The 'Life Certificate': A tool for grief work in Singapore

Mohamed Fareez

Mohamed Fareez is a social worker from the sunny Island of Singapore, where he is currently Centre Head of Cheng San Family Service Centre (AMKFSC Community Services Ltd). As a practitioner, he is keen on developing ways of integrating narrative ideas into social work case management and community work in Singapore. Fareez also works with persons affected by grief and loss, where he values ideas of 're-membering' as important counter-stories to the dominant discourses of grief work. Fareez writes about his experiences as a social worker in his blog www.fareez.sg, where he can also be contacted.

Abstract

This article proposes an alternative to the formal, impersonal document of the death certificate – a 'Life Certificate', a narrative therapeutic document to honour the lives of lost loved ones. The article shows examples of the 'Life Certificate' used in practice, as well as a six-stage map of narrative practice that can be used in conjunction with it, to help renegotiate people's relationships with grief.

Key words: narrative therapy, grief, 'Life Certificate', death, dying, externalising, therapeutic documents, outsider witnesses, definitional ceremony, re-membering conversations

The use of documents is prominent in narrative therapy (Denborough, 2008; Epston, 1999; Freedman & Combs, 1996; White & Epston, 1990), where they are utilised in presentations of the 'self' (White & Epston, 1990). Narrative practice has also included therapeutic documents in the context of death and dying (see, for example, Trudinger, 2009; White, 1997). Formal identity documents tend to be impersonal, with 'facts' printed by an authority other than the person whose identity is being described. David Denborough's collective narrative practice in Burma/Myanmar (Dulwich Centre Foundation International, International Women's Development Agency, & Women's League of Burma, 2013) introduced novel ways of modifying formal identification documents so that they are of relevance and resonance to human rights workers. These preferred identity documents, being situated in the domain of 'alternative local, popular knowledges' (White & Epston, 1990), enabled the participants to be heavily involved in their sense of identity, and the making known of special skills and knowledges.

As a social worker consulting people affected by grief, I noticed how my clients were affected by problematic stories surrounding the pain of losing a loved one, difficulties involved in 'letting go' of the memories of the deceased, issues of 'unfinished business', and disturbing memories of the event of the loss. These stories formed the dominant discourse of people's relationship with grief. Inspired by the idea of preferred identity documents, I have sought ways to use creative documentation within culturally-relevant parameters in Singapore. The 'Life Certificate' was developed as an alternative twist to the formal death certificates issued to families after the death of a family member. I developed the Life Certificate in the hope of identifying and making known stories of the person who was lost in the preferred ways of how people might want to remember them. The certificate not only identifies details of the loved one, but also facilitates reflection on how these persons have influenced our lives and values. Conversely, it also explores how *we* have influenced them.

This paper traces outlines my development of the Life Certificate and the website (www.life-certificate.com) as a platform for the performance of new stories within definitional ceremonies (Myerhoff, 1982). I discuss the Life Certificate as a possible tool in grief therapy, and illustrate its use through the case study of Ramlah (not her real name). The paper ends with a discussion on the possible uses of the Life Certificate in other settings.

Dominant perspectives surrounding grief work in Singapore

The dominant discourse in grief work in Singapore has been situated around working with our clients through stages (Kubler-Ross, 1970) deemed to be common in all experiences of grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance). The limitations of describing grief as going through several stages are evident when we elicit people's diverse experiences of grief, as well as how they make their own meaning in relation to these. When we expect grieving persons to go through a set order or experiences, we dismiss their unique responses to the loss.

Similarly, William Worden (2009) emphasises four main tasks that need to be completed to successfully resolve grief: accepting the reality of the loss, processing the pain of grief, to adjust to a world without the deceased, and finding an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life. Worden postulates flexibility in his approach when working with the unique individualised responses that people have in relation to grief. A critique of the model is that the processing of pain through activities that foster re-experiencing may potentially lead to re-traumatising effects (White, 2006; Yuen, 2007). As just one example of an alternative, avoidance itself may be seen as a strategy in responding to grief or trauma (Linehan, 1993), one that may take some skill in maintaining.

Shifting into social constructionist ideas

Grief is embedded in people's cultural experiences. In Singapore, various cultures intersect with different religious practices. Where Chinese Taoist cultural discourse may value the act of crying and outward display of grief at the funeral of the deceased, the Malay Muslim cultural discourse may value the restraining of emotions and instead focus on the practice of prayer.

Dominant beliefs can be oppressive in that the individual is compelled to follow 'normative' ideas of grieving which may not fit with their own personal views. Each person's relationship to culture and religion is unique to their own understanding of the world. Someone from a Chinese cultural heritage may find the dominant practice of outwardly showing grief to be overly histrionic and experience pain and distress when being compelled to show emotion for the deceased person. Conversely, someone from the Malay Muslim cultural heritage may also experience discomfort of not being able to express their emotions freely. Belief systems are formulated within social interactions within the realms of cultural discourse (Neimeyer,

1998). Furthermore, people experience varying degrees of connection to the narratives of their lives; some are committed to their beliefs and practices, whilst others experience estrangement to them (Monk, Winslade, Crocket & Epston, 1997). This clearly further complexifies matters of culture and grief.

As we move into the realm of social constructionism in understanding the processes of grieving, we can consider revisions towards the dominant beliefs of 'moving on' and 'letting go' of the person who has passed on (Kubler-Ross, 1970). Neimeyer (1999) discussed the process of grieving as one of meaning reconstruction with emphasis on the unique experience of grief. This involves a shift away from the presumption that successful grieving requires 'letting go' of the one who has died, and moving toward a recognition of the potentially enriching role of maintaining continued symbolic bonds with the deceased.

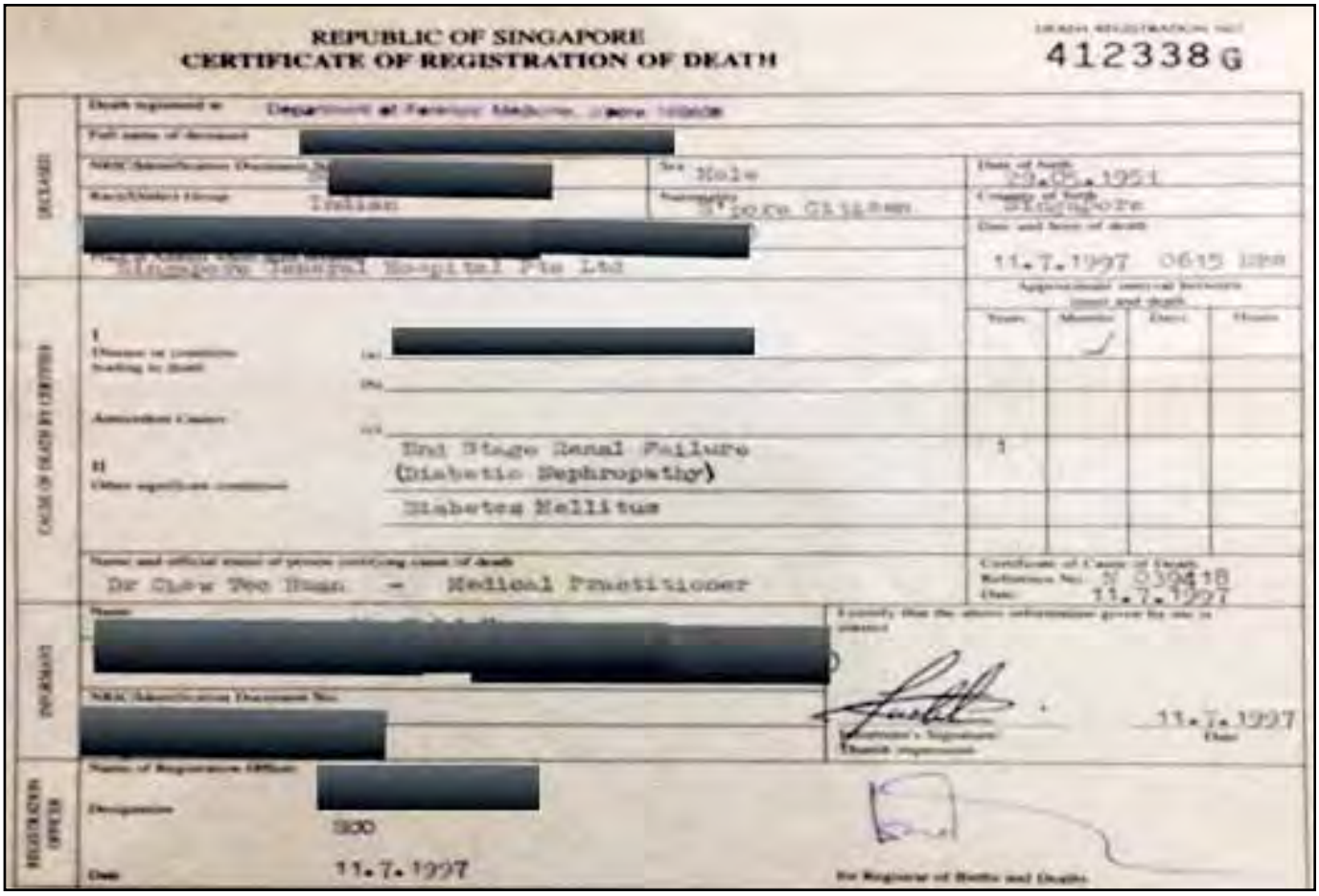
These sentiments are echoed by Lorraine Hedtke (2003), who discussed how loved ones who have died can continue to play crucial roles in our 'club of life'. Practices of re-membering represent ideas that move away from ideas of letting someone go, while supporting a continued symbolic connection with the deceased. This connection is respectful, as it facilitates a continued legacy of the person in the context of work with the dying (White, 1998; White & Epston, 1992). It is this process of re-membering that forms the core process of the Life Certificate as a tool in grief work.

From death certificate to Life Certificate

In Singapore, families are issued a death certificate of the family member who has died. These certificates, like our identity cards, are impersonal, and permanent (see Figure 1).

In contrast, the 'Life Certificate' is a tool that may be helpful in identifying alternative storylines to people's experience of loss. The certificate itself is not a tool with fixed components, although a template has been provided on the website. The components are based on guidelines that may assist in second story development. There should be flexibility for persons to personalise their Life Certificates in ways to honour the legacy of a deceased loved one (see Figures 2 and 3).

The Life Certificate generally has the following components:


REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION OF DEATH

412338 G

Male

Indian

11.7.1997

End Stage Renal Failure
(Diabetic Nephropathy)

Diabetes Mellitus

Dr Chew Tee Huan – Medical Practitioner

11.7.1997

11.7.1997

Figure 1: A death certificate in Singapore

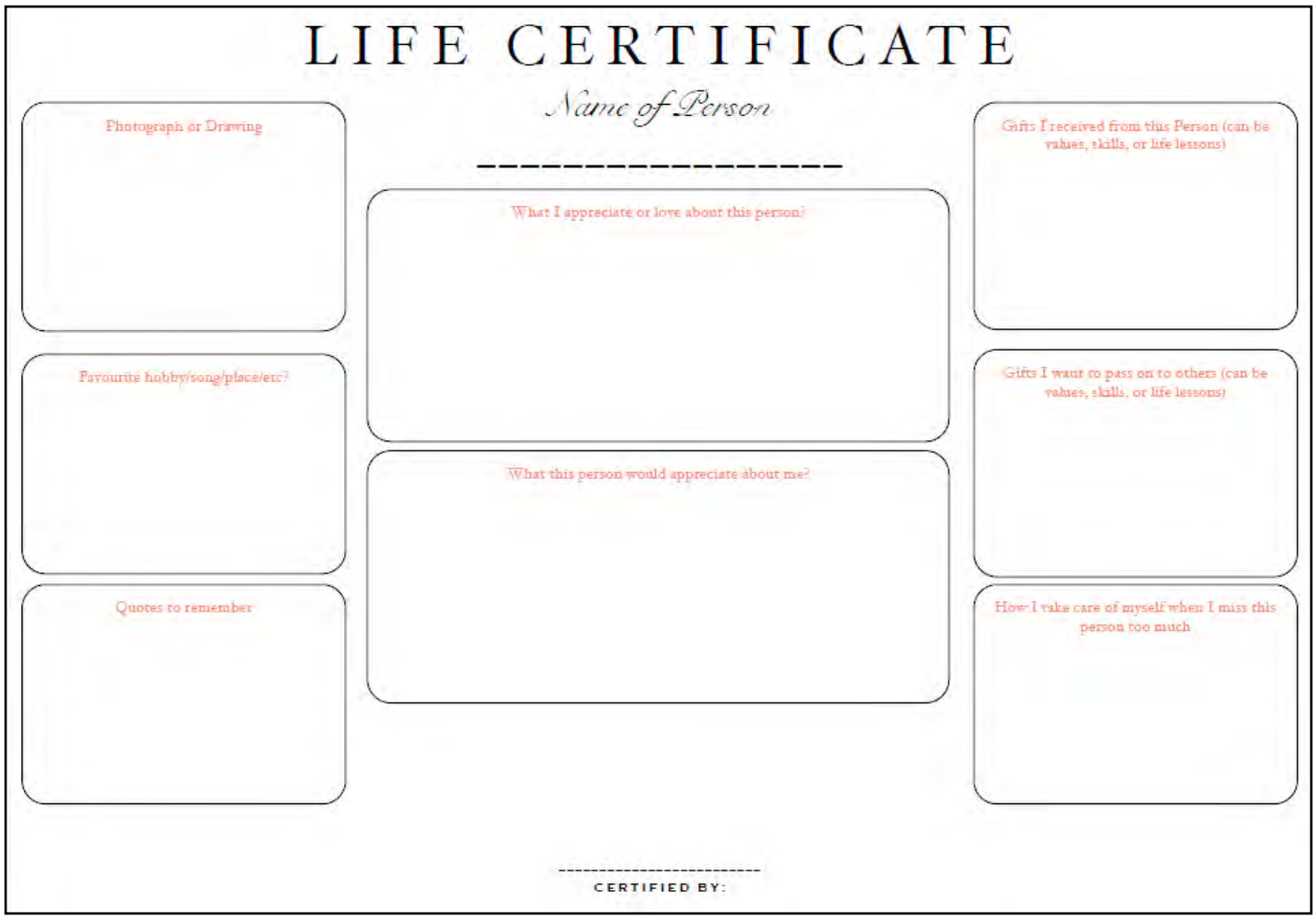


Figure 2: The Life Certificate

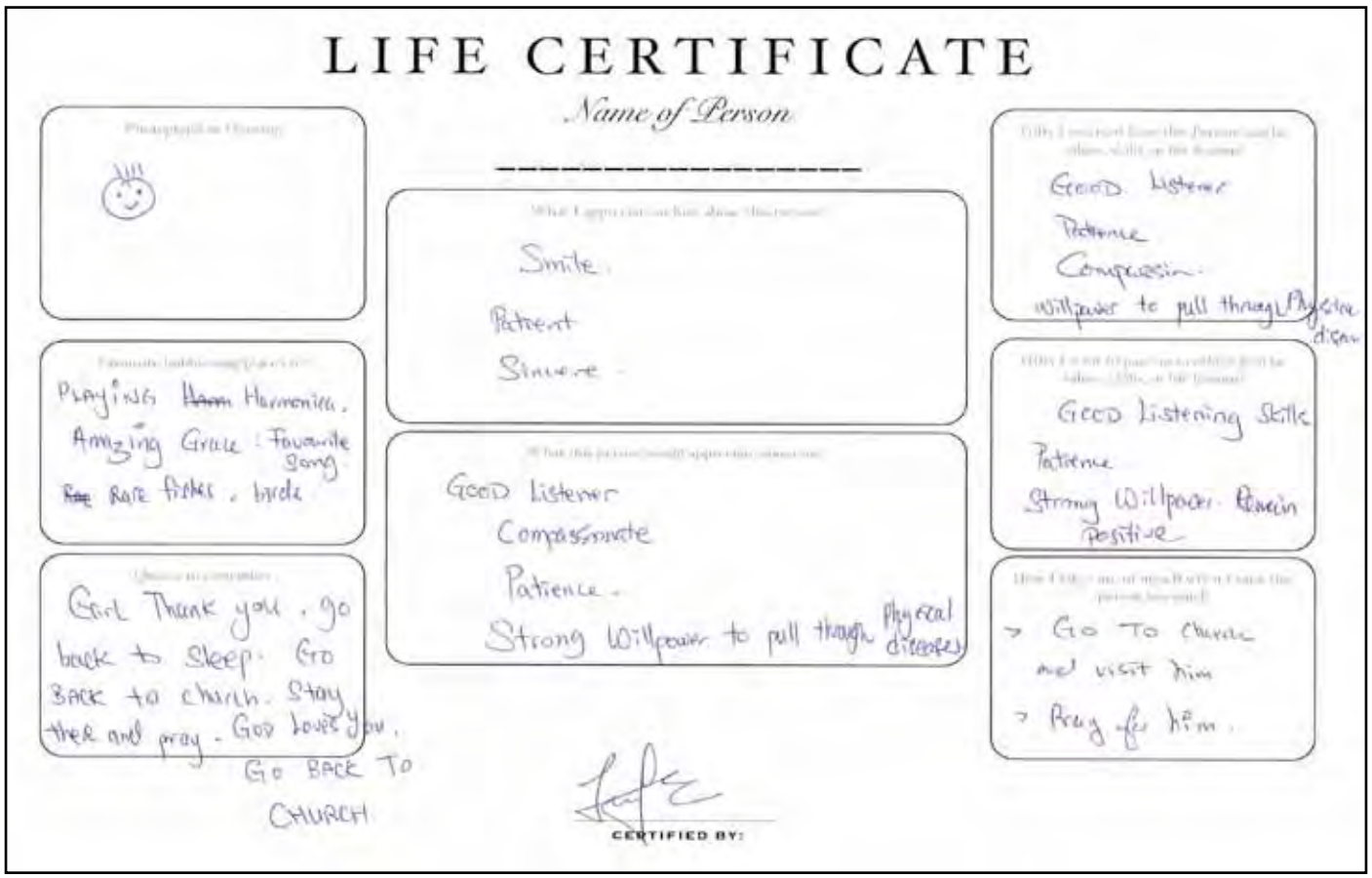


Figure 3: Example of a completed Life Certificate

- Name or preferred name of the person
- Photograph or drawing of the person
- Person's favourite hobby/song/place/etc.
- Quotes that are remembered from this person
- What I appreciate or love about this person
- What this person appreciates or loves about me
- Gifts I have received from this person (may include values, skills, or life lessons)
- Gifts I want to pass on to others (can be values, skills, or life lessons)
- How I take care of myself when I miss this person too much
- Signed off and certified by the creator of the certificate.

Other guidelines to consider would include exploring the following questions (if they are relevant):

- What are some memories that you have about this person that have contributed to you being the person that you are right now?
- What are some memories you have that would be worth re-telling to honour this person?
- What are some things you might want to say to this person?
- What might this person say about you now?

The Life Certificate presents an opportunity for persons facing grief issues to reclaim their relationship with their loved ones who have died. According to Michael White, 're-membering conversations are not about passive recollection but about purposive reengagements with the history of one's relationships with significant figures and with the identities of one's present life and projected future' (2007, p. 129). In using the Life Certificate combined with re-membering conversations, we can move away from the experiences of pain, worthlessness and isolation that can be related to the memories surrounding the loss, and embrace memories and new understandings of these relationships.

Secondary story development can be facilitated through the following maps of enquiry:

- Talking about talking about grief
- Externalise the experience of grief, and map its effects on the life of the person dealing with grief
- Appreciating and honouring the contributions of the deceased person, and supporting the continuation of this person's legacy
- Exploring one's own contributions to the life of the deceased
- Identify and document responses to the grief
- Engagement of outsider-witness responses.

Talking about talking about grief

'Talking about talking' is a concept that has been discussed by various authors (Dallos, 2006; Fredman, 1997; Freedman & Combs, 1996). It involves the process of discussing what is comfortable or not comfortable to talk about during sessions, as well as various understandings about grief and its effects. Talking about talking about grief supports transparency of the therapeutic relationship, which in turn fosters collaboration. This involves questions that invite discussions around grief, as well as expectations of how the therapeutic process can be helpful:

- Would you think that it would be useful to have any discussion about what you are going through right now?
- What do you think a useful discussion could look like?
- What are your expectations of this discussion?
- Have you spoken to anyone else about this issue? Was it helpful or unhelpful?
- What was helpful/not helpful about that previous conversation?
- Are there any questions I might ask about this problem that might be useful/not useful for you?
- Would you have any ideas of where these conversations might take you?

In addition, the following questions are ways of exploring the intersectionality of cultural and personal understandings of grief and the histories of these understandings. The first question was adapted from Glenda Fredman's exercise of exploring and elaborating stories (1997):

- What do your beliefs tell you about what happens when
  - people die?
  - after people die?

- What does your culture or religion tell you about how you should manage this grief [or other experience-near term for this grief]? Which parts of this understanding are useful? Which parts are not?
- What are your family members' understandings of how grief [or other experience-near term] should be managed or supported? What parts of this understanding are useful? Which parts are not?
- What is your own understanding of how you should manage this grief [or other experience-near term]?
- How do these different understandings tell you about what you value? What is the history of this value?
- If we took into account these values that you have, what would have been done differently that would honour these values and this person that you lost?
- What are some cultural or gender-ascribed expectations of how you should respond:
  - During and after a funeral of someone close to you?
  - When mourning someone close to you?
- Were these expectations helpful?
- What are your understandings of how you might maintain a relationship with someone who has passed on?

Externalise the experience of grief, and map its effects on the life of the person dealing with grief

Externalising conversations (White, 2007; White & Epston, 1990) play an important role in separating the problem from the person's identity, while at the same time enabling the mapping of the effects of the problems on the lives of people affected by grief. Samad, a male member of the Malay community, described his grief as 'fikiran pedih' (painful thoughts) which bothered him. As opposed to using foreign nomenclature such as 'complicated grief', the use of experience-near names (Geertz, 1983) facilitates a connected understanding of the effects of the externalised problem on everyday life. Experienced-near terms allow discussions to move away from the realm of diagnostic and medical perspectives, and instead be situated in the sociological world of our clients.

- What name do you have about all of these things that have been bothering you?
- In what areas of your life has ___ been bothering you?
- What are your hopes about the role of ____ in your life?
- Are there times where ___ did not bother you as much?

Appreciating and honouring the contributions of the deceased person, and supporting the continuation of this person's legacy

The Life Certificate represents an endeavour towards validating the existence of the deceased person. By creatively documenting alternative storylines in response to the storyline that dominates the loss of the person, we can honour the contributions of the person. Legacy-building is supported in two ways: first, preferred stories of the person are 'immortalised' in the certificate. Second, values, skills and abilities that have been passed down can be honoured through documentation, and plans can be made to ensure longevity of these 'gifts'.

In my practice, this is usually the phase where I start to float the possibility of using the Life Certificate as a way to re-member the deceased:

- What do you love or appreciate about this person?
- What are some gifts that have been given to you by this person? Why are these gifts important?
- What are some memories you have that remind you of what you appreciate about this person?
- What would this person say about the person you are?
- What advice would this person have for you?
- What are some ways of how you are living your life that tell you that you are still carrying on this person's legacy (be it in certain values that you hold, certain rituals that you are practicing, and so on)?

Exploring one's own contributions to the life of the deceased

This line of enquiry is geared towards identifying an alternative storyline of how the person facing grief has contributed to the life of the deceased. The practitioner is encouraged to elicit details of how this contribution had shaped the deceased person's perception of who he or she was. It represents a turning point in practice where it encourages one to think about storylines that she might not have thought about if she

was preoccupied with the dominant story of loss and pain. This category of enquiry opens up the space into alternative storylines that move away from the usual experiences of grief one is accustomed to:

- What did this person appreciate about you?
- What might this person say about how you have also contributed to his or her life?
- How do you think this contribution made a difference to how this person saw his or her life?

Identify and document responses to the grief

This line of enquiry involves another set of questions that would facilitate a rich second-story development where we can look into personal agency in the responses to grief, as opposed to just exploring the effects of grief alone:

> There is always the story about the trauma and its consequences – people have the opportunity to speak of their experiences of trauma, and they are actively supported in speaking about what hasn't been spoken of before. And, there is also the story about the person's response to trauma that is often very thinly known … it is vitally important that we do get onto this trace, and that we assist people to thicken this up. (White, 2006, p. 30)

The tracking of responses also facilitates the identification of strengths, skills, abilities, and values (Denborough, 2008; Yuen, 2007), which aid in the thickening of the alternative story. Rich material can be developed through practices which include the use of experience-near names, tracking the histories and legacies of the skills, exploring future plans for these skills, as well as embedding these skills in the context of collective and cultural traditions:

- What do you do when the memories and thoughts get too painful?
- How have you been able to survive this pain [or other externalised name] so far?
- What has been useful in chasing the pain away?
- Are there certain memories you visit that have provided comfort?
- Who has been around in helping you get through the pain?
- If the pain were to come and disturb you again, which of these strategies would be useful and which would not?
- What does this pain tell you about what you value most?
- What name do you have for this value, skill, or knowledge?
- What is the history of this value, skill, or knowledge? How did you learn this? Who did you learn it from?
- How is this value, skill or knowledge linked to your own religious and cultural beliefs?
- How would this value, skill or knowledge make a difference of how you might want to see yourself in your future?

Engagement of outsider-witness responses and definitional ceremonies through the use of the Life Certificate

Michael White (2007) discussed how individuals, through definitional ceremonies, are able to re-author their experiences through the lens of other community members, and have their identity claims validated and acknowledged. Definitional ceremonies enable participants to be seen on their own terms, and hence be rendered 'visible' (Myerhoff, 1986). Definitional ceremonies focus on bringing to light preferred views of the self, which include stories of competence in responding to an externalised problem (Lobovits, Maisel & Freeman, 1995). At the same time, there is an empowering effect in the process of creating documents that enable contribution and social action on the part of the client. Within this perspective, the clients we work with would be more inclined to share these stories of their preferred selves. This act of telling and re-telling can serve to thicken these preferred stories, and lead to the re-invigoration of the self towards responding to the effects of grief.

The process of facilitating a definitional ceremony with the Life Certificate may typically include outsider witnesses who may already have some level of pre-existing connection with the client. Outsider-witness practices can take the following forms:

- Individuals or families being interviewed by the practitioner about the contents of the Life Certificate in the presence of an audience of outsider witnesses
- The practitioner interviews outsider witnesses who observe and respond to the contents of the Life Certificate in the presence of the individual or family. In this context, outsider-witness responses may also be recorded if individuals and families are not available as an audience.

- Online outsider-witness responses to Life Certificates posted on the online blog www.life-certificate.com.

Significantly, a definitional ceremony can also be embedded in existing family and community rituals (Denborough, 2008). For example, a Malay Muslim Singaporean family may decide to collectively create a Life Certificate of the deceased during the process of a prayer ceremony marking the 100 days anniversary of the death. A Chinese family I worked with decided to complete the Life Certificate of their father during the first birthday after his death.

In line with the four categories of definitional ceremony – identifying expressions, describing images, embodying responses, and acknowledging transport (White, 2007) – the following questions can be used with the Life Certificate:

- After hearing the stories that come from the life certificate, what caught your attention? What expressions were meaningful for you?
- What images came into your mind? What images did you have of the identity of the person who created it? What do you think he or she values or holds precious?
- How do these expressions and images connect with your own personal history? What are some memories of your own life that came up as you read the Life Certificate and heard its stories?
- How have you been moved by what you read and experienced? How has your life been affected on account of hearing the stories of the Life Certificate? What new thoughts do you have about your own life and identity? How has your understanding of your personal history been affected? What new actions might you take in your life?

With these considerations in mind, I will now discuss how the Life Certificate can be used in grief work through the following case study with Ramlah.

Case Study: Ramlah

Ramlah, a woman from the Malay Muslim cultural group, was referred to the Family Service Centre by the Mental Health Hospital, where she had been diagnosed with clinical depression following 'complicated grief issues' surrounding the death of her father. The death of her father, Said, had also coincided with a recent separation from her husband. At the point of referral, Ramlah was seven months pregnant with her second child, which would contraindicate with any medications that doctors were willing to prescribe. Hence, she was advised to see a professional at the family service centre so that she could 'process her emotions'. During the intake interview, it was clear that Ramlah was in no condition to talk about the grief and trauma that she had been experiencing. She had not been eating regularly, slept less than four hours a night, and still harboured suicidal thoughts. There was a need to engage her in managing her safety, where family members were brought in as part of the safety plan to provide suicide watch.

Talking about talking about grief

It was only during the third session, when Ramlah reported that her concerns regarding her family's basic needs were somewhat addressed, that I extended the invitation to talk about what she was experiencing in relation to grief. To set the context for this, we also had discussions about her hopes and expectations of a useful therapeutic relationship and whether there may be issues I might gloss over, being of a different gender and class from her (even though we were from the same Malay Muslim cultural group).

Ramlah was able to share her own struggles with her recent hospitalisation. She felt as if her rights as a woman were taken away from her, and as if she was being further punished after the immediate losses she experienced. She felt disrespected by doctors who suspected her of being at high risk of committing suicide when Islam specifically forbids the taking of one's life. This was exacerbated by conversations she overheard from the doctors that she might be at risk of harming her children as well, which further invalidated her role as a mother.

After ironing out her expectations for help and what was comfortable for her to talk about, Ramlah began opening up about the guilt she experienced from the loss of her father. Because of problems that were occurring between her and her husband, she felt that she was not able to play an active role in caring for her father when he was suffering from the terminal stages of colon cancer. As we entered conversations around cultural understandings of grief and responses to loss, Ramlah talked about her belief that her father's soul was in a better place, although she felt plagued by *perasaan salah* (wrongdoing or guilt) that bothered her each night before she slept. We explored her beliefs as to her ideas of what happened to her father and his soul when he died. We explored her relationship to cultural and religious ascriptions pertaining to grief. Ramlah talked about how *perasaan salah* had intensified during the prayer recital sessions when her father was awaiting burial, because she was not able to understand Arabic. She felt that she disappointed her father by not being able to read Qur'anic verses for him. Being able to read some verses for him represented an important Islamic ritual for Ramlah.

Externalise the experience of grief, and map its effects on the life of the person facing grief issues

Through the externalised experience-near name of *perasaan salah*, we were also able to start mapping out its effects on Ramlah, and evaluate Ramlah's stand against it. We explored unique outcomes of Ramlah's responses to *perasaan salah* and started documenting these responses. She talked about using specific religious verses that included the quote 'with every suffering there is relief' in her efforts to take a stand against *perasaan salah*.

Appreciating and honouring the contributions of the deceased person, and supporting the continuation of this person's legacy

Ramlah's discussions about her father and his contributions during the various difficult periods of her life presented an opportunity for the Life Certificate to be introduced. She felt an instant connection to the idea, as she had experienced fear and anxiety even looking at her father's death certificate. The Life Certificate provided an opportunity for her to participate in the creation of her father's legacy. Ramlah also quoted a Malay proverb, '*Harimau mati meninggalkan belang, gajah mati meninggalkan gading, manusia mati meninggalkan nama*'. This translates literally to: 'Tigers die leaving their stripes, elephants die leaving their trunks, and humans die leaving their name'. To Ramlah, ensuring that her father's name is honoured involves making known his good deeds, and how he had been influential in taking care of her. She mentioned being the favourite of her father among her three siblings.

Ramlah filled out her Life Certificate with quotes from her father, which included 'Whatever happens, no matter how difficult it is, we have to breathe and stay calm', as well as 'Turn to God every time your heart is in pain'. As she wrote these quotes down, she expressed a sense of relief as though her father was there responding to her as she experienced his loss amidst the multiple issues affecting her current situation. She experienced a calmness that she felt she had lost in the struggles she experienced with her husband. It was this calmness that she hoped to reinstate in her life as part of continuing her father's legacy and ensuring that his values continued to live on in the family. She talked about the importance of religion as stressed by her father, and how she felt that it was important that religion was a gift that she would want to pass on to her children to ensure that they did not make similar mistakes as she did in the past.

Exploring one's own contributions to the life of the deceased

Although Ramlah was not keen to talk about her own contributions to her father's life, she was surprised what she came up with. She found that she was valued by her father for being the daughter who would take time to engage and talk to him regularly. She was able to confide in her father, her father felt appreciated and connected to her, and he was able to be 'like a friend' to her.

Her values of filial piety, consideration for others' feelings, and responsibility, also became known. This helped her to understand how *perasaan salah* came about: it was a response to the violation of her sense of responsibility to her father. She was able to access new understandings of her grief where, although she had not been active in supporting her father during his final days, she had always been the one to by his side during his illness This knowledge of her skills and how she was also able to contribute to her father's life provided Ramlah with a sense of relief and reduced the influence of *perasaan salah* in her life.

Identify and document responses to the grief

The process of identifying responses to grief occurred throughout the process of therapy. Whenever we discussed stories of the pain of grief (or *perasaan salah*) that she had been subjected to, double-listening (Denborough, 2008; White, 2004; Yuen, 2007) was used to hear of ways where she had been able to respond to this experience. As we filled out the Life Certificate, we were able to identify the following responses for the section titled 'How I take care of myself when I miss this person too much':

- I let myself cry my heart out, instead of forcing myself to keep all the feelings in. It is okay to cry sometimes.
- I take out a picture of him and me that I have started to keep in my handbag.
- I recite *Surah Al Inshirah* from the Qu'ran, and remember the verse: 'with every suffering, there is relief'.
- I recite the *Al Fateha* (a verse from the Qu'ran) for him every day.
- I remind myself that I had done my best to support him during his final days.

- I will watch *Pendekar Bujang Lapok*, his favourite classic comedy, if I feel too sad.
- I will tell my children about the good deeds of their grandfather.

As we went into the details of these responses, we were also able to pick up the skills and values that Ramlah was able to utilise, and further explorations were made into the histories of these skills and values, in an effort to thicken the alternative stories.

Engagement of outsider-witness responses and definitional ceremonies through the use of the Life Certificate

As Ramlah was not keen for her Life Certificate to be put up online, we recorded an outsider-witness response separately with three contacts who had each experienced the loss of a loved one in their life. One of the witnesses, Ali, a member of the Malay Muslim community, discussed how filial piety seemed something that was valued by Ramlah. He said he resonated with this value as his belief was that filial piety by children can be important in helping the deceased parents absolve their sins in the afterlife. At the same time, he felt a strong desire to recreate Ramlah's close relationship with her father in his own relationship with his mother. Ali discussed how he had distanced himself from his mother after the death of his own father, and how he now felt moved to start reconnecting with her.

Another outsider witness, Tracy, a woman from the Chinese community, connected with the Qur'anic verse of 'with every suffering there is relief'. She talked about the loss of her sister, which happened during a time where her husband had recently been diagnosed with cancer. It was important to look for times where relief was available. She felt moved to reconnect with her own religious practices to make sense of the difficulties that she was facing.

After viewing the recordings of these outsider-witness retellings, Ramlah felt moved that her stories had made some impact in the lives of these strangers. She felt a sense of solidarity where her experiences of grief were similar to others who experienced loss. She discussed feeling empowered to share her stories with other people who may be affected by grief. At the same time, she was moved by Ali's attempts to reconnect with his mother. She felt that she had distanced herself from her mother in the aftermath of her father's death, and was inspired to take steps to reconnect with her.

Future implications

Ramlah's example reflects how the Life Certificate can be used in the practice of grief work in direct therapy settings with individuals. To a large extent, the Life Certificate can be incorporated into family therapy as a collective project to re-member and honour the memory of a deceased family member. In multicultural Singapore, with its various religious and cultural ceremonies and festivals, there may be options for the Life Certificate to be used in various rituals across cultures.

I have also found utility in the use of the Life Certificate in situations of ambiguous grief (Boss, 2000) in cases where a child is experiencing the loss of a parent due to incarceration. It is common practice in Singapore for the caregiver to hide the knowledge from the child that his or her parent is currently serving time in prison. In therapy, the Life Certificate has also been used in work with the dying, where discussions are facilitated on how one might want his or her life to be honoured after death.

There is also potential for using the Life Certificate in the context of bereavement groups, and group work with clients affected by terminal illnesses. It is to be noted that the Life Certificate would need to be modified and adapted according to the needs of the people we work with, and be culturally resonant to their experiences of grief. There needs to be formative research towards addressing the relevancy of the Life Certificate for the various cultural groups in Singapore, namely the Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures. Hassan & Mehta's study (2010) on the grief experience of Malay Muslim youths in Singapore suggests that spiritual-focused coping can be an important strategy in maintaining relationships with the deceased parent. It may be worth developing questions to explore the spiritual realms of coping when working in the Malay Muslim community. Following that, future research endeavours may also explore the impact of the Life Certificate and its accompanying maps of enquiries on the experiences of grief.

This paper has discussed the utility of the Life Certificate as a tool in grief work. There is a need to be ethically responsible in ensuring that the tool is culturally respectful and fits with the experiences of the people who consult us. It is hoped that this paper further thickens the alternative stories in the nature of grief work in Singapore.

References

Boss, P. (2000). Ambiguous loss: Learning to live with unresolved grief. London, England: Harvard University Press.

Dallos, R. (2006). *Attachment narrative therapy: Integrating narrative, systemic and attachment therapies*. Berkshire, England: Open University Press.

Denborough, D. (2008). *Collective narrative practice: Responding to individuals, groups, and communities who have experienced trauma*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Dulwich Centre Foundation International, International Women's Development Agency, & Women's League of Burma. (2013). *Narrative responses to human rights abuses: Sustaining women workers and honouring the survival skills of women from Burma/Myanmar*. Melbourne, Australia: International Women's Development Agency.

Epston, D. (1999). Co-research: The making of an alternate knowledge. In Dulwich Centre Publications (Eds.), *Narrative therapy and community work; A conference collection* (pp. 143–146). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Fredman, G. (1997). *Death talk: Conversations with children and families*. London, England: Karnac.

Freedman, J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

Geertz, C. (1983). *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Hassan, M., & Mehta, K. (2010). Grief Experience of Bereaved Malay/Muslim Youths in Singapore: The spiritual dimension. *The International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 15*, (1), 45–57.

Hedtke, L. (2003). The Origami of Remembering. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (4), 58–63.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1970). *On death and dying.* New York, NY: Macmillan.

Linehan, M. (1993). *Cognitive-behavioral treatment of borderline personality disorder*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Lobovits, D. H., Maisel, R. L, & Freeman, J. C. (1995). Public Practices: An ethic of circulation. In S. Friedman (Ed.), *The reflecting team in action: Collaborative practice in family therapy* (pp. 223–256). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Monk, G., Winslade, J., Crocket, K., & Epston, D. (Eds.) (1997). *Narrative therapy in practice: The archaeology of hope*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Myerhoff, B. (1982). Life History among the Elderly: Performance, visibility, and re- membering. In J. Ruby (Ed.), *A crack in the mirror: Reflexive perspectives in anthropology* (pp. 99–117). Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press.

Myerhoff, B. (1986). 'Life Not Death in Venice': Its second life. In V. Turner & E. Bruner (Eds.), *The anthropology of experience* (pp. 261–286). Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Neimeyer, R. (1998). *Lessons of loss: A guide to coping*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Neimeyer, R. (1999). Narrative Strategies in Grief Therapy. *Journal of Constructivist Psychology, 12*, (1), 65–85.

Trudinger, M. (2009). Remembering Joan: Re-membering practices as eulogies and memorials. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, (1), 29–38.

White, M. (1997). *Narratives of therapists' lives*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (1998). Saying Hullo Again: The incorporation of the loss relationship in the resolution of grief. In C. White & D. Denborough (Eds.), *Introducing Narrative Therapy: A collection of practice based writings* (pp. 17–32). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (2004). *Narrative practice and exotic lives: Resurrecting diversity in everyday life*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

White, M. (2006). Working With People who are Suffering the Consequences of Multiple Trauma: A narrative perspective. In D. Denborough (Ed.), *Trauma: Narrative responses to traumatic experience* (pp. 25–85). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications. (Reprinted from *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work,* 2004 (1), 45–76.)

White, M. (2007). *Maps of narrative practice*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton.

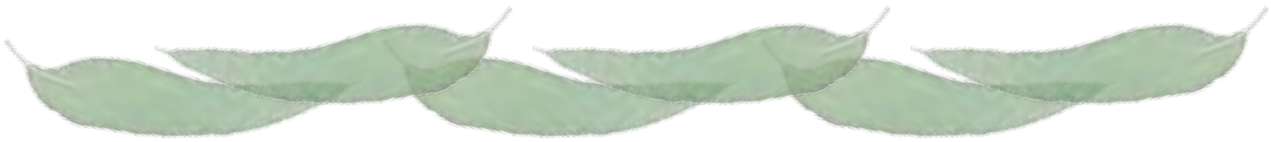
White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative means to therapeutic ends*. New York: W. W. Norton.

White, M., & Epston, D. (1992). A Conversation about AIDS and Dying. In M. White & D. Epston, *Experience contradiction, narrative & imagination: Selected papers of David Epston & Michael White, 1989-1991 (chapter 2)*. Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications. First published in the 1991 No.2 issue of the *Dulwich Centre Newlsetter.*

Wingard, B. (2001). Finding Our Own Ways to Grieve, to Remember and to Heal. In B. Wingard & J. Lester (Eds.), *Telling our stories in ways that make us stronger* (pp. 41–44). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Worden, W. (2009). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner (4th ed.)*. New York, NY: Springer.

Yuen, A. (2007). Discovering Children's Responses to Trauma: A response-based narrative practice. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community work*, (4), 3–18.



Dear Reader