


Chapter 5

The Unraveling of a Dream: Grieving the Loss of an Institution as a Former Student Turned Faculty

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the personal and professional grief experienced by a social worker who witnessed the closure of their alma mater where they later served as a faculty member. Written from a reflective yet research-informed perspective, the chapter examines the emotional complexities of institutional loss through the dual lens of student and educator. Drawing on theories of grief, loss, and professional identity, the author highlights the roles of anticipatory grief, as faculty and students grappled with the looming end of the institution, and collective grief, as a community mourned the shared loss of identity, history, and purpose. Through narrative inquiry, the chapter situates the experience within the broader context of higher education instability and explores how institutional closure disrupts one's sense of belonging and professional direction. Ultimately, it offers pathways for meaning-making, legacy-building, and healing amid profound transition.

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INTRODUCTION

When the College of Saint Rose announced it would be closing its doors at the end of the 2023–2024 academic year, I was deeply affected professionally and personally as I began to process the significance of the news. As an alumna and faculty member, the college shaped my identity and grounded my purpose. The announcement marked the unraveling of an institution and a deeply cherished home. What followed was a year of anticipatory grief, collective mourning, and, unexpectedly, a profound journey of meaning-making.

The news was shocking and disorienting. It brought sadness, anger, and a deep sense of loss. But as the weeks turned into months, and teaching and mentoring continued amid the uncertainty, the grief evolved. It became anticipatory, an awareness that my time on campus was slowly fading. This grief was not mine alone. It reverberated through classrooms, faculty meetings, community partnerships, and alumni circles. Yet in that grief, something remarkable happened: connection deepened, meaning clarified, and a new path emerged. I made meaning out of the challenges I faced by leaning on my colleagues, creating ways to honor the past and all the work that had been accomplished, and taking a leap of faith for the future. When you can integrate and accept change after a loss, you assign value to what has occurred, and the healing begins.

Journey From Student to Educator

The College of Saint Rose has been a part of my life in one way, shape, or form for over twenty years. Since I first stepped foot on its campus in the Fall of 2002 as a high school senior planning my next steps, it felt like home. Its manicured campus and walkability in the heart of a residential neighborhood appealed to my small-town background. It was not so big that I would get lost or overwhelmed, but it still offered the diverse and new experience I desired.

When I think back to that first visit, I remember walking through the campus green and down Western Avenue. The campus was beautiful with a mix of historic and modern buildings. I was nervous but hopeful, unsure of what I was looking for in college, but deeply aware of how it felt to be there. I recall touring the social work building, a small two-story house with a large conference table on the first floor. It was subtle, but something told me this was a place that cared not just about academics, but about people. Every face was friendly and welcoming, which was not what I had received on some other college tours. I knew I could stop looking and had found my place.

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