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Letting Go Of Preconceptions: A Novel Approach To Creating Memorial Services\*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a novel application of Grounded Theory (GT) to the creation of memorial services. Several relevant aspects of Grounded Theory methodology are presented which have made a positive and significant contribution to the creation of relevant, meaningful, and hopeful memorial services. The relevance of the grounded theory (the story) that emerges as the memorial service lies in the very manner in which the story is created. Here the story itself is the means of responding to the problem, the basic social and psychological process of dealing with loss. "Letting go of preconceptions" is the core variable. It provides the means whereby the energy invested in responding to the problem is best guided in creating meaningful and hopeful stories. Suggested areas of applications and relevance for this methodology, within areas where creating stories of meaning and hope are essential to healing, are also presented.

LETTING GO OF PRECONCEPTIONS:  
A NOVEL APPROACH TO CREATING MEMORIAL SERVICES

While I was a chaplain resident in an acute care medical teaching hospital, I was called upon several times to conduct memorial or funeral services. The services were for patients who had died while in hospital. I either had connected with the patient or their families during their time in hospital.

Two primary factors contributed to these requests for me to conduct these services. The first was that for many of the patients who died, their family and/or friends did not have a religious connection or a person in a religious capacity with whom they felt comfortable contacting to create and conduct such a service. Not having this religious connection certainly did not preclude a desire for a service to honor the memory and the life of the deceased and the story they left behind as their legacy. The second reason I was contacted was that the connections made within the hospital with the patient, or with their family and friends were of such a nature as to make the choice a meaningful one.

What is a Memorial Service?

It is important to clarify what a memorial service is as it is understood in the process conceptualized in this paper. The memorial service is understood as a service that is created to honor the memory and the life of the person deceased. Each person leaves behind a story which is their legacy. The intent of a memorial service is to provide a story, a legacy that is hopeful and meaningful, for the family, the friends, and the community of the deceased.

## A “Word” On Hope

“Trusting in emergence” is a key concept in Grounded Theory and in creating memorial services. It will be introduced below and how it so important in this creation process. Through “trusting in emergence” space is cultivated for hope and meaning to emerge. The word “hope” might appear a bit constraining or forced at this point, but is the closest approximation for what I have seen emerge continuously, no matter what the circumstances. Many of the families I have met with have related to me how comforted they felt at the end of our meeting, and that they were surprised they felt as comforted as they did.

The process of preparing the scaffolding, which will also be introduced below, is set at the outset so that the legacy is couched in an emergent hope, not a forced hope. It is not obligated of the family or community, but it is an invitation to consider. Hope is congruent with the legacy because no matter how hopeless the story may appear, hope can emerge.

I was asked this question about how I work with peoples’ beliefs that might not be congruent with mine, about meaning and purpose, afterlife, explanations of death, simplistic or complicated, that I don’t drag them in directions that are incongruent for them. In such times where shock, disbelief, sadness, grief can be so close or so far away, these are significant questions and relevant concerns. It is in such circumstances that the strength of Grounded Theory works so well, where trusting in emergence in such contexts creates the space for an emergent hope. Staying close to the data and coupling the emerging story with the data and concepts diminishes the possibilities of separation and conflict. The relevance and fit of the story that emerges for those who have contributed to its creation assures this. I will flesh this out a bit more clearly and how this connects with “letting go of preconceptions” below.

## The Context for Creating Memorial Services

The life stories of the people I am called upon to represent may or may not include a formal religious tradition and associated funeral or memorial service, particularly with respect to “God” language. For instance, some families may request a spiritual service rather than a religious service, or one where “God” is not even to be named at all.

As a consequence of the position from which planning for these services often starts, outside common religious traditions, I have utilized Grounded Theory as a means of creating memorial services that are respectful of, and responsive to, these contexts and stories as they emerge. Having conducted over eighty memorial services using this process has led to these refinements to the application and relevance of the process as presented here.

The application of Grounded Theory as a methodology guiding the creation and presentation of the services has been a significant contribution to the creation of meaningful and hopeful services. The methodology has substantially influenced the approach to interviewing family and friends of the deceased, the creation and preparation of the service, and the actual presentation of the service itself.

Congruent with Grounded Theory’s approach to interviewing and conceptualization, I have observed that a great deal of the essence of the service created is realized within the very process of creating the service itself. Meeting with the family, the conversations, the time spent reminiscing; all contribute greatly to the actual meaning and hope of the service and the story that emerges.

This article will present certain aspects of the conceptualization and application of Grounded Theory that make it so very relevant in this context. My intent here is not to instruct or define Grounded Theory. However, particularly relevant aspects of this methodology will be

presented here so as to illustrate and provide some comprehension of how its application leads to such relevance in creating memorial services. For those who are not familiar with Grounded Theory and wish to explore its potential in greater depth by actually doing it, some basic resources are provided (Glaser, 2003; Glaser, 2001; Schreiber & Stern, 2001; Stebbins, 2001; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Stern, 1980; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967b).

The key aspects of Grounded Theory that bear on the process of creating a memorial service are connected through the core variable of “Letting Go Of Preconceptions”. Several aspects of Grounded Theory will be explored below as they relate to “Letting Go Of Preconceptions” and their contribution to creating memorial services. These aspects are:

1. “Trusting in emergence” generally, but also where timing and pacing of creating the memorial service are concerned
2. “All is data”
3. “Constant comparison”
4. “Abstract of people, time, and place”

## A UNIQUE METHODOLOGICAL APPLICATION FOR CREATING MEMORIAL SERVICES

To facilitate the process of creating a memorial service, I have applied Grounded Theory methodology as a means of guiding the creation of memorial services. Here the Grounded Theory that emerges is the story, the actual memorial service that is created. So it must be kept in mind that in this context the Grounded Theory that is generated is in effect a story, a memorial service. The methodology of Grounded Theory informs the creative process that leads to the

emergence of the memorial service. What follows below is the conceptualization and application of Grounded Theory to creating memorial services.

### What Is Grounded Theory?

Grounded Theory is an extremely powerful methodology developed and articulated by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. Their work was published as a book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*, as a means of conceptualizing the methodology they used conducting their “Awareness Of Dying” study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967a). The intent of these two researchers was to generate new theory from data they acquired, rather than having a pre-existing theory constrain and inform their research process and outcome. Following the methodology of Grounded Theory led, and leads to the generation of an emergent theory which has relevance to those individuals and families who contributed to the study. The relevance of the grounded theory, the story that emerges as the memorial service, is the manner in which the story is created. The story itself is the means of responding to the problem, the basic social and psychological process of dealing with loss. The core variable of letting go of preconceptions is the means whereby the energy directed to responding or resolving the problem is best guided toward healing, and providing a meaningful and hopeful legacy for the family, the friends, and the community as the legacy of the deceased.

Subsequent relevant additions to the conceptualization and application of this methodology have been presented by Glaser (Glaser, 2001; Glaser, 1998; Glaser, 1992; Glaser, 1978) as well as Stern and colleagues’ very relevant de-mystification of the necessary essentials for actually doing Grounded Theory (Schreiber et al., 2001; Stern, 1980).



## Grounded Theory's Relevance In Creating Memorial Services

Grounded Theory in its accessibility and relevance relates well to creating a meaningful and hopeful story of a person's life. As with a Grounded Theory, the theory or story created must be accessible and relevant, congruent with the person's life and the perceptions of those who shared it with them. Stories well created, emerging out of listening, sharing, feeling heard, and the generated using the constant comparison method bridge the gap of either/or perceptions. Those family members who have shared their reminiscences and stories of the person for whom we are creating this memorial service and those who hear the service as it is presented feel connected with the story.

The application of Grounded Theory as the methodology guiding the creation of the memorial service informs the interviewing process, as well as working with the "facts" and stories received from which the service is generated. In this context the Grounded Theory that is created is in effect the person's life story. The memorial service is their story, connecting through family and friends, work and leisure, community, and transcending these. The memorial service informs how a life story moves on through family and friends, and through the community.

## Trusting in Emergence: Timing and Pacing

One of the core concepts or themes that permeates Grounded Theory is "Trusting in Emergence" (Glaser, 1992). This certainly is applicable to the process of creating memorial services.

"Trusting in Emergence" is also relevant as a guiding principle informing timing and pacing of creating the service through emergence rather than through forcing.

A story might best represent how comforting and relevant “Trusting in Emergence” is as a concept applied in creating a memorial service. When I first meet with the family, many are overwhelmed by their perceptions of the task at hand. To provide some perspective for the family, I often share this story with them as a means of connecting “Trusting in Emergence” with what we are about to share as we prepare the service. I have to be sensitive here as well to the timing and pacing in sharing this story, especially with regard to the family’s comfort with hearing something from the Bible, as it can be a sensitive subject. The story goes like this:

Do you know the story of the feeding of the five thousand or the five loaves and two fishes from the New Testament? The story presents a perspective on seeing that I would like to invite each of us to consider as a way of seeing the story, the legacy, that we are about to create.

The essentials of the story are these: There was not much food to feed five thousand people who had gathered in the desert, coming to listen to Jesus’ teaching. So Jesus’ disciples went looking for food amongst the crowd, not expecting to find much. But one child gave all that they had, five loaves and two fishes. Jesus gave thanks for what he had received as it was. And through this child’s giving there was enough food to feed every one there so that they were satisfied; maybe not stuffed, but satisfied. And there was enough remaining for leftovers.

The story continues. This story had just been read from the New Testament to a group of kids during the depression. An adult who overheard the

story commented that, “Miracles don’t happen like that anymore these days.” But one of the kids in the group said “Hold on! Mom’s got that recipe. Every night she feeds our family of 15 with next to nothing. If you want, I’ll go and ask her for that recipe for you.”

This story illustrates how our perceptions influence what we see and consequently how we connect or not. What we are looking to see often dictates what we actually think we see. Are we willing and able to let go of our preconceptions and look, to see miracles or not? In many cases we can choose, choose to see these miracles in our own lives, miracles that contributed to the memories we have and share in creating this memorial service. And so “Trusting In Emergence” is about trusting that what emerges will be sufficient to sustain us. And this often is a comforting position from which to work..

All is data

“All is data” is an excellent dictum of Barney Glaser’s and of Grounded Theory that works extremely well here (Glaser, 1992). There are many, many sources of information that can contribute to the creation of the memorial service. The sources for “data” can be as varied as our senses; stories shared orally or in writing, memories, pictures, music, scents, songs, ... So “all is data” can also connect with “Trusting In Emergence”.

Constant Comparison

The constant comparative method of Grounded Theory is one of the most important aspects of the Grounded Theory methodology (Glaser et al., 1967b). The constant comparison method

keeps the theory from running away from the data, or with the data. Theory that has separated from the data is often running toward becoming disconnected, ungrounded, and irrelevant. The relevance and density of the theory, of the story, emerges through the attention to connecting the story with the data, the codes and the concepts. Keeping with this constant comparison is especially important where one does not know the family or the person for whom they are preparing the service. Constant comparison is a means of keeping the emerging story on track with the data and relevant. It is through constant comparison that meaning and hope also emerge.

Constant comparison is also a significant check to “embellishing the story”. Embellishing can be a default mechanism that can emerge when it appears that there is not enough “data” or story to constitute a service. Being aware of any efforts or attraction to embellishing a person’s story provides an opportunity of letting go of this predisposition. Letting go of this predisposition allows the story to emerge, maintaining the connection with the story and the data through constant comparison.

#### Abstract of People, Place, and Time

Grounded Theory is (an) abstract of people, place, and time (Glaser, 2001). Grounded Theory also establishes a trajectory due to the conceptual nature (probability) embedded within the theory itself. This is reflected within the conceptual nature of the methodology compared with a descriptive emphasis. An emergent Grounded Theory does not have the “frozen in time” feel as pictures or descriptions often do. The Grounded Theory that emerges has an essence, a feel, a connection emerging through it, just as good stories do.

Grounded Theory and its relevance can be compromised by erosion (Stern, 1994) or method muddling (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1996). And Grounded Theory being abstract of people,

place, and time can be misinterpreted or misapplied as being independent of people, place, and time. Such independence of people, place, and time in this context leads to a disconnection (separation) of the Grounded Theory or story. The result of this sort of independence is a Grounded Theory that is not a Grounded Theory, a story that is not a story. Such a memorial service will have diminished relevance and connection, and consequently diminished meaning and hope for the family and community of the person for whom the service was created.

## ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS IN CREATING MEMORIAL SERVICES

### Preparing The Scaffolding: The Intent Guiding The Process

The scaffolding which is erected influences and guides what emerges with regard to construction. So too is the case with establishing a scaffolding to guide the emergence and unfolding of a story. The scaffolding is especially relevant and important here. The scaffolding is guided and established through the intent presented below, in this reflection on Thomas Merton's vision of contemplation and compassion by (Padovano, 1984, p. 56-57).

True silence is loving and communicative. Speaking does not shatter this silence.

Silence finds space for the other, and oneself. It is a silence which listens to the other rather than excluding or rejecting him or her.

The point of silence in human development is not economy of words or absence of speech. The silence which humanizes us is the silence emerging from reverence for life and for others. To listen, one must be humble and sensitive,

willing to allow the other to speak, truly interested in what the other has to say. It is not monologue but dialogue which creates life.

As we grow to human maturity and care for the life of others, we become creatively and beautifully silent. We evoke words from the other and generate life by our listening. The silent person invites the other into the world and makes that person feel valuable. The silent person is not the one who never speaks but the one who knows how to listen well. When such a person does speak, it is clear to the other that he or she has finally been heard.

### Connecting with the Family

Setting up the meeting with the family plays an important role in setting the scaffolding. It is the first contact that the family has with the person conducting the service. From this first connection with the family, opportunities for choice are created. I identify myself and provide the name of the funeral director who provided me with the family's contact information. This helps the person who answers the phone to place and connect me, a caller they have never met. We discuss a convenient time to meet as well as a location that is comfortable for the family, usually a family member's home if that is agreeable, because it often can be the most convenient and comfortable option.

I also extend an invitation for the family to invite any that they might wish to attend. As there are often people traveling whom they indicate would like to attend but can't, I reassure them that there are still many opportunities for them to contribute or connect to be part of the service. I also ensure that the family has my contact information in case anything arises that they

are unable to make the meeting, they can contact me to let me know and then we can reschedule. This contributes to flexibility and choice that can decrease anxiety and stress as we plan to meet.

### Meeting with the Family: Letting Go Of Preconceptions

Letting go of preconceptions contributes to the cultivation of an emergent process. Anthony de Mello nicely depicts the significance and impact that letting go of preconceptions has on cultivating relationships;

“Wisdom occurs when you drop the barriers you have erected through your concepts and conditioning. Wisdom is not something acquired; wisdom is not experience; wisdom is not applying yesterday’s illusions to today’s problems. ... Wisdom is to be sensitive to this situation, to this person, uninfluenced by any carryover from the past, without residue from the experience of the past. This is quite unlike what most people are accustomed to thinking. I would add another sentence to the one’s I’ve read: ‘If the heart is unobstructed, the result is love.’”  
(de Mello, 1990).

In Grounded Theory, our preconceptions or expectations, our barriers as de Mello refers to them, are erected through concepts and conditioning. These preconceptions are best treated as Sensitizing Concepts (Van den Hoonaard, 1997).

It is my experience that I have many preconceptions and expectations. Trying to resist them or reject them often only serves to energize them. Within the context of sensitizing concepts, our preconceptions can help sensitize our listening, and we can let them go. But our

preconceptions are not to direct the interview. It is here that our ability to let go of our preconceptions provides the most comfortable space for the stories to emerge.

Out of this meeting with the family, the material for generating a meaningful and connected memorial service, the story of a person's life is gathered. Surprisingly, there are many opportunities to develop a very trusting relationship in a very short period of time that facilitates the emergence of a relevant, meaningful, and hopeful memorial service.

### Some Preconceptions Encountered

During my time creating memorial services and using Grounded Theory, I have observed a number of preconceptions that can arise and block the emergence of the story. Specific examples are provided below to illustrate how letting go of these preconceptions benefits the creation of the service by providing space for the story to emerge:

#### Time

Most meetings with family and friends take place as a single meeting in person. The meeting usually varies from between one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours. Often there is an initial sense of urgency with the families when we meet, a sense of having to get things done. With the service taking place usually within the next day or two, this perspective can contribute to a hectic, breathless meeting. A meeting with this sense of urgency contributes more to stress and anxiety than comfort.

If the family seems anxious about the time frame, I share my perspective that we have a lot of time within which to work, sharing the options that we have. I let them know that I will be open to receiving feedback or changes to the service right up until the time of the service, or



even during the service if need be. This can settle things down a bit so that we can let the various aspects of the story emerge rather than forcing it under artificial time constraints.

Another question that I receive quite frequently that deals with time can be a variation of “How long should it be?” or “How long do you think it will be?” Many people have shared with me that they have had experiences with services that went on way too long, having had a sense that people were restless, and were left with the feeling that the service would never end. My initial response to them is that at this point it is too early to be concerned with how long the service will be.

I invite them to start by just sharing what they might like to see in the service without any concern with limiting the contents. When we have “saturated” the data, then we start organizing what we have to work with. I let them know that I am interested in hearing the stories of the person’s life, and their connections, relationships, hobbies, interests, what they like to read, whatever emerges. I let the families know that my interest in the stories serves as a tuning fork for me so that when I go to organize the service as to what connects and fits, and what does not, I have a better feel for what is relevant from the stories I have heard. When we have created a service that is a story that fits, is relevant and congruent, through this connection, time won’t matter.

Sometimes this story of research about sermons that Bishop Untener conducted provides a meaningful connection that families can grasp. This story connects with the concept of fit above. Bishop Untener conducted research on peoples’ responses to sermons. The “runaway first place” in people’s complaints about homilies, surprisingly, was not that they were too long. “Without a question the consensus is that homilies often contain too many thoughts.” (Digmann,

1999). So it is not the length of the sermon necessarily, but how well connected the sermon is and how it connects with the congregation or audience that dictates the perception of time.

The analogy of a movie is also relevant here. A movie can be three hours long, but if we are really connected and interested in the movie, it can seem like 5 minutes. The converse is that a movie we are not interested in, even in the first 5 minutes we can start wishing that we weren't there. So I place the creation of the service in the context of connecting, of relevance that the perception of time will also be relative to our connection with the service and the person for whom we are creating the service. But I do reassure them that I have a guess from experience as to how long it will go so that we can work with this detail if need be. With this reassurance, we are usually able to begin and let the story emerge and unfold.

#### Facts and Accuracy

Another common preconception that I have had to deal with in myself is that of knowing, the need for facts and accuracy. I have had to learn to practice being present with them where they are and not having to preconceive or know where they are. This freed up a lot of energy for being present with them. Families have appreciated this opportunity of sanctuary, of being just as they are. Being present and minimizing the preconceptions is also congruent with an open, nondirective interviewing style mentioned above. I have found the most significant means of shifting the emphasis from knowing and preconceiving is to approach the interviews with the emphasis on learning through the connections I make with the family and the stories that unfold during the meeting.

In meeting with family and friends of the deceased, listening, being open and not directing or forcing the conversation leads to a much more relevant and deeper essence of the

person for whom the memorial service is being created. I don't try to fit the information they provide into a "fill in the blank" questionnaire style. The intent is not to generate a generic profile of the person or in the strict sense, an accurate account of their life. The intent here is to appreciate and apprehend the individual aspects of the person; their relationships, family and friends and coworkers, their personal and professional identities, hobbies and games they appreciated, the various things they were and did in their lives which enriched their life and the lives of those around them.

The emphasis in the interview is not on facts, although they emerge. The emphasis is on the story of the person's life and the many relationships and facets through which it may emerge. I believe that it is at this juncture between facts and story that is where the term "worrisome accuracy" has such relevance (Glaser, 2002). The paradox is that if one apprehends the story of the person's life, it will provide a connection that can not be duplicated by a recitation of the facts or "worrisome accuracy". It is the story that conveys the meaning, purpose, and hope of a person's life, that speaks of the connections and relationships, that provides a healthy movement to the person's story through family, friends, and community.

### Protecting Privacy

Often there are times when we come to a portion of the conversation with which the family has reservations about some of the information they have shared. It can be of a sensitive or confidential nature and there may be reservation about this information having been shared. I acknowledge what has been shared and clarify how this information has been received, and how it will inform the service we are creating. The information is on the table and can then be dealt with in a way that is respectful and considerate of a healthy response to creating a story. I

reassure the families that not everything they say will be included in the service, as some are very concerned about how the information and stories they provide will be used. A story that includes both sides of life, the good and the bad is more often a healthier and more relevant story than one that has had aspects of the life of the deceased glossed over in favor of presenting only one side. Such a story often sounds hollow and superficial.

Providing less than a whole story can also lead to blind spots. These sensitive issues or concerns can be blind spots that might emerge during the service and inadvertently compromise the service if the person conducting the service is left unadvised. Families are often quick to realize and agree with this. Thus, a direct approach to sensitive issues has actually been comforting for family and friends. They then have choice in the matter of what constitutes the service; they have the opportunity to practice developing trust with how the information will be received and used for the creation of the service. There is also a sense of relief that is often associated with sharing what an individual or family may consider sensitive or compromising information.

### Shortage of Resources

Time or geographical constraints often lead to concerns that other family members or friends who are unable to attend the meeting but would like to contribute to the service in some meaningful way might be excluded. This is easily addressed with an invitation to follow-up with any information, stories, or input that a family member or friend might wish to contribute. Meeting in-person is an option, as well as communicating via the internet which can be an effective means of facilitating information transfer across distances and time constraints for incorporating these contributions into the service.

## CREATING THE STORY THROUGH CONSTANT COMPARISON

The story of a person's life is created so that meaning and hope might be cultivated and nurtured through the connection with the story, the memorial service created. The relevance of the story is maintained through the constant comparative method of Grounded Theory (Glaser et al., 1967b). The constant comparative method ensures that the story is connected with the interviews and resources from which to draw in creating the service, the "data" that have been shared during the course of creating the memorial service.

Staying connected throughout the course of preparing the memorial service is relevant and essential at two levels. The first is to stay connected with the family. The second is to stay connected with the story that is emerging through the interviews, conversations, and various other forms of feedback that often accompany working with families when creating memorial services.

### Staying Connected With the Family

E-mail and telephone are two excellent means of staying connected with families after meeting with them in person and the service. One stipulation I try to maintain wherever possible is that e-mail and phone don't take the place of meeting face-to-face. E-mail and phone serve well, after the meeting takes place.

During the first meeting with the family, I usually request that there be one contact person that I can be in touch with through e-mail. However, I invite all who are interested to be involved in the feedback process. Having one contact and inviting the family to be involved in the feedback and creation process serves two purposes: one can reduce the propensity for one

voice to dominate and direct the creation of the service as all have been invited to contribute. The second is that there is less opportunity for the information to diffuse amongst many people receiving the e-mail and not acting on them, or having too much input and not really being able to discern if many are involved or just one. This process seems to keep the process manageable, responsive, and accountable.

### Staying Connected with the Emerging Story

Congruent with constant comparison and Grounded Theory, the story that emerges must maintain a connection with the data from which it was created, and be abstract of people place, and time. As the story is emerging, and through maintaining connection with the family and friends of the deceased as they are inclined, the story maintains its relevance and becomes even more connected as it is parsed. Steering clear of embellishment also assists greatly in maintaining the connection of the story with the data from which it emerged. As the story, the service enters the final phase of creation, just before it is printed off I do a last check in with the family to see if there are any who are interested in hearing a bit of how it sounds.

My invitations to share a part of the reflection are often accepted, and I will read aspects of the reflection to a family member with whom I have worked or with those who have expressed an interest in hearing it. This sharing serves two purposes. It can further refine the story to connect it even closer with what I have heard through meeting with family and friends. Often, another story or connection might emerge which can increase the density and relevance of the story. I also get a strong sense if I am on the right track or not, if I am connecting when reading some of the service to a family member. The second purpose that this serves is to comfort the family in that they have an opportunity to hear how the service will sound, and how I

have interpreted the conversations and stories shared. This can often alleviate some of the stress and anxiety families might otherwise feel if they do not know how the information has been translated and used to create the service.

### Illustrations of Memorial Services Created

Thus far the emphasis has been on the methodology of Grounded Theory and how Grounded Theory contributes to the process of “Letting go of preconceptions”, of connecting with the family and the emerging story that is being created as the memorial service. The best means of illustrating how this methodology works is to provide a couple of aspects of stories that have emerged as themes informing the creation of the memorial service. An example of an actual service that is available on-line will also be included.

The first example is of a service that we created for a premature baby who lived only four days. I met with his mother, father, and aunt to plan his service on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. I listened to the stories that were shared of this little fellow, and what he was able to accomplish with his family in such a short time. This little child cultivated a great deal of inspiration in his brief life. He bridged a lot of gaps in a very short time. He had small feet, but he certainly left big tracks that I found easier to follow than I would have believed before meeting with his family.

A core theme that emerged for his service was “Are We Getting It?” It was difficult for me not to preconceive that this service would be challenging. What do you do with the questions that emerge, of what to say about a four-day-old child, born 15 weeks premature whom you haven’t even met? Well my preconceptions would have gotten in the way of this little guy’s story if I hadn’t been able to let them go. Letting go of my preconceptions provided the space for his

story, and his family's story to emerge. I got to listen to how much relationship building and bridging that this little guy did. It added to my appreciation of the miracles that can be realized if we are open to seeing miracles. I believe that there was hope in his story and in his legacy that he left his parents and his family and me.

Permission has been graciously provided by Mr. Paul Carreau to share a web-link to an actual service created using this methodology. The service was for Ms. Sue Larose, Mr. Carreau's partner. The web-link is <http://www.ikcvktan.org/Sue/Funeral%20service.htm>. The theme of "More Than Was Expected" emerged as I listened to the stories Sue's family and friends shared of her. She always went beyond the call of duty for her family, friends, and colleagues. And one essential in this "More Than Was Expected" was Sue's acceptance of others. I was particularly struck by this when her husband and co-worker marveled at how patient she was when directing those whom she encountered in her place of work as a commissionaire. She considered their perspective of having never been in this building and directed them accordingly. I try to imagine this when I work with people. It seems to be most congruent with "Letting Go Of Preconceptions" as well.

## CONCLUSION

The application of Grounded Theory to creating memorial services has proven to be a rewarding one. The connections that can be generated in such a short time, and based upon so little pre-information is still a source of surprise and reassurance of the meaning and hope that reside in stories that connect us with each other.

In keeping with Grounded Theory, the problem that has emerged is that of responding to loss, of a loved one, of a family member or friend and how we respond to this loss. Through the



application of Grounded Theory, memorial services are created that that are meaningful and hopeful for the family, the friends, and the community. The story that emerges is the memorial service itself, but also serves as the legacy that the person for whom the service was created leaves behind. The impact of emphasizing the importance of the “Scaffolding” at the outset in working with families to create these memorials services has a significant impact upon the trajectory of service, and on the story that emerges during the interview and the subsequent creation of the service. “Letting Go Of Preconceptions” is a core (high impact dependent) variable that has been determined to be an essential in creating the space that leads to the emergence of relevant, meaningful, and hopeful stories and memorial services.

From work that I have done in family counseling and spiritual care, I see an opportunity to apply this Grounded Theory methodology to areas where relationship, meaning and hope are extremely central to healing; for instance in the medical field, counseling, and social services. I also see the niche for the exploratory, inductive nature of a methodology such as of Grounded Theory in research, particularly in the area of Spirituality, Health, and Prayer. Grounded Theory provides an excellent complement to the deductive, hypothesis verifical model that much of medical research is conducted within.

The important contribution that Grounded Theory makes in these areas of cultivations and nurturing therapeutic relationships and research is that in providing the space for individual meaning, purpose, and hope to emerge. Within this story that emerges lies the relevance that a story can connect us all as a community, no matter how small or how short the time we connect. Grounded Theory methodology, and the value of an emergent theory or story is often an underestimated complement to the usual medical and scientific emphasis on facts. This is the strength and relevance of Grounded Theory and Story. The therapeutic application of Grounded

Theory to therapy has been nicely made by Dr. Odis Simmons in his paper Grounded Therapy (Simmons, 1994), which opens up space for further application of Grounded Theory in similar medical, psychological, social and scientific fields of inquiry and healthcare.

The most relevant and remarkable contribution that Grounded Theory has made and can make when this methodology is applied according to Glaser's conceptualization is that the theory or the story that emerges transcends time, place, and person, and yet is most relevant to those for whom it was constructed. The story is created in such a way that it is relevant, meaningful, and hopeful without being trite or naïve. It is connected, because it has been constructed in relationship, and in the end it is the relationship that heals (Yalom, 1980).

In today's busy world, with such potential for information overload, Grounded Theory has contributed to an oasis of calm amidst the rush, and a depth of relationship that defies our perceptions of time, space, and action. Grounded Theory is a methodology to remember as an option when beset by the demands of little time or resources in creating meaning, purpose, and hope in a story, in life, with our own or with those whom we serve.

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