

Applying the Concept of Warm-Up in a Life Crisis of Redundancy

by Caril Cowan

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In 1998 I was made redundant. This is an account of a significant insight that I gained from living through this experience of being made redundant. I applied a general concept of grief to my experiences and found it lacking. The insight I had deepened my concept of warm-up. This suggests to me that concepts of grief may be more useful to people experiencing loss if the concept of warm-up is incorporated.

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The Sudden Change

On Tuesday there was an emergency meeting with the other Team Leader, Manager and Director. The service is seriously over budget. In order to continue the Trustee Board and Director had a radical proposal. They suggested that the two team leader positions be restructured into one

only position. Because I was the team leader most recently employed, I was the one to go. With a consultative process there is a week of thinking, talking and planning. The following Monday it is final. In one week I have study leave. The remainder of the week is spent handing over to the other team

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leader, informing and saying goodbye to clients, staff and colleagues from other organisations.

With the week of study, the reality of the redundancy is blunted. Sitting in the university tutorial room, I remain part of the community of people involved with deeply meaningful work.

Then comes the first Monday I am at home, three weeks since the emergency meeting. My stepchildren have left for school, my partner for work. I am alone. I have one vital purpose in my life today, to buy the newspaper and look in the situations vacant. However, this will not take all day. Then there is tomorrow, the rest of the week and the following week. I have no other demands, no relationships to foster, no accountability to anyone. Life is stretching forward to a great empty space. I am experiencing ... nothing.

Looking through a Grief Lens

I left the Tuesday morning meeting in shock and denial. This cherished position is under threat. It is unbelievable. I have been in the position such a short time. There is work in the team that is incomplete. There is movement in clients I want to be part of fostering. I have wanted to have comprehensive care/life plans for each client, and embrace a recovery approach. A successful audit immediately prior to my arrival, and the interpretation of the policy by the experienced team members made such initiative impossible. A recently conducted audit has highlighted my concerns. These initiatives were now possible. I don't want to leave, least of all at this time.

The contract I have signed includes a redundancy clause. I cannot prevent the loss of this

position. I can only obtain the best redundancy deal possible, leave gracefully, and in such a manner that is least traumatic on myself, staff, clients, but which also honours the work I have started.

Shock. Denial. Anger. Bargaining. "At least I am moving through the grieving process," I tell myself.

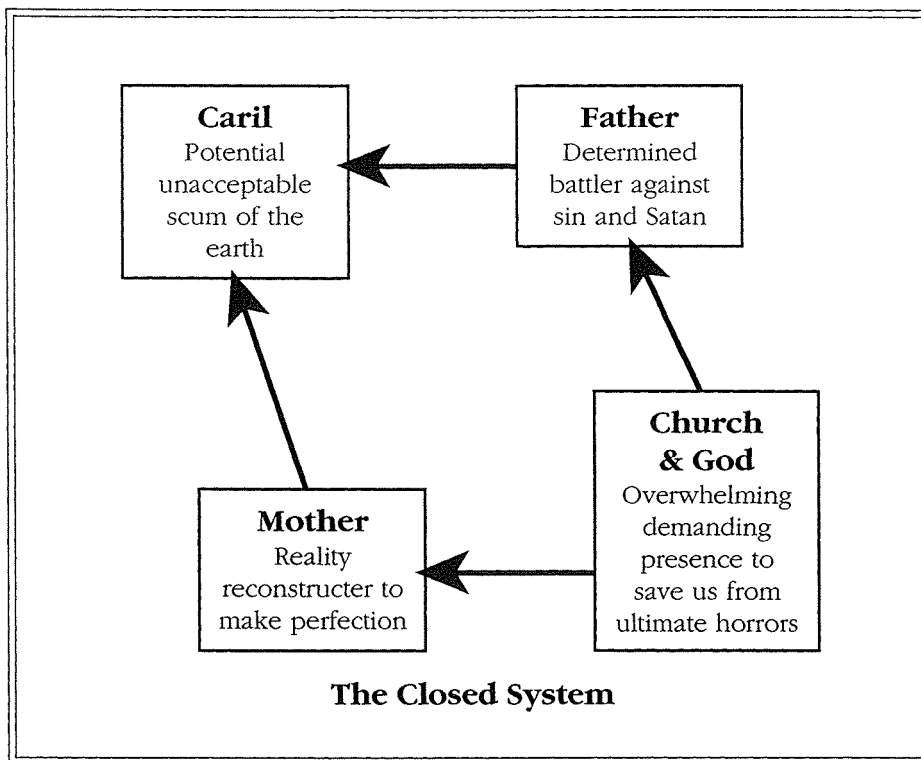
The first week I had at home I started waking at 5am (very early for a night owl). As I hover half awake I am besieged with all the inadequacies I had in the position. I maximise them unrealistically – unbridled self-doubt. I relearn the "real" cause of being made redundant. I am utterly incompetent. It was a cheek of me to have even applied for the position!

When I am fully awake I recognise this as insomnia and thinking of depression, another aspect of the brief process. While I don't like this experience I understand it is necessary not to bypass the depression stage, but to enter into it, as part of the path to resolution.

Looking through the Role Theory Lens

I have a great hunger to live my life fully. I wanted to do more than wait passively for the grief process to work its way through me. I wanted to be real about the situation I was in. I did not want to fall part, fragment. Neither did I want to determinedly hold myself together, coping. I wanted to respond to this real life role-test creatively, maintaining my sense of self-worth and my spontaneity.

On reflection I saw that I was in the role of *wistful, retrospective dreamer*, dreaming my life away, having value in the world only in my dreams of the past. Old coping roles were easy to use. Finding lots of



things to do such as applying for positions, writing for this journal, study, home-making, I was also in the role of *hard working escapist*. I devoured a six volume fantasy-sci-fi series – fantasy escaper. I carefully planned each day so that it was not wasted, so I was also enacting the role of the *grimly determined organiser*.

In the 5am insomnia sessions I heard the echoes of my social atom. The family of my childhood was dominated by the fundamentalists belief system of the Salvation Army. The whole world was seen as a battle ground between God and Satan. God needed everyone to be His soldiers, fighting evil. We were a privileged family because God has chosen my parents to work full time for him, battling evil and building His forces. Everything was sacrificed to this purpose. To be idle, in unpaid work, was to sin against God

risking Satan's triumph and the unspeakable horrors of everlasting hell.

My father, now in his eighties, continues to battle for God against sin and Satan. My mother believes that because she dedicated her life to God, life must be perfect. She constantly reconstructs her perception of reality to create her ideal of perfection.

A Closed System: Part of My Social Atom Re-Emerges

The echoes of my social atom were with me through this transition. If I was not in paid employment I was one of the scum of the earth. It is unacceptable for anyone in my family to be scum of the earth. My father urged me to obtain any work that I could possibly do (McDonald's, cleaning houses, etc). My mother

found a reason for me not being in paid employment immediately. Many positions were being offered to me but they were not good enough and I was refusing them! At this point I had not been short-listed for any position.

Warm-Up: A New Approach

Warm-up to action, how we live our lives, is constructed from how we make sense of our world. It comes from the personal meaning we create to provide identity and authenticity in the world. It is stimulated by a cosmic hunger for a full and creative life. It is creative life. It is created when we are young and relates to the psychodramatic roles we have developed.

In my early morning insomnia, it was difficult for me to feel that my life had value. I increasingly found it difficult to maintain my sense of self-worth necessary for promoting myself into new positions. I used the science fiction reading increasingly to dull pain of depression, waiting for a magical answer to my unhappiness, thinking that the grief had to be passively worked through, until resolution evolved.

I cherished the vibrancy, vitality and connectedness of doing the deeply meaningful work of the lost position. Every day I was reinforced in how I mattered in the world. My hunger for authenticity within the world was satisfied.

With the sudden redundancy I had lost my positive warm-up to life I no longer knew how I mattered in the world, or how I connected to others. In the vacuum, learning from my social atom came to the fore. But not being in paid employment I was a sinner, one of the fallen, scum of the earth, only fit for the unmentionable horrors of hell.

During one of the 5am sessions I had this insight into warm-up, and saw that I needed to change my warm-up to life.

The personal meaning that I had for my life was that I critically mattered in the world primarily because of this position. Now that I was not in this position I did not know how I mattered in the world. There were many ways in which I did and do matter, but they had been put into the background. I was not seeing them or claiming them. I was passively waiting for the depression to pass, for the grief process to work its way through me so that I could again experience my usual vibrancy.

Role Training

Everyday I consciously focused myself on developing new warm-up. I started each day with a time not dissimilar to morning devotions. At a particular time and place I considered the position that I had been forced to leave, acknowledging the warm-up to it. I then considered my new situation as a time of transition, acknowledging the need for a new warm-up to life and the day ahead of me. I started seeing opportunity in this situation. I could do all those home-making things that get put off when life is busy. I could catch up with friends who are so often neglected. I could give my partner more support in an extra challenging period in his work. I could get ahead on my study. I started looking for a new position with eagerness and curiosity. What would the universe provide? What position would be available and desirable to me? What position would I be right for? I was surprised at how quickly the depression disappeared. Applying the warm-up

concept I re-discovered and became reconnected to the roles of my progressive role system.

The New Warm-Up: Reorganisation of My Role System

Progressive Roles	Coping Roles	Fragmenting Roles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loving self appreciator • Accepting change acknowledger • Eager anticipator of life • Creative transition organiser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wistful retrospective dreamer • Fantasy escaper • Grim diligent organiser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopeless hermit • Worthless scum of the earth

With a new insight into the application of warm-up, I deliberately applied some of the principles of role training on a daily basis, somewhat like morning devotions. I focused on the life transition I living through and looked for the opportunities each day. I started to wonder what new position I would gain. I was surprised at the speed with which depression lifted. I found the concept of warm-up to life tapped into my cosmic hunger for a deeply meaningful and vibrant life. This warm-up fostered progressive functioning.

Cosmic Hunger Satisfied

I found redundancy a particular challenge in my life. The employer made the decision for me to leave this position. It thus threatened the sense of control I have over my life. It threatened my basic needs for economic security housing/shelter and food. It was easy to personalise the redundancy, to feel dismissed and worthless, threatening the basis of my self-esteem.

Concepts of grief that I had developed during my profession life were some help to explain and accept the wide range of varying emotions I experienced while moving through this transition. I readily identified shock, bargaining, anger and depression. The depression stage was experienced as deadening and frustrating. It felt that I could do little but wait for the depression to lift. This fostered coping roles. I wanted to live with greater liveliness.