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Transcending Our Stories: A Narrative Perspective on Spirituality in Later Life

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Abstract

This paper draws on insights from narrative gerontology, narrative psychology, and narrative therapy to discuss spirituality in relation to aging. Defining spirituality in terms of meaning-making, it considers the possibility of narrative foreclosure - i.e., one's life continues on (beyond retirement, for instance) yet, in one's mind, one's story has all but ended. It argues that coping with the changes and challenges of later life requires countering such foreclosure by developing a good, strong story. A process of story-work is then elaborated whereby older adults can be assisted in *expanding*, *examining*, *transforming*, and eventually *transcending* the stories by which they live.

Every person is born into life as a blank page -
and every person leaves life a full book (Baldwin, 2005, p. ix).

Growing old is one of the ways the soul nudges itself
into attention to the spiritual aspect of life (Moore, 1992, p. 214).

Social Work, Spirituality, and Aging: A Narrative Perspective

Let me confess straightaway that I am a gerontologist, not a social worker. That said, many of the people social workers work with are older adults, struggling with the changes and challenges that can accompany later life. Vital to effective practice, then, is an appreciation for the sorts of age-related issues - physical and emotional, financial and social - with which gerontologists are commonly concerned. Embedded in these concerns are *spiritual* issues too. Indeed, the very process of aging, it can be claimed, is spiritual in nature: "a natural monastery", as one source proposes (Moody, 1995, p. 96).

Happily, spirituality is of increasing interest to social workers as well, even if, as a profession, social work has "historically had an approach-avoidance attitude" or "conflicted attitude" toward it (McInnis-Dittrich, 2005, p. 269). At the same time, a growing awareness of the central role of *narrative* in human life - in disciplines as varied as psychology, philosophy, medicine, and education, not to mention social work itself - is shedding light on the experience of spirituality

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by providing a framework for conceptualizing the “inside” of human development - and, by extension, of aging (Ruth & Kenyon, 1996) - plus topics such as wisdom, with which aging has traditionally been linked (Randall & Kenyon, 2001). In addition to “literary gerontology” (Wyatt-Brown, 2000) and “qualitative gerontology” (Rowles & Schoenberg, 2002), a sub-field of study that focuses on these more internal dimensions of aging (dimensions that my own work focuses on as well) is thus “narrative” gerontology (Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries, 2001).

In this paper, I want to sketch a perspective which social workers might find helpful to consider when responding to the needs of the elderly and their families. It comes out of some thinking I have recently been doing with my colleague Beth McKim on “the poetics of aging” (Randall & McKim, 2008), but it also has roots in my experience some 20 years ago as a parish minister - where, conveniently, many of my parishioners were older adults! I refer to it as a *narrative* perspective (Randall, 2001) and I see it as having four main phases, which I will outline later on. In suggesting such a perspective, though, I am operating with the assumption that it is in many ways spiritual agendas that lie beneath the issues seniors may be wrestling with: especially emotional issues such as stress and depression, plus issues of “existential meaning” (Reker & Chamberlain, 2000). Fueling this assumption is my perception that, viewed in terms of narrative, the topics of social work, spirituality, and aging find a measure of convergence.

Social Work and Narrative

The practice of social work - at least in terms of its counseling or therapeutic side - involves practitioners in what are, essentially, narrative processes. “All therapies are narrative therapies,” insists psychologist John McLeod (1996, p. 2). “Whatever you are doing, or think you are doing, as therapist or client,” he says, “can be understood in terms of telling and re-telling stories” (p. X). As I like to put it, all therapies are therapoetic, where “poetic” derives from the Greek verb *poiein*. *Poiein* means “to make or create” and is associated with making meaning through memory and imagination, and typically in words. In brief, to counsel someone is to listen closely to both the content and the form, the substance and the style, of the stories they recount to us about their life. It is to help them make sense of the themes (and under-stories) those stories reflect, and, with the aid of one therapeutic masterplot or other, to assist them in re-storying in more positive, more preferable, and ultimately more livable directions (see Freedman & Combs, 1996; Kenyon & Randall, 1997). “People reach out for therapy,” maintain Michael White and David Epston (1990), pioneers of narrative therapy per se, “when the narratives in which they are ‘storying’ their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience ‘storied’ by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience” (p. 14). People reach out for therapy, one could add, when the stories that they have internalized about their lives inhibit them from living those lives as fully - and as meaningfully - as possible.

Spirituality and Narrative

Spirituality, too, is a narrative process, insofar as it has to do with making meaning. In the words of adult educator, Robert Atkinson (1995), “everything we encounter as adults that gives us a new and deeper meaning in life is spiritual” (p. xiii). Spirituality and narrative, one can argue then, are symbiotic, to the degree not just that stories are structures for meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988) but that the very act of telling them - above all, the stories that are integral to our sense of

self - is “a quest for personal meaning at deeper levels” (Bianchi, 2005, p. 321). “Telling our stories,” Atkinson (1995) maintains, “is an act of transcending the personal and entering the realm of the sacred” (p. 11).

In a similar vein, regardless of the form which our expression of it takes, spirituality is something we experience, not despite the stories by which we understand our lives, but *through* them. We do not meditate or pray, we do not make sense of sermons, we do not have mystical awakenings, in some sort of existential vacuum; rather, in the context of, or through the filter of, the complex set of storylines by which our sense of self is shaped. Furthermore, these storylines are tied in turn (for better or worse) to the master narratives of whatever doctrines or philosophies have shaped our vision of the world in general (Brockelman, 1992). Such narratives constitute the “ideological setting” (McAdams, 1988, pp. 215-251) in terms of which, explicitly or otherwise, our individual reality gets interpreted. That said, the connection between spirituality and religion is ambiguous at best, inasmuch as religion is often experienced not as facilitating our spiritual development but as stifling it. Witness the growing number of people - including many seniors - who take pains to stress that, while they may consider themselves “spiritual”, they resist the term “religious”. It is spirituality, not religion, then, that I am most concerned with here.

Aging and Narrative

Aging, too, is a narrative process, for we do not just age and change in biological ways; we age biographically as well (Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots, & Svensson, 1996). We age with respect to our sense of identity, of who we are as a person. We age with respect to our understanding of our past, our present, and our future; with respect to our own unique story. For psychologist Dan McAdams (1996), in fact, “identity is a life story” - namely “an internalized and evolving personal myth that functions to provide life with unity and purpose” (p. 132). We do not simply have this story, however, so much as we are this story (Randall, 1995). Psychologically speaking, the proverbial “story of my life” is my life. Furthermore, this personal myth-identity-story (whether “I’m a loser and nothing will ever work out for me” or “I’m capable of accomplishing whatever I wish”) is continually changing, slight though the changes may be. And as it changes, we change. Accordingly, biographical aging is every bit as intricate and dynamic as biological aging, and as critical to study (see Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries et al., 2001). Nor is there some maximum or intrinsic limit to biographical aging, as the latter is assumed to have: 115 years, according to biogerontologist Leonard Hayflick (1994, p. 66). Barring the onset of dementia, our “narrative development” (Ray, 2000, p. 28) can conceivably continue till our dying breath. Says psychologist Mark Freeman: “it is a potentially *infinite* process” (1991, p. 90). “When it comes to our lifestory,” adds McAdams (1993), “nothing is ever final. Things can always change” (p. 278). And yet it is biological aging far more than biographical aging that has driven the agendas of gerontology to date (Ruth & Kenyon, 1996). Indeed, the implicit equation of “aging” with what happens to our bodies has placed our experience of aging in general in the shadow of what cultural studies scholar, Margaret Morganroth Gullette, dubs the “narrative of decline” (1997). Tragically, such a narrative eclipses the positive possibilities which aging might otherwise be seen to have: possibilities for spiritual growth.

Aging and narrative are also linked by virtue of the fact that the passage of time itself instills an increasing awareness of the complexity and thickness of our stories, of all the things we have

seen and done, suffered and survived. Old age, notes Freeman, is thus “the narrative phase par excellence” (1997, p. 394). Put another way, the movement into later life itself supplies us with an “inner push” (Cohen, 2005, p. 75) to wrestle with pivotal developmental tasks, “philosophical” tasks even (Schacter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995) - tasks that are critical to tackle, I believe, if we hope to cope maturely with the challenges of later life. Among them, as social work scholar, Kathryn McNinnis-Dittrich (2005) expresses it, is “finding meaning in past memories as part of constructing meaning in life” (p. 273). In other words, our task is to make sense of the past and, in the process, make peace with the past, through such autobiographical activities as life review (Butler, 2007) and reminiscence (Webster & Haight, 2002). Activities of this kind can assist us to “assimilate” (Coleman, 1999, p. 136) and thus “recontextualize” (Schacter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995, p. 94) our past. In essence, they can help us to redeem our past (Brady, 1990), by transforming the negatives of life into positives, the sufferings into learnings, the losses into gains (see McAdams, 2006). Equally important is the need to forge a sense of connection with the temporal horizons that border our existence: with the past, through interest in history or in genealogy, and with the future, through one mode or other of generativity (McAdams, 1996; 2006). The consequence of our engagement in such endeavours, I submit, is a greater openness to the human story overall, to “the universe story” (Swimme & Berry, 1992). With it comes a greater openness to transcending our personal stories and, eventually, letting them go.

Narrative Foreclosure

Tackling the sorts of developmental tasks just mentioned requires (and fosters) what I like to call “a good, strong story”. Good health, adequate income and social support, proper exercise and diet - surely these are valuable resources as well, and vital to “successful aging” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998). Yet even in their absence, such a story can assist us in (actively, consciously) growing old and not just (passively, resignedly) getting old. It can serve as an important internal resource as, despite the losses and setbacks that can befall us in our latter years, we persevere with the journey of personal development. While this may be the ideal, however, many seniors seem unable to sustain such a story and, for a variety of reasons quite apart from dementia per se, succumb to what gerontologist Lawrence McCullough (1993) calls “arrested aging”. They lose “the ability to respond to time” (p. 186) and become imprisoned in “a past that seems to allow no escape” (p. 191). Rather than living off the past, and drawing on their memories and reflections as “biographically accrued capital” (Mader, 1996, p. 43) with which to enrich their inner worlds, they live in the past. They fall prey, that is, to “narrative foreclosure” (Freeman, 2000).

Freeman (2000) defines narrative foreclosure as “the premature conviction that one’s life story has effectively ended” (p. 83). It is the conviction that, even if one’s life as such continues on (beyond retirement or the children leaving home), even if one continues getting up each morning and going through the motions, no new chapters are likely to be added to one’s story. From an emotional perspective, it is - quite literally - “the same old story”. As a quasi-literary work, one’s internalized narrative is experienced less as an “open text”, with a wealth of meaning just waiting to be harvested, than as a “closed work” (Barthes, 1989). Kurt Vonnegut (1982) puts it well: “If a person survives an ordinary span of sixty years or more, there is every chance that his or her life as a shapely story has ended and all that remains to be experienced is epilogue. Life is not over,” he says, “but the story is” (p. 235). In consequence, a sense of meaninglessness may overwhelm

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a person, a sense of despair, of ennui, the ultimate “pitfall” in Erikson’s (1998) much-cited schema of psychosocial development. Narrative foreclosure, it might be argued then, is a factor in depression. In light of these possibilities, our challenge as professional helpers is to do or say whatever it is we can to aid our clients in re-starting their stalled life-narratives. It is to coax them out of “epilogue time”, where “no present action could make any real difference” (Morson, 1994, p. 142), and urge them to get growing.

Informing the concept of narrative foreclosure - which youth as well, of course, can certainly experience - is the idea that how our lives unfold through time has less to do with the actual events of which they are comprised than with what it is we make of those events in our memories and imaginations, with the interpretations that we place upon them. Accordingly, our life-course is contingent on our life-story, as much as the other way around. What is important is not so much the facts of our life than the fictions that we weave around them - or at least around that comparatively narrow set of facts that manage to claim our attention and thus get fashioned into the memories by which we identify what our life involves (see Steele, 1986). In other words, depending on multiple factors - including our basic personality type (McRae & Costa, 2003), plus the families, communities, and cultures we have lived within across the years (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2000), many of which may have imposed foreclosure on us from without - the lion’s share of our actual existence goes virtually unnoticed. As such, it is not woven into the meandering, quasi-literary inner text that is integral to our identity, what elsewhere I have called our *texistence* (Randall & McKim, 2008, p. 5) or the novelty of our lives (Randall, 1999). In the case of foreclosure, though, what gets noticed gets remembered in a rather thin and limiting manner, with a more or less rigidified reading - an under-reading, as it were - of what the events at issue might otherwise be seen to mean.

My bottom line here is that we live our lives and experience our selves less in terms of facts than in terms of stories. Narrative therapists are wont to say, our stories “live us” (Parry & Doan, 1994, p. 44). To speak of someone in the throes of narrative foreclosure is to say, therefore, that the myth by which they are living, that is providing their life with unity and purpose, is for various reasons lacking. It is too stunted or constrained, too chaotic or incoherent, too pessimistic or tragic. Or it is too dominated by the stories of others, including the master narrative of whatever religion they may subscribe to, plus the ever-seductive narrative of decline.

This notion of narrative foreclosure will be lurking in the background as I move now to sketch an overall process that social work practitioners, operating with a range of theoretical frameworks and strategies for practice, can envision themselves facilitating in their interactions with older clients. The process I have in mind - a kind of inner story-work that aging itself nudges us to undertake - involves four main phases. Though these phases clearly overlap, and though for a given individual they scarcely need follow one another in the order I present them, they are: expanding our stories, examining our stories, transforming our stories, and transcending our stories. As for the first phase, I will be touching on the topic of memory; as for the second, that of meaning. The third will take us into the issue of wisdom, while the fourth will bring us back to spirituality. Critical to note in all of this of course is that, in mainstream gerontology, discussions of these topics have seldom been seriously linked. From a narrative perspective, however, such links become easier to appreciate and more compelling to consider.

Expanding Our Stories

In the words of philosopher Edward Casey (1987), “we are what we remember ourselves to be” (p. 290). The relationship between memory and the self is symbiotic, one might say (see Beike, Lampinen, & Behrend, 2004). Our sense of self is dependent upon our memories, yet what we remember is dependent on the self, or selves, for whom it holds meaning and is judged worthy of retaining. The sorts of memories that are at issue here - “episodic” memories or “autobiographical” memories - invariably have a narrative dimension (Rubin, 1996, p. 2). They take the form of little narratives that we tell ourselves, and others, about events in our lives that for some reason we hang onto as pertinent to our identity. In short, such memories are stories, and taken together, they constitute “the story of my life”: the internalized, evolving myth that rumbles through our minds as inseparable from who we see ourselves to be. That said, irrespective of everything they may have come through to date, have accomplished and learned, many older adults end up operating with too constricted a story of who they are. They default to a closed-in, tightly edited narrative that, effectively, curtails their curiosity, their interest in the future, their will to live. Sadly, this often happens just at that stage in life when precisely the opposite is what is needed, a story sufficiently fluid and open, sufficiently substantial and dynamic, to supply them with a vibrant sense of meaning. Yet with limitations on mobility and income, the loss of familiar routines, and the passing of spouses and friends, their world can steadily shrink to the point where meeting that need is difficult to do. This predicament is due to a variety of reasons, among them the ageism - the narrative of decline - that permeates society and that they themselves have unwittingly internalized; not to mention the impoverished environments in which their circumstances may require them to live (e.g., nursing homes), where their stories may rarely if ever be elicited, much less listened to and honoured.

As I say, to deal effectively with the challenges that later life can bring, what is called for is a good strong sense of self - in other words, a good strong story. For starters, this means an expanded story, one broad enough and deep enough to assimilate one’s actual engagements in the world to date, or at least those of which one has retained some recollection. As social workers, then, how can we help older adults to expand their stories? In a word, it means listening. Allowing a person to indulge in their natural inclination to talk about their lives, what I have elsewhere called “the autobiographical imperative” (Randall, 1995), takes time, to be certain. And, with the pressure of unwieldy caseloads, time is something social workers often lack. Still, what matters most, I will propose, is not the quantity of time we spend with someone as much as it is the quality of our connection. What I mean is compassionate listening, careful listening, empowering listening, listening in the sorts of ways that therapists (especially narrative therapists perhaps) are adept at doing. I mean the kind of listening that asks open-ended questions (e.g. “tell me about your life ...”), questions that invite a person to realize just how much material their memory has actually preserved, and thus how rich their inner world is. In turn, this permits the limiting versions of their past that they may have clung to up till now to breathe a bit, to open out, and so be readied for closer, more soulful inspection (see Freedman & Combs, 1996).

Examining Our Stories

“The unexamined life,” states Socrates, rather starkly, “is not worth living” (Plato, 2002, p. 4). Such an observation can be interpreted in terms of those unexamined recollections, those un-reflected-on memory-texts, that we all no doubt possess, which easily admit to a variety of readings, many of them more self-supporting and life-affirming than those we have organized our identity around to date. Here, I appreciate the work of memoirist Patricia Hampl (1999). In an essay entitled “Memory and Imagination”, Hampl recounts a memory from her childhood (her first piano lesson at the age of 7) to illustrate the incredible complexity of our more “self-defining” memories (Singer & Blagov, 2004): memories that seem potent with emotional significance, whether positive or negative in nature. Peering into them carefully can surprise us with the more inventive, more creative sides of what, hitherto, seemed our surest, most solid reminiscences. As a consequence, we can begin to play with alternative interpretations to those we have been wedded to thus far. As important as it is to tell our stories, Hampl says therefore, it is equally important to “listen to what our stories tell us” (p. 33). Put another way, as important for growth in later life as telling our lives can be, so is reading our lives (Randall & McKim, 2008) - which is to say, reflecting or pondering in that deeper, more indeterminate sense which the greatest stories are skilled at tempting us to do. In the case of such stories, though technically they must end, there is no end whatever to the meaning to be gleaned from them. Part of what such reading entails, where the texts of our own lives is concerned, is critiquing the impact of the larger stories (of family and community, culture and creed, gender and race) by which our personal ones have invariably been shaped, including, of course, the narrative of decline, with its inevitable colouring of our construal of “old age” as such.

Among the many ways in which examining our stories can be facilitated are life review therapy (Garland, 1994), reminiscence therapy (Viney, 1995), dynamic reminiscence (Chandler & Ray, 2002), and creative reminiscence (Bohlmeijer, Valenkamp, Westerhof, Smit, & Cuipers, 2005) - not to mention soulful conversation of any sort, whoever it might be with. What I mean is any sort of strategy that stretches our inner world and permits the emergence of a more nuanced, more resilient, more dynamic sense of self; a self whose story reflects a healthy sense of completion yet for which new themes and new chapters could still be opened up. Gerontological social workers Nancy Kropf and Cindy Tandy (1998) describe the merits of such strategies in empowering a woman in her 80s, suffering from depression following a series of major losses, to shift her basic self-storyline from “I’m a failure” to “I’m a survivor” - someone who has surmounted obstacles in the past and thus can do so in the future too.

Transforming Our Stories

What I am offering in this paper is not a step-by-step technique. Rather, it is an over-arching point of view to bear in mind when working with older clients, regardless of the particular problems they might face or the strategies we enlist to help them. The third phase of the process I envision - a process of story-work that is integral to our spiritual development in later life - is transforming our stories. To talk about it, let me begin by suggesting that the second phase, examining our lives, is less an end in itself than a means to liberate the “ordinary wisdom” (Randall & Kenyon, 2001) of which our stories are arguably the medium. Yet, ironically, wisdom is not a topic to which gerontologists have given nearly the attention one would think.

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Instead, it has been viewed as something of an embarrassment: too vague, too idealistic, or too difficult to measure to be worthy of scientific interest (see Baltes & Smith, 2008). Dominated by what is essentially an empirical-medical paradigm of human life, gerontology has thus expended much more energy on studying things (important in their fashion) like medication usage and urinary incontinence than on considering what, traditionally, aging has been thought to carry with it.

What is wisdom, though? Whatever else it may or may not be, wisdom is not a thing. It is not a commodity. It is not a collection of tidy conclusions about “the meaning of life”, nor a neat set of lessons learned - though learning is certainly involved. Rather, it is an ongoing process. It is the continual opening-out and deepening-down that the phases of expanding and examining help initiate. As such, it is characterized by an ironic stance on life, one rooted in awareness of the perpetual reinterpretability of one’s existence (Randall & McKim, 2008, pp. 236-242). To cite Rabbi Zalman Schacter-Shalomi and Ronald Miller (1995), authors of *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*, it is a process of continual “re-contextualization”, whereby we “open old files, relive them, recontextualize them for deeper meaning, and then refile them in the ‘plus’ files, from their negative emotional valences” (p. 117). Expressed differently, wisdom is a searching and a savouring of the stories that we are, a journey of “autobiographical learning” (Nelson, 1994), of self-discovery, of transformation: a journey with no intrinsic end. As such, it is inseparable from the process of spiritual growth - a process which, ironically, later life itself provides the very pre-conditions that enable it to flourish.

Transcending Our Stories

Spirituality itself is a narrative process. In this respect, it parallels wisdom, inasmuch as, while wisdom is related to knowledge, the relationship is hardly straightforward. “Where is the wisdom that is lost in knowledge?” asks the poet (Eliot, 1940). Wisdom has to do, not with the quantity of our knowledge, but with the quality of our relationship to the knowledge that we have, especially our self-knowledge (Randall & McKim, 2008, p. 223-231). In the same way, spirituality is more than religion, or is deeper than religion - even if, for many, its expression takes a religious form. In sum, spirituality transcends religion.

Seen in narrative terms, spirituality entails transcending our stories. But how is this possible? If our self-stories are our identity; if we ourselves are continually composing them, as author, narrator, character, and reader all at once, then how can we possibly transcend them? How can we have an existence - a human existence - apart from stories? The answer is clear: we cannot. We live in stories and stories live in us; in effect, they are us. And, as they change, we change. As immortalized in “The Chambered Nautilus” by the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes (2005 / 1895), and as reflected in the image of The Evolving Self, put forward by psychologist Robert Kegan (1982), there is a continuous push within us to outgrow the myths by which we comprehend our lives and to grope our way toward broader, more all-encompassing self-stories: stories that can embrace the ever-changing circumstances and ever-widening horizons of our relationships, our commitments, our world. It is in this connection, I suggest, that we need to understand the passion that many older adults bring to the study of family history, to genealogy, to tracing their “roots”. It is also how we can understand the impetus within us to impact future generations - our sense of generativity, as psychologists describe it (McAdams, 1996; 2006),

whatever form our expression of it takes: from rearing children to writing books to contributing to the community as an activist or volunteer. Both impulses (one toward the past, the other toward the future) reflect the need to link our personal story - to merge it, even - with the story of the world at large (see Tornstam, 1996).

When we were children, we understood our lives through child-like storylines. As we grow older, though, life itself pushes these lines to become more complicated, however much the push may be resisted. This, I argue, is in keeping with the internal dynamics of stories per se: they push inexorably toward their own conclusion. In a real way, the meaning of a story lies in its telos, in its end - "closed" or "open" though that end may be (Taha, 1998-99). In a comparable manner, life pushes us to relinquish - to transcend - our stories. Indeed, the processes of expanding, examining, and transforming prepare us to do exactly that. The prospect of death itself, which looms larger in our consciousness as time marches on, functions in a way analogous to "the sense of an ending" (Kermode, 1966) for the reader of a novel - the sense that the story must at some point conclude. Moreover, without such conclusion, the story is lacking in purpose and shape. From a narrative perspective, then, death is an aesthetic necessity in the structure of "the story of my life". It is - literally, or literarily - The End.

What do such insights imply for those who work with the elderly, or in fact with anyone facing their mortality, at any age - in the context, say, of palliative care (Kuhl, 2002; Kuhl & Westwood, 2001)? It implies that the impulse to review one's life (Butler, 2007), to finish unfinished business and deal with un-dealt-with memories, to achieve a sense of resolution about one's life overall, is not to be discouraged as unduly morbid: "Oh no, you mustn't think that way. You'll be feeling better before you know it!" Nor is it a sign of narrative foreclosure. To borrow from author Thomas Moore (1992), it is the "soul" doing whatever it must to ready itself for whatever might be next - for the continuation of one's story beyond The End perhaps. And the role of the social worker, I propose, is to do or say whatever possible or feasible to enable this process to happen. Yet the goal is not necessarily to feel a tidy sense of closure about the story of one's life, with every loose end tied conveniently together. This may be how it is for some in the course of approaching death, but except in Hollywood perhaps, endings do not work this way. In fact, the greater the story, it can be argued, the messier the ending and the more open the closure; the more it points to larger stories beyond it (the human story, the cosmic story), and the more it leaves us pondering and wondering as we prepare to let it go.

Table 1. Sample Demographics (n=65)

Mean Age	28.12 (SD=5.40)
Fathers Education (years)	16.33 (SD=3.63)
Mothers Education (years)	15.69 (SD=3.96)
% First Year	56.9%
% Female	89.2%
% European American	69.2%
% Heterosexual	81.5%
% by Specialization	

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Children and Families	32.3%
Community Mental Health	27.7%
Gerontology	13.9%
Health	12.3%
Management and Planning	13.9%
% by Religion While Growing Up	
Protestant	35.4%
Catholic	27.7%
Jewish	12.3%
Hindu	3.1%
Buddhist	1.5%
Atheist	3.1%
Spiritual	1.5%
Yoga	1.5%
None	21.5%
% by Current Religion	
Protestant	15.4%
Catholic	16.9%
Jewish	7.7%
Hindu	1.5%
Buddhist	6.2%
Muslim	1.5%
Atheist	1.5%
Agnostic	4.6%
Spiritual	4.6%
Yoga	4.6%
12-Step	1.5%
None	43.1%

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