

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**'TO SPEAK OF UNSPEAKABLE ACTS'**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Social Policy  
at Massey University**

**Robert Bruce Gordon Teppett**

**1999**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	iii
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS</b>	3
<b>A RATIONALE FOR THE THESIS</b>	4
<b>A Family Legacy</b>	5
<b>A Crime Victim's Voice</b>	5
<b>Professional Interest</b>	5
<b>THESIS STRUCTURE</b>	6
<b>Chapter 1</b>	6
<b>Chapter 2</b>	6
<b>Chapter 3</b>	7
<b>Chapter 4</b>	8
<b>Chapter 5</b>	9
<b>Conclusion</b>	10
<b>CHAPTER 1 A Literature Review</b>	11
<b>AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TRAUMA</b>	12
<b>Hysteria</b>	12
<b>Shell Shock/Combat Neurosis</b>	12
<b>Rape Trauma Syndrome</b>	13

<b>ELDER ABUSE</b>	14
<b>Definition and Context</b>	14
<b>Dependency and Caregiver Stress</b>	15
<b>Perpetrator Psychopathology</b>	15
<b>Elder Abuse and Spousal Abuse</b>	16
<b>The Prevalence of Elder Abuse and Neglect in New Zealand</b>	17
<b>NATURAL SOURCES OF TRAUMA</b>	18
<b>Trauma Arising From Facial Disfigurement</b>	18
<i>Effects of Facial Disfigurement</i>	18
<i>Facial Disfigurement as a Cultural Phenomenon</i>	19
<b>Trauma Arising From Parental Death</b>	20
<i>Child's Socio-demographic Characteristics</i>	20
<i>Past Social Interactions with the Deceased Parent</i>	22
<i>The Context of the Parent's Death</i>	22
<b>Spousal Bereavement and Personal Functioning</b>	23
<i>Bereavement Effects</i>	23
<i>Gender Effects</i>	24
<i>Context Effects</i>	24
<b>THE CRIMINAL VICTIMISATION OF THE ELDERLY</b>	25
<b>Reporting Crime</b>	25
<b>Victimisation Surveys</b>	26
<b>Homicide Rates</b>	27
<b>The Prevalence of Homicide</b>	27
<b>Homicide Survivors</b>	28

<b>THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF A HOMICIDE SURVIVOR</b>	28
<b>Homicide Survival and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder</b>	29
<b>Homicide Survival and Grief Reaction</b>	29
<i>Shock Denial and Isolation</i>	30
<i>Emotional Release</i>	30
<i>Guilt, Anger and Resentment</i>	30
<i>Depression</i>	31
<i>Acceptance, Resolution and Adaptation</i>	31
<b>The Importance of Context in the Experience of Grief</b>	33
<i>Social Support Systems</i>	33
<i>The Survivor's Past Experience with Loss and Death</i>	34
<i>Socio-cultural, Ethnic and Gender Factors</i>	34
<b>ELDER RAPE VICTIMS</b>	35
<b>Rape Statistics: A Matter of Legal Definition</b>	35
<b>Law Reform</b>	36
<b>The Under-reporting of Rape</b>	36
<b>The Sexual Victimization of Older Women</b>	37
<b>Elder Rape Survivors and Rape Trauma Syndrome</b>	38
<b>Elder Rape and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder</b>	38
<b>FEAR OF CRIME/RAPE</b>	39
<b>Greater Physical Vulnerability of Elderly Rape Victims</b>	41
<b>Greater Social Vulnerability of Elderly Rape Victims</b>	41
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	42

<b>CHAPTER 2 Research Methods</b>	44
<b>WHAT IS A LIFE HISTORY</b>	44
<b>SUBJECT SELECTION</b>	46
<b>Was Joyce a Good Informant?</b>	47
<b>INTERVIEWS WITH JOYCE</b>	47
<b>Developing the Question and Probe Schedule</b>	48
<b>Difficulties Encountered</b>	49
<b>Reflection on the Interviewing Procedure</b>	49
<b>Joyce's Dairy</b>	50
<b>OTHER DATA SOURCES</b>	50
<b>Official Records</b>	50
<b>Media Articles</b>	51
<b>Letters</b>	51
<b>DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION</b>	52
<b>Transcription</b>	52
<b>Constructing the Personal Document</b>	52
<b>Field Notes and Files</b>	53
<b>THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH</b>	54
<b>The Continuum of Contamination</b>	54
<b>The Life History Informant and the Phenomenological Attitude</b>	55

<b>The Researcher and the Phenomenological Attitude</b>	56
<i>My Pre-understandings of Joyce's Life</i>	57
<i>My Shared Status as a Homicide Survivor</i>	57
<b>The Interaction Between Researcher and Subject</b>	58
<b>Internal Validity Checks</b>	59
<b>External Validity Checks</b>	59
<i>Methodological Triangulation</i>	60
<i>Data Triangulation</i>	61
<i>Investigator Triangulation</i>	61
<i>Theoretical Triangulation</i>	62
<b>ETHICS</b>	62
<b>CHAPTER 3 The First 35 Years</b>	65
<b>The Joy of Mangere</b>	69
<b>The Shift to Palmerston North</b>	75
<b>Transition to Womanhood</b>	78
<b>Entering the Work-force</b>	80
<b>Disfigurement</b>	81
<b>A Career in Nursing</b>	85
<b>The Death of Grandmother and Mother</b>	88
<b>THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF JOYCE'S LIFE</b>	90
<b>Economics</b>	90
<b>Family, Socialisation and Relationships</b>	91
<b>Politics</b>	92

<b>Religion</b>	93
<b>Educational Transmission</b>	93
<b>THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE IN CONTEXT</b>	93
<b>The Trauma of Losing Her Eye</b>	94
<i>Biological Dimension</i>	94
<i>Cultural Dimension</i>	94
<i>Social Dimension</i>	95
<i>Psychosocial Dimension</i>	96
<b>The Trauma of Losing her Grandmother and Mother</b>	96
<i>Joyce's Experience of Grief</i>	97
<i>The Significance of a Salient and Negative Relationship with Her Mother</i>	97
<i>The Significance of Context and Faith</i>	98
<b>THE LIFE WORLD AND THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ATTITUDE</b>	98
<b>Joyce's Phenomenological Attitude</b>	99
<i>Influence of Cultural Determination</i>	99
<i>Selective Effects of Memory</i>	99
<b>Joyce's Life World</b>	100
<i>Idiosyncratic Conceptualisation of Experience</i>	100
<i>Significant Imputation of Meaning</i>	101
<b>SELF IDENTITY</b>	101
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	102

<b>CHAPTER 4 A New Direction</b>	104
<b>Developing a Connection with Foxton</b>	105
<b>Joyce's Marriage to Sam</b>	109
<b>The Death of Joyce's Father</b>	112
<b>Joyce, Sam and Howard</b>	115
<b>The Car Accident and Sam's Death</b>	116
<b>Joyce's Rehabilitation</b>	118
<b>Joyce Shifts From Her Family Home</b>	120
<b>The Foxton Boarder</b>	121
<b>Joyce and Howard Sharing Their Lives</b>	122
<b>The Night Joyce Would Never Forget</b>	124
<b>THE INDIVIDUAL LIFE IN CONTEXT</b>	125
<b>The Death of Her Mother as a Turning Point in Joyce's life</b>	126
<i>Cultural Dimension</i>	126
<i>Social Dimension</i>	127
<i>Psychosocial Dimension</i>	128
<b>Joyce's Marriage to Sam as a Turning Point in Her Life</b>	128
<i>Cultural Dimension</i>	128
<i>Social Dimension</i>	129
<i>Psychosocial Dimension</i>	129
<b>The Trauma of Losing Her father</b>	130
<i>Joyce's Socio-demographic Characteristics</i>	130
<i>The Context of Her Father's Death</i>	131

<b>The Death of Joyce's Father as a Turning Point in Her Life</b>	131
<i>Cultural Dimension</i>	131
<i>Social Dimension</i>	132
<i>Psychosocial Dimension</i>	132
<b>The Trauma of Losing Her Husband</b>	133
<i>Bereavement Effects</i>	133
<i>Gender Effects</i>	134
<i>Context Effects</i>	134
<b>The Accident and Death of Sam as a Turning Point in Her Life</b>	135
<i>Biological Dimension</i>	135
<i>Cultural Dimension</i>	135
<i>Social Dimension</i>	136
<i>Psychosocial Dimension</i>	137
<b>JOYCE'S LIFE WORLD AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL ATTITUDE</b>	137
<b>Joyce's Life World</b>	137
<i>Idiosyncratic Conceptualisation of Experience</i>	137
<i>Significant Imputation of Meaning</i>	137
<b>Joyce's Phenomenological Attitude</b>	138
<i>The Influence of Cultural Determination</i>	138
<i>Selective Effects of Memory</i>	139
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	139

<b>CHAPTER 5 The Father of All Traumas</b>	142
<b>From Fright to Flight</b>	144
<b>Initial Police Contact</b>	145
<b>Joyce's Response to Howard's Homicide</b>	147
<b>Joyce's Substantive Police Interview</b>	148
<b>Joyce's Three perspectives on the Trauma of 1 October 1993</b>	149
<b>The Societal Response to this Crime</b>	150
<b>Howard's Wake and the Funeral</b>	152
<b>Joyce's Reflection on Howard's Death</b>	153
<b>Joyce's Reflection on Being Raped</b>	154
<b>Sleep Disorder</b>	154
<b>Serious Assault Counselling</b>	155
<b>The Trial</b>	156
<b>Joyce's Perception of the Court</b>	157
<b>The Verdict</b>	159
<b>The Fall Out</b>	160
<b>The Law is An Ass</b>	161
<b>The Sentencing of Green and Thompson</b>	164
<b>Reflecting on the Media</b>	165
<b>THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF RAPE AND HOMICIDE</b>	166
<b>The Traumatic Experience of Elder Rape</b>	166
<i>The Nature and Context of Her Rape</i>	166

<i>The Social and Physical Vulnerability of     Elder Rape Victims</i>	167
<i>Fear and the Loss of Control</i>	168
<b>The Traumatic Experience of Homicide Survival</b>	168
<i>Joyce's Past Experience of Loss and Death</i>	168
<i>Shock, Denial and Isolation</i>	169
<i>Social Support Systems</i>	169
<b>THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF A MURDER TRIAL</b>	170
<b>Her Testimony</b>	171
<b>The Jury Deliberation and Verdict</b>	172
<b>The Media</b>	172
<b>JOYCE'S EXPERIENCE OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER</b>	173
<b>Shock and Numbness</b>	173
<b>Concern About the Brutality and Suffering of the Crime</b>	174
<b>Guilt, Anger and Resentment</b>	174
<b>Disturbance of Sleep Patterns</b>	175
<b>Feelings of Depression and Hopelessness</b>	175
<b>Inability to Put the Homicide and Rape Out of Mind</b>	176
<b>THE TRAUMA OF RAPE AND HOMICIDE SURVIVAL AS A TURNING POINT IN HER LIFE</b>	176
<b>Cultural Dimension</b>	176
<i>Faith and Joyce's Ability to Cope</i>	177
<b>Social Dimension</b>	178
<i>Fear of Crime</i>	178
<i>The Loss of the Caregiver Role</i>	179

<i>Vulnerability and Independence</i>	179
<b>Psychosocial Dimension</b>	179
<b>JOYCE'S LIFE WORLD AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL ATTITUDE</b>	180
<b>Joyce's Life World</b>	180
<i>Idiosyncratic Conceptualisation of Experience</i>	180
<i>Significant Imputation of Meaning</i>	181
<b>Joyce's Phenomenological Attitude</b>	181
<i>Influence of Cultural Determination</i>	181
<i>Selective Effects of Memory</i>	182
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	183
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	186
<b>THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES WHICH HAVE SHAPED HER LIFE</b>	187
<b>Losing Her Eye</b>	187
<b>Her Mother's Death</b>	188
<b>Her Father's Death</b>	189
<b>The Death of Her Husband</b>	190
<b>Her Rape and Homicide Survival</b>	191
<b>THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HER SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT</b>	193
<b>The Significance of Faith</b>	193
<b>Her Family's Compliance with the Norms and Values of the Social Context</b>	193

<b>The Significance of Intra-familial Relationships</b>	194
<b>The Consummate Caregiver</b>	195
<b>RECOVERY FROM THE TRAUMA OF HOMICIDE AND ELDER RAPE</b>	196
<b>Fatalistic Disposition and Self-determination</b>	197
<b>A Changed Lifestyle</b>	198
<b>THE MAIN POINTS WHICH EMERGED FROM JOYCE'S STORY</b>	198
<b>REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE HISTORY AND IT'S LIMITATIONS</b>	200
<b>SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH</b>	201
<b>The Impact of Bereavement on the Elderly</b>	201
<b>The Criminal Victimization of the Elderly</b>	202
<i>Police Interviews with Traumatized Complainants</i>	202
<i>Serious Assault Counselling</i>	203
<b>The Loss of Independence</b>	204
<b>APPENDIX</b>	205
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	227

## ABSTRACT

This life history constitutes a phenomenological analysis of trauma as it has occurred over one woman's lifetime. My subject's life was somewhat atypical. At 21 years of age she had to deal with facial disfigurement after losing an eye in an accident with a pair of scissors. When she was 35, her mother whom she had nursed for several years died from cancer after a long illness. The death of her father when she was 61 was more traumatic; they had had a salient and positive relationship and she had been his caregiver for almost thirty years. At 66 she was critically injured in a car accident in which her husband was killed, and began living alone for the first time in her life. At 78 she was raped, and her brother killed in the aggravated burglary of his home and surgery. She described this most recent event as the most traumatic experience of her life.

I have used the life history method(s) of in-depth interviews, and participant observer techniques to record her narrative. It was apparent that our close familial relationship and her phenomenological attitude influenced her disclosure during the interviewing process. The issue of truth was exacerbated because I was unable to triangulate the early years of her narrative with another person who had known her during this period. There has also been distortion of her narrative when I have intruded with my idiographic propositions which explained how some of these traumatic experiences and her successive recoveries became significant turning points, facilitating subsequent changes in the biological, cultural, social and psychosocial dimensions of her life.

As her socio-cultural context was changed by these experiences, so too was her disposition toward subsequent trauma. She seemed to develop a degree of crisis competence and stoicism which appeared to reflect the socio-cultural context in which she had matured and the cumulative experience of trauma which had been such a feature of her life. It was also apparent that her Christian faith facilitated a fatalistic disposition toward recovery from trauma, bolstering her self-confidence and determination to survive adversity.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the patience, generosity and co-operation of my aunt Joyce Marsden in consenting to be the subject of this enquiry. It has been a privilege to have access to her story and to construct her life history. I acknowledge also the tolerance and patience of my partner Karen and our children Kate and Sam, as I have persevered with this thesis over a period of four years. They have made many sacrifices to accommodate the demands of this academic pursuit, within an existing schedule of substantial work and family commitments. It would not have been possible to complete this thesis without their support, and for this, I am deeply appreciative.

I would like to thank my employer the New Zealand Children, Young Persons and Their Families Service, for their generosity in giving me twelve months study leave in 1994, following the homicide of my father and the rape of my aunt. I have been extremely fortunate to have this time-out, as this provided the initial impetus for undertaking post-graduate study in social policy.

Finally, I am indebted to the guidance and support of my thesis supervisors Associate Professor Andrew Trlin and Dr Martin Sullivan, School of Social Policy and Social Work. They have had a significant influence over this enquiry, in providing not only academic advice but also the personal encouragement I have needed in order to persevere and to complete this study. For their insights, attention to detail, patience in reading successive drafts of chapters, and their ability to provide rapid feedback on material, I am very grateful indeed.