

## Appendix A: Interview with Vasalisa

- 1 VASALISA The lovely family I had: you know, you only need a few seconds, with  
2 the one and then he was dead, and just two months and then I found out  
3 that the other one had cancer. Your life changes so dramatically in such  
4 a short time that I ... I don't think a lifetime is long enough to ... to  
5 actually understand why. We always say why, and why not me – it  
6 happens to other people.
- 7 INTERVIEWER *I'm wondering, in terms of this particular interview, can we focus on ...*
- 8 VASALISA With cancer (pause) yes well... the thing is, you hear about cancer every  
9 day. Lots of people I know. Well, maybe I won't say ... maybe not quite  
10 friends, but I know them very well over a long time – like my hairdresser  
11 – two hairdressers. Uhm ... and I'm talking now between ten and thirty  
12 years and they're dead, (with emphasis) they're gone. Now one day, ...  
13 er... my daughter-in-law phones me and says B, my son's got cancer.  
14 Well, you sit down and say, OK so you've got cancer, so what do you do  
15 with that?
- 16 INTERVIEWER *What did you do with that? I mean, how did you experience that news?*
- 17 VASALISA At first I wasn't quite sure if I heard right. She said ... er ... he was in  
18 hospital, he had an operation and they found out it was cancer. So I  
19 said, "No, I don't think so." You know, why would he have cancer? I  
20 mean, he was such a healthy (*with emphasis*) healthy, living person.  
21 Why should he have cancer? I said, "I'm going down." They were in  
22 Cape Town then. My husband went down on business. He went to see  
23 him in hospital. I went to see him when he came out. (*pausing and*  
24 *reflecting*) I don't think I ever really accepted it until I ... I... (*thinking*)  
25 even when he couldn't move any more, when he was a skeleton, I  
26 couldn't er... (*long pause*)
- 27 INTERVIEWER *So it was almost unbelievable*
- 28 VASALISA Ja (*with conviction*)
- 29 INTERVIEWER *What do you think made it so unbelievable?*
- 30 VASALISA (*Pause*) It didn't feel possible. Well it did and it didn't. I mean, I was  
31 quite often up and down. I went there every three months –down – and  
32 stayed for about a week. I must say I couldn't stay much longer than a week.  
33 I had to come back and recuperate and go down then again. But in that  
34 week I think I handled myself very well. I have photos of him. I took a  
35 photo ... it was one of the last times he could still come down. He had sat  
36 in the garden and ... er... but I tell you when it really hit me, he



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73 same context, and of course we had to feed him, and to me it was like  
74 having my baby back. You know, this little boy who ... this little child who  
75 actually 100% depends on you. You know when they are small, and ehm ...  
76 it was well, and I never cried (*pause*). I cried once when he was cross with  
77 me and said I didn't eat and I had to bring my plate round, like a little girl  
78 and eat next to him so he can see what I eat. All I did was go to the toilet  
79 and bring it all back up again. That upset me, but otherwise I don't think I  
80 could have stayed longer than a week. I think I was somehow geared for it,  
81 you know.

82 INTERVIEWER *Now I heard before, you said earlier you had to come home and*  
83 *recover, so what did it actually do to you, it's like you could manage for*  
84 *a week but then you had to give yourself a break.*

85 VASALISA I did not cry. I did ... you see ... my other son died just before it so I  
86 was in a state of grieving for the one which of course was put to a side  
87 because B was still alive and uhm if someone is dead, that's one thing,  
88 but if as long as they're still alive you care for them. And when I came  
89 here I just led my own little life and uhm basically spent a lot of time  
90 with my other children until I felt I have to go again

91 INTERVIEWER *When you felt you had to go again, why was that important to you?*

92 VASALISA I think it was, most probably it was, I knew he didn't have much time. I  
93 didn't say it in so many words and maybe even my brain didn't  
94 acknowledge it quite like that, but something inside me knew it. Because  
95 one day ... See, when I was down there he was still working half days.  
96 Then when I went down later, he couldn't drive any more. You know, he  
97 went, all the stages, he went down, they all went down and, *um*, once I  
98 flew down with my daughter and her children We spent still a nice day  
99 out, but he couldn't drive any more, and then one day he phoned me and  
100 said ... (*pause*) well, he could still move his hands (*long pause*)  
101 *So there was the sense of time running out, and that sense of time*  
102 *running out was really brought about by the fact that he was losing*  
103 *certain abilities?*

104 VASALISA Yes, yes.

105 INTERVIEWER *And his independence in doing things was gradually being taken away.*  
106 *How was that, to see that gradual deterioration in his health?*

107 VASALISA Well, if somebody would ask me if would I felt, I think my whole body  
108 had shut down.

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- 109 INTERVIEWER *So that is what you were saying in the beginning that it was almost*  
110 *difficult(yes) at the point(yes) when you had to worry about his being ill*
- 111 VASALISA Yes. You know I have seen people dying of cancer, well not actually  
112 dying. I've seen them a few months before they were dying, and I  
113 always thought, "Ugh, I don't think I could watch anybody dying like  
114 this". But if it's your child you do watch. You do, and you grudge  
115 every minute you're not with them and if it's the actual acceptance of  
116 dying, I'm not quite sure if it is. I think it's more the minutes while  
117 he's still living – you don't think dying yet. It's still living.
- 118 INTERVIEWER *So then there was obviously such a big change when it came to the*  
119 *point that he did die.*
- 120 VASALISA Well, the worst ... what happened was, when he couldn't move, I went  
121 down for a week, that's when we started the cooking and the ... and er ...  
122 it was just before Christmas, and I came home. I phoned every day and I  
123 spoke to his wife. The first week when he could still hold the telephone, I  
124 could speak to him, but he couldn't do that either any more eventually.  
125 My husband bought me a ticket to Cape Town, an open ticket, and *um*  
126 (*pause*) on this particular Friday I thought, "Tomorrow, Saturday, I must  
127 go, I *must* go. Something was pushing me. The messages I got from  
128 Cape Town, they were every day the same: it was not going good, it was  
129 going slowly down, but when he heard my voice on the phone, he would  
130 still say, "Hello, mummy, how are you?" So he was still there. This  
131 Friday, I had a terrible day (*pause*) *er* ... on Thursday I had my maid,  
132 Friday I cleaned the house again because on Saturday I was going to Cape  
133 Town. And as I was finished, washing the dishes, I found a cracked glass  
134 and what I would do is wrap it in newspaper and throw it in the dustbin. I  
135 mean, that's what I do. But I didn't do it that day, so I wasn't ... I don't  
136 think, quite normal any more, because I can hardly remember it, I was in  
137 such a state. But don't ask me why. It wasn't a logical thing. I didn't talk  
138 to him in the morning. I *er* ... *er* ... had the glass in this hand, and in this  
139 hand I had the lid of the pen, and I broke the glass on the side ... don't ask  
140 me why ... this I really don't. I tore my whole arm up. So I took kitchen  
141 towels, they were all nice and clean, and I wrapped them around my arm,  
142 closed the door, and went upstairs with the towel because it was all  
143 soaked with blood. See, (*indicating her forearm*) I've got skin grafts right  
144 up, my whole arm. I put the towel around it and lay down. And then my

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145 husband came home and he took me to hospital which I honestly don't  
146 remember.

147 INTERVIEWER *Now, thinking of when you heard he died, what did that say to you*  
148 *about this whole event with the glass?*

149 VASALISA Well, I think he ... I'm not a very spiritual person, *um* ... I won't say not  
150 at all, but not ... not very when I listen to someone, but I'm sure he  
161 wanted me there and I couldn't get there. I mean, it's Cape Town. Cape  
162 Town for God's sake, you know you can't even ... the flight takes two  
163 hours, it takes an hour to go along to the airport and another hour from the  
164 airport to where they lived so that alone is already four hours and I was, I  
165 think, the thing happened – strange. Another strange thing happened to  
166 my husband, who dearly likes a glass of beer with the boys. Friday  
167 afternoon, sure, he was asked if he would come and have a beer, they'd  
168 had a tough week. When it came to half-past four, he said, "I won't have a  
169 beer, I'm going home." I don't think I would have been alive, I lost so  
170 much blood. And I know my husband, to say no to a beer with the boys,  
171 not that he drinks heavy, but I mean this is a very good pastime, this  
172 belongs to working.

173 INTERVIEWER *It sounds like it's a good experience for him to be doing that. That must*  
174 *have been a big change for him not to do it?*

175 VASALISA Well, he just ... I mean ... I never phoned him, I never thought about it.  
176 But he came home and he took me to hospital.

177 INTERVIEWER *So there where some very strange things really that happened on that*  
178 *day.*

179 VASALISA Really, I think they were very strange.

180 INTERVIEWER *And now, how do you understand them now thinking back?*

181 VASALISA Well, as much as what I can see, to me they are good things in all the  
182 bad things. I mean if your child dies it's always a bad thing, but I think  
183 they were good things. They were signs which he most probably would  
184 have wanted me to know.

185 INTERVIEWER *That your son wanted you to know?*

186 VASALISA Yes. And somehow must have transferred from him, or from me, to my  
187 husband, because when I was there first they just stitched it all, it was all  
188 loose and hanging you know from jagged glass and they put it all very  
189 nicely, except I shouldn't lose so much blood. It was just lucky I missed  
190 the main vein, otherwise it would have been too late. But *um* ... the

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191 doctor ... the day after that – it was Friday night – the day after that was  
192 Saturday, Saturday late afternoon, they had to operate again, it didn't  
193 take, and they told me they had to take a graft. Took a piece from here  
194 (*indicating*) and put it on here. And it was like all muddled again. In the  
195 meantime my husband, and of course my girls, knew that my son was  
196 dead. And he didn't know what to do, so he spoke to the doctor and he  
197 said "No ways. (*Very emphatic*) No. Not now. You have to wait till I tell  
198 you." And they told me then on Tuesday. I wasn't actually shocked. I  
199 think I knew it even though I could have never said it in words.

200 INTERVIEWER *You felt as though you knew it in another way?*

201 VASALISA Yes. And when I think back now, I mean not just now, after all these  
202 years, even once I came home from hospital, I thought, yes ...  
203 because... (*pause*) my son wasn't very spiritual. I'm not, how, what  
204 kind of sign could there be between the one and the other broken  
205 blooming glass – you nearly bleed to death, how ... it's something  
206 tumbled inside I'm ... you most probably can explain that better, and er  
207 ... that I did a stupid thing like that.

208 INTERVIEWER *So now if you had to put a name to this sign, what is the sign for you?*

209 VASALISA Very irritable. All I wanted - to go. I wanted to be finished that I could  
210 go. I had the ticket, and er... I know that it was going towards the end,  
211 really to the end, even though all the time before, with the logic I had, I  
212 could tell you, yes, I saw it. But it's the understanding, the perfect  
213 understanding of it wasn't there. I think I rejected that absolute ... you  
214 know what I mean ...this ... this ...

215 INTERVIEWER *Almost like two parts of you?*

216 VASALISA Yes. Yes, I think I was two parts for those whole two years. I could cry  
217 here, but I could never cry when I was down there. We always had a  
218 beautiful time down there. We talked, spent time together, we talked  
219 and er ... we were ... just us.

220 INTERVIEWER *And then here you were – the sadness could happen here?*

221 I could relax here. And I had my days I could cry but er ... then again, I  
222 thought again er ... why cry ... he has to die, he can't live like that, you  
223 know ...

224 *With the suffering?*

225 Yes. But the other part of you of course says no, illogically.

226 *Wants to hold on?*

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- 227 Yes. But er...I ... I didn't want it to hold on any more when I last saw  
228 him. I really didn't because it was really too bad. But then my  
229 daughter-in-law said er ..."It was good you couldn't come, because he  
230 looked even worse." But er... when N, his wife, phoned she would say,  
231 "Mummy sends her love" and he'd say "Yes." She said the last day and  
232 that was on the Friday, he died Friday to Saturday, he heard voices, it  
233 was probably N and her mother, and he thought it was me, and he called  
234 "Mummy". N just said "Yes?" But he wasn't there any more. He died  
235 in the night, actually in his sleep, with one of the little cats. The little  
236 cat he bought for N, a pair of these long-haired things. They're only this  
237 size but so much hair they look bigger.
- 238 INTERVIEWER *They must have been like a ball of fluff.*
- 239 VASALISA What are they called?
- 240 INTERVIEWER *I don't know. I just said they must have been like a ball of fluff.*
- 241 VASALISA They were. They've got these flat faces – it's all hair. The one - they  
242 both came from the same litter - was a loving little thing; the other one  
243 nobody could touch. You went to touch it and it went "yeeah" it screamed  
244 at you, and that cat sat with B. And they said when she went at night -  
245 they had the lady from Hospice coming at night – because er... when he  
246 was in bed he was uncomfortable because he couldn't move and we sat  
247 him in a chair, like a Lazy-boy, but I mean he was tall, and he was a dead  
248 weight. I mean N's mother and myself nearly broke our backs to get him  
249 out of bed into this chair. And then you've got to see you've got all the  
250 limbs with because they couldn't move themselves  
251 and we er ... so they got these people from Hospice who helped them and  
252 er... and she said er ... er ... when she went in, er... before she went to bed,  
253 I mean she slept in the same bed, a double bed, but she went out to the  
254 bathroom, whatever she went to do. She saw the cat, and she thought, "I  
255 wonder if I shouldn't take the cat away." It was lying in this hollow  
256 (indicating abdomen), er ... Ag, and she said, "No, I'll leave it". In the night  
257 the cat went away, and he touched that cat, I mean I know that cat for years,  
258 something like that.
- 259 INTERVIEWER *So what do you think that was about now when you think about it  
260 looking back – such an inexplicable thing?*
- 261 VASALISA It is. It is. It's odd (*with emphasis*).
- 262 INTERVIEWER *Something strange though. So it seems like at that time there were*

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- 263 *a number of signs for you?*
- 264 VASALISA I er ...Oh, I think there were, there definitely were, yes, yes
- 265 INTERVIEWER *And what do those signs point to then? How do they make you think?*
- 266 VASALISA I don't know.
- 267 INTERVIEWER *You said right at the beginning that there's stuff you'll never really understand as long as you live.*
- 268
- 269 VASALISA No. I mean some things are er ... (*hesitation*) look there's ... there's a lot of things we er ... we ... we don't understand. I mean all these er signs, but how do we understand signs, but I think we were crazy, I think that's what we were, and I would say that he, *he* wanted me down there. But he knew he was dying because he didn't even want a prayer on his .... We took the ashes up Table Mountain. We're not very religious, but there's some things you just do. So er... so I said to him, "What about me?", "Oh, I'll sort something out", and there's a German mission down there. It's only one er .. so you see he was actually serious, and just said, "Ja, all right, I'll make something and I choose it", and he said, "Yes,"... so we with N and her mother decided and we read it to him "Does it make a difference?" "Well", I said, "it does make to us, I don't know if it makes to you, I mean what about ... don't you think about it?" And he said, "No." He said he was thinking about us but he just ... I don't know if it's easier if people are religious, I think, maybe it helps, I don't know, for some maybe.
- 285 INTERVIEWER *Do you think it might have helped you?*
- 286 VASALISA No, I don't think so. This was enough.
- 287 INTERVIEWER *It was enough.*
- 288 VASALISA It was enough. Yes, it was enough. Just on Table Mountain, see we only took his ... you see his birthday is on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July. We decided we take his ashes up on Table Mountain on his birthday, provided the weather in Cape Town let's you get up Table Mountain, and er... the 6<sup>th</sup> was the most terrible weather in Cape Town. Now on the 7<sup>th</sup> is my one daughter's birthday. I said, "Sorry that today I have to go and I think that hour on Table Mountain was er... was the sum of the loss and whether I fall apart. I'm not quite that person: I can cry yes. But actually falling apart ...(pause)
- 297 INTERVIEWER *And you felt like you fell apart on that day?*
- 298 VASALISA Totally (*emphatically*) totally.



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- 299 INTERVIEWER *So, all the grief and all the sadness*
- 300 VASALISA *Yes!*
- 301 INTERVIEWER *And all the exhaustion, the worries.*
- 302 VASALISA *All of it. It was, to me, it was the worst day of my life. And that is a*  
303 *long life. And er ... (pause)*
- 304 INTERVIEWER *So it really stands out.*
- 305 VASALISA *That day, yes. Yes. That day was an awful day, an awful day ... it was*  
306 *really an awful day.*
- 307 INTERVIEWER *Does it also stand out in the sense of being like a milestone, a point*  
308 *before which something was one way, and after which something was a*  
309 *different way?*
- 310 VASALISA *Yes (with emphasis) I think it had, I think that was the finishing because*  
311 *in these six months, when he [had] died and before we had the ashes up*  
312 *on Table Mountain, (pause)*
- 313 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 314 VASALISA *it was like a waiting period, (pause)*
- 315 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 316 VASALISA *but I cannot tell you what I was waiting for, (pause)*
- 317 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 318 VASALISA *and I ...I ... I mean I'd scattered once ashes already before, (pause)*
- 319 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 320 VASALISA *and so I know all it would do to me (pause)*
- 321 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 322 VASALISA *but I didn't know it would be that bad, but then again I had that two*  
323 *years of missing, grieving for the one (pause)*
- 324 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 325 VASALISA *and seeing the other one dying (pause)*
- 326 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 327 VASALISA *and this ... this was really ... I thought this was ... is ... I thought Table*  
328 *Mountain ... was actually ... I don't know, splitting up, exploding and*  
329 *doing its own thing, and it was the most beautiful day – everything. You*  
330 *know Cape Town when it's beautiful, (pause)*
- 331 INTERVIEWER *Um, um*
- 332 VASALISA *You can see ... (pause)*
- 333 INTERVIEWER *And yet there that sense that things were just falling apart?*
- 334 VASALISA *Ahh – when I looked I ... I thought, how can people walk around like*

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- 335 this? (*pause*)
- 336 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 337 VASALISA I sat on a bench all by myself and the crying, it wasn't just crying, it  
338 was a total ... flooding (*pause*)
- 339 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 340 VASALISA of ...Table Mountain. It was really terrible. But my daughter-in-law, I'd  
341 arranged to stay there the night, and I fly the next day back. I couldn't  
342 stay there the night. And I phoned my husband and said I'll come back  
343 today. I didn't have a plane yet, and there was..., his main office, his  
344 head office, is in Cape Town, and they were very good when I was  
345 down there, they gave me lifts. I didn't need it often, but you needed  
346 definitely a lift to go to the airport because once by taxi it cost me  
347 R200. If there are such a lot of two hundred Rands ...  
348 *phew*
- 349 VASALISA when you have to go every three months down, you know
- 350 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 351 VASALISA And, er, I called this chappie and he was coming past, he was picking  
352 me up. Actually, I told him "No, I want to go home, because in my own  
353 four walls I can let myself go".
- 354 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 355 VASALISA I could there as well, but it was not the same. He [my son] had a little  
356 girl – I didn't want to cry in front of her.
- 357 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 358 VASALISA So you hold back again.
- 359 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 360 VASALISA And er ... up on Table Mountain, she, my daughter-in-law and her  
361 mother and the little girl, they went for a walk (*pause*)
- 362 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 363 VASALISA And I think they saw it and er ... er N's mother, she had still her sister  
364 and her brother-in-law up there, very nice people, really nice people,  
365 and it hurt, but *oof* ...(*pause*)
- 366 INTERVIEWER *um*
- 367 VASALISA It's just a day ...no. Uhm uh I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. It  
368 was a bad day, it was really bad
- 369 INTERVIEWER *A bit like the end of the world really?*
- 370 VASALISA It was. Yes. But at the same time, er... giving it that day or two, er ...

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371 it was a closing point as well,  
372 INTERVIEWER *um*  
373 VASALISA so now I could go on grieving for the one, and for the other one.  
374 INTERVIEWER *um*  
375 VASALISA Because before that I had no, no time: I had to concentrate on the one.  
376 Would you like something to drink?  
377 INTERVIEWER *No, I'll be fine thank you. Thank you so much for telling me all this, it's*  
378 *a great help.*  
379 VASALISA Oh good.  
380 INTERVIEWER *I think I would just have one question,*  
381 VASALISA Yes  
382 INTERVIEWER *before we finish, if you could if you feel up to it.*  
383 VASALISA Yes, yes.  
384 INTERVIEWER *At the very beginning you said how this experience of loss has changed*  
385 *the way you think about things completely and I wondered if you could*  
386 *explain to me what the difference is. How do things feel different?*  
387 VASALISA You know, it's not that easy to explain really. Er... what I often said  
388 and er ... didn't actually explain, my world will never be the same.  
389 INTERVIEWER *Um. The world's changed.*  
390 VASALISA Yes, for me.  
391 INTERVIEWER *For you.*  
392 VASALISA With two of my sons gone. I only had the two sons. I still have girls.  
393 And er ... how it changed. I don't know (*pause*). In so many ... in so  
394 many ways. At first ... the first about two years I never even went out to  
395 a restaurant. I couldn't go in Edenvale, because that's where my other  
396 son was, every place reminded me of him. And I would look, I would  
397 actually look for him. I went to Cape Town, I think about two years  
398 after and then after two years everybody was still crying, and I said,  
399 "this is no good, I want to go home." It took about another two years,  
400 until I can say, I can go and work ... I work in the garden, I got to  
401 work in the garden because outside I'm still all right but er... for  
402 instance I get out of church and all I want to do is cry, and I said, "No,  
403 that's not why I should go to church." I don't know about you, but I can  
404 read the bible as well. If that minister wants to read the bible to me, I  
405 can do that myself. I was actually upset, I was upset that they couldn't  
406 give me more.

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- 407 INTERVIEWER *So you were looking for something.*
- 408 VASALISA I was looking for something.
- 409 INTERVIEWER *And they couldn't give it to you?*
- 410 VASALISA No.
- 411 INTERVIEWER *Did you ever find what you were looking for.*
- 412 VASALISA No.
- 413 INTERVIEWER *Still not?*
- 414 VASALISA No. I found it within myself and within my family. We're very close,  
415 and er ... I found it within our people. I do go out, and I go on holiday,  
416 I do go, and I do go and I've been to Cape Town as well. I haven't  
417 been up Table Mountain since and I actually want to go.
- 418 INTERVIEWER *Now?*
- 419 VASALISA Yes.
- 420 INTERVIEWER *You feel ready?*
- 421 VASALISA I feel ready. Now I can go. Yes. Yes. I think, maybe. We went three  
422 years ago to see the flowers in the Cape. That flower show grows in 44  
423 years and it was absolutely magnificent and then we went to see my  
424 daughter-in-law and my granddaughter and that helps, and their little  
425 girl. She's not a little girl, she's in Standard Ten this year. So it ... that  
426 of course helps as well, to see that they're going on, but I couldn't stay  
427 with them. I couldn't stay with them.
- 428 INTERVIEWER *Was it too uncomfortable?*
- 429 VASALISA I don't know what it is. Er... she wanted to show me the house: she'd  
430 changed something on the house and I said "No, it's all right." I have  
431 the feeling I'm looking for B or his ghost or something.
- 432 INTERVIEWER *Um*
- 433 VASALISA I'm allright when we had the braai on the verandah, and later sat in the  
434 lounge for coffee – it was fine. The first time we went there we took  
435 them out for lunch. I wouldn't even go there.
- 436 INTERVIEWER *You're so looking for him still, or that you were at that stage?*
- 437 VASALISA I was then. Yes. Yes. It's better now. Now I just said to my husband, I  
438 said, "Ugh." You really didn't want to go. We had five days: two days  
439 were raining, three days were our trip up to this. We could have stayed  
440 another day, three days is not much, but that's not the point. It's eight  
441 years since he died, eight years.
- 442 INTERVIEWER *Umm. Sounds like a lot of things have been changing, a bit here, a bit*

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- 443 *there – a continuous change. It hasn't been like this happened and then*  
444 *it was different.*
- 445 VASALISA No.
- 446 INTERVIEWER *The change has been a gradual ongoing change.*
- 447 VASALISA Yes. And it was only after Wolfgang died that I went to confession again. I  
448 remember my one daughter, she had a friend and she lost the baby three  
449 days old and she went to Compassionate Friends, and she was very close to  
450 my daughter and she said, "Mummy, don't you want to go to help you  
451 manage?" And apparently I didn't manage because the kids said to me, why  
452 don't you go and I said, "Don't nag me, I'll manage, I'm fine." But they  
453 said, "You wouldn't talk, you weren't laughing, you weren't ... outgoing.  
454 You were ... you were not there." And I did everything but I wasn't quite  
455 ... there.
- 456 INTERVIEWER *There was a part of you that was missing almost?*
- 457 VASALISA Yes! And then I went to Compassionate Friends, but I don't know if it  
458 helped me, to be honest. I really don't know. Maybe it did. What I did was  
459 I cried for every single woman there. Including myself. And this is not good.  
460 There are so many sad cases. The minute I came in and they  
461 started talking. One's son he hanged himself in the garage, the other one  
462 blow his brains out .... (pause)
- 463 INTERVIEWER *It was too much.*
- 464 VASALISA It eventually became too much. Uhm ... we went there and they phoned me.  
465 But you know, even when they phoned me it was er ... when you have a  
466 wound that is just starting to heal and it just breaks open again.  
467 The minute I heard compassionate voices, you know what I mean. I  
468 had somebody er... I had a friend here, just two houses further down,  
469 and she lost a son, a suicide as well, so we could sit and talk. We would  
470 ... one day she had a bad day and she would cry; I had sometimes a bad  
471 day and I would cry and we would understand what it feels like.
- 472 INTERVIEWER *So you gave each other support.*
- 473 VASALISA Yes. But in Compassionate Friends, there are ... you can say ... it's not  
474 quite right what I'm about to say, but the voices are too loving, too  
475 touching, you know what I mean ...(pause)
- 476 INTERVIEWER *It's almost overwhelming?*
- 477 VASALISA Yes. So every time they phoned, I could hardly talk. And er ... but I knew  
478 they meant well, I'm almost 100% convinced they did, it just didn't go

## Appendix A: Interview with Vasalisa

479 with me. And I slowly just broke away and I thought I'd just have to do it  
480 by my own way.

481 INTERVIEWER *And that's something I've heard quite a bit from you: how important it*  
482 *was for you to find your own way*

483 VASALISA Yes.

484 INTERVIEWER *And is that what took some time as well*

485 VASALISA Yes it took time, and it takes more time, yes.

486 INTERVIEWER *It takes more time.*

487 VASALISA Yes, yes. Yes it does. I can talk about it, I can. I have my days when I  
488 cry quicker than other days, but you see it comes now from days for  
489 dates. My son one died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August and B died on the 10<sup>th</sup> of  
490 February. So these are not good days.

491 INTERVIEWER *This is a difficult time of the year.*

492 VASALISA Yeah. Yeah, they're not good. And what I normally do is (*laughs*), I  
493 don't want to talk then, I want to just be me. You know, just my little  
494 self. Then I go to bed. When it was hot in summer I didn't put electric  
495 blanket on but now I put the electric blanket on top of me. I will drink  
496 but I will not eat and I can do that quite happily for three days. My  
497 husband is very unhappy when I do that. But I come out after three  
498 days like a new person. I have a bath, I get dressed, I even put a bit  
499 eye-liner on, whatever it's necessary on your face, and I go back into  
500 my bed. Not in bed but on top of my bed. Not in bed. You go into bed  
501 when you're sick you, but I'm not sick

502 INTERVIEWER *You're not sick you just need that is it almost a period of isolation, of*  
503 *withdrawing from the world?*

504 VASALISA Yes. Yes. Just .. just withdrawing. I didn't want to see er.... You know it  
505 was very hot, I was watering my garden then. Basically, my husband  
506 I mean, over here didn't exist, just didn't exist. I just gave him some  
507 food. I just wanted to be alone. There was no actual pain it was just like  
508 that. After that I'm fine.

509 INTERVIEWER *So that's what helps you to get in touch with where ...*

510 VASALISA To get in touch. Get in touch. Yes yes. I mean we don't lead a hectic life  
511 any more because nobody's working, and so on, er ... but you have outside  
512 influences and the family's growing and it's er .... And from  
513 my husband's sister's has girls and they're married. He has two children  
514 and the one has no children and the one has gone back to England. So

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515 there is four children now, so they become more and more, and there's a  
516 lot of birthdays during the year. As I said, my few days I take to my  
517 bed, nobody says anything. I think they all know.

518 INTERVIEWER *Do you have a sense during that time, of what happens, and where you*  
519 *go to in your mind and in your heart?*

520 VASALISA Really don't know. I really couldn't tell you.

521 INTERVIEWER *It is just a withdrawal?*

522 VASALISA It is a withdrawal. You know, when you sit here, or anywhere you're  
523 sitting, you have things in your vision, there are things. My bedroom  
524 has got things as well, but far less. And it is as if I need, I don't want to  
525 see all these things ...er... it's too busy.

526 INTERVIEWER *Too much, too busy.*

527 Yes, but what I do sometimes, I take a little object away. I take  
528 sometimes one away with me, or when I have a bunch of flowers  
529 they're so expensive, you can't buy them all the time, I take them to the  
530 bedroom. Some kind of flower. Like the gardenias. I've got one  
531 beautiful one here, I will cut that off with me to the bedroom, and a  
532 candle. You know I sometimes nod off on my chest. I fall asleep, it's  
533 not a heavy sleep and er... but ... it's just there. I just need it, I must  
534 need it from time to time.

535 As I said, I'm not sick, I haven't got pains (*pause*)

536 INTERVIEWER *So that seems like quite a healing experience when it happens?*

537 VASALISA Well, I feel pretty well when I come out again. I just get up and have  
538 my bath as normal, and just get into whatever needs to be done, without  
539 thinking, "now do I need still another day?" The body tells me, or my  
540 mind tells me, or whatever. That's where you stay today, or today you  
541 can go. It's not in ... er ... a thing you can put your finger on .... It's  
542 not physical. It's more spiritual, if I can use that word - I do very  
543 seldom, but sometimes it fits.

544 INTERVIEWER *That's how it fits for you.*

545 VASALISA Yes. Yes. And there ... somehow, you know, you've got to make your  
546 little world still livable because I'm still here, and my children are still  
547 here and my husband is still here and other family members are still  
548 here. And er... sometimes you have to put yourself a bit in the  
549 background er.. for them, because my girls will get very easily upset  
550 when I'm upset and er...so you always try not to be upset when they're

## Appendix A: Interview with Vasalisa

551 there but mostly we have phone calls, I don't see them, we just phone,  
552 because they're very busy, they have that kind of work, so I only see  
553 them once in two weeks, but ... (pause) Er... I don't think it will ever  
554 change, I don't think it can change.

555 INTERVIEWER *What can't change?*

556 VASALISA The way I feel, still that loss

557 INTERVIEWER *Yes.*

558 VASALISA It cannot go away. I mean ...

559 INTERVIEWER *So that remains a part of you?*

560 VASALISA Yes, and partially I want it to be there because somebody said to me a  
561 while ago, "Are you still crying, don't you get over it?" It's not a matter  
562 of getting over it, and then why shouldn't I cry. They are my kids. You  
563 know, we lived a whole life, a lifetime together, why shouldn't they  
564 deserve a tear? The people they think you can put it on the side and er..  
565 say that's where it can stay. You can do it on the odd day, but you can't  
566 do it in general, you know, you can't.

567 INTERVIEWER *It's a part of you*

568 VASALISA Ja. I don't want to do that. I mean, I've got photos of my kids, some of them.  
569 I've got some in the bedroom and some in the study, and I take my albums out  
570 from time to time. That's a bit heavy, that's a bit of a cry time. But it's a happy  
571 time as well because there's lots of beautiful memories, so why would I wish  
572 this away, why would I want to wish it away - I don't. It's just sad that they're  
573 not there now to share maybe a phone call or a visit, but here (*stops*)

574 INTERVIEWER *Would you ever feel he's here in some other way, or near to you in some  
575 other way?*

576 VASALISA As I said, I'm not very spiritual, I ... sometimes when some songs bring  
577 him up, but physically no. you know, you still have people looking like  
578 they did and it gives you an odd shock. Now my daughter had a dream  
579 like that. We were talking about him and I said, "you know I saw a guy  
580 and from the side he looked just like B." I saw another one who  
581 looked like my other son. And I said I don't go and look for it but I do  
582 sometimes; I look for it. I do. And there is no logic, there is no logic  
583 coming in and so my daughter had a dream and she saw somebody said to  
584 her they saw A, my first son. And I thought I did, well, to make this  
585 dream short, she went into a crowd of people and then she saw him ...  
586 She said, "A!" And he just smiled at her, and the people made way for



## Appendix A: Interview with Vasalisa

587 her, and he just came towards her. She's my youngest and she was  
588 close to both the boys, I think because she was the youngest. And she  
589 said, "Mummy that was such a lovely dream!" But I don't have often  
590 dreams, just the odd time, the odd time, I dreamt once that I actually  
591 saw, (laughs) strangely enough, with the two boys and my father, and  
592 my nephew, in Germany. My father is dead - he never came back from  
593 the war. And my nephew, he was a youngster in my dream, a teenager,  
594 that's how I first saw him. So when I woke up I thought "What's this?"  
595 When you dream sometimes I think your brain is pretty muddled when  
596 you go to bed. In general I accept my thoughts. Otherwise, no I don't  
597 feel they're beings here, no.

598 INTERVIEWER *Just a last question would be, at the beginning you said the world's*  
599 *changed. How do you know the world's changed - in what way has it*  
600 *changed and what is different?*

601 VASALISA I er... well, do you know, one thing is when I hear families fighting,  
602 which luckily we didn't have it, that's one thing I don't even have to be  
603 sorry about, that we tried to make up something. We didn't have anything  
604 to make up. When I hear, not my kids, but from other sides of the family  
605 ... I have a sister in Germany, she has one son with problems, and I said,  
606 'no! no! make up! I think I was always aware of a closeness with my  
607 children, but I think it's more, and I think it spreads out to other people.  
608 Eventually my sister said, you're right. And she can be stubborn. A  
609 certain amount of stubbornness you need to go through life, but don't let  
610 him go, make up, and that is very important. Don't fight. Don't fight.  
611 The world - I can't change the world, I mean logically, I can't do that -  
612 but my surrounding world. I've got a few friends but one friend she  
613 lives unfortunately in Edenvale, it's always a bit far out, I've had for 50  
614 years. And then basically it's the family, and me, my house and my  
615 husband, my books, my garden.

616 INTERVIEWER *So it's a new understanding then.*

617 VASALISA Yes, it's a new understanding of when you hear ... you can't change the  
618 world, of course you can't change the world, but it's doesn't mean you  
619 don't feel anything. This fighting, and you hear so many dead ... did  
620 they think five minutes before that they would lose that person in the  
621 family. They didn't. Or they wouldn't have the fight still. I get a little  
622 bit uptight over fighting, yes it's er... it's become very important to me

## Appendix A: Interview with Vasalisa

623 ehm that er... how can I say, that you don't sit ... when somebody dies  
624 you sit there with er... big things saying, 'if I would have done' 'if'.  
625 They're useless. They don't mean anything. Do it now. And my one  
626 daughter she's got a daughter who's a teenager. And she says to my  
627 daughter, "Mummy, I'm a teenager, that's a teenager's job." And I burst  
628 out laughing, I think it's so funny. My daughter was cross, and I said,  
629 "What are you cross for? You were like that. So what, leave her alone,  
630 she will grow out of it." And then she would say, "I know." I said, "I  
631 don't think we could get away with as much as your kids can today." But  
632 it can irritate me very heavy, yes it can. But er... these little upheavals,  
633 you know you get ups and downs, you know ... but er.. otherwise I think  
634 you retreat a little bit, because I'm happier inside, and that includes my  
635 garden, than outside. Visiting, except for my girls, is hard work. My  
636 world is in my four walls, and that I found out very very quickly. That is  
637 where I can, I think, manage. It's all contained, it's you know, maybe,  
638 I'm not that spiritual, that I feel my children that much, but I always  
639 think about them, when nobody is bugging me. My thoughts can travel  
640 easily here, without hampering it with people or things. They are free  
641 here.

642 INTERVIEWER *It makes the way clear.*

643 VASALISA Yes. Yes yes.

644 INTERVIEWER *Thank you.*