister became an avid reader in junior high and that is when a greater variety of books began coming into their home. "I remember *How the Red Fern Grows*

being around for a long time.” With all of the books around her home, she went to kindergarten knowing how to read, although she does not remember who taught her to read.

She started kindergarten at age four, being one of the youngest students in her class. At the time she began kindergarten, schools in her area were on a track system with different groups beginning at different times. There were too many students for the number of schools so the schools were being used year round. Yvonne has very clear memories of doing October crafts in school but has no memories of December-type activities, so she assumes her track was not in school during December. In having conversations with her older sister about why they switched tracks, the belief is that

they put us in the dumber track to start off because we were Mexican and that was the attitude of the community here. I also had a speech problem because I lost my teeth at that time and they thought I couldn't pronounce my words correctly. My sister thinks they figured out we were smart and moved us to the smart track.

She was in and out of accelerated classes, although when she graduated to the junior high school, she had a difficult time adjusting and her grades plummeted.

In spite of the grade difficulties, when starting junior high school she was selected to take the PSAT test at a major research center in the area, which not only impressed her mother, but influenced her to keep after Yvonne about getting good grades and going to college. “I feel in some ways that my mom regretted the choices that she had made. My mom was very intelligent when it came to

mechanical things. She could rewire items in our home without any problem.”

Yvonne being selected to be tested caused her mother to believe that she would go on to college.

As for her extended family, there did not seem to be a push for attaining education beyond high school. As far as she knows, no one on her mother’s side of the family has earned a college degree. On her father’s side, she knows that a few of his brothers went to college and some of her cousins have attended as well.

It is interesting that Yvonne was reading the book about women’s hair when I met her. As we talked about her memories of time that she shared with just her mother, it was centered on her hair. Both of her sisters had wavy hair, which Yvonne explained as that which “comes with Mexican hair, but I didn’t, my hair was completely straight.” Her mother would like to

spend so much time doing things with my hair, braid it, crimp it, curl it.

. . . I have a tough scalp so I could put up with my mom brushing it longer than my younger sister could. My sisters didn’t want to do this so it was just time for me and my mom.

Yvonne’s mother died suddenly, but describes her mother’s health as deteriorating over an extended period of time. They did not have insurance so her mother never went to the doctor. About a year before her mother died she started having symptoms that concerned Yvonne, but it appeared to her that the adults in her life did nothing to get her mother help. The daughters would “beg her to go to the doctors but there was only so much we could do. We were brought up with the belief that you don’t talk back to your parents and you don’t tell them what to

do.” The morning her mother died, she did not wake up before the girls went to school, and her father sent them on their way. Her mother was 39 years of age at the time of her death and she died just as the Christmas holidays began. At some point over the Christmas break, a social worker came to their home to talk to all three of the girls. The social worker explained

that our mother made horrible decisions by not letting us know she was sick, and because of that she left us motherless. My sisters said we yelled at her and threw her out of the house. But that was the only one who even talked to us about her death.

Yvonne knew that she wanted to get away after she graduated from high school. A private college in the Midwest had courted her, so she headed east. Yvonne attended for about two-and-a-half years, but explained, “I kind of failed my way out.” Her dream had been to go to Berkley and become a lawyer, but that plan died with her mother. No one at her high school discussed with her what would be a good college choice, and her father did not talk to her about it either. She was out there on her own making those decisions. She returned home after those two-and-a-half years and ended up in the local community college, working full time, and trying to finish a degree in education, until someone on the staff at the college finally told her she should go to the university and finish her degree. Yvonne lived with her older sister, who she still lives with today. Even with the extended amount of time it took for her to attain her college degree, Yvonne is the first person in her family to have done so. “My mom would have loved to come to my graduation!”

Yvonne has earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies and her teaching credential. She received her credential in 2005. Yvonne had a full-time position for one year

teaching 3rd grade at the school that I love, but the year after that they had to restructure the district office and put some people back into classrooms, so I lost my spot being a new teacher. So I am back working as a sub.

“My life halted at the moment my mom died. I didn’t get to follow the path I was going to be on and no one was there, not even my dad, to help me.”

Late Teens to Mid-20s

Martha, Age 26

I met with Martha at her place of business, a church. We have known of each other since her mother died. She was 15 at the time of her mother’s death. She attended parochial school from kindergarten through second grade, and then she and all of her siblings were home schooled by their mother. When her mother was getting ill, she enrolled Martha and her older sister Maureen into a charter high school. A year following her mother’s death she attended a public high school for just a few weeks.

Martha is the second oldest of seven children born to her mother and father, and they were born over a 17-year span. Her youngest sibling, a boy, was only a year-and-a-half old when their mother died. Her father has since remarried and has had additional children with his second wife. Both of her parents were born in the upper Midwest and their families were a mix of European ancestry.

Her father never attended college. He learned a trade early on and has worked in that trade his entire life. The family did not have health insurance, which became an issue with her mother's illness. Martha's mother graduated from college, earning a degree in Elementary Education. She taught elementary school prior to the birth of her children.

Books held a large place in Martha's home and she and her older sister Maureen "grew up reading a lot." Much of that had to do with being home schooled; there were textbooks as well as books for enjoyment all through the home. "If we were being punished, the punishment our mom would give was to take away our books." Martha learned to read when she was four. She explained,

Maureen, who was in kindergarten at the time, would come home and teach me what she had learned at school that day. She did the same thing during first grade so by the time I arrived on the doorstep of the kindergarten room I was already reading at a second grade level.

Because of Martha's early ability to read she has no memory of anyone reading to her.

As several other interviewees reported, Monopoly was a popular game in her home as Martha was growing up. They also played chess, checkers, and many strategy games that developed their analytical skills. She defined all of these as being educational.

She began being home schooled at the start of the third grade. Her education was ongoing; being home schooled meant a lot of hands-on type activities. She spoke of learning about sheep: "We actually drove out to a sheep

farm. We got to talk to the farmer about them, and were able to pet them so we learned about things hands on.” Her mother was very good with math and English but she would outsource things like art. There was a home schooling network in the area, and at times they would join with other families for lessons. The children in Martha’s family helped each other, and the older ones taught the younger ones. Martha took a psychology class at the local community college and related that she learned that “you retain about 20% of what you hear, 30% of what you hear and see, and something ridiculous like 90% of what you teach. So my mom was probably genius in having us teach the younger ones because it solidified our prior learning.”

When her mother started home schooling the children, as she was going into third grade, there were not any state requirements regarding scores or testing the students. When she was in approximately the sixth grade, there was a requirement that certain standardized tests be administered, and at this point it was the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The next year, her seventh grade year, the state required that home schooling families use only certain programs that had been approved. When that began, Martha’s mother had to collect samples of the work each of the children were doing and submit the samples to the company. After her mother died, there was difficulty when she attempted to attend a public high school. Because there were no official grades, she would have to retake all of the classes she had previously completed. Martha would not have graduated until she was 19. The high school counselor advised that she go to the local community college instead. She could attend without a high school diploma or a GED; all she

needed to do was to take the placement tests. She did exactly that, and while initially some of the classes were below the 100 level, she was in college and not spending time retaking classes she had already completed.

When her mother first became ill, it was the decision of Martha's parents to send her and her sister to a charter school. Martha explained, "It was one of those places where you were either there because you were advanced or because you had been kicked out of every other school in the area, so it was a very diverse group of people." Martha had taken piano lessons growing up, but it was at this charter school where she had a music teacher who praised her for her musical talent. She credited him with "being very influential in what I ended up doing in the long run with my career." In addition to being a music director at a church she has also had a band that played locally at clubs and events.

Maureen married and started a family so she dropped out of college. Maureen's eldest child is about to start kindergarten and she is planning on home schooling her children. Martha dropped out because of funds; she needed to work full time and did not have the money to attend college as well. Her younger brothers have taken up the trade of their father.

None of my siblings have finished college, and that is a pattern I have seen in my immediate family. . . . I'm not sure if that is related to the death of my mother when we were young or if it has to do with my dad who did not attend college.

She also believes part of the reason she and her siblings have not graduated from college is because there was no financial or emotional support from her father to

continue their education; there were so many children. “We have all had to pay our own way for college.” But in the extended family, all of her cousins have graduated from college.

When she thinks of her relationship with her mother, she remembers an extremely loving person. “One of my strongest memories of my mom is just hugging her, and what she felt and smelled like, what her nightgown felt like.” Because there were so many children, her parents made sure that each child had one-on-one time with them. “My dad would take us on our birthday, and we would spend the day doing anything we wanted to do. Our mom would take the half birthday, so at least once a year we had a whole day with each of our parents.” Her mother was always conscious of giving each of the children the respect they deserved. If they were in trouble, she would remove them from the rest and discipline them to avoid shaming them in front of their siblings.

My mom had a cough, which in the end was diagnosed as bronchoalveolar cell cancer, basically a form of lung cancer. She had been coughing for about six months. Then on January 2nd, my mom was rushed to the Emergency Room where they performed an emergency lung biopsy. . . .

My mother did not go to a doctor. My parents believed that if they prayed that she would be healed; there was a lot of controversy over that decision. The denial of the severity of the illness frustrated myself, Maureen, and my younger sister Maura as well.

As January began, the older girls took on the responsibility of home schooling the little ones. They remained out of school for a year to educate their younger brothers and sister.

Although Martha states that she would one day like to complete a degree, she believes the lessons her mother taught them about life and relationships are much more valuable, everything from writing a check to her approach to help make them successful human beings. “I like to think that my mom’s life impacted my education more than her death did. . . . Her choice to home school us gave us so much time to be with her. She really taught us how to learn.”

Donna, Age 23

Donna has eyes that smile. She went out of her way to meet me, taking a city bus or two to get to the coffee shop where the interview took place. It was a bit noisy but we worked around that. Donna arrived, wearing medical scrubs, as she is currently her grandmother’s caretaker. Donna, too, is a part of a motherless daughters group and that is how I made initial contact with her. One of her passions is photography and one day Donna would like to create a motherless daughters book that is filled with photographs, especially focusing on motherless children.

Donna’s ethnic background is German and Native American of the Muscogee tribe. She lives in the western United States and is the middle child. She has two younger brothers, one by the name of Matt who is the youngest; and two older half siblings, both of whom are old enough to be her parents. Her parents and grandparents were born in the United States. She is not sure if her

father graduated from high school or attended any level of college. Her mother attended college through her sophomore year.

Donna was five years old when she began kindergarten and graduated from high school at age 18, attending a total of five public schools. While growing up, books in her home were fairly nonexistent, and, in fact, she would get in trouble from her mother's boyfriend (Matt's father) for having books. She believes that may be why she collects books today. When at her grandmother's home, her grandmother, with whom she had a close relationship, would read to her.

Education was important to Donna's mother. She would make the children complete their homework when they came home from school. "If I didn't want to do it she would go on for an hour telling me how important homework and education were, so I just learned to get home and do it." During school Donna participated in soccer, softball, and band. She began in the marching band playing clarinet and moved on to the drum line. The connections in the marching band provided her with a family and mother figures beyond her grandmother.

The expectation in the family was that the boys would graduate from high school and college, but that expectation was not held for Donna or Matt, who were considered "the black sheep of the family."

When her family returned to the west coast after living elsewhere, it was to the home of their grandmother and grandfather. Following the death of her mother, her grandmother took custody of the minor children, which included Donna.

Donna's mother died from a brain aneurysm at age 47, which occurred while she was driving. Matt was in the car and luckily he was not injured when the car stopped. Donna's mother had had aneurysms when she was younger, so in some ways no one was surprised that one eventually caused her death. Donna was 12 years of age in middle school at the time. She was in summer school when her mother was taken to the hospital. She remembers that morning she did not want to go to school because she wanted to go to the beach with her friends. Her last words to her mother were "I hate you." She was able to see her mother before she died, though her mother was unconscious.

After her mother's death the events of life were hard. Not having her mother there for band events, prom, and especially graduation was difficult. She had her grandmother and mothers of her friends but it was not the same. She graduated from high school and then completed a semester at a community college with an emphasis on criminal justice, and then transferred to a technical school for web design. "As much as I enjoyed the creativity of that, I realized it was more of a hobby than something I would want to do as a career."

After the death of her mother Donna took on the role of mothering Matt her youngest brother. She was a mother figure for him even before her mother's death due to the work schedule her mother was carrying. After their mother's death Matt decided to move to another state with his father. That did not work out; his father was abusive and kicked Matt out. Donna dropped everything, including her education, to move to where Matt was and became his legal guardian. She explained, "In my family, it is family first, and now I am taking

care of my grandmother as well. . . . One day I'll go back to school and graduate, because I know that is what my mom would have wanted.”

Jessie, Age 23

I connected with Jessie through a mutual friend. We met at a local sandwich shop near her home. She is youthful and excited about life, her education, and where the next chapter of her life will lead. Her goal is to become a sports trainer so she is currently applying to top rated programs in the United States and internationally. One of the international programs includes internships with many professional soccer teams.

Jessie is bi-racial; her dad is Mexican and her mother was Black. Both parents and their families migrated west, her mother from the Midwest, and her father from the southern United States. Her father's first language was Spanish; however, Jessie grew up speaking only English. She, like several of the other women in this study, is an only child. She was also the only grandchild on her mother's side of the family.

As for her family members' education, her father completed some high school and then went into a cosmetology program to become a hairdresser, an occupation he currently holds. Her mother had a Master's degree in Education and taught many different levels of elementary school.

Before she began school, her grandmother was her caretaker while her parents were at work. Many of the memories of game playing and reading are tied to her grandmother. Books were a part of her growing up years, and her maternal grandmother would read to her regularly. One book that she remembers loving

was the *Atlas*: “I loved it because it was a huge book with great pictures and information about all these countries.” She describes her grandmother as her best friend. Jessie was much closer to her mother’s side of the family because it was smaller and she was the only grandchild and niece. Those family members lived only 10 minutes away. Her grandmother died after she began school, and then the rest of the family moved to the southeastern United States following a local earthquake.

Jessie began school at age five, attending the same parochial school from kindergarten through the eighth grade. This school had an enrollment of approximately 270 students. She then went on to an all-girls Catholic high school for grades nine through 12. Her high school’s enrollment was approximately 500 students. She remembers not crying the first day of kindergarten because she thought it was fun, but then “when I realized I had to go back every day, I cried.” She earned very good grades in her early elementary years. When she received her first C in third grade in physical education, “I was freaking out! My parents were like, it’s fine, it’s just PE, just run a little bit.”

“Education was very important to my family. My mother had gone to college and received so many degrees, it was really important.” Her mother’s dream was that Jessie would attend the major university in her state, the dream school of their area. When her mother knew that she was dying she would tell everyone, “Make sure she goes to college. Make sure.”

Jessie’s mother was a take-charge type of person. She remembers one Christmas receiving a Barbie Dream House. Jessie kept trying to get people to put

it together for her, first her father, and then her uncles. They kept saying “later, later.” Finally her mother just stepped in and set it up. As a four- or five-year old, that was an action of major importance for her; she was so happy that her mother had listened to her.

Breast cancer was the initial health issue for her mother. Jessie was 9 at the time her mother was 45 or 46. This caused changes in Jessie’s life. She would go with her mother to the hospital for chemo treatment. Hanging out at the hospital became ordinary. Because her father needed to tell people what was going on, her entire school knew of her mother’s health issues. Eventually her mother had some strokes, but by that time Jessie did not want to go to the hospital, so she often stayed with friends. Her mother died when Jessie was 13, in May of her seventh grade year. After her mother’s death, Cs became an acceptable grade, although “they hadn’t been before.” She explained, “I wasn’t reaching my full potential.”

Because she was at a small parochial school everyone knew about her mother’s death. Her class attended the funeral Mass. She never had to relate that her mother had died until her sophomore year in high school. Jessie was in religion class and another student was talking about her grandfather being very ill, close to dying. Jessie raised her hand and said,

Yeah, I know how you feel. The teacher responded, “Oh, you lost someone, like your grandparent?” “No, no”—I remember it was the hardest thing I had to do ‘til this day. . . . it was like “No, my mom.” And I lost it. I could see the reaction on the teacher’s face. She felt so bad. She

had no idea. That was the first time I had to say it because before that everyone already knew.

Hailee, Age 19

Hailee, a smiling young woman who likes to talk about her mother, met me for her interview at my school. She told the person who connected us that most people do not want to hear about her mother; it makes them uncomfortable because when you are 19, most of your friends do not understand death being that close. Hailee is currently a full-time college student and a part-time employee at a children's center, the same one she attended when she was small. Again, like several of the ladies in this study, Hailee is an only child. Her parents had been told they could not have children, so when she came along, she was a gift they did not expect. She was born in the southwest and has lived there her entire life. She related, "I grew up with a really happy childhood. My mom adored my friends and I am still friends with the friends I have had since first grade."

Her family's roots are European and Native American. She has some Cherokee background though she is not sure how far back in her family's history. "You could see the Cherokee in my mom, especially in her facial features." Her mother was born in the Pacific Northwest and her father was born in the western United States.

As she was growing up, Hailee's mother attended school to attain a master's degree. Since her mother was going to school full time, it put a strain on their family's finances. Her father had attended community college, but something seemed to have happened with his credits, so he never completed any

college degree. He was employed by a major employer in the area and received on-the-job training. Due to the economy, her father was recently laid off.

Books were an important part of her growing up years. As a child, her father would read the book *The Moon Horse* to her every night. “As books had less pictures and more words, I started to have less interest in books, but I liked picture books. . . . Later on I read the *Harry Potter* series and the *Twilight* series, I was a trend follower.” She is not a huge reader today, and just uses books for the material she needs for classes.

“My parents were important in my life. They would always tell me they are there for me.” As a young child she was always afraid of losing them, and she considers it ironic that it happened later on: “It was weird.”

Hailee remembers being in school because she went to day care from the time she was probably one year of age. She began kindergarten at age five. Hailee was an A or B student before her mother became ill. She had several teachers who were influential in her life, and she talked about one fifth grade teacher she continued to keep in contact with. She defines all of the teachers she remembers as “having character, they were fun, not boring.”

The connection to education varies in her family. One of her father’s brothers is a physician and the other is an apple farmer, though she does not know what level of education or training he may have attained. Her paternal grandfather was a physician as well and her paternal grandmother was a homemaker.

Unfortunately her paternal grandfather died when her father was only 11 years of

age. Because of that, he lost a stable home. Her maternal grandmother died when her mother was 15, “and those deaths had a huge impact on their lives.”

Her maternal grandmother died of a drug overdose. Hailee’s mother never knew if it was intentional or not: “It made my mom really bitter toward her, about her death.” Then, when her mother was ill she would often ask Hailee, “Don’t feel that way about me,” and I would say, ‘Mom, it’s cancer, I’m not mad at you.’”

Hailee’s mother worked to give her self-confidence. When she was in middle school she had issues with acne. “My mom would get up early every morning and help me cover my zits and she would make sure my hair looked nice. Even though it was early in the morning she would do something to make me laugh. My mom was really funny.”

Ovarian cancer was the cause of Hailee’s mother’s death. She was diagnosed at age 49 and died four months after diagnosis. Hailee was 15 and at the end of her freshman year in high school when her mother was diagnosed and died the following September, the start of her sophomore year. She remembers not being able to focus on school at the time. During these four months she spent a great deal of time at the home of her friend Amanda. Amanda’s family is like her second family now and her mother was a surrogate mother as high school continued. Eventually her aunt came down to take care of her while her mother was ill so she could be in her own home. Her father was spending all of his time at the hospital and her aunt provided her with some stability.

Another individual who was important to Hailee at the time was her mother’s brother. This uncle was the one who she could cry with. “He and I are

my mom's last living relatives, so we are really attached to each other. I felt like I could open up to him.”

“My mom would always say to me ‘You’ve got to go to college, you’ve got to go to college.’ Like every other word was college.” Because she had that attitude, Hailee’s mother put an emphasis on her grades; in fact, she said school was Hailee’s job so Hailee was paid for her grades. Her high school provided a counseling group for students who had a parent who died or was seriously ill. That group gave Hailee a community of students who understood what she was going through, and “it was nice knowing I wasn’t the only one in the school facing these problems.”

She and her father are very close now. They remained in Hailee’s childhood home until she graduated from high school, but due to the economy they bought a smaller home. She related,

My dad is the best roommate ever. . . . Because I lost my mom I think I appreciate the people in my life. Her death gave me a bigger outlook on life. I appreciate everything I get and I always tell people I care about them.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented narrative portraits of the 11 women who participated in this study. These women’s stories share a common thread in that they are motherless daughters. Their experiences vary, however, due to the time when their mothers died as well as the family situation that remained in the wake of the death. Even with the wide variance in age there are themes that cross-cut

participants' accounts from one generation to the next. I examine and expand upon those themes in the next chapter, connecting them with the research from my literature review.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

The data from the interviews revealed certain common experiences in the lives of the women in relation to their education, their mothers, and their schools. One commonality was the fact that several of the women were an “only child.” Being an only child placed these women in situations in which they did not have other siblings to talk to about mothers. One benefit to this study was that this seemed to make the women more open to discussing their mothers with me.

Another commonality was the fact that several of the women have immigrant roots in Eastern Europe. These women responded from my snowballing efforts to recruit subjects. Additionally women were recruited through motherless daughter groups that had been established through “meet-up” groups online. Because of their prior decisions to be part of a group to share their experiences of the loss of a mother through death, these women, like the women who were “only children,” willingly spoke freely about their mothers and their relationships with their mothers. They were already reaching out to others.

Although the women in this study were initially recruited and categorized by age, the analysis of the data reveals themes that cross-cut age categories. Reflecting those themes, this chapter is divided into the following six sections. The first section concerns the theme of unsupportive fathers, a theme that relates to the emotional support provided to the daughter but does not relate to specifics about the daughter’s education. Many of the women had specific memories of a caring teacher, the second theme, who took the time to reach out to them. The

third theme is that of school community individuals who reached out to them. These women told of two opposite reactions of the school community on the loss of their mothers—supportive and “unfeeling.” The desire to not be singled out as different was the fourth continuing theme. Counseling groups were only available to a few of the women but their reactions to the groups were remarkably different, the difference coming not from their current age but from the age they were when their mother died.

Of the six cross-cutting themes, the last two (themes 5, and 6) are directly related to the role of the women’s mother. The fifth theme is not having a mother there to encourage them. Several of the interviewees discussed their mother being the one who pushed them, keeping them on track as to their goals with education and grades. Once she was no longer there, grades slipped and dreams faded. The sixth theme, “Mom’s Dream,” is an expression of wanting to continue their education because their mother wanted them to and fulfilling the dream their mother had for them. Several of the women talked about their mother reminding them and those around them that they were to go to college.

Unsupportive Dads

As Linda Nielsen (2007) stated, mothers are the communication nexus between fathers and daughters. When a mother dies, the intimate relationship that is forged in the communication between the mother and daughter is now missing. In many of the cases here, the fathers did not create a climate of communication between themselves and their daughters.

Joan's experiences are illustrative of these consequences of mother-loss. The culture and practices of the time period in which Joan's father was born, the early 1900s, may have impacted the way he dealt with his wife's death and subsequently with his young daughter. "My father never talked to me about her after she died, like she never existed. I don't have any memories of her at all as a person." Joan was never told by her family that her mother had died; she learned of it on the playground at school the beginning of her second grade year from another little girl who teased her. She also related that her father became abusive after her mother's death:

The worst thing that happened to me was that after she died my father turned abusive. . . . He never talked to me about her. He never saved anything of hers to give to me. He, you know it was like she never existed so I operated in a vacuum. He never told me anything she said about me; he never told me any stories about her; he never told me anything we did as a family, so the answers to a lot of your questions are I don't know because nobody ever talked to me about her.

The experiences that Joan faced with her father of never being told about her mother, her joys, her sorrows, and her hobbies, are representative of those in a study by Ludemann (2006), who found that it is beneficial for a daughter's psychosocial development to be made aware of a mother's hobbies and how she felt about being a mother (p. 33). It is important for children to know that their mother values them and that their mother's role contributes to a strong mother-daughter bond (Ludemann, 2006, p. 48). Joan's father not providing her with any

information kept her from any understanding of her mother or what their relationship was like. Similar to Joan, Diane stated, “We didn’t know our mother was ill until after she had died.” Had conversations occurred between daughter and father there might have been an understanding of shared interests and a history on which to construct a life. For example, in contrast to Joan’s and Diane’s experiences, Bea recalled a nun who told her that her mother had liked “dancing and choir”; that teacher then encouraged Bea to become a part of singing and dancing groups to share in an activity she would have in common with her deceased mother.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1968) described experiences like those of Joan and Diane when she wrote that “few people are comfortable talking to a child about death” (p. 184). The work of Nielsen (2007) also relates that the lack of communication between father and children results in no support to the grieving adolescent. Tina’s dad reacted to his wife’s death by telling his children simply, “‘You guys are on your own now. I have to go to work.’ So it made me . . . start thinking about college. When I was 12; I was wondering, ‘What is my future, I had no idea.’”

Yvonne talked about her mother encouraging her to go to college and supporting her dreams of becoming a lawyer. Even though her father put money in an account, he offered no verbal encouragement. She had to make her own way. This again relates to the work of Nielsen (2007) whose research showed a closer connection and involvement in each other’s lives between daughters and mothers than daughters and their fathers (p. 112). Although Yvonne’s father did

not discourage her, he was not her “cheerleader” for doing well in school or going to college. She described it this way:

As it was my dad kind of like, here’s some money, I put some money in your account. And never asked me anything about school, never even called me on the phone when I was there. And I was gone I was in Ohio, never even helped me get home, fly home or anything. I had to take the Greyhound across country to have him say “Never again!” It really was that extreme.

Although Talia’s and Laura’s fathers appear to have believed they were caring for their daughters, it was in a way that was comfortable for them but did not reflect an “ethic of caring.” Noddings (2010) stated that caring is a response to legitimate needs (p. 28). Talia’s father, while supportive of education, refused to allow her time to grieve between high school and college. Talia related, “When she [her mother] did die in July, you know, the next month my father is filling out the application for City College and basically enrolling me in City College.” She did not want to attend City College; she wanted to attend one of the University of California schools. According to Silverman and Worden (1992), children whose mothers die from an extended illness are usually sent back to school the next day. Although their research examined children in grade school, this is similar to what Talia faced by her father enrolling her at City College.

Laura did not speak of her father being unsupportive or abusive, but he was busy and his job kept him away from home for long hours.

My dad at that time by that time in my life was when you are in the entertainment business he was doing Carol Burnett and Price is Right and the Young and the Restless and everything else that was coming into CBS at that time, and he was working 24 hour shifts sometimes. And I was by myself. . . . I didn't have help at home. I had a wonderful dad but he wasn't available to be there to help me with homework.

Noddings (2010) discussed the need for the community to support a grieving student; that was vital for Laura who had a father who was at work late into the night. This situation allowed others from her classroom to protect her from harm, to recognize her as fully human, and to respect and comfort her (p. 130).

Martha's father seemed to have negatively impacted his children's attainment of a college education. She believed she and her siblings did not graduate from college because there was no financial or emotional support from her father to continue their education and because there were so many children. "We have all had to pay our own way for college."

Teachers Who Reached Out

Tina explained her experience with a teacher and her school following her mother's death was abrupt:

I came back to school in January and this science project was due that I didn't know about. So I told him that my mother had passed away and I think he went in and told a counselor, or maybe he didn't, because a counselor called me in and he said, "Is everything OK at home?" and I

said “yeah,” and the next day they took me out of mentally gifted minors classes and put me in regular classes.

Bea remembers one mother-like teacher in high school: “Well I took a sewing class and I guess because I lost my mother that this teacher, to the girls, to all the girls, it seemed like she was a mother-type figure.” Bea’s view of her teacher as a mother-type figure connects to the role of teachers supported at the normal schools in Argentina. It was the teacher’s role to nurture and mother the next generation (Fischman, 2007).

Bea’s teacher at the time of her mother’s death was not very kind to her, or it seems to anyone else.

Well the Sister wasn’t very nice; that was one thing, that I mean, in regard to me, but in general when we first went into her. She was very strict, and I don’t think she—she didn’t understand the changes we were going through from adolescence, teens, and so forth.

Donna’s supportive teacher was Mrs. W., whom she described as “this crazy lady and she just was there, and she actually was there to see me through [her mother’s] death as well, and [she was] the one I was able to come and talk too when I needed someone.” However, not all supportive teachers were women; both male and female teachers offered support. Martha’s case is illustrative. Although Martha did not have a nurturing teacher present when her mother died, she explained that during the onset of her mother’s illness,

one music teacher that I had at Charter One Academy, his name was Mr. C. and he . . . was one of the first people outside of my family to really

encourage me and say that I had a gift in music and I just really ran with that, . . . he was so encouraging. I think that he was huge factor in me actually pursuing it. It is one thing when your parents say you play piano nicely. But it's another thing when a complete stranger/music teacher tells you that you have a gift in song writing or something like that. So I remember him being very influential in what I ended up doing in the long run with my career.

Hailee, the youngest of the women interviewed, also had a male teacher who made a difference in her life at the time of her mother's death. Hailee related some of the most vivid memories of teachers at the time of her mother's illness and death:

Mr. S, my freshman math teacher, he was really cool. He was an outgoing guy. . . But he was always like there for me, like especially when my mom got sick. His mom had died when he was in high school too and he was always protective of me. If he would see me in the hall he would ask me how I was doing.

At the time of her mother's death, some teachers reached out to Hailee. For others it was just business as usual, but it is those who reached out in some way that impacted her. She explained,

My sophomore English teacher, Miss T she got very upset because her and her mom are really close. Whenever she'd talk to me about my mom or something she'd start crying. . . . My German teacher . . . she actually had everybody sign a card for me.

The teachers that Hailee discussed in having a caring attitude toward her during her mother's diagnosis and following her death saw a need to place a value on caring, in line with Noddings' (2003a) description as to maintenance of caring making us better than we are. Dialogue is essential in nurturing caring (p. 121).

In Yvonne's case the teacher who nurtured her at the time of her mother's death was her speech and debate teacher. They had a connection from all of the outside classroom time that is spent in any competitive activity. Yvonne explained,

My speech and debate teacher was another favorite teacher and part of being in the classroom, and actually spent a lot of time with that person because when you are doing Speech and Debate you are always traveling and doing this and that. . . . You know, it was just that kind of situation. And she just strove and worked with me to become better at the things I needed help with and also praised me for the things I already was good with. And she was one of my teachers the year my mom died she was instrumental to helping me out. . . . Speech and debate teacher Miss B, she really became an instrumental person as an adult, you know, someone who you wanted to please because she was your teacher but also someone you could just talk to about problems and stuff. And after my mom died, she was the only adult who would talk to me about it at all.

It was this teacher who told Yvonne of her mother's death. Yvonne had been off campus for lunch and when she returned everyone in her Speech and Debate class was looking for her. Miss B found her: "Miss B, the teacher and so she stood

there, and just started crying, and I said, ‘She’s dead, isn’t she?’ and she just lost it.”

Yvonne and Laura had teachers who responded to them with empathy and care. Noddings (2003a) described such a teacher, one who takes time to care for a student: “[The student] must be met by me as the cared-for by me, one caring. Teaching involves the meeting of the one-caring and cared for. . . . To teach involves a giving of self and a receiving of other” (p. 113). In Laura’s case, this caring came from her choir teacher:

I remember at the Christmas concert, the choir teacher always took an active interest, but I remember after the Christmas concert I broke down and nobody had seen me, but for her, and it was really hard. And she just took the time, and she had checked in on me, but she took the time that night after everyone had kind of left, and she said, “Sit down and let’s talk and just made sure everything was okay, and that I was okay,” and I’ll never forget that. And 20 minutes of someone caring, and it made such a huge impact, and I’ll always remember her. And she always just checked in on, you know checked in on me. Was there anything I needed? And that helped me get through school. So to actually have someone you know actually care, meant a lot.

Talia’s mother, who battled thyroid cancer during Talia’s years in high school, died following her high school graduation. Talia too had a teacher she could confide in and who supported her through her mother’s illness:

My German teacher, she is always the first one that pops out. And so I had her freshman year, sophomore year, junior year, and half of my senior year. . . . She had lost her mother I believe to cancer, and so I related to her on that level. She really inspired us to kind of do what we wanted to do. I remember she had a sticker in her office that said “Question Authority.”. . . She was really supportive of me, and what I was going through, and I felt comfortable sharing with her what was going on with me at home. She just had a way—it is almost that I can’t put words to it—she just had a way with the students.

The importance of caring teachers is underscored when placed in contrast to the absence of such teachers or the presence of “unfeeling” teachers.

Unfortunately for Laura, two teachers made her life more difficult or were hurtful in their dealings with her. The first was her student council sponsor:

I was probably on the way, and I can’t remember what started it, . . . or what happened. It was probably a month into school and I can remember breaking down in the quad area, the outside. And I remember her [student council teacher] comment was “Well I figured this would happen sooner or later” . . . instead of it being “What can I do to help?” It was more of a put-down and I can’t even remember what triggered it, but I remember after that time really guarding my emotions and not allowing myself to show emotion, per se, and so I never felt like I could really talk about it with any of the teachers or anything.

Then Laura had a difficult time with her math class. She did not need the class to graduate and spoke to her father about dropping the class. He accepted her decision. In order to drop the class, she had to meet with the assistant principal, a counselor, and the teacher; she did it alone. The reaction by this teacher was hurtful as well:

I think the hardest thing I had to deal with was the math. . . . I was very bright. I had a good strong GPA; they weren't weighted at the time, but I carried a 4.0 and until I got to my senior year— no, it was my junior year, . . . So I was getting a C in the class, and I had a strong GPA and a C wasn't acceptable for me, and I wasn't getting it and I wasn't getting any help to get it.

The individuals Laura had to meet with should have known her from her involvement at the school with Student Council and cheerleading. They should have known her situation but it appears from her memory of the event no one supported her.

And so about mid-semester I wanted to drop the class and so I went home and talked to my dad about it, and he said "that's fine." So I met with the teacher. I had to meet with the counselor and the teacher and myself. And it is already kind of intimidating for the student to go in and sit with the counselor and the teacher and yourself, and I can't remember if anyone else was in there. But I remember the teacher saying to me, "You're using your mother's death as a crutch; that that is your excuse to drop the class," and I remember sitting there thinking, "Are you kidding me? You just said

. . . to me that I am using the death of my mother . . . I come to you with questions and I'm not getting any answers. I'm not getting any help.

Where did this. . . I can't even believe he would bring that up." There was absolutely no support whatsoever from him or the counselor. And I ended up being able to drop, but it was kind of that . . . insert-knife, turn-handle of making me feel like I wasn't good enough again. And I went home and it was so hard. I was like why? Why is this happening? Why would they even bring up the death of a mother?

The words of an adult at that time are words still remembered over 30 years later. The impact that teachers and counselors have on students can leave an indelible mark. Neither the teacher nor the counselor took into account the feelings and the reality of Laura as a teenager who lost her mother.

As a child using that as an excuse when that was my reality. Using that as an excuse even if I had, regardless that was my reality. That was the reality I was facing. But it was just that someone would actually have the gall to say that, instead of saying, bringing it around and saying, "We understand you are struggling with the death of your mom; we understand that this might be affecting your ability to do the work. What can we do to help you?" You know, there are different ways of wording than instead of making you feel like crap. So, I never really felt like there was anybody I could talk to, or go to counselors or anyone for help. Where did this. . . . I can't even believe he would bring that [my mother's death] up.

School Community Support

The school community includes those individuals, both teachers and students, who are part of the day-to-day existence of the school and the student whose mother has died. Many are friends of the daughter; at times it is the parents of those same friends. How did the people in the community of the school support the interviewee? At times there was great support from the teachers. But at other times, there were teachers whose comments were detrimental.

Bea's experiences exemplify the importance of school community support. Bea's girlfriends' mothers were the most supportive. This connects to Noddings' (2003a) discussion of mothering and caring: "Why she [a woman] mothers other people's half-grown children (p. 128). Bea said:

So mainly my girlfriends' mothers were the ones to help me out, cause we lived, like I said, close by, especially the ones where we were one child in the family, an only child, so we always kept close together. . . . Well, how do I explain—we were like a community; we were like two doors away. "Why don't you come over." Maybe we'd do our homework together and they'd say, "Bea why don't you stay for dinner." Or Sunday after church, or going shopping, or something, so that's how, you know, we kept in contact.

Donna, coming from the perspective of someone who was 12 at the time of her mother's death, related that the teachers "weren't too great. We talked about that one yesterday at the [Motherless Daughters] group. They [the teachers] treated me more like a little kid, so that was a big issue afterwards."

Jean Marie's mother died in the 1970s . She recalled, "The high school knew only because one of my good friends, her father was a counselor." Her mother died in the summer and Jean Marie was participating in a trip to the eastern United States, seeing both historical and governmental sites:

No, she died during the summer, she died in July. I was actually on a trip around the U.S. It was a school trip, . . . so [I] flew home for a while and then went back on the trip. Yeah. Well, it was probably the best thing because my mind was taken off everything when I went back. Although the day after we got back, we visited three cemeteries and all these kids were coming up to me to make sure I was okay, yeah three cemeteries, you know, historical cemeteries in one day, that was fun!

For Jessie, coming from a parochial school, there was support. She explained, Especially when she passed away. . . . Because everyone just knew, and like her funeral was at the church connected to my school and my class went, and everyone knew. [Initially] I didn't want them there, but looking back now I guess it was kind of nice. She related that "the vice principal may have because she was a friend of my dad, but that's it."

For Talia she was able to be absent quite a bit her senior year. Yet no one in the front office seemed to take notice or directly reach out to her.

I really didn't care at all about school. And I didn't really want to be there, especially because my mom was ill. I managed to forge her signature. . . . I signed her name to the paper allowing me to do this [excuse her own absences]. It was so good that my sister even said, "How did you get mom

to sign this piece of paper?” and I’m like, “Yeah, she didn’t, I did.” Now the school still ended up calling, because I was calling so much for myself that they were concerned and wanted to know what was going on. . . . I mean those last three months where everyone is like partying and having a grand time, I’m like, you know, awake during the day, and then on night shift at night, and then having to, you know, go to school the next day; it was just a little ridiculous. It was really an “I don’t care.” I didn’t care. I didn’t care about much of anything.

Talia didn’t realize the severity of her mother’s illness until her senior year in high school; this was also the case for Diane who did not know her mother was ill until after she died. Yvonne knew something was wrong but did not realize the severity. Even though indirectly the school learned about the severity of Yvonne’s mother’s illness, they never reacted to that information by providing her any support. These women’s experiences exemplify Schultz’s (2007) observation that often the daughter did not comprehend the reality that her mother was going to die.

While Laura’s teachers, beyond her choir teacher, did not provide any support, her peers did. The caring community of students allowed her and her friends to “become more vulnerable, for what hurts another will also hurt us” (Noddings, 2010, p. 163). Laura had a strong network of friends:

My friends were amazing I had. My dad worked in show business so he was gone every night, so I was by myself. So I had guy friends, they took turns on Thursday nights coming over for dinner; they just took turns

poppin' in, checking on me. So Thursday night was the night for the guys to take turns. And I had girlfriends who popped in constantly. Yeah, so my friends were amazing, making sure I was taken care of and safe and that everything was good.

Desire to Not Be Singled Out as Different

Askew, Godette, and Childs (2005) discussed the desire of teenagers to not want to be different. One way this is expressed is not speaking to anyone at school, such as a school counselor, about what has occurred. They do not want to be asked about it. Donna and Jessie did not want to be pulled out of class for any type of group or counseling session. Though their desire disputes the findings of Brown et. al (2007), the authors suggested that it is vital there be some sort of social support.

In this study, the women who were in middle school at the time of their mother's death were less receptive to counseling groups or counseling sessions than the girls who were in high school. Donna, who was 12 at the time, explained,

Yes, they were trying to force us to ask each other questions about this and that, and it just didn't work for me. We don't want to do that. We understand where they are coming from but we are also grieving. So we kind of want to deal with ours first, especially when you are in middle school it's more about me. So we're not adults yet either and that made a big difference.

Donna's mother died suddenly when Donna was 12 years old. The last thing that Donna had said to her that morning was "I hate you." Her mother made

her go to school rather than to the beach with her friends. Donna's experiences illustrate those examined in research reported by Schlozman (2003), who wrote that adolescents may not have the opportunity to apologize for past arguments. This is where the school community can play an important role. In Donna's case, attempting to force her to write an essay about something she has lost as the school year began, a month after her mother died, was not a successful assignment. This established a clash of wills for the entire school year between Donna and her teacher. She refused to do the assignment.

Hope Edelman (1994) wrote that, "I desperately longed for the anonymity of the crowd" (p. xviii). This speaks to desires expressed by Jessie, who was 13 at the time of her mother's death and in middle school. She described the issue of counseling in this way:

Yes, and I hated it. I just was like I don't want to be here. I did also go just off outside on my own to a group of kids whose parents passed away. Yeah, I did that. Just in grade school, not really in high school, just in grade school. Yeah, there was the counselor who—actually my dad still goes to once—whenever he gets the extra money for it. . . . She talked to me only a couple of times. I think she could tell I just didn't want to be there, 'cause they would pull you outside of class, and I was like "No, I'd just rather go back, thank you."

Although the previous two individuals did not respond well to being pulled out to a counseling group, Hailee did. Information provided by Schultz (2007) relates that the death of a mother is a defining moment in a daughter's life.

She stated that a safe environment needs to be provided for them to talk about their experience. She further stated that a relationship needs to be established with the individuals who will help the young women process their grief (p. 39). The best example in my research of a school providing support came from Hailee:

Yeah, there was a support group. There was one for death and loss. I went to it my junior year. The leader, she was really cool. She was kind of a hippy and was very liberal and open. Everybody—that lots of people had the same problem, it was nice knowing I wasn't the only one in the school who had those same problems.

It was sixth period every Thursday and . . . you got an excuse out of math, and also because it was really comforting. It was really great and then my senior year, the person who ran it, I don't know what happened to her, but she couldn't run it again. It was because she didn't work at the school. She wasn't a teacher and so she had to have a teacher in the group like watching her sort of supervising it. And the teacher we had my junior year, she loved him and she trusted him, and she had lots of trust issues. And she said, "If I can't do it with the teacher I want, I can't do it at all." And I thought that was kind of selfish because we all needed her, and needed this group. And it was hard my senior year not having that; it was a place you could vent, even if it wasn't about your mom. We were all there and had issues. You know some of their moms were currently sick, others had passed away already, and it was just a nice little thing to have. But my senior year we didn't have it. It was death and dying. When I signed up for

it, it said death and mourning was the group, because they had other stuff for abandonment issues kids. But this was strictly for kids whose parents were dying or kids who had lost parents, and so they had a really great wide variety of support groups at my school.

In college Talia was provided with counseling sessions:

At college, we had, it was ridiculous, eight sessions, I believe that's it. You got eight sessions, and then you were supposed to be done [brushing hands] with your problem apparently. . . . But I had eight sessions, and I think I got that every quarter.

If a summary of Noddings' (2002) work might be given in the context of these women's accounts, it would be that we must teach children how to give and receive care (p. 15).

Mom Not Being There to Encourage

Case and Ardington (2006) discussed mother death being a predictor of poor schooling outcomes. While none of the women I interviewed dropped out of the educational system, several spoke about not achieving their dream. Another concern raised was the time it took them to complete a degree, or, in Jean Marie's case, not completing a bachelor of arts degree. According to Case and Ardington (2006), mothers are the gatekeepers for their children's education, and no one else has that vigilance (p. 413). Once a mother has died, as Edelman (1994, p. xix) related, things that "rankled many of my peers" do not faze you anymore. A failing grade on a paper or grades slipping in general are not that important. Yvonne explained her mother's death changed the plans she had for herself:

In seventh grade I had a plan, I wanted to be a lawyer, I wanted to go to Berkley, and I groomed myself for that up until she died. So I knew for years I was going to apply to Berkley. I knew there was no way I was going to apply to SDSU. I considered it an inferior school at least at that time.

She also discussed her mother being the one to encourage and push her along, “I think if my mom was around I would have finished in four years. I would have been this lawyer thing or something and she would have kept me on track.”

Yvonne’s comments about being encouraged and pushed by her mother to do well in school *connect* to the research of Lang and Zagorsky (2001). Her mother’s death did not stop her from attaining a degree, but her initial experience of college was not successful; she took many additional semesters to attain her Bachelor’s degree and teaching credential.

Bea believes she may have attended college at least one or two years if her mother had been alive: “Maybe she would have been more forceful to make me go at least one or two years to college. She might have, yeah, she would have been.” Martha told of her mother home schooling her children in conjunction with their happiness:

She talked about our happiness. She never really detailed it down to the fact that she had gone to college and my dad had not finished college. I think that she wanted us to go, but she also explained to us that whatever road that we took as long as we were happy that was what mattered.

Donna, 12 at the time of her mother's death, had to complete junior high and high school. Regarding her grades and motivation, "After her death it went down to Bs and Cs, some Ds depending, just because there wasn't anyone there to push me anymore." She referred to her mom as the "homework Nazi," and, "If it had not been for her persistence and keeping me on track with the grades, I probably would not have made it through high school in general." Her mother had a goal for Donna: "She'd also tell me she wanted better for me than she had so I knew it was important to her."

Jessie's mother had been a teacher and the one who helped her with her homework, especially math. After her mother died she said her grades and work ethic dropped.

A lot definitely, if you look at my transcripts throughout they years, you see a plummet in my grades especially in math. I didn't like to do homework and I think she was probably the one who made me do it, or sat me down and did it with me, Because afterward, I hated math homework. If I couldn't finish it in class, I probably wouldn't finish it at home. I would still do like my papers and all that stuff. But there is definitely a big plummet. Cs were getting acceptable when they weren't before. . . . I wasn't, I know, reaching for my full potential.

Jean Marie's story is validated by Chen, Chen, and Lui (2009), who related that losing a mother has a dramatic impact on college enrollment. It is not the financial support that appears to be most tied to the college success but the emotional support. In the study by Lang and Zagorsky (2001), the lower success

rate appears to be connected to the daughter's cognitive performance, which was impacted by the mother's death (p. 272). Jean Marie also believes that if her mother had been alive she would have completed her degree:

Well if she had been alive I guarantee you I probably would have had a Bachelor's degree. Just kind of being on your own, . . . the focus got lost a little. My dad was important, but my mom was more the driver of the education.

Talia also believes that she would have accomplished more academically if her mother had not died:

I feel like it's possible that I could have potentially gone on to graduate school if she were still around to encourage me. . . . Okay, maybe this is the other thing: had she not died, at 18, it's very possible that I would have had, you know, gone on and gotten a teaching credential and then taught English, or taught theatre, or something like that.

She also discussed her internal motivation due to her mother being a trailblazer as a female medical school student:

Her death also impacted me in terms of because I knew my mom was one of the only women in her medical school class; that it also gave me some motivation to complete college. There were so many times when I wanted to drop out, or just like, I can't do it, I can't do it, I can't do it. But kind of by invoking the memory of my mom, I tried to step it up a little bit and say, "You can do; it you can finish."

Laura too spoke of her mother's influence and support in getting homework done or helping with projects:

My mom was really more my mentor when it came to school and helping me type or teaching me to do that, so when I got older in that regard my mom helped take an active role in my educational experience.

Additionally she said her mother's death impacted her education:

Yes. Because, I knew I needed to make a go of it for myself. Like I didn't have anyone there to take care of me. And so I needed to. I had my dad but he was in show business, and so I just knew I needed to have an occupation of my own . . . for me personally. If she was there, if I needed to know how to do certain things, she was always very supportive. But then when that support net came out from under me, it was harder, who do you answer to and how do you . . . if you have a problem, who do you go to, and it just kind of isolated me, and there wasn't anyone I could go to who really understood that I was really on my own . . . it was me who was setting my own priorities and my own curfews and my own responsibilities toward my schooling or towards home, or anything like that. And so there really wasn't any guidance.

Mom's Dream

Donna, when talking about finishing her degree someday, said, "It is not as important to me in a sense just because I want her to be there to see me succeed in it, but at the same time *I want to* [italics for emphasis] because I know that is

what she wants.” Hailee described the connection to her mother’s desires for her this way:

I tried to do what my mom would want me to do. Thinking about how she would want me to keep doing good in school, how she would want me to. . . . Well, one, I want to make her proud. I want to get a degree and I want to, you know— if I would want her to see my diploma and that’s good motivation. . . . just kind of want to make her proud, I guess, with the piece of paper.

The care for the other comes from a desire to be cared for in one’s own life. To finish up this chapter, looking again at the work of Nel Noddings (2002) “Human relations must be the first priority of our intellectual and moral efforts. . . . students must learn how to care and be cared for” (p. 38).

For Jessie, her mom had spoken often to her about college:

Yeah, I was supposed to go to UCLA, yeah, that’s where they wanted me to go, everyone wanted me to go, yeah, that’s what she told me. She would tell people when she knew she was going to die, “Make sure she goes to college. Make sure.” It was always there.

Hailee too had a mother who wanted her education to continue,

Yeah, she would always tell me, “You’ve got to go to college, You’ve got to go to college,” like every other word, “go to college.” You know she would always tell me my grades are important. She’d, ya know, give me money for grades, when I couldn’t have a job, because it’s like I’m doing

my job by working on school, so she would always encourage me to get good grades.

In the seventh grade Yvonne was one of a select group of students to be given some advanced testing that provided her mother with the opening to talk about college, “We definitely had that conversation when I was about in seventh grade. . . . There was always the understanding that I was going to go.” She talked with excitement as she described how she believes her mother would have felt about her college graduation:

But I think she would have loved to have come to my graduation. I think she would have *loved it*. I think she would have thought it was so cool, because I would have been the first person in my little family to graduate from college, because none of my grandparents did, none of my mom’s brothers and sisters did, and on her side, like I said, none of the grand kids did. . . . So she would have been incredibly proud and definitely she would have been pushing me. I don’t know that she would have had the best advice considering she never . . . barely made high school, but it would have been definitely a dream.

Jean Marie, who was 15 at the time of her mother’s death, recalls her family’s views on education:

They were very big on education. My mom always wanted us all to go to college. I don’t remember formal talks but it was understood that we were all going to college. I don’t remember her sitting us all down but we knew that was what was expected of us.

Talia and her mother were on a train trip and her mother was talking to her about college, “We were at Carmel, riding the train, you know, one of our trips down to Southern California. And so it was, it was one of those things talking about it. And you apply your junior year, so I applied my junior year.

Laura and her mother spoke about college:

I think they, they just assumed I would go to school because I was a pretty intelligent child but we had—I was still pretty young. I was a sophomore. I think we talked about me going up to BYU or to one of the universities, but we hadn’t talked in detail about it.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have analyzed the accounts of 11 women, ages 19 to 78, according to six cross-cutting themes: unsupportive dads, teachers who reached out, the community of the school [friends and families], the desire of the girls not to be seen as different from their peers, their mothers not being there to encourage them as their education continued, and finally fulfilling the dream of their mothers. The realities of the women in this study, who as adolescents lost their mothers, supports the research on parental/mother-loss cited earlier in this dissertation. The correlations of a need to be cared for as well as a need for our educational system to learn how to care are paramount in both the women’s stories and the research. Unfortunately the way society grieves is not necessarily the same as an adolescent daughter. In society we move on after a week or maybe a few weeks, but for that daughter the absence in her life will be there forever. Yet, as these accounts show, we as teachers sometimes unthinkingly make

assignments such as writing eulogies or essays about loss without realizing the impact it has on some of the students sitting before us. The value of a caring teacher, whether that person is male or female, may be simply to listen.

It appears that the work of Noddings to teach students to care and to be cared for would be valuable to our society. The women highlighted the importance of having that one teacher who cared and took the time. In addition to the caring teacher, we see the need for caring counselors who are aware of what occurs in the lives of students. We have seen with several of the interviewees the importance of supportive friends and the community of the school providing support when they may not be receiving that support at home from their fathers. Even in this time of budget cuts it is imperative for schools to offer support groups for students who have had a parent die; it appears especially important for students who are in high school at the time of the death. The emotional well-being of the students needs to be supported. This may require creative connections being made between the school and local mental health agencies, or local universities' counseling programs. I explore these implications of the study more fully in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the answers to my research questions based on the data, and the implications to be drawn from the research. I place before the academic community my recommendations for additional research and modifications in practice. Beyond what I believe the recommendations should be, I also include the recommendations of the 11 women who shared their stories. Those who sat in schools as motherless daughters have a front row seat to recommend changes.

I include in this chapter a summative analysis along with the conclusions and a discussion of how this study contributes to the theoretical base discussed in chapter 2. From my research I answer my main research question and subquestions. I then explore the implications and recommendations for practice, ending this section with recommendations offered by the 11 women who were interviewed. Their recommendations are grouped into the following areas: decision-making as to their careers, the role the counseling department plays in their educational decision-making, the need for schools to reach out to the students, and the need for teachers to demonstrate care in assigning topics related to death. Teachers should perceive students as experiencing a major shift in their lives at the loss of their mother. I begin this discussion by returning to my original research questions.

Returning to the Research Questions

I began this study with the following overall research question: “*How does the death of a mother impact her daughter’s subsequent education?*” As I investigated the literature on mother-daughter relationships, caring and education, and mother loss I developed the following subquestions to guide my research:

1a. *What role does the mother play in the life of the adolescent and her education?*

1b. *How does the adolescent’s desire not to be different potentially prevent her from grieving?*

1c. *How do friends and teachers treat the young girl if they learn that her mother has died?*

1d. *How can schools be a place of caring and nurturing for all students?*

In this section I explore the answers to the overall research question through each of these subquestions.

Subquestion 1a

Subquestion 1a asked, *What role does the mother play in the life of the adolescent and her education?* Findings from the interviews, as well as the research literature, suggest that the daughter’s grades are likely to slip following the death of the mother, which then impacts her ability to attain college acceptance. If an essay is required on the loss of a close relative, an academic counselor or teacher could help the student write the essay explaining why her grades have dropped. Additionally it appears that fathers, because they grieve differently, may not take a great interest in the daughter’s homework and post-

secondary education or are too busy with work and keeping the family intact to support their daughters in these endeavors. In the cases of the participants in this study, whatever the daughter wanted to do, as long as that included going to school, it was fine with the father.

These findings suggest that the role the mother plays in the life of the adolescent and her education is threefold. First, the mother appears from my study to be the parent who makes sure homework is completed. Second, she also reminds the daughter to complete tasks related to school and helps with projects for class assignments. Third, it is the mother who encourages post-secondary education; she is the one who discusses the process. Even if she has not directly experienced the process herself, she reminds the daughter of the necessity of a college education.

Subquestion 2

The second subquestion asked, *How does the adolescent's desire not to be different potentially prevent her from grieving?* In this study, it seems the daughter's desire not to be seen as different comes from two sources: When a student who has lost a parent approaches and reaches adolescence, it appears to her that everyone else has a mother. In most cases a student who has lost a parent does not casually know another child who has had a parent die. So none of the peers understand what the student is going through. The peers may also treat the student who has lost a parent differently because in their mind if "Susie's" mother can die that could happen to my mother too"—a thought that for most adolescents is immensely threatening and impossible to sustain. The second reason is that

students approaching adolescence (particularly those in middle school according to the data presented here) do not want to be singled out to be part of a support group. However, from my research, girls who lost their mothers while in high school either had a support group or would have desired the availability of a support group. The research reveals that in general terms students in middle school do not want to talk about their mother's death. However, these students will open up to one or two trusted members of the faculty, whether they are teachers or counselors.

Subquestion 1c

The third subquestion asked, *How do friends and teachers treat the young girl if they learn that her mother has died?* The range of treatment by peers and faculty seems to vary with the individual as well as the child involved. As I have presented, the casual acquaintances seem to distance themselves initially due to the "fear" that if her mother died then my mother could die too. But close friends provide support in a variety of ways. They invite the daughter over for dinner, check on her when she is home alone at night, or just hang out like they always have, at times giving her a place to talk about her mother and telling their own stories of their memories of her mother; at other times, just continuing to be teenage girls and doing things that teenage girls do seems to provide comfort to the grieving girl.

Subquestion 1d

The fourth subquestion asked, *How can schools be a place of caring and nurturing for all students?* For the faculty this too spans a wide spectrum. As

discussed previously, teachers have treated students in unkind and intolerant manners for not living up to the standard that was previously achieved. There are teachers who have ignored the event entirely, which may come from their own uncomfortable feelings around the issue of death and dying. Then there are the teachers who reach out, who provide the child with a safe place to go if the day isn't going well, or provide a place to talk if that is needed. They may just be able to smile in the midst of a difficult day. These teachers were often discussed as providing emotional support by the women I interviewed.

Many of the recommendations provided later in this chapter address this question; here I briefly summarize key ideas growing out of the research. In order for schools to become a place of caring, we need to provide training and education to faculty staff and students on caring. There are programs available, which include programs for secondary schools. It needs to be an acceptable norm on a campus to care for other individuals. I believe this would not only assist the student who has lost a parent to a death, but those who have difficult home lives, whether it be from abuse, abandonment, or family financial distress. This would also be pertinent to the issue of bullying, an issue that has received a great deal of press coverage in the last six to 12 months. Another issue that I have discussed is the need to keep teachers informed of the major events in a student's life. Schools are now creating homeroom groups in which teachers review student grades, another way of monitoring how a student is doing in general. With schools of over 3,000 students there has to be a human factor that is apparent; otherwise, more than the motherless will feel alone.

Contributions to Scholarship and Recommendations for Further Research

Hope Edelman (1994) initially discussed the impact that the death of a mother has on her daughter, focusing on the adolescent daughter. She did not specifically look at the daughter's education, beyond anecdotal evidence based on her own educational experiences. My study had taken her work to a more specific level in focusing on the education in both the secondary and post-secondary areas.

Marks, Jun, and Song (2008) in their research found that a mother's death led to more negative effects for daughters than sons (p. 1611). Their work is supported also by Lang and Zagorsky (2001), who suggest that a mother's death lowers educational attainment. My findings support this as evidenced by the extended time it took for the daughters to finish degrees, the inability to continue on their dream path for their education, and the reality that several of them had to move into the traditional role of homemaker beyond going to school.

Noddings' (1996) work on caring, which weaves throughout many of her writings, looks at the humanity of caring for other human beings. Throughout my research the women discussed teachers who took the time to care about them, friends who reached out that provided a safety net for their physical and emotional well-being.

The work of Pill and Zabin (1997) looked specifically at the death of the mother in the life of a daughter before adulthood. They discussed the grief associated with this loss resurfaces every-time there is another loss in the life of the daughter. They also examined the outward appearance of strength masking an internal difficulty in committing to long-term relationships for fear of the loss that

may come. My research similarly analyzes the difficulty for some girls and women to establish long-term relationships or marriages.

Shultz (2007), in a qualitative study, reinforces my research, confirming that first, there is a disbelief that one's mother is going to die, even when the daughter is told or the physical symptoms are evident. The second point is that the adolescent needs a safe environment where she can process the loss. My study supports these points as several participants stated that they did not really *hear* or comprehend the diagnosis that was shared with them. Their mothers were ill yet they did not comprehend the severity. Some were fortunate to have support groups offered to them. For others it was a teacher with whom they could talk to share their feelings.

Nielsen (2007) posited that the mother-daughter relationship involves a deeper communicative quality than that between the father and daughter. This is very apparent from my study with the daughters discussing their fathers financially supporting them but providing little or no emotional support. The encouragement to do well in school departed with their mother. The one who shared their dreams of the future had left as well. This is echoed in the study by Denner and Guzman (2006), who describe the legacy in the Dominican [Dominican Republic] community of mothers being that personal influence for educational and career advice, even if the mother had not attended college herself.

Thus, my study both reinforces and extends existing research on parental and mother loss and its impacts on child survivors. This continues to be an under-

researched area, however. In light of the dearth of empirical studies, the following questions remain to be adequately addressed:

(1) How can a post-secondary institution support a motherless daughter, through mentoring, counseling services, and career counseling? Is there evidence of effective practices in this regard? (2) In the world of high-stakes testing and bullying, how can secondary schools become caring communities? Again, what types of qualitative or quantitative data (including case studies) can be brought to bear on this question? (3) How does becoming motherless in adolescence impact a woman's ability to engage in and nurture a long-term relationship? (4) In an era of budget cuts to education, what types of economic support are available for academic communities to create and sustain support groups to exist on secondary school campuses? Through qualitative or quantitative data how do the economics of a community, impact the support for student groups? (5) What is the nature of the father-daughter relationship following the loss of a mother? What does research suggest regarding how fathers and daughters communicate better and understand each other's manner of grieving? (6) How can working with an organization that supports research and education on the cause of a mother's death help the daughter in the grieving process? And finally, (7) how do the experiences of girls from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds compare in terms of the experience and impacts of mother loss? What can we learn from comparative research on how these issues impact girls differently depending on their cultural, familial, and ethnic background? I turn now to recommendations specifically for

teachers, school administrators, counselors, and others in the educational community.

Recommendations for the Educational Community

(1) *Faculty, counselors, and administration, as a caring community, need to reach out to students who have lost a parent and seriously realize that the death of a parent is a major occurrence in a student's life.* Schools, as agents of society, are not prepared to deal with death and grief. While death is a natural occurrence, the time that death occurs may make it difficult for family members to process. As a heterogeneous society some cultures within the United States do not deal with death well; it is segmented to the constraints of a week or two when the death occurs, and then we are presumed to “move on” and “let go.” This is illustrated by several of my interviewees who discussed the mother never being discussed again, or returning to school immediately following the funeral. Unfortunately that is not the reality for most people, especially the adolescent daughter of a mother who has died. Research has clearly revealed that the daughter whose mother has died needs support and understanding.

(2) *Teachers need to be trained to not only offer support to a student who experiences the death of a parent, but also be trained how to deal with death within their subject areas.* A sidelight to the school issue is the reality that teachers are not trained to deal with death and grief. In an uncaring fashion, we may teach about the issues of death whether it is in literature, broadcasted by the news media, and taught in history classes. We may not respect the child who has had a parent die and “blame” the child for using that as an excuse. My research,

though limited, reported on a teacher accusing the daughter as using her mother's death as an excuse. Whether teachers personally understand it or not, as my interviewee stated, that was her reality. How can teachers be trained to deal with the issue of death within their subject areas? How can they become more sensitive to assignments so as not to unduly burden a child who has had a parent or close relative die? These are questions of awareness and information, which must be provided to teachers from school administrators but which can also be included in teacher preparation and professional development activities. Communication must continue beyond the semester the parent dies.

(3) *Follow-up should be provided to a student who experiences the death of a parent, either through a mentor on a one-to-one basis or through a campus support group.* This recommendation addresses the issue of being successful in post-secondary education. My study has shown that for some of the women, dreams relating to the educational goals they had when their mother was alive vanished with her death; or their dream became vague as they negotiated their post-secondary education, taking longer to complete a degree or never completing it at all. The loss of this dream goes back to the loss of the mother and not having that person who believes in you and pushes you to do well and finish.

(4) *Post-secondary institutions may need to reconsider the topic of an essay that is required in an application packet.* For the post-secondary community, in many cases, students are asked to write an essay as part of their application packet. If the student chooses to use the death of the mother as the topic of the essay, then the post-secondary institution might note that on the

student's file. If that student should attend that institution, services and outreach, such as mentoring, could be offered.

It appears that even though various studies have been conducted on the issue of motherless daughters very little has been shared with the educational community. In the following pages I cover the issues that I believe are necessary for schools to consider in the light of my research.

One item that has been brought to the forefront in this study and others is that the death of a mother can negatively impact the advancement of the daughter's education. *One reason for this is that the daughter no longer has a personal "cheerleader" to help her stay on track in her studies.* The person who most believed in her is no longer there, or she is having to replace the mother in the home, allowing her less time to attend school or complete assignments.

The second point is that there needs to be a communication system created so that teachers will know the significant stories of the children in their classrooms. There is communication with faculty about student's physical ailments, but sometimes there is no communication about emotional issues until it is too late.

Contemporary education realities, which emphasize increased class size and high-stakes test scores, raise the question, Where does the human being in those classrooms sitting at those desks come into play? They are not "widgets" that can be returned if they do not work properly. They cannot be given back to the manufacturer if there is damage to the workmanship; the teachers in the classrooms must work with the students placed in their care. So how do they do

this for students, both female and male, who have faced the death of a significant member of their family?

In light of these points, I suggest the following for schools and educational leaders:

Train teachers about grief and how that impacts adolescents specifically.

What issues would students who have recently experienced the death of a significant person in their life be facing? Teachers may need to reevaluate assignments that they “have done forever,” realizing that some of those assignments may be difficult for a student who is grieving. The training should also include dealing with death in the literature and content area that we teach. Do not just ignore the deaths of Romeo and Juliet or the death of a person in the media.

Train teachers on caring as defined by Nel Noddings (1996). Create a caring environment on campuses around the nation where teachers and students are taught to be the one caring and the cared for. Tie the caring curriculum into service learning, literature, social sciences, and all of the remaining curricular areas.

Communicate with teachers each semester or flag the student’s identification screen for personal information that enables teachers to see information about a student’s history. This will assist teachers, at the minimum, to not give assignments that may upset the student. It may also open dialogue between the teacher and the student if it seems appropriate.

Establish support groups on high school campuses. Create a cooperative relationship with local university counseling departments to encourage internships. The caveat is that the graduate student would have to commit to the full high school academic year to moderate a support group for students who have had a parent die or who have a parent dealing with a life-threatening disease. If the number is too high for one group, have the group split into two. Each group would be moderated by an intern but would also be attended by a member of the faculty. This would create continuity year to year, as well as having a certified member of the staff available for any contingencies.

These groups would be organized during the school day, one day a week, ideally rotating hours of the school day to prevent a student from always missing the same class. The student always needs to make the choice to attend. If the student would be missing a test and the week is going well, the student may choose to remain in class.

Rethink the responsibilities and increase the number of personal counselors at the middle and high school levels. The majority of counseling department personnel perform testing, career exploration, and credit checks. This scenario usually does not provide students with the opportunity to have someone to talk to about personal issues. It also does not give them an advocate if an issue comes up and the student is uncomfortable discussing it with the teacher directly.

Recognize that for adolescents the death of a parent is a life marker and that what occurs around this event may make an impact for the rest of their lives. It is time to truly become a caring community.

Research the schools on or near military bases. What type of support or programs do they have, if any, to work with the students who have had a parent die in the line of duty? If there are programs available that are being used in those schools are they readily available for all schools? Does grieving look differently in a community that may face parent death in greater numbers than a school in a non-military community? Does a caring community exist due to the commonality of the military, and the support that families and individuals provide for each other?

In the next section I provide the recommendations of my interviewees, the motherless daughters whose stories I have told and honored here.

Recommendations of the Interviewees

Careers

Most of the women made recommendations on what schools could do when working with motherless daughters. Tina made one recommendation having to do with career advice:

I would say certain majors and occupational fields can provide financial security, a safety net so the girls don't have to feel compelled to hastily marry a man thinking the man will provide a roof over their heads.

Laura realized that she had to be able to make it on her own after her mother died:

Because I knew I needed to make a go of it for myself, like I didn't have anyone there to take care of me. And so I needed to. I had my dad but he

was in show business and so I just knew I needed to have an occupation of my own.

The death of a parent may also impact the daughter's choices of a career; for example, Donna would like to be an emergency room nurse eventually. She explained,

Most definitely. It wasn't something I thought about right after her death.

A lot of my career choices are based off of what life experiences I've gone through. When we were saying our last goodbyes I stood back as everyone went to her side and a nurse was standing next to me and I remember her saying, "You weren't close with your mother, I can tell. Least it's over." I was 12 and hearing that was beyond horrible. There are other nurses that say those kinds of things and I don't want to be one of them. I want to be the nurse that is there for comfort even if it's just being there. It makes a world of difference when you have a nurse that cares, and I want to be one of them.

Counseling Departments

Hailee, even though she was in a school of approximately 2,600 students, had a counselor who kept track of her grades and kept in touch with her.

My school counselor, because, you know, you are assigned counselors, I actually got a really good one. Oh, I was lucky, and she was awesome!

She would tell me that if I ever wanted to talk I could come to her with scholarships and planning for college. She was always sending me notes and telling me she would help me with that. She actually showed me a

scholarship that I won. It was like only two people get them and it was writing about, you know, a struggle you had in high school, and I wrote about my mom and how I overcame it—not just sob, this is what happened, but I wrote how I came out of that, and I got \$5,000 for school, and she was really a great help.

Yvonne had no guidance when it came to the selection of a college to attend. Although she had a counselor who helped her select her classes, no one offered her guidance or advice for college selection. She described her experience:

But I didn't have any discussions about what an intelligent choice of a college would be with anyone. So basically I applied to the most random schools, schools I had heard of. I applied to a school in New Mexico because that is where my grandma came from. One kind of courted me hard so I applied to that one and that is the one I ended up going to. But I ended up not going to a California school probably because I wanted to get away.

Jean Marie too had no guidance for an appropriate career field.

The bigger push would have been in high school I think. Then that college, maybe my freshman year of college, they could have helped me find more of a path. But once I went into early childhood ed, I mean I completed what I set out to do there. . . . just basically someone taking the time to maybe expose me to different things as well.

Additionally Tina recommended that teachers and counselors “just try to keep the other pressures off. . . . The trauma from the loss of a parent is emotional, in your head.”

In this study, girls who were middle school age at the time of their mother’s death seem to have had a different reaction to counseling than the older girls. Donna said, “They put us in counseling but it wasn’t anything worthwhile.”

Donna supported Tina’s recommendations this way:

Definitely be a lot more sensitive to what’s going on because you don’t know what their relationship is like with them, with their mother, what happened, how they spent their last moments together. . . . They don’t know the whole situation, and if they aren’t sensitive to it, that can cause major problems. Just give them time and don’t force them to talk.

Jessie brought up points regarding counseling and counselors:

I think there should be a little bit more than just . . . tell a counselor, go talk to them. . . . I think they need to see—for me, they saw my grades weren’t as great as they were before, and I think they just said, “Oh, it’s okay,” when maybe they could have been like “Hey.” If they would have gotten on me, still I probably would have picked them up. . . . So I think just not be so easy with me and just assume that because I talk to a counselor that everything is going to be okay. Because like it wasn’t.

Outreach at School

Laura, as an educator today, says,

When I was struggling in math and I had no where to go, they accused me of using as an excuse that my mom had passed away and I've never forgotten that. I feel in our society, and it is kind of a society thing, and even as teachers, and it's getting worse, where we are so under the—that the requirements and the expectations of us and the expectations we have, I don't know that we all have time to help “the one.” I mean, yeah, we help them with school and we help them with—I hope we offer them the resources they need for academics, but we have lots of other kids out there who are struggling in a lot of other ways who are just on survival, and we are so busy just trying to get our ducks in a row with all of the accountability that is involved with the teaching aspect, and that is important. . . . Of course, that is primary, that at times I don't have time to recognize “the one” or “the few” that need that extra attention.

Yvonne was 16 at the time of her mother's death and today wishes there had been outreach to her at school:

I think probably what they should have done, even if I didn't want it, was they should have forced me to go and talk to somebody. And we may have just gotten lost because it did happen just before the break. It sucks. I mean your memory should last for more than two weeks when someone dies. . . . No one made me get any kind of help. No one asked me if I needed any kind of help. . . . They should have made us go to counseling, or if they had asked us or anything, but in my opinion we were just ignored. So if they find out, . . . if they could have contacted someone like

hospice, or something like that, because the motherless daughters group that I go to, a lot of them talk about going to this hospice thing and working through their feelings and that would have been awesome. It probably didn't exist back then, but there is this thing called Camp David.

Jean Marie would in retrospect have liked the school to, "Well, just well, especially since it was a mother that I lost, just a female to touch bases with. That could have helped kept me on the road to figure out more what I wanted to do."

Talia was the most specific on her recommendations for schools:

Overall what has been really beneficial for me is to be around other people who are like me, other motherless daughters. So if I had advice to a school counselor, I would say, try to find a group, because it can't just be one in the whole school. And if it is one in the whole school, there has to be some other sister schools in the District, what football teams play one another. You gather all those students, those student bodies, . . . you get people together in a group setting to talk about the loss. I think that has been the most beneficial. . . . I would say read Hope's book; that would be required reading for someone that lost their mom especially, or is going through something like that like to read her book. And I really put a lot of value in a group situation. . . . You have a sense of community, and you have that support that you know the other people who are there are struggling just like you.

Knowing that one is not alone was important to these women. Similarly to Jean Marie's reflection above, Hailee suggested, "What is school like for a

student whose mother or father is battling what could be a deadly illness?” Hailee talked about school after her mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer:

I was in school and I just remember not being able to think about what was going on in class. I can remember just looking at everybody else thinking, wow, like you’re so, like—I would hear things in school of people talking and I’d be just like “shut up,” like you don’t know what real drama is like. And I just remember feeling very—I don’t know. I felt bitter in school when I would see people who, you know, would talk about petty stuff, and it’s just like don’t talk, like you don’t realize how good you probably have it. So that’s what I remember thinking at that time in school. Assignments were not always completed on time. I’d have to say, “Listen I’ve had so much at home, you know, I couldn’t do an assignment,” or something, and they were totally fine with it. They were very understanding toward what was going on.

As far as programming for a high school, Hailee suggested, “You lose your mom during high school—that needs to have programs and need to have supportive teachers and people and my high school did.”

Caring Teachers: Be Aware of Assignments

Another area of consideration for teachers would be the assignments given or the conversations held in class. Donna’s mother died about six weeks before the school year began. She went to her English class and the first assignment was to “write about someone you lost.”

First week of school, my English teacher assigned a project to write about someone you lost, and that just was awful to have an assignment like that. For Donna this assignment established an almost combative relationship with this specific teacher that continued throughout the school year.

For Jessie it wasn't an assignment but a conversation in her religion class. She related the following:

Sophomore year was the class where you find yourself and you learn to love everyone in your class. I remember one girl was talking about her grandpa, and he was like in the hospital, and basically the picture she was painting was like the last couple of days of my mom, and I raised my hand and I said, "Yeah. I know how you feel," or something like that. And then the teacher goes like, "Oh you lost someone. Who? Like your grandparent or someone like that?" and I was like "No, no." I remember still the hardest thing that I've had to do till this day. I remember it was one of those moments that you see in the movies where like it is right there and you can't just push it out and you just start freaking out inside, and it is so hard to actually just say it, so you say it as softly as you can, and then you completely lose it. And so I was like, "No my mom." . . . I realized that was the first time I had to say that because everyone just knew already.

This incident addresses the need for teachers to be made aware of students' backgrounds who come into your class each year or each semester. This teacher was caught totally off guard, as Jessie stated, "I can see the reaction on

my teacher's face. She felt so bad 'cause she had no idea, and everyone in my class kind of like, 'Oh my gosh.'"

A Shift in Her World

The students who have lost a mother, or any close relative, have a deeper understanding of the fragility of life. There is a need for teachers and other school personnel to understand this. It may be reflected in grades not being as important or an emotional reaction if a friend moves away. The realization, as Talia explained, "I feel like it shifted my world of like anyone can die at any time, life is really precious," provides a variant point of view than that of other teenagers.

Further Research from the Participants' Point of View

Jean Marie, in our conversation, suggested that the impact on younger brothers be researched. Their mother died when her brother was nine, and their father died when he was 15. At this point, he is only three classes away from his bachelor of arts degree. His best friend died about five years ago. Jean Marie explained, "And he's never recovered from that."

In my conversation with Becky following our interview, she suggested it would be interesting to interview all of the girls in the family, to get each one's perspective. Additional data could be collected from several of my interviewees.

During my interview with Talia, she recommended further research on mother-loss and relationships:

Theresa, that is more interesting to me. Like if I were going to do a book or a dissertation, that's what I would want to focus on, like mother-loss and how it affects your partnerships. Who you get partnered with, do some

girls decide because they have mommy issues that they have to go play for the other team even, right? Do those decisions happen, like I'm curious about how that gets played out.

Conclusion

Students need someone to care; faculties and staff need information and training; and I have now returned to the beginning—back to school, back to the students. When the nurse, the assistant principal, or a counselor discovers a child who has lost a parent, whether a mother or father, they come and find me. What can we do? What should we do? How can we help? In all of this research, through hours of interviews, transcription and analysis, if one teenager is helped to finish high school, helped to go on to college, helped to just get up the next morning, then it has all been worth it.

And we were there when our mothers drifted out of this world.
—M'Lynn Eatenton from *Steel Magnolias* (1986, p. 106, paraphrased)

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APPENDIX A
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date

Dear _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Teresa McCarty in the Education Leadership Department of the Mary Lou Fulton College of Education at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to study the impact of mother death on education of adolescents both at the time of the death and future educational endeavors.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve three interviews of approximately 60 minutes in length each. You have the right not to answer any question, and to stop the interview at any time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty.

This is a part of my research for my dissertation. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation.

Your name will be changed in the written portion of the project. The audio tapes will be held in my possession. Your responses will be anonymous. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name will not be known.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. The interview tapes will be kept in my possession until the acceptance of my dissertation. The tapes will then be destroyed by being broken.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact the research team at: Theresa Ratti 480-813-9052. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Sincerely,

Theresa H. Ratti

APPENDIX B
SURVEY

Information for Participants: You are being invited to voluntarily complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire is part of a study being conducted by Theresa Ratti of Arizona State University. The purpose of this study is to provide baseline data on individuals who have had a family member die while the individual was in school. Your responses will be anonymous and treated with the utmost confidentiality. By completing this questionnaire you grant your consent to use the information you provide. Thank you for your time and willingness to complete this questionnaire!

Contact: For further information about this study, please contact Theresa Ratti at 480-472-5743 or <theresa.ratti@asu.edu>

Sex M_____ F_____

- 1. Race/Ethnicity** _____Caucasian
_____African American
_____Hispanic
_____Asian
_____Pacific Islander
_____Bi-racial
_____Other

2. Current age _____

3. Highest Level of education attained

Some High School_____

High School Diploma_____

Some College_____

Associates Degree or Certificate_____ in what field?

Bachelors Degree_____ in what field?

Masters Degree_____ in what field?

PhD/EdD_____ in what field?

4. Current Profession

5. Have you lost a family member to cancer? Yes No

Please circle all that apply

Mother

Father

Grandmother

Grandfather

Other Female Relative

 please indicate

Male Sibling

Female Sibling

Other Male Relative

 please indicate

6. What was your age when your family member died?

7. If your mother died what was your age at that time?

8. In what grade were you enrolled at the time?

9. How much education had your mother completed?

Some High School _____

High School Diploma _____

Some College _____

Associates Degree or Certificate _____
 in what field?

Bachelors Degree _____
 in what field?

Masters Degree _____
 in what field?

PhD/EdD _____
 in what field?

If you would be willing to participate in an additional portion of the research which will consist of 3 interviews of between 45 to 60 minutes each please add your name and contact information below.

Name

Phone _____

e-mail _____

Thank your for your participation in this survey!

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A Note to Participants. Thank you for taking the time to contribute your story to this project. Little has been written about the impact of the death of a mother on her daughter’s education, and these stories need to be told. The goal of this project is to tell these individual stories and provide information to the educational communities about the needs of the daughter whose mother died when she was an adolescent. This three part interview sequence is designed to explore and reflect on the meaning of your mother’s death and how it has impacted your educational choices. It may help to begin by thinking of the pivotal moment(s) or life experience(s) that connected your mom to your educational journey. We can work forward and backward in terms of your experiences; the process can be circular and recursive rather than linear. The second part of the interview sequence asks you to elaborate on your actual experiences with your mother’s death and your education at that time. Finally, there is an opportunity to reflect: How has your education evolved? What role did your mother play in the choices you made for your education? Were there individuals who had an impact on your educational choices?

<p>Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants’ Experience in Context</p> <p>Please tell me about your family and education as you were growing up, prior to your mother’s illness/death.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where were you born and grew up? • What was your family structure? • Parent’s place of birth, first language, education and professional background? • Did either of your parents attend school as you were growing up? • How did that impact you? • What place did books have in your home? 	<p>Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants’ Experience with her education at the time of the death of the mother.</p> <p>Please tell me about the time of your mother’s illness and death (The first 4 questions will be used if the mother’s death was caused by a life threatening disease. Otherwise begin with question 5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What age was your mother at the time of her diagnosis? • What was your age at the time and what grade were you in? • When you think of that year in school, what most comes to your mind? • Did your teacher know about your 	<p>Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the Death of the mother and the education after the death.</p> <p>Please tell me about your life and education following your mother’s death.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What grade were you in at the time of your mother’s death? • What is the highest level of education you have completed? • What is your current occupation? • Does your occupation correspond with your education?
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often were you read to, by someone in your family? • Who was the person that would read to you? What was your relationship like with that person? • When you think of the games activities your family did when you were a child were they educational in nature? • Who were the important people in your life? • Number of siblings and their age in relation to you? • When did you start school? • How many schools did you attend? • Were they public, private or parochial schools? • What are your personal memories of your schooling? • How did you do academically, in school? Socially? • Do you have memories of a favorite teacher or teachers, what defines them in that role for you? • What was your parents, extended families view of education? • Will you tell me a story of your growing 	<p>mother's illness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did he/she react to that information? • What was the families responsibility in caring for your mother? • What was the age of your mother at the time of her death? • What was the cause of her death? • What was your age at the time of her death? What grade were you in? • Were you involved in school activities at the time? What were they? • Had your mother talked to you about her desires for your education? What were they? • When you think of that time period are there adults, other than your parents who were influential in your life? What was your relationship like with them? • Did your friends know of your mother's illness/death? • How did the school react to your mother's death? • Please tell me about your memories of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you go directly on to the next level of education? • How do you believe your mother's death impacted your decisions about your education? • What is your current living situation? • Have you completed additional education? • Were there any services available to you because of your mother's death at any level of your education? • Looking back over the last _____ years, how do you feel that your mother's death impacted your education? • Looking back over the last _____ years how do you feel that the educational institutions you have attended could have better served you because of your mother's death?
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up years that best depicts your relationship with your mother?	school at that time.	
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APPENDIX D
INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER

To: Teresa Mccarty
ED 144E

From: Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 03/28/2011

Committee Action: **Renewal**

Renewal Date: 03/28/2011

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 1003004947

Study Title: Impact of the death of a mother on the current and subsequent Education of their adolescent daughters

Expiration Date: 03/17/2012

The above-referenced protocol was given renewed approval following Expedited Review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval of ongoing research before the expiration noted above. Please allow sufficient time for reapproval. Research activity of any sort may not continue beyond the expiration date without committee approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in the automatic suspension of the approval of this protocol on the expiration date. Information collected following suspension is unapproved research and cannot be reported or published as research data. If you do not wish continued approval, please notify the Committee of the study termination.

This approval by the Soc Beh IRB does not replace or supersede any departmental or oversight committee review that may be required by institutional policy.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Theresa Helen McLuskey Ratti, was born in Jersey City, New Jersey. She is the daughter of Annie Morrow McLuskey and Anthony Frank Ratti; the grandchild of Helen McCaig and Peter McLuskey, immigrants from Scotland; and Angela Ratti and Frank Ratti, immigrants from Italy. Her elementary education took place in New Jersey, North Dakota, and Arizona. Her secondary education was completed at Seton Catholic High School in Chandler, Arizona. In 1979, Theresa entered Arizona State University; then transferred to Mesa Community College in 1980; and returned to Arizona State University in 1981 as a Secondary Education major. Upon graduation in 1983 she was employed as a substitute teacher for four years before receiving her first teaching contract at her alma mater, Seton Catholic, to teach American Government and Senior Religion. In 1989 Theresa continued her teaching career at Mesa High School in the Social Studies department. She attended Northern Arizona University in 1991 and graduated in 1993, where she completed her Master's Program for Secondary Education with an emphasis in Women's Studies. Currently, Theresa is the Service Learning Coach at Mesa High School. She has presented at national conferences and holds a National Certificate in Service Learning. She is a teacher in the AVID program and feels a great connection with those students as she is a first generation high school and college graduate.