Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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B.B.A. (Okanagan University College, 2009)
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“The Legacy of Loss: The Early Death of a Parent and the “Ever After” Impact in Young Adulthood From a Phenomenological Perspective”

School of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Monday, October 2nd, 2017
10:00 a.m.
MacLaurin Building
Room A341

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Natalee Popadiuk, School of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. E. Anne Marshall, School of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies, UVic (Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Anne Bruce, School of Nursing, University of Victoria

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Carmen Rodriguez de France, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Although there is a strong body of existing literature on early parental loss, the majority of research is devoted to examining the consequences of parental death in childhood. Less is known about the long-term impact of this early loss. In particular, there is a lack of understanding about what it is like to live with early parental loss in young adulthood. This hermeneutic phenomenological study addresses the question: What is the young adult’s experience of living with early parental loss? An in-depth exploration into the lived meaning of early parental loss was conducted through open-ended interviews with 8 young men and women (20-30 years old) who lost a mother or father in childhood (between the ages of 9-18 years old). Interview data was coded and analyzed using van Manen’s (2014) hermeneutic phenomenological method, including the process of guided existential inquiry. The fundamental existential themes of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived other were used as a guide to thematic representation of data. Ten identified themes characterize the essential qualities of this phenomenon: (1) The Grief Experience, (2) The Parentless Identity, (3) Body Awareness, (4) The Transition, (5) The Unexpected Visitor, (6) The New World, (7) The Empty Space, (8) Navigating Relationships in New Ways, (9) Continuing Bonds, and (10) The Relationship with Loss. Through rich experiential descriptions, presented findings demonstrate that the early death of a parent has an “ever after” impact and significantly influences many facets of life in young adulthood. Implications for clinical practice and directions for future research are discussed.