

**Losing a Sibling to Murder as a Young Adult:  
An Autoethnography**  
by  
Derrek Bentley

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of  
The University of Manitoba  
In partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Joint Master's Program in Peace and Conflict Studies  
The University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © 2020 by Derrek Bentley

**Abstract**

This autoethnographic study delves deeply into my journey as a sibling who lost his brother through murder. The research will draw heavily on my own experience while making connections with theories and concepts such as violence, grief, structural violence, trauma, vicarious trauma, and sibling attachment theory. The qualitative nature of this study provides profound and personal insight into this challenging experience while also suggesting potential adjustments to various systems that could have made a difference in my life. In the end, I answer the following question: What effects do losing my brother to murder, as a young adult, have on my life and what recommendations may have mitigated the adverse effects? This study is significant for improved services, programming, and future research for people, especially young people, who have lost a sibling.

### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my Thesis Advisor, Dr. Jessica Senehi, and my Thesis Advisory Committee that includes Dr. Lloyd Kornelson, and Karen Ridd. Your patience, reassurance, wisdom, and teachings have helped make this thesis a reality. Specifically, your positive comments surrounding my work are comments that I will never forget. Thank you for your support. Secondly, thank you to the faculty, staff, and students of the Arthur V. Mauro Centre at St. Paul's College at the University of Manitoba and at the University of Winnipeg. No matter which way our paths crossed, thank you for being a part of this learning journey. To my mum, thank you for your strength and love. To my aunt and uncle, thank you for the laughs and the conversation. And finally, thank you to those in my life, you know who you are, who continue to support me throughout this writing even when I told you to stop asking me about it. Sometimes, the smallest of gestures made the most significant difference in helping me complete this important project.

Thank you, merci.

**Dedication**

I am dedicating this writing to all those who have lost a sibling from murder. It is especially dedicated to my little brother Joshua Bentley. I miss you every day, and you are truly the best brother I could have asked for, March 8, 1995 to January 25, 2014.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Losing a Sibling to Murder as a Young Adult: An Autoethnography.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Research Question .....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Organization of Thesis.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Context.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Who I Am.....</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Our Relationship.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>What Happened?.....</i>	<i>8</i>
Before Reading this Subsection .....	8
My Story .....	8
<i>Violent Crime in Winnipeg.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Gang Violence in Winnipeg .....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Timeframe .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Conclusion .....</i>	<i>15</i>
<b>Chapter 2 Theoretical Background.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Trauma.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Trauma and Homicide .....</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Vicarious Trauma .....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Violence.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Structural Violence .....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Sibling Attachment Theory.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Sibling Bereavement and Complicated Grief .....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Connecting Trauma, Violence, and Siblings.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Galtung's Positive and Negative Peace.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>Lederach's (2005) Moral Imagination .....</i>	<i>29</i>

<i>Limitations of Current Theory and Research</i> .....	32
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	33
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	35
<i>Arriving at Autoethnography</i> .....	35
<i>Autoethnographic Research Methods</i> .....	37
<i>The Importance of Autoethnography</i> .....	38
<i>Autoethnography Conclusions</i> .....	39
<i>Ethical Considerations</i> .....	40
<i>Self-Care</i> .....	42
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	43
<b>Chapter 4 Self-Positioning</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	44
<i>My Work with Homelessness</i> .....	45
<i>My Step into Learning about Human Rights and Being a Peacebuilder</i> .....	47
<i>The Significance of the Study</i> .....	49
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	51
<b>Chapter 5 The Personal Effects of Losing a Sibling</b> .....	<b>52</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	52
<i>Who I Was and Who I Am</i> .....	54
<i>Guilt</i> .....	57
<i>Sadness</i> .....	61
<i>Lack of Grief and Dealing with Emptiness</i> .....	63
<i>Am I Doing This Wrong?</i> .....	64
<i>Complicated Grief</i> .....	65
<i>I Will Never be ‘Over it’ and my Personal Health</i> .....	66
<i>Connections and Reflections on the Personal</i> .....	67
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	69
<b>Chapter 6 Changing Relationships After Losing a Sibling</b> .....	<b>71</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	72
<i>Becoming an Only-Child</i> .....	73

<i>Changing Expectations Within the Family</i> .....	74
<i>Relationships Outside of the Family</i> .....	77
Romantic Relationships .....	78
Relationships at Work and School .....	79
<i>Taking Time to Move Forward</i> .....	81
<i>Connections and Reflections on Relationships</i> .....	82
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	84
<b>Chapter 7 Structures as a Victim and Peacebuilder After Losing a Sibling</b> .....	<b>86</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	86
<i>I Am a Believer that Violence is Learned</i> .....	87
<i>I Am a Part of the Structural Violence</i> .....	88
<i>The Court Experience and the Justice System</i> .....	89
<i>The Immigration/Refugee System</i> .....	93
<i>Strength of Community</i> .....	94
<i>Connections and Reflections on Structures</i> .....	95
<i>Conclusion</i> .....	98
<b>Chapter 8 - My Final Thoughts</b> .....	<b>100</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	100
<i>A Review of my Recommendations</i> .....	101
<i>The Power of Autoethnography</i> .....	104
<i>The Need for Continued Research</i> .....	106
<i>To Close</i> .....	107
<b>References</b> .....	<b>109</b>
<b>Appendixes</b> .....	<b>119</b>
<i>Appendix A (Obituary)</i> .....	119
<i>Appendix B (Victim Impact Statement)</i> .....	121

## **Losing a Sibling to Murder as a Young Adult: An Autoethnography**

Much has been written about the trauma parents experience when they lose a child who is murdered. Yet, often in these families, there are also surviving-siblings who face unique circumstances, challenges, and emotions. Little has been studied about these surviving-siblings, specifically in the context of young adults who have lost a sibling to murder. Therefore, this research is a critical step in continuing the vital discussion and highlighting this problematic experience for siblings. Specifically, when it comes to my research, Ellis (2009) asks: “Why does social science have to be written in a way that makes detailed lived experience secondary to abstraction and statistical data?” (p. 84). My chosen format of autoethnography does the opposite explicitly by putting the lived experience at the forefront.

In the university institution, there is often an unspoken understanding that the disclosure of the emotions that drive and inform research causes the ‘validity’ to be questioned by our colleagues and fellow scholars (Drake & Harvey, 2014). Yet, through autoethnography, the emotional underpinnings of the research are precisely what gives it its weight and validity. In addition, I add that my writing of this autoethnography gives you, the reader, an intense and in-depth look into an experience that only I can write about in this way. By authentically sharing with you my story while weaving in existing theory, I hope to pull you in, for a brief moment, into the uniqueness of who I am and what I have been through.

Throughout this research, in true autoethnographic style, I include stories and moments from my life that provide context, insight, depth, and authenticity to my topic. Together, the stories, thoughts, and analysis form this research on my experience as a surviving young adult who lost a sibling to murder. I hope, in the end, to answer the following question: What effects did the loss of my **brother** to murder, as a young adult, have on my life and how can this influence the field of Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS)? This study is significant for improved services, programming, and future research for people, especially young people, who have lost a sibling.

### **Research Question**

*In the second year following the loss of my **brother**, I had a meeting with a professor I had done some marking for in the past. He wanted to know if I still intended to participate in the Peace and Conflict Studies program at the*

*University of Manitoba and the University of Winnipeg. We met at a restaurant over my lunch period. This meeting was the first time I had discussed explicitly with someone outside of my friends and family what my plans were. Having deferred my Masters' admission for a year, I had decisions to make.*

*During this meeting, the professor asked me how I had been doing, and we ended up discussing my **brother**'s death at length. Well, the "discussion" was much more my explaining my thoughts on my loss over a half-hour period. I brought out many different topics that used my undergraduate education in human rights and international development to help explain what had happened to me. Specifically, I remember talking about structural violence and how difficult it was to blame an individual's actions when clearly structures were at play that left my **brother**'s murderer in a position to make such a horrible choice. At the same time, it was, and continues to be a struggle to 'know' this, but still have to suffer from an individual's actions.*

*As I ended my thoughts, the professor I was talking to told me he was deeply moved by what I had said. He mentioned that it must not be easy seeing things the way I do. Although at the moment I did not realize it, looking back, this was a turning point for me in my story. This validation of what had been going through my head pushed me to continue this deep thought and different, and sometimes difficult, understanding.*

This story, although seemingly meaningless at the time, is the moment I can pinpoint where my thinking around my thesis topic began to change. As I thought about it, I wanted to make a difference for others who have had an experience like myself. Yet, how could I do this? How could I tell my story while respecting those of others? How could I put everything I had learnt into practice to be a tool for others?

Keeping in mind my story, the context of the number of families and siblings having lost a loved one, as well as violence in Winnipeg, I must now define my research. This research is the study of my journey as a sibling who lost his brother through murder, the journey of learning to redefine my identity. Yet, it is also bigger than this. This study provides insight into my experience with the hope that it can inspire systemic changes to help others embarking on a similarly difficult journey. The qualitative nature of this study has allowed me to provide insight

into potential adjustments to various systems that could have made a difference in my life. These are outlined with hopes to provide further insight into systemic barriers – and solutions – for those of us who have experienced similarly difficult life-changing events, such as the murder of a sibling.

### **Organization of Thesis**

The following autoethnographic study is structured into eight chapters. At the opening of each of these chapters, I offer two things: 1) a memory that was pulled from the stream of consciousness writing I did as an exercise for this thesis, and 2) a photo and a brief description of that moment. These are added to encourage readers to connect with my story and better understand the writing through these highly personal moments.

Throughout my thesis, whenever referencing my **brother**, either by name as **Josh** or **Joshua** or as my **brother** or my **sibling**, this reference is bolded. For me, this is a way to acknowledge his importance in my life and my story. In addition, throughout the writing, moments pulled from my stream of consciousness writing are included. When they are, these direct quotes are always italicized with larger margins.

Chapter 1 begins by providing context to my story. It looks at who I am, where I come from, and the relationship I had with my **brother**. It also provides situational context to the fact this happened in Winnipeg, a city where I was born and raised, but also a city that is known for its crime that for many years was the ‘murder capital of Canada.’

Chapter 2 is an overview of the existing literature. To be clear, there is limited research that exists specific to sibling bereavement following the loss of a sibling from murder. Yet, I do review the existing literature that exists on trauma, homicide, vicarious trauma, violence, structural violence, sibling bereavement and attachment, as well as complicated grief. In addition, there is the inclusion of some specific PACS-related theory.

Chapter 3 digs into my chosen methodology of autoethnography, including ethical considerations. Specifically, I consider my process and why autoethnography was a good fit for this type of study.

Chapter 4 is a short chapter on self-positioning. This chapter looks at some of my past experiences and how these experiences offer a lens into my research and some of my biases in approaching it. The chapter concludes with a discussion around the significance of the study.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 share an analysis of my findings through a series of personal accounts weaved with theory. These chapters convey many pieces of my lived experience that come together to describe my life following the murder of my **brother**. Throughout the writing of these stories, I offer my reflections and findings on my lived experiences and my complex pain following his death up until the end of the trial.

Chapter 5 expresses the story of my emotions and feelings as I processed the death. I present a variety of situations where I felt quite alone to confront the loss. I offer my thoughts and recommendations on how I could have been better supported on my journey. I conclude the chapter with some suggestions regarding why acknowledging and researching sibling grief further are important for fields such as PACS.

Chapter 6 looks at my experience in the context of the relationships around me. I begin by looking at becoming an only child in my family and also my increased role and feelings of supporting my mom. I then move into romantic relationships and also look at my relationships with my university professors and supervisor at two different workplaces. Again, I conclude the chapter with recommendations in terms of how those in my life could have better supported me in my journey.

Chapter 7 describes some of the structures that influenced my experience. Specifically, I look at the justice system, the refugee system, and my community. This section does not fully analyze these structures, but instead looks at their effects on me and my thoughts on them. The chapter concludes with my position on how these structures need to change and how PACS theory and practice can and should influence them.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, concludes my writing with some final thoughts on the power of autoethnography and the need for continued research on this topic for PACS and other fields.

### Chapter 1 Context

*So many times, I thought to myself, "Why me?". I still do sometimes. What did I do wrong? What did I do to deserve this? Why have I been singled out? I was hyper-aware while watching the news. Whose sibling might that have been in the city's most recent homicide? I wonder if this murder was also linked to a gang? Is there someone like me in that situation?*

*I never had answers to these questions, they would just run through my mind over and over, as I tried to answer the central questioning of why this happened. I was very aware that Winnipeg was the murder capital of Canada, but alas, it had never affected me, so the weight of that statement never fully hit me until it did.*

*In some ways, I started to hate the city. I avoided the Osborne area. I avoided the bridge. I avoided any place that reminded me of what had happened. I was angry. But I did not know where to place the anger. Confused anger consumed me for many months as I went through the grief.*



This is my **brother, Joshua Jerome Bentley**. This was taken at The Forks by one of his friends. I was not there for the photo, but I imagine he was out skateboarding and just having a good time with friends when this was taken.

## Introduction

This chapter on context provides essential background to understand my research. It begins with a brief portrait of who I am as a writer, researcher, and most importantly, as a brother. It continues by delving into the facts around my lived experience of my **brother's** death and the aftermath. This narrative brings together news articles and testimonies from friends. Finally, this chapter describes some of the circumstances that play a part in my story. This includes looking at violence and gangs in Winnipeg to understand better the specific circumstances in which my story intercedes. I finish this chapter with a summary of the key facts.

## Who I Am

My full name is Derrek Lawrence Bentley. I am a peacebuilder, brother, activist, Francophone, avid traveller, lover of music, community volunteer, and enthusiastic movie watcher. I was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and raised in the South end of the city. My mom immigrated to Canada from England in her twenties, and my dad was born and raised in Ontario. They divorced while I was young, and over the years, I grew close with my mom and more distant from my dad. I grew up with one brother, **Joshua**. Although he has been my **brother** my whole life, in many ways, it was not until this writing that I truly began exploring more profoundly what having a sibling, and that special bond, mean to me.

My passion for social justice issues was instilled in me at a young age. I vividly remember participating and eventually organizing food and clothing drives throughout elementary school. These types of projects continued and expanded throughout high school as the cause of ending poverty, and homelessness is one that became a passion for me. For as long as I can remember, I have felt inspired to understand better the experiences of people who end up homeless. My goal has been to share this deeper understanding with other youth with a goal of us all working together to force decision makers to eventually end homelessness all together. Thus, when I entered the program, my PACS research intended to look at the topic of root causes of homelessness and how this links with reconciliation and intergenerational trauma with Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Around the time I was accepted into the program, my **brother, Joshua**, died an unexpected death. After deferring my program start for a year and completing a year of courses, I

realized that my research focus had shifted. My research began to focus on my own lived experiences of piloting myself through the complexities of death, grief, and healing. Through my readings and reflection on the *meaning* of my experience, I stumbled upon Viktor Frankl's (1959) work that notes: "for what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement" (p. 135).

This idea of turning my predicament into an achievement struck a deep chord in me. It is my hope, and confidence, that my conducting this research and sharing insight into my own story of hardship, this work can serve the purposes of connection and story while being a resource for others who will face a similar experience in their lifetime. Perhaps even, my research can be a spark to create change, so sibling loss is better recognized and supported.

To close this section about who I am, I would also like to recognize that I have many privileges in being able to write this in a university setting. I am white, male, cis-gender, and heterosexual. I come from a family that allowed me to have a roof over my head and enough food to eat my whole life. Although I paid for university myself, being able to work and keep that income for a university education is also a privilege. I recognize that my privilege places me in a position that permits me to do this writing in the correct setting. For me, this writing is also a way to use this privilege to try and create change and offer better support to those, like myself, that have lost their sibling.

### **Our Relationship**

Simply put, **Josh** and I were not close. Although we did have our good moments, like many siblings, we spent a lot of time fighting. This was a bit more intense than classic bickering though. My **brother** had stolen from me, straight from my own room, and this put significant strain on our relationship. I found myself almost always angry with him. And because I felt so hurt by some of his actions, like stealing and selling my iPad, I seemed to be consistently testing the waters to see how far I could push things. Looking back, I am not proud of some of my actions; however, in those moments, it was a reasonable response to having to have a lock on my room door.

A specific memory I will never forget is driving back from the mall one day, in the middle of winter. I had just picked up my **brother**, and as we hit the main street, I turned a little too fast. The back end of the car skidded and swung out, and the whole car spun 360 degrees.

We ended up in the right direction and just kept driving. **Josh** and I burst out laughing after the fact; it was a moment of pure joy even if it had been scary at first. We spent the twenty-minute car ride back talking about driving stories. I had never felt so close to my **brother** at that moment. Things felt normal, like how my imagination told me they were supposed to feel. It is moments like these that I try and recall.

Although our relationship might have been hard at times, he was still my **brother**, and I loved him. I believe he loved me too. Like many siblings who fight when they are young and grow older to end up being best friends, I looked forward to that time with my **brother**. Of growing a little bit older and being close. Of being the uncle to his kids and he the uncle to mine. This potential of a better future together was something I thought about often. I knew that we would have many years to grow and would long outlive our parents. I looked forward to being present at his wedding and him at mine, etc. Our hard childhood and adolescence did not stop me from loving him and knowing things could turn for the better in an instant.

## **What Happened?**

### ***Before Reading this Subsection***

It explores the particulars surrounding the death of my **brother** and my experience with the shock of the news, as well as the grief that followed. As a reader, you may find some of these details difficult to read, challenging, and even triggering. I would like to invite you to continue reading while also keeping your own health and well-being in mind.

### ***My Story***

“You never think that is going to happen to someone that you know,” said Karli Quigley in an interview after releasing a song and music video about losing a friend who was murdered on the Osborne Street Bridge in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada (Global News Winnipeg, 2014). In a separate interview, another friend named Sabrina Schick described the victim as being “extremely loved, and cared for by everyone...[p]eople gravitated towards him, he touched a lot of lives” (Fraser & May, 2014). And another friend, Kestin Wood, said that “[h]e’s always been one of my best friends...[h]e was a good kid” (Fraser & May, 2014). This story of losing a close friend is one that began on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014, at about 11:30 PM, when police officers responded to an incident on the bridge (Fraser & May, 2014).

As reported by the Winnipeg Free Press, on January 24, 2014, the victim “was stabbed...in an area not far from the Osborne Bridge.” Two people had been stabbed that

evening, and “[e]mergency crews ultimately found the men around 11:30 PM and rushed each to hospital in critical condition... [one of the victims] died of his wounds” (Turner, 2014). The police later confirmed that, for this victim, there had been “extensive trauma to the upper body after the attack” and found themselves asking why the victim was “attacked in the vicious manner that they were” (CBC News Manitoba, 2014). A few days later, police charged a 26-year-old man, Mowlid Korane Mohamed, with second-degree murder and arrested him (CBC News Manitoba, 2014).

More than three years later, Mowlid Mohamed “was found guilty by a jury of second-degree murder...with no chance of parole for at least 10 years” and, in this case, “Queen’s Bench Justice Gerald Chartier increased that to 13 years” (McIntyre, 2017). It was revealed through the case that Mohamed was associated with the African Mafia street gang and that he had a lengthy criminal history, including weapons possession, drug trafficking, and assault (McIntyre, 2017). Justice Chartier explained that “Mr. Mohamed's actions have seriously transgressed our society's code of values... The murder...was unprovoked, capricious and senseless, making it therefore a particularly evil act. I easily agree that parole ineligibility should be raised” (McIntyre, 2017). One of the victim’s friends noted that he was “far too young to die,” and another said that he was “a good kid” (CBC News Manitoba, 2014).

In this case, the primary victim’s name was **Joshua Jerome Bentley**. In this case, the victim is my **brother**. He was murdered at the age of eighteen when I was only twenty-one years old. My **brother**’s life being violently taken away from me turned my life upside down and had effects on all aspects of my life. The obituary I helped write for my **brother** can offer some insight into the person he was:

Josh carved out a path in life that was unique and inspirational. It would have been a great gift to see him live life to a ripe old age; to further witness his ability to question things, colour outside the lines, and live life on life's terms....From boyhood, he was a lover of the outdoors and being active. Karate, football, jazz, hip-hop, bmx-ing, ballet, skateboarding, and so much more—enthusiasm for all things he loved poured out of him....At 18, he had but just begun, and the gifts he leaves transcend death. (Appendix A)

Words could never fully describe someone; however, these words offer a small sample into the incredible person he was and how he affected those around him in many ways.

The events of finding out are all blurry. The shock took over. I remember the sinking feeling the pit of your stomach when you know something is wrong. When my mom called me that morning and said I needed to come home right away. I knew something was wrong. My thoughts spiralled as I drove back to her house from my partner's place, where I had spent the night. I drove over the Osborne Street bridge on my way home. Yes, I drove over the bridge, and I saw the police tape without even knowing, that did not hit me until later.

I got home, and my mom asked me to sit down. Other extended family was there as well. With just my mom and me on the couch in the living room, she broke the news. "Your brother has been killed." Maybe it was, "**Josh** has died." Honestly, the exact words escape me; I just sat there. I did not say much; I did not cry. I just sat there. My mom got up and went back to the kitchen, and I just sat on the couch. Eventually, other family members came and sat in the living room, and we started talking. I do not remember what, but it was not about my **brother**.

The phone kept ringing; the doorbell kept going off. Everyone was calling and showing up with meals. My phone was exploding with texts and Facebook messages. I did not want to talk to anyone, so I did not really. I could not see my face, but I felt like it was simply blank as I stared off into oblivion. I was not thinking about anything. Just mindless staring at the green walls of the living room listening to the murmurs of conversation around me. A few other things happened that day and the following days that will always stick out in my memory.

The first is that the Winnipeg Police Service detectives came to our house to talk about what had happened. Right off the bat, they had a suspect, and it did not take long for someone to be arrested. I remember feeling relieved. There was no happiness associated with an arrest; however, the relief I felt that there would not be a long investigation to try and find out who did this, was a good feeling. The detectives who came were nice and expressed their condolences. I remember one of the two having much experience, and this gave me confidence that the case would be solved. It also made me sad, as I realized this detective had given this type of speech many times. At the time, he was able to give us a bit of detail in terms of what happened the night previous. He was very sorry.

Secondly, I remember going to the Health Sciences Centre to identify the body. We were in the South end of the city, so this was not a short trek. I really did not understand why they needed a positive identification. Clearly, they knew it was my **brother** if they were able to call us to come down. But we did go down. My mom and I, as well as two other family members,

arrived at the hospital. We were escorted through a maze of hallways. A victim services support person was there. We finally arrive in what seemed like the basement of the basement.

My mom and I were told that it “was through that door” whenever we were ready. We look at each other and silently agree just to go in. We do. And there is **Josh**. He is just laying on a table. A white sheet is covering him, except for this face. He essentially just looks asleep. There is a plexiglass wall between him and us. We cannot get any closer than the plexiglass lets us. “His body is part of an ongoing criminal investigation,” is what we are told. We do not stay there long; the whole experience is so strange and surreal. We confirm it is him, **Joshua Bentley**, my mom’s son and my **brother**.

Finally, the third piece that stands out in my mind comes during the days after **Josh**’s death in the lead up to the funeral. The outpouring of support was incredible. I do not remember many specifics; however, the feeling of being supported will stay with me forever. I kept myself very busy during this lead-up. I helped write the obituary, I created a video to show during the funeral, I designed the funeral program hand-out, and I worked closely with my parents to plan every detail of the funeral. I do not think my drive to do this would have been possible without the support around me. In some ways, staying this busy was my way of coping and contributing; I wanted to honour my **brother** in the best possible way. At the funeral, we do not know how many people attended, but we estimate it at about one thousand. The church was full. So many people brought photos, art, and shared memories. It was sad, but magical, at the same time to see connections my **brother** made, but also the support myself and my family had.

The direct trauma and vicarious trauma I experienced through this is something that is difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe to someone who has not lived the experience fully. The intense emotions, ranging from sadness to frustration to anger to sorrow, came at different times in uncountable combinations. Unfortunately, I am not the only one to have lost a sibling through murder. Nor are my parents the only ones to have lost a child. Taking a closer look at these numbers can inform us of how many other siblings are living something similar to what I have experienced myself.



The photo was taken at the popup memorial that was made at the location on the Osborne Street Bridge, where my **brother** was killed. As a student at the University of Winnipeg, when my **brother** was killed, it was a special moment to see this photo filling the full back page of the university newspaper. I never learnt why or who decided to include this, but I have always appreciated it.

(Photo by: The Uniter, 2014, p. 20).

### **Violent Crime in Winnipeg**

Looking specifically at Winnipeg, violent crime is much more common than the average Canadian city. From 1981 to 2012, Winnipeg has been the “murder capital” (most murders per capita) of Canada sixteen times, which is 51.6% of the time (Coutts, 2012). From 2007 to 2012, Winnipeg was consistently the murder capital. Outside of murders, over the same period of 2007-2012, Winnipeg had the highest rates of sexual assaults and robbery and the highest-ranking on the violent crime index of any large Canadian city (Statistics Canada, 2015). For example, in 2011, Winnipeg’s homicide rate was 6.2 per 100,000 residents, which was four times higher than the national average of 1.7 per 100,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2015). In 2012, the rate was 4.5 per 100,000 residents, which, although less than 2011, was still almost

triple the national average of 1.6. When combining 2011 and 2012, Winnipeg had 71 known homicides (Statistics Canada, 2015). This means, in two years alone, 71<sup>1</sup> families lost a brother or sister, a child, or a parent. While 71 families have lost a relative, far more have lost a friend. The ripple effects are huge, and addressing this immense gap in the network of care is essential.

When using Statistics Canada's household size for Winnipeg, which is averaged at 2.5 people per household and multiplying it by the number of homicides, from 2011-2012 alone, approximately 106.5 people were living with these homicide victims (Statistics Canada, 2013). If one looks at a twenty-year period, over 2,000 people would have lived with a homicide victim. These people, along with thousands of others, are directly affected by the violence. If instead, we hypothetically average each one of these families as having three children/siblings, this means there are approximately 142 brothers and sisters who have lost a sibling. This number is over two years for one city alone, and over twenty years, 1,420 siblings. These siblings are just like me and have had their lives turned upside down by another person's violent actions.

When one broadens these crime statistics to look at murders across Canada over a single year period, the number of potentially affected siblings increases greatly. In 2012, the Canadian homicide rate was 1.56 per 100,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2015). With a population 340 times this size, it means that there were approximately 530 homicides in the country over a single year or 10,600 homicides over twenty years. This means roughly 31,800 affected siblings over twenty years. These statistics look at homicide victims and their siblings alone. Of course, the number affected would multiply greatly if other forms of severe violence were added to the calculations.

### **Gang Violence in Winnipeg**

Winnipeg is the city where I have lived my whole life. I was born at Saint-Boniface Hospital, lived in Waverley Heights as an infant and then in Saint-Norbert for my life until I moved out. Winnipeg is a city that I have grown to love and defend to anyone who does not see its incredible arts and culture scene, its charm and friendliness, and its endless skies and

<sup>1</sup> The number of 71 is specific to the number of families who had a confirmed homicide victim in Winnipeg. Although not the focus of this thesis, I feel it is important to note here that this number and others that relate to the number of homicides exclude all those who are missing and not confirmed as deceased. In a Canadian context, there are likely many more Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that are not part of these statistics. Although knowing someone who is missing is not the same as my experience, there is likely an equally as important and difficult impact on the siblings who have been left behind.

gorgeous red, orange, purple, and yellow sunsets. Yet, as my **brother** was murdered, the context of crime in Winnipeg became a new facet of how I see this city. When it was released by the police that my **brother**'s murderer was "associated with the African Mafia street gang and.... [the police] had 'significant' prior involvement with him," it became part of my understanding of why my **brother** senselessly lost his life (Turner, 2014).

When asked about crime in Winnipeg, Rick Linden, a criminology professor at the University of Manitoba, noted that "it is impossible to assess the city's crime problem based on year-over-year homicide numbers alone" (Coutts, 2012). What is so different about Winnipeg, then? Linden notes that Winnipeg has a high-level of "social disadvantage" that he associates with family dysfunction, low income, and low levels of education and health (Coutts, 2012). He explains that Winnipeg has "extensive areas of poverty with high rates of child poverty. One of the things we know about murder and other kinds of violent crimes is that they are much more common in poorer areas of communities" (Coutts, 2012). Other cities that generally rank high on Statistics Canada's homicide report like Regina, Edmonton, and Thunder Bay are similar to Winnipeg in this way (Coutts, 2012).

These areas of social disadvantage are the ideal breeding grounds for gangs, and Winnipeg is not immune to this phenomenon (Chura, 2014). Global News reported in 2014 that there "are about 10 street gangs in Winnipeg" (Chura, 2014). Due to "the migration of Aboriginal peoples from rural and reserve communities, and the growing numbers of new immigrants," there has been the creation of a "concentration of racialized poverty in Winnipeg's inner-city" (Comack & Silver, 2006, p. 1). Logically, the composition of these gangs follows this trend. Youth become involved for a variety of reasons, and the "decision to join [a gang] is often well thought out, and the individual believes that this is best for their interests at the moment" (Dunbar, 2017, 5). Street gangs often make their money by engaging in break-and-enters, assaults, robberies, prostitution, illegal gambling, insurance fraud, and extortion; however, the majority of their profits come from the sale and distribution of illegal drugs (Comack et al., 2013; Buddle, 2011).

As John Hagedorn (2008) notes: "Gangs are shaped by racial and ethnic oppression, as well as poverty and slums, and are reactions of despair to persisting inequality" (p. xxiv). Inner-city Winnipeg is one such area, and it is from these beginnings that Winnipeg became the "gang capital of Canada" that has negatively affected the city's crime rates (Comack et al., 2013;

Buddle, 2011, p. 178). Today in Winnipeg there are an estimated 2,000 street gang members belonging to dozens of street gangs with names such as African Mafia, Indian Posse, Manitoba Warriors, Native Syndicate, MOB (Most Organized Brothers), Redd Alert, Deuce, Nine O, North End Brotherhood, West End Boyz, East Side Crips, and TOL (The Over Lords) (Buddle, 2011; Chettleburgh, 2007). The existing research on these groups shows that they have violent histories that have caused significant harm to Winnipeg families and communities.

The gang-related violence in Winnipeg towards other gang members, as well as non-gang members, hurts people and families throughout the city. Specifically, there are siblings in these situations who are harmed through violence that is out of their control. I am one of those siblings and always will be. The following sections look more closely at my experiences as a sibling whose **brother** was murdered while I was still a young adult. These experiences, feelings, and thoughts continue to build on this context section regarding the important discussion around siblings like myself that are consistently left out of much of the research.

### **Timeframe**

I have intentionally not set a specific time frame, as many autoethnographies do. Although it makes it easier to understand and focus this research if I were to look at, for example, the month following my **brother**'s death, I have chosen not to go this route. For me, my experience is not timebound in any way. Yes, at times, I do measure when certain events occurred. However, these moments all flow together to make up my experience. In broad terms, this writing looks at my experience from the day of my **brother**'s death to the end of the trial. For reference, it is mostly focused on the months after his death, the first anniversary, and the months before the trial and the trial itself.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter is only a brief look at my life and my environment. I could write much more; however, the pieces above are vital to understanding where I am coming from. It started by looking at some of my and my **brother**'s history, specifically that we were not the closest at the time of his death, as well as the story surrounding his murder. Then, it delves into the context of being born and raised in Winnipeg while also noting that, losing a sibling to murder is not as uncommon as one might think. The brief discussion on gangs is important for a later section that looks at some of the structural violence that impacted my experience. In sum, this chapter gives

you, the reader, a glimpse into my life. Stories, always in italics with larger margins, throughout this paper allow for an even closer look into some of these moments and memories.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical Background

*I received a long Facebook message from a friend who I had asked to screenshot all the messages from my **brother**'s Facebook page. He had blocked me due to some of our fighting, so I could not see them myself. I was instantly overwhelmed upon opening the files. There were hundreds of messages. I broke down in tears, reading them all. I had no idea that so many people loved my **brother** so much. It gave me some peace, in at least a small way, knowing that he had lived a good life, even if it was short. He had helped lots of people in a variety of ways and was known throughout the booming Winnipeg music scene.*



I posted this photo on my Facebook feed on the third anniversary of my **brother**'s death. It was taken while we were at a friend's cabin in the Whiteshell. During this trip, we went on hikes to pick blueberries, played tag on big hills, and covered ourselves in mud just because it was fun.

### Introduction

As a young adult who lost his **brother**, how does this affect my work as a peacebuilder? How do my actions contribute to the understanding of direct and structural violence? How has this trauma and the trauma felt by those around me affected me in direct and vicarious ways? To find solutions to these inquiries, an examination of the applicable PACS theories is needed. These theories include explanations of trauma, vicarious trauma, violence, structural violence,

and the strength and importance of sibling relationships. I need to comprehend several concepts and theories so that I can better understand my own experiences.

Following a review of the literature, it is clear that little has been written on the topic of young adult trauma and bereavement caused by the murder of a sibling. Even if we go a bit broader to general sibling loss, when compared to other types of familial loss, it is still the least researched (Rostila, Saarela, & Kawachi, 2012). What does exist, focuses mostly on the complexity of this grief and not on the needs of sibling-survivors (Cicirelli, 2009; Mash, Fullerton, & Ursano, 2013). Therefore, understanding the above-named theories by first defining them is essential to understanding my experience and potentially the experience of others.

These concepts do not exist in silos, and therefore, examining the interweaved relationships between the theories and concepts is important. How the various forms of violence and trauma work together can begin to explain how surviving-siblings might be affected differently. Connecting the corresponding peacebuilding methods to my life will shed light on my experiences and what systemic changes can be made to create change. Given the abovementioned gap in the existing literature, further research is required to understand the needs comprehensively and lived experiences of surviving-siblings following the murder of a brother or sister.

As will be outlined in the next chapter on methodology, the chosen method is autoethnography for this research. My process for the creation of this review of the theoretical background has been to write in tandem with conducting the study. The theories and concepts I focus on below were used to support my writing as I went through the analysis of my experiences relating to the murder of my **brother** and the following pain and healing.

The theories I am looking at can be grouped into three sections, the first being trauma and violence. This overarching theme is central to my lived experience, and the theory that does exist can help me understand how the violent act of murder causes trauma, and this has a variety of consequences. Secondly, there is the theme of siblings and grief. The links to my story here are obvious. Third, I discuss Galtung's (1969) theory of positive and negative peace, as well as Lederach's (2005) moral imagination. And finally, the last section of theories looks at pracademia and how, as an activist and peacemaker, the theory and research of this thesis are more than simply writing. It is, in fact, part of my growth, the shift from theory to lived practice.

## Trauma

All those who have lost someone to murder are dealing with various levels of trauma. Of course, health is important at all times, but it is increasingly important following an event that causes trauma. Following the loss of my **brother** on January 25th, 2014, I am aware of my trauma and the necessity of healing through positive change. This section will begin by summarizing Eric Brahm (2004) and Judith Herman's (2015) approaches to post-traumatic healing. Although both authors do not necessarily focus on the interpersonal level, I argue that the approaches they describe can be used at this level following traumatic events. As trauma is experienced uniquely by individuals, the healing process is similarly unique.

To begin, after trauma, a difficult post-traumatic healing journey begins. This journey is filled with the constant contradiction that some "violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud" (Herman, 2015, p. 1), but that "trauma will not go away unless it is actively confronted" (Brahm, 2004). Because of this dichotomy, healing following trauma requires carefully planned processes that attempt to return victims to "a feeling that they have control over their lives again" (Brahm, 2004). Herman (2015) argues that this is done through three principal stages of the healing process: the creation of safety, remembrance, and reconnection with every day, normal life (p. 155). Herman (2015) then furthers these stages by developing them fully over multiple chapters of her book. In short, Herman (2015) argues that the three stages have been used to guide and create different post-trauma healing programs around the world with varying degrees of success.

In his article, Brahm (2004) focuses on large-scale conflict and genocide, such as healing in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. He describes how truth commissions can provide healing by allowing the sharing of stories that can lead to a feeling of validation and also by allowing one to witness that they are not alone in their suffering (Brahm, 2004). However, despite this, Brahm (2004) then explains that the vast scales of most truth commissions can make healing difficult due to significant time constraints for one to share their story, a lack of follow-up services, and a short supply of resources. Therefore, he argues that local, community-based initiatives seem to be more effective (Brahm, 2004).

To clarify his point, he cites multiple examples including the Medical Network in the former Yugoslavia that used tools such as community integration to "empower marginalized groups" and volunteer action to "help restore the feeling of worth in trauma sufferers" to aid in

the healing process (Brahm, 2004). In the case of Rwanda, Brahm (2004) uses examples of public community lectures regarding the context of the genocide and different healing techniques, as well as the implementation of radio programs that specifically discussed how to deal with one's feelings. Overall, Brahm (2004) makes a compelling argument regarding the need for community-based projects for healing. Additionally; however, I would add that many of the same healing processes and methods also apply to small-scale interpersonal violence and trauma.

### **Trauma and Homicide**

Specifically, as it relates to the trauma of survivors of homicide, the research on this grief experience is a somewhat recent area of research attention; most work in this area has only been done in the past twenty years. Therefore, the theoretical models that exist to look at homicide grief are not fully developed and are still unspecific. As Rynearson and Correa (2008) describe:

When the violent dying is deemed a criminal act (terrorism, homicide or criminal negligence) the media, medical examiner, police and judicial system begin a mandatory, public announcement and inquiry of the dying to find and punish whoever was responsible. The public retelling of the violent dying story is very different from the public respect for the family's privacy in retelling a natural death. Once declared criminal, the public and media demand a spotlighted reenactment of the dying that in, some cases, becomes voyeuristic. Public repetition of the dying reenactment may heighten the distress of friends and family members. (p. 5)

As suggested by Rynearson and Correa (2008), one conclusion that can be drawn is that violent death is quite different from natural death for a variety of reasons, and these reasons include the public-nature of death by homicide.

Although limited, the research that does exist deals predominantly with parents who have had a child murdered and many authors have noted the gap in research dealing specifically with children and youth (Asaro, 2001; Schlosser, 1997). Secondly, other authors have looked at the trauma experienced by children who have lost a parent to violent death, yet none looks at the loss of a sibling specifically (Cohen, 2005; Lohan, 1999). Other than one article that briefly looks at "the lived experiences of young adults who had lost a sibling through murder in South Africa" (Pretorius et al., 2010), the topic of young adult sibling bereavement, specific to murder, has yet

to be fully explored. This project could become the inspiration for eventual research specific to these experiences.

Throughout life, every individual will face some type of loss through death. It is uniquely painful and different for each person. Therefore, this uniqueness makes it difficult, and even insensitive, to try and compare different types of loss. However, these different kinds of loss do exist and Redmond (1989) presents evidence that when a death occurs unexpectedly through violence, like a loss from homicide, the reactions of survivors are intensified. Specific to this intensified grief, Asaro (2001) describes how when a loss is linked to murder, a total of four losses occur. These four losses are as follows: the actual death of a loved one; the loss of friends and family loss due to the destruction and change of the survivor's perspective of the world; the loss of social standing and community support; and the extra-personal loss that can occur due to financial and resource loss (Asaro, 2001). Together, these various forms of loss cause conflicting and contradictory feelings. On one hand, a survivor is likely thankful to still be alive, but on the other hand, there may be feelings of guilt and being no longer deserving of life (Rando, 1993). These elements quickly lead to rising feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame that are difficult to process and overcome (Rando, 1993).

Other research pertaining to loss through violent death primarily focuses on grief and its complexity (Wright, 2016). When it comes to these violent deaths, they are defined as "caused by human intent or negligence" (Armour, 2007, p. 55). Together, this umbrella term is often split into three subcategories of accidents (often motor vehicle), suicide, and homicide (Armour, 2007; Lichtenthal, Neimeyer, Currier, Roberts, & Jordan, 2013). Throughout the research, it is clear that when violence is involved, the loss is different and the survivors' suffering increases. In one study specific to parents who lost children, "53% of violent loss survivors could not make sense of their loss, as compared to 32% of non-violent loss survivors" (Lichtenthal et al., 2013, p. 1).

Although it pertained to death caused by suicide, one study that interviewed 45 adult siblings on how loss and uncertainty manifested in the sibling's experiences and perceptions (Powell & Matthys, 2013). This same qualitative study concluded that sibling-survivors of violent death often are left with a cognitive void filled with unanswered questions (Powell & Matthys, 2013). In addition, Buksbazen (1976) explains that it "remains a mystery...that you can't deal with because there's nobody there to answer when you hit the right answer to the

riddle” (p. 107). Working through these questions while also failing to find hope in the hopelessness of violent death often causes this void to remain as the lack of hope and meaning causes incoherence throughout the death story (Ryerson, 2001). The death simply does not make sense. This reality leaves survivors of violent deaths with exacerbated challenges that cause complicated bereavement and a heightened vulnerability to trauma (Lichtenthal et al., 2013).

### **Vicarious Trauma**

In addition to the direct trauma of losing a sibling, my experience also shows signs of vicarious trauma. As someone who lost a **brother** through violence, I also became the son of parents who lost a child. Additionally, by losing my only **brother**, I also lost all forms of sibling support in my life. This changed relationship of becoming an only child and of witnessing my divorced parents work through suddenly having one son instead of two, plays a large role in my healing journey. This section connects my experience to the concept of vicarious trauma. Although vicarious trauma has typically been used to look at the trauma experienced by trauma workers through their clients, I argue that siblings are also uniquely placed to experience the vicarious feelings and trauma of the loss of a child through their parents.

Characteristically, vicarious traumatization is a way to describe the transformation of a trauma worker that results from engaging empathetically with a client or person who has been traumatized (Saakvitne, Pearlman, & Abrahamson, 1996). Often, the worker reports of traumatic experiences despite the worker not experiencing the event or effects directly themselves (Saakvitne et al., 1996). In broader terms, vicarious trauma is a distinct form of transmission of trauma. It is stimulated by exposure to a survivor; in most cases, this is a client and the client’s traumatic experiences (Courtois & Ford, 2009). It is a negative experience primarily due to it causing a disruption of the receiver of the story’s perception of the meaning of life and hope (Meichenbaum, 2007). The term was originally used specifically in reference to the experience of psychotherapists working with clients who are trauma survivors; however, its use has since broadened greatly (McCann & Pearlman, 1990).

Since then, many authors, including Saakvitne, Gamble, Pearlman, and Lev (2000), have expanded the application of vicarious trauma to a wide number of different types of people who assist trauma survivors—some examples include journalists and first responders (Shah, 2010), front-line social workers (Pryce, Shackelford, & Pryce, 2007), humanitarian workers (Pearlman & McKay, 2008), health care providers (Madrid & Schacher, 2006), and justice system

professionals (Levin & Greisberg, 2003). Many authors have referred to this phenomenon and being a “double-loss” where “overwhelmed by their own grief, parents' capacity to look after the needs of the surviving children is sorely limited....They often just do not have the emotional energy to adequately reach out to them” (Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006, p. 825).

I argue that my experience as a sibling and son also falls within the scope of vicarious trauma. In many ways, I experienced additional trauma, as I became a primary support to my parents, who had lost a child. This support role is much like the role of a trauma worker. Together these theories and concepts offer a glimpse at the uniqueness of the experiences of surviving-siblings. Specific support needs to be tailored to these young adults that have experienced this trauma.

### **Violence**

In its broadest sense, “violence is any physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural or spiritual behaviour, attitude, policy or condition that diminishes, dominates or destroys others and ourselves” (Bobichand, 2012). Generally, there are two sides to how researchers understand violence. Some believe that violence is deep-rooted in human nature, with the argument being that almost all peoples (as many as 95 percent) have participated, directly or indirectly, in warfare at some point (Ferguson, 2005). In contrast, William T. Hathaway (2013) argues the opposite, saying that “[t]his view ignores anthropological evidence about societies that have lived in relative peace, and it also contradicts our knowledge of ourselves as human beings. ...[W]e may feel violent impulses, but we can control them; we know they are only a small part of our make-up.” Simply put, this side of the argument says that most individuals or groups do not consciously choose to act violently. Violence exists, but it does not define a human as a human or humankind as humankind.

These two sides of understanding violence are only a snapshot of the vast attempts to understand violence. Around the world, different languages, cultures, and even different academic fields, use different definitions of violence and these different definitions influence one's worldview. The World Health Organization (WHO), in their 2007 World Report on Violence and Health (WRVH), defines violence as: “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation” (as seen in Rutherford, Zwi, Grove, & Butchart, 2007, p. 676).

This definition positions the perpetrator (a person or a collective) of violence as needing to have intent to use force or power. This means that violence itself is not accidental. This definition also identifies that violence can be the threat of force or actual power that is used “against oneself, against an individual or against a group or community, as in gang violence or repression of ethnic groups” (Rutherford et al., 2007, p. 676).

Violence is not only physical actions. It can also happen “where psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation occurs” (Rutherford et al., 2007, p. 676). Additionally, violence can be directed in different ways: at one’s self, at another, or at a group. The WHO digs one step further and categorizes the nature of violence. They explain that there are four types: physical, psychological, sexual, and occurring through active neglect (Rutherford et al., 2007). To be clear, although there are different types of violence, they can still occur simultaneously and alternate with each other. Of course, this is a broad definition of violence and detailing some of the specific forms of violence in more detailed terms will be helpful in our shared understanding.

### **Structural Violence**

Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace researcher, first proposed and defined the term structural violence (Galtung, 1969). Now, he is considered the contemporary founder of peace and conflict studies. His typology of violence uses three main categories: personal, cultural, and structural (Galtung, 1969; Grewal, 2003). Specifically, Galtung defines violence as being “present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization” (Galtung in Vorobej, 2008, pp. 84-85). He further explains that structural violence occurs when there is unequal power distribution and, therefore, unequal life chances (Galtung, 1969). It is built into structures themselves. The oppressive framework encompassed by structural violence is indirect and avoidable. It operates through powerful governments, institutions, and organizations that ensure their political agendas are prioritized, and by extension, their methods and ideologies enforced (Galtung, 1969).

Since Galtung first described the concept, many scholars have accepted and developed it. Among them are Farmer (1996) and Vorobej (2008), as well as Høivik (1977), who writes that “[w]e know that social structures kill and maim as surely as the bullet and the knife” (p. 59). The WHO’s WRVH similarly includes structural violence explaining that it is: “the physical and psychological harm that results from exploitative and unjust social, political and economic systems” (Rutherford et al., 2007, p. 678). The key to this concept is the invisibility that allows it

to be pervasive. Structural violence can be an underlying cause of conflict, but it can also be an effect of ongoing conflict; this means that structural violence can be difficult to resolve as its source can be unclear (Rutherford et al., 2007, p. 678). In my situation, this includes the structures that led an individual down a path that caused him to choose to kill.

### **Sibling Attachment Theory**

As put forward by psychologist John Bowlby (1980), attachment theory is a powerful framework examining child-parent relations. Specifically, the theory asserts that a person's ability to create a physical and emotional "attachment" to another individual gives them a sense of security and consistency (Bowlby, 1980). This feeling contributes to the development and allows them to take risks better, branch out, as well as grow and develop their unique personality (Bowlby, 1980). An important mechanism to help analyze this grief is Bowlby's (1980) concept of an attachment schema that an infant forms through their interactions with a caregiver. This schema argues that the quality of the attachment bonds formed as an infant, continue to influence interpersonal attachments for the lifespan of the individual (Bowlby, 1980).

Although attachment theory was initially focused on parents and children, many authors have since expanded the concept to also look at sibling-to-sibling relationships (Balk, 2009). These authors argue that the attachments formed by siblings can be just as important to development (Balk, 2009). When one applies this concept to sibling grief and bereavement, the bonds that may have helped create attachment can suddenly become fragile and broken, causing additional interpersonal issues and potential problems with personal development. Although losing a sibling is not the same as losing a parent, the effects can still be detrimental.

### **Sibling Bereavement and Complicated Grief**

Complicated grief has been described as trouble understanding and accepting the death of a loved one (Charney et al., 2018). As explained by Meredith E. Charney, Sarah Wieman, Nicole Leblanc, and Naomi Simon (2018) "[t]his includes intense yearning or preoccupation with the deceased, wishes to be reunited with the deceased, proximity seeking related to the deceased, emotional distress specifically related to the loss, and avoidance of painful reminders related to the deceased." Although not the focus of this research, they also note that there are close similarities (and differences) between complicated grief and depression, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder.

In any circumstances, the death of a sibling is also the destruction of a special bond. Zampitella (2011) explains that, due to a shared genetic makeup, biological sibling bonds are inherently unique. Wright (2016) adds that there is a strong emotionality between siblings that adds to the uniqueness. This relationship is often a connection to family, memories, and shared experiences (Eaves et al., 2009). While also being a reliable source of support, and importantly, one of the longest-lasting relationships in one's lifetime; from birth until death in some cases (Moss & Moss, 1989). Therefore, the death of a sibling, causing the elimination of the previously mentioned factors, can be devastating and often results in complex hardship for the surviving sibling.

When this happens in adulthood, the sibling-survivor faces distinct challenges. Some examples include, as outlined by Wright (2016), supporting other family members such as parents, making decisions around funeral arrangements, and adjusting to their 'new' role in the family. As I have mentioned, Wright (2016) also explains "very little research exists regarding effective support interventions for bereaved adult siblings, and this is an avenue for further inquiry" (p. 35). Some conclusions can be drawn around young adult sibling loss. Some of the negative effects are that:

- 1) Mourning siblings experience a series of negative emotions such as depression (Cicirelli, 2009), disbelief and shock, culpability, and anger (Pretorius et al., 2010), and even regret (Eaves et al., 2005).
- 2) Bereaved siblings are at an increased risk of a variety of health problems (Rostila, Saarela, Kawachi, 2013).

Not all is negative, there are some more positive outcomes that have been recognized following sibling loss. All of these focus on growth and the idea that difficulties in life, even traumatic ones, can lead humans to change in complex and positive ways (Taku, Tedeschi, & Cann, 2014). Some examples are:

- 1) Newly found or a renewed amount of resilience and strength (Pretorius et al., 2010).
- 2) A greater sense of significance and meaning in life (Mash et al., 2013).
- 3) The identification of new opportunities and potential (Taku, Tedeschi, & Cann, 2014).

Again, although these outcomes have been noted in the loss and grief research, more inquiry is needed to look at sibling-survivors in general, specifically while focusing on specific to

traumatic, violent loss. Only then can initiatives and interventions be developed to support survivors.

In addition, it is important to note that discussing the complexity of grief, as done above, must be done with caution. Grief and bereavement are multifaceted lived experiences. Klass and Steffen (2018) articulate in their research that they are: “[R]eluctant to see pathology in grief as anything more than a cultural matter.” They continue saying that “all cultures have guidelines for grieving and expectations of bereaved people....[and that] we should avoid drawing simplistic causal relationships and should be particularly careful when it comes to telling people how they should live and grieve” (p. 6). Living through trauma and the loss of a loved one is complex and Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) clarify that just looking at the negative (or positive) effects of grief on one’s physical and mental health is challenging because the experiences themselves are wide-ranging among survivors, including sibling-survivors. Therefore, I add that this is a clear benefit to studies such as autoethnographies that look at larger sections of lived experience rather than just reactions and responses to grief.

### **Connecting Trauma, Violence, and Siblings**

With these theories in mind and a lack of existing theory specific to young adult loss of a sibling through murder, it is important to note how none of these individual concepts exists in silos. In fact, they all work together and play on each other. Robinson and Mahon (1997) argue that the grief related to losing a sibling is unique and distinctive from other variations of grief that occur following loss. Siblings are expected to spend approximately 80-100% of their lives together which is a higher percentage than any other type of relationship. Therefore, being a sibling-survivor means that a relationship that should have lasted a lifetime has ended prematurely (Packman et al., 2006; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Likewise, as siblings spend much of their lives together, the sibling relationship is an intimate one due to the high number of shared experiences, knowledges, and emotions (Robinson & Mahon, 1997).

As they grow up together, the lives of siblings become deeply intertwined and interconnected, which, upon the death of a sister or brother, often leaves the remaining sibling(s) with feelings of isolation, depression, and confusion (Noel & Blair, 2008). Additionally, this death opens a void in the family unit and may force the sibling-survivor(s) to take on different and unfamiliar roles as they attempt to fill the void (White, 2006). When looking specifically at

youth and young adults, delayed mourning can occur as the surviving sibling(s) takes on a protector role towards their parents, other close family members, and even friends (White, 2006).

As stated above, young adults may also experience a form of vicarious trauma; of living the experience again through their parents. By extension, this means taking on new roles that potentially lead to longstanding difficulties. Gill White (2006) argues that such long-term difficulties may appear in many ways, including over-reacting to seemingly minor future losses, a cynical style of thinking, and overprotectiveness of other relationships in their lives, including that of their (eventual) own children. This all too common experience for siblings around the world, including communities in Canada, needs to be properly understood so that this potential for intergenerational trauma can be avoided. Without proper healing specific to siblings, the loss of a brother or sister from murder can have effects on all the surviving sibling's relationships, and the generations yet to be born.

### **Galtung's Positive and Negative Peace**

As previously mentioned, when discussing structural violence, Galtung's (1969) work identified multiple forms of violence. Along with this, he also defined corresponding different forms of peace. Specifically, Galtung (1969) discusses negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace can simply be defined as the absence of war. More broadly, negative peace is classified as a lack of explicit conflict or violence. For example, the absence of war. However, negative peace does not tackle the importance of need to adjust the systemic processes of conflict and violence. Therefore, Galtung (1969) discusses the importance of positive peace, which can be simply defined as social justice. Unlike negative peace, positive peace looks to not only eliminate explicit violence, but it also tries to address the structural inequalities and oppressions that may have been the root of the conflict to begin with. This additional form of peace must be activated to ensure that existing structures do not continue to cause loss of life or harm. In sum, negative peace is the absence of overt violence, conflict, or war; whereas, positive peace is about the fuller human experience (Galtung, 1969; Grewal, 2003). Positive peace eventually became seen as a potential remedy for structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Grewal, 2003).

The concept of positive peace will be used later in this writing to describe a deeper understanding of peace, specifically internal peace. It is not simply enough to be without internal conflict, violence, or pain. We must actively work to restore and fully integrate one's self into their new environment following trauma. Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace allows us

to understand what this might look like on the micro-scale, even if the original intent was for it to be used on a more macro scale.

### **Lederach's Moral Imagination**

In his book, John Paul Lederach (2005) argues that: "Transcending violence is forged by the capacity to generate, mobilize, and build the moral imagination" (p. 5). Lederach (2005) defines the moral imagination as the ability to identify turning points and opportunities to endeavour along unfamiliar paths and construct new structures that do not yet exist. This term, moral imagination, is directly connected to the art of building peace because generates effective processes that are entrenched in the everyday challenges of all forms of violence (Lederach, 2005). Lederach (2005) does not see peacebuilding as possible with a set of techniques and applications. Instead, he argues that peace can only occur through a creative progression that is almost artistic in nature. Throughout his description of the moral imagination and how it can be used to achieve peace, Lederach (2005) grounds his ideas in different, non-linear ways that allow the reader to be imaginative.

Lederach (2005) argues that a peacebuilder needs to be an artist. He uses this analogy because he "fear[s] we see ourselves to be...more technicians than artists....[O]ur approaches have become too cookie-cutter-like....and as a result our processes are too rigid and fragile" (p. 3). He furthers this by explaining that so far those working in the field of peace and conflict have acted less like artists and more like technicians with an approach of diagnosing complexity and reacting (Lederach, 2005) This method has caused a rigid complacency where the sense of humanness is lost in the analysis. Therefore, humanity in conflict needs to be re-acknowledged in all its complexity and mystery - this is only possible through the moral imagination (Lederach, 2005).

More specifically, Lederach (2005) develops the moral imagination and its goal of transcending violence and achieving peace by describing four principal capacities. They are as follows:

- 1) The moral imagination necessitates the development of the ability to imagine one's self as part of a web of relationships. This web even includes less-positive relations like ones with our enemies.
- 2) The moral imagination commands one to have the ability to embrace complex new ideas.
- 3) The moral imagination requires one to be committed to creative actions.

- 4) The moral imagination needs one to accept and take risks. These risks are a by-product of all attempts to transcend violence constructively.

With these four principles in mind, when one looks at many world events, they are, in many ways, the antithesis of Lederach's (2005) notion of moral imagination. Fear, segregation, and unwavering ideologies force people into a paralysis, leaving them incapable of achieving any of Lederach's (2005) four principles. The paralysis helps perpetuate cycles of violence driven by uncertainty and fear. Without change, Lederach (2005) argues that we will be unable to recognize that the current responses cannot overcome violence. When looking specifically at the field of peacebuilding, when used correctly, the moral imagination "has the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that...transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles" (Lederach, 2005, p. 6).

Lederach (2005) offers a path to move past violence and conflict, even that of structural nature, and build positive peace. Although, at first glance, it may seem like Lederach's (2005) approach can only be applied to direct violence or large conflicts, when I reflect on my own life, it is not the case. When I reflect on my trauma and experiences, it is clear that the moral imagination can and should be used as a model for other forms of violence as well. Based on my experiences, although it can be easy to 'blame' the systems and structures, the roots of these are still based on people and relationships. I add that when combined, Lederach's (2005) moral imagination is a method that can allow one to achieve Galtung's (1969) positive peace on an individual level.

### **Pracademia**

As a student of PACS focusing on peacebuilding, it is simply not enough to contemplate and hypothesise about conflict and peace. I also need to be putting forward potential actions and ways to respond to create change. With this in mind, Byrne and Senehi (2008) continued the development of the idea of "pracademia" to look more closely at this relationship between academia (theory) and that of practice (actual peacebuilding). This final section of theory introduces one important theory from within PACS that will lead to the development of some concrete actions in the concluding thoughts of this thesis. This theory comes from Roger Mac Ginty's (2010) writings and argues that Indigenous methods of peacebuilding are significant in creating successful change towards lasting positive peace.

Roger Mac Ginty (2010), an Irish PACS scholar, explains that “contemporary peace and development is the result of a complex mix of local and international forces” and that this is “hardly a revelation” (392). He goes on to define liberal peace as “the dominant form of internationally supported peacemaking and peace-building that is promoted by leading states, leading international organizations and international financial institutions. These peace interventions and peace-building strategies are justified using liberal rhetoric. The concept of liberal peace is a broad umbrella.... [and] [a]ccording to its critics, it reflects the practical and ideological interests of the global north” (Mac Ginty, 2010, p. 393). Based on this definition, there can be an assumption made, and I have made it previously, that in disciplines such as PACS, the only responses that are valid at the macro level are those that exist within the larger political arena. Simply put, some might say that liberal peace efforts, as defined by Mac Ginty (2010), are the only significantly valid peace efforts.

However, in his work, Mac Ginty (2010) refutes this idea that “real” peacebuilding can only occur through elected officials or academics through political peace talks. He instead identifies the notion of hybridity (Mac Ginty, 2010). This hybrid model has four aspects that are as follows. First, the power of compliance of liberal peace involves things like using force or threatening the use of force to enforce compliance with peace initiatives. Second, the power of incentivization of liberal peace suggests the use of rewards along with tactics to incentivize compliance. Third, the capability of local actors to choose to “resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace interventions” (Mac Ginty, 2010, 403) suggests that local actors can actively, or sometimes without realizing, work against the liberal peace model. And fourth is the “ability of local actors, structures and networks to present and maintain alternative forms of peace and peacemaking” (Mac Ginty 2010, 404). This fourth element of hybrid peace is important to this thesis.

This fourth element implies that peacebuilding practices can also be rooted in peoples’ own practices and traditions (Mac Ginty, 2010). Although he looks specifically at how Indigenous peacebuilding methods have responded to colonial violence and how these practices have been developed directly by the “victims,” a similar argument could be used for other victimized groups. Mac Ginty (2010), drawing on his experiences in South Africa, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland, calls for this bottom-up approach to peacebuilding. Despite having an “insider” perspective on macro-peacebuilding, he still calls for importance to be placed on grassroots initiatives from people taking self-determining steps to build peace. Mac Ginty (2010) says

because liberal peace efforts can often thwart local peacebuilding efforts and methods, this creates an imbalance where local methods are ignored even though they are often the most effective “forms of dispute resolution and reconciliation that draw on traditional, indigenous or customary norms and practices” (403).

Yet, why is the work of Mac Ginty (2010) relevant to this writing? Simply put, the experience of losing my **brother**, shifted my thinking to see an increased emphasis on the importance of grassroots peacebuilding, as suggested by Mac Ginty (2010). It also permitted me to become more of an insider to the true experience of some of the inequalities that exist. I am still a white, middle-class, heterosexual, cis-gender male; however, this experience of losing a sibling and being ‘othered’ and ‘forgotten’ by many of the systems that are in place to protect people like myself, has changed my perspective. Although in theory, I already agreed with the idea of grassroots peacebuilder and I was a participant in some of these actions, as Mac Ginty (2010) suggests, becoming an insider to this type of work provides me with a different perspective. Becoming an insider challenged my thinking and obliged me to reevaluate—more on this in the analysis sections of the thesis.

### **Limitations of Current Theory and Research**

Although many authors acknowledge that the death of one’s child is one of the most, if not the most, intense losses that a person can experience (Horsley & Patterson, 2006; McNess, 2007; Paris, Carter, & Day, 2009). Yet, many of these situations, the family will have multiple children and therefore a child loses a sibling. Surprisingly, the number of studies that exist for sibling loss is dwarfed in comparison the research on the experience of the loss by the parent. This can partially be explained by two key factors. The first factor is that it is believed that, following the loss of one of their children, bereaved parents are at a higher risk of causing significant disruptions within the family unit (Rogers, Floyd, Seltzer, Greenburg, & Hong, 2008). Secondly, parents are likely to experience a variety of strong emotions that include symptoms of post-traumatic stress such as depressions, guilt, and anxiety (Rogers et al., 2008). These emotions also take a toll on the full family unit. However, even these beliefs cannot be validated without stronger research into sibling bereavement to act as a comparative factor. And, I would add that, from my experience, there seems to be a general prejudice that exists towards children and young adults in my context. My experience is simply undervalued compared to that of ‘real’

adults. I have little doubt that this perception of my experience being ‘lesser’ because of my age also plays a role in the lack of research that exists.

Thankfully there is a slowly growing body of research that looks at sibling bereavement, although there are still large gaps in understanding what supports surviving-siblings would find most beneficial for themselves and also for their grief-stricken family and friends (Kazak & Noll, 2004). Many of these gaps are due to varying differences in methodology that make conclusions difficult to draw. Some of these differences include varying lengths following the death that assessment occurs, the age of the surviving-siblings when the death occurred and when assessment occurred, and the way in which information is gathered (self-reporting, assessment, parent reporting, etc.) (Barrera, Alam, D'Agostino, Nicholas, & Schneiderman, 2013). In addition, the research also seems to have been limited by the ability of researchers to find significant samples that fit certain types of deaths. Examples of these types include losing a brother or sister to homicide, to cancer, and to suicide (Barrera, Alam, D'Agostino, Nicholas, & Schneiderman, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

There is no singular existing theory that identifies the various emotions and trauma that a youth sibling experiences when losing a sibling to murder. However, based on my experience, the theories above help explain my experience. Trauma, homicide, and vicarious trauma are all intertwined, but looking at them separately does provide insight. Then, violence and structural violence both played a direct role in my **brother's** death, as did theories and research on sibling bereavement and attachment, and complicated grief. Despite the shortcomings of the existing literature as it pertains specifically to the topic, I do review the existing literature that exists on trauma, homicide, vicarious trauma, violence, structural violence, sibling bereavement and attachment, as well as complicated grief. In addition, there is the inclusion of some specific PACS related theories surrounding pracademia and Galtung's (1969) negative and positive peace. Finally, the chapter concluded with a brief look at some of the limitations of this research, specifically flagging the lack of specificity of the theories reviewed to surviving-siblings following a murder.

### Chapter 3 Methodology

*As I talked to people about my story, I noticed a change. Whether it was one on one or in a group setting, my words seemed to ring a bell for others. When speaking at a candlelight service organized by the Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance (MOVA) in December 2017, I re-read my Victim Impact Statement from my **brother**'s trial. As I re-read this statement and discussed what I had learnt through the process of losing my **brother** and attending the trial, I looked around the room. Faces, downward eyes, staring eyes, tears, nodding heads, hugs, reaching for a hand.*

*I felt at that moment that my words were connecting with people. Others who had also lost someone in their life, my words rang true for them as well.*

*Following my speech, people came up to me and said that they had never quite thought about what losing a sibling this way would be like. Others told me they felt they understood their children who had lost a sibling much more now.*



In March 2015, as we celebrated **Josh**'s birthday, we decided to light lanterns and let them float up into the clouds. My mom and I, as well as some of my other family, all wrote a message on a lantern and then let it fly away. This was my lantern.

## **Introduction**

Due to my own experience, I am uniquely placed to analyze how I have been affected by the loss of my **brother**. Therefore, in order to understand the impact of trauma and vicarious trauma on young adults who have experienced losing a sibling through murder, I will primarily use an autoethnographic method while also drawing upon some secondary research such as news articles, theories, and articles to support, analyze, and explain my experiences. By looking closely at myself, interiorly and exteriorly, conclusions can be drawn through my thoughts, motivations, and actions.

In her writing, Carolyn Ellis (2009) describes herself as “both the author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed...thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller” (p. 13). This thesis is an individualized qualitative study that is innately very personal. As a young adult, how has losing my **brother** affected me? How has having parents who have lost a child affected me? How do I negotiate knowledge of structural violence with the direct violence that has affected me? These deeply personal questions are ones that only I can answer.

As autoethnography as a research method in the PACS field is still relatively uncommon, the following section will serve as an explanation of the method in the context of my story and this study. I do this by first taking a look at my story, in autoethnographic style, to describe how I arrived at this method. Then in the second part, I focus on describing autoethnography and why it is a good fit for this research. I finish this chapter by looking at ethics and self-care. In sum, this chapter is an overview of the chosen method and the safeguards that were in place to ensure my health.

## **Arriving at Autoethnography**

When I applied to the PACS program at the University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg, I was determined to research and write about young adult initiatives towards reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Yet as I took courses and began to think about writing on the topic, I kept on drifting. Each time I tried to narrow my focus, I would end up thinking about young adults who had been affected by violence and, specifically, others like me, who had lost a sibling to murder. Although it took over a year, I eventually realized that I needed to change my research focus to look more closely at surviving-siblings—

young adults who have lost a sibling to murder. Arriving at the autoethnographic methodology is a different story.

*I am sitting in my research-methods proposal writing class, thinking about what to write for my master's thesis. "I think I want to write about siblings and the trauma they experience when losing a brother or sister to murder," I remember saying. My advisor quickly added to the idea that I could interview four to five people on their experiences. I agreed and began to proceed. Yet, something felt off. I was not content. I could not figure out how I would ever be able to tell someone else's story authentically, and I was struggling with how I could weave in my own perspective. With my own experience in mind, I could not determine how I would be able to stay neutral and not let my life influence what and how I heard others' thoughts.*

*Many weeks later, in class, I asked my professor, who also happens to be my advisor, to clarify autoethnography and how the method works. Following this explanation, I asked if it would be appropriate for me to use this method. I had already been thinking about it; however, this was the first time I specifically brought it up as a potential method. The professor and my fellow classmates quickly agreed that it would absolutely work and were even in the best interest of the research due to my unique position.*

*I went home that evening with an unexpected feeling of relief and motivation. The lack of motivation I had experienced around my original topic had completely turned into a new drive and excitement about digging more deeply into my own story to perhaps open a door for others with similar experiences.*

In sum, understanding the implications of losing a sibling as a young adult requires an analysis of my actions, thoughts, and lived experiences. Examining these elements through writing is a way of exploring myself and these moments within the larger context of PACS and my location of Winnipeg, Canada. The questions around this research focus on my experiences, and my stories. Importantly, there are also questions that result from my reflections on myself, the ethnographic subject, throughout the writing process. Laurel Richardson (2000) writes, "[h]ow we are expected to write affects what we can write about... The conventions hold tremendous material and symbolic power over [researchers]. Using them increases the

probability of [acceptance] but they are not...evidence of greater—or lesser—truth value...than...writing using other conventions” (p. 7). Autoethnography is a newer method that, as Richardson (2000) states, has equal “truth value” to other methods. It is for these reasons autoethnography is the evident choice of research method for this study.

### **Autoethnographic Research Methods**

How can one, as a researcher, successfully and authentically describe someone else’s trauma of losing a sibling? And, how can I, as an *insider* of this experience, not allow my experience to influence how I perceive someone else’s story? Autoethnography as a method is a solution to these issues as it focuses on my own story instead of the stories of others. So, what even is autoethnography?

Autoethnographies are “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21). An autoethnography focuses on one’s self instead of the stories of others. Rose Richards (2008) writes about this and argues that the research subjects “are representing themselves, instead of colonized by others and subjected to their agendas or relegated to the role of second-class citizens” (p. 1724). Therefore, as a research method, autoethnography successfully addresses the complexities around writing about traumatic events and experiences. It prevents re-traumatization of others by not asking them to retell their stories. And, it ensures no injustice is done to another’s story by retelling it through the researcher’s personal lens.

Autoethnography is a process built from three parts: auto, ethno, and graphy. The etymology of the word shows that *auto* is the self. The role of *auto* is the critical reflection of my own role through my thoughts and actions as an active participant in a situation (Camangian, 2010). Secondly, *ethno* is culture and it broadens the scope of the work by placing the unique individual reflections within their contexts, both cultural and social (Camangian, 2010). Finally, the *graphy* is writing and is the process of documenting the story (Camangian, 2010). When brought together, this written story and reflection incorporates the writer’s lived experiences within the broader social and cultural contexts in which they exist (Camangian, 2010; Ellis, 2009; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011; Chang, 2008).

Ellis (2004) confirms that, by definition, and autoethnography is a form of qualitative research in the social sciences. Qualitative research methodology began in the field of sociology and was first used in the 1920s as a way to study human group (Charmaz, 2005). At first,

quantitative methods scholars resisted this addition to the research field; they labelled qualitative researchers as “journalists” and “soft scientists” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 2). Qualitative research implies that the focus is on processes and meanings with little emphasis on specific measurements. Alternatively, to quantitative research, qualitative research sees *reality* as being socially constructed (Charmaz, 2005). Charmaz (2005) notes that research is inherently “value-laden” due to the inevitability of a relationship between the researcher and their chosen subject matter (p.8). Therefore, qualitative research acknowledges this existing relationship and that analyzing the context including positionality, history, cultural norms, and bias is important in shaping the overall analysis (Charmaz, 2005). For these reasons, qualitative research consistently answers questions that “stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 8).

More specific to my chosen method, when one uses a method like ethnography, the method analyzes more deeply the role of the researcher(s) in the research process itself (Reeves et al., 2008). Similarly, autoethnography looks at this role of the researcher more deeply by focusing on the single researcher themselves and their knowledge of an experience set in context. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) define this as “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (p. 273).

### **The Importance of Autoethnography**

The opportunities within autoethnography are endless as the method “show(s) people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live and what their struggles mean” (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 111). As one reads these struggles, the opportunities are never-ending for the creation of empathy between the reader and the researcher who is the central subject within the stories. The creation of connections and exchanges of information between different groups, across different cultures, and different experiences are all possibilities. In my case, the opportunity for the reader to experience empathy and see those who have lost siblings in a different light is of great importance. Autoethnography gives me the opportunity to share important information through my lived experienced, while also creating a deep and new understanding of situations, such as sibling-loss, in ways that other forms of research seldomly can (Chang, 2016).

For instance, someone can read that ‘x’ number of young adults lost a sibling through murder over a certain time period, and they can certainly feel sadness that these siblings lost someone so close to them. However, when one grasps the story of how one (or many) of these siblings managed to survive this traumatic loss, they begin to understand much more. The reader is then able to begin to feel what these siblings might have felt and experience empathy towards the situation (Chang, 2016). As Chang (2016) explains, the *graphy* portion of the research is key as stronger information-sharing logically leads to stronger elicitation of emotions. These emotions lead to mental responses of questions such as how? why? who? ... willing the reader to want to know more and to explore these emotions.

I can think of many moments, when I look back, that prove to me how my own story can elicit a response. Not telling my story for my research would be an injustice to myself and those around me. To share my experiences while connecting them to the existing research is a service to my communities, both academic and not. Autoethnography is a valuable research method that allows me to do this authentically. In sum, “autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel and care and desire” (Bochner & Ellis, 1996, p. 24). I hope my readers will do exactly that.

### **Autoethnography Conclusions**

Finally, it is also important to note that the inherent limitations within qualitative research limit this autoethnographic study. As I am the only participant in this research, there will be narratives that my own experience is to capture in my findings. Therefore, unlike quantitative research, I cannot expand my findings to the wider population with the same level of confidence. My lived experiences of losing **Josh** are unique and cannot be replicated in any way, by anyone. McKenzie (2015) explores some of the weaknesses of autoethnography as a methodology. It can be seen as unreliable as it is unreasonably narrow and, therefore, not strong research and perhaps even self-indulgent.

An autoethnography is an intentionally different type of research. There is a growing body of research that focuses on the strength, and even the importance, of autoethnographic research (Cho and Tent, 2006). Allen-Collinson and Hockey (2009) argue that every individual lived experience reflects and offers distinctive perception into understanding the meaning of the human experience. My way of sharing my unique story is mainly by looking at my lived experiences in comparison to the existing research on trauma, mourning, and grief. My analysis

is, therefore, a dialogue through the presentation of moments and memories that are honest and represent my lived experience of my **brother**'s murder and my healing journey.

Although different, my research is rigorous while still finding ways to incorporate emotion and storytelling (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015). As I often draw upon memories of events as a research tool, I have mitigated the complexity around memory by verifying facts through my own journaling at the time, friends and family, as well as media coverage to increase reliability. Consequently, my research is my lived experience yet, through the addition of recommendations and other sources, it is also designed to be more generally pertinent while also recognizing that all-inclusive simplifications cannot be made. My experience is unique yet shared. Armour (2007) asserts that those, like me, who have suffered from a violent and traumatic loss may fanatically "search for reasons or dwell on the missing details in an attempt to have the senseless loss make sense" (p. 55). Autoethnography is a way for me to share my understanding of the senselessness that is the story of losing **Josh**.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As the sole official participant within my autoethnographic study, the ethical considerations for the research revolve primarily around myself. The importance of self-care will be outlined in the next section. However, there is a risk that the dissemination of the findings could reveal the identity of others through my stories of self. This is inevitable as my own stories always exist in relation to their context and environment (Ellis, 2004). As I cannot exist within a vacuum and therefore, others may become identifiable through my stories, especially by those with additional knowledge of my life. To mitigate this risk, the identities of others who appear in my narrative will be concealed through camouflage, the amalgamation of similar individuals, or not including specific details that may inadvertently lead to their identification.

The exception to this identity concealment is twofold. Firstly, individuals whose identities are already publicly identified and recorded (such as my **brother, Joshua Bentley**) through media and government reports are named throughout my research. Secondly, although they will not be identified by name, my parents will both be easily identifiable due to their close family relationship with me. They have both already provided verbal consent for this research. As anyone who knows me and my story may be able to make connections, it was consciously decided to forego any formal consent form. It would be impossible to have everyone in my life sign a form. Furthermore, this is my story, and all efforts have been made to conceal identities

as much as possible. Overall, a decision was made not to bring this research to the Research Ethics Board. To ensure my health throughout the process, my process for self-care is outlined in the next section.

Before discussing my self-care, there are some other ethical considerations that I am putting forward. As outlined by Ellis (2007), there are some considerations, outside of those relating to myself, that are vital to an autoethnographic framework. Ellis (2007) asks the important question: “How do we honor [sic] our relational responsibilities yet present our lives in a complex and truthful way for readers?” (p. 14). This brings us to the term relational ethics which refers to the unavoidable responsibilities that I have to those who are connected to my story. Because my story is now my research, it is my obligation, as a researcher, to look at these connections and consider the ethics of these relationships to honour these people connected to me (Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, & DeRoche, 2010). My way to approach honouring these relations is through self-reflexivity.

Through self-reflexivity, I carefully considered all information that could be harmful to myself or to others connected to my story like my friends and family (Adams et al., 2015; Ellis, 2007). I also considered my **brother**. As he is deceased, and therefore cannot give consent, it was important for me to consider the effects my writing may have had on him and ensure I am honouring him (Ellis, 2007). Although I did not ask for written consent from others in telling my story, those who are closely connected have all given verbal consent to the research. When relevant, they were also given advanced copies of the research, specifically sections pertaining to their stories, to review for any inaccuracies. Although this research is dedicated to my life and my lived experiences, I am confident that my friends and family who are connected will not be harmed in the telling of my story.

To conclude on ethics, for the purpose of my writing, there is perhaps not a singular set of clear rules to follow. There is certainly no magic solution to ethics when it comes to an autoethnography. A tension exists between the telling of what is necessary for one’s own story and construction of self and how this telling has implicit trust provisions with those who are related to the story. Another layer of complexity is added when discussing the death of a loved one, as dead people cannot give permission. However, the set of rules I have chosen are ones that, I believe, are doing good. Arthur Frank (2004) wrote about this, and his words summarize my approach well. He says:

We do not act on principles that hold for all times. We act as best we can at a particular time, guided by certain stories that speak to that time, and other people's dialogical affirmation that we have chosen the right stories.... The best any of us can do is to tell one another our stories of how we have made choices and set priorities. By remaining open to other people's responses to our moral maturity and emotional honesty...we engage in the unfinalized dialogue of seeking the good. (pp. 191-192)

Simply put, the good I am seeking through the autoethnographic method and my efforts to protect those connected to the writing means that the story itself is a gift that may offer readers companionship in a time where they need it the most (Mairs, 1993).

### **Self-Care**

Due to the personal nature of this writing, it could pose potential dangers to my wellbeing. Specifically, these risks include the surfacing of new and resurfacing of old painful emotions (Denshire, 2014) and also the risk of intense public scrutiny (Adams et al., 2015). To the first risk, I made sure to be aware of my levels of emotional stress that risked increasing throughout and following the writing process. I am fully aware of this risk and am taking precautions to prevent the potential negative effects. These precautions include remaining in regular communication with my academic advisor, as well as my emotional support network, which includes friends and family members.

Additionally, I have developed several strategies since the loss of my **brother** to ensure self-care, including regular visits to the doctor to prevent medical repercussions, regular physical exercise and sleep, and debriefings with trusted confidants and mentors in both formal and informal settings. Finally, I am not writing in isolation and will be under constant observation and in communication with my support network.

Secondly, when it comes to the risk of public scrutiny, I have taken time to ensure that I am comfortable with what I include in this writing. Specifically, I have reviewed my writing to make sure it does not surpass my threshold of what is safe and ethical (Denshire, 2014; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). After reviewing my writing, I made sure to remove any references or facts I felt I did not want to be public. As I approached closer to finalizing my writing, I did face some self-doubt if I truly still wanted to share my story. Some fear and anxiety around sharing something so personal surfaced. However, through discussions with my support network, I was able to work through these feelings and move past them.

Additionally, a significant amount of time was taken in writing this thesis to ensure my health. After completing my course work for the program, I had set some hard and fast deadlines for completing my writing within a year. As my writing began, I soon realized that working towards fast deadlines was not a healthy approach to my writing. Before beginning, I underestimated the emotional and mental toll the writing would have on me. I found myself having to limit writing to hour-long sections before needing a significant break. Being someone who was used to writing for many hours straight with tight deadlines, this realization was difficult for me to accept.

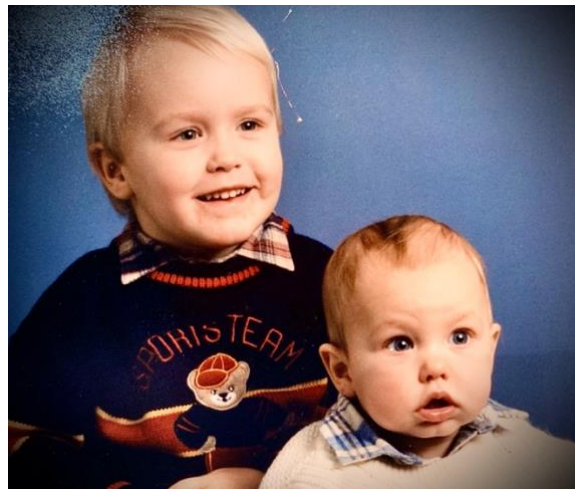
I made sure to take my time with the research and quickly doubled my timelines from a single year to two years. Taking additional time to write has allowed me to ensure that risks to my health and safety have been mitigated. Through a strong network of family, friends, and colleagues, as well as the availability of a counsellor throughout the research, I was proactive in ensuring the surfacing of difficult emotions was handled healthily. For these reasons, I am confident that I was able to mitigate the stress, and when entering periods of too much stress, I took my time before continuing to write. I consistently had immediate supports available who were also consistently watching me in case I am unconscious of my own needs. Finally, I will add that the writing process, although difficult, was also healing in itself. In many ways, the physical writing of my story has become a part of my self-care as I continue to live with my trauma and experiences.

## **Conclusion**

To close this chapter, autoethnography is an important research method that allows deep and emotional stories to be told. From an ethical perspective, as the researcher is also the subject of the research, there is much less risk, if any at all, in terms of such a personal story being misrepresented due to the lens used by the researcher. This chapter began by describing autoethnography as a research method as it related to this study. I did this by first writing about how I arrived at this method while sitting in a course working on my thesis proposal. Then in the second part, I focused on describing autoethnography and why it is a good fit for this research. I finished this chapter by looking at ethics and self-care. In sum, this chapter gave a succinct overview of the chosen method and the safeguards that were in place to ensure my health.

### Chapter 4 Self-Positioning

*I was sitting in a local downtown restaurant with three friends that I hadn't seen in more than a year. I hadn't planned on this, but I apologized. I said I was sorry I had disappeared, that I had been mean and thanked them for their patience with me. Like any friends would be, they were all very supportive and said it was okay. But hearing them talk and feeling that moment, I knew the apology was needed, and it was the right thing to do. I did not know it then, but this type of conversation happened many times in the coming years.*



This image is of my **brother** and me back when we were young. I do not remember this moment; I was too young. It is one of the earliest photos I can find of the both of us.

#### Introduction

In the writing of this autoethnography, I initially found the idea of self-positioning confusing. Was the writing itself, not my position? The short answer to this is no; my writing is not my position. Differentiating the two is central to the autoethnography itself. To offer a clear picture of my experience in its context, I must be aware and accountable for my context and the position that I occupy within this. Positioning myself within this autoethnographic research is essential as it assists in providing accountability to the research (Ellis, 2009). Clarifying my position identifies the perspective and relationships that I have and that I am dedicated to upholding (Ellis, 2009; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Therefore, this chapter on self-positioning begins with a short personal introduction and follows this with an academic and

professional introduction so that you, the reader, can better understand who I once was, who I am now, and where I am coming from.

A portion of my data comes from secondary sources such as newspaper articles and videos. The majority of the data is snippets of self-reflections, memories, and self-analysis. Additionally, in my writing, I have attempted to protect the identities of those who are involved in my story whenever possible. The goal of this writing has never been to place public blame or guilt on anyone; however, this does not mean that others are not involved in my story. When possible, names have been entirely removed. When names have been needed to provide clarity, aliases have been used for these people so that they are not publicly identifiable. To be fully clear, despite this, all people who are mentioned are real people, and all events are true.

This chapter is divided into a few parts as I build a baseline to my understanding of myself and some of my own positions that likely have an influence on the research. The first piece looks at my work with poverty and homelessness that began at a young age. Then, it discusses my learning about human rights as a bigger concept. This short chapter ends with looking at the significance of the study.

### **My Work with Homelessness**

*Throughout elementary school, my school often did a variety of projects to help people with unmet needs. Examples include projects such as food drives, clothing drives, coat drives, and volunteering at homeless shelters and senior homes. These types of projects became normalized to me; they were something that all schools did as it was important for children, like myself, to learn about how not everyone is as fortunate as each other. When I changed high school halfway through grade nine, I was surprised to find out that my assumption that all schools did this type of project was, in fact, incorrect.*

*At my new high school, I quickly found out that such projects did not exist. With no one able to provide me with a good reason as to why these projects were not happening, I took it upon myself to get them started. With the help of one specific teacher who was, and still is, consistently there to support me, the first school-wide food drive began. We called it B.A.N.G. so that it would be a catchy phrase we could all be saying, 'Did you bring your food for BANG?' I remember saying. It stood for Banque alimentaire de nécessité gigantesque*

*(Food bank of giant necessity). By grade twelve, the project had continued, happening twice a year and raising approximately 1,000 pounds of food at each instance of the project. We were giving back.*

*As I began my last year of high school, I was not satisfied. After so many years of collecting food and clothing, I began to realize that this was not the impact I was trying to have. Everyone in the school knew to bring food because it was important, but no one really understood why it was important, myself included. Throughout September, a new project formed, called *Une nuit sans-abris* (A Homeless Night). This project consisted of the same food drive, with the addition of clothing, and it was all to be held on Halloween night. Then, that same night, my graduating class was to sleep outside all night in cardboard shelters and go volunteering the next day. All with the goal of better understanding the difficulties surrounding homelessness and why it is never as easy as just walking into a fast-food restaurant to get a job.*

*Needless to say, ten years later, there have been thousands of students who have participated in *Une nuit sans-abris*. Thousands of students who understand, a little bit better, why being homeless is not something people choose, but is a result of a variety of factors that make the cycle of homelessness hard to break.*

Every time I look back at this project, I am filled with pride. To know I have created a small positive change in the world is a good feeling. What I did not understand until a few years after my **brother**'s death was that this project and experience would also shape my understanding of what happened. As I tried to justify losing my **brother**, I found myself torn between wanting to blame the individual who committed the crime and knowing that it was not that simple. As in the case of homelessness, a piece of me knew that my **brother**'s murder was likely not as random as the police and the Crown attorneys explained it to be. I ended up spending much time thinking about how someone who is homeless does not choose to be in that position, and that homelessness is, in fact, caused by a variety of factors like structural violence that have very little, if anything, to do with choice. Therefore, what can we infer about someone who murders; are there not also structural factors at play?

If one looks at the Canadian Homelessness Research Network's (2012) definition of homelessness, we can draw partial conclusions to how this thinking has influenced my thoughts:

[T]he situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing. (p. 1)

After deep reflection and thought, I realized that, if I believed this definition of homeless and the working I had been doing for years on the homelessness front, I had to apply the same arguments to the horrible events in my life. This realization pushed me to begin to look at and understand the factors that may lead someone to 'choose' to murder. How do similar things that affect homelessness such as addiction, gangs, structural violence, and the justice system also affect someone who murders? As I began to piece things together in my mind, I formed similar conclusions as I did with homelessness. Is something truly a choice, if you are unaware or unable to see any other option? So just as homelessness is not a choice because those in that position do not even realize or are unable to do what needs to be done to change the situation, perhaps committing murder was also coming from a place of feeling as if it was the only option.

Of course, believing this does shape my worldview and shapes this thesis. Believing that acts of violence do not simply come to someone for no reason or by choice, is a key motivator to writing this thesis. This belief is not one that is addressed in this writing. I do not delve into the different schools of thought in terms of violence being nature versus nurture. I am working on the basic premise that violence is nurtured. Therefore, in the case of my **brother's** murder, the act of violence was nurtured through various factors, just as becoming homeless is not a choice, but nurtured through a variety of factors often outside of a person's conscious control.

### **My Step into Learning about Human Rights and Being a Peacebuilder**

*Throughout elementary school and high school, I was consistently involved in a variety of social justice projects. This naturally led to me applying for the Human Rights and Global Studies undergraduate program at the University of Winnipeg. I specifically remember being fascinated by the courses and the content, especially in my third and fourth years. I recall sitting in a course on non-violent social change and being tasked with creating a change ourselves as an assignment. As a small group, we studied different types of actions. We ended*

*up constructing a giant three-dimensional, cardboard 'trojan horse' and bringing it to the Manitoba Legislative Building. It was to protest a new free-trade agreement that was going to have 'hidden' consequences, just like the trojan horse. I finished that project on such a high. Even though our difference might have been small, we were still making a difference...I was still making a difference.*

*In the end, I finished with a double major in Human Rights and Global Studies and International Development. As I continued to learn in the Peace and Conflict Studies program, I realized that all of these actions I had been making for years, were all related to me being a peacebuilder. I recall sitting in class and us discussing peacebuilding. My first thought being, I want to do that one day. Moments later, as if a light switch turned out, I realized that I was already doing peacebuilding work.*

My work in learning about human rights through my undergraduate program and continuing in PACS also furthers my understanding of social justice. Through my studies and research, my passion for social justice and human rights continued to grow and expand. My deepening understanding allowed me to gain perspective as to why so many people in my province, but also across Canada and around the world, seemed to be suffering. My growing knowledge assisted me in better being able to explain why so many were unable to *live* their rights.

*Lived rights* are “the difference between legal words on paper and actions that result in positive changes in the daily lives of disadvantaged people, locally and globally” (McPhedran, as seen in Granholm, 2011). Achieving *lived* rights allows all people to experience, in their daily lives, the rights that are assured to them through written law. Yet, to achieve this, the laws need first to be put into place at all levels of government. In terms of conflict, even though most disputes do not result in armed conflict, a number do around the world (Bentley, Sullivan & Wilson, 2017). World wars, ethnic disputes, terrorism, civil war, and feuding communities are only some examples of the numerous conflicts occurring around the world. As time goes on, these conflicts become increasingly protracted and increasingly complex (Bentley, Sullivan & Wilson, 2017).

One law that does exist, of course, is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Two sections come forward as specifically important to Indigenous homelessness. These sections are number seven and number fifteen. Section 7 of the Charter says that: “Everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of the person and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice” (Canadian Charter, 1982, s 7). The same document specifies that: “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex age or mental or physical disability: (Canadian Charter, 1982, s 15(1)). Yet, along with my struggle outlined in the previous section, my training in human rights causes me to be compassionate towards situations where perhaps not everyone is equal.

As a peacebuilder, I view this thesis itself as an act of peacebuilding, of pracademia. The lack of research in this area is troublesome. As the statistics show, there are so many siblings that are missing the supports needed to be able to continue their healing journeys in a healthy way. As I see this research as an act of peacebuilding for all those siblings in the world, myself included, this does put me in a position of wanting my writing to make a difference. I am writing this, and sharing my life, not just to share, but to create positive change.

### **The Significance of the Study**

*I remember waking up after a great night with friends; I had stayed at my girlfriend's place overnight. I reach over and grab my phone and see that I have tons of notifications. Many, many missed calls and texts from 'Mommy' saying that I needed to call her right away. I remember my stomach flipping over right away...I know something is wrong. I call her, and she says I need to come home, and she would talk to me once I got there. My stomach continues to flip-flop. Thoughts are racing through my mind of all the horrible things that could have happened. Did my dad die? Did my **brother** get arrested? Did my uncle's mom or dad pass on?*

*I immediately got up, changed, told my girlfriend I had to leave and went to my car. I began driving home...left onto Portage, right onto Osborne, continue onto Pembina, right onto Bishop, left onto Waverly, left onto Grandmont, right onto my street. As I am driving, I get a message from my cousin Alex who lives in*

*England, "I'm so sorry for your loss Derrek, but I'm here for you." As I get close to home, a message from Erin, an old friend, "Thinking of you Derrek, so sorry about your brother." I already knew before even getting home; my **brother** had somehow died.*

*I finally got home, see my mom, my uncle and both aunts are there too, but I don't see them at first as they stay in the kitchen. My mom tells me to sit on the couch; I do so. I can tell she has been crying. She sits beside me and begins to speak but quickly begins sobbing. In between sobs, she says that my **brother** had been killed. I knew this was coming from the car ride, but hearing her say it shocked me all the same. I didn't know what to think...how could it even be possible? She asks if she can hug me, I refuse and move down the couch, I just wanted space, I needed to process. She returns to the kitchen, and the rest of the family come and sit in the living room. No one speaks really. The phone keeps ringing, person after person calling. I felt so alone despite being surrounded by people. I realized that, in many ways, I had become an only child.*

After reviewing the literature, it is clear that this topic of violently losing a sibling as a young adult has not been fully researched. It has barely been examined at all. A better understanding of this experience that so many have lived through needs to be done so improved services, programming, and future research can be developed. Specific to the PACS field, this research provides a new framework and understanding of how to approach and deal with survivors of violent sibling loss. It also potentially opens future doors for research of both the quantitative and qualitative nature for the young adult age group. Additionally, this research could then have an impact on policymaking and program-planning as it considers and demonstrates a perspective that is often not considered and is consistently left out of the conversation.

Overall, this study is significant as it will help ensure that others who have lost a sibling through murder are better prepared, have access to properly tailored resources, and through reading this study, might feel less lonely. I hope that the results of my writing and this study can create positive changes both for individuals and at a community/societal level. Maybe new innovations in different forms of support, such as educational and therapeutic supports, can be created as the body of research continues to grow on sibling bereavement and trauma following a

traumatic loss. Perhaps my autoethnographic writing can inspire others to continue writing on the topic and help someone in need along their journey to hope again.

### **Conclusion**

As I wrote this autoethnography, I was at first confusing the idea of positioning. It did not make sense to wrestle with the sense of who I am in relation to the research, while also coming to terms with larger questions about life (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998). Yet, as I grappled with positioning, I realized that the two pieces mentioned above, the first around seeing violence as nurtured and not inherent to human nature, and the second of a deepened understanding of the difficulties and lack of opportunity to *live* one's rights, were essential positions I had that influenced my journey in arriving at autoethnography as a research method. I was also influenced by how I defined the world around me, including the death of my **brother**. Acknowledging these positions allows me to understand how my perception of my lived experience is influenced by how I have been brought up and what I have learnt through the various education systems.

## Chapter 5 The Personal Effects of Losing a Sibling

*“Just leave me alone”; “I want to be left alone”; “Nope, I don’t want to do anything” all seemed to be common phrases I was using. At the time and in the months and years following my loss, these were phrases I was using all the time, that didn’t come out of my mouth that often before then. During this period, it is nothing something I was conscious of, but in retrospect, I see it so clearly. I did not want to see people; it didn’t matter who, family, friends, I just wanted to be alone.*



I consider myself lucky that my **brother** and I were able to travel together with my family to England twice. These trips are filled with happy memories. This photo was taken the first time we went to England together. We had gone to a park for the day and my **brother** and I spent time climbing on the rocks. We visited a second time in 2007 when my family and I visited some of my mom’s family in England. My uncle took us on the London Eye, a giant ferris wheel, while we were there. I vividly remember going up and around and **Josh** simply being in awe, along with myself, and the expansiveness of London. We never had the chance to take a big trip like this together again.

### Introduction

As previously explained, the specific research that exists to help explain my feelings and experiences following the loss of my **brother** is limited. In fact, research directly related to young adult surviving-siblings following a violent act such a murder is nearly non-existent.

Thankfully, there has been some research into gender differences following sibling deaths, as well as the differences between terminal illness deaths and sudden suicide deaths. In addition, there is general research on surviving-siblings following a loss; however, this research often looks at the loss of parents at a younger age or the loss of siblings following a terminal illness. For the purposes of this chapter, the existing research on sibling bereavement has been brought together to draw two conclusions that can help in the understanding of my experience.

The first is that as a male, I likely experienced equal trauma, but less immediate grief than if I was female (Paris et al., 2009). Paris et al. (2009) discovered this by analyzing self-reported data from children who were aged nine to eighteen when they lost their brother or sister. This loss occurred within the last fifteen months when self-reported. Although the sample size was small, the researchers were able to draw some conclusions regarding the differences between genders, such as the one noted above. The second piece of research showed because the type of death is sudden, there was likely a longer period of social difficulties and peer isolation than had the death been not sudden (McNess, 2007). McNess (2007) discovered this through a study with twenty-five young adults who lost a sibling either through suicide or terminal illness. McNess (2007) found that those who experienced a suicide-caused death had increased social difficulties and isolation than those siblings that experienced the loss through terminal illness. Therefore, McNess (2007) concluded that the suddenness of the loss likely contributed to these feelings.

Outside of these two nuggets in the literature, a few additional conclusions can be drawn specific to my own experience. The first can be drawn by looking at Herman's (2015) work on trauma and vicarious trauma and the issues these raise with identity. Secondly, additional conclusions can be drawn by diving more deeply into Paris et al.'s (2009) work on males experiencing less grief. Thirdly, the general misunderstanding of losing a sibling can provide additional insight into my experience of losing **Josh** to murder. Finally, combining these pieces along with other theories mentioned previously can help one understand my experience, and perhaps others' as well, of losing a sibling.

This chapter will look at my experience through these lenses. It begins by explaining who I was and who I have become. It continues by looking at the key emotions I felt during the grieving process: guilt, anger, deep sadness, and emptiness. Finally, the chapter concludes by opening the door to the next chapter on how being misunderstood and forgotten as a sibling by those around me added important layers to my experience. In sum, this chapter looks closely at

the emotional experience I felt after losing my **brother**. It focuses on my reactions and inner turmoil throughout the events.

### **Who I Was and Who I Am**

As previously explained, Herman's (2015) and Brahm's (2004) work on trauma and vicarious trauma help us understand how difficult healing journeys are following traumatic events. Herman (2015) explains explicitly that during trauma, "[e]ven those who are lucky enough to escape physically unscathed still lose the internal psychological structure of a self securely attached to others" (p. 188). Horseley and Patterson (2006) would likely concur with this analysis as they argue in their research that sibling loss has serious and lifelong emotional and psychological consequences for the sibling-survivor. Devita-Raeburn (2004) goes as far as to explain that, when one sibling dies, the surviving sibling loses a part of themselves and often, the surviving sibling must find ways to honour the sibling.

It is troublesome that the existing research places emphasis on the parent-child relationship; this is due to the number of studies on parents losing a child, causing this relationship to appear more valuable than that of siblings (Packman et al., 2006). Along with the lack of research, based on my experience, there is a similar lack of focus on surviving-siblings in society, specifically Western society, on the impact of losing a sibling at a young age. This often left me feeling alone and even disenfranchised as I struggled with my feelings while also trying to hide them to avoid adding a layer of distress to those around me. Based on my experience, this lack of focus intensifies the effects described by Herman (2015) and Brahm (2004).

When looking at my own experience, both of these identity issues ring true. It was my **brother** who was murdered; no physical violence was done upon me, nor was I direct witness to the violence in any way. I was not physically hurt in any way by the perpetrator or through the experience, but it certainly took an emotional and mental toll. I had many feelings of being disconnected from the world and the people around me. In addition, the lack of focus that was placed on my experience and how I was feeling, intensified these feelings of being alone and disconnected. Both of these elements of my experience played and continue to play today in who I am and, therefore, deserve to be explored further.

To start, after my **brother's** death, I always wanted to be alone. It did not matter who I was around or who was wanting to see me; I just did not feel up to it, ever. This was in stark contrast to before his death when I was a social butterfly, always out with friends or doing

something with others around. I felt very alone, all the time, but being around people increased these feelings of loneliness. I felt like the same person, but looking back, I can see that this was one of the first signs that I had instantly changed. Before my **brother's** death, I had still enjoyed the alone time to recharge; however, this had been amplified into being the only thing I wanted to do. These antisocial feelings did not go away and intensified over the days, weeks, months, and years to come. Without me even realizing at first, I had become isolated from friends and family and would only see them with a strong push...at times, even being forced.

*I hadn't seen my best friend from childhood yet really; it was only a week or so after the tragic events. I hadn't really seen anyone, except my family and girlfriend here and there. I received a text from my best friend telling me I was going with her and another friend for ice cream and that they were coming to get me in 5 minutes. I tried to protest but was told I did not have a choice. I quickly said to my mom and family that "Apparently, I am going for ice cream," they all said, "good for you, try and enjoy." When my friends arrived to get me, if I am honest, at first I was not very impressed, and I was annoyed. However, that soon dissipated... it was nice that things were briefly 'back to normal.'*

*We went to a frozen yogurt place in St. Vital. I had never been there before, but it was serve-yourself with at least eight different flavours and every topping imaginable. Then, the dessert was weighed to get the cost. Mine came to more than \$12, and I didn't even care, it was what I wanted. What I didn't expect, though, is that my friends refused to let me pay. It seems so small, but they literally argued with me, saying that it was the least they could do. I really appreciated it.*

*We sat and ate our frozen yogurt. Talking here and there, but the silence was okay too. It was nice to just be with good friends, with no pressure to 'be okay' or talk about how I was feeling. Eventually, we got up and left, and they drove me home. Out of all the things I did in the days and weeks following what happened, it is the one and the only moment that sticks out in my mind as being 'normal' and I will forever be grateful for that brief moment that reminded me things would eventually be 'okay,' different and hard but still 'okay.'*

I did not realize it then, but that frozen yogurt outing was one of the last times I would just feel ‘okay’ around friends for a while. And it would take me even longer to realize that the feeling was still possible. I had gone from a young man with a good job, almost done his bachelor’s degree on time, a great relationship, and a solid social life to being off work, struggling to finish his degree, not wanting to see his partner, and avoiding every friend and person that he could. I did not know who I had become, and I desperately wanted to have the life I had back. So that is what I tried to do. I tried just to pretend nothing had happened. Of course, that was a great plan in my head, but it did not work out that simply.

I was filling up my time as much as possible, staying busy as I always had been. Staying busy allowed me to continue working on the various projects I had always been working on. Sitting on five or more non-profit boards, volunteering to help with social media for other organizations, and planning my projects. All while working and being in school full-time. After taking a month off, I was back at all these things. But I was mean. I had become hardened, and my sarcasm I was used to was becoming much more than sarcasm. The sarcasm had been an outlet for anger, frustration, and pain. I was taking these things out on everyone around me. To preserve who I was, I was destroying the relationships I had built.

As Herman (2015) explains, “violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud” (p. 1), and although I had read this and found it interesting, I did not have an understanding of how true this would be. So true that I did not even want to utter them to myself, let alone to those around me. Therefore, that is what I did. I did not utter them; I kept them to myself. When asked by those around me how I was doing, I consistently answer ‘I’m fine’ or ‘I’m doing alright.’ I was in autopilot, piloting a plane that was a model from before January 2014. Everyone around me seemed okay with this, so I was too. It was great for things to be back to normal.

Unfortunately, as the months and first year went by, it was becoming harder and harder to stay on autopilot. Pieces of the plane seemed to be falling off, and the computer was not keeping me on track. I needed an upgrade but did not know how to make this happen. I began to withdraw again. I could not figure it out. I finished my degree at school, I was working full-time, I was considering starting a Master’s, but I did not feel right. Perhaps this was because, as Herman (2015) explains: “Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation. In [a] renewed connection with other people, the survivor re-creates the

psychological faculties that were damaged or deformed by the traumatic experience. These faculties include the basic operations of trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy” (p. 201). I slowly realized that pretending nothing had happened was not a better solution than spending time alone and avoiding people. I needed to take steps to recover, and this would only be done by rebuilding relationships.

A key breakthrough moment for me occurred about one year after my **brother**’s death as the breakup with my partner of a few years began. I had become distant emotionally, without even realizing it. I no longer knew who I was, without even realizing it. I was avoiding my partner and friends, without even realizing it. I was consistently sarcastically rude and mean to those around me, without even realizing it—more on these relationships in the next chapter. I had changed, and not acknowledging this change was causing growing anger and frustration within me.

It took time—way more than I would have thought. And still today, some of those relationships are not fully repaired, and perhaps they never will be. I still find myself realizing that an apology is needed for some of my behaviour, for taking out my grief on those I love. For expecting that just because I care for them and they care for me, that they will stick around and put up with my reaction. This pull and tug of my identity continues to play out today; however, it is much more controlled, and the outbreaks onto other people have lessened. I have learnt and grown to understand better and appreciate the new me. I continue to reconcile these identities of who I was before, who I am now, and who I want to become. This is an ongoing work in progress; however, as I have worked through it, it has brought on a few realizations. I learnt a lot about my emotions and what I was feeling. The next subsections will look at these emotions more closely.

### **Guilt**

I had to teach myself and tell myself over and over that smiling, laughing, and being happy was okay. I had to learn that just because I was not crying or sad every moment does not mean I have forgotten my **brother**, it just means that I am coping. I had to be okay with being happy and know **Josh** is always in the back of my mind. I had to relearn what happiness means for me. (Appendix B)

I wrote about it in my victim impact statement, but still today, it is something that gets to me at times. How can I be happy when my **brother** is not even here at all? During the days,

weeks, months, and years following **Josh**'s death, I felt a variety of opposing feelings at the same time. Often, these feelings were layered with contradictions that were difficult to navigate. Being both happy and sad; and relieved and angry, are only two examples of some of these contradictions. It is as if my body and mind were trying to balance out my emotions. I was trying to find good in every situation, even though I did not want to see any good. To avoid being overwhelmed by friends at every moment of every day, I coped by feeling some of these positive emotions. However, in turmoil, even these positive moments were followed by guilt for having them.

As I think back on these moments of happiness, I wonder if perhaps this was my way of reminding myself that I was, and am, very much alive and that I must carry on. I was able to use these moments of happiness as temporary distractions, to prevent myself from collapsing in on myself. As time continued, I have learnt that I need to be open to the moments of joy and pain at the same time. Although happiness is more of a constant today and the pain is more of a surprise, the opposite was true closer to his death. During difficult times, bad feelings can be all-consuming; I have experienced this consumption. Yet, I think it is important to be okay with the small moments of light wherever they can be found. It is even okay to search for these glimmers to find hope.

In addition to the guilt I have felt for feeling the moments of happiness and becoming happy again along my journey, there have also been other forms of guilt associated with this loss. It has been hard to accept the guilt and move past it. As mentioned in an earlier section, **Josh** and I were not close at the time of his death. We fought a lot, and this made us quite distant in the later years of his life. It was rare for us to have a discussion of any kind that was not, in fact, an argument. Not having been closer with my **brother**, and therefore, feeling like I was not 'there' for him, left me feeling guilty, wondering if I could have made a difference.

Replaying my life with him, it was easy to pinpoint so many moments where I could have acted differently and been more supportive. I wonder if, had I been a 'better' big brother, would the outcome be different. Part of me knows that this is irrational, but the emotional guilt that I have felt pushes my mind to this place of wondering. What if I had spent more time with him? What if I had not gotten so mad about things being stolen? What if I did not push his buttons at every opportunity due to my anger? Looking back, it is so easy to ask these questions, wonder if they would have made a difference, and feel guilt. Maybe, he would not have been out partying

that night. Perhaps, there would not have been drugs in his system, and it would have made a difference. Maybe, us being closer would have made this feel easier. Although I know these questions will never have answers, the emotional guilt still exists even though it is irrational.

Linked to this is also feeling guilt based on the small relief I have felt at times. Reassurance that the never-ending conflict, of arguing, and of stealing is over. I no longer have to lock up my bedroom. I no longer have to worry about what mess I am going to get home to. I no longer have to not have friends over because who knows what mood he would be in. It felt so wrong to feel relief that my **brother** is gone. But every so often, that feeling would bubble up, and it transitioned quickly into guilt. To be clear, the sense of relief was rare, but it did come here and there as I thought of all the different possibilities of how life could have been different. Combined with the guilt, I also had feelings of anger. There was rarely ever a single emotion, and this made them difficult to share with anyone in my life. Putting words to multiple emotions at the same time is difficult. The wondering led to guilt. The relief led to guilt. The guilt would be followed by anger. In the next section, I will look more closely at this anger. **Anger**

Another emotion that often coursed through my veins was anger. It came in many forms. Anger towards myself for not being closer with my **brother**; anger towards **Josh** for not doing something different that night; anger towards my **brother**'s murderer for making such a horrible choice; anger towards my friends and family for not understanding better what I was going through, and anger towards the systems that failed when they could have prevented the whole situation. I even felt anger whenever people around me would complain about their siblings. I wished I was still able to complain about my **brother** and some would do it right to my face without even a second thought of how lucky they were to have a sibling still and to be able to continue to grow up with them, see them graduate, see them get married.

Some of the phrases I heard that would ignite immediate boiling of my blood, were "Be grateful for the time you had" and "He is in a better place." It was extremely difficult to hear these kinds of things and to separate people's intentions from what they were saying. It took time and practice to be able to understand that, even though these things seemed insensitive and hurtful, each individual was doing their best to say the right thing and console or support me. I learnt that, until someone has lost a sibling in this way, they cannot possibly begin to understand, let alone say the right thing. Yet my anger still existed.

I had anger that some of my world beliefs had been shattered. Why did this happen to me? I had made assumptions without even realizing that this type of event simply was not possible for someone like me. As I dug into this, I realized that I had a belief that was shattered. I had incorrectly assumed that as a white male, my privilege would protect me. And that it would also protect my **brother** and my family from such a tragedy. Through my socialization, and perhaps most importantly, the media, I had falsely come to assume that I was safe from such violence. I was wrong, and this incorrect belief caused me to ask many questions of myself in terms of different forms of racism and unconscious bias that I learned without realizing it. In addition, my belief in relationships was shattered as I became afraid to go out and form new relationships due to the potential that those people would be ripped away from me. At the same time, staying at home was simply a constant reminder of who I had lost. I could not go anywhere without being angered by my environment.

The most difficult anger to deal with was my anger against **Josh**. Angry with him for making some of the choices he made that night. Mad at him for drinking, for doing drugs, for trusting someone he had just met. Even mad at him for not fighting harder to survive so that I could have at least had a chance to say goodbye. My head in these instances was always well aware that this was illogical, but the anger and my emotions took over at times. As this anger built up, the thought spirals around, being angry at him would create additional anger and sadness. Eventually, I would lash out. I had much difficulty dealing with the rollercoaster of emotions.

Expressing the anger, or sharing how I was feeling, was difficult as I felt the thoughts and emotions I had to share were not socially acceptable. No one could understand, and when I brought up the topic of my **brother**'s death and my anger, the conversation was often shifted back to something more positive. I had general irritability for a long time, and it was hard to shake; it still is at times. Being grouchy at work and being annoyed at the smallest of things, there was no relief to the anger. I found that I had a much shorter temper than I had ever had. I could not handle anything unexpected from my normal busy routine, and a tiny change could set off the anger. As I began to realize this and talk to people about it, acknowledging it allowed those around me to understand my anger was not directed at them. This was another step in my healing journey; of acknowledging my anger to myself, sharing that it existed with others, and beginning to develop strategies to deal with it.

The key strategy I developed for this was to give myself time and space to work through the moments and rebalance my feelings. Time and space became a theme to deal with all of my emotions. Having been busy for as long as I can remember, since at least the start of high school, there was a learning curve. Learning how to say no to different projects and initiatives is something I still struggle with; however, I know that I need to keep on carving out time and space in my life to deal with the anger and other emotions that still exist inside of me—more on this in the coming chapters.

### **Sadness**

Having never been diagnosed with depression, I am careful in this section to label what I was feeling as sadness. However, I do want to note that I would not be surprised if some periods of my sadness would have been classed as depression. Perhaps having had a diagnosis would have helped me through some of these periods of intense sadness. Yet, I did not do this and therefore, to ensure I do not use depression out of place, as a diagnosed mental illness, I will refer to what I was feeling as sadness. The deep sadness I felt played with the anger and was difficult to come to grips with this inner feeling.

I would find myself being overwhelmed with the tasks I had to do with my busy lifestyle. I would do nothing for hours and sometimes days, and then rush through a giant pile of tasks that had built up. I was barely getting things done, but I was still doing enough that people were not noticing that I was behind. My coping mechanism of staying busy was unravelling as I needed time to deal with the sadness I was feeling. I would feel tired all the time, I had no sexual interest, and headaches would pop up out of nowhere. My intense mental issues seemed to be manifesting in physical issues. As I continued to try and cope with the sadness, I turned to food to help me handle what I was feeling.

A second way I tried to cope with my emotions was through food. Unfortunately, junk food became a regular piece of my diet as a way to cope. Research shows that during periods of sadness following trauma, many turn to the use of drugs and/or alcohol to help decrease the pain (Khoury, Tang, Bradley, Cubells, & Ressler, 2010). For me, this was not the case; however, I did turn to food. And along with the food came weight gain. In many ways, I was addicted to ‘bad’ food, and this was not good for my health or my body image. Although the junk food tasted great at the moment, it would not take long for a gross feeling to hit me, and I would soon become hungry again. This cycle would repeat itself over and over. As the months and years went on, I

would try and break this cycle, but I would always end up back there from a negative mood swing. Even if I successfully ate healthily for four to six weeks and lost weight, something would happen, and the sadness would return. The cycle would begin again, and the weight and unhealthy habits came back.

The weight gain and overall knowledge that I was not eating well also affected my mindset. I lost confidence in myself and was frustrated with my appearance. These feelings would add additional layers to the deep sadness when it came. I had to buy bigger clothes, I did not want to share with my family what size pants I was wearing, I was gifted things that did not fit, and I was overall embarrassed at the size I had become. At the peak, I was close to 300 pounds, and I just fitted into an extra-large size. I would be able to get down to about 280 before my weight would climb back up, and I would lose all motivation. This process of using food to cope with my feelings is one that I still deal with today; however, I have been able to lower my weight. I am still not comfortable with where I am at, but I have made huge strides in eating healthier. For me, eating good food and feeling healthier is what counts, even if the scale does not show that progress.

During the writing of this thesis, eating good food and feeling confident in my skin, is still something I struggle with. However, I was able to develop better coping mechanisms so that my sadness and eating were not linked all the time. Specifically, in this case, I began counting on a few people in my life who I could share my sadness with. Two specific friends became the people who I could trust to listen to my feelings and experiences. Although they never had much to say, they were always listening attentively, and I knew I could trust them to do that. Building this trust with two people who would just listen, not judge, and not pretend to understand, started to shift my sadness. They were and still are a true gift. I would not be writing this today without them. It took time, but I learned to trust them with these difficult thoughts I would have. As I talked more and more consistently about the sadness I was feeling, and about the loss, I was going through, the long bouts of sadness lessened in length and in frequency. Today, I still feel that sadness at times; however, it is manageable where before it was debilitating.

Now, you may be asking why I did not discuss seeking professional counselling. The simple answer is that I did; however, I was told that I was coping well. I went for a total of two sessions, and at the end of the second session, the counsellor's response was simply that I could continue coming once a month or every few months, but that overall, I was coping well and

seemed to have the right supports in place. I ended up not going back. For the longest time, I felt a weird sense of pride, knowing that I did not need therapy.

When I look back at this experience, I have two thoughts. First, I wonder if I would have received the same response from the therapist had they received specific training on sibling loss. Perhaps, due to the lack of research and focus, there was no framework for the therapist to understand the intense emotions I was feeling. Secondly, I acknowledge now that having more consistent support might have been helpful in managing my experience and understanding my pain. Having someone outside of my circle of friends to count on and to talk to might have helped me continue to progress through my sadness. Overall though, the key for me, like with anger, was to create space and time to work through the emotions, and this meant having not to overwhelm my schedule with activities. Forcing myself also to reconcile who I was and who I was becoming.

### **Lack of Grief and Dealing with Emptiness**

My confused identity, my guilt, my anger, and my sadness were all intertwined and almost all-consuming. Yet, at the same time, I had an intense feeling of emptiness. Feelings empty, of being dead inside, as if a part of me had also died. It felt as if losing my **brother** was also losing a part of myself. When he died, a part of me died as well. Despite all the emotions I had, I felt empty at the same time. Along with this emptiness was the accompanying loneliness.

I had a deep, almost aching desire to see and talk to my **brother** again. I would spend a long time thinking about how he died, even though I was not there—thinking about if he thought of me in those last moments. While also wondering if he suffered at all. Thinking about if he forgave me for the difficult times we had. Thinking about the different maybes surrounding his death. What if I had driven home that night on the bridge, could I have made a difference? I was not there on the bridge that night, I was not a witness to anything, but my loneliness still drove me to consider what happened in those last moments. In some ways, I was haunted by the possibilities of not knowing. It was exhausting.

As a bit of time went on, the loneliness and emptiness still existed; however, I did see my thought patterns shifting. I was moving away from thinking of his death, and more of his life. It was strange, though, as this shift happened, there would be times where I could have sworn, I saw my **brother**—walking down a street from a distance, in a crowd, at a skate park. Although I knew this was impossible, these moments of ‘seeing’ and feeling his presence were a reminder

that I was not always alone. As these brief moments dissipated, though, the reminder of his death came rushing back.

Although these moments also went away, triggers that would remind me of **Josh** still exist all around me. Sometimes these triggers bring back good memories, and sometimes the memories are not so good. Unfortunately, the good memories are always quickly replaced by the thoughts of him being permanently gone. Sometimes simple things like hearing a doorbell ring, my first thought is still, 'that's my **brother**.' When I get a phone call from my mom, my thoughts jump to the phone calls the day **Josh** died. Driving by a skate park and seeing a skinny kid from behind can remind me of **Josh** in an instant. It is impossible to escape these triggers. They are everywhere. With time though, the negative effects of them have lessened.

Along with the negative triggers dissipating, so did the emptiness. Yet, these feelings going away brought me back to the guilt and then the anger and the sadness. It was a vicious cycle and still can be. Over time the frequency of these cycles has reduced significantly. They still do come. Because of this, I have had to teach myself that self-care is okay. Yes, this included learning to be selfish. Now it might seem obvious, but for me, it was not. Taking time to myself, even if that meant having to say 'no' to certain commitments, was a struggle. Yet, it was necessary to help break some of the cycles and to lessen their frequency. But it was not easy, and I was often concerned that maybe I was 'doing grief wrong.'

### **Am I Doing This Wrong?**

Through all the emotions - guilt, anger, deep sadness, loneliness and more - I sometimes found myself wondering if I was doing grief right. Wondering if maybe I was not, and instead, I was cracking and becoming irrational. Staying busy, as described previously, was a way for me to hide the discomfort I was feeling. Not only hiding it from myself, but also from those around me. I was covering up the painful feelings and often heard statements like 'look how well he is taking it.' These statements gave me a weird sense of pride and accomplishment, but at the same time, I knew they were false. I simply was not allowing others to see my quiet suffering and deep internal hurt and turmoil. It took more than a year for me to start exhibiting signs of grief and to start sharing it with those around me. Everything was delayed.

Along with this delay came the thoughts of maybe I was 'crazy' for not feeling anything. I had convinced myself I was fine, and therefore, I worried myself that maybe I was, and this was strange. A series of behaviours added layers to some of these negative thoughts. These

include an inability to cry, poor self-esteem; unsuccessful expressions of sorrow; never-ending guilt; mood swings; excessive anger, and prolonged deep sadness. In retrospect, these emotions seem normal, and the existing research confirms to me they are normal. Feeling them, especially in a delayed way, had me wondering at times what was really going on. Thinking that I was not grieving right and that I was different or crazy added an additional layer to the complex emotions I felt in the first years following my **brother's** murder.

### **Complicated Grief**

I cannot be a super-child or super-person by staying super busy and filling all my time with tasks. It is okay to be angry, it is okay to cry, it is okay to do nothing for a whole day, it is okay to live my life, it is okay to take the time I need, it is okay to be there for myself instead of those around me. I had to learn these things. I had to learn that I could no longer always give, give, give to those around me, but that I also had to give, give, give to myself to be able to process and live life without my **brother**. I had to learn very quickly how to support myself in new ways and this learning process was rough. I pushed everyone in my life away and isolated myself, before I could rekindle incredible friendships in my life. (Appendix B)

Through the research completed for this thesis, I learned of the concept of complicated grief, and it immediately resonated. When people would tell me "I know what you are going through" based on the experience of losing a grandparent, for example, it never felt right. How could the effects of a natural death be compared to a violent, sudden one? This is where the idea of complicated grief, instead of normative grief comes into play. My purpose here is not to compare experiences. I am not trying to say that one grief is worse than the other. Instead, I am putting forward that they are different.

Interestingly, the Mayo Clinic (2017) defines Complicated Grief as a specific mental health condition that differs from grief. The Mayo Clinic (2017) explains this condition as:

Most people experiencing normal grief and bereavement have a period of sorrow, numbness, and even guilt and anger. Gradually these feelings ease, and it's possible to accept loss and move forward...For some people, feelings of loss are debilitating and don't improve even after time passes. This is known as complicated grief, sometimes called persistent complex bereavement disorder. In complicated grief, painful emotions are so

long lasting and severe that you have trouble recovering from the loss and resuming your own life.

As is the case with depression, I have not been diagnosed with complicated grief; reading about it makes it feel like it fits. Reading about it made a lightbulb go off in my head and made me realize I was not totally alone in my grieving process. The Mayo Clinic (2017), when discussing symptoms, adds that “while normal grief symptoms gradually start to fade over time, those of complicated grief linger or get worse.” Again, this rings true when I look at my own lived experience.

When I dig deeper into the various emotions and experiences throughout my ongoing grieving process, saying things are complicated seems almost like an understatement. My feelings of grief were filled with contradictions: wanting to live, but not seeing the point to life, wanting to cry but being unable to, having moments of happiness but feeling immediate guilt, feeling deep sadness, but unable to shake it off like I normally would have, wanting to see friends but isolating myself at the same time, staying busy with a variety of tasks and projects but procrastinating and finding difficulty in finding a routine. These contradictions caused me to struggle, and they did not simply go away with time. I had to actively work through each of them to get to where I am today. Grief and the complicated grief that I believe I experienced are experienced differently. I constantly have to remind myself that it is okay to feel what I am feeling, to live in those moments and that what I am feeling is normal, based on events in my life.

### **I Will Never be ‘Over it’ and my Personal Health**

The number has grown too large to count of the amount of looks or the number of comments that those around me have made that directly or indirectly suggest that I should be ‘over’ my **brother** being murdered. Simply put, people do not understand. I must live with this every day of my life and it is not something that will just go away or that I will be okay with one day. The perfect illustration of this is that my mom, my aunt, and others around me, always told me that one day my **brother** and I would be best friends and that we would look back on all the fights and the arguing and laugh about it. This opportunity has been ripped away, never to return. I will never be best friends with my **brother**, and I will never be over not being able to. My best man at my wedding will not be my

**brother**, the guy I go for drinks with when I am 50 to laugh at our childhood will not be my **brother**, and nothing will ever let me get ‘over’ this. (Appendix B)

With the lack of research that exists on this topic in general, it is not surprising to me that this lack of understanding also exists throughout my experience. With no explanations or research for people to draw from, how can they even attempt to understand what I was and still feel? The misunderstanding and constant inadequate comparison were draining and difficult for me to contend with. Not only was I experiencing the loss, but I also continuously felt the need to help those around me better understand, as I was faced with their misunderstanding. The loss, at a relatively young age, affected my independence, romantic relationships, and potentially even career path.

When my **brother** died, there was an outpouring of grief from family, extended family, friends, and community as people tried to support my parents, and specifically my mom. Unfortunately, as a brother, I felt caught between still being seen as my mom’s ‘child’ in the situation but also being a responsible adult. Jan-Louise Godfrey (2017) suggests that “that the depth and intensity of sibling relationships can be overlooked” (p. 324), and therefore, the intensity of the grief that the surviving-sibling is experiencing can also be overlooked. In my experience, this certainly felt like it was the case. Especially because those around me were aware that my **brother** and I often fought, it seemed as if this further discounted my experience because ‘we were not close anyways.’

In the same study, Godfrey (2017) concludes that the combination of trauma and grief can lead to additional mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. Above, I went through many of the emotions I felt during this difficult time; however, these emotions were likely compounded by this lack of understanding from others. I did not get the support I needed from those around me in the same way that my parents did. I believe this had an impact on my longer-term well-being. The next chapter will look more closely at how my relationships with others and my community evolved based on some of these feelings of being forgotten.

### **Connections and Reflections on the Personal**

Although no singular model can explain grief as it is unique to each person, there needs to be research and work done to specifically identify how siblings losing another sibling

traumatically go through this trauma. Through my experience, I learnt that self-care and learning self-care is of utmost importance. My journey showed me that taking time for myself to relax and reflect is vital to being able to heal and work at my emotions. Self-care can appear, sound, and feel distinctive for each individual, and my version of self-care might differ from another that of another survivor or person. I had to teach myself that taking this time, even if I might not have before my **brother's** death, was vital to my growth and success.

Specifically, when it comes to writing this thesis, this meant taking time for myself. I would carve out chunks of time to write, but also chunks to not think about my writing. I discovered that I could only write for an hour or maybe two before I needed an equally long break to recover from the emotional strain of writing about some of my deep emotions and thoughts. Before my **brother's** death, I was the type of person that filled my time and kept busy. I rarely needed any breaks, and for me, my work was my refuge. Because of this, though, I never learnt strategies to take care of myself. This quickly became an issue.

Not only did I have to deal with the loss, but I also had to struggle and learn how to take care of myself properly, initially with no help at all. Knowing this leads me to make two recommendations that relate to the work of PACS but also other fields.

- 1) Our education systems need to take on the responsibility of teaching the importance of self-care from a young age. This idea of self-care is learning the importance of taking concrete action to maintain and improve one's own health. This can include learning how to take an active role in guarding one's own happiness and is especially important during periods of increased stress or trauma. For example, this could include revisiting things like homework at a young age that indirectly teaches children that, even once school (or work as adults) is completed, it still continues after-hours at home. Children need time to play and take care of themselves. For adults, if they never learn of the importance of taking this time, they may never realize that they need this time just as much. We cannot wait for burn-out or trauma before teaching the importance of self-care.
- 2) When we look at systems that are in place to support individuals following trauma, including peace and conflict interventions, it is vital that we ensure victims have space for self-care. We cannot expect healing to happen automatically. Physical spaces and support programs need to be in place to support those in need. This also holds true for researchers and practitioners. We must continuously fight against the negative stigma

around taking care of one's mental health to ensure we are all able to be healthy and take the safe space we need to do so.

Self-care is a vital part of the process and of Galtung's (1969) idea of positive peace. If one takes this concept and applies it to the micro-scale of self, I suggest that they are equally as applicable. In the case of self, negative self-peace is the simple absence of turmoil or difficult emotion. However, positive self-peace looks at the conditions where one feels cared for and whose inner emotions are positive. Positive self-peace likely cannot be achieved without some form of self-care. Although I am not quite there yet, the self-care I have implemented for myself has allowed me to be much closer to this idea of internal positive peace than I once was.

I also learnt through myself and the reading that grief is messy. It does not flow in a straight line or in a single direction. There is no linear timeline or schedule or set of requirements that easily define the grieving process. My grief had its own agenda that I was unaware of, and it would decide to show up at the most inconvenient times. This caused me challenges in terms of completing work, meeting deadlines, and attending important commitments. In terms of this writing, it sometimes made me simply want to give up. Despite the impact of these waves of grief, they also taught me many things and were a reminder of my **brother's** importance to me.

I learnt, with time, to accept the invitation to feel the grief, no matter the inconvenience to myself or to others. I learnt that I would come out stronger on the other side. I had heard over and over that everyone grieves differently. Not only that, but over time I have come to learn that there is no wrong way to grieve. Through my experiences as a sibling-survivor, and also a researcher and practitioner, I have come to realize that my way to grieve is the right way, for me. This will look different for others and that is how it should be. We, myself included, simply must give ourselves permission to let that grief happen, no matter what it looks like. As PACS practitioners and researchers, but also as human beings interacting with others, we need to all remember this uniqueness of grief's shape. We must build this uniqueness into our models and theories, as well as our simple interactions with people. We do not know, just by looking at someone, if perhaps they are grieving just like I had to. Just because someone's grief looks different than our own, does not mean it is any less valid.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter looked at my experience through my eyes. It began by explaining who I was and who I have become and the struggles that went on with my own identity. It was hard and still

is at times, to understand how I have evolved and changed significantly while still being the same person. The chapter continued by looking closely at some key emotions I felt during the grieving process: guilt, anger, deep sadness, and emptiness. Overall, these emotions came together to create a bit of a cycle that was difficult to break. Still today, I sometimes end up in the cycle; however, it is much less frequent and less intense than it was. Time has helped me develop strategies to break the cycle. Finally, the chapter concluded by opening the door to the next chapter on how being misunderstood and forgotten as a sibling by those around me added important layers to my experience. This chapter looked closely at the emotional experience I felt after losing my **brother** and my inner turmoil throughout the events.

My experience is unique. My needs following this trauma are also unique, and this is clear when I look back and see how differently I needed to deal with the trauma compared to others around me. For others in my life, their healing has entailed continuously sharing about **Josh** or through different acts of memorialization through the printing of photos and placement of flowers. For me, these things have not been the focus of my healing. I do not feel the need to talk about my **brother** any more than I used to; I prefer to remember in my own ways, such as journaling instead of public acts of memorialization. Individuals react differently to the same traumatic event. The needs of victims vary, and we need to work with each individual to help them achieve their own positive peace.

## Chapter 6 Changing Relationships After Losing a Sibling

*The formal funeral service has just finished, and I am in the church lobby, surrounded by hundreds of people. I know many of them who are there to support me, and some of my mom. It is all a bit of a blur. I remember suddenly having none of my family around me, I had lost them in the crowd somehow. There was quickly a lineup of people forming in front of me, hug after hug, condolences after condolences, all from close friends and not-so-close friends. "Here for you Derrek, whenever you need it," "You spoke beautifully," "You are so strong," "Love you," "Here for you," it just went on and on. It was a beautiful feeling in many ways, during such a horrible moment of time. Suddenly, as I was talking with some friends, I felt my arm being pulled. A family member simply said, "Come with me, your mom needs you." A part of me didn't want to leave, it was a good feeling being surrounded by friends and people I thought I could count on. At the same time, I knew I had to leave, and it was at that moment that I realized many, if not all, my relationship would never be the same. I would always feel like I had to be there a 'little bit more' for my mom and family, and my friends would never really understand what it was like. I walked a short way and arrived at my mom, who also had a long line-up of people waiting to see her and say hello, as well as how sorry they are. I join my mom and offer what support I can as she struggles to hold it together. The number of people who have come out is truly overwhelming. In discussions with my mom years later, she doesn't even remember me arriving and this line of people. The whole day was just a blur that we both got through, a day that neither of us should have had to live. My relationships were forever changed, and I knew it.*



When I came across this photo, it was my **brother's** 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was 17 or 18 when this was taken. When I found this photo, I imagined what we would be doing; maybe we would have grown closer, maybe we would have gone for a beer. I wondered if you would have regretted that full neck owl tattoo.

### **Introduction**

Although not specific to murder or sudden-traumatic death, the research that does exist in terms of grieving young adults ranges from discussing emotional changes such as guilt, anxiety, depression, and sadness, to behavioural changes such as trouble sleeping and acting out, and also social changes such as increased withdrawal and feelings of loneliness (Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). In one study by Fanos and Nickerson (1991), the researchers interviewed seventy-five adults who had experienced the death of a sibling in the 1960s and 1970s. Twenty-five of the sibling-survivors were younger than twenty-years-old at the time of the loss (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). In an exploration of the long-term effects of sibling bereavement, those in this younger group at the time of death expressed much stronger feelings of guilt, vulnerability, anxiety, trouble sleeping, fear of intimacy, and an excessive concern for others (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991).

When one considers changing relationships following the death of a sibling, the likely first thought surrounds the relationship that ends between the siblings. In addition, the death of a brother or sister is also the death of a child for the parents and therefore, the structure of the family itself changes. This includes the roles that surviving-siblings play within that family. This

could mean many things, such as the youngest becoming to oldest child or becoming the only boy or girl in a family. In my cases, this rings true. I, in an instant, became an only-child. This chapter looks more deeply at these changing relationships following the death of a sibling by looking at the change of becoming an only-child, the new expectations within the family, and also, changing relationships outside the family.

### **Becoming an Only-Child**

*I arrive at Boston Pizza for a friend's birthday, it has been a couple of years since my **brother**'s death, but meeting new people in social situations is still difficult. I walk in and see my friend; I go and join. I get to talking to new people, and I already know the sibling question is eventually going to come up. I was sort of used to it, but people always reacted strangely, and it generally ruins any conversation. I am sitting across from someone new, and we start talking. I am worried about the inevitable, but we are hitting it off a bit, so maybe it won't. Then it happens.*

*"So, do you have any siblings?" I start off with my classic, "Yes, I have a **brother**, but it is a bit of a sad story, and unfortunately, he was killed a few years ago." The typical "I am so sorry" response follows. I say that it is okay; it is just a part of my life. We talk about it a little bit, but the mood has changed. It takes a while to get back on track to the lighter conversation we were having. I think to myself, maybe I should just say I have a **brother** and be done with it to avoid the awkwardness.*

In another study, Davies (1991) completed research with twelve adults (aged twenty-five to seventy-five) who had lost a sibling prior to the age of seventeen. Through semi-structured interviews, Davies (1991) concluded that participants struggled with psychological growth. Some of the examples from Davies' (1991) research include bereaved adolescents having felt different from their peers. This was often caused by feelings of increased maturity compared to their peers, resulting in a lack of tolerance for the immature actions of their peers (Davies, 1991). Davies (1991) found that grieving youth often withdrew from their peers, thereby increasing their feelings of sadness and loneliness. Overall, the study showed that these feelings of intense sadness continued to exist in different way for many years following the death (Davies, 1991).

For me, I was suddenly alone. I instantly went from having a **brother** to being an only-child. There was no time to prepare. I struggled with this. A big part of my identity was being a brother; I had never in my life said the words ‘I am an only-child’ and suddenly I was thrust into it. At the same time, though, I was not an only-child... I was an only-child-ex-brother-it’s-complicated. Honestly, I did not know how to define myself, and it took me a long time to be okay with that lack of definition when it came to siblings. I do not define myself as an only-child as I feel this does an injustice to **Josh**. Yet, at the same time, I do not define myself as still being a sibling as that part of me has been ripped away. I am somewhere in the middle.

Being in the middle has required the unlearning of defining myself based on my relationship with my **brother**. This has not been easy. When a relationship you expect to last most of your whole life disappears, it takes work to fill that void. Without even realizing it, I had always expected my **brother** to outlive my parents, but it was no longer the case. As I struggled to redefine myself in this middle position, my role in my family and in my friendships and community was also evolving along with it. Again, this change in relationship with my **brother**, who was gone, had severe impacts on my identity and, thus, my entire life.

When it comes to talking about my **brother** to new people, this is something I still struggle with at times. For example, in group situations, especially when dealing with people I have not previously met, I find it easier and simpler to talk about my **brother** as if he is still alive and well. I sometimes worry that people might be angry if they realize it is a bit of a white lie, but then I remind myself that his death in relation to me is my story to tell. In more private conversations, I tend to be more direct and answer with something like, “my **brother** was murdered a few years ago.” Other times, I go with a simple “my **sibling** situation is complicated, let’s talk about something else” as sometimes, I just do not have it in me to elaborate on that topic. In all the situations, I have had to learn to go with the moment and answer the way that feels right to me.

### **Changing Expectations Within the Family**

The death of a child in a family changes the structure of that very family and affects the roles that surviving-siblings play within the family. As was previously noted, feelings of loneliness are associated with the idea of becoming an only-child. In addition, this shift in role and label can also occur in how parents and caregivers change their expectations, consciously or unconsciously, of the sibling-survivor. In the same study noted previously in which Godfrey

(2017) explains the potential for long-term development delays, she also touches on how a piece of these delays is due to changing relationships with the surviving-sibling and their parent(s). She explains that her study “suggests that the reaction of the parents to the death of the sibling is greatly affecting....[and] [t]herefore, witnessing parental grief can be hugely impact[ing] for surviving adolescent siblings” (Godfrey, 2017, pp. 74-75). She expounds by adding that: “Quite a few of the participants said they felt responsible for their parents’ wellbeing and some took on personal care of their parents. Adolescents tend to stay around home when that happens so their normal process of separating from parents is influenced by this desire to remain at home and look after their parents” (Godfrey in The Psychopaedia Team, 2016).

I am beginning this section by briefly talking about my relationship with my dad before moving on to my mom. Before my **brother**’s death, my relationship with my dad was already rocky. Needless to say, my **brother** dying did not improve the relationship. If anything, it got worse. With so many unresolved issues between us, my dad and I do not have a strong relationship. With my parents divorced, I rarely see him, and we only text here and there. Throughout the funeral planning process and in the months and years since, although we have seen each other and chat here and there, my dad has not been a significant part of my story. Although I hoped that perhaps losing one son, would bring my dad and me closer together, this has not been the case. As he deals with the pain, and I do as well, the relationship simply has not improved. My dad is still my dad; however, in the context of my **brother**’s death, my relationship with him did not change; we remained distant.

*“Derrek, you need to do what you need to do; I will be okay” is the type of phrase I remember hearing over and over from my mom. She has always wanted the best for me. Like any parents I guess, she has wanted me to be myself and do amazing things. As I was deciding to move out into an apartment, the phrase popped up again “Derrek, it is okay, I will be okay” as I spoke with her with worry in my voice about her living on her own. Maybe my worry was misplaced, but it was there. We had come to count on each other, and I needed her reassurance to know it was okay for me to take this next life step.*

When it comes to myself and my mom, we are much closer now than we were. We count on each other in various ways, mostly for emotional support and to talk things out. Following my **brother**’s death, this relationship was strengthened, but it took time. It was just my mom and me

now, and I felt that the expectations of me had changed. I felt a strange sense of pride in my newfound responsibility of being 'alone' in supporting my mom, but it also added an intense pressure of living up to this role I felt I was in. And although generally it went well, I sometimes found myself lashing out in anger from pent up frustration of being in this new role. I want to stress that in some ways, the role was self-imposed; I felt the need to support my mom now that it was just the two of us. This need also helped me feel a purpose in my life.

I travelled quite a bit for various volunteer work in the time before my **brother's** death and also in the time after. For my mom, there was a noticeable change in her communication with me when I was leaving on one of these trips. I was asked much more often if I was okay, asked if I was on the plane, asked if I had arrived safely, etc. Although annoying at times, I understood that extra communication was important for my mom to ensure I was safe. I obliged because I did not want her to worry more than she already was. I did not really understand the extra worry, though. For me, I was travelling like I normally had, nothing was different. But it seemed like for my mom, there had been a shift, and I tried my best to adjust and accept this shift.

My lack of understanding changed when I moved out and into my own apartment about three years after my **brother's** murder. The process of leaving my mom all alone in my childhood home left me with intense feelings of worry. Not being around consistently had me worrying about my mom's well-being. I suddenly understood how she likely was feeling when I was away. This newfound understanding of her feelings and thought processes made me much more considerate and timelier in answering messages. I transitioned from seeing the extra texts as a chore, to wanting to answer with empathy and thoughtfulness.

Although I did grow closer with my mom, we still had our pinch points and issues. Specifically, there were some difficult conversations we had to have around my **brother's** death and some deep disagreements that have resulted in some tough moments. The most difficult point of divergence surrounded the role of the justice system and acceptable punishment for the perpetrator. Without getting into details of my mom's opinion, simply put, it differed greatly from mine. This made it hard to talk about anything trial or justice system related. Having learnt of different forms of justice, such as restorative justice, I have my issues with the way justice is completed in Canada. Retribution is not what I was looking for through the process, but it was my only choice.

Needless to say, my goals of wanting to speak with the perpetrator, of wanting to understand what happened, of wanting him to heal as well and learn to be better, were not necessarily goals my mom or other family members held. This led to some frustration and anger between my mom and me. After trying to talk with her a few times on the topic, I realized it simply was not worth the argument. Having to avoid some topics of conversation, though, put a strain on our closeness. At times when I wanted to talk about the circumstances around my **brother's** death, we disagreed, making us both uncomfortable. But, if I was not talking to my mom about my **brother**, then who? Without a close relationship with my dad and no other siblings, I had to develop strategies to be able to still talk to my mom about my **brother**, without touching on some of the more difficult topics.

An additional change that came to me in the context of my family was the increased importance of family itself. In Manitoba, the number of family members I have here is limited. Yet, this family has always been important to me. Every special occasion in my memory, such as birthdays or Christmases, has always included the same core group of family. Following my **brother's** death, this importance increased. Since 2014, this group of four family members made a commitment to have Sunday dinners together, and this has not stopped; very few dinners have been missed over the past six years. These Sundays are a way to spend time together by sharing food and playing card games after. They are also a way to remember **Josh**. Although over time, our discussions around things like the murder and the trial dissipated, these consistent Sunday dinners started because of him. Losing him became a reminder of how our time on earth can be short, and we need to spend it with the people we love. Although I wish I could have **Josh** back, I am thankful that he continues to remind me, every Sunday, of the importance of family and nurturing relationships by spending quality time together.

### **Relationships Outside of the Family**

Godfrey (2017) writes about how losing a sibling as a youth can cause longer-term development issues in a few important areas, two of which will be elaborated here: romantic relationships and career progression. In Godfrey's (2017) study, she finds that many participants avoided dating and romantic relationships entirely. In other instances, participants experienced additional trouble in forming relationships (Godfrey, 2017). In both cases, this was due to a fear of being unable to bear the pain of a romantic relationship, not working out (Godfrey, 2017). Godfrey (2017) explains that: "An overwhelming theme in the data was the reluctance of

participants to become involved in romantic relationships following the loss of their sibling. Some participants expressed that the thought of experiencing the pain of a relationship that ended was too much to bear.” (p. 310). In addition, as life progresses, Godfrey’s (2017) findings also support anxious attitudes towards having children due to a fear that what happened to one’s sibling might happen to their own child.

Secondly, when it comes to career choices, Godfrey (2017) notes that the experience of losing a sibling often caused school and university studies to suffer among participants. The loss led to a diminished ability to concentrate and difficulty from study participants to apply themselves and submit assignments on time (Godfrey, 2017). These struggles, especially at the university-level, had “long-ranging effects on career choices if they can’t get through the degree they want” (Godfrey in The Psychopaedia Team, 2016). My experience with both of these types of relationships is explored in the next two subsections.

### ***Romantic Relationships***

When it comes to romantic relationships, I have been single most of the time since my **brother**’s death. Previous to his death, I had been in the longest relationship of my life. At the time of his death, it had been approximately two years that we had been together. I had been staying at my partner’s place the night of his demise. I woke up at my partner’s place to the numerous texts from my mom. Therefore, my partner was linked to what I was going through in ways that I did not understand at the time. The week and months following his death put a strain on my relationship. I did not want to spend time with my partner, and the emotions described in the previous section were often taken out on her. My anger, sadness, guilt and emptiness were taken out on her. I was not doing this consciously at the moment, but in retrospect, perhaps subconsciously, I was doing this because I did not think she would leave me. A year after his death, leaving me is what she did.

It was a messy breakup, and to protect those difficult moments, I am choosing not to write in more detail about them here. For me, though, it felt like I was going through another period of loss all over again. The emotions I had taken out on her no longer had an outlet, and I was required to deal with them, but twofold; the emotion of my **brother** dying was now layered with the emotion of losing my partner. It was hard. I was now dealing with what I had avoided dealing with. I pushed other people away and was angry with myself for how I had ended up

where I was. I felt like there was no one who cared about me and that I was even more alone than I was before.

With time, I was able to work through these emotions and today, my ex-partner and I are now friends and on good terms. Since this breakup, I have remained single. I have tried dating and seeing where things might go with others; however, it never seems to work out. I am good at finding excuses for a prospective relationship not to work out. Through writing this thesis and some of the research, it has allowed me to discover and begin working at the fear I have around losing someone else. As Godfrey (2017) discusses in her research, perhaps I have a fear of losing someone else, and therefore a new relationship is simply not yet a risk that I am to take. A consequence of losing someone so close to me, and losing a second person through my relationship, has been this fear of continued loss. Working through this fear is a task that is still at hand for me as I walk down the path of healing.

### *Relationships at Work and School*

For my own career, it had barely started when my **brother** died. I had been working at a non-profit for about three years and had recently applied to start a position with a branch of the government. The non-profit I was at was very accommodating, and I was given enough paid-time-off throughout the process for as long as I needed. I slowly went back to work, and I continued to be supported by my boss at the time in any way that I needed. I cannot imagine what that period would have been like had I had only a few paid days off available. I consider myself lucky to have had an employer that was understanding as I know that is not always the case when it comes to grieving and mental health. Although sick time exists for things like mental health, in my experience, the stigma around using sick time for this reason still exists. I am still thankful today for the relationship I had built with my boss at the time that allowed for flexibility and confidence that I would have a job to return to.

Similarly, I was in the final year of my bachelor's degree at the time, and again I mostly lucked out. I had very understanding professors at the time who all, after about a month off, helped me catch up in my course so I could complete them. I had one specific professor who went above and beyond my expectations and gave me the option to complete the course through private meetings with the professor to avoid having to be in a classroom setting. Another professor did all the paperwork for me to be able to take the final exam at a later date. I finished these courses with normal marks that I was used to and was not penalized in any way. My

professors respected what I was going through, and even though they did not understand, I felt supported. My relationships with these professors became strong during these difficult times, and whenever I see them, I cannot express my gratitude enough. I cannot imagine how much more difficult my experience would have been without this support from my boss at work and professors at school.

Unfortunately, though, my experience from a university and career perspective was not all positive. Two specific elements are strong reminders to me that certain systems in place do not take into consideration the mental health of survivors of trauma. The first experience I am referencing features my employer when it came to my **brother**'s murder trial. I will not get into the specifics here about the justice system itself; however, I do want to address my employment at the time. As the trial approached, I spoke to my boss about getting paid time off to be able to attend the trial. After my boss spoke with the human resources (HR) department, I was told that it simply was not possible. I was told that a leave-without-pay might be possible, but even then, I would have to pay into benefits to keep my coverage going.

I was not happy with that result, so I escalated my concerns. I spoke with a union representative, with the director of HR, with my department's vice-president, and with the institution CEO, and I was unable to get a different answer. In each instance, I had to retell my story, which was retraumatizing in itself. Each time, I was told something similar to "I am so sorry this happened to you, I will make sure we find a solution." Yet, time and time again, there was no solution, and the sympathy I was shown resulted in no action. I ended up having to go to my doctor, and again retell my story, to be able to go on stress leave during a difficult time. Although I tried to work with my employer and the union, even offering to make up hours whenever possible, I was told that they did not want to 'set a precedent.' To this day, I still ask myself, 'why wouldn't an employer or a union want to set such a beautiful precedent when an employee wishes to attend the murder trial of their **brother**?' I wonder if maybe things would have been different had it been my child instead of my **brother**.

The second experience that was a harsh reminder was working with the academic advising department of my university following my **brother**'s death. I was specifically looking to be reimbursed for a course that I had decided to drop. I had only participated in three weeks of the course before my **brother**'s death. I proceeded to miss the next six weeks before I was ready to approach academic advising to drop the course and request a refund. Dropping the course was

easy as I had not passed the deadline yet; however, a reimbursement was a complex process. I had explained the situation to an academic advisor who had seen the news of my **brother's** death, but this explanation was not considered adequate. The academic advisor, similar to my employer years later, said they were sorry for my loss; however, I did little to support me during the time.

To get a reimbursement, I was required to write out what had happened and submit the correct form. I had to include 'proof' in terms of a death certificate and news articles to show that I 'deserved' a reimbursement. Again, having to do this was retraumatizing. I had already told my story to all my professors and an academic advisor, and now I was being forced to have to write it all down so that my case could be evaluated. I did not participate in this process as I could not handle it at the time, and I accepted the financial loss of the course. I was frustrated that the human connection of seeing my pain was not enough. Recalling my experience with my employer not giving me the time off, again, the human connection with people I knew and had worked with for years failed to result in real understanding. Both institutions hid behind the bureaucracy of approvals and in the process, retraumatizing me and denying the relationships that had been built and our basic empathetic human connection.

Overall, Godfrey (2017) sums up relationships for someone who has lost a sibling by saying that "siblings who lost their only sibling and became an only child found it was a deeply lonely experience" (p. 78). When speaking about this research, she also notes that "milestones like finishing school, getting married, having a child or as parents age, participants tended to revisit those feelings of loss. It's an enduring grief that is often revisited" (Godfrey in The Psychopaedia Team, 2016). Together, the research and my experience clearly support the idea that the loneliness that accompanies becoming an 'only-child' combined with the bereavement process impacts many facets of life. Looking at other relationships such as romantic ones adds layers to this loneliness. The denial of the human connection and of acknowledging my experiences as I felt from my university and employer, also add to this loneliness, of feeling like no one understands.

### **Taking Time to Move Forward**

As I think back on the five years following my **brother's** death, I do see my own personal growth that has happened, and I look forward to continued growth as I move forward. I have been able to rebuild many of the relationships in my life. I learnt that sharing my pain was

an important aspect of my grief. Truly sharing how I felt with those around me was important. This more open line of communication, even when I was stressed, allowed my friends/family to understand better where I was at. It removed the assumption from them that they had done something wrong, and instead re-entered the discussion around the different emotions I was feeling. This communication, across the board with my family, partner, friends, colleagues at work, helped them develop a deeper understanding of what I was going through. Simultaneously, it helped me better understand my grieving process as well.

This type of communication takes time and will likely be a lifelong journey for me. Learning to build relationships in a way that lets me be me will likely be a lifelong journey. Learning to live with my grief will be a lifelong journey, as well. It is as if when my **brother** died, I was given a new heavy backpack. It is filled with supplies that I need, but feels so, so heavy, and at first, I wondered how I would ever be able to carry it. Although I still have that backpack, as time has continued, I have developed strategies to be better at carrying it. It is still full of the same stuff, but it has become lighter with time, and I have relationships to help me carry it. I am more comfortable with the backpack and can adjust as I go. Some days like my **brother's** birthday, holidays like Christmas, and others can trigger periods of pain. Gradually though, my grief has softened, and I have been able to enjoy life again. Having strong relationships helps me work through these moments that are still difficult.

### **Connections and Reflections on Relationships**

Lederach's (2005) theory on the moral imagination begins to help me understand where I can make a difference as a peacebuilder when it comes to relationships. His first principle looks specifically at relationships and how one must imagine themselves as a part of a web of relationships. This first core principle speaks to the centrality of relationships in peacebuilding. Relationships form all the time and are the context where energy is established to allow people to overcome violence. It is important that people learn to recognize their relational interdependency with those around them. By seeing one's self as part of a pattern of relationships, one may then be able to take personal responsibility for behaviour and choices.

Following my **brother's** death, I found myself pulling away from everyone around me and alienating the relationships I had. Friends, family, acquaintances, work colleagues -- no one was exempt from my desire to be alone, which quickly led me down a dark and destructive path. It was not until I realized this and began to work again at these relationships that I felt the

support needed to deal with the trauma. By seeing myself surrounded in a web of relationships where I was connected to others, even if they could not understand what I was going through, I began feeling the strength of the web. Even when part of me snapped, I could feel the other ‘strings’ of the web supporting me. In my case, this is how this first principle applies. The importance of relationships and having the support and interconnectedness required to take steps towards transcending violence were vital to me.

In addition, Lederach’s (2005) second principle of the moral imagination also touches on relationships. Often, the perpetuation of cycles of violence occurs due to false dichotomies and polarities. Choices about how responding to a conflict are stuck into categories of ‘either-or’ where each decision puts one into a ‘with us’ or ‘against us’ box. The moral imagination allows one to build the capacities required to lift themselves above these false divisions. To do this, it requires “paradoxical curiosity” (Lederach, 2005, p. 36). Specifically, this is the ability to respect complexity but also to reach beyond what is visible or apparent. It involves accepting others at face value and not passing judgement and also taking the time to look beyond exterior appearances. By reaching beyond these accepted polarities, peacebuilding can occur, and violence can be transcended.

We need to do more learning as individuals on how to look past the outside and into the hearts of those around us. I had to learn to do this by not judging people when they would hurt me with their words of support without their even knowing what they were saying was painful. Perhaps if others also had additional inquisitiveness, they might have seen how their intentions were not matching their actions and dug a little deeper to understand me. I felt alone because no one could understand, yet perhaps there may have been more understanding from myself and towards myself if those in my life had learnt more and been trained on this second principle of Lederach’s (2005) moral imagination. It is so easy to label and categorize but doing so is potentially problematic.

Grief cannot be reduced to a step-by-step formula or a universal approach. When it is, this does a disservice to the unique experiences each individual has through their grief. Therefore, we must be careful in the ways in which we place expectations on ourselves and those around us in terms of the labels and categories we use. When supporting survivors such as myself, practitioners need to be aware that the incorrect use of a label or an expectation can limit the potential for growth following the trauma. Elements such as new personal strength, increased

resilience, and a greater sense of purpose in life are all possibilities following trauma but are not always recognized. In addition, even labelling the death a murder may not properly reflect how a survivor sees or understands the death.

Therefore, I make two recommendations when it comes to my experience and relationships. They are:

- 1) There need to be additional supports available to help sibling-survivors work through direct trauma. These supports also need to take into consideration the vicarious trauma a sibling-survivor might be feeling through those around them that are also experiencing the loss, like their parents. In addition, there needs to be support offered when there is a feeling of needing to support others in their lives. These supports need to be offered to the sibling-survivors, and to others who the survivor feels they personally need to support. In my case, knowing there was outside support for my mom, in addition to supports for myself, would have helped me along my journey while lessening the load of the double-loss I was feeling. These supports must be government-funded, and their use be strongly encouraged by those with direct contact with survivors I stress again, the supports must take into consideration the uniqueness of the sibling loss.
- 2) For those who share space with people like me who have lost a sibling to murder, they need to be aware that even the label ‘murdered’ may not be appropriate. The terms used need to properly portray the reality of how a sibling has died. Those in these shared spaces must keep an open mind and learn from the survivor, recognizing that each experience is unique and may change over time. Some may be comfortable with labels, whereas others may find the assumptions to be dangerous and negatively influence their grief process. We must allow survivors to define for themselves their grief process and support them in it, and this includes the labels we use surrounding the loss.

These two recommendations would have allowed me and those sharing space with me to understand better our different roles in providing support during a difficult time.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, when one considers changing relationships following the death of a sibling, I first wrote about how my relationship ‘ended’ with my **sibling** and how I felt I had become an ‘almost’ only-child. Then, I discussed my experiences with the fact that the death of my **brother** was also the death of a child for my parents and therefore, the structure of my family changed. This

included my new role as a surviving-sibling within my family. I suddenly felt an added pressure to ensure my mom was handling things as best as possible. Then, I dug into some other relationships outside of my family, including romantic relationships and relationships with my employer and my university professors. Finally, I concluded by looking at how reimagining many of these relationships took time before ending with some recommendations.

## Chapter 7 Structures as a Victim and Peacebuilder After Losing a Sibling

*On and off for five years, I found myself questioning whether or not I would attend the trial or participate in any way in the justice system. I simply did not believe in the system. Retributive justice had been shown time and time again to not really work. And from what I had heard and read in the news, the accused had already been in a courtroom, and in and out of prison in the past. So, with this in mind, why would I attend a trial when the justice system had already failed? Would I be showing my support to the system, simply by participating?*



I took this photo of myself while in Whitehorse. This trip was for volunteer work, but I took a few days before the official trip to just relax and enjoy nature. These moments were some of deep reflection and thought as they came only a few months after the trial.

### Introduction

This chapter explores more closely my own actions as a peacebuilder in relation to also now being a victim. How do my opinions, experiences, and actions as a peacebuilder relate to my experiences as a victim and the concepts of violence, structural violence, attachment theory, trauma, and vicarious trauma? And, how many choices have I had in determining my actions as I move forward with this new lived experience?

Mac Ginty (2010) argues that “virtually all actors involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding have to take cognizance of structures, principals and laws shaped by the liberal peace” (p. 393). This experience of loss has forced my eyes to open to the fact that, as an actor in

peacemaking, I am part of the structures that exist around me. This chapter begins by looking at my beliefs that violence is learned and how this caused me to pause and consider who was to 'blame' in my **brother's** death. Then, I move into discussing how I struggled knowing I was also a part of the structural violence that influenced his death. Next, I specifically look at two systems that I interacted with: the justice system that I interacted with directly and Canada's refugee system that I interacted with indirectly. Finally, I discuss the strength of community and how this helped me in my journey before closing with some recommendations that relate to building peace within systems in the face of trauma and structural violence.

### **I Am a Believer that Violence is Learned**

As a peacebuilder, I have learnt various different ways of seeing the world through courses and readings, but also life experience. Throughout all of this, I have been led to a place where I firmly believe that humans are beings who learn their behaviours through a variety of factors. Simply put, humans are not born knowing anything; everything is learned. This includes the issue of violence that we seem to see recurring all around the world. I firmly believe that violence is a learned behaviour. For me, this behaviour is learned through various social structures that influence how one perceives the world around them and their options for action in the world.

My views on violence and how violence occurs influence my perception of the world around me. As I worked through my **brother's** murder, this belief that violence is not a simple choice drove me to a different understanding of the events that almost all others in my circles of family and friends. The anger toward the perpetrator experienced by those close to my **brother**, including my parents, was different. - I found my anger focused on the systems that let this person fall to a place where violence became the only option.

I believed that **Josh's** murderer was not simply born and pre-programmed to become a murderer, that my **brother's** murderer did not wake up on the morning of January 24, 2014, and decide that today was the day to kill someone, that even at the moment that the knife came up, my **brother's** killer was not making an active logical decision between a bunch of different options to resolve the situation. I was led to a place of being unable to place blame on the individual fully. Placing blame on the individual was fully against these beliefs.

Having arrived at this conclusion that I still believed that violence was learned, did not come simply or immediately, **Josh's** murderer forced me to reconsider this belief and reconsider

if Galtung's (1969) discussion of concepts like structural violence were simply wrong. Yet, despite perhaps the easier and simpler idea of blaming an individual for this act, my thoughts consistently circled back to my learning about homelessness. When it comes to homelessness, my past research and projects have led me to understand that a variety of factors such as poverty, systemic racism, lack of mental health supports, and non-existent low-income housing all play central roles in causing homelessness. I have learnt to firmly believe that becoming homeless is not a choice, but a combination of factors that leave someone in this position.

My belief about homelessness has consistently given me a position of hope. If we can change those systems that cause homelessness, we can eliminate it. We can eliminate the need for emergency shelters if we address the root systemic causes. Through fighting for strong legislative backing that works to decrease income inequality and increase the availability of affordable housing while also working at finding ways to reduce discrimination within society, eliminating homelessness is possible. It has been done in other contexts. Logically, my belief had to extend to the crime that was committed against my **brother**. If I replace the word homelessness in the above writing and replace it with the words: direct violence and murder, I realize that my perspective is as follows.

If we can change those systems that cause direct violence and murder, we can eliminate them. We can eliminate the need for prison rehabilitation and other forms of punishment if we address the root systemic causes to stop the crime in the first place. Through fighting for strong legislative backing that works to decrease income inequality and increase the availability of social supports, among other supports, while also working at finding ways to reduce discrimination within society, eliminating direct violence and murder is possible. Given my understanding that homelessness and the forces that lead to murder are similar, I realize that that there was much more to this murder than blaming the individual. The systems at play certainly had not helped the situation. And, had the systems been different, the murder likely would have never occurred.

### **I Am a Part of the Structural Violence**

Thinking of these structures was hard because I became increasingly aware that these structures are built and enforced by people. I am one of these people. In a roundabout way, my partial blame on the structures also was partial blame on myself as a participant in these structures. I struggled with knowing I was, and still am, a part of the structural violence that was

a factor in my **brother**'s death. My evolving identity allowed me to become an insider, as well as an outsider to structural violence. I have inside and outside perspectives where I did not before. The structural violence had affected me in a direct way through losing my **Josh**.

I struggle with the complexity of this duality. The many layers of direct and structural violence play an important role in how I see the world. It, therefore, has effects on my research and the work I am putting forward. Lederach (1996), Dyson (2007), Vickers (2007), and Roth (2005) all write about some of these complexities. As both an insider to the effects of the structural violence and an outsider as a practitioner and researcher (Lederach, 1996), this duality allows me to access additional and diverse perspectives (Dyson, 2007). In addition, Vickers (2007) explains that we gain meaning in life through identity, and that identity in itself, is repeatedly shifting and multiple identities exist. And finally, Roth (2005) explains that the various roles and identities that I have, both personally and professionally within my peace work but also my healing from trauma and structural violence, provide me with an interconnected perspective.

Because of this, I feel a responsibility to use my knowledge and position to continue to work at the structural violence and the guilt I feel because of it. This writing is, in some ways, a way to bring about change. When it comes to structural violence, often the oppressors look to encourage silence when it comes to unjust realities. They likely believe that, it is in the best interests of all that the status quo continue and therefore, the silence may even be enforced. The enforcement of silence is a central weapon of structural violence itself (Lederach, 2005; Senehi, 2008). Silence is ingrained in our environment. Throughout history, it is only by breaking the silence that many oppressed peoples have become aware of their oppressive situation. The idea of being a pracademic, as suggested by Byrne and Senehi (2008), combines academic work with the need for action, of raising my voice. As an insider to the violence, I feel it is my duty as a pracademic to unsilence what is happening and raise my voice for myself and other siblings that have lost a brother or sister.

### **The Court Experience and the Justice System**

*Three years and a little more than a month after my **brother**'s death, the trial began. March 6, 2017, is a day I thought I was prepared for but was not. I had debated for years and years about whether or not I even wanted to attend the trial, but here I was, arriving at the courtroom. We find parking, our special*

*'victims' parking spot we had to request so that we did not have to worry about street parking. Who would have thought that, if it were not for requesting it, we would have had to pay for daily parking? We walk through the doors and have to go through security. I understand why there is security, but I find it frustrating all the same. Why do I have to interact with so many people on a day that I want to see no one?*

*Once inside, the first stop is a family room. Again, there are only one of these rooms, and we had to request it. We get to leave our coats in there, as well as the lunch we brought. This is going to be an all-day affair. We sit there for a little while; I don't say much. I am thinking about the next steps to come. It is going to be a long day. I have a pen and a notebook with me. I send some Snapchats out to friends, saying I am in a courthouse. I simply assume that they know why...I found out later, weeks later, that most of my friends didn't make the connection that this was my **brother's** murder trial. But even if they had, what were they to say?*

*As the trial start time approaches, we make our way over to the courtroom—such a maze of hallways. We are waiting outside when our Crown attorneys arrive. Both are very nice, and I know they will do their best. I also know though that their job is to represent the State...not us as victims. And although they say they will do their best to keep us informed and looped in, I find it hard knowing that really, this whole process has nothing to do with me or my family. We are really just flies on the wall. How does a court that is supposed to provide justice, not care about the victims in that process? It does not seem to make much sense.*

*We enter the courtroom, and it is smaller than I thought. It doesn't look like courtrooms you see on TV. I am apprehensive. A few minutes later, the accused is brought in in handcuffs. He is escorted by the sheriff right in front of us to a little table. Someone he knows sits in the visitor seating, just like us. They wave to each other and smile. I can't take my eyes off of the interaction. It is all so surreal. Unlike some of my family, I did not attend the pretrial. This is all very new to me. We are told to rise. The judge enters. This begins. Justice Chartier is*

*presiding. I write: "10:37 am – Crown opening statement 10:58 am – Break 11:13 am Nathan, police constable, is on the stand... '12:22 am, **Joshua Bentley** was pronounced deceased." The weight of the process hits me. This is finally happening. The trial, more than 1,000 days later, has begun.*

Looking back on this courtroom experience, much of it is a blur. I do not remember a lot of detail. Thankfully, throughout the process, I took many notes to help me stay calm as the minutes, hours, and days went by. My exercise of looking back on these notes for the first time since the trial has been an emotional experience. It has brought back some of the anger and frustration I felt-- emotions that still arise sometimes, but not in the force they have while rereading my notes. Forty-two pages are full of handwriting. Although I do not specifically look at these pages in detail in this writing, they did serve as a deep reminder of the trial experience. First though, I want to take a step back and discuss the weeks leading up to the trial.

As a peacebuilder and student of PACS, my decision on whether or not to attend the trial was a struggle. For me, the style of retributive justice that is available in Canada is not how I see or define justice. With so many models of restorative justice out there, I struggled with even wanting my **brother's** murderer to go to prison. I did not see how locking someone up for years would make a real change in their behaviour or their life. I wanted to understand what truly happened; I wanted an apology, and I wanted healing for myself, my family, and even for the perpetrator. I doubted I would get any of this from the justice system. I was right.

I decided to attend the trial because I did not want to regret not attending at a later date. Although attending was frustrating, it was also enlightening in many ways. What I learnt through the process can be split into two groups. By participating and through my frustration, I was able to learn first-hand some things about the justice system itself. Although most of my experience was difficult, I do want to start by saying that I had been warned before the trial to ask lots of questions as the process was not about the victims, but about the State. I had been warned that, because of this, the Crown attorneys had no obligation to ensure my understanding of the process. However, perhaps I lucked out because the Crown attorneys that were assigned to my **brother's** case were incredible. I was able to meet them before the trial began, and they always took time throughout the trial to walk us through what was happening. Although I still had a question here and there, them taking the time to explain each step of the court experience was helpful.

At the start of every day, during every recess, before and after each lunch break, and at the end of the day, one or both of the Crown attorneys were on hand to make sure we were understanding. They would always lay out what the plan was for each session, and then after they would go through things they felt might have been confusing and answer any questions. They were fully transparent about the potential outcomes of each day while also ensuring not to get my hopes up about a conviction. They also spent time reassuring my family and me when we worried about elements of the trial, like a difficult cross-examination. I cannot express the gratitude I have for having had such a positive experience with the Crown attorneys. They made the trial process bearable because, overall, it was difficult.

Although I could write an entire thesis based on my experience with the justice system, I want to focus on a few elements I found the most difficult. The first is the lack of accommodations for victims at the courts. Arriving at the courthouse every day, we had to go through a security process similar to an airport, and it made me feel like I was a criminal and not a victim. We had to arrive early every day because there was no way to know if there would be a line to enter or not. There was no different treatment for myself as a victim; I was just another person going to the courthouse like anyone else. Arriving at the courtroom itself, we also had to be there early. Every morning we would stand outside the room, waiting to be allowed to enter. Going in, there would be no reserved seating for us; we would have to fend for ourselves each day. I consistently tried to get the same seat for some consistency; however, it was not always possible as sometimes we were not the first to arrive.

Sitting in the courtroom was strange. First of all, there were sometimes classes of students that would come in to watch. Other times, there would be, what seemed to be law students, who would come in to take notes. It was strange and difficult for me to see people who had no emotional connection to the case, and in some instances, seemed like they were not even listening or even want to be there. There were also friends/family of the perpetrator that came daily. I have mixed emotions about these people. Part of me is still filled with anger that they were there to support him when he took my **brother** away. Another part of me is filled with compassion because his friends/family did not choose this path, and in some ways, the perpetrator going to jail is a loss for his friends/family as well.

Seeing the accused every day was hard. All of the emotions I described in Chapter 5 were bottled up and waiting to be unleashed at the accused during the trial. It was hard for me just to

sit silently and watch as he was able to interact with his friends/family who had come to support. It disgusted me to see him smile and laugh here and there like life was great. All I wanted was for my **brother** to be able to interact with me and smile. At the same time, I struggled inside, knowing that this was the right of the accused to be present at his trial. After he was convicted, I knew that this might be the last time for a long time that he would be able to interact with his friends/family, and the same was true for them.

I never formally interacted with the man who did this to my **brother**. Sometimes, I wish I had had the chance. He also did not take the stand. By pleading not guilty to the charges, I never had the chance to hear him explain what was going through his head that night and why he chose to stab my **brother**. Although I heard testimony from various witnesses from that night, a piece still seems to be missing. I hope one day to be able to hear Mowlid Mohamed's explanation of what happened. In many ways, I also hope that Mowlid Mohamed is able to come out of prison one day as a changed person. I do not know if either of these things will ever happen, but I do hope for them. I hope for change.

Not all was bad. We were lucky that we were able to reserve a room in the courthouse to store our stuff that a local non-profit, Manitoba Organization for Victim Assistance, was able to secure for us. This room allowed us a place to sit, wait, discuss, and decompress. We were also generally able to reserve a single parking spot at the courthouse for immediate family. Yet both of these things had to be reserved daily, and the responsibility fell on us as victims. I am thankful that these two small things were possible; they made a big difference during a process where I generally felt alone and left out.

### **The Immigration/Refugee System**

In her book entitled *Crossing Law's Border*, Shauna Labman (2019) writes that "Seeking refuge is a journey that no one pursues willingly... It is not a marker of legitimacy or genuine fear. No one willingly leaves her home, her family, her friends, her country for an uncertain and often dangerous journey to start with nothing in a different country..." (p. 168). My writing on this will be brief as I do not pretend to have extensive knowledge of how exactly these systems work. During the sentencing portion of the trial, it was revealed that **Josh's** murderer had been through Canada's refugee systems. Similar to the justice system, my awareness that this person had touched yet another government system caused me to pause, think, and dig deeper.

During the sentencing portion of the trial, it was revealed as part of the defence for a shorter sentence that the perpetrator was a refugee from Somalia and had come to Canada to get away from the violence he had witnessed in his birth-country. Hearing this fact during the sentencing caused me immediately to feel compassion for the now-convicted perpetrator. I already was frustrated with the justice system as Mowlid Mohamed was on probation when he killed my **brother**, but knowing he had also interacted with other Canadian systems added to my anger.

How did he, after leaving a conflict-area, end up in more conflict here? I immediately found myself questioning the systems that Canada had in place to support refugees, and I quickly felt anger towards these systems. Why had they not done more to support Mowlid Mohamed? I go back to some of Dunbar's (2017) writing when she explains that the "decision to join [a gang] is often well thought out and the individual believes that this is best for their interests at the moment" (p. 5). Although through the trial process, it was confirmed that my **brother's** murder was not gang-related, it was also confirmed that his murderer had gang affiliations. So again, I find myself asking, why did someone believe it was in their "best interests" to join, and how did this affect my **brother's** and my own life?

At only 26 years old, my age, while I write some of this thesis, how did Mowlid Mohamed end up on this destructive path? Knowing some more about his life, that he had come from a conflict-area, made me wonder how perhaps his past traumas and lack of support set him on a destructive path that caused my **brother's** death. I could not stop myself then, nor can I today, from wondering how many people Mowlid Mohamed interacted with that were meant to support and protect him but failed.

### **Strength of Community**

To begin this section, I want to bring forward two quotes by Herman (2015) that I find extremely powerful. The first is that: "Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity, depends upon a feeling of connection to others. The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience" (p. 214). And, the second is that: "Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatises; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her

humanity” (p. 214). For me, the core of these quotes is that being a part of a group is a restorative process in itself that can be healing.

I relate to these quotes because I feel deeply that my sense of belonging within the community helped me along my journey. Since high school, I have been actively involved in the Francophone community in Manitoba, and also across Canada. I have been lucky to be able to participate and volunteer at events around the world in French. Through these events, I have been able to build connections and friendships with people who all played a role in helping me heal after my **brother**'s murder. This network of people was vital for me, and I am thankful that the Francophonie was able to offer me this. I do wonder where I would be today if it were not for web of support and sense of community. Throughout my struggles, I felt like I belonged, and as Herman (2015) suggests, this sense of belonging helped me relearn my “sense of self, of work, [and] of humanity” (p. 214).

Through continued participation in certain events like youth parliaments where I was able to see friends from near and afar and through continued communication with friends from all over Canada through Facebook Messenger group chats with funny names like ‘Pie and friends, and ‘Les meilleures personnes ever,’ I felt less alone. There was an outpouring of support from this community that I call my own. Meals, flowers, messages, and more seemed endless at times. When I needed some support the most, I felt the support from the connections I had made through la Francophonie. Therefore, structures like this, that help build a sense of community are vital for sibling-survivors. Even if the structures are not directly trauma-related, we cannot underestimate their value to support people like me as they heal.

### **Connections and Reflections on Structures**

When I look at PACS as a field of study, it seems to be often focused on the structures. From my experience, this focus on structures and how we change structures to achieve positive peace. For a long time, I was in agreement that if we could change the structures, we could achieve a better world. However, through the loss of my **brother** and through the writing of this thesis, I have realized that it is vital we do not forget the human element within the field of PACS. These structures are made by humans, through collective effort. This effort comes down to a series of individuals making decisions and leading a path forward.

Yet, looking at these individuals rarely seems to be the focus of the field. This is often left to fields such as Psychology or Sociology. Perhaps, PACS is off-track by over-focusing on

the structures. Let me explain. As I look back on my experience with structures, specifically the justice system and the refugee system in Canada, I still feel anger towards these systems and to myself for participating in them. Yet, I have been working to turn this anger into a constructive outlet to try and work at and change these systems. This has taken ample time and much self-reflection to arrive at this place where I do not blame myself for **Josh**'s death due to my inaction previous to his death in changing existing systems.

My experience is not unique. As was outlined, there are many siblings that have lost a sibling and likely more than parents who have lost children. Yet the existing research is almost entirely focused on parents and not the siblings. Moreover, this research is not generally coming out of the PACS field. Perhaps it should be. As we analyze large scale conflicts and wars, it can almost be too easy to apply a model to explain the structures. We cannot forget that at the core of these structures are the individuals. Individuals like myself who have likely experienced pain, grief, anger, sadness, guilt, and confusion. Individuals like myself who need time and support to heal and to carve a better path forward. Yet, without research or taking time to understand this experience better, how can these supports exist?

For PACS, as a field of research and as practitioners, we cannot forget the core of what we do: the human element. The micro intrapersonal conflict, and even interior conflict, is vital to true positive peace. If all the structures change, but individuals are not properly supported in their healing, how can they be expected to make the right choices moving forward? I cannot imagine being in a conflict-zone and having lost my **sibling**. Yet, even in the safety of where I live, I still struggled internally with my emotions, destroyed relationships I had, and bargained with different systems to try and justify what had happened. These inner conflicts are worth the time of PACS research. Taking this time is needed to ensure that as structures are changed and evolved, that the individuals who must continue that work as conflict dissipates, are in the right place in their own journey to do so.

This chapter on structures also connects well to Lederach's (2005) third and fourth principles of the moral imagination. His third principle calls for the creation of space for creativity. Throughout my journey, there was a lack of this type of space, and I often had to create it myself. Structurally, creativity did not exist in processes, such as funerals and trials, that are focused on the steps and structures of these events. I created my own space through elements like designing the funeral program handout, as well as, create a video montage. I carved out this

space for myself, and without even realizing it, it allowed me to begin transcending the trauma that had occurred. When it came to the trial, the format of my victim impact statement was also creative. I remember the Crown attorneys telling me they were surprised I wrote one but that they were not surprised how it was different than what they had heard in the past. This leads me to my first and second recommendations around structures:

- 1) Crown attorneys should have additional training and trauma-awareness to ensure their approaches with a case and with victims are trauma-informed. Although, in my case, I fully understood the process through the attorneys, I am aware that even other members of my family did not. With this in mind, and in line with the other recommendations above, Crown attorneys need to ensure their approaches respect victims' needs. Of course, as the attorneys are representing the State and not the victims themselves, this may be complex; however, victim needs need to be prioritized whenever possible.
- 2) The justice system in Canada needs to find ways to better take into account victims' needs throughout the judicial process. It needs to create space for victims to express their creativity. This should include elements of restorative justice, such as mediation between victims and perpetrators, as well as improved communication surrounding the options and processes available to all parties, including victims. In addition, small changes, such as reserved courtroom seating, would also reduce stress for family members during an already difficult time. Victims should not have to worry about finding a seat and risking their participation in the process.

Finally, Lederach's (2005) fourth principle of the moral imagination is the willingness to risk. In my story, one clear example for me is the process of writing and speaking of a victim impact statement. First, the Government of Manitoba describes victim impact statements as being "your [victim's] way to tell the court how the crime has affected you" and describes the "emotional, physical and financial harm" a crime has had on a victim and becomes a public document of the court (p. 1). Furthermore, they must be submitted in written form, but victims can ask to read their statement in a courtroom (Government of Manitoba, p. 2). Simply put, it is a way for victims to express how they have been affected by a crime in the hopes that their trauma may influence sentencing. I did write one of these, and it was my way of taking a risk and participating in the system.

Yet, in an already difficult period of time, it was draining and took an additional emotional toll. I learnt through this that it takes time to be willing and able to take risks again, even though this is important to building positive inner-peace. Therefore, my third recommendation is as follows:

- 3) There needs to be further flexibility in the types of paid leave available for victims following the murder of a loved one. In addition, paid trial leave should be available for all immediate family members to attend the murder trial of a loved one, no matter how long it takes to arrive at this process. Overall, both of these types of leave must always include siblings, not just parents. By being able to have financial security, as well as not have to get things like a doctor's note to go on stress leave, victims can instead focus on taking positive steps for their own healing. No one should have to risk financial security in addition to dealing with such a horrible crime. Of course, these types of leave could be expanded to include other types of crimes as well.

Finally, I would like to touch on one last recommendation before finishing this chapter. As discussed in the section on the refugee systems in Canada, I became aware that my **brother's** murderer was a Somalian refugee. I want to reiterate here my frustration with this fact. How could our systems in Canada allow someone to get to a place where they felt like murder was the only option? This person had clearly been in touch with systems that are in place as they came through the refugee system. Therefore, why was this person not given the proper support to ensure committing a crime was not an option? I will never have the answers to these questions, but they do lead me to a final recommendation:

- 4) There need to be improved support-structures for newcomers to Canada and better communication between the various systems that a newcomer might interact with when coming to the country. Maybe, if people were properly supported, including my **brother's** murderer, the outcome would have been very different, and I would not be writing this thesis at all.

Together, these four recommendations would have helped me in my healing journey by changing some of the structures I found most difficult to work with throughout the process.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of loss has forced my eyes to open to the fact that, as an actor in peacebuilding, I am part of the structures that exist around me. Specifically, I am a player in the

negative effects of some of these systems, and I have a responsibility to work towards changing them. This chapter began by looking at my beliefs that violence is learned and how this caused me to pause and consider who was to 'blame' in my **brother's** death. Then, I moved into discussing how I struggled knowing I was also a part of the structural violence that influenced **Josh's** death. Next, I specifically looked at two systems that I interacted with throughout my journey. The first one was the justice system, and the second one was Canada's refugee system. Finally, I discussed the strength of community and how this helped me in my journey before closing with a few recommendations that relate to building peace within systems in the face of trauma and structural violence. Although my journey is a deeply personal one, it was largely influenced by big structures that could have made a greater positive change but did not.

## Chapter 8 - My Final Thoughts

*Months after the murder, a family member picked me up from a bus stop. We say hello, and the next words from my family member's mouth were, "How is your mom doing?" Perhaps I simply am not in the mood, so I answer, "She's okay, I think, but I really wish people would focus on me for once." I immediately feel selfish for saying it. Of course, people are worried about my mom; she just lost a child; however, at the same time, it is frustrating as I lost my only **brother**, and sometimes I felt like no one cared. So, I snapped a little...more than I should have...but it led to an important conversation.*



This was taken in June 2011 at my high school graduation. Switching caps was **Josh's** idea, and it is one of my favourite photos. Although we did not always get along, this was a good day, and I felt fully supported by my **brother** and knew he was proud of me. I wish I would have been able to repeat this photo at his high school or university graduation.

### Introduction

As I was faced with the death of my **brother**, I felt like I was left alone to navigate the difficult emotions, fears, and grief. Horsley & Patterson (2006) explain that the loss of a sibling can have serious and long-term emotional and psychological effects on the sibling who survives. I would add that these effects can also show up physically with elements like weight gain. For me, this healing journey will be a lifelong process. I will never 'get over' the loss; I will learn

how to manage it better as each day passes. Through this writing, I looked at my personal interior emotions and processes, the relationships around me both inside and outside my family, and also some of the structures that were at play. Each of these concluded with some ideas around why it is important for the PACS field to ensure that the individuals are not forgotten when it comes to peacebuilding work.

I mentioned a few times how my difficulty in grieving in a healthy way caused me additional pain in how I felt I was hurting others around me. I repeat this here because my experience begs the questions: why was I not able to grieve in a healthy way? Why did I find it difficult to reconcile the loss while also creating opportunities for myself to grow? Where was the external support to help me in this journey? I was able to arrive in a place where I am able to answer some of these questions and I continue to work at them; however, it took much time and self-reflection. Existing research has already identified that there is a gap in the literature on the surviving-sibling experience (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). My lived experience reinforces this notion that siblings are often forgotten grievers when a child dies.

Although my study is focused on the field of PACS and how this field of study can better adjust to account for this type of grief within peacebuilding approaches, this study can be more far-reaching than this single field. It adds to a slowly growing body of literature around sibling grief. The cross-disciplinary work must continue because sibling grief and bereavement are not going anywhere. As Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) describe so well: “The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal, and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same, nor would you want to” (p. 230). With this in mind, I will end this autoethnography with a few final thoughts.

### **A Review of my Recommendations**

Throughout this thesis, I provided some recommendations in terms of my thoughts on what changes might be possible within PACS and in other fields that would have made a difference. I talked about various aspects of my experience, including becoming an ‘only-child’ that resulted in fractured-identity issues. Brahm (2004) argues that there is a need for small-scale community healing after violent conflict. I add that a similar approach is also necessary after interpersonal violence within a community. The healing journey cannot be made alone. Simply put, we have all been affected by different levels of trauma in life and must work together as a

community to heal. Yet, this must be done in appropriate ways for appropriate audiences, and therefore, even these recommendations may not work for other victims and survivors.

Individualized approaches are needed whenever possible.

These are the eight recommendations that were split up between the three previous chapters. They are in no way comprehensive; however, if implemented, would have made a difference and facilitated my healing journey. My hope is that these may be useful for further reflection within and outside of PACS.

- 1) Our education systems need to take on the responsibility of teaching the importance of self-care from a young age. This idea of self-care is learning the importance of taking concrete action to maintain and improve one's own health. This can include learning how to take an active role in guarding one's own happiness and is especially important during periods of increased stress or trauma. For example, this could include revisiting things like homework at a young age that indirectly teaches children that, even once school (or work as adults) is completed, it still continues after-hours at home. Children need time to play and take care of themselves. For adults, if they never learn of the importance of taking this time, they may never realize that they need this time just as much. We cannot wait for burn-out or trauma before teaching the importance of self-care.
- 2) When we look at systems that are in place to support individuals following trauma, including peace and conflict interventions, it is vital that we ensure victims have space for self-care. We cannot expect healing to happen automatically. Physical spaces and support programs need to be in place to support those in need. This also holds true for researchers and practitioners. We must continuously fight against the negative stigma around taking care of one's mental health to ensure we are all able to be healthy and take the safe space we need to do so.
- 3) There need to be additional supports available to help sibling-survivors work through direct trauma. These supports also need to take into consideration the vicarious trauma a sibling-survivor might be feeling through those around them that are also experiencing the loss, like their parents. In addition, there needs to be support offered when there is a feeling of needing to support others in their lives. These supports need to be offered to the sibling-survivors, and to others who the survivor feels they personally need to support. In my case, knowing there was outside support for my mom, in addition to

supports for myself, would have helped me along my journey while lessening the load of the double-loss I was feeling. These supports must be government-funded, and their use be strongly encouraged by those with direct contact with survivors I stress again, the supports must take into consideration the uniqueness of the sibling loss.

- 4) For those who share space with people like me who have lost a sibling to murder, they need to be aware that even the label ‘murdered’ may not be appropriate. The terms used need to properly portray the reality of how a sibling has died. Those in these shared spaces must keep an open mind and learn from the survivor, recognizing that each experience is unique and may change over time. Some may be comfortable with labels, whereas others may find the assumptions to be dangerous and negatively influence their grief process. We must allow survivors to define for themselves their grief process and support them in it, and this includes the labels we use surrounding the loss.
- 5) Crown attorneys should have additional training and trauma-awareness to ensure their approaches with a case and with victims are trauma-informed. Although, in my case, I fully understood the process through the attorneys, I am aware that even other members of my family did not. With this in mind, and in line with the other recommendations above, Crown attorneys need to ensure their approaches respect victims’ needs. Of course, as the attorneys are representing the State and not the victims themselves, this may be complex; however, victim needs need to be prioritized whenever possible.
- 6) The justice system in Canada needs to find ways to better take into account victims’ needs throughout the judicial process. It needs to create space for victims to express their creativity. This should include elements of restorative justice, such as mediation between victims and perpetrators, as well as improved communication surrounding the options and processes available to all parties, including victims. In addition, small changes, such as reserved courtroom seating, would also reduce stress for family members during an already difficult time. Victims should not have to worry about finding a seat and risking their participation in the process.
- 7) There needs to be further flexibility in the types of paid leave available for victims following the murder of a loved one. In addition, paid trial leave should be available for all immediate family members to attend the murder trial of a loved one, no matter how long it takes to arrive at this process. Overall, both of these types of leave must always

include siblings, not just parents. By being able to have financial security, as well as not have to get things like a doctor's note to go on stress leave, victims can instead focus on taking positive steps for their own healing. No one should have to risk financial security in addition to dealing with such a horrible crime. Of course, these types of leave could be expanded to include other types of crimes as well.

- 8) There need to be improved support-structures for newcomers to Canada and better communication between the various systems that a newcomer might interact with when coming to the country. Maybe, if people were properly supported, including my **brother's** murderer, the outcome would have been very different, and I would not be writing this thesis at all.

### **The Power of Autoethnography**

Reflecting back on the process of writing this thesis, I realize that the writing of the thesis itself has been part of my journey. I knew this would be the case; however, I did not quite realize how profound an experience it would be. To conclude this section on my final thoughts and moving forward, I feel it is necessary to reflect on autoethnography and make a few observations on using one's own story for research. From the outside looking in, autoethnography may seem simpler or easier than more traditional research, my experience of writing this piece has shown me that an autoethnography is a demanding and challenging undertaking. Throughout this process of weaving my personal experiences with academic research, I have been able to share an experience that can only be understood "when feelings are a significant part of the research process" (Ellis, 1993, p. 724).

Grief is an experience that can only be understood this way. It is deeply personal and not easily examined. I could not imagine talking about someone else's grief in a research context. To say something like, '*pseudonym* was feeling deep sadness,' feels wrong and an invasion of their grieving process. In addition, the misrepresentation of another person's story may lead to increased pain. Autoethnography can assist us in working around this issue. By writing out my own experiences in a stream of consciousness and pulling vignettes from them, I was able to continue to process my grief. Analyzing these snippets allowed me to begin to make meaning around my role as a peacebuilder following the loss. This was accomplished without infringing on the pain of others.

Working through the personal and intimate nature of this research is perhaps what makes this qualitative approach so difficult to attempt. It was extremely difficult to express and, I am sure to hear my painful experiences, yet the sharing of my stories has been transformational for me, and I hope you the reader as well. Through my writing, I embarked on a transformational journey and autoethnography allowed for this to happen. I wrote through my pain through specific painful memories and moments. I struggled with the acceptability of the writing, both to others and also to myself. As I wrote, a fear slowly developed that my writing would not be acceptable for myself, for my advisor, for my committee, and eventually for the university and the public. What if all this work simply resulted in failure? What if my story was a failure?

I consistently found myself questioning my own objectivity, even though I believe that it is impossible to be completely objective. I was taught my whole life that as a researcher, I always had to be neutral and objective. Taught that not do so would invalidate the research. Yet, what even is neutrality? Can we be truly neutral? The selection of a topic of interest, is in itself, a biased act. I forced myself to keep going, even when it seemed unbearable. I made myself return to writing after some recuperation. It took me much longer than I originally expected. I wrote about things that I had never said aloud or shared. And little by little, as the writing came together, I also felt better, piece by piece. My one-year process turned into a little more than two years, but I made it. Most importantly, writing about my loss helped me survive the loss.

Because of this fear that built-up and my own questioning, there were many times where I considered stopping my writing or dropping out of my program entirely. Being so vulnerable and risking that my vulnerability is criticized was a step I, at times, was not sure if I still wanted to take. However, through the support of friends and family, as well as fellow students and professors, I continued to push and working through this newly developed fear. In the end, I am happy with the product and the work it took to get to this point. I have learnt to be proud of myself and my struggles, but also how those struggles have turned into beautiful moments of resilience and triumph. I am proud of my work.

Also, I know I am not alone. Reading how others like Ellis (2009) processed their grief helped me process my grief of losing **Josh**, even if the experiences are not quite the same. I am not alone in having had these difficult experiences. I hope that if you, the reader, are also a sibling-survivor or someone going through grief, that this writing has been able to show you that you are not alone. As a peacebuilder, perhaps this is my true goal: to help someone else find

inner-positive peace: to help others not only get through their pain and grief but help them get to a better place, to see the opportunity and meaning-making that can exist from their grief as they work through the pain. My weaving of the analytical and the personal is a profound way to ethically examine a painful topic while uncovering insights that may not have been discoverable with a more traditional research method. This is my contribution to PACS, a clear reminder that individual human beings are at the core of the work we do, and each individual finding inner-peace must be a part of our goal.

### **The Need for Continued Research**

In his autoethnographic article on clinical depression, Smith (1999) began by saying, “Come and join me. Join my pulsating body. Join my fragmented self. Join my life. Join a story. Feel a statistic” (p. 264). We must join more of these stories. We need to continue to feel the statistics. We need more research that sheds light on the highly personal processes of grief. My thesis is only one example of how the storytelling within an autoethnography can be powerful. I fully recognize that my story does not disqualify other lived experiences or other stories, even if they are contradictory to my own. I also do not claim any type of rigid action being required based solely on my experiences. Instead, I hope this writing of my **brother**’s murder and the ensuing pain and bereavement may promote further research and discussion while also playing a role within the overall practice. A single story like mine can provide insight into a topic that needs to be examined further.

More research is needed to begin to understand the commonalities between these deeply personal stories. Commonalities within larger groups, and specifically larger groups of surviving-siblings, need to be discovered so that new tools can be developed for practice. With this in mind, my research may promote additional inquiries in the following areas:

- 1) The sibling experience. My study demonstrates that more research is needed to define better and understand the sibling experience and specifically the experience following the murder of a sibling. Keeping in mind that this experience is likely just as - or more - common as that of parents losing a child and therefore, should be researched just as extensively.
- 2) Better care. A complete understanding of the sibling experience following traumatic death must lead to patient-oriented research that looks at practical ways surviving-siblings can be better supported.

- 3) Complexity around labels. Additional research is needed to understand how labels can help and hurt following sibling death. The words and language that are used in these painful moments are important.
- 4) Justice improvements. Even though a more restorative justice system will not replace the current retributive one overnight, efforts are needed to move closer to restorative. There needs to be a bigger focus placed on victims and their needs, as well as treating different types of victims differently and not overgeneralizing or over assuming each individual's needs.
- 5) First-hand lived studies. More studies, including autoethnographic ones, need to be encouraged cross-disciplinarily. Hearing firsthand lived experiences of survivors is needed to better support practitioners in finding ways to support the survivors. This is specifically important when it comes to moments such as when labels are misused and when a trial arrives.

I look forward to seeing what some of this additional research might reveal about my own experience and also how it might help sibling-survivors continue to build connections in an area that has not received enough focus.

### **To Close**

Throughout this writing, I used Lederach's (2005) moral imagination, as well as other theories, to help explain some ways that my experience might have been different. I also proposed a variety of recommendations and areas for further research, to better support sibling-survivors like myself. As Lederach (2005) explains, the moral imagination is meant to help us transcend violence, to help us build positive peace, to allow us to be better. Lederach (2005) talks about how the moral imagination can "transcend...destructive patterns and cycles," and I would add that it can also create new and constructive patterns and cycles (p. 6). It is by creating relationships, stepping outside the box, and taking risks that these systems can change.

This process certainly does not occur quickly or easily, but the point is that it can be done. This hope of changing structural violence has been vital to my understanding of my own trauma. I believe that it is the greatest contribution I have taken from Lederach (2005). Simply put, instead of seeing structures as unchangeable, Lederach's (2005) moral imagination has forced me to reconsider and realize that the structures can be addressed just like people. After all,

it is people who create and perpetuate structures, which means people can also break them down and change them. Moral imagination offers a way to do so.

Finally, Lederach (2005) says: "Reach out to those you fear. Touch the heart of complexity. Imagine beyond what is seen. Risk vulnerability one step at a time" (p. 177). As I, and we, move forward in a world filled with uncertainty around an uncountable number of conflicts, perhaps our only way to make progress is through the moral imagination. Thank you for taking the time to read my story. I am only one example of many that drive the point home that, at its core, peacebuilding is about the individuals. If we can allow each person to feel the interior positive peace and if we actively work towards building systems and supports that help those with trauma along the way, perhaps we can achieve a place where sibling-survivors like myself do not feel so alone throughout their journey.

### References

- Adams, T. E., Holman Jones, S., & Ellis, C. (2015). *Autoethnography: Understanding qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allen-Collinson, J., & Hockey, J. (2009). The essence of sporting embodiment: Phenomenological analyses of the sporting body. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences*, 4(4), 71-81.
- Armour, M. (2007). Violent death. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 14(4), 53-90. doi:10.1300/J137v14n04\_04
- Asaro, M. R. (2001). Working with adult homicide survivors, part I: Impact and sequelae of murder. *Perspectives in psychiatric care*, 37(3), 95-101.
- Balk, D. (2009). *Adolescent encounters with death, bereavement, and coping*. Springer Publishing Company.
- Barrera, M., Alam, R., D'Agosito, N., Nicholas, D., & Schneiderman, G. (2013). After childhood cancer death: A longitudinal study, *Death Studies*, 37(1), 25-46.
- Bentley, D., Sullivan, S., & Wilson, K. (2017). British Colonialism: Perpetuating Structural Violence Through Perceptual Misunderstandings in Canada. *Peace Research*, 49(2), 61-145.
- Bobichand, R. (2012). Understanding violence triangle and Structural violence. *Kangla Online*. Retrieved December 15, 2017, from <http://kanglaonline.com/2012/07/understanding-violence-triangle-and-structural-violence-by-raj कुमार-bobichand/>.
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (1996). Talking over ethnography. *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*, 1, 13-45.
- Bochner, A. P., & Ellis, C. (2006). Autoethnography. *GJ Shepherd, J. St. John, & T. Striphas (Eds.) Communication as...: Perspectives on theory*, 110-122.
- Bold as Lions. (2014). Hope again. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-bSX807TUw>.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). Attachment and loss. *Vol. 3, Loss: sadness and depression*. London: Hogarth Press
- Brahm, E. (2004, January). Trauma Healing. *Beyond Intractability*. Retrieved December 4, 2017, from <http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/trauma-healing>.

- Buddle, K. (2011). Urban Aboriginal Gangs and Street Sociality in the Canadian West. *Aboriginal Peoples In Canadian Cities: Transformations and Continuities*, 171.
- Buksbazen, C. (1976). Legacy of a suicide. *Suicide and life-threatening behavior*, 47, 106-122.
- Byrne, S., Senehi, J. (2008). Conflict analysis and resolution as a multidiscipline: a work in progress. In *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution* (pp. 27-42). Routledge.
- Camangian, P. (2010). Starting with self: Teaching autoethnography to foster critically caring literacies. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 179-204.
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 7, Part I of the Constitution Act, 1982, being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c11.
- CBC News Manitoba. (2014, January 27). Police call fatal Osborne Village attack 'vicious'. CBC News Manitoba. Retrieved December 15, 2017, from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/police-call-fatal-osborne-village-attack-vicious-1.2512681>.
- Chang, H. (2016). *Autoethnography as method* (Vol. 1). Routledge.
- Charmaz, K. (2005). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2nd ed.*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, 507-535.
- Chettleburgh, M. (2012). *Young thugs: Inside the dangerous world of Canadian street gangs*. Harper Collins.
- Cho, J., & Tent, A. (2006). Validity in qualitative research revisited. *Qualitative Research*, 6(3), 319-340.
- Chura, P. (2014, August 29). Police name Winnipeg street gang targeted in drug raid. Global News Winnipeg. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <https://globalnews.ca/news/1534068/police-name-winnipeg-street-gang-targeted-in-drug-raid/>.
- Cicirelli, V. G. (2009). Sibling death and death fear in relation to depressive symptomatology in older adults. *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 64(1), 24-32.
- Charney, M., Wieman, S., Leblanc, N., & Simon, N. (2018). Trauma- and stressor-related disorders. In Stoddard, F., Benedek, D., Milad, M., Ursano, R. (Eds.), *Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder*. Oxford University Press.

- Clarke, M. A. (2015). *As a Social Worker in Northern First Nations, am I also a Peacebuilder?*. (Masters' thesis, University of Manitoba (Canada)).
- Cohen, E. (2005). *Bereavement During the Adolescent to Young Adult Transition: A Developmental Resilience Model; a Dissertation* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts Boston).
- Comack, E., & Silver, J. (2006). *Safety and Security Issues in Winnipeg's Inner-city Communities: Bridging the Community-police Divide*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba Office.
- Comack, E., Deane, L., Silver, J., & Morrisette, L. (2013). *"Indians Wear Red": Colonialism, Resistance, and Aboriginal Street Gangs*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Courtois, C. A., & Ford, J. D. (Eds.). (2009). *Treating complex traumatic stress disorders: An evidence-based guide*. Guilford Press.
- Coutts, M. (2012, December 4). Latest numbers crown Winnipeg as Canada's murder capital. Yahoo! News. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/blogs/dailybrew/latest-numbers-crown-winnipeg-canada-murder-capital-214530106.html>.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. SAGE publications.
- Davies, B. (1991). Long-term outcomes of adolescent sibling bereavement. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 6*, 83-96.
- Day, J. H., Vermilyea, E., Wilkerson, J., & Giller, E. (2006). *Risking connection in faith communities: A training curriculum for faith leaders supporting trauma survivors*. Baltimore: Sidran.
- Denshire, S. (2014). On auto-ethnography. *Current Sociology Review, 62*(6), 831-850.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1998). *The landscape of qualitative research : theories and issues* (2nd ed.). Sage publications.
- DeVita-Raeburn, E. (2004). *The empty room: Surviving the loss of a brother or sister*. New York: Scribner.
- Drake, D. H., & Harvey, J. (2014). Performing the role of ethnographer: Processing and managing the emotional dimensions of prison research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 17*(5), 489-501.
- Dunbar, L. (2017). Youth Gangs in Canada: A Review of Current Topics and Issues. *Public*

*Safety Canada.*

- Dyson, M. (2007). My story in a profession of stories: Auto ethnography-an empowering methodology for educators. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 32(1), 3.
- Eaves, Y. D., McQuiston, C., & Miles, M. S. (2005). Coming to terms with adult sibling grief: When a brother dies from AIDS. *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*, 7(3), 139-149.
- Ellis, C. (1993). "There are survivors": Telling a story of sudden death. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 34(4), 711-730.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Rowman Altamira.
- Ellis, C. (2007). Telling secrets, revealing lives: Relational ethics in research with intimate others. *Qualitative inquiry*, 13(1), 3-29.
- Ellis, C. (2009). *Revision: Autoethnographic reflections on life and work*. Left Coast Press, Inc..
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 273-290.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (Eds.). (1996). *Composing ethnography: Alternative forms of qualitative writing*. Rowman Altamira.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject.
- Ellis, C., Bochner, A. P., Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., Morse, J., Pelias, R., & Richardson, L. (2008). Talking and thinking about qualitative research. *Qualitative inquiry*, 14(2), 254-284.
- Fanos, J. H., & Nickerson, B. G. (1991). Long-term effects of sibling death during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 6, 70-82.
- Farmer, P. (1996). On suffering and structural violence: A view from below. *Daedalus*, 261-283.
- Ferguson, B. (2005). Tribal warfare and "ethnic" conflict. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 29(1), 18-22.
- Frank, A. W. (2004). Moral non-fiction: Life writing and children's disability. *The ethics of life writing*, 174-194.
- Frankl, V. (1959). (1984). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Fraser, E., & May, K. (2014, January 26). Popular musician dies after assault: 'He was extremely loved,' says friend. Winnipeg Free Press. Retrieved December 5, 2017, from

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/popular-musician-dies-after-assault-242021891.html>.

- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of peace research*, 6(3), 167-191.
- Global News Winnipeg. (2014, May 9). Healing from the tragic loss of a loved one through music. Global News Winnipeg. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <https://globalnews.ca/video/1322935/healing-from-the-tragic-loss-of-a-loved-one-through-music>.
- Godfrey, J. (2017). The impact of sibling death on adolescent psychosocial development and psychological wellbeing. *Swinburne University of Technology*.
- Government of Manitoba. (n.d.). Victim Services. Retrieved December 10, 2017, from <https://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/victims/>.
- Granholt, N. (2011, August 9). Canadian lawyer to talk about lived rights. South Dakota State University. Retrieved April 19, 2017, from <http://www.sdstate.edu/news/articles/lived-rights.cfm>
- Grewal, B. S. (2003). Johan Galtung: Positive and negative peace. *School of social science, Auckland University of technology*, 30, 23-26.
- Hagedorn, J. (2008). *A world of gangs: Armed young men and gangsta culture* (Vol. 14). U of Minnesota Press.
- Hathaway, W. (2013). Varieties of Violence: Structural, Cultural, and Direct. *Conflict Resolution/Mediation*. Counter Currents. Retrieved December 12, 2017, from <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2013/10/varieties-of-violence-structural-cultural-and-direct/>.
- Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence--from domestic abuse to political terror*. Hachette UK.
- Hill, T. T. (2019). *The Art of Grief: An Autoethnography Exploring Sibling Bereavement* (Doctoral dissertation, Royal Roads University (Canada)).
- Høivik, T. (1977). The demography of structural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 14(1), 59-73.
- Horsley, H. & Patterson, T. (2006). The effects of a parent guidance intervention on communication among adolescents who have experienced the sudden death of a sibling.

- American Journal of Family Therapy*, 34(2), 119-137.
- Joshua Bentley Obituary. (2014, January 25). In memory of Joshua Jerome Bentley. *Thomson in the Park Funeral Home and Cemetery*. Retrieved December 18, 2017, from <http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Joshua-Bentley&lc=3754&pid=169392654&mid=5835259>.
- Kazak, A.E., & Noll, R.B. (2004). Child death from pediatric illness: Conceptualizing intervention approaches from a family/systems and public health perspective. *Professional Psychology*, 35(3), 219-226.
- Klass, D., & Steffen, E. M. (Eds.). (2017). *Continuing bonds in bereavement: New directions for research and practice*. Routledge.
- Khoury, L., Tang, Y. L., Bradley, B., Cubells, J. F., & Ressler, K. J. (2010). Substance use, childhood traumatic experience, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in an urban civilian population. *Depression and anxiety*, 27(12), 1077–1086.
- Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). *On Death and Dying*. Routledge Ltd.
- Kübler-Ross, E., & Kessler, D. (2005). *On grief and grieving: Finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss*. Simon and Schuster.
- Labman, S. (2019). *Crossing Law's Border: Canada's Refugee Resettlement Program*. UBC Press.
- Lahman, M. K. E., Geist, M. R., Rodriguez, K. L., Graglia, P., & DeRoche, K. K. (2010). Culturally responsive relational reflexive ethics in research: The three Rs. *Qual Quant*, 45(6), 1397-1414.
- Lederach, J. P. (1996). *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures Syracuse*. University Press.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
- Levin, A. P., & Greisberg, S. (2003). Vicarious trauma in attorneys. *Pace L. Rev.*, 24, 245.
- Lichtenthal, W. G., Neimeyer, R. A., Currier, J. M., Roberts, K., & Jordan, N. (2013). Cause of death and the quest for meaning after the loss of a child. *Death studies*, 37(4), 311-342.
- Lohan, J. A. (1999). Parents' perceptions of family functioning and sibling grief in families who have experienced the violent death of an adolescent or young adult child.
- Mac Ginty, R. (2010). *Hybrid Peace: The Interaction Between Top-Down and Bottom-Up*

- Peace. *Security Dialogue*, 41(4), 391-412. Retrieved May 17, 2020, from [www.jstor.org/stable/26301105](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26301105)
- Madrid, P. A., & Schacher, S. J. (2006). A critical concern: Pediatrician self-care after disasters. *Pediatrics*, 117 (Supplement 4), S454-S457.
- Mairs, N. (1993). When bad things happen to good writers. *New York Times Book Review*, 1(February 21), 25-27.
- Mash, H. B., Fullerton, C. S., & Ursano, R. J. (2013). Complicated grief and bereavement in young adults following close friend and sibling loss. *Depression and anxiety*, 30(12), 1202-1210.
- Mayo Clinic. (2017, October 5). Complicated grief: Symptoms and causes. Retrieved June 5, 2020, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/symptoms-causes/syc-20360374>.
- McCann, L. I., & Pearlman, L. A. (1990). Vicarious traumatization: A framework for understanding the psychological effects of working with victims. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 3(1), 131-149.
- McIntyre, M. (2017, April 18). Gang member gets life for random killing of popular teen. *Winnipeg Free Press*. Retrieved December 15, 2017, from <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/gang-member-gets-life-for-random-killing-of-popular-teen-419768583.html?k=SkIXHC>.
- McKenzie, E. A. (2015). An autoethnographic inquiry into the experience of grief after traumatic loss. *Illness, Crisis & Loss*, 23(2), 93-109.
- McNess, A. (2007). The social consequences of 'how the sibling died' for bereaved young adults. *Youth Studies Australia*, 26(4), 12-20.
- Meichenbaum, D. (2007, May). Self-care for trauma psychotherapists and caregivers: Individual, social and organizational interventions. In *11th Annual Conference of the Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment of Victims of Violence, Miami, FL*. Retrieved December 1, 2017, from [http://www.melissainstitute.org/documents/Meichenbaum\\_SelfCare\\_11thconf.pdf](http://www.melissainstitute.org/documents/Meichenbaum_SelfCare_11thconf.pdf).
- Moss, S. Z., & Moss, M (1989). The impact of the death of an elderly sibling. *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 33, 94-106.
- MOVA. (2017). Home. Retrieved December 4, 2017, from <https://www.mova.ca/>.

- Noel, B., & Blair, P. D. (2008). *I wasn't ready to say goodbye: Surviving, coping and healing after the sudden death of a loved one*. Sourcebooks, Inc..
- Packman, W., Horsley, H., Davies, B., & Kramer, R. (2006). Sibling bereavement and continuing bonds. *Death studies*, 30(9), 817-841.
- Paris, M., Carter, B., & Day, S. (2009). Grief and trauma in children after the death of a sibling. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma*, 2, 71-80.
- Pearlman, L. A., & McKay, L. (2008). Understanding and addressing vicarious trauma. *Headington Institute*. Retrieved December 2, 2017, from [http://headington-institute.org/files/vtmoduletemplate2\\_ready\\_v2\\_85791.pdf](http://headington-institute.org/files/vtmoduletemplate2_ready_v2_85791.pdf).
- Powell, K. A., & Matthys, A. (2013). Effects of suicide on siblings: Uncertainty and the grief process. *Journal of Family Communication*, 13(4), 321-339.
- Pretorius, G., Halstead-Cleak, J., & Morgan, B. (2010). The lived experience of losing a sibling through murder. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 10(1), 1-12.
- Pryce, J. G., Shackelford, K. K., & Pryce, D. H. (2007). *Secondary traumatic stress and the child welfare professional*. Lyceum Books.
- The Psychopaedia Team. (2016, September 12). Silent grief – the overlooked impact of losing a sibling. Retrieved June 6, 2020, from <https://psychopaedia.org/family-and-relationships/silent-grief-the-overlooked-impact-of-losing-a-sibling/>.
- Rando, T. A. (1993). *Treatment of complicated mourning*. Research Press.
- Redmond, L. M. (1989). Surviving: When someone you love was murdered. *Psychological Consultation & Education Service*.
- Reeves, S., Kuper, A., & Hodges, B. D. (2008). Qualitative research methodologies: ethnography. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 337.
- Richards, R. (2008). Writing the othered self: Autoethnography and the problem of objectification in writing about illness and disability. *Qualitative health research*, 18(12), 1717-1728.
- Richardson, L. (2000). New writing practices in qualitative research. *Sociology of sport journal*, 17(1), 5-20.
- Robinson, L. and Mahon, M. M. (1997) 'Sibling Bereavement: A Concept Analysis', *Death Studies* 21: 477-500.
- Rogers, C. H., Floyd, F. J., Seltzer M.M., Greenbug, J., & Hong, J. (2008). Long term effects of

- the death of a child on parents' adjustment in midlife. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 22, 203-2011.
- Rostila, M., Saarela, J., & Kawachi, I. (2012). Mortality in parents following the death of a child: a nationwide follow-up study from Sweden. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 66(10), 927-933.
- Rostila, M., Saarela, J., & Kawachi, I. (2013). Fatal stroke after the death of a sibling: A nationwide follow-up study from Sweden. *PLoS One*, 8(2), e56994
- Roth, W. M. (2005). *Auto/biography and auto/ethnography: Praxis of research method*. Brill Sense.
- Rutherford, A., Zwi, A., Grove, N., & Butchart, A. (2007). Violence: a glossary. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 61(8), 676-680.
- Rynearson, E., Correa, F. (2008). *Accommodation to Violent Dying*. Violent Death Bereavement Society. Retrieved June 3, 2020, from [https://vdb.org/docs/ATVDENGLISH\\_JUN2013.pdf](https://vdb.org/docs/ATVDENGLISH_JUN2013.pdf).
- Saakvitne, K. W., Gamble, S., Pearlman, L. A., & Lev, B. T. (2000). Risking connection: A training curriculum for working with survivors of childhood abuse.
- Saakvitne, K. W., Pearlman, L. A., & Abrahamson, D. J. (1996). *Transforming the pain: A workbook on vicarious traumatization*. New York: WW Norton.
- Schlosser, E. (1997). A grief like no other. *Atlantic Monthly*, 280, 37-76.
- Shah, S. A. (2010). Mental health emergencies and post-traumatic stress disorder. *Emergency public health: preparedness and response*. Boston, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, 493-516.
- Sebold, A. (2017). *Lucky*. Simon and Schuster.
- Senehi, J. (2008). Building peace. In *Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*. Routledge.
- Smith, B. (1999). The abyss: Exploring depression through a narrative of the self. *Qualitative inquiry*, 5(2), 264-279.
- Sparkes, A. C. (2000). Autoethnography and narratives of self: Reflections on criteria in action. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 17(1), 21-43.
- Statistics Canada. (2013, February 13). Household size, by census metropolitan area (2011 Census). Retrieved December 2, 2017, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/famil122f-eng.htm>.

- Statistics Canada. (2015, November 30). Attempted murder and homicide, police-reported rates, Canada, 1981 to 2011. Retrieved December 2, 2017, from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2012001/article/11692/c-g/desc/desc10-eng.htm>.
- Taku, K., Tedeschi, R. G., & Cann, A (2014). Relationships of posttraumatic growth and stress responses in bereaved young adults. *Journal of Loss & Trauma, 20*, 1016.
- Turner, J. (2014, January 28). Murder suspect's anger issues known: Judge spoke of concerns before weekend slaying. Winnipeg Free Press. Retrieved December 4, 2017, from <https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/murder-suspects-anger-issues-known-242344491.html>.
- The Uniter. (2014, January 30). Soundcity. *The Uniter*. Retrieved June 1, 2020, from <http://uniter.ca/pdf/Uniter-68-18-web.pdf>.
- Vickers, M. H. (2007). Autoethnography as sensemaking: A story of bullying. *Culture and Organization, 13*(3), 223-237.
- Vorobej, M. (2008). Structural violence. *Peace Research, 84-98*.
- White, P. G. (2006). *Sibling grief: Healing after the death of a sister or brother*. iUniverse.
- Wright, P. M. (2016). Adult sibling bereavement: Influences, consequences, and interventions. *Illness, Crisis & Loss, 24*(1), 34-45.
- Zampitella, C. (2011). Adult surviving siblings: The disenfranchised grievers. *Group, 35*, 333-347.

## Appendixes

### Appendix A (Obituary)

#### OBITUARY

Joshua Jerome Bentley

8 MARCH, 1995 – 25 JANUARY, 2014

Joshua Bentley, a creative, loving soul, and incredible artist passed away Saturday January 25, 2014. Josh was born in Winnipeg on March 8, 1995 and left to celebrate his life are mum, Sharon; brother, Derrek; dad, Larry; and countless family and friends.

Donations gratefully accepted at the Winnipeg Centre Vineyard 782 Main St, Winnipeg, MB R2W 3N4 for the Josh Bentley fund to build a music studio.

Longer obituary to follow. (Longer Obituary not published in Winnipeg Free Press )

Joshua Bentley, a creative, loving soul, and incredible artist passed away Saturday January 25, 2014. Josh was born in Winnipeg on March 8, 1995 and left to celebrate his life are mum, Sharon; brother, Derrek; dad, Larry and Tina; close relatives Kay and Doug; family friend Auntie Mary; special friend and cousin Mike; and a community of family and friends. Josh carved out a path in life that was unique and inspirational. It would have been a great gift to seem him live life to a ripe old age; to further witness his ability to question things, colour outside the lines, and live life on life's terms. Yet, as life would have it - God had another plan. A God, that Josh came to know over the recent years as he grew in the communities of Grant Memorial Baptist Church and the Winnipeg Centre Vineyard Christian Fellowship.

From boyhood, he was a lover of the outdoors and being active. Karate, football, jazz, hiphop, bmx-ing, ballet, skateboarding, and so much more - enthusiasm for all things he loved poured out of him. Josh was a sensitive boy and felt things acutely through his young life. This translated into so many wonderful and complicated things for Josh - one of the most remarkable being his relationship with music and dance, ballet.

He struck the hearts and baffled the minds of those around him as he pursued a position with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Professional Division. Later, as Josh finished high school at St. Norbert Collegiate and was working at West 49 and Pure Perfection Salon, this passion turned to music as lead singer (screamer), for Empty Hands. His family and friends, were moved by seeing Josh's tenacity to always try something so unconventional and unexpected - experience something that was very much... Josh. A maverick, a soul following the magic that exists in so few who dare, who dare to try.

Josh's life was not without disappointments, sadness or loss. At 18, what this young man accomplished was profound and one of the many gifts he leaves for those of us behind is to do just this - to dare to dream; dare to try. At 18, he had but just begun, and the gifts he leaves transcend death.

Josh, dance with the angels. Show them some new moves. Cut your angel wings into some rad design and know that you are loved and missed. We will honour and remember you, as fiercely as you lived. Your light lives in our hearts and we will be watching for you in the small beauty and wonders of each day. We know that your spirit is with us and for you, we pray, watch over us, you beautiful young man. There never was nor will there ever be anyone like, our Josh.

In memory of Josh, donations will be gratefully accepted by the Winnipeg Centre Vineyard 782 Main St, Winnipeg, MB R2W 3N4 for the Josh Bentley fund to help build a music recording studio.

For all friends and family who would like to celebrate Josh's life, a memorial service will be held at Grant Memorial Church (877 Wilkes avenue) on Tuesday February 4, 2014 at 2pm. The family asks those attending to please (if they would like) bring a photo of Josh or of an owl with a personal message written on it to include in a large collage that the family would like to keep.

## Appendix B (Victim Impact Statement)

### The Question: What Impact Has My Brother's Murder Had On Me?

How does one write or say the horrors of losing a loved one even under normal circumstances? How does one even begin to think of what to write or say in a situation such as this? How can I even begin to tell anyone the effects of losing my brother when I was 20 and he only 18? How do I explain to anyone how different the trauma of losing someone to murder is when compared to losing someone from old age or even young age from disease? What words even exist to describe such complicated and impossible feelings? The simple answer is that I cannot do any of these things. There is nothing that I can say that will successfully explain to anyone what this feels like.

Shock, disbelief, confusion, difficulty concentrating, lack of motivation, anger, irritability, anxiety, guilt, fear, shame, withdrawing from others, grief, sadness, hopelessness, disconnection, numbness, mood swings, irritability, insomnia, agitation, aches and pains, fatigue. Those are the emotions, the feelings, the words...yet none of them work alone. It is all of these things and more, all at the same time, at different times, and in various, unpredictable combinations. I have felt them all, and I should never have had to in the first place. I should never have lost someone in my life, let alone my only brother, to murder.

So what does that mean? What does living with all of those emotions mean? Simply put, it means I have had to learn a lot, to redefine myself, to become a new and different person than I was when I still had a living brother. A few things that I have learnt are what I will share now with the hope that they can briefly show the never-ending work that I must do on a daily basis to be able to live life to the fullest.

#### **1. I have to be okay with hearing a ton of stupid things**

"How are you?" they ask, "how do you think I am?" I answer.

"He is in a better place," they said, "is that so?" I answer.

"This was god's path for him, it was his time," they said, "thank you for that life changing comment" I answer.

"I understand," they said, "oh you had a sibling murdered too? How do you feel about that?" I would answer.

It was infuriating, to say the least. It took so much time to realize that these comments from my friends and family came from good places of compassion, of people trying to find something to say in an impossibly difficult situation. Eventually, my sarcastic responses faded and I learnt to grit my teeth and be understanding of the effort being made. With time, I learnt to have productive conversations about what was being said instead of lashing out in anger.

#### **2. I do not have to feel guilt when I am happy**

I had to teach myself and tell myself over and over that smiling, laughing, and being happy was okay. I had to learn that just because I was not crying or sad every moment does not mean I have forgotten my brother, it just means that I am coping. I had to be okay with being happy and know Josh is always in the back of my mind. I had to relearn what happiness means for me.

#### **3. Sometimes, I will be forgotten**

I learnt in school that in trauma, a sibling losing a brother or sister, is a trauma in itself. But then, often the remaining sibling is 'forgotten' about which is traumatizing all over again. This is incredibly true. I am not saying that everyone in my life forgot about me or

ignored me or disregarded my feelings; however, how my parents were feeling about losing a child was definitely the priority for those around me. Repeatedly people told me to make sure I was there for my mom through it all without even realizing that I was also going through trauma and grieving. It as if those around me could relate to the thought of losing a child, but did not even think about how horrible it would be to lose their sibling. It took me time to accept that sometimes I would be forgotten and to be able to have constructive conversations with those around me as to why I had to make decisions that supported me instead of my close family. I had to learn to be there for myself.

#### **4. Being selfish is necessary occasionally**

I cannot be a super-child or super-person by staying super busy and filling all my time with tasks. It is okay to be angry, it is okay to cry, it okay to do nothing for a whole day, it is okay to live my life, it is okay to take the time I need, it is okay to be there for myself instead of those around me. I had to learn these things. I had to learn that I could no longer always give, give, give to those around me, but that I also had to give, give, give to myself to be able to process and live life without my brother. I had to learn very quickly how to support myself in new ways and this learning process was rough. I pushed everyone in my life away and isolated myself, before I could rekindle incredible friendships in my life.

#### **5. I will never be ‘over’ it, and that is okay**

The number has grown too large to count of the amount of looks or the number of comments that those around me have made that directly or indirectly suggest that I should be ‘over’ my brother being murdered. Simply put, people do not understand. I must live with this every day of my life and it is not something that will just go away or that I will be okay with one day. The perfect illustration of this is that my mom, my aunt, and others around me, always told me that one day my brother and I would be best friends and that we would look back on all the fights and the arguing and laugh about it. This opportunity has been ripped away, never to return. I will never be best friends with my brother and I will never be over not being able to. My best man at my wedding will not be my brother, the guy I go for drinks with when I am 50 to laugh at our childhood will not be my brother, and nothing will ever let me get ‘over’ this.

So why share these five lessons I have learnt? The answer is simple: I should never have had to learn them. I should never have had to learn to be okay with watching TV in bed for a few days. I should never have had to learn to be okay with being happy in life. I should never have had to realize that I will never be over losing my brother. I should never have had to teach myself to not feel guilty about being selfish or not being there for someone else. I should never have had to plan my brother’s funeral. Joshua Bentley, my brother, should still be alive and well today.

So, back to the original question, what impact has my brother’s murdered had on me? It changed every aspect of my life for the worse and I am still working at reinventing who I am to be able to live with this on a daily basis: every second of every minute of every hour of every day of every week of every month of every year. The pain I feel is just as real and horrifying as it was when I found out of Josh being murdered on January 26th, 2014; however, I have been forced to learn difficult lessons that have allowed me to deal with this pain in increasingly better ways. Finally, Rose Kennedy said: “It has been said, ‘time heals all wounds.’ I do not agree. The wounds remain. In time, the mind, protecting its sanity, covers them with scar tissues and the pain lessens. But it is never gone.” I would like to add that in fact, it is a miracle to survive these wounds at all.