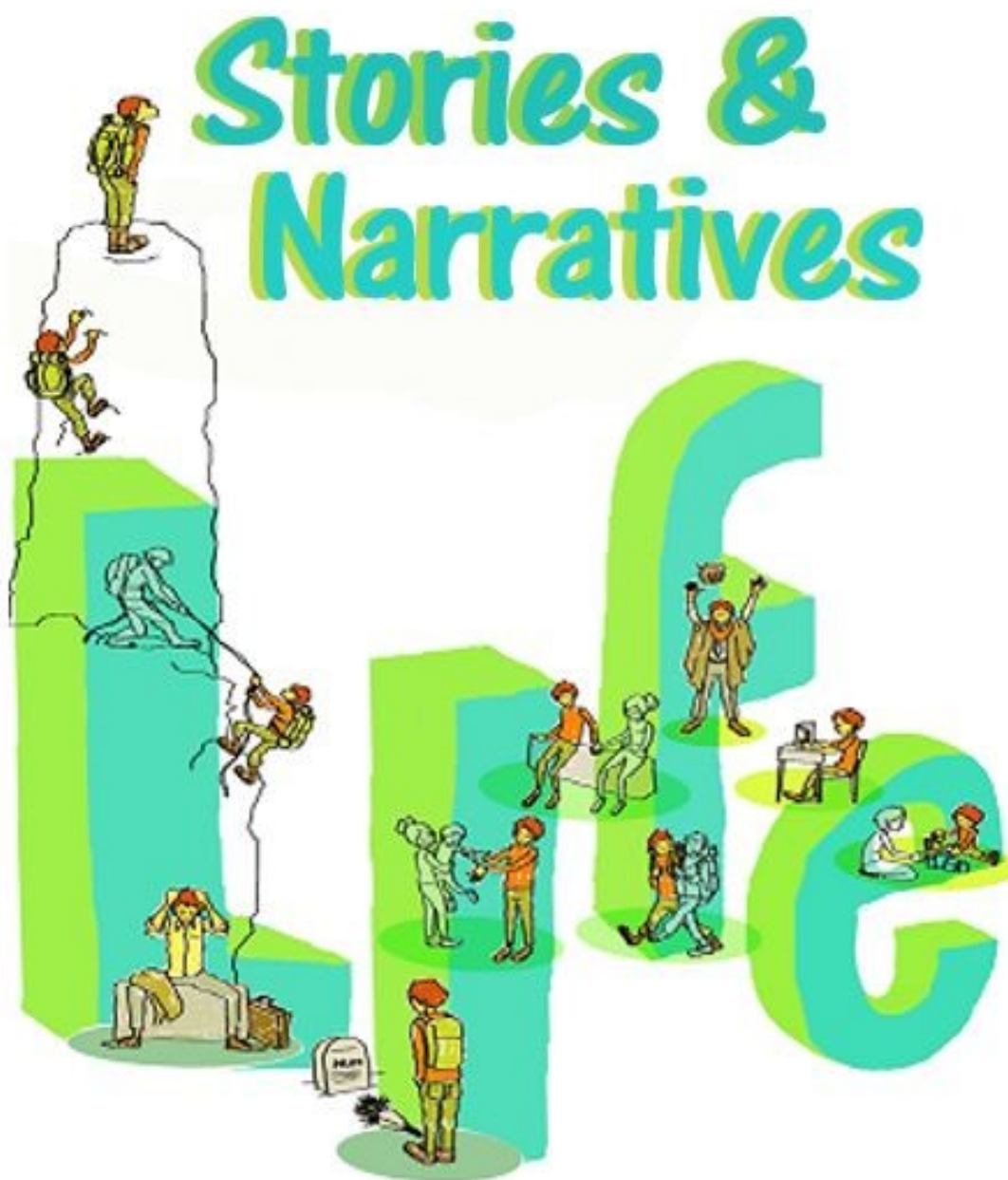




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**Commissioning Editor: Norman Jackson**

**Executive Editor: Jenny Willis**



## Commissioning Editor's Introduction

### Life Stories & Narratives

**Norman Jackson**

There are no stories more meaningful than our own biography, but unless you are a famous person it's likely that your story, in all its fantastic richness, will die with you. Think of all the billions of stories that have been lost in the history of mankind. The stories we create about our life, serve many purposes but perhaps the most important is to reveal to ourselves and others that our life has meaning and purpose.

Our life is a story, more accurately a multitude of stories that we can imaginatively fashion into a narrative that brings a sense of coherence to what otherwise might seem a hotpotch of events and circumstances. Creating a life narrative is a deeply human and ecological phenomenon in the sense that it connects us in our present. It involves us selecting and remembering specific moments, circumstances, people and relationships in our life, making stories about these things then connecting and weaving the stories into a narrative to create the meaning that is our life. Of course there are good and bad experiences and lots of loose ends, lost opportunities and unfulfilled ambitions, but our life narrative is a heuristic to help us make sense of and value our life as a journey and help us answer those existential questions like 'why am I here?' Our life story captures our appreciation of our own existence in the great story of humanity and reflects the identity's that we have created for ourselves.

We tell the stories of our life to our children to illustrate something important we have learned and in this process we reveal to them the person we were and are. Whenever we meet someone new we search for common points of reference, usually through stories of ourselves and our past and current life. We might draw on our lived experiences in conversations with friends and with colleagues at work again to illustrate a point and to convey to them the sort of person we would like them to see, and perhaps hide the stories that are not so complementary. As we tell these stories to ourselves and others they become the narrative of our life. As we weave our stories into a larger narrative we integrate different parts of our lives. The narrative becomes the means to integrate the different dimensions of our lifewide experiences into the journey that is our, past, present and possible futures.

The importance of life stories and narratives to us and to the people who know and love us, was brought home to me recently. Indeed, this story is the inspiration for this issue of the magazine. Two weeks before writing this introduction, a close friend of my wife's whom she had known for over 30 years, was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition that means she will completely lose her memory in the space of only a few months and probably die within 6 months. Our first response was shock, and feelings of sadness and injustice especially as

she is a mother of two teenage boys and come through a serious illness only two years ago. But these thoughts were soon replaced with what can we do to help her and her family. My wife is really good at providing such emotional and practical support and she was quickly into action. After giving it some thought and thinking about the circumstances I decided to offer to help our dying friend write her life story if it was something she wanted me to do. She did, and a few days later I spent a couple of hours listening to her with a digital recorder. For me it was a humbling, sometimes painful but often uplifting experience. For her, it gave her comfort to know that she had told her story in the way she wanted to. It was a privilege to listen to her telling story knowing that she trusted me to communicate it when she could not do so for herself anymore. What struck me was the multiplicity of stories that she wove together in a life well lived and how certain experiences or defining moments shaped in a profound way her personality and her future life. Furthermore, when integrated into a narrative these revealed her character, her beliefs and her values.

**We seem to have no other way of describing "lived time" save in the form of a narrative. Which is not to say that there are not other temporal forms that can be imposed on the experience of time, but none of them succeeds in capturing the sense of lived time: not clock or calendrical time forms, not serial or cyclical orders, not any of these.**

**Jerome Bruner *Life as Narrative Social Research* Vol 71 : No 3 : Fall 2004 691-710**

A few days later I was on an aeroplane flying to Australia to visit my mother. A 24 hr plane journey provides a lot of time for thinking and I reflected on the idea of life stories and how they become integrated into a larger narrative. I started thinking about a school friend I had reconnected with earlier this year when a suggestion had been made on the school's Facebook page that there might be a reunion next year. So I set about trying to find my friend Harry to let him know. We had been bosom buddies for those important growing up years between round 15-17. He was easy to find as his sister was quite prominent in the school Facebook group. So she put me in touch with Harry and we began exchanging emails. We have met up a couple of times since then and I discovered he was writing a novel about his early years in which he was including the people he knew and the events that shaped him. Of course I was keen to find out how I featured in it and he very kindly let me read the chapter that included our attempt to form a pop band inspired by the WHO I might add. I was impressed with the way he was using his own life and a bit of imagination to tell himself and others the story of his life. I could see from the way he told me what he was doing that this was very important to him.

So I arrived in Australia and travelled down the NSW coast to visit my mother who is now in her mid 90's. She has lived in a peaceful place called Narrawallee for over 30 years. Her small bungalow is just 10mins walk from a beach. It's the sort of beach that demands you walk its full length and uplifts your spirits when you walk on it. When I visit my mum I try to walk on it every day and the process of walking on this beach triggers endless memories of my past life. On my visit this time I made a short movie in case I never come here again.



**Narrawallee Beach Walk Youtube** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FICTSuiJAug>

I have made this journey to see my mum 8 times in the last 25 years and it is inevitable that my mum and I talk about our past as well as sharing all our family news – we have a large family so there is a lot of story telling. As I talk about what my wife, children and grandchildren are doing I know I am recounting my current life stories and I am conscious of the way I tell each story and what meaning I am trying to convey. I am aware that we are both sharing and creating the family narrative and that my mum will tell the rest of the family the stories I have shared, enriching the oral history of our whole family and to some extent connecting us all.

I am also conscious of how important objects are in the telling of life stories. I show her photos of my children and grandchildren and the places we have visited on my smart phone and these artefacts stimulate more stories. On this visit, she has decided to give back all the gifts of pottery and plates and other stuff to the people who gave them to her so we had another round of story telling as the significance and meaning of each gift was recounted.

A few years ago, when my father was alive, I sat with my mum and dad at the kitchen where I am writing and, with the aid of a digital recorder, I 'made' them talk about their life, recording their stories and their life narrative, so much of which they had been fortunate to share. It included the story of how they came to be in Australia and this particular place. I didn't know it at that time but this conversation, when it was transcribed, became the first chapter in a book I wrote about our family. The recording of their stories inspired me to create life narratives for my late wife and her parents and eventually myself. I did this to honour their lives and to fulfil a need to connect myself and my children to the people to whom we owe our existence.

**The theory of narrative identity postulates that individuals form an identity by integrating their life experiences into an internalized, evolving story of the self that provides the individual with a sense of unity and purpose in life. This life narrative integrates one's reconstructed past, perceived present, and imagined future.**

**McAdams, D (2001). "The psychology of life stories". *Review of General Psychology*. 5 (2): 100–122.**

This house and garden in Narrawallee and the local beach which I walk on every day hold memories of past visits. This kitchen with its loud ticking and chiming clock marking the passage of time, the gallery of family photos – children, grand children and great grand children in the hall, the cool shady veranda, the patch of couch grass and well kept garden full of flowering shrubs, the distinctive sounds of the Australian birds, and daily walks on the mile long, near deserted beach, all provide wonderful spaces and prompts to think and imagine the past and possible futures. Each time I come I ponder my life, accessing vivid memories and triggering feelings that cannot be gained in any other place. There is no doubt that all this pondering helps me make sense of a life trajectory that could never have been anticipated 25 years ago when I first visited this place.

Thanks to the internet, I was able to share a short post on the theme of life stories in the #creativeHE forum. What I said must have struck a chord as a number of people responded by sharing their own experiences.

**eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very "events" of a life. In the end, we become the autobiographical narratives by which we "tell about" our lives.**

**Jerome Bruner Life as Narrative Social Research Vol 71 : No 3 : Fall 2004 691-710**

As our life unfolds in its many lifewide dimensions, perhaps we weave different stories together into a narrative that only makes sense to us. As I wove this sequence of seemingly random events that I have experienced over the past few months into the thought that it would be interesting to explore the idea of life stories and narratives, several members of our community volunteered to contribute their stories and narratives to the Magazine.

In this issue we are interested to discover how, when and why we create life stories and narratives for ourselves, or when we help others create their life narratives, and the effects and

consequences of engaging in such acts. We are interested in the means by which narratives are recorded and communicated - what technologies, if any, are used to bring a story to life and enable it to be shared. We are interested in understanding what it means to create such narratives and how places, people, objects, events or situations stimulate the need or desire to reflect on and recount our stories and narratives. We are interested in how the creation of our life narrative formed in the past, influences our present and our future, our sense of identity and who we would like to become.

With so much technology available to us recording our stories through text, photos, audio and video has never been easier. But with this new capability comes responsibility. I read somewhere that as parents we need to be the digital record keepers for our children. Perhaps we also have a responsibility to provide our children with our own narrative – we are the only one who knows our complete story and part of our story is also part of their story. Equally perhaps, we have a social responsibility to help others – our parents and friends, create their own narratives, when there is a need or an interest.

I am very grateful to the members of our community - Paul, Chrissi, Harry, Jenny, Maria, Russ, Rob, Maja, Eamon and Serena who have contributed their perspectives on life stories, many of which are deeply personal. When I look at their contributions and reflect on my own I can see enormous consistency in the way we use our stories and the processes of creating and recording them to both define and renew ourselves, to heal the psychological damage that has been created through our experiences of living, to enable us to make sense and of the happenings and our relationships in our lives, and to recreate ourselves as the more coherent and complete person we want and need to be. The stories and narratives we create give meaning to us as a living organism in the vastness, turbulence and bewildering complexity of the ecosocial systems we inhabit.

*Norman Jackson*

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*November 12<sup>th</sup> 2018*

*Narrawallee, Australia*



Aboriginal story telling, <https://wcdf-france.com/>



## Life's Stories

### Julie Beck



*Julie is a senior editor at the Atlantic, where she covers family and education.*

***How you arrange the plot points of your life into a narrative can shape who you are—and is a fundamental part of being human.***

In Paul Murray's novel *Skippy Dies*, there's a point where the main character, Howard, has an existential crisis. "It's just not how I expected my life would be," he says.

"What did you expect?" a friend responds.

"Howard ponders this. 'I suppose—this sounds stupid, but I suppose I thought there'd be more of a narrative arc.'"

But it's not stupid at all. Though perhaps the facts of someone's life, presented end to end, wouldn't much resemble a narrative to the outside observer, the way people choose to tell the stories of their lives, to others and—crucially—to themselves, almost always does have a narrative arc. In telling the story of how you became who you are, and of who you're on your way to becoming, the story itself becomes a part of who you are.

"Life stories do not simply reflect personality. They are personality, or more accurately, they are important parts of personality, along with other parts, like dispositional traits, goals, and values," writes Dan McAdams, a professor of psychology at Northwestern University, along with Erika Manczak, in a chapter for the *APA Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*.

In the realm of narrative psychology, a person's life story is not a Wikipedia biography of the facts and events of a life, but rather the way a person integrates those facts and events internally—picks them apart and weaves them back together to make meaning. This narrative becomes a form of identity, in which the things someone chooses to include in the story, and the way she tells it, can both reflect and shape who she is. A life story doesn't just say what happened, it says why it was important, what it means for who the person is, for who they'll become, and for what happens next.

"Sometimes in cases of extreme autism, people don't construct a narrative structure for their lives," says Jonathan Adler, an assistant professor of psychology at Olin College of Engineering, "but the default mode of human cognition is a narrative mode."

When people tell others about themselves, they kind of have to do it in a narrative way—that's just how humans communicate. But when people think about their lives to themselves, is it always in a narrative way, with a plot that leads from one point to another? There's an old adage that everyone has a book inside of them. (Christopher Hitchens once said that inside is "exactly where I think it should, in most cases, remain.") Is there anyone out there with a life story that's not a story at all, but some other kind of more disjointed, avant-garde representation of their existence?

***Is there anyone out there with a life story that's not a story at all, but some other kind of more disjointed, avant-garde representation of their existence?***

"This is an almost impossible question to address from a scientific approach," says Monisha Pasupathi, a professor of developmental psychology at the University of Utah. Even if we are, as the writer Jonathan Gottschall put it, "storytelling animals," what does that mean from one person to the next? Not only are there individual differences in how people think of their stories, there's huge variation in the degree to which they engage in narrative storytelling in the first place.

“Some people write in their diaries and are very introspective, and some people are not at all,” says Kate McLean, an associate professor of psychology at Western Washington University. Journal-keeping, though a way of documenting the life story, doesn’t always make for a tightly-wound narrative. A writer I interviewed several months ago—Sarah Manguso—has kept a diary for 25 years, and still told me, “Narrative is not a mode that has ever come easily to me.”

Nevertheless, the researchers I spoke with were all convinced that even if it’s not 100 percent universal to see life as a story, it’s at least extremely common.

“I think normal, healthy adults have in common that they can all produce a life story,” Pasupathi says. “They can all put one together ... In order to have relationships, we’ve all had to tell little pieces of our story. And so it’s hard to be a human being and have relationships without having some version of a life story floating around.”

***it’s hard to be a human being and have relationships without having some version of a life story floating around***

But life rarely follows the logical progression that most stories—good stories—do, where the clues come together, guns left on mantles go off at the appropriate moments, the climax comes in the third act. So narrative seems like an incongruous framing method for life’s chaos, until you remember where stories came from in the first place. Ultimately, the only material we’ve ever

had to make stories out of is our own imagination, and life itself.

Storytelling, then—fictional or nonfictional, realistic or embellished with dragons—is a way of making sense of the world around us.

“Stories don’t have to be really simple, like fairy tales. They can be complicated. It can be like James Joyce out there.”

“Life is incredibly complex, there are lots of things going on in our environment and in our lives at all times, and in order to hold onto our experience, we need to make meaning out of it,” Adler says. “The way we do that is by structuring our lives into stories.”

It’s hardly a simple undertaking. People contain multitudes, and by multitudes, I mean libraries. Someone might have an overarching narrative for her whole life, and different narratives for different realms of her life—career, romance, family, faith. She might have narratives within each realm that intersect, diverge, or contradict each other, all of them filled with the micro-stories of specific events. And to truly make a life story, she’ll need to do what researchers call “autobiographical reasoning” about the events—“identifying lessons learned or insights gained in life experiences, marking development or growth through sequences of scenes, and showing how specific life episodes illustrate enduring truths about the self,” McAdams and Manczak write.

“Stories don’t have to be really simple, like fairy-tale-type narratives,” McAdams says. “They can be complicated. It can be like James Joyce out there.”

If you really like James Joyce, it might be a lot like James Joyce. People take the stories that surround them—fictional tales, news articles, apocryphal family anecdotes—then identify with them and borrow from them while fashioning their own self-conceptions. It’s a Möbius strip: Stories are life, life is stories.

People aren’t writing their life stories from birth, though. The ability to create a life narrative takes a little while to come online—the development process gives priority to things like walking, talking, and object permanence. Young children can tell stories about isolated events, with guidance, and much of adolescence is dedicated to learning “what goes in a story... and what makes a good story in the first place,” Pasupathi says. “I don’t know how much time you’ve spent around little kids, but they really don’t understand that. I have a child who can really take an hour to tell you about Minecraft.” Through friends, family, and fiction, children learn what others consider to be good storytelling—and that being able to spin a good yarn has social value.

It's in the late teens and early years of adulthood that story construction really picks up—because by then people have developed some of the cognitive tools they need to create a coherent life story. These include causal coherence—the ability to describe how one event led to another—and thematic coherence—the ability to identify overarching values and motifs that recur throughout the story. In a study analyzing the life stories of 8-, 12-, 16-, and 20-year-olds, these kinds of coherence were found to increase with age. As the life story enters its last chapters, it may become more set in stone. In one study by McLean, older adults had more thematic coherence, and told more stories about stability, while young adults tended to tell more stories about change.

McAdams conceives of this development as the layering of three aspects of the self. Pretty much from birth, people are “actors.” They have personality traits, they interact with the world, they have roles to play—daughter, sister, the neighbor's new baby that cries all night and keeps you up. When they get old enough to have goals, they become “agents,” too—still playing their roles and interacting with the world, but making decisions with the hopes of producing desired outcomes. And the final layer is “author,” when people begin to bundle ideas about the future with experiences from the past and present to form a narrative self.

This developmental trajectory could also explain why people enjoy different types of fictional stories at different ages. “When you're a kid, it's mostly about plot,” McAdams says. “This happens and this happens. You're not tuned into the idea that a character develops.” Thus, perhaps, the appeal of cartoon characters who never get older.

***It's in the late teens and early years of adulthood that story construction really picks up—because by then people have developed some of the cognitive tools they need to create a coherent life story***

Recently, McAdams says, his book club read *Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton. “I read it in high school and hated it,” he says. “All I could remember about it was that this sled hits a tree. And we read it recently in the club, and whoa, is it fabulous. A sled does hit the tree, there's no doubt that is a big scene, but how it changes these people's lives and the tragedy of this whole thing, it's completely lost on 18-year-olds. Things are lost on 8-year-olds that a 40-year-old picks up, and things that an 8-year-old found compelling and interesting will just bore a 40-year-old to tears sometimes.”

And like personal taste in books or movies, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves are influenced by more than just, well, ourselves. The way people recount experiences to others seems to shape the way they end up remembering those events. According to Pasupathi's research, this happens in a couple of ways. One is that people tailor the stories they tell to their audiences and the context. (For example, I tell the story of the time I crashed my mom's car much differently now, to friends, than the way I told it to my mom at the time. Much less crying.)

When people drop the cheesy pick-up line “What's your story?”, like a man who nicks his carotid artery while shaving, they've accidentally hit upon something vital.

The other is that the act of telling is a rehearsal of the story, Pasupathi says. “And rehearsal strengthens connections between some pieces of information in your mind and diminishes connections between others. So the things I tell you become more accessible to me and more memorable to me. Those can be pretty lasting effects.” So when people drop the cheesy pick-up line “What's your story?” at a bar, like a man who nicks his carotid artery while shaving, they've accidentally hit upon something vital.

But just as there are consequences to telling, there are consequences to not telling. If someone is afraid of how people might react to a story, and they keep it to themselves, they'll likely miss out on the enrichment that comes with a back-and-forth conversation. A listener “may give you other things to think about, or may acknowledge that this thing you thought was really bad is actually not a big deal, so you get this richer and more elaborated memory,” Pasupathi says. If you don't tell, “your memory for that event may be less flexible and give you less chance for growth.” This is basically the premise of talk therapy.

And all of this doesn't even account for all the conversations you plan to have, or elaborately imagine having and never have. The path from outside to inside and back out is winding, dark, and full of switchbacks.

Once certain stories get embedded into the culture, they become master narratives—blueprints for people to follow when structuring their own stories, for better or worse. One such blueprint is your standard “go to school, graduate, get a job, get married, have kids.”

That can be a helpful script in that it gives children a sense of the arc of a life, and shows them examples of tentpole events that could happen. But the downsides of standard narratives have been well-documented—they stigmatize anyone who doesn't follow them to a T, and provide unrealistic expectations of happiness for those who do. If this approach were a blueprint for an Ikea desk instead of a life, almost everyone trying to follow it would end up with something wobbly and misshapen, with a few leftover bolts you find under the couch, boding ill for the structural integrity of the thing you built.

***the act of telling is a rehearsal of the story, “And rehearsal strengthens connections between some pieces of information in your mind and diminishes connections between others”***

“I think that’s particularly pernicious frame for people who become parents,” Pasupathi says. “That’s a narrative where the pinnacle is to get married and have kids and then everything will be sort of flatly happy from then on.”

And these scripts evolve as culture evolves. For example, in centuries past, stories of being possessed by demons might not have been out of place, but it’s unlikely most people would describe their actions in those terms nowadays.

Other common narrative structures seen in many cultures today are redemption sequences and contamination sequences. A redemption story starts off bad and ends better—“That horrible vacation ultimately brought us closer as a family”—while a contamination story does the opposite—“The cruise was amazing until we all got food poisoning.” Having redemption themes in one’s life story is generally associated with greater well-being, while contamination themes tend to coincide with poorer mental health.

Many people have some smaller stories of each type sprinkled throughout their greater life story, though a person’s disposition, culture, and environment can influence which they gravitate to. People can also see the larger arc of their lives as redemptive or contaminated, and redemption in particular is a popular, and particularly American, narrative. “Evolving from the Puritans to Ralph Waldo Emerson to Oprah Winfrey... Americans have sought to author their lives as redemptive tales of atonement, emancipation, recovery, self-fulfillment, and upward social mobility,” McAdams writes in an overview of life story research. “The stories speak of heroic individual protagonists—the chosen people—whose manifest destiny is to make a positive difference in a dangerous world, even when the world does not wish to be redeemed.”

The redemption story is American optimism—things will get better!—and American exceptionalism—I can make things better!—and it’s in the water, in the air, and in our heads. This is actually a good thing a lot of the time. Studies have shown that finding a positive meaning in negative events is linked to a more complex sense of self and greater life satisfaction. And even controlling for general optimism, McAdams and his colleagues found that having more redemption sequences in a life story was still associated with higher well-being.

The trouble comes when redemption isn’t possible. The redemptive American tale is one of privilege, and for those who can’t control their circumstances, and have little reason to believe things will get better, it can be an illogical and unattainable choice. There are things that happen to people that cannot be redeemed.

It can be hard to share a story when it amounts to: “This happened, and it was terrible. The end.” In research McLean did, in which she asked people who’d had near-death experiences to tell their stories to others “The people who told these unresolved stories had really negative responses,” she says. If there wasn’t some kind of uplifting, redemptive end to the story (beyond just the fact that they survived), “The listeners did not like that.”

“The redemptive story is really valued in America, because for a lot of people it’s a great way to tell stories, but for people who just can’t do that, who can’t redeem their traumas for whatever reason, they’re sort of in a double bind,” she continues. “They both have this crappy story that’s hanging on, but they also can’t tell it and get acceptance or validation from people.” In cases like this, for people who have gone through a lot of trauma, it might be better for them not to autobiographically reason about it at all.

There are things that happen to people that cannot be redeemed.



“The first time I ever found this association, of reasoning associated with poor mental health, I thought that I had analyzed my data incorrectly,” McLean says. But after other researchers replicated her findings, she got more confident that something was going on. She thinks that people may repress traumatic events in a way that, while not ideal, is still “healthy enough.”

“The typical idea is that you can repress something but it’s going to come back and bite you if you don’t deal with it,” she says. “But that’s still under the assumption that people have the resources to deal with it.”

In one study, McLean and her colleagues interviewed adolescents attending a high school for vulnerable students. One subject, Josie, the 17-year-old daughter of a single mother, suffered from drug and alcohol abuse, bipolar disorder, rape, and a suicide attempt. She told the researchers that her self-defining memory was that her mother had promised not to have more children, and then broke that promise.

“I’m the only person that I can rely on in my life because I’ve tried to rely on other people and I either get stabbed in the back or hurt, so I really know that I can only trust myself and rely on myself,” Josie said when recounting this memory.

“That’s pretty intensive reasoning,” McLean says. “So that’s meaningful in understanding who you are, but it doesn’t really give you a positive view of who you are. It may be true in the moment, but it’s not something that propels someone towards growth.”

It’s possible to over-reason about good things in your life as well. “There’s been some experimental research that shows that when people are asked to reflect on positive experiences, it makes them feel worse, because you’re like ‘Oh, why did I marry that person?’” McLean says. “Wisdom and maturity and cognitive complexity are all things that we value, but they don’t necessarily make you happy.”

Though sometimes autobiographical reasoning can lead to dark thoughts, other times it can help people find meaning. And while you may be able to avoid reasoning about a certain event, it would be pretty hard to leave all the pages of a life story unwritten.

“I think the act of framing our lives as a narrative is neither positive nor negative, it just is,” Adler says. “That said, there are better and worse ways of doing that narrative process for our mental health.”

In his research, Adler has noticed two themes in people’s stories that tend to correlate with better well-being: agency, or feeling like you are in control of your life, and communion, or feeling like you have good relationships in your life. The connection is “a little fuzzier” with communion, Adler says—there’s a strong relationship between communion and well-being at the same moment; it’s less clear if feeling communion now predicts well-being later.

***the act of framing our lives as a narrative is neither positive nor negative, it just is***

But agency sure does. It makes sense, since feelings of helplessness and hopelessness are classic symptoms of depression, that feeling in control would be good for mental health. Adler did a longitudinal study of 47 adults undergoing therapy, having them write personal narratives and complete mental health assessments over the course of 12 therapy sessions. What he found was not only that themes of agency in participants’ stories increased over time, and that mental health increased, and that the two were related, but that increased agency actually appeared in stories before people’s mental health improved.

“It’s sort of like people put out a new version of themselves and lived their way into it,” Adler says.

(There’s something about the narrative form, specifically—while expressing thoughts and feelings about negative events seems to help people’s well-being, one study found that writing them in a narrative form helped more than just listing them.)

But, he continues, “I’m not like Mr. Agency, agency at all costs. I don’t believe that. If you have stage 4 cancer, agency may be good for you, but is it a rational choice? And I do think [redemption] is good in the long term, but in the throes of really struggling with illness, I don’t know that it actually helps people.”

But I wondered: Though agency may be good for you, does seeing yourself as a strong protagonist come at a cost to the other characters in your story? Are there implications for empathy if we see other people as bit players instead of protagonists in their own right?

“That’s actually kind of an interesting empirical idea,” Pasupathi says. “I don’t know that anybody’s looking at that.”

As Adler’s work shows, people need to see themselves as actors to a certain degree. And Pasupathi’s work shows that other people play a big role in shaping life stories. The question, perhaps, is how much people recognize that their agency is not absolute.

According to one study, highly generative people—that is, people who are caring and committed to helping future generations—often tell stories about others who helped them in the past. McAdams suggests that narcissists are probably more likely to do the opposite—“People [who] are really good at talking about themselves and pushing their own narrative, but they’re not willing to listen to yours.”

“If our stories are about us as triumphant agents going through life and overcoming, and they underplay the role of other people and the role of institutional support in helping us do those things, we are likely to be less good at recognizing how other people’s lives are constrained by institutions and other people,” Pasupathi says. “I think that has real implications for how we think about inequity in our society. The more the whole world is designed to work for you, the less you are aware that it is working for you.”

***highly generative people—that is, people who are caring and committed to helping future generations—often tell stories about others who helped them in the past.***

It’s a dizzying problem: People use stories to make sense of life, but how much do those stories reflect life’s realities? Even allowing for the fact that people are capable of complex Joyce-ian storytelling, biases, personality differences, or emotions can lead different people to see the same event differently. And considering how susceptible humans are to false memories, who’s to say that the plot points in someone’s life story really happened, or happened the way she thought they did, or really caused the effects she saw from them?

**“Any creation of a narrative is a bit of a lie.”**

Pasupathi’s not convinced that it matters that much whether life stories are perfectly accurate. A lot of false memory research has to do with eyewitness testimony, where it matters a whole lot whether a person is telling a story precisely as it happened. But for narrative-psychology researchers, “What really matters isn’t so much whether it’s true in the forensic sense, in the legal sense,” she says. “What really matters is whether people are making something meaningful and coherent out of what happened. Any creation of a narrative is a bit of a lie. And some lies have enough truth.”

Organizing the past into a narrative isn’t just a way to understand the self, but also to attempt to predict the future. Which is interesting, because the storytelling device that seems most incompatible with the realities of actual life is foreshadowing. Metaphors, sure. As college literature class discussion sections taught me, you can see anything as a metaphor if you try hard enough. Motifs, definitely. Even if you’re living your life as randomly as possible, enough things will happen that, like monkeys with typewriters, patterns will start to emerge.

But no matter how hard you try, no matter how badly you want to, there is no way to truly know the future, and the world isn’t really organizing itself to give you hints. If you’re prone to overthinking, and playing out every possible scenario in your head in advance, you can see foreshadowing in everything. The look your partner gives you means a fight is on the horizon, that compliment from your boss means you’re on track for a promotion, all the little things you’ve forgotten over the years mean you’re definitely going to get dementia when you’re old.

“Actual life is full of false clues and signposts that lead nowhere,” E.M. Forster once wrote. These become obvious in the keeping of a diary: “Imagine a biography that includes not just a narrative but also all the events that failed to foreshadow,” Manguso writes in *Ongoingness*, the book about her 25-year diary. “Most of what the diary includes foreshadows nothing.”

So what to do, then, with all the things that don’t fit tidily? There is evidence that finding some “unity” in your narrative identity is better, psychologically, than not finding it. And it probably is easier to just drop those things as you pull patterns from the chaos, though it may take some readjusting.

But Pasupathi rejects that. “I would want to see people do a good job of not trying to leave stuff out because they can’t make it fit,” she says. “We’re not trying to make pieces of your life go away.”

And so even with the dead ends and wrong turns, people can’t stop themselves. “We try to predict the future all the time,” Pasupathi says. She speculates that the reason there’s foreshadowing in fiction in the first place is because of this human tendency. The uncertainty of the future makes people uncomfortable, and stories are a way to deal with that.

***Organizing the past into a narrative isn’t just a way to understand the self, but also to attempt to predict the future.***

“The future is never a direct replica of the past,” Adler says. “So we need to be able to take pieces of things that have happened to us and reconfigure them into possible futures.” For example, through experience, one learns that “We need to talk” rarely foreshadows anything good. (Life has its own clichés.)

There’s been some brain research supporting this link between the past and the future, showing that the same regions of the brain are activated when people are asked to remember something and when they’re asked to imagine an event that hasn’t happened yet. On the flip side, a patient with severe amnesia also had trouble imagining the future.

Similarly, the way someone imagines his future seems to affect the way he sees his past, at the same time as his past informs what he expects for the future.

“If you’re planning to be a doctor, and you’re a 25-year-old starting medical school, and you have expectations about what the next five to 10 years are going to be like, you’ve probably construed a narrative from your past that helps you understand how you got to this point,” McAdams says. “Then, say, you get into med school and you hate it and you drop out, you probably at the same time are going to change your past. You rewrite the history.”

### **A life story is written in chalk, not ink, and it can be changed.**

“You’re both the narrator and the main character of your story,” Adler says. “That can sometimes be a revelation—‘Oh, I’m not just living out this story, I am actually in charge of this story.’”

Whether it’s with the help of therapy, in the midst of an identity crisis, when you’ve been chasing a roadrunner of foreshadowing towards a tunnel that turns out to be painted on a wall, or slowly, methodically, day by day—like with all stories, there’s power in rewriting.

“The past is always up for grabs,” McAdams says.

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We are grateful to author for allowing us to republish the article in our issue devoted to life stories and narratives.



<http://amywilliamsllc.com/event/write-the-rest-of-your-life-story/>

# Narrative Identity

## Dan McAdams and Kate C. McLean



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### Introduction

Human beings are natural storytellers. In forms that range from traditional folk tales to reality TV, stories are told or performed in every known human culture. People construct and share stories about themselves, too, detailing particular episodes and periods in their lives and what those experiences mean to them. Out of the episodic particulars of autobiographical memory, a person may construct and internalize an evolving and integrative story for life, or what psychologists today call a narrative identity<sup>1</sup>. Narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person's life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person's life story synthesizes episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future. The idea that people create identity through constructing stories about their lives has emerged, over the past 2 decades, as a broadly integrative conception in both the humanities and the social sciences<sup>2</sup>. Within psychological science, researchers use empirical studies to examine both the internal dynamics of private life narration and the external factors that shape the public expression of stories about the self. In many studies, investigators ask participants to tell extended stories about scenes or periods in their own lives, and they then code the narrative accounts for dimensions and features, such as those presented in Table 1. As just one example, researchers have shown that middle-age adults who score high on self-report measures of generativity, indicating a strong commitment to improving society and promoting the well-being of future generations, tend to construct life stories that showcase many instances of redemption sequences<sup>3,4</sup>. As indicated in Table 1, a redemption sequence marks a transition in a life narrative account from an emotionally negative scene to a positive outcome or attribution about the self.

***Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future.***

By conceptualizing their own lives as tales of redemption, middle-age adults may sustain the hope or confidence that is needed to weather short-term setbacks while reinforcing long-term commitments to improving the lives of others<sup>5</sup>.



**Table 1.** Examples of Life-Story Constructs Used in Research on Narrative Identity

Coding construct	Definition	Example (of high score)
Agency	The degree to which protagonists are able to affect change in their own lives or influence others in their environment, often through demonstrations of self-mastery, empowerment, achievement, or status. Highly agentic stories privilege accomplishment and the ability to control one's fate.	"I challenge myself to the limit academically, physically, and on my job. Since that time [of my divorce], I have accomplished virtually any goal I set for myself."
Communion	The degree to which protagonists demonstrate or experience interpersonal connection through love, friendship, dialogue, or connection to a broad collective. The story emphasizes intimacy, caring, and belongingness.	"I was warm, surrounded by friends and positive regard that night. I felt unconditionally loved."
Redemption	Scenes in which a demonstrably "bad" or emotionally negative event or circumstance leads to a demonstrably "good" or emotionally positive outcome. The initial negative state is "redeemed" or salvaged by the good that follows it.	The narrator describes the death of her father as reinvigorating closer emotional ties to her other family members.
Contamination	Scenes in which a good or positive event turns dramatically bad or negative, such that the negative affect overwhelms, destroys, or erases the effects of the preceding positivity.	The narrator is excited for a promotion at work but learns it came at the expense of his friend being fired.
Meaning making	The degree to which the protagonist learns something or gleans a message from an event. Coding ranges from no meaning (low score) to learning a concrete lesson (moderate score) to gaining a deep insight about life (high score).	"It really made me go through and relook at my memories and see how there's so many things behind a situation that you never see. Things are not always as they seem."
Exploratory narrative processing	The extent of self-exploration as expressed in the story. High scores suggest deep exploration or the development of a richly elaborated self-understanding.	"I knew I reached an emotional bottom that year . . . but I began making a stable life again, as a more stable independent person . . . it was a period full of pain, experimentation, and growth, but in retrospect it was necessary for me to become anything like the woman I am today."
Coherent positive resolution	The extent to which the tensions in the story are resolved to produce closure and a positive ending.	"After many years, I finally came to forgive my brother for what he did. I now accept his faults, and, as a result, I think he and I have grown closer."

## Adaptation: How People Narrate Suffering

The theme of redemption points to the broader adaptational issue of how human beings make narrative sense of suffering in their lives. In general, research on narrative identity suggests that adults who emerge strengthened or enhanced from negative life experiences often engage in a two-step process<sup>6</sup>. In the first step, the person explores the negative experience in depth, thinking long and hard about what the experience felt like, how it came to be, what it may lead to, and what role the negative event may play in the person's overall life story. In the second step, the person articulates and commits the self to a positive resolution of the event. Research suggests that the first step is associated with personal growth—the second, with happiness. With respect to the first step, studies by King and colleagues have examined how people narrate difficult life challenges, such as learning that one's child is disabled or coming to terms with divorce<sup>7</sup>. Those narrators who were able to articulate detailed and thoughtful accounts of loss and struggle in their lives tended to score higher on independent indices of psychological maturity, and they showed increases in maturity over the following 2 years. Bauer and colleagues have examined negative accounts of life-story low points as well as stories about difficult life transitions. People who scored higher on independent measures of psychological maturity tended to construct storied accounts that emphasized learning, growth, and positive personal transformation<sup>8</sup>. McLean and Pratt<sup>9</sup> found that young adults who engaged in more elaborated processing of turning points in their lives tended to score higher on an overall index of identity maturity<sup>10</sup>.

When it comes to the narration of suffering, then, self-exploration often produces lessons learned and insights gained, enriching a person's life in the long run. Nonetheless, narrators should not go on so long and so obsessively as to slide into rumination, for good stories need to have satisfactory endings. Accordingly, many studies demonstrate that positive resolution of negative events is associated with higher levels of happiness and well-being<sup>7,11</sup>. In a longitudinal demonstration<sup>12</sup>, Tavernier and Willoughby<sup>12</sup> reported that high school seniors who found positive meanings in their narrations of difficult high-school turning points showed higher levels of psychological well-being than those students who failed to construct narratives about turning points with positive meanings, even when controlling for well-being scores obtained 3 years earlier, when the students were freshmen. In American society today, a major arena for the narration of suffering is psychotherapy. Therapists work with clients to re-story their lives, often aiming to find more positive and growth-affirming ways to narrate and understand emotionally negative events. In a series of studies, Adler and colleagues asked former psychotherapy patients to tell the story of their (remembered) therapy<sup>13</sup>. Those former patients who currently enjoyed better psychological health tended to narrate heroic stories in which they bravely battled their symptoms and emerged victorious in the end. In these accounts, the theme of personal agency (see Table 1) trumped all other explanations in accounting for therapeutic efficacy. Moreover, agency emerged as the key narrative theme in a prospective study of psychotherapy patients who provided brief narrative accounts about the course of their treatment before each of at least 12 therapy sessions<sup>14</sup>. As coded in the succession of narrative accounts, increases in personal agency preceded and predicted improvement in therapy. As patients told stories that increasingly emphasized their ability to control their world and make self-determined decisions, they showed corresponding decreases in symptoms and increases in mental health.

***Constructing and internalizing a life story provides an answer to the key identity questions:***

***Who am I?***

***How did I come to be?***

***Where is my life going?***

## **Development: The Formation of Narrative Identity**

Given the importance of narrative identity to well-being, it is important to understand how individuals develop the abilities to engage in the complex process of narrating stories about the self. Building on Erikson's<sup>15</sup> theory of psychosocial development, McAdams<sup>16</sup> originally argued that narrative identity emerges in the late-adolescent and early-adult years, partly as a function of societal expectations regarding identity and the maturation of formal operational thinking. Constructing and internalizing a life story—McAdams argued—provides an answer to Erikson's key identity questions: Who am I? How did I come to be? Where is my life going? Accordingly, Habermas and Bluck<sup>17</sup> proposed that it is not until adolescence that people can construct stories about their lives that exhibit causal coherence (a convincing account of how early events cause later events) and thematic coherence (the derivation of organizing themes or trends in a full life). Consistent with their claim, a growing body of research suggests that as people move from late childhood through adolescence, their life-narrative accounts show increasing evidence of causal coherence, thematic coherence, and other markers of a well-formed narrative identity<sup>18</sup>.

Working within a Vygotskian tradition, McLean et al<sup>19</sup> have developed a sociocultural model to guide examinations into the development of narrative identity. The model suggests that a narrative identity builds slowly over time as people tell stories about their experiences to and with others. Over developmental time, selves create stories, which in turn create selves<sup>19</sup>. Through repeated interactions with others, stories about personal experiences are processed, edited, reinterpreted, retold, and subjected to a range of social and discursive influences, as the storyteller gradually develops a broader and more integrative narrative identity.

To develop a narrative identity, a person must first learn how to share stories in accord with particular cultural parameters and within particular groups—in families, with peers, and in other formal and informal social contexts. Employing cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental designs, developmental psychologists have repeatedly shown that conversations with parents about personal events are critical to the development of narrative skills in children<sup>20</sup>. This research demonstrates that parents who use an elaborated conversational style—focusing on causes and explanations in personal stories and underscoring emotional evaluations of past events—tend to stimulate the development of strong self-storytelling skills in their children.

Greater parental elaboration is associated with a variety of positive cognitive and socioemotional outcomes in children, including greater levels of elaboration in children's personal storytelling. Early parent-child conversation provide the foundations for children to learn how to make meaning out of personal events<sup>21</sup> and meaning making (see Table 1) is a process central to the development of narrative identity. Through meaning making, people go beyond the plots and event details of their personal stories to articulate what they believe their stories say about who they are. Storytellers may suggest that the events they describe illustrate or explain a particular personality trait, tendency, goal, skill, problem, complex, or pattern in their own lives. In making meaning, the storyteller draws a semantic conclusion about the self from the episodic information that the story conveys. Developmental research shows that meaning-making skills show age-related increases across the adolescent years<sup>22,23</sup> as do other kinds of interpretive narration<sup>24</sup>, particularly in middle adolescence when individuals become better able to manage paradox and contradiction in personal stories. The research also shows that meaning making can be hard work and it may sometimes exert a cost. Especially in early adolescence, boys who engage in greater levels of meaning making in relating autobiographical stories tend to show lower levels of psychological wellbeing compared with boys who engage in less meaning making<sup>23,25</sup>. It may be the case that some boys come to adolescence less prepared for the work of narrative identity, perhaps because they have had less practice in processing emotions and reflecting on the meanings of personal experiences. By late adolescence, however, boys seem to catch up with the girls, such that their meaning making efforts in late adolescence may become associated with the higher levels of wellbeing and greater levels of self understanding<sup>23,25</sup>. What is happening over the course of adolescence to produce age-related changes in meaning making? Cognitive development likely plays a crucial role in the ability to represent the self in more ways and to deal with the contradictions and paradoxes of life experiences. In addition, social pressures to define the self become more prominent, encouraging adolescent to 'figure out' who they are. As adolescents broaden their social networks, they may begin to share themselves with others more often and in a wider range of conversational contexts. Such sharing typically requires having interesting stories to tell about the self and being able to tell them in such a way as to capture the attention of potential listeners.

Research on adolescents and emerging adults has now shown that several aspects of conversational contexts matter for the degree to which conversations become important for meaning making processes. First, the reason for sharing a memory matters. When trying to entertain a listener, meaning does not appear as relevant as when one is trying to explain oneself to another<sup>26</sup>. Therefore, stories told exclusively for the entertainment of others typically contain few examples of meaning making. Second, the listener matter. In experimental designs in which listener behaviour is manipulated, Paupathi and colleagues have shown that attentive and responsive listeners cause tellers to narrate more personally elaborated stories compared with distracted listeners<sup>27</sup>. In this sense, attentive listening helps to promote the development of narrative identity. Third, relationships matter. In a short-term longitudinal study the more the romantic partners agreed on the meaning off a shared memory, the more likely the teller was to retain that meaning overtime<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, when important people in a person's life agree with his or her interpretation of a personal story, he or she is likely to hold on to that story and t incorporate it into his or her more general understanding of who he or she is and how he or she came to be.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on two central themes in the side-ranging empirical literature on narrative identity: adaptation and development. A strong line of research shows that when narrators derive redemptive meanings from suffering and adversity in their lives, they tend to enjoy correspondingly higher levels of psychological wellbeing, generativity, and other indeces of successful adaptation to life. Important exceptions to this rule, however, have been identified in studies of young adolescent boys, indicating that future researchers need to more carefully track the moderating effects of demographics, developmental stage and a range of other factors, as they may impact the relation between the quality of life stories on the one hand and psychological adaptation on the other<sup>28</sup>. In additions, researchers need to conduct more longitudinal investigations and controlled experiments to disentangle causal relations. Does the construction of redemptive narratives increase wellbeing, or does enhanced wellbeing lead naturally to the construction of redemptive life stories? Studies<sup>12, 14</sup> are consistent with the former possibility, but considerably more research – employing a broader range of methodologies – is needed. Studies tracing the development of narrative identity from childhood through the emerging adulthood years underscore the power of conversation and social contexts for learning narrative skills, shaping identity expectations and formulating a meaningful story for one's life. Reinforcing the significance of social context, future research on the development of narrative identity would benefit from a broader consideration of the role of culture. Hammack<sup>29</sup> and McAdams<sup>3</sup> have described how cultural narratives about national history, ethnicity, religion and politics shape the personal stories

people live by, and how personal stories can sustain or transform culture. In a study of Israeli and Palestinian youths, for example Hammack found that both groups imported into their personal narrative identities dramatic master narratives about their respective cultures, resulting in a preponderance of redemptive stories for Israeli youths and stories of contamination and tragedy for the Palestinian youths. The striking mismatch between respective narrative identities of Israeli and Palestinian youths may contribute to difficulties, Hammack argued, in finding cultural common ground and establishing peace. McAdams et al<sup>30</sup> documented sharply different styles of redemptive discourse in the life stories of American political conservatives and liberals, reflecting competing national ideals that prevail between conservative and liberal subcultures in the United States. It would seem that different cultures offer different menus of images, themes and plots for the construction of narrative identity, and individuals within these cultures appropriate, sustain and modify these narrative forms as they tell their own stories. Beginning even in childhood, narrators draw selectively from the menu as they gradually develop story forms that capture well their personal experience. Therefore, because narrative identity is exquisitely contextualized in culture, future researchers need to examine the development of life stories in many different societies, nations and cultural groups.

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# Truly a Story of Life

**Paul Kleiman**



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How well do we really know the life stories of our parents? Obviously most of us will know some details of their lives before they were our parents: place of birth, schooling, career etc., and as children - and we will always be their children - we will, of course, know much of the middle and latter parts of their stories. There will also, usually, be some documentary record of their lives e.g. photos, letters, various official documents, kept - perhaps - in a drawer, box or folder. But how often do we have access to the detailed narratives and minutiae of their entire lives?

My mother, Shirley, passed away peacefully, with her three sons and daughters-in-law by her bedside, on Friday 2nd November 2012. She was buried, according to Jewish custom, on Sunday 4th November next to her beloved husband Alfred who had passed away in January 2006 after a long illness. She was a remarkable woman, much loved and admired, as testified by the hundreds of people who attended her funeral and who visited the family during the *shiva* (the seven days of official mourning). But I, along with my two brothers and our respective wives, only discovered quite how remarkable she was when we tackled the Herculean task of clearing her apartment.

We always knew she kept a diary, and that no day was complete without her making a diary entry before she went to bed, always after midnight. We could always phone her to ask when a particular childhood or family event occurred. She would inevitably return the call giving chapter and verse on the event in question. She also wrote notes to herself, normally in the form of a 'to do' list, usually on small pieces of paper held together with a paper clip, and would fret if she mislaid them.

My mother liked to have things 'so so', and disliked causing upset, and so although her death was unexpected, she had already ensured that there were lists and instructions to cover any and all eventualities.

I ought to add at this point, as the above makes her sound like some sort of obsessive-compulsive, that she wasn't at all - or certainly not obviously. She was delightful company; always elegant, gracious, a wonderful host, full of intelligent conversation whether discussing the latest book she'd read or play she'd seen. She even suffered fools with regal politeness...at least until they had left her presence. But when she was alone, and when my father was alive that would usually mean late at night after he had gone to bed, or in the years after he had passed away, she became what might have been her true vocation if her life had taken another direction: a highly skilled and dedicated archivist.

What we didn't know, and what we discovered when we started clearing the apartment, was that alongside the carefully stored schoolgirl diaries that she started in 1941 when she was 15 years old and the page-a-day diaries that she started in the 1950s, she had recorded, labelled, catalogued and archived what appeared to be the documentation of her entire life: letters, postcards, photographs and slides, study notes, maps and guides, newspaper clippings, certificates, theatre and concert programmes.

Some of it was contained in two huge files each labelled 'My Life', each of which contained hundreds of documents. There were also dozens of files and folders with labels such as 'Holidays', 'Trip to Far East', 'Film Work' (she works in the British film industry in the 1940s), 'Family Documents' (some of which went back to Russia in the late 19th century). There was one file that was labelled 'Rememberings' which really caught my eye. I opened it to find a series of typed pages that were almost a stream of consciousness about my mother's early life. The first one 'Deptford High Street' recalled in as much detail as she could remember when in her 80's, growing up on Deptford High Street in south-east London and describing the people and the shops, cinema, goods yard etc. as she walked to school. Another was a much earlier 'Remembering' from when she had asked her own mother to describe the family's origins in Russia and their early life in England in the early 1900s.

### Photos of my mum 1929 to 2012 (2 weeks before she died)



Virtually every personal letter my mother had ever received or written (she always made carbon copies until the advent of computers, when she'd simply print it out twice) had been carefully sorted into either years or particular individuals or topics. Each bundle was held together by an elastic band, and on the top of each bundle, held in place by the elastic band, was a small piece of paper which had the contents of the bundle written on it in her distinctive handwriting e.g. 'letters to/ from Alfred in Hong Kong' or simply 'Letters 1983'.

There were also small bundles of papers, usually small and clipped together, of what she called her 'journals'. Whenever she travelled anywhere, she would not take her actual diary with her. Instead she would write her thoughts and observations on any piece of paper she could find, clip them all together, and then bring them home to be transferred into the diary or kept together in a file somewhere.

When we started dipping into the odd diary or two, there were frequent references to 'see my commonplace book'. It was a term we were all unfamiliar with, so naturally I googled it. According to what seemed a perfectly sensible article in Wikipedia: *"Commonplace books (or commonplaces) were a way to compile knowledge, usually by writing information into books. They became significant in Early Modern Europe...Such books were essentially scrapbooks filled with items of every kind: medical recipes, quotes, letters, poems, tables of weights and measures, proverbs, prayers, legal formulas. Commonplaces were used by readers, writers, students, and scholars as an aid for remembering useful concepts or facts they had learned. Each commonplace book was unique to its creator's particular interests... the value of such collections is the insights they offer into the tastes, interests, personalities and concerns of their individual compilers. From the standpoint of the psychology of authorship, it is noteworthy that keeping notebooks is in itself a kind of tradition among litterateurs....Some modern writers see blogs as an analogy to commonplace books."*



We eventually found my mother's commonplace books, and they were almost exactly as described in the Wikipedia article. Whenever she had read, seen or heard something of interest, whether it was in a book or newspaper, on the radio or television (usually BBC Radio 3 or 4, she was not a great fan of television unless it was a factual programme), or at the cinema or theatre, she would write it down or cut it out and place it in one of her commonplace books.



The amount of material we had uncovered was extraordinary, both the sheer amount of it and the quality of contents: my mother wrote beautifully, often with great style and wit, and in great detail.

When we told people about it they all said "what are you going to do with it all?". There were one or two who said we should just throw it all away. But I don't think they had any sense (how could they?) of what we had in front of us. The more I read, the more I became determined to 'do something'.

The final piece or decider of the 'what to do with it all?' question fell - literally - into my hands some weeks after we had started clearing the apartment. I was in the room known as the 'office'. It was the room in which my parents had worked for nearly 30 years, mainly in their role as editors of their local synagogue magazine which was a large, serious, glossy bi-annual publication. Before he retired, my father also ran his textile merchant business from there, and the shelves were full of files and all the paraphernalia of a working office.

I had decided to 'have a go' at clearing the office, and was sorting through and preparing to put into rubbish bags a whole set of files related to the magazine. As I pulled one box file off the top shelf, another file fell out which I managed to catch. This was not a 'business' file. It was one of those 'concertina' files with about a dozen sections, held together by a band. The handwritten label on the front said: "Special Letters and Journals", and it only took a glance at the first bundle of documents from the section labelled '1940s' to realise just how special the contents of this file were.

It became clear to me that, particularly since my father passed away in January 2006, my mother had gradually worked her way through all the documents she had written and/or kept so assiduously throughout her long and active life, and had carefully arranged them in some sort of order. It was fascinating to see a note or clarification, written relatively recently, next to some diary entry or letter from 50 years ago. It was also clear that she had left it to be read, and what convinced me that something 'needs to be done' with it was finding something she had written in the back of one her early schoolgirl diaries. Alongside the list of books she had read that year and the list of films and concerts she had attended, was a quote from the writer Giuseppe de Lampedusa (box right)

***"It should be an obligation upon every citizen, imposed by the state, to keep a record of their lives. Because, if they do not, who will know they ever existed".***

I felt it was important not to leave the record of my mother's life hidden away in a cupboard. So I determined to find a way to bring her life story to life. It was obvious from the start that writing any form of linear narrative was out of the question. What I had before me was a giant jigsaw and I realised that notion of a website, with its layers, sections, multiple entry points etc. offered a real opportunity to slowly - in fact very slowly- define and create the various pieces that, together, formed the picture of my mother's life. So that's what I did and continue to do.

At the present time the material on it is not for public access, although members of the close family have access. I occasionally, however, publish various sections when they are complete and there have been some articles in newspapers and magazines. Last year (2017) BBC Radio 4's The Film Programme did a feature on the diaries and letters my mother wrote when she worked in the film industry in the 1940s, and a lot of that material is eventually going to be deposited in the National Film Archive. My mother would have been absolutely chuffed!

Not long after my mother died, a close friend, whose mother had also passed away recently, said to me with a hint of envy, "you don't just have the things of her life, you also have access to her mind and her heart". That is certainly and wonderfully true: from the vibrant, idealistic, politically-engaged young woman of the 1940s who was looking forward to the future, to the still vibrant, still idealistic, still politically-engaged family matriarch of 2012 looking back on a life not only lived but also documented to the full.

***"you don't just have the things of her life, you also have access to her mind and her heart".***



**Listener Paul Kleiman talks about his mother Shirley Finn, who kept a record of almost every day of her adult life, including the years she spent in the British film industry as a "script girl".**

**The interview starts at 11min 40 secs.**

**<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0910p23>**



## With love for Papi

Με αγάπη για τον Papi

**Chrissi Nerantzi**

*Chrissi is a Principal Lecturer in Academic CPD, at Manchester Metropolitan University, a National Teaching Fellow 2015 and ALT Learning Technologist of the Year 2017. She has been active member of the Lifewide Community and contributed many articles to the magazine and is Co-leader of Creative Academic.*



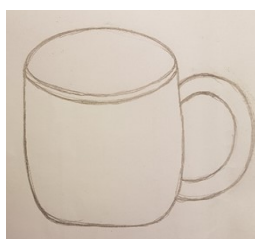
With love for Papi  
Με αγάπη για τον Papi

I wrote this story (overleaf) on the plane coming home from Athens after a visit to see my dad who was very ill. I felt a lot of pain in my heart and the need to externalise recent and life experiences and stories as a way to heal my heart and my soul. It is interesting that the original is in English. I think I feel in English, if emotions have a language. I have been in the UK for almost 20 years and maybe that provides an explanation for this. After writing the story in English, I started immediately translating it into Greek as my original idea was to share it with my dad and communicate what he means to me. I haven't done this yet as I still feel very emotional about it.

[Postscript, to be read after reading page 22]

### A picture book adventure

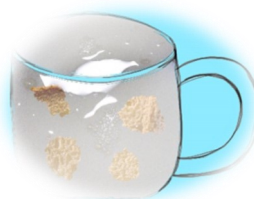
It has been hard to re-read this story and my eyes still fill with tears when I do. But I feel that I am also healing and I feel the need to turn this story into a picture book. So I have started experimenting with what could work. I don't have the confidence somehow to do this on my own. But I want to be part of this as the images will create a visual world that I may also be able to taste and smell. And hopefully, the readers will too. I am adding here where I am now with this little book project. I have created a storyboard on a scarp paper and then started visualising with pencil the individual scenes. I haven't done this yet for all 12 scenes. Below, I am capturing just the ideas for one of them, scene 9 to illustrate how ideas grow and evolve. I don't know yet what I will use in the end. We are at an explorative state and I am working with my colleague Ben Davies and my boys Nassi and Ody on these.



Scene 9 Drawing on scrap paper  
I like drawing and illustrating. I am not good at doing everything in the same style.

This is why I struggle to illustrate a whole book. I am inconsistent I feel as progressively I my ideas evolve and change and this is reflected in the drawings.

I drew this on a scrap paper. It only took be a few minutes. Ben liked it he said and saw the potential. So we decided to go ahead and see where this would lead us.



My heart broke when I found out  
You had a stroke.  
My eyes became the sea.  
The plane brought me to you, quickly.

My heart broke even more when I saw you  
In hospital.  
Lost in your thoughts  
Unable to breath, smile. Sad.

I looked after you when it was dark  
So nothing bad would happen to you.  
I am not a nurse  
But I did all I could with love.

You stroke my hair  
And made me feel like your little girl again.  
I closed my eyes and cried.  
I didn't want you to see my tears.

I told you that I love you  
very very very much.  
You know it anyway.  
But I wanted to remind you.

I told you all the things I remember  
From when I was little.  
The sledging, the garden, our travels...  
To thank you for everything.

We always find it hard to say goodbye to each other.  
Always.  
This goodbye was extra hard.  
I didn't want to leave you.

I wanted to help you become strong again.  
To see you smile.  
Nothing else is important.  
Nothing.

This morning you wanted me to give you breakfast.  
So that you can remember this, you said.  
You said I am like your mum, and looked at me.  
You made me cry.

You gave me two imaginary oranges from your garden  
For the boys.  
They are in my suitcase.  
They will last forever.

I am on the plane back now. In the air, where you loved to be.  
I bought an olive bunch brooch from the airport  
My birthday present from you.  
I will always carry it with me, and you too Papi.

Thank you.

Η καρδιά μου ράγησε  
όταν έμαθα πως έπαθες εγκεφαλικό.  
Τα μάτια μου έγιναν θάλασσα.  
Το αεροπλάνο μ' έφερε κοντά σου γρήγορα.

Η καρδιά μου ράγησε ακόμη πιο πολύ όταν σε είδα  
Στο νοσοκομείο.  
Χαμένος στις σκέψεις σου.  
Ανήμπορος να πάρεις αναπνοή, να χαμογελάσεις.  
Λυπημένος.

Σε φρόντιζα όταν ήταν σκοτάδι  
Για να μη σου συμβεί κάτι κακό.  
Δεν είμαι νοσοκόμα  
Όμως ό,τι έκανα το έκανα με αγάπη.

Μου χάιδεψες τα μαλιά  
Και μ' έκανες να νιώσω ξανά σαν μικρό κοριτσάκι.  
Έκλεισα τα μάτια μου και έκλαψα.  
Δεν ήθελα να δεις τα δάκρυά μου.

Σου είπα πως σ' αγαπώ  
πολύ πολύ πολύ.  
Το ξέρεις έτσι κι αλλιώς.  
Όμως ήθελα να σου το θυμίσω.

Σου είπα όσα θυμάμαι  
Από τότε που ήμουν μικρή.  
Το έλκηθρο, τον κήπο, τα ταξίδια...  
Για να σε ευχαριστήσω για όσα έκανες.

Πάντοτε δυσκολευόμαστε να λέμε αντίο ο ένας στον  
άλλον.  
Πάντοτε.  
Αυτό το αντίο ήταν ιδιαίτερα δύσκολο.  
Δεν ήθελα να σ' αφήσω.

Ήθελα να σε βοηθήσω να δυναμώσεις και πάλι.  
Να σε δω να χαμογελάς.  
Τίποτε άλλο δεν θέλω πιο πολύ.  
Τίποτε άλλο.

Σήμερα το πρωί ήθελες να σου δώσω το πρωινό  
σου.  
Για να το θυμάσαι, μού είπες.  
Είπες πως είμαι σαν μάνα σου και με κοίταξε.  
Μ' έκανες και έκλαψα.

Μου έδωσες δυο πορτοκάλια της φαντασίας από τον  
κήπο σου  
Για τα παιδιά.  
Τα έχω στη βαλίτσα μου.  
Θα κρατήσουν για πάντα.

Είμαι τώρα στο αεροπλάνο. Ψηλά από τη γη, όπου  
σου άρεσε να είσαι.  
Αγόρασα μια καρφίτσα ελιάς από το αεροδρόμιο  
Το δώρο σου για τα γενέθλιά μου.  
Θα την έχω πάντοτε μαζί μου, κι εσένα Papi.

Σ' ευχαριστώ.

## **‘Slices of Life’ : Autobiographical stories about growing up in Manchester in the 1960s**

**Harry Muskett interviewed by Norman Jackson**

### **Background**

Harry was my closest teenage friend – here we are when we were 15 (Harry on right). It’s fair to say that we shared those important adolescent years when we were both struggling to create an identity for ourselves amongst our peers. Sadly, we lost touch soon after Harry left school in 1967 and our lives went in different directions. Over the five decades since then thoughts of Harry often came into my head and I wondered what had happened to him. Then, 6 months ago when there was a suggestion on our school’s facebook page that there might be a reunion next year, I set about trying to find him to let him know. Actually, he was easy to find as his sister was quite prominent in the school facebook group. So she put me in touch with Harry and we began exchanging emails. A few weeks later, I took my brother, who was visiting England from Australia, to the place we grew up and I arranged to meet Harry. We spent an enjoyable evening in the pub telling stories - revisiting our past and sharing our life narratives. I discovered that Harry was writing a novel about his early years in which he was including the people he knew and the events that shaped him – of course I was keen to find out how I featured in it and he very kindly let me read the chapter that featured us trying to form a band. I was impressed with the way he was using his own life and a bit of imagination to create an interesting story so I invited him to contribute to this issue of the magazine. He kindly agreed and after sending me a few examples of his writing which are included below, I had a chat to discover how he came to write his narrative.



### **Interviewer: Tell me how the idea of a life story novel came about?**

It was just a nostalgia thing.. the period I was writing about in the book was quite interesting and eventful to me.. and I thought I needed to put it down....it was almost like a catharsis really just to get it out of my system... and then that led to other little articles expanding on where I came from and what I was really or how people see me (see first two extracts).

### **Interviewer: So what period did you choose to write about?**

The period I chose for the book was from leaving the choir at the age of XX and then adolescence really, from 1963 up until about 1969 ... when I was at the grammar school, until they didn’t want to carry on teaching me.. and then getting a job and leaving the job and going to Newquay. In between I had a brush with the law, me and a lad in a drunken state attempted to steal a car and I got two years suspended sentence, all a bit sobering really.

### **Interviewer: Do you plan to carry on writing your story?**

I’m not sure yet. There are interesting things that happened to me since, which may or may not be interesting to other people, but what I wrote about were the most interesting or life changing maybe.

### **Interviewer: You mentioned that the writing was cathartic – were you trying to process something**

It was trying to understand me really.. That’s a cliché isn’t it.. trying to understand what I was and how I came to be the person I am. I believe there is a book in everybody its just getting it out and having the time and patience or inclination to do it. I wrote my story over 4 or 5 years so it was written over quite a long time. I kept adding bits and taking bits out. When I write I don’t really know what I’m going to end up.. It’s a creative process as I go along and then thoughts come out of my head that I wouldn’t necessarily say to anybody and they are just about how you feel and who you are. Having written about it I feel I’ve gotten it out of my system.

***Interviewer: By doing this you were trying to tap into your creativity- how did your imagination help you?***

When I was at junior school I was always writing essays and getting praise for it and then I never did it since. So the writing almost took me back to my childhood and the feelings I had when I wrote my essays.. I did use my imagination but in a fairly controlled way. I kept to the incidents in my life although I did sometimes combine anecdotes.. For example the little piece about Arthur Logan going apple scrumping (see extract).. that wasn't actually him it was someone else.. But it did happen with someone else. It's a story that is true to life but with a little bit of poetic license.

***Interviewer: Who were you writing the story for?***

I was writing it for myself.. Initially it was for me just to get it down on paper... We've gone through this process of trying to get it published with my sister.. But in the end I'm thinking lets just get a few books for the family and friends.. My intention now is to publish it on LULU.

**Here are some illustrations of the narratives I created about my life**

**Early Life**

Two heads bobbed close together as they both concentrated on popping tar bubbles between the cobblestones with lolly sticks.

'It's not 'ot enough, they aren't melting' complained Harry. His companion, Bernard, agreed. 'we'll try later it'll get 'otter after dinner.' They looked round the street, further up, was Harry's cousins Les and Lol closer to the railway wall doing the same thing. Sat on a wall opposite where Harry lived was his sister Margaret with Mavis, Anne and Christine Millet playing with some dolls. Harry and Margaret lived in the council houses next door to Les and Lol. The others lived in the large, crumbling Victorian houses that comprised the rest of the street. The top of the street was bordered by a six foot high wall behind which was the railway. It was built to keep people from straying onto the tracks, but all the lads could climb it easily with the aid of a telephone pole and it's hawser situated conveniently next to the wall.....

Harry's Mam appeared at the front gate. 'Harry will you go to the shop for me, I need some bread and eggs' 'Aw, Mam, why can't Margaret go?' 'Just do as your told, anyway if you go on your trike it won't take long. Here's some money, I've written what I want on a piece of paper, take a shopping bag, and tell Mr Watson you want fresh eggs, and wait for the change' 'right' sighed Harry. He actually felt rather proud, this was the first time his Mam had asked him to go on his own. He gathered the money and note, shoved it in his pocket and slung the string shopping bag over the tricycle handlebars. He headed straight down the street along the pavement, passed the first ginnel down to the bottom. It won't take long he thought and he'll be back playing with his mates. At the bottom he turned right and headed towards the corner shop, situated on Knowsley Avenue. He got a fair speed up on his trusty trike. Once in the shop, he queued patiently behind some woman who seemed to be buying up the whole shop. Finally he handed the note to Mr Watson, who limped off to get the eggs, He remembered the other part of the message and shouted after him 'Me Mam says she wants fresh eggs.' A couple of women behind him muttered something about eggs should always be fresh. Mr Watson limped because of something that happened in the war. Harry didn't know what, but he could imagine. Him and his cousins and Bernard were always playing 'Japs and English' in somebody's back yard or over the railway wall and were always getting their arms and legs blown off. Mr Watson didn't look like a war hero though, surely he was too old? Harry was getting a bit impatient now to get back to his pals, but finally Mr Watson returned with the eggs and a sliced white Wonderloaf. He put the eggs in the string bag and decided the loaf was too big to go in, so he got on his trike and tucked it under his arm. He then decided he would go back via the entry between Knowsley avenue and the back of his street, it would be quicker. He bowled out of the shop and turned left into the cobbled back entry. He peddled with all his might, the shopping bag swinging away on his handlebars, juddering over the cobbles. He got to his back gate and pushed it open with his front wheel. His mam was at the kitchen window and rushed out 'Bloody Hell Harry look behind you!' He stopped halfway down the garden path and looked back. There was a neat trail of sliced white heading back through the gate into the entry. 'And look at the state of the shopping bag' He took it off his handlebars and watched it drip. All but one of the eggs were broken

'Oh, that's probably because they were very fresh.'

'That's the last time I ask YOU to go to the shop'

Harry didn't know whether he should laugh or cry.

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## Extract 2 Growing Up

Arthur Logan got out an unfiltered cigarette from deep within his jacket pocket and a match from another. 'Do you want a drag?' he asked Harry. 'Yeah, OK' Harry hadn't smoked before but thought he would give it a 'go' Loads of the other lads seemed to do it and every adult apart from his Mam and Dad seemed to do it. 'Nicked this from home' said Arthur. Harry wasn't sure exactly where Arthur lived, Lane End way he thought but he wasn't really bothered. All he knew was that Arthur wore boots. In his book, any kids that wore boots, as opposed to shoes, were probably poor. Arthur was a skinny kid with knobbly knees that came out of his short trousers like twigs and ended up in his oversize boots. He had a mop of curly, wiry hair that seemed to be combed into a 'Teddy Boy' style and gave him an air of menace. It wasn't deliberately combed that way, it just naturally fell into that style. His skinniness gave lie to the toughness of his constantly moving and restless spirit. He could run faster than anybody Harry knew and leaped over garden walls as if they weren't there. His Mam constantly warned him about 'knocking about' with Arthur. 'He's trouble, that lad, just watch what you're doing.' Arthur lit the 'fag,' took a deep drag and handed it over to Harry, who tried to copy exactly what Arthur had done. He felt himself going green and then practically coughed his lungs up. 'Capstan Full strength, knew you couldn't handle it' said Arthur nonchalantly. 'I'll dimp it and save it for later' He took a couple of more drags, snuffed the cigarette out and put it back into the recess of his jacket from whence it came. His face brightened as an idea came to him. 'Let's go to the bombsite at the bottom of Clarry and see what's going on' Harry agreed and set out alongside his mate. Passing his house he shouted in through the front door 'Just going to the bombsite at Clarendon road, be back for tea' A disembodied voice came back out through the front door 'Just be careful crossing that road and make sure you're back or your tea will spoil, and avoid Arthur Logan' They looked at each other and giggled.

*[Section omitted]*

They headed up Clarendon Road past the school and into Old Ellesmere Park, where enormous houses the size of Buckingham Palace lined the leafy avenues. Harry always felt uncomfortable in places like this as if it wasn't for the 'likes of him.' As if he was being watched by lots of important people wondering what he was doing in their private world. None of this bothered Arthur, who took them right into the middle of the posh estate stopping at the front of a very impressive Victorian mansion surrounded by a six foot brick wall. 'Look, an apple tree, with err,.. apples!, there just for the taking.' He pointed at a tree on the other side of the wall down the side of the building. 'But it's inside somebody's house' protested Harry. 'They won't mind, they're dead rich, a few apples means nowt to them, besides, what they gonna do with all them apples? Come on follow me.' With that he slid down the side alley stopping just long enough to assess how he was going to climb the wall, which wasn't long. He scaled the six foot wall as if it wasn't there. Harry reluctantly followed taking a lot longer to climb over. Inside the enormous garden, Harry began to fill his pockets with apples from windfalls along the floor. Arthur meanwhile was more intent on other things. Harry looked back and was astonished to see him tipping large flower pots over covering paths and lawns with soil and compost and then turning on a hosepipe flooding the paved area outside the back of the house. 'What're you doing?' shouted Harry getting really anxious. 'Thats stupid!' 'It's just a bit of fun, what's the matter? It's a laugh' There was something maniacal in his expression that Harry didn't comprehend. Suddenly. 'Oiy what're you doing, Who the hell are you?' A voice bellowed out from further down the side of the house. Arthur didn't hang around. Quicker on the uptake than Harry, he stopped what he was doing and headed for the wall at the point where they had come in. He climbed it twice as fast as before and was beetling down the alley way as fast as his skinny legs would carry him, which was fast. Harry was left in the lurch, not realising what was happening. He was quickly caught by the scruff of the neck by a young man wearing posh corduroys and a cravat. 'I've got one of the little buggers, should I hit him?' An older man appeared out of a doorway 'No, bring him in here' He was dragged by his jacket collar into a large kitchen with pot plants, loads of copper pans and things dangling from a rack hanging from the ceiling which looked like dead plants. Harry had no idea why they would hang dead plants from anywhere. The rack in his house was used to air clothes in the back room. Other figures appeared behind the older man and hovered over him. 'Now, young man, what the HELL do you think you're playing at? Do you think it's clever to trash other people's property?' The older man's voice got louder and more indignant with every word he spoke. 'What have you got to say for yourself? Eh ? eh?' 'It wasn't me sir, it was the other lad, I was just after apples' he stammered. And with that he produced an apple from his pocket. A female voice came from behind the older man 'He's right Dad, I saw from upstairs, he was picking apples off the tree, it was the other scallywag that did all the damage' 'Dad' retorted ' they must have had an idea what they were going to do, it didn't just happen' 'It did sir, I had no idea he was going to do that.'

Harry put on his sincerest, innocent face. 'And just who was the other lad? Eh?' He could see 'Dad' was wavering a little. 'I don't know his name, I only met him this morning on the bombsite down Clarry. Well I know his first name is Billy but I don't know his second,' lied Harry. 'And I suppose, you don't know where he lives either' said 'Dad' 'Just somewhere down Lane End, I think.' And as an afterthought, 'I think he was very poor' 'Dad' sighed and looked at his companions knowing that there wasn't much he could do 'Right young man I'm not going to call the police this time, but if I ever catch you in this area again, I will have no hesitation in calling them and getting you locked up. Now get out of here before I change my mind.' Harry didn't need telling twice, he ran as fast as his chubby little legs could carry him and didn't stop until he came out of the Ellesmere Park estate and on to the little green at the top of Clarendon Road. He stopped to catch his breath and sat on a park bench. He pulled an apple out of his pocket and bit into it. It was horrible and full of worms. He slung it and the others as far as he could.

He never saw Arthur again. A week or so later after the summer term had ended, his class was called together and informed that Arthur Logan had been killed whilst playing on the railway at Patricroft sheds. He was ten.

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### **Extracts from 'Slices of Life'**

Harry ploughed his usual dreamy furrow throughout the following week, only being sent home once by Mr 'History' Thomas for wearing the wrong coloured pullover. Not bad. He wasn't a rebel on purpose, if at all. He didn't set out to be awkward or consciously try and see who he could upset this week, it just happened. He was stubborn though like his Mam said and if he couldn't see a reason for doing something, he wouldn't do it. Not obnoxiously or aggressively, it just wouldn't be done. Or, if in his mind, something was getting in the way of what he wanted to do, what he was supposed to do would be forgotten or pushed to the back of the queue. The problem was that he didn't really know what he wanted to do. He liked socialising and talking to friends and girls and considered himself to be fairly popular. He wasn't one of life's leaders but nor was he a hanger on. He was an observer and could unconsciously categorise people. He assessed them and unconsciously mirrored them. They responded to his subtle impressions and initially thought they had something in common, although long term he would move onto the next person to imitate. The consequence of this was that he would never really get close to anybody and never felt a need to. But conversely he felt upset if he thought he should have been included in things and wasn't. Much of it was down to the current trend of trying to be cool and aloof. Some people pulled it off and were highly popular as a result. Harry was only marginally successful although not unpopular. One thing he didn't know was what he wanted to do after he left school. University seemed a possibility although he didn't know in what subjects. He was naturally good at languages, hopeless at Maths, completely indifferent to History, Geography, Chemistry, Physics and Biology. Most of his reports always read "could do better, just needs a lot more effort" Effort was not something he could put his back into! Probably because of his 'slow blood', besides University and GCE exams were ages away, there were lots more interesting things to do before then if only he could think of them. Harry's memory was pretty good and so far in exams and tests he had 'winged it', relying purely on what he could remember in classes and not through any study or homework. This was how Harry got through his day, dreaming and remembering.

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A few days later a van pulled up outside Harry's house and Terry Hamblett and a Scottish bloke proceeded to unload amplifiers, drum kits and other group related kit. Harry's Mam opened the door and was greeted by Terry's amiable grin, "thanks for doing this Mrs M. we'll soon be famous and get our own place." Beattie shouted through to the living room. "HARRY, what's all this about?" "Oh! I told you on Saturday, or did I? I, er, said we could practise in our front room. We can't we? They're here now anyway. We won't be too much of a problem, we've nowhere else to go!" stammered Harry emerging down the lobby.

Beattie did not like to be shown up and not know what was going on and accepted the situation straightaway, ushering Terry into the parlour, glancing darkly in Harry's direction. "me and your dad are going out anyway to see your Auntie Ellen so don't start till we have gone"

The bloke with Terry turned out to be a friend of Terry's Mum and was just doing him a favour. He disappeared as soon as the van was unloaded, shortly before the other members of the group arrived.

"Bloody hell Harry, its like a prison camp out there with all them wire fences and passageways round the flats, I was half expecting you to be wearing striped pyjamas" said Ken. "Stop swearing in here, me Mam might hear you" whispered Harry "she's the only one allowed to swear in here" He had never heard his dad swear so assumed that was the rule. "ok keep your hair on, you've heard worse than that" "Aye but not from grown ups"

The practise went pretty much as the other one did with Harry learning more songs off the first WHO LP and discussions about what they should and shouldn't be doing. Jacko led the discussions on this as he seemed to know much more about what was going on than the others having typically researched more and being a better guitar player. Names of other singers and groups were mentioned, Otis Redding, Martha and the Vandellas, and other soul artists that were becoming more and more popular. Harry went along with whatever was decided upon even though he was only vaguely familiar with most of these. Terry had brought an LP of Otis Redding and after listening to it, they attempted to play one of the songs. Harry just did not get it and could not make head nor tail of the tune. There was no tune! not a proper one. It was much too old and sophisticated for his limited experience. It was like one big moan. The others seemed enthralled by it so Harry went along with them .He decided he had better like it otherwise he just couldn't be cool and trendy like the others.

"He's Fab isn't he" said Harry. "Nobody's Fab anymore, not since the end of the Mersey sound, who says fab?" said Pete Brez. "Well he's good anyway" lied Harry, who hadn't realised the Mersey sound had ended. Jacko suggested that they go to see a live gig in Manchester. He'd heard of a club in Manchester called the Oasis where groups and singers were on every week and it wasn't too dear. They might get some ideas. Parents might be the only possible obstacle. It was decided to go the very next Saturday.

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**WATCH OUT FOR 'SLICES OF LIFE'  
ON LULU**



**Harry & Norman in Cornwall nearly 50 years since  
the summer of 69 we spent in Newquay!**

## Telling Family Tales:

### My Involvement In Creating a Family Narrative

**Jenny Willis, Executive Editor**



“Where are you from?” This innocuous question always disconcerts me. What do I reply? Singapore? Yes, I was born there, but am not Malaysian. Surrey? I may live there but this was a choice driven by financial viability for a home that met my desires. Or do I pick one of the nearly 30 other places I lived before I left home? The trouble is, I have always struggled with my identity, which must lie unconsciously at the roots of my quest into my family’s history and my need to know the tale.

#### **Skeleton in the closet**

It was, however, with a more overt objective that I began my genealogical exploration some 15 years ago. My mother had died suddenly and at a relatively young age, and some instinct drove me to put flesh on a skeleton that had emerged from the closet when my great uncle Bob died: out of the blue, the sister of my long-deceased grandmother maliciously revealed that Bob was, in fact, my father’s half-brother, born in 1916, years before she went to India and there married a British regular soldier.

Bob’s conception was a mystery I wanted to solve. I had scant evidence with which to work: a few sepia photographs and images of my grandparent’s wedding party. I knew when and where my grandmother was born in



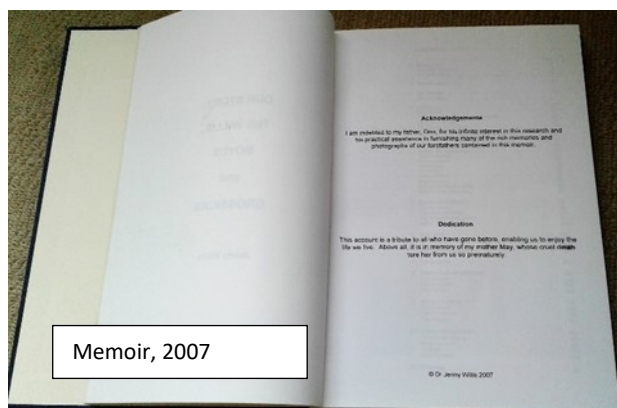
My grandparents’ wedding, India 1920

Scotland, and that she had been a lady’s companion at the time Bob was conceived. My primary resource was my father: we engaged in long discussions during my daily phone calls to him, he giving me memories, I painstakingly searching various genealogy websites for any clues. Fifteen years on, the task would have been much easier, but at the time, only limited records had been scanned for internet access. Nevertheless, the story began to unfold and I was able to solve the mystery. I even took advantage of a visit to Bangalore to search out the barracks and follow the roads that my grandparents would have trodden for their wedding and on church parades. It was a bizarre sensation., and I wondered how they would have felt had they known I would be doing this, eighty years on.

It emerged that Bob’s father was born into a family still well-known today. Public-school educated, he became a pilot in WW1, was wounded, shell-shocked, patched up and sent back to the Front where he was killed in 1916, months after Bob’s birth. If he had been an ordinary soldier, he would have been labelled as having ‘Low Moral Fibre’ and executed rather than given another chance at the Front. Furthermore, there would not have been individual records of a mere Tommy: as an officer, though, he warranted individual remembrance. I was in luck. I was also becoming sensitised to the unfairness with which the services treated (and still treat) personnel, but on a personal level the records were revealing a line of mental illness which flowed through both Bob’s and my own family to this very day

We were not interested in making contact with Bob’s father’s family, or in igniting controversies that were long past, perhaps unknown even by their descendants. Our aim was to know more about our immediate heritage, to understand our identity, but at a deeper level, the research was uniting me with my father, giving meaning to our lives at a time when my mother’s loss had rocked our world. We were silently acknowledging our individual, if relatively trivial, existences., and validating them.





Memoir, 2007

At this stage, the story unfolded through oral history, backed up by archives such as births, marriages and deaths, census and travel records. To give it greater permanency, I collated the evidence into a book which I dedicated to my father and had bound in 2007, a copy for each of us. This need to leave a mark, to demonstrate a purpose to our lives, is universal, but has a special poignancy for me (and no doubt others who have no children to continue their line and thereby remember their lives). I am convinced that my creations, be they research, books or poetry, are surrogate children, a heritage which will testify to my once having existed, and maybe contribute to a less tangible but broader line of continuance than one of corporeal

descendants.

Unbeknown to us, this was only the start of a greater story, one which I am still unravelling and which has stunned us. For the original secret would lead to far greater, totally unexpected, revelations which set me off into searches closer to home.

## A stunning revelation

As I researched my paternal grandmother's side of the family, equality demanded investigation of my grandfather's, too. All we knew of this was that he (Joseph, known as Jim) had two brothers, but they had no contact with each other once grown up. They had been brought up by their maternal grandparents in rural Bedfordshire, the accepted account being that their parents had died in a house fire, whence my grandfather's lifelong fear of thatched cottages, and an end to any questions. Census records confirmed part of the story, but could not explain enough. Who was their mother? This was my next quest.

Typical of Victorian families, Jimmy's grandparents had had many children, some of whom had died young. I painstakingly examined records, cross-checked ages and came to the conclusion that one of their daughters must have been Jimmy's mother. There were no records of her having married so my next step was to purchase a copy of Jimmy's birth certificate, which would give his mother's name. What it revealed was astounding: it confirmed that I had the right mother but ... Jimmy, the Regimental Sergeant Major, later Chief Super Intendant of Police, Masonic Grand Master, was not only illegitimate – he was born in the workhouse!

Once again, my father and I engaged in intense debate using the few memories he had of his father's background. Now we both had to confront an unimagined aspect of our heritage. Was this the reason for Jimmy severing links with his brothers? Did he know who his mother was? Was the fire story true?

Copies of his brothers' birth certificates brought further incredulity: they were also illegitimate, the second having been born in the workhouse, too. Few records of these workhouses have survived, so we cannot be sure of events, but my guess is that the grandparents tolerated one pregnancy, but when a second and third occurred, they could no longer cope with their wayward daughter. But was she wayward or maybe a simpleton, a gullible woman? Throughout my research, I have been meticulous in cross-checking evidence in order to ensure the accuracy of the tale I am telling: I do not want it to be fiction. I have had to accept that there are some questions that must remain unanswered, and this, like the fire, is one of them.

Whilst I sifted through archives, my father dug through suitcases of old photographs and found one that Jimmy had kept. It was of a stout, unnamed woman and the back bore no name. Suddenly, there could be no doubt who she was and why he had retained the photo: the resemblance between this woman and Jimmy was indisputable. She had to be his mother!



Jimmy and his inferred mother



Now I made contact with the Archive Services in Bedfordshire and arranged to visit them. At this time, we did not have extensive digital archives that I could access from home. Instead, I spent time in Bedford and Kew examining documents that might shed further light on events. By now, the drive to know more was not only existential: I was using my powers of analysis and intellect, things which have been central to my sense of wellbeing throughout my life. I was enjoying the challenge of solving apparent mysteries, and extending my knowledge. I have become an amateur historian of WW1; an off-shoot from shell-shock has links with my lifelong passion with mental illness; my studies have given me insight into many socio-political aspects of the last century and more. I was learning and this keeps me buoyant.

As before, I was eventually able to tell the sorry tale of how my grandfather's peripatetic life began. Shortly after his birth, he and his mother left the workhouse when she married a widower with several children. After a short time with this family, Jimmy was sent to live with his grandparents and brothers; my suspicion is that his mother became pregnant and her new family could not afford to keep him. Adjusting his age, Jimmy joined the army in 1915, was wounded and returned home three times, sent back to the Front bearing the scars and internal shrapnel that he would have for the rest of his life, then re-enrolled in France in 1919 as a regular and was sent with his regiment to India. He had changed his name and age; he had no further contact with his family, and never spoke of his origins.

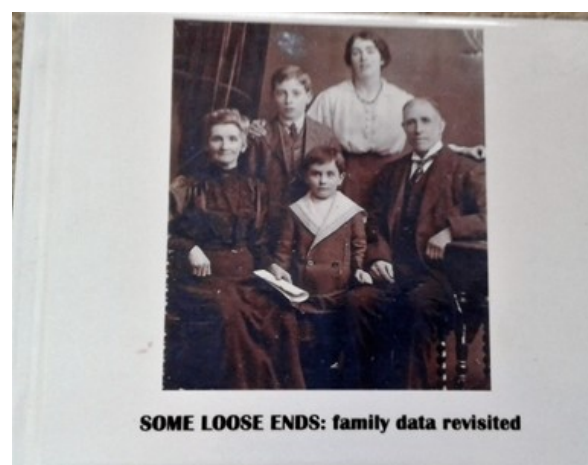
The man I knew was a pillar of respectability who favoured me, but an ‘awkward cuss’ who stood by his principles and could rub people up the wrong way. This he did when he pursued a case against a famous nuclear scientist only to find the political establishment close ranks against him. This part of the story we did know, but, ironically, I am unable to uncover the detail as records are sealed. Nevertheless, Jimmy’s stance lives on: both my father and I have had careers curtailed in similar ways. An uncanny co-incidence.

## A never-ending tale

These, and the heritage of my mother's family, were stories recorded in my long memoir of 2007. Curiosity is addictive, though, and in 2013, I produced a sequel for the family archives. Technology had moved on, so this time I used a website to produce the book, which I optimistically called 'Some loose ends'. It was a Christmas present for my father, and I kept a personal copy.

I updated the records to include marriages and the births of great-grandchildren, clearly with a view to future readers. The aim was not so much to validate our lives and those of our predecessors, as to recognise the latest generation. Unconsciously, was I hoping to raise their interest so that one day one of them might continue the story?

But I was not done, yet. If my second book implied an end to the narrative, I was mistaken. Currently, I am immersed in the stories of Jimmy's two brothers, again driven by a puzzle: why did they have no contact with each other after being brought up together by their grandparents? To investigate matters, I have re-subscribed to two genealogical websites. Today, research on-line is almost too easy, and those who share their family histories can save much time for relatives following related lives. You still have to be cautious, though, and cross-check every detail to ensure the person you have identified is the correct one. It is time-consuming work, and hours of searching can result in a blank, but it is this very challenge to the intellect that drives me. On the other hand, uncovering one fragment can bring immense satisfaction, and I immediately share it with my father. We reconstruct the story verbally over the phone; when I visit him, I show him the evidence in my computer records; my next step is to write up and illustrate my findings as a third volume.



**Database:** 1881 England Census Print 1, 106  
1 of 116

View	Name	Estimated Age	Birthplace	Relationship	Residence	View Image
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Albham Wills	abt 1870	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Son	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Annie Wills	abt 1872	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	George Wills	abt 1865	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Son	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Alice Wills	abt 1858	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Alfred Wills	abt 1878	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Son	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Harriet Wills	abt 1877	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	John Wills	abt 1838	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Wife	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Joseph Wills	abt 1860	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Son	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Lillian Wills	abt 1863	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Minnie Wills	abt 1871	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>
<a href="#">View Record</a>	Ruth Wills	abt 1873	Essexch, Bedfordshire, England	Daughter	Upper Park Rd, Emsworth, Bedfordshire, England	<a href="#">View Image</a>


**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH**

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE  
Application Number: COL677383

REGISTRATION DISTRICT: Widmore

1884 Quarter in the half-century of Widmore in the County of Bedfordshire

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Mr.	Wife	and child	Male child	Female child	Married woman	Occupation	Signature of declarant	Where signed	Signature of Registrar	Where signed	Signature of Registrar



CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Births in the District here mentioned.  
 Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, near to St Pauls Church, the 19th day of July, 1904

K04 455410

CERTIFICATES ARE ISSUED FOR THE PAYMENT OF A FEE OF ONE SHILLING AND SIX PENCE TO PRODUCE A TRUE EXTRACT OF THE REGISTER.  
 MAKING A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

Alongside this is another story: my father's. From mid-teens, he was a regular in the Royal Air Force, and his career took him to Singapore, Jordan, Iraq and Cyprus in addition to innumerable postings in the UK. I used to joke that I could track global events by where we were living at any given time: Korean War, Suez Crisis etc.. This was over a period when nuclear war was



**My father in his  
93<sup>rd</sup> year**

a real threat and my father's work was in this domain. He is bound by the Official Secrets Act so cannot disclose technical information, but a documentary maker who is recording the experiences of old servicemen is interested in his story. I have many and frequent conversations with my father about aspects of his experience that he *can* discuss: I know how plans would be enacted in the event of a missile, for instance, and he talks of the psychological impact of such work. He was recognised by the Queen for his contribution, but his experiences had a permanent impact on his mental and physical health. My plan now is to video-record some conversations with him, both for my personal use and to share with the documentary maker.

This activity not only uses a different medium for relating the story: it is designed for a different purpose. My father's service experiences have a much wider audience and can contribute to historical records. And so I return to the reason for telling these tales.

## Towards a synthesis

The episodes I have shared are not earth-shattering on the grand scale, yet to my father and me they are precious. I began with the question of identity: who are we? How did we come to be the people we are? These are the simpler questions to answer. More profoundly, why does this matter? Why do we need to feel that our existence has a value, if not a purpose? Surely this is the conundrum of life: even if we have no religious belief, we still want to make 'good' use of our time and to leave something positive behind us.

Table 1 is my initial attempt to analyse the purposes of my (and others') story telling. Some are explicit, others implicit; some are for personal needs, others altruistic; most are for present benefit, whilst some look to the future.

Table 1, Why recreate and tell the story?

Present	Future
Curiosity and interest	
Understanding my roots and myself	An account for descendants' information
Remembering my ancestors were people just like me	Potential stimulus for continuing the story
Psychological support at time of grieving	Contribution to historical archives
Drawing on memories, validation of these	
Creative process of writing	
Intellectual stimulus – the buzz of meaningful research that has personal meaning	
Leads to new skills and knowledge	
Being human?	

If I were to sum up my personal purposes in a few words, I would choose:

- ◆ self-realisation
- ◆ validation
- ◆ love.

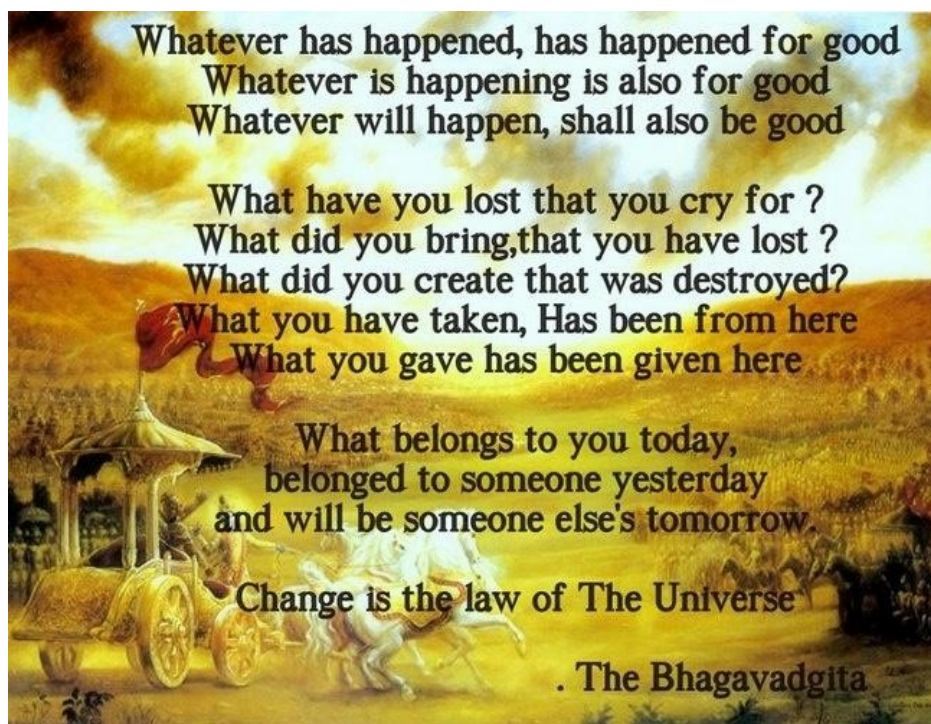
Turning to the means of achieving these ends, there is a clear progression in the media I draw on, starting with the investigative process and culminating in fixing the stories for reflection and future development (Table 2).

Table 2, Media for story telling

Oral transmission (face to face, by phone)
Archived library records (census etc.)
Electronic archives
Recording on audio and video both for data collection and fixing
Fixing the story in writing/publication

Reducing the whole process and objectives behind telling my stories to these academic points may be helpful for comparing with other story tellers, developing a paradigm, but it robs them of their very essence. For the past 15 years' interaction with my father, the resolution – or not – of mysteries, have been a tale of love: the instinct to heal pain in the face of death, drawing on my father's memories and the tools I possess; reconstruction of the lives of those who once loved us, and our gift of love to future generations who will know us even when we are gone. Ultimately, we are saying 'Our lives matter', however humdrum; this is the belief that impels us, even in the face of our mortality.

My narrative began with my own sense of identity, but this is inextricable from the environment in which my life has been lived. In other words, my narrative links to that of my family, which in turn interacts mutually with society, in a historical spiral from the past, through our present and into the future. We are both humble and the centre of our micro-universe. I end with some words from the Hindu scriptures.





## Encouraging Higher Education students to create stories and narratives about themselves

Rob Ward



*Rob Ward is the Director Emeritus of the Centre for Recording Achievement and is trying to retire! Until 2016 he was the Director of the CRA, a not for profit company limited by guarantee, registered charity and international community of practice, having joined one of its many forerunners in 1991. During this time he took a leadership role to support Personal Development Planning implementation in UKHE nationally, led the CRA contribution to the National Coordination Team on Student Employability (ESECT, 2002/5), was centrally involved in the revision of the sectoral Guidelines on Personal Development Planning (2009) and in the development of the QA toolkit in respect of extra-curricular awards (2013). He was a member of the initial Scoping Group on Measuring and Recording Student Achievement (2004-6) and subsequently led the development, trial and implementation of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) following the report of the second Burgess Group ('Beyond the honours degree classification'). He is still involved in supporting the implementation of this initiative across UKHE, and has worked with others with similar interests internationally.*

### Importance of the habit creating our own stories about ourselves

The life stories and personal narratives we construct matter, to how we construe our experiences, the beliefs we develop about ourselves and what we are capable of, and the thinking we have and planning we do to prepare for our futures. We cannot begin to make such sense of ourselves and our lives unless we are able to 'stop and think'. And in that stopping and thinking space what usually emerges is a story. But opportunities for 'stopping and thinking' are often seen as self-indulgent in these busy, task centred times. Education is all about helping learners see the value in something. In this contribution I'll be doing just that, by emphasising the importance of helping learners to recognise the *value in the opportunity* and the *habit of stopping and thinking*. More specifically, I'll try to do two things:

1. To present just a few 'snapshots' from students I have worked with over the two decades and more of the work of the Centre for Recording Achievement. As this began – as a two year funded Project in 1991 – our initial Evaluators were wont to talk of the importance and power of '*a bucketful of anecdotes*' in the creation of narrative accounts that helps people make sense of their own development. So- with full acknowledgement to them - here I go with a few of the anecdotes that still have resonance with me today.

2. Through these stories to highlight the opportunities those working in HE can create which will facilitate and encourage students to reflect on their own increasingly busy lives so as to draw deeper meaning and learning from their experiences. The theoretical focus of my Research Supervisor Donald Super was on the importance of self-concept, and of the development of a self-concept which itself is malleable over time. He also developed something called 'a LifeSpan, Life Space Approach to Career Development'<sup>1</sup> (and Figure 1)

which identified six life spaces - parent/homemaker, worker, citizen, leisurite (sorry about that terminology), student, and child. This rang lots of bells for me at the time and subsequently in my working life, working with students in HE in particular, as – at whatever age - they develop, document and present ideas about themselves and their life experiences and – through a process of 'stopping and thinking' about all of this - seek to make more sense of their lives and themselves.

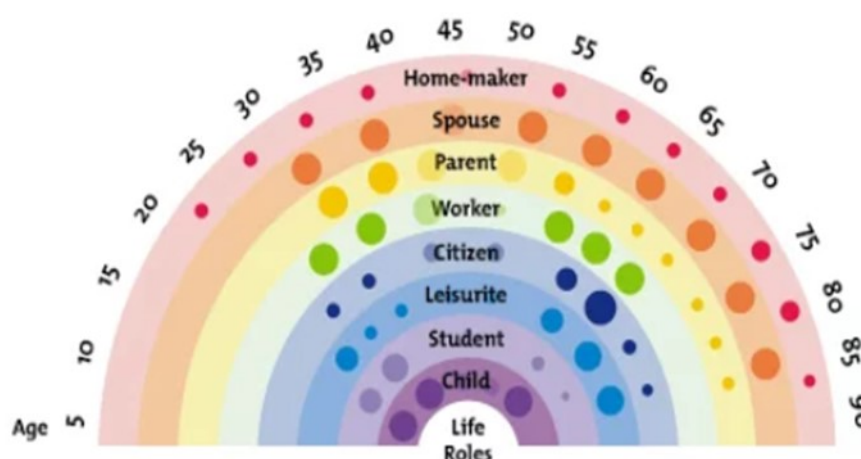


Figure 1 Donald Super's Life-Career Rainbow



## Stories from my life

So-here are some of my stories gleaned from a lifetime of endeavouring to bringing about a change in the educational ecosystem that I believe will help the higher education learners of today become lifelong creators of the stories and narrators of their own lives.

**Anecdote #1:** Toward the end of the ‘Recording Achievement and HE Project (the original incarnation of the CRA, funded from 1991-93), as part of our dissemination and development work, we invited a group of four students from the University of Huddersfield to present their experience to a Project Conference for HE staff. They were due to travel with a staff member but industrial action put paid to that, so they came anyway. They worked as a group on the brief we gave, each one offering a contribution and then speaking about the ‘benefits and weaknesses’ of the ‘Personal Development Journal scheme as they saw them. Subsequently they worked in small group discussions with interested HE staff, and finally they each wrote up their experience of the day, a process which helped to articulate the value of their contribution to their own development (some of their comments are included in the box on the right).

The student contribution had impact on others too. A conference attendee from a Russell Group University, who confessed to attending ‘out of a sense of duty, nothing more’, went away confirming that ‘I see a venture such as PDP as a most important addition to the range of opportunities which a University can offer its students... I have enlisted the help of... in targeting three or four departments to run a pilot... and we shall move as soon as possible to the full implementation of our ‘Personal Development Programme’.

*‘From the day I felt a greater sense of appreciation of what I am trying to achieve – to become a business professional’*

*‘To me the greatest benefit was that I was able to give a confident presentation to people older than myself whom I had never met.’*

*‘It helped to underline the importance of the scheme to us as active participants where previously we had very much seen ourselves as passive. We were brought to understand and appreciate what an active role we had and were playing towards the overall success of the scheme. The conference... crystallised what we were doing; its benefits (strengths) and its shortcomings (weaknesses)... the day provided the opportunity to step back to review our activities and in doing so evaluate their effectiveness’.*

**Anecdote # 2:** On now to a group of Physics students who had the opportunity for a summer placement at Google in Silicon Valley, then a new and exciting opportunity which academic colleagues were sure would prove invaluable in making them out as great candidates in the forthcoming graduate employment market. On their return departmental staff were keen to learn of the ways in which they had put their discipline learning to good use, and somewhat taken aback by the key learning the students spoke about:

Evaluator: ‘So, what did you learn from the experience?’

Student responses: ‘Well, we learned we needed to make local friends quickly... otherwise we could have not have ....got around very easily (given the minimum age for renting a car) ... or managed to get a drink (given the minimum age for going into a bar) or ‘getting on with people who spoke the same language’ (i.e. English) but without the same cultural base.

Evaluator: And what about how it helped you in terms of Physics:

Student responses: ‘Well yes, I suppose it did help a bit, but it was much more about the experience of being in, and surviving in, another country.

For the academic staff –viewing via a subject lens - this delivered less than they hoped; for me as a ‘critical friend’ it reinforced the holistic value of the opportunity. Incidentally, the same style of responses was encountered in a Modern Languages Department in the same University, where for many the key learning from the Year Abroad placement was centred upon managing a relationship with ‘a difficult Landlord’ or with a colleague with oversight of your work if you were working in a school setting. Interestingly, the students who chose such settings, as opposed to those who selected a year at a University, reported – in retrospect – a much richer experience.

**Anecdote #3:** And so to a specific, Portfolio-based extra-curricular Award scheme then running at a third institution, and the reported – and evidenced – experience of one student who shared, as one element within her Portfolio – her work to raise money for the provision of a minibus in Africa. She not only developed and implemented a plan to raise the funding for this, but also sourced the vehicle and made sure it arrived where it was needed in good order. As a Project it was hard to beat, and the range of skills and capabilities she developed and exhibited simply blew the Assessment Panel, including myself, away. Unsurprisingly, this was a deeply collaborative effort, working with many others to achieve the objectives of her Plan. And, as one experienced employer on the Assessment Board remarked, without knowing anything of her academic performance, *‘this is a simply spectacular candidate in terms of employability’*.

**Anecdote #4:** Just one more story, this time very directly related to the academic curriculum, the Digital Patchwork text project, funded by Jisc between 2010-12. The original Patchwork Text Assessments (PTAs) saw students select examples of their work, or ‘patches’, choosing those which best evidenced the skills, knowledge and understanding gained during learning. Peer and tutor comments, and the learner’s response to such feedback, was an integral part of each patch, creating a series of records of activity which could be revisited, and from which a single overall statement could be produced. Thus the approach supported learning and assessment which:

- engaged learners whose experience of formal education may not be positive, and whose focus is on working rather than learning;
- maximised communication between stakeholders, including collaboration between peers and dialogue between any workplace and institutionally-based trainers, mentors or supervisors;
- allowed access to and integration of knowledge across disciplinary boundaries as dictated by the nature of problems;
- allowed the identification of outcomes relevant to individuals in their work contexts and to their sponsors;
- assessed the achievement of such outcomes based on diverse evidence and the judgement of relevant professionals/experts;
- fostered an engagement with further learning and personal development within the individual, together with the skills to support that learning: key among these skills is the capacity for self-judgement of performance.

This updating used technology to encourage communication and sharing between module participants and the construction of a synoptic statement: a ‘reflective synthesis’ using (a selection of\*) writing tasks as ‘evidence’ (the ‘stitching together’ of the ‘patches’). As one Tutor put it, we are: *‘getting them to build up synoptic skills...seeing the discipline in the round... which I don’t think we teach very well, taking students to think about articles, or groups of articles, who is writing it, where is it published, how did it come to be written this way’*.

Student comments from one institution reinforced the value of the approach (box right).

### The space to think about ourselves

The reason I know these stories is because I have created or at least have access to - the structures provided and space created for engagement with the student participants, whether face2face or via assessment and feedback processes. In each case HE provided both the context(s) and the opportunities for shifting the focus of learner attention, hence ‘stopping and thinking’, giving permission to refocussing on the ‘how’ as opposed to the ‘what’, and with an emphasis on developing the capacities and skills that enable students to create developmental personal narratives. Many such opportunities were – and are - in spaces alongside the curriculum, with more opportunity for experience in and learning from less controlled/defined and predictable contexts and with outcomes that can’t be assumed in advance.

***“Patchworks are a lot more work than a single assessment, but also force me to study at home regularly. All in all a good thing...”***

***“The patchwork texts are very useful and I’ve found that the feedback has been prompt and helped me gain knowledge & understanding...”***

***“The patchwork texts enabled me to continue working and re-read each section of work rather than put it to one side until revision time!”***

We know, not least from the work of Camille Kandiko-Howson<sup>2</sup> and Jackson<sup>3</sup> that student perspectives on HE encompass ‘a wide view of student life. This goes beyond what is often traditionally part of the academic student experience to include internships, work experience, extra-curricular activities ... a sense of community... which are all what students expect as part of higher education, and from students’ perspectives play a significant role in their learning experience.’ That’s not the only story, however; some institutions are increasingly wishing to open up such opportunities to many more students, not least by establishing verification systems and including the wider achievements demonstrated by today’s students in their Higher Education Achievement Reports. But even that’s not the only story; as WonkHE very recently reported on the conclusion from the outcomes of the ‘Learning Gain’ Projects that are now finishing up:

*‘what the learning gain projects are finding is that students find ways of keeping an eye on how their learning is progressing – through standardised tests possibly, but certainly through a process of reflection – via learning diaries or otherwise. Such reflections are little use in driving a market, but provide huge value in supporting student learning.’*

What went around in 1991 is still travelling! **AND ALWAYS WILL BECAUSE IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO BEING HUMAN.**

New technologies, suggested in my final anecdote, bring new opportunities and challenges. In terms of creating narratives, we need - in my view - to look toward some of the electronic portfolio work, including in the US, given the potential of the digital medium to enable multiple connections, e.g. by hyperlinking, and also to interrogate and re-order data to generate and illustrate a narrative account and accompanying synoptic statements. See e.g. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Molly\\_Epstein/publication/254078973\\_Eportfolio\\_A\\_Tool\\_for\\_Constructing\\_a\\_Narrative\\_Professional\\_Identity/links/5853dc8908ae95fd8e1ff29c/Eportfolio-A-Tool-for-Constructing-a-Narrative-Professional-Identity.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Molly_Epstein/publication/254078973_Eportfolio_A_Tool_for_Constructing_a_Narrative_Professional_Identity/links/5853dc8908ae95fd8e1ff29c/Eportfolio-A-Tool-for-Constructing-a-Narrative-Professional-Identity.pdf). This is not without challenges: notably in terms of who is/are the audience(s) for such narratives, and what the purpose(s)? I would certainly want to hold true to the view that the sort of narratives we are exploring are for the benefit of self and they support psychological growth and wellbeing. However, we also need to recognise the multiple pressures on many of our learners which may bring other agenda and audiences to the fore. Here we need to ensure that our work takes full advantage of the technology to support the construction of a narrative centred upon self – and individual development - whilst also enabling differing views on such data to be created for different audiences and for different purposes. This way we celebrate the centrality of self-development which is an essential component of higher level learning, and arguably, all learning, whilst also recognising the potential of such investment to have other value for other purposes.

**Final anecdote:** To take a pre-digital illustration, one student at Leeds used two pages selected from a structured physical Portfolio (with regular opportunities for stopping and thinking via a mentoring process) constructed over a year as a Sabbatical Officer to take to interview for a job opportunity as it specifically related to the role for which she was applying. She did not produce it for this purpose, but she did select from it to help her cause when the time came (she got the job)!

Any such recognition – in terms of eportfolios at least - also deals with issues of digital capability and literacy, and centres upon students as eportfolio-makers as opposed to eportfolio users (Yancey ed, in press), more good reasons to champion and celebrate a narrative approach to personal and (life) career development!

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## Life Stories – some light hearted perspectives

### Russ Law

*Russ (on the right) is a founding member of the Lifewide Community and has contributed many articles on whatever theme we have been exploring in our magazine. Here he is swapping life stories with the commissioning editor.*



Having read Norman's moving and insightful introduction and the excellent piece from Julie Beck, I feel both inspired and inhibited in offering a contribution, since the body, soul, meaning and technical character of the "life story" are so vividly and authentically explored there. I don't think I can reach the same depth of emotional resonance and impact; however, as a light-hearted but sincere gesture, here are some thoughts that come to mind in reflecting on the subject.

#### Life stories as facts

On looking back, it's fascinating to find that so much that you've thought of as factual may not actually be so. Episodes and experiences in the family, passed down and reminisced about over the years, become legends. On closer examination, though, we can often find different "realities" perceived by surviving actors. This has happened recently with my sister and me; she's younger and has an excellent recall of the true circumstances and surrounding details of events. We lived in a big house with our parents, maternal grandparents and for a period an uncle and two aunts as well; it was the setting for a host of dramatic situations and experiences, happy and otherwise. "Facts" vary according to who recalls them. For example, a cousin fondly remembers the joyous occasions at Christmas, with the house stuffed full of relatives – literally stuffed with food, and crammed into confined spaces playing "sardines". My sister seems to have filtered out all of my horrible attributes as an older brother, and recalls only my nicer qualities and actions; I feel doubly guilty now! Still, I did write an essay on Macbeth for her, so when she lent me the cash to buy a new coat to replace the one I'd left in a telephone box she did so gladly.

#### Life stories as selective, edited versions of reality

Lately, I've been in contact, physically but mainly by email, with two old schoolfellows from my teenage years. We hadn't met for decades, and this has been both hilarious and painful, as we've revisited events, escapades, characters and perceptions hitherto unspoken. We've been kind to each other. It's been very informative (in an "if only I'd known that at the time" sense), to fill in some of the background and factual details of some legendary events featuring ourselves, other pupils, teachers, headmasters and associates, as well as to admit to the doubts, worries and questions that we suffered at the time. Both of these old chums are clever blokes, and one of them is a writer. They have incredibly detailed memories, and huge capacity of recall, ranging across all sorts of subjects. I, on the other hand, have spent a lot of time dumping all but the most essential or enjoyable recollections and knowledge gathered in my life. Lately, some occurrences that had "never been mentioned" have been resurrected, corrected, clarified and accepted, in a kind of truth and reconciliation process. We've also discovered some enjoyable dinner party material (not that we've actually had a dinner party) from the schooldays and works of some famous alumni, such as Gryff Rhys-Jones and Douglas Adams (who once took me for a master of ju-jitsu).

#### Life stories as collections of quirky events and parables

Have other people found that, as they look back on key events from their lives, some of these come to have lessons in them? I certainly have. One has been the lesson about seizing opportunities that arise unexpectedly, becoming pivotal, life-direction-altering moments. Many years ago, I felt gloomy about the prospect of remaining as a teacher in Leeds. I didn't have any particular life plan, but wanted to see more of the world, and have more excitement; my wife was less restless but generally of the same view. One day, I was drinking coffee in the staffroom when a young supply teacher came in and we got chatting.



He explained that he had a plan to get a teaching job abroad, save some money, come back to England, buy a cottage in the Lake District and live happily ever after. I asked how you got a teaching job abroad, and he referred me to the back pages of the Times Educational Supplement. Without delay, I started applying for jobs in faraway locations: the Dominican Republic, the New Hebrides (my mum said that would be nice, and she and my dad could come up to Scotland and visit us, not really knowing about Vanuatu), and Iran. Fast forward: Tehran; fall of the Shah; evacuation by the RAF; new jobs in Yorkshire and then Saudi Arabia; meeting Norman and his family, being part of the expansion of the school and building of new premises for many years, having our own children at the school with us, and then returning to the UK to work in an academic context. Decades after that chance encounter in the Leeds staffroom, I met the teacher concerned, sadly at the funeral of a mutual friend, as we discovered. I told him he'd changed my life, and asked him where he'd travelled to. He said he'd stayed in Leeds.

### **Life stories as learning explorations**

Lifewide Education and people like Norman and Jenny are great at eliciting meaning and learning from all sorts of sources, with life stories a good illustration of that. An exploration of both the general direction of travel of one's life and the countless episodes that have formed it can be instructive. What things have we learnt? For myself, I'd say that when people said it would get better it very often did. I learned that some things can never be put right, and the struggle to come to terms with that is ongoing. Then there's the discovery that much of what you thought was true was at least only partially so. Finally, I'd recognise that reflecting, connecting, tracing pathways from origins to outcomes, and sharing with others brings about many instructive, interesting or just surprising results.

### **A final word, for the moment**

I went on a trip down memory lane to the big house where we'd lived in my childhood. It was in a sorry state, with rubbish in the front where there'd been a tree and a hedge, but now just parking, graffiti on the pebble-dashed walls, and the cover for the coal chute to the cellar (once used by me to gain entry to the house – yes, I was very skinny) concreted over. There was a number on the smaller of the two doors – “Flat 38A”. Our daughter Susi was with us, and as we travelled back we chatted about a fascinating BBC Radio 4 feature on coincidences, agreeing to be on the lookout for them. Two days later, Susi found one. She does social work, and was helping a client with some financial matters relating to rent payments. On checking the address...



## Stories that Heal - supporting mental health recovery with story-telling

**Maja Jankowska**



*Maja is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology in the Department of Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire. She is a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist & Brain-spotting Practitioner and she has been a longstanding member of the Lifewide Education community.*

I have always been interested in story-telling. In fact, the story I like telling myself is that I am a good story-teller! The phrase 'stories we tell ourselves' is very telling indeed and forms a backbone of the story I am about to tell you. The proposition is quite simple: the story we tell and re-tell (to ourselves and others) can become something we are associated with and potentially integrated as a core belief and a part of our identity. Just think about it... What were you told by your parents or teachers as you were growing up? I was told I was excellent at writing and really (I mean REALLY!) bad at maths. Subsequently, I spent more and more time writing in my diary, writing various stories and writing poetry (and neglecting maths). I recall winning several competitions in my primary school and getting my poetry published when I was in high school. I shall return to this point of writing and publishing later – please bear with me.

As I grew up I realised that some of the stories we tell and re-tell are not so good and can actually cause quite a lot of psychological damage. Unfortunately, they tend to 'stick' to us.

One part of my story is about how I loved listening to what people had to say about themselves and how I always wanted to search for meaning in these stories. As a psychology student I dreamt of being a psychotherapist who could help people work through their stories and try and re-work and re-write their 'negative scripts'.

Only many, many years later I realised how I myself became a victim of my own story-telling. The story I told myself and re-told to others was that I could not be a psychotherapist in the UK. I thought that as a migrant and speaker of English as a second language, I had not sufficiently mastered English to deal with intricate and sophisticated nuances of psychological expression.

**As I grew up I realised that some of the stories we tell and re-tell are not so good and can actually cause quite a lot of psychological damage.**

I am not quite sure how I could tell myself that kind of story and then decide on an alternative career as a university academic and researcher. Surely writing up a PhD in English does require a certain degree of language proficiency! Perhaps even more than therapeutic work would entail. But there you go – this story stuck to me like resin and it took years before I re-wrote this story and indeed became a psychotherapist.

So, what's the other part of the story about story-telling? Well, whilst I started pursuing an academic career and came to choose a topic and research methods for my doctorate, I realised I was turning into a qualitative researcher, interested in personal development, identity and meaning-making. As the time passed I was more and more drawn towards narrative approaches precisely because they concentrated on 'stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)'. This 'who I am' narrative can be viewed as 'stable' – something core to our identity. Yet, at the same time I acknowledged the fluidity of identity - 'always producing itself through the combined processes of being and becoming, belonging and longing to belong' (Yuval-Davies, 2006, cited in Riessman<sup>1:8</sup>). This view of dynamic, unfinished and fluid self does not regard a person as 'fixed' in any representation of his or her words and cannot claim any finality as to what a story means, since any story has a potential for revision in future stories<sup>2:227</sup>.

So here I was – ticking away with my doctoral and academic work, not thinking much about how all of the fascinating ideas about identity, self, personal development and growth can actually be translated into therapeutic work. It took several years before I started thinking again about how we could help people using story-telling.

One of the early projects I undertook to explore the potential healing properties of story-telling was focused on story-telling and story-writing with bilingual primary school children. Although the stories were not meant to be therapeutic or have a healing message, some children clearly used the opportunity of having sessions of Bilingual Creative Writing Clubs in their

schools<sup>3</sup> to work through their problems. From research I conducted, I learned that giving bilingual children (many of them migrants and speakers of English as a second language) an opportunity to publish a book in two languages led to the increase in their confidence, self-esteem and recognition at school and beyond.

I guess that by now in this story you begin to see common threads.

As I became more and more interested in the power of multilingual identity texts<sup>4</sup>, I also realised that the experience of emigration and difficulties related to the one's own ability to express herself/himself fully in a foreign language can lead to development or maintenance of mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or other more serious/deeper problems.

Hence, the next project I created was designed specifically for bilingual and/or bicultural individuals who suffered mental health issues and were on a journey towards mental health recovery. I wanted to give MIND BLMK <https://www.mind-blmk.org.uk/> service users an opportunity to narrate their stories of mental health recovery through bilingual writing. We published these heart-warming stories (see Eamon's story below) and noted how writing facilitated and contributed to healing and mental health recovery (Jankowska, in preparation).

In a meantime, I was presented with an opportunity to take on another HE degree – Postgraduate Diploma in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). In issue 16 of Lifewide Education Magazine I reflected on my own agility in professional development<sup>5</sup> – being able to adapt to changes to my environment<sup>6</sup> as well as not being afraid to move to new, often challenging contexts. I wrote about how this agility also means always being 'alert' and on the look-out for opportunities. On this occasion, I was fully alert and decided to take the opportunity to study a therapeutic degree, before my own fear, self-doubt and the story about how I could not become a psychotherapist in the UK could kick in.

Although I was very busy re-scripting my own story (which involved intensive study and working therapeutically within NHS talking therapy service), I also was on the look-out for more opportunities to work therapeutically using story-telling that has potential to heal. Yet again, I invited my colleague from local MIND branch (MIND BLMK) – Jeanette Skipsey and my fellow story-teller academic – Amalia Garcia (Senior Lecturer in Dance and Performance at my university and a psychotherapist in training) to create a project in which we would combine therapeutic story-telling and story-writing with expressionist theatrical and dance performance. We told and wrote short stories and poetry (published in an anthology titled mind ME), worked through therapeutic metaphors and stories and created a 1-hour theatrical performance (also titled mind ME), which is available to watch on youtube



#### A poster from our performance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvNtQn8zvyg&t=3052s>

This was perhaps the most challenging yet also the most healing project I have been involved with. We told our stories in words, images, vision boards, dance moves and theatrical expression, and we felt deeply connected with each other and with our audience (when we performed in the university theatre). We felt exhilarated with our performance production and publication and as individuals we experienced growth in our confidence, self-esteem, self-expression and our abilities to deal with life challenges.

**Right:** A photo from a live performance. In the background one of the participants from the session we filmed under water (in a local swimming pool) – a 72-year old chap who cannot swim but trusted us enough to go into the pool and film a sequence that shows depression – metaphorically presented as sinking in the water



## Daily bread of acceptance

By Maja Jankowska

Dear God,  
Hear me!  
I'm so hungry...  
I'm praying to you  
for daily bread of acceptance.

So that I can share it,  
shower the world around  
with loving kindness,  
compassion,  
and acceptance.

Dear God,  
Hear me!  
I'm praying to you  
for the crumbs I spread  
to be enough to make a difference.



I cannot underestimate the benefits of narrating personal stories in various languages and through various forms of expression for meaning making, personal development and mental health recovery.

As I finish this story, I would like to come back to re-visit the beginning of the story. Although my projects are aimed at supporting others' wellbeing, I fully realise the healing impact of this work on myself. In the last project (briefly presented above), I felt truly re-connected with the younger version of myself (who liked/loved writing stories and poetry) as well as with my current developing identity of a psychotherapist. This joining of the two identities, found its artistic expression in the poem (left) published in Mind ME – anthology of poems.

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## My Self-Healing Stories & Poems

### Eamon Kugenieks

*Eamon has been using the services of Mind since the start of 2016 and is very passionate about using his personal lived experience and knowledge to help and support others in their recovery from the effects of Mental Health Illness. Eamon has found using writing as a therapy has been very beneficial and had a positive effect on his self-esteem and confidence. Eamon currently works with Age UK as a Home Help support with the elderly.*

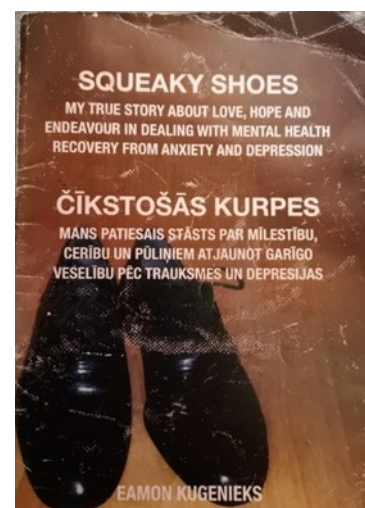
My particular story starts on Christmas Day 2016. I had an episode of passing out at the dinner table, which led to a 2 night stay in the hospitals in Bedford and Luton.

Following on from a visit to my GP in January 2017 I contacted MIND BLMK, the Mental Health charity and that has proved to be one of the most positive moves I have ever made.

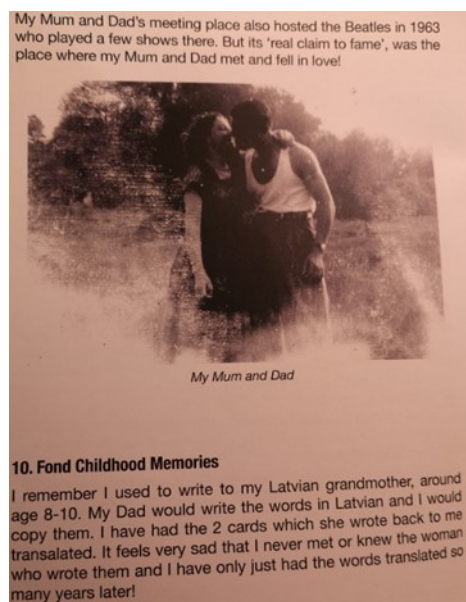
It was MIND that gave me and others the opportunity to write a book about sharing my narrative of Mental Health recovery. It was during this process I met Maja who was involved in setting up the project. This was as a therapeutic endeavour for adults in mental health recovery.

My book is called 'Squeaky Shoes – my true story about love, hope and endeavour in dealing with Mental Health Recovery from anxiety and depression.'

For me this has worked on a number of levels. It was an opportunity to demonstrate how writing can help with Mental Health recovery as well as be challenged and help with my self confidence and show others what can be achieved.



### A page from my book about my mum and dad



Working on improving my mental health has been a challenge for sure, especially as by writing my book I have seen that there have been several life events over the years that have culminated in leading up to the event of Christmas 2016 that negatively impacted on me. These would include the death of my father when I was 25 and then the death of my mother when I was 32. So in fact I have lived more years after their deaths than I spent with them while they were alive.

However, there are many positives to be drawn from writing the book and one was the connection I made on an emotional level with my Latvian roots and Latvian grandmother. In the book I write about some postcards that I rediscovered from my grandmother which Maja had arranged to be translated for me, which was a part of my life I had forgotten about as I was around 8 years old when I received them. It was a really powerful and moving emotion to read what my grandmother had written to me, her grandson, some 50 plus years ago. Of course this is a woman I never met but there does feel connection there.

I can remember I used to copy the words that my Dad would write in Latvian. It feels very sad that I never met or knew the woman who wrote them but it's amazing I now have the words translated so many years later.

Here are the words my grandmother wrote to me – they are two separate greetings cards that my Dad had received and I am pleased I kept them and have them still.

**“White snow is covering the hills and valleys of my motherland (*homeland – Latvia*) and the happiness of Christmas is shining in people's faces. The bells ring resounding over far mountains and the fields and white glittering forests. Happy (a lot of happiness) Christmas! With wishes to you from your dear grandma”**

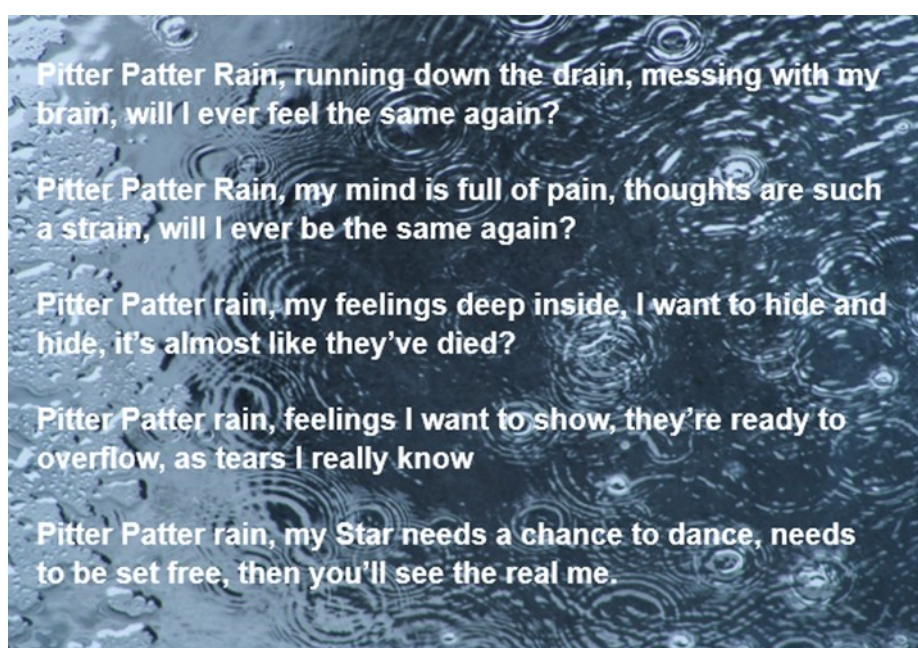
**“Let the roses and flowers bloom in the path of your life. Merry and happy New Year wishes for you  
from your grandmother”**

There was also the cathartic effect of having to write about the deaths of my parents as well as my godparents. That has led me onto Psychodynamic counselling which I have been working with since September 2017. This counselling is something that although emotionally painful at times is proving invaluable and I will continue with that for as long I feel the need.

Then writing the book has highlighted various parts of my personality that have formed over the years and I have had moments of “so that’s why I think that way”!

It has also ignited my love and passion for writing. I had always enjoyed writing at school but had forgotten how much! However, one of the ‘bonuses’ I have found is in writing poetry, which has given me an unexpected outlet to express my feelings. I have become very passionate about this and any opportunity to talk or write about this I am very pleased and happy to do so!

I end my book with a poem called ‘Pitter Patter Rain’ which I wrote in April 2017.



The ‘Star’ I refer to is from a poem by Nietzsche, the philosopher and poet. I came across this many years before I wrote my book and it’s always resonated with me:

**“ I say unto you one must still have chaos in one self to be able to give birth to a dancing star”**

So it’s like so many of us have ‘chaos’ within us but eventually we can give birth to a dancing star!

I can say to you as the reader even now I feel such pride in having written this poem as it was from the heart and expresses exactly how I was feeling at the time.

For me this was the start of an unexpected journey of expression and discovery and some 40 poems and stories on that journey is continuing! It is also interesting to see that the subject, content and style of my writing has changed and is evolving all the time. This has become like a ‘barometer of progress’, almost as if ‘I am emerging from the dark’. But essentially the key for me has been and always will be the opportunity to say how I am feeling through writing. Creative Writing is something I will always be eternally grateful to Maja for introducing to me.

At first Mental Health was always my subject of my poetry but gradually that has changed. I am certain this will be evolving all the time. I have the intention to write a poem called ‘Poetry is my medication’! I have since become involved with a number of writing groups where we share and read our written poetry and have also just recently started to write short stories.

In July 2018 I was privileged to again be involved with Maja, Mind and others in a project in conjunction with Bedfordshire University called 'The Human Bookstore'. This was a 20 week project (every Friday for at least three hours) that culminated in a stage performance which included dance, physical movement and spoken word.

This aspect of the project was led by Amalia Garcia Senior Lecturer in Dance at Bedfordshire University. What I and my colleagues witnessed first hand while working on the project was how both Maja and Amalia incorporated their individual skills as a form of therapy through discussion with us and listening to each other – a testament to their years of training and teaching. This was never planned, just happened when it was relevant and appropriate. I am truly grateful for these experiences.

An anthology of poems was produced called 'Mind ME' and I was very pleased to have a number of my poems included. It was a challenging project but again helped to demonstrate how being involved in a live stage performance can really help with confidence.

Here is a poem that I wrote with one of the people who took part in the project.

#### **FRIENDS AT THE HUMAN BOOKSTORE**

**The pleasure I get from being amongst friends, is something I love, but not when it ends  
This special time I really do adore, filled with things I've never tried before  
One afternoon we explored outside to see what we could find, I found a rose,  
the scent of which was delicious on my skin**

***By Eamon and Lemon***

It reminded me of the joy of a baby, like a past whisper from within. I'm amazed by this process and just can't wait for next Friday to begin



I feel very grateful and privileged for Maja asking me to share my story and I hope you as the reader find what I have written to be interesting and beneficial.

I will end with a poem that I wrote in May 2017 when I was starting to feel that I had hope and there was a positive future ahead.

#### **JUST BECAUSE – A POEM ABOUT HOPE**

**Just because today I'm down  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I can't be happy**

**Just because today I'm feeling sad  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I won't be feeling glad**

**Just because today I'm feeling mean  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I won't be feeling keen**

**Just because today I can't cope  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I don't have hope**

**Just because today my head is spinning  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I won't end up winning**

**Just because today is full of strife  
Doesn't mean tomorrow I can't have a fabulous life!**



**Eamon Kugenieks May 2017**



## Metaphors in story-telling

### Serena Weerakoon



*Serena Weerakoon is a student at the University of Bedfordshire studying psychology, counselling and therapies. Born in Italy, she now lives in England. Studied languages in high school: Italian, Spanish, German and English. She is hoping to pursue a career in developmental coaching. In her previous role she worked as an assistant psychologist at the University of Bedfordshire and as a volunteer in Sri Lanka to help people with mental health issues.*

Metaphors have been used for a very long time as a way of transmitting information regarding one's culture, society and morality from one generation to another<sup>1</sup>. They help people express how they perceive the world around them and the thoughts and feelings of how they experience different events<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, they are so embedded in our language that we do not even notice that we are using metaphors when we speak in our daily lives<sup>3</sup>. A single metaphor used in the right context can tell a story in itself. For instance, if I say his behaviour is very ecological it conjures up a picture of someone relating to and interacting with the world in a particular way.

At first, metaphors were transmitted orally, or in writing and images, however, in more recent times we are more likely to share them through the use of social media. In fact, sharing content on social media is like standing in the middle of the room and yelling 'I like bagels!' and one person yelling back 'I like them too'. As a matter of fact, people nowadays tend to share most of their private lives on social platforms and they expect other people to like their posts or pictures. Similarly, it has been said that social media helps us tell a story and share it with other people: the content we post represents our recollection of different events. On the other hand, we might have observers, i.e. the people that like and comment. Finally, self-talk is the responses we give to people and the content we decide to share<sup>4</sup>.

I first came across metaphors when I was in school and I found really interesting the fact that they allow us to explain how we feel when words don't feel to be enough or when we can't find the right things to say. Personally, I am not a very talkative person and I find it difficult to communicate with others hence, I find metaphors to be very useful when it comes to talking about my feelings through a comparison to a similar situation. Also using metaphors has helped me express myself with people from different cultures. In fact, even though I now live in England, I was born in Italy and I am originally from Sri Lanka and Japan. Therefore, I have had contacts with people from completely different cultures and I have noticed that they perceive the world around them in diverse ways. For instance, people in Sri Lanka care more about the community and how they can establish relationships with people around them. On the other hand, people in Italy and England tend to prioritise themselves as individuals rather than the community they live in. Also, being a person that also likes to travel a lot, I find metaphors particularly useful because they allow me to communicate with other people in a way that is easy to understand, without using complicated ways or speaking. Additionally, I think that metaphors form a crucial part of all of us, because, depending on which metaphor one decides to use, we can deduct a large amount of information regarding one's culture, beliefs, interests and social classification. They give us the opportunity to relate to other individual on a deeper level. In fact, in the instance in which a person decides to use a metaphor as a way of inviting others to listen to the life-story, the listener puts some effort to accept the invitation, must realize that a metaphor is used and also *uncover* the meaning of such expression<sup>5</sup>. This is interesting, because not everyone would be able to understand it or would make an effort to know what other meanings are hidden in such expression. In turn, it also





helps to build trust with other people as, through metaphors, we are sharing crucial information about our lives. However, we need to acknowledge that, even though we can express our experiences of the world through metaphors, the actual feeling will only be available to ourselves. In fact, other people will not be able to truly understand how we're feeling because they can only get an image of what it is said<sup>1</sup>.

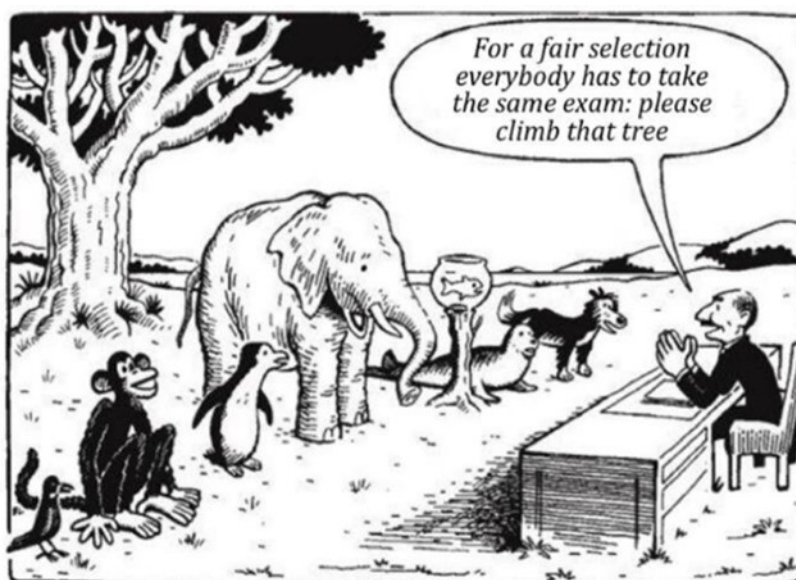
I find metaphors so interesting that I have decided to conduct a study on them for my dissertation. As a matter of fact, I will research upon the role and use of metaphors by therapists with clients from different cultures and backgrounds. It has been said that metaphors are widely used in therapy. For instance, Freud used sexual symbolism to talk about dreams and unconscious associations. Similarly, Berne<sup>6</sup> discussed about the games people play in their daily lives.

Nowadays, metaphors are used in therapeutic settings as a way of better understanding the client and helping them get a better insight on their problems. For instance, it is said<sup>6</sup> that 'depression is like a pair of dark glasses' because it doesn't allow people to see the positive aspects of life. On the other hand, they will be more likely to focus on all the negative events. Similarly, it is said that 'depression is like a horse with blinkers' because people suffering from this condition can only see what is in front of them, which is often perceived as something distressing.

In more recent times, a new form of story-telling in therapy has been developed which is known as fairy-tale therapy. In this instance, people have the chance to express themselves and explain their life situation by comparing it to the events of a fairytale. I think this would be useful for some people as it contains some level of isomorphism. Therefore, people are able to talk about their life issues by comparing them to the event of a fairytale and they are not asked to talk about their life-story in first person.

Returning to the use of metaphors by therapists, I am particularly interested in knowing whether therapists are more likely to use metaphors with clients from particular backgrounds because I find it really interesting that metaphors allow people to express their life stories in a more abstract way. However, we have to consider that not everyone would be able to understand them. For instance, when some of my friends use metaphors, I don't understand them because there is still a language barrier. Similarly, this issue could become more prominent in therapy in the instance in which therapists and client come from different cultures and backgrounds and it is crucial that they make sure that they understand each other. If this doesn't happen, the person listening to the metaphor could have a completely different image of the life-story of the person telling such metaphor. This means that if the therapist doesn't make sure the client understands the metaphor he or she is using, the whole concept could be lost.

For this reason, I would also like to find out whether therapists decide to use culturally adapted metaphors with their clients. This interest comes from the fact that I was born in Italy, but I am originally from Sri Lanka and Japan hence, I am in a position in which I could consider myself to be a bilingual and belong to completely different cultures. I have noticed that people in these different cultures have completely different approaches and attitudes towards the world around them and their daily experiences. Moreover, more or less three years ago I decided to move to England to proceed with my higher education. At first, I felt like I was being pulled out of a hat: I was going to live on my own for the first time in my life and I was in a new country, far away from my parents. In addition, I found it very challenging to adapt to this way of life because I had noticed that people had a very different approach to their daily experiences. Not being able to fully understand the language and having



## Our Education System

*"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."*

*- Albert Einstein*

difficulties expressing my feelings was very difficult. However, I have found the use of metaphors really useful because they have helped me build my interpersonal skills by creating images in people's mind and giving them the possibility to have an insight on how I perceive the world. For instance, I usually use the metaphor according to which 'everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid'. This metaphor has helped me a lot when I was younger because I used to think that I was not smart enough. In fact, the majority of my cousins excelled in mathematics whereas I wasn't really good at it. One day I talked about it to my parents and they told me that sometimes it is good to 'swim against the current', they encouraged me to try new experiences and to give space to my creativity. Eventually, I realized that I was really good at languages and decided to pursue my high school education studying Spanish, German, Latin and English. This has allowed me to value my individuality. In fact, a fish is a very good swimmer and it would be highly inappropriate to judge its abilities by focusing on a skill that it does not possess. I find this metaphor particularly relatable and I try to use it with my friends because I want to help them focus on the positive aspects of their lives and to work more on their strengths rather than thinking that they are not good enough when compared to other people and to the abilities they might possess.

I find it interesting to focus on these differences and learn more about how one's culture influences one's use of metaphors and how they enable people to talk about their thoughts and feelings. Moreover, as it was said by Kopp<sup>8</sup> metaphors will hold deeper meanings related to who we think we are as individuals, what we have learned from our parents and families and how we perceive the world around us in relation to the culture we belong to. Similarly, metaphors can give us a unique insight on other people's lives. To exemplify, people might talk about their perception of life as a glass half full or half empty and this



clearly tells us whether the person has a more pessimistic or optimistic orientation to life and daily experiences, for instance. We can imagine the life stories of people with these different psychological orientations will be very different. It could be said that metaphors allow us to 'grasp the ungraspable, make visible or audible that which is normally invisible or inaudible'<sup>9</sup>. At the end of the day, life is just like a box of chocolates and we should be able to make the most out of it.

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## Narrative Therapy The Dulwich Centre, Adelaide, Australia

**Jenny Willis, Executive Editor**

### The Dulwich Centre, Adelaide

As we researched this edition of LWM, we came across an impressive project, initiated in the Dulwich Centre, Adelaide and now stretching across the globe. The Dulwich Centre prides itself on being 'a place of innovation and creativity' and, under the leadership of an early director, Michael White, pioneered community and mental health projects which 'pushed the field in new directions.' Today, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Dulwich Centre also offers Master's degrees in Narrative Therapy and Community Work, which boasts graduates in countries as far apart as Canada and South Africa, Chile and Singapore.

### The Tree of Life

One of the techniques used for working with vulnerable children, young people and adults alike, who have experienced traumatic events, is The Tree of Life. It was developed by Ncazelo Ncube working in South Africa, in partnership with David Denborough, working at the Centre, as a means of supporting colleagues who work with children affected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Its success has resulted in its use now in many and diverse countries.

### How does it work?

The Tree of Life helps people to speak about their experiences in ways that do not re-traumatise them. Through drawing their own 'tree of life' they are able to speak to their 'roots', examine their skills and knowledge, their hopes and dreams, and to recognise those who are special in their lives. The individual trees are then combined to form a forest. Group discussion of the trees and the 'storms' each person faces facilitates mutual support and strengthens individuals' relationships with their personal history, culture and significant people.



The Tree of Life has been used with people of all ages in many different contexts, including groups of refugees and immigrants; people whose community has suffered from a natural disaster (e.g. floods); groups of young people who have been expelled from school; women who have been subject to domestic violence, neglect, physical abuse, and emotional abuse within their families; adults who are experiencing mental health struggles, and in many other contexts.

The Centre has recently developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander version of the Tree of Life, which this is being used in Central Australia, Arnhem Land, and north Queensland.

Here are a few examples of how narrative therapy is working in quite diverse situations, extracted from the stories you can find in full by visiting <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/>.



## Hopework: The Tree of Life as a helpful metaphor for multiple families having children with cancer

**Linda Moxley-Haegert**

Never in their wildest dreams would most parents think of having a child diagnosed with cancer. When when it happens it seems like their greatest nightmare. Even when the percentages regarding chances of cure are good, the news that their child will have to go through years of chemotherapy, sometimes surgery and sometimes radiotherapy, often hospitalization is very hard to hear and when it happens even harder to bear. Their children will often feel sick, will lose their hair, will have to stop going to school and can only see one, very well friend, at a time. There are so many changes for children and families. Often one parent has to quit work, the other children in the family will get much less parent time than previously and finances go down.

When parents approached me to ask for a support group I began to think about how I could do this and not end up with too many stories of complaint and suffering. Narrative practice helps people move away from the reality of the problem stories into other realities which are also there but relatively unavailable. I knew these parents and children had a wealth of stories of mastery and coping and I was challenged with finding a way that their achievements, knowledges, resources and perhaps unique discoveries could be voiced. I thought of the Tree of Life metaphor and felt that this might be a helpful metaphor for these families. [...]



What seemed to sustain most families through hard times was community. These communities were cultural, religious, family and even the culture of the oncology team, including the oncology families. Two stories of culture were particularly moving. One, told tearfully by a French Canadian mother, expressed such gratitude towards her Italian in-laws and their community who kept them supplied with meals for over a month while their son was in hospital with his newly-diagnosed leukemia. The other was narrated by Sri Lankan parents who, with their two daughters, drew a maple tree (the symbol of Canada) to express their gratitude to be living in a “peaceful country, filled with warm and welcoming people” who helped them feel cherished and safe even through the difficult period of discovering that their daughter would lose her vision because of a retinoblastoma tumor. This girl’s 6-year-old sister entertained us all by explaining the meanings of the many lovely words of hope written on the branches of her family’s tree.

The full story is at: <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/in-canada/>



## Working with orphaned children in Nepal

**Ken Woods**



Ken's account begins: 'We spent four days at the children's home. The first day we used a group activity, the 'Tree of Life' with 15 of the younger children; on the second day, we conducted the same activity with the other 15 older children. On the third day, we conducted some group activities and then met with some of the children individually and some in small groups. These were children who the counsellors or staff felt may have had particular problems or children who requested to meet with the counsellors themselves. Ten children had individual sessions. On the fourth day, an interaction was held with members of the children's home staff and also local schoolteachers and members of the home's management committee. Individual meetings were also held with staff members and the international volunteer.'

To read the full story, go to <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/the-tree-of-life/nepal/>

## Re-rooting leadership identities in South Africa

**Rev. Spiwo Xapile and Ariella Tilsen**

In February 2009, we led a week-long narrative leadership workshop in Gugulethu, South Africa, for 13 ministers who are also leaders of their communities. We used the Tree of Life to help participants see, knit together, and then reclaim the richness of their past and present, and to unpack their hopes for the future of their congregations and communities. Using the Tree of Life to explore and bring forth the seeds of each participant's leadership identity proved to be a powerful experience.



Ariella learned about the Tree of Life at a Winnipeg workshop led by David Denborough and Cheryl White, and immediately thought of adapting it to the leadership training that she and Spiwo were planning.

When Spiwo first heard about the Tree of Life, he was a bit concerned about what would happen when participants were asked to identify their roots. A very strong clan orientation, which includes a patriarchal lineage, persists among black South Africans. Yet because of apartheid's harsh and intentional breaking of family bonds, many people grew up (and continue to grow up) knowing their mothers' side, but never getting to know their fathers' side. As a result, a lot of children struggle with identity. This is especially difficult for boys who don't know their fathers' roots. So to talk about roots in black South Africa is to touch a deep wound that has not healed. Even today, many people do not want to talk about their families and their roots.

During the Tree of Life activity, several participants struggled with articulating their own roots. In one case, a participant wanted to draw and name only those roots he wanted to remember—other roots were too painful to recall. Another participant told Ariella that he had been abandoned as a small child and didn't know about his past. So Ariella asked him questions about significant people in his life who helped root and ground him as he grew up. Only then, in re-situating his experience, was he able to begin drawing from the strength and nurturing he received from those people.

Spiwo noticed that several participants, in spite of weak or limited roots—or multiple traumas to those roots—had developed the strength and sturdiness to grow their leadership narratives. They did this by focusing on and privileging whatever nourishment they did receive from others. They acknowledged and claimed the sustenance, care, knowledge, and wisdom they received, and spoke of the specific people and experiences that shaped their values, skills, and accomplishments. In revisiting their roots—and their current achievements—with a fresh sense of pride, they were able to re-root their leadership identities with vigor and power. This, in turn, revitalized each participant's vision for their community, and opened up fresh possibilities and hope.

## Using the Tree of Life in the wake of a cyclone

### Andrew Orenstein

In 2008, Andrew Orenstein and four friends visited Burma soon after the cyclone which swept through the delta region in the south of Burma/Myanmar. The cyclone killed at least 150 000 people, was the worst natural disaster in Burma's history, and possibly the eighth deadliest cyclone of all time. Survivors had often lost family members, and were often left without shelter, food, and clean water.



Andrew and his companions ran training in the Tree of Life methodology for 60 participants from 35 villages in the delta region. A training manual was translated into Burmese, and given to every attendee. At the end of the two days' training, workshop participants said they would take the workshop back to their villages to run not only with children, but all village members.

Andrew concludes with some stories and comments from the

people ' so you can get a feel of what it was like. Not all the stories are "good" or "successes". It is hard to define what a success is in this situation. There was so much suffering that people had experienced in such a short period of time. I thought I would include a cross section of stories. Ones that gave us a feeling of satisfaction that we helped, some funny stories and others that make me feel uncomfortable and a bit powerless. Here they are... At the end of the first day Leah asked what it was like drawing the trees and re-telling them. These are written how we heard them...even if they don't have perfect grammar;



- "I liked sharing my life, it felt very good"
- "I can learn about 60 people in 1 day, we have 1 dream, we turn only to God"
- "Talking about my life and childhood...I'm 68 but I feel 16 again"
- "By seeing these trees, they look like, remind me of Labutta trees, some look very bad and dry" (Labutta was one of the areas affected. This comment was followed by fits of laughter all round as he was teasing them about their trees being ugly). "But I am still encouraged because nobody is giving up"
- "By drawing the picture the lesson was more clear. I want to imitate this teaching technique because in Burma we just tell, tell, tell. This was different"
- "I drew a banana tree. A banana tree dies when the banana's are picked. When banana's are picked it dies but another grows in its place. Just like my grandparents and parents died and future generations grow up. I drew a banana tree and I was reminded of love everywhere"
- "There were 6 steps, each step has a purpose. When I look at all of the steps I see love. That's why I drew 2 trees, like 2 people looking at each other full of love"
- "After this training I can now thank God for the Nargis, otherwise I would not have meet these people from Australia. I also got to try new food supplied from other countries" (talking about aid rations)
- "You are like the gardener. You planted and watered and now beautiful flowers have grown"
- "Forest will withstand strong wind. If we live together we will be strong"

- Some people asked us how we were going to support them. I didn't have an answer. They wanted our help for the future but I didn't know how to answer. One person said "Trees need fertilizer to grow tall, where are we going to get our fertilizer from. Our government won't support us. What will you do to fertilize us?"



These few examples reflect the widespread application of narrative as therapy in a formalised context. They contrast with the personal stories included in this issue of Lifewide Magazine. Nevertheless, it is clear that, in constructing, telling and recording our personal experiences of more mundane events than those requiring therapeutic intervention, we are all seeking a common purpose: to know ourselves and be comfortable in our lives.

## Acknowledgements

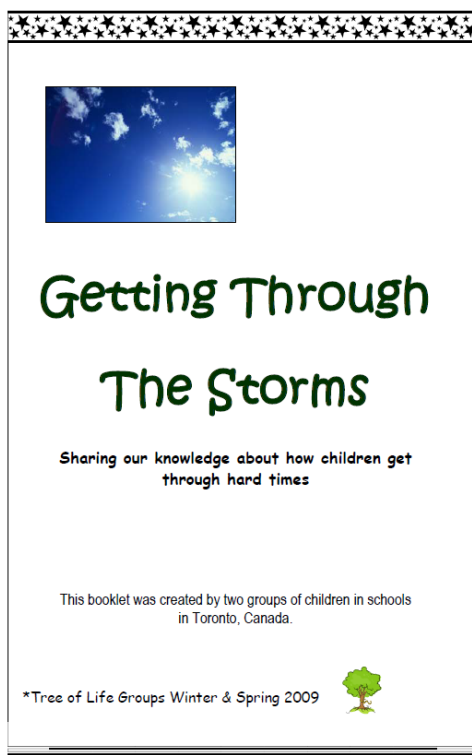
The contents of this article are adapted from the Dulwich Centre website. Further information can be found at <https://dulwichcentre.com.au/>

## Other resources

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us

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### Getting Through the Storms of Violence

A number of us witnessed violence in our homes in the past. Sometimes we could stop the violence...and sometimes we couldn't. We learned that even when we couldn't stop the violence...there were lots of ways that we responded...

#### Protecting our moms

Many of us have seen our moms being hurt. It is upsetting and scary and can make us cry when we see the person we love the most being hurt. For some of us we have fathers who used to live with us who have temper problems. 'My dad almost killed my mom!' 'I remember when my mom was pregnant with my brother that my father was sometimes violent.' 'When I was 6 years old my dad was really drunk and he poked both of my mom's eyes so hard that caused her to have difficulty seeing even today. I yelled at him to 'Stop!' and would shout at him 'Leave her alone!' got in-between him and my mom and tried to push him, but I was so little.'



# The Tree of Life Concept and Practical Exercise

## Nathan B. Weller

The tree of life concept is pretty simple and straightforward. It is a visual metaphor in which a tree represents your life and the various elements that make it up—past, present, and future. [It provides a means of identifying stories that are important to your life and eventually creating a whole of life narrative from the different parts of your life]. By labelling these parts, you not only begin to discover (or perhaps rediscover) aspects of yourself shaped by the past, but you can then begin to actively cultivate your tree to reflect the kind of person you want to be moving forward.

Just as we learned in my last post that the stories of our lives are the events we choose to highlight and contextualize, in this post we will learn how to discover and highlight alternate paths through our past—which in turn create new horizons in our future.

Follow the instructions below to give it a try for yourself.

## The Tree of Life Exercise



The image left is an example of what the tree of life exercise will look like once complete. I was able to complete this rough draft in about an hour. The instructions below will describe how you can create your own.

The first step of course is to draw a tree. However, I should note that—at least for your first draft—it might be helpful to keep it rough. You can always go back later and redraw or touch-up your existing drawing for aesthetics. This round is all about getting the information down.

Next, follow the labeling instructions below. If you can only think of one or two things per section at a time, don't worry about it. The nature of this exercise is that as you complete each step, it unlocks more memories and ideas for other parts. You can skip around and fill things in at any time. The most helpful thing in the beginning is to just write stuff down and see where it takes you. You might be surprised!

### The Compost Heap (Optional—But Highly Recommended!)

Write down anything in your compost heap that would normally go in the other sections described below but which are now things you no longer want to be defined by.

These are often sources of trauma, abuse, cultural standards of normality/beauty/etc. or anything else that shapes

negative thoughts about yourself in your mind. You can write down places, people, problems, experiences. Whatever you need to. I blurred mine out above, but you can see it has several items. Generally, they all have to do with past trauma and damaging relationships I'm trying to let go of. I've found that the idea of a compost heap is an extremely helpful way to think about these things. Especially since many of them are not neatly categorized as "all bad".

There are in fact quite a few life defining lessons I learned through the things that ended up in my compost heap. And like a compost heap is supposed to do, I will eventually break those things down and re-sow the rich parts back into my life. You can do the same with yours.

### The Roots

Write down where you come from on the roots. This can be your home town, state, country, etc. You could also write down the culture you grew up in, a club or organization that shaped your youth, or a parent/guardian.



### **The Ground**

Write down the things you choose to do on a weekly basis on the ground. These should not be things you are forced to do, but rather things you have chosen to do for yourself.

### **The Trunk**

Write your skills and values on the trunk. I chose to write my values starting at the base of the trunk going up. I then transitioned into listing my skills. For me this felt like a natural progression from roots to values to skills.

### **The Branches**

Write down your hopes, dreams, and wishes on the branches. These can be personal, communal, or general to all of mankind. Think both long and short term. Spread them around the various branches.

### **The Leaves**

Write down the names of those who are significant to you in a positive way. Your friends, family, pets, heroes, etc.

### **The Fruits**

Write down the legacies that have been passed on to you. You can begin by looking at the names you just wrote on leaves and thinking about the impact they've had on you and what they've given to you over the years. This can be material, such as an inheritance, but most often this will be attributes such as courage, generosity, kindness, etc. (Tip: if your tree is pretty crowded by this point, perhaps try drawing some baskets of fruit at the base of your tree and label them accordingly there.)

### **The Flowers & Seeds**

Write down the legacies you wish to leave to others on the flowers and seeds. (Tip: again, you may wish to de-clutter your drawing by visualizing saplings, baskets of flowers, etc. on which to write these items down.)

### **Going Further**

After completing this exercise you are no doubt swimming with ideas and possibilities. My best advice is that if an idea has occurred to you that will help you process the things you have uncovered in a positive way, do it! Here are three things that I have chosen to do as a follow up to my initial experience.

### **Journaling**

I've decided to journal about the various elements on my tree. I want to explore the connections between my roots, values, skills, people, etc. in a safe way before sharing it with others in any organized manner. But I do intend to share it with others. And I already know two of the ways in which I plan to.

### **Writing Letters**

Some of the connections are pretty easy for me to determine. I know that I wrote certain values or lessons on my tree and immediately followed them up with the name of a person or group of people. These are the people who have instilled something special in me and I intend to tell them how much that means to me by writing some letters.

### **Meditation Through Art**

I found that the drawing part of this exercise was particularly satisfying and therapeutic in and of itself. I've decided to follow this initial exercise up with some more study sketches of trees followed by a series of paintings and collages that express more than mere labels can. I hope to be able to share these with my friends, family, and community in the future too.

### **Final Thoughts**

Even though I've spent this whole post talking about how great of an exercise this can be, I know how scary it can feel to take the first steps in claiming the storytelling rights over your life. It usually means confronting aspects of our past that we might feel are better left unchallenged. And that's a valid concern.

If you are worried that an exercise like this might stir up a lot of raw emotion or trigger traumatic flashbacks, I would encourage you to complete this exercise with a therapist. Or, at the very least, with a friend or family member who will be there to talk to you and support you through the process.

Regardless of how you choose to complete this exercise, or what personal spins you put on it (which is half the fun!), I'd love to hear how it goes. Feel free to reach out to me about it via any of my social channels, my contact page, or the comments section below. **Published at:** <https://nathanbweller.com/tree-life-simple-exercise-reclaiming-identity-direction-life-story/>

# Social Media and Our Daily Stories

Norman Jackson

*There are currently 2.8 billion social media users worldwide. This means that over a third of the world's population is using some form of social media to communicate. It has already been a year since both Snapchat and Instagram announced the next generation of storytelling: Memories and Stories. These social media channels enable users to not just share the best picture out of their daily experiences; it encourages them to share the full story. Through Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat stories many users channel their creativity to share their day from the moment they wake up, to the moment they go to sleep.*



Image credit: <http://circaedu.com/hemj/how-social-media-changed-the-way-we-communicate/>

We're at the cusp of the visual communication era. Stories creation and consumption is up 842 percent since early 2016, according to consulting firm Block Party. Nearly a billion accounts across Snapchat, Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Messenger now create and watch these vertical, ephemeral slideshows. Facebook chief product officer Chris Cox shows a chart detailing how "the Stories format is on a path to surpass feeds as the primary way people share things with their friends sometime next year."

***The use of Stories is on the rise on social media while news feeds see a decline of usage.***

The repercussions of this medium shift are vast. Users now consider how every moment could be glorified and added to the narrative of their day. Social media platforms are steamrolling their old designs to highlight the camera and people's Stories. And advertisers must rethink their message not as a headline, body text, and link, but as a background, overlays, and a feeling that lingers even if viewers don't click through.

WhatsApp's Stories now have over 450 million daily users. Instagram's have over 300 million. Facebook Messenger's had 70 million in September. And Snapchat as a whole just reached 191 million, about 150 million of which use Stories according to Block Party. With 970 million accounts, it's the format of the future. Block Party calculates that Stories grew 15X faster than feeds from Q2 2016 to Q3 2017. And that doesn't even count Google's new AMP Stories for news, Netflix's Stories for mobile movie previews, and YouTube's new Stories feature.

## Background

'Story' is a concept that was first introduced in the social media by Snapchat, a network entirely based on the short life-span of its shared content. It is an option that allows users to quickly and easily post a picture or a short video of what they are doing. This picture or video can then be viewed by his or her followers or friends for a 24 hour period, depending on the platform. After this window, the content self-destructs. The purpose of this is to give a quick overview of what's happening in someone's life on any given day.

If Snapchat was the first to introduce this option, other popular social media platforms were quick to realize how much users enjoyed the idea, and soon went with it. Instagram, a social network also based on the sharing of pictures and videos, was the first to follow in April 2016. Till now, nothing too surprising was happening. Less than a year later, the alternative SMS and calling application Whatsapp jumped on the bandwagon with its Whatsapp Status. The following month, Facebook Messenger launched Messenger Day. Just a few weeks after that, the main Facebook application itself was on Instagram's heels, rolling out Facebook Stories.

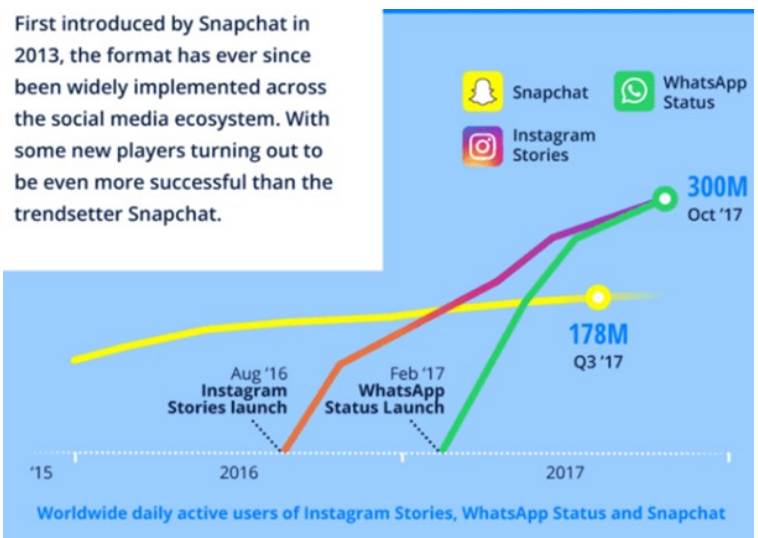


Image credit: <https://sociallysorted.com.au/social-media-stories-story-format/>



Image credit: <https://sociallysorted.com.au/social-media-stories-story-format/>

## Why do people like to share their life stories through social media?

Researchers from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania scanned people's brains using an MRI to try and discover exactly what happens in our minds when we click 'share'. Participants in the study were shown a selection of The New York Times' health articles and asked which ones they'd share based on the headline and abstract. The results of the experiment show that the articles we share are most likely to be ones that provide the potential for self-enhancement and social promotion. The researchers found that our brains are very efficient in quickly deciphering which articles could show us in a positive light or offer social interaction when shared.

But we needn't lament the increasing narcissism of mankind for this is not a new human trait - it's simply playing out in a

different way. The study authors point out that: "Social belonging is a basic human need and motivation, and relationship maintenance has been suggested as a motivator of information sharing." They believe that the results show "sharing is really grounded in very basic human motives and human motivations of creating positive relationships with other people, which is really related to how we evolved as a race.

It's worth pointing out that the study only assessed 80 students aged between 18 and 24, but the results can be considered largely accurate because they predicted which articles would be most widely-shared amongst The New York Times' wider readership.

"Each individual may share for a different specific reason: Somebody might share to make their friend laugh; someone else might share to help their friend achieve a certain goal; another person might share just to have a positive conversation with somebody else," [the researcher says] "What all of these three thoughts have in common is the social common denominator - somebody wants to relate positively to somebody else and that's what we're seeing in the brain activity." So although we do share articles [including stories about ourselves] to make ourselves look good, we also do so to be sociable, and it's no bad thing.

But the use of social media in this way is a double-edged sword for culture, though. While a much more vivid way to share and engender empathy, they also threaten to commodify life. When Instagram launched Stories, Systrom said it was because otherwise you "only get to see the highlights". But he downplayed how a medium for capturing more than the highlights would pressure people around the world to interrupt any beautiful scene or fit of laughter or quiet pause with their camera phone. We went from people shooting and sharing once or a few times a day to constantly. In fact, people plan their activities not just around a picture-perfect destination, but turning their whole journey into success theater.

If Stories are our new favorite tool, we must learn to wield them judiciously. Sometimes a memory is worth more than an audience. When it's right to record, don't get in the way of someone else's experience. And after the Story is shot, return to the moment and save captioning and decoration for down time. Stories are social media bedrock. There's no richer way to share, so they're going to be around for a while. We better learn to gracefully coexist.

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It's all about self-enhancement and social promotion Independent Monday 6 March 2017 11:15

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## Lifelogging – how technology might reshape our story telling

Between Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, whether people know it or not most are already well-immersed into the rising trend of lifelogging. Once explored by only an elite few, the practice of lifelogging refers, quite literally, to logging or registering your daily life with technical tools and services.

When lifelogging first emerged in the 1980s, pioneers wore bulky heads-up-displays, computer backpacks and even computerized shoes, capturing large portions of their lives as physiological data, photos and videos.

With the onset of social networks centered on status updates and photo sharing, the practice of recording and tracking life has gone mainstream. Furthermore, self-tracking health devices have made lifelogging an essential practice for monitoring health and exercise with popular devices and applications like Runkeeper and Nike Fitbit. In 2013, lifelogging hit another milestone with the launch of self-tracking hardware devices like Google Glass and Memoto's wearable, automatic camera.

To explore the “lifelogging” phenomenon and the shift in how people are remembering and capturing their lives, the creators of Memoto recently launched a documentary about the lifelogging movement. The documentary includes interviews with experts in the field like Steve Mann and Gordon Bell, along with the technical lead of Google Glass — exploring the past, present and future of lifelogging.



VIDEO <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6parXjBeU>



<http://www.katinamichael.com/opinion/2015/4/1/wearables-and-lifelogging-the-socioethical-implications>



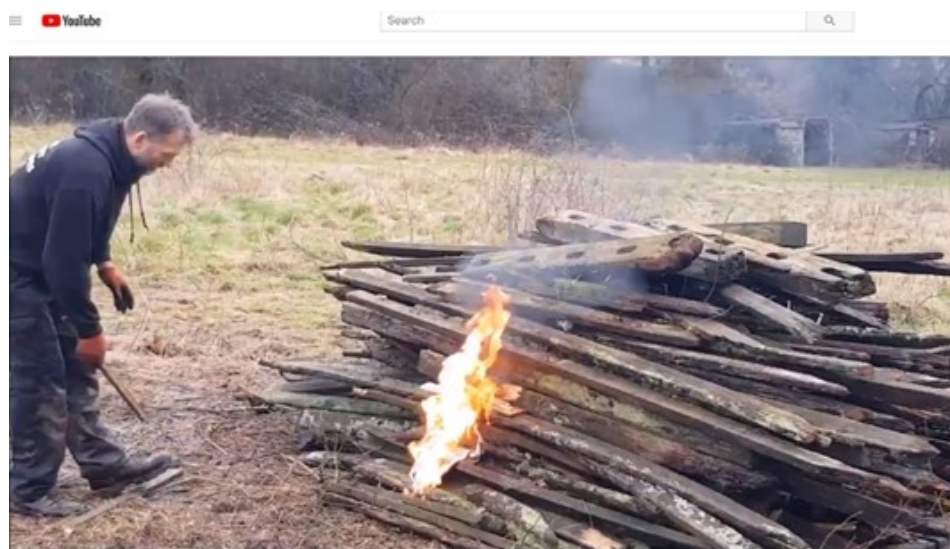
## Stories about places in our life

### Norman Jackson

Places are important to us and one of the sorts of life stories we tell is about the places we grew up or lived in or the places we visit on holiday. When we strike up a conversation with someone for the first time, where we have come from is often a topic of conversation and an initial way we share our life. In my introduction to the magazine I talked about visiting my mother in Australia and how that particular place and experience affected me.

The place we inhabit everyday is very personal to us: it provides us with a sense of belonging. Our home is filled with things that are familiar and have meaning to us – photographs, pictures, books, furniture, carpets, the implements we use, the toys of our children and much more. If we are fortunate to have a garden that also is place in our life that has meaning. In this short article I want to talk about a story-making project I began earlier this year through which I have tried to create movies about the life in my garden. Technology was the key enabling factor: I bought myself a Samsung Galaxy S8 mobile phone with a fantastic camera which was so easy to use that I had no excuses but to use it. The motivation came from a desire to try to understand the ecology of my garden and I thought by making movies about the living things in my garden I would learn more about the way ecology worked. Most life stories are created after the event, through retrospective reflection. But telling a story through the making of a movie, involves prospectively seeking the elements that will make up the story to film, and then assembling and editing them to make a particular story.

My garden movie making project began in March 2018. My wife and I had decided to replace a fence that had been part of our garden for the last 50 years. I was involved in a conversation on the #creativeHE Forum about creativity in the making and I thought I would make a movie about its demise. So over the few days it took to demolish, burn and reconstruct I filmed each element of the story and then edited and connected the clips using windows movie maker adding some music that I felt reflected the sadness and hope in the symbolism of destroying and then rebuilding something that meant something to me. Quite honestly, I was taken back by the emotional impact the story had on me and of how I felt about the story I had created and shared through the movie which I posted on YouTube.

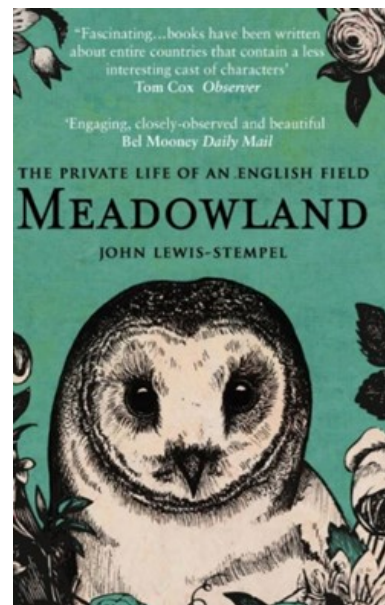


#### Ode to my fence

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPIT5GHnZF8&t=25s>


It sounds crazy but I felt I had preserved the memory of the existence of this old dilapidated fence in this landscape. In this film and story I had honoured the service it had given me and previous owners. I felt something about this place I had not felt before and the combination of imagery, sounds and story assumed almost spiritual meaning. It made me realise that by creating a story in this way I was engaging in a project for my own creative self-expression. I was seeking and trying to create new value from the raw materials of my life – the environment that is my home in the process I was enhancing my own wellbeing.

By mid April we were enjoying some warm weather and spring was arriving fast. For an Englishman spring is the most important and uplifting time of the year: full of hope and renewal. I started reading a book called 'The private Life of an English Field MEADOWLAND by John Lewis-Stempel. It's a beautifully written book and I imagined the pleasure John gained from experiencing the everyday life of his field and then share his understandings through his writings. I thought I might try something similar in a blog in which I would record my observations and interactions with my garden. I had also discovered a wonderful citizens science project led by Cornell University, which aims to encourage ordinary people like me to literally map my back yard. Their mapping tool inspired me to begin creating a habitat map of my own back yard and to invest time and energy in understanding it. These things came together to create the conditions within which my garden story telling project emerged and over the next 4 months I made twenty, 2 to 4 minute movies of the unfolding story of my garden and its inhabitants.



You can see these movies and read about my stories on my Garden Notes blog..

<http://www.norman.jackson.co.uk/creativehe>




## Autumn is coming

10/9/2018

0 Comments

Actually when I look back at my photos it has been coming since early September when the dogwood leaves started to turn red. 6 weeks on and the dogwood has lost most of its leaves leaving the red stalks. We have a red maple rising above the dogwood and the scene is so beautiful that I got out my paints.

Astronomically autumn starts at the equinox (September 23) but meteorologically it starts September 1st so we are nearly 6 weeks into it. I decided to record the changes in my photos throughout the autumn so I will keep adding to my movie as we move through October and November.



## Garden Notes

My garden keeps me busy but it gives me a lot of pleasure. It enables me to express myself creatively and draws my attention to the beauty and ecology of life. In this blog I am telling the story of a year in the life of my garden through photos, movies, paintings and other

## Life Stories & Narratives: a Synthesis

Jenny Willis, Executive Editor

### The 'what' and 'why' of narratives

In his introduction to this edition of Lifewide Education magazine, Norman Jackson rightly describes our lives as 'a multitude of stories', but why do some of these remain prominent in our memories whilst others fade or disappear? The more prominent our stories become, the more they influence our perceptions of who we are and who we might continue to become.

Russ Law reminds us that we all have different recollections of a common event, and we see this in Harry Musckett's accounts of the events Norman experienced with him. Can there be any single reality in the stories we tell? A little bit of imagination here and there, perhaps informed by the benefit of hindsight, can fundamentally change the realities in the story and of our very existence. Already, we are beginning to understand the complexity of narratives based on lived experience.

Moving away from the 'what' of the story to its 'why', this is also deceptively simple. Norman triggered the idea for this edition by his moving account of helping a friend record her life before she became incapable of doing so because she is rapidly losing her memory. On the surface, she did this in order to leave something personal for her children to remember her by. But what is it in us that makes us feel a need to tell our story in the way we want it to be told and to leave behind something that shows people in future that we were a living, thinking, caring person just like you. This is one of the issues I explore in my own article about researching my genealogy, and Paul Klein's mother's lifelong 'obsession' with documenting her whole life provides a wonderful example of this phenomenon. Not only did she record events and keep evidence: she also analysed and catalogued her material with a view to its future use by people who would not know how it all fitted together to make a coherent whole.

Family is a key theme in every one of the stories. Some look back to their relationships with parents and siblings; others look forward to the next generation. Chrissi Nerantzi straddles the generations as she reaches out to her children as a means of coping emotionally with her father's illness.

As therapists, Maja Jankowska and Serena Weerakoon apply the principles inherent in story telling to help individuals deal with traumatic life events, extending the notion of communion to a more altruistic end. They reflect the theoretical principles described in the articles by Julie Beck, Dan McAdams and Kate McLane then, later, of the Dulwich Centre and the Tree of Life. Eamon sets out with an explicit aim of helping mental health professionals and fellow service users to understand the lived experience of mental illness.

"THERE IS NO  
GREATER AGONY  
THAN BEARING AN  
UNTOLD STORY  
INSIDE YOU."

MAYA ANGELOU



Maja and Norman highlight the dynamism of our stories, which, although retrospective accounts, enable us to effect forward change in our lives. Agency is another (sometimes) implicit element in our need to tell the story and learn more about ourselves. Hence we get the sense that, as Harry recounts difficult events from his childhood, he is gaining redemption and coming to terms with his erstwhile self. In fact, all of the stories included here have positive learning outcomes, none ends on a permanent note of negativity: Harry and Maja overcome 'bad' events, whilst Chrissi and Harry both find catharsis through channelling their pain into creativity.

<http://thestorytelleragency.com/goodreads/50-best-quotes-for-storytelling>

The ecologist in me sees the why question as a complex, multi-dimensional and relational phenomenon – we create and tell our stories for many different reasons and they serve many purposes during our lifetime. We are adept at drawing on them for motivation and inspiration. We are good at using them to relate and empathise with others when a suitable moment emerges in a conversation. They are particularly valuable in helping us sustain and develop the relationships we have developed with family and close friends. In this way they are profoundly important to an ecological concept of humanity. We use them to illustrate to the people we are nurturing, some profound truth or insight we have discovered through the ups and downs of life. We construct them to help us make sense of our own reflections and create memorable thoughts that we can share. We commandeer them to promote ourselves and, like a politician, we spin them to show ourselves in a favourable light. We use them to heal ourselves and to create our sense of wellbeing and spirituality, to come to terms with our disappointments and regrets, and we make use of them to be thankful for the experience of living the life we have been so fortunate to have had. And when we choose to record our stories using a particular medium we move our story from our imagination to some new artefact which we have made and in this act we extend our creativity.

I began my article by talking about identity and my personal quest to establish one. I had not, at the time, read Dan McAdams' article, but was interested to find parallels between my random thoughts and the growing field of narrative identity. After compiling LWM#21, I thought it would be fascinating to analyse each of the story articles against the 7 constructs Dan proposes. Table 1 is my personal interpretation – readers might draw their own and see how well agree.

Table1, Applying McAdams' constructs of narrative identity to the stories in LWM#21

Constructs Narrative Identity	Agency Effect change	Communion Interperson- al connec- tion	Redemp- tion Bad leads to good	Contamina- tion Event turns bad	Meaning making Learn from event	Exploratory Self- exploration	Coherent positive Resolution, closure
Paul Kleiman							
Chrissi Nerantzi							
Harry Muskett							
Jenny Willis							
Russ Law							
Maja Jan-kowska							
Eamon Kugenieks							
Serena Weerakoon							
Dulwich Centre							
Tree of Life							
Norman Jackson							

Colour-coding for each of the 7 constructs enables us to visualise the relative significance of each factor (vertical reading) and of how factors co-exist (horizontal reading).

According to this analysis, meaning -making is found in each of our narratives. In other words, it confirms that by telling a story, , we are seeking, whether implicitly or explicitly, to understand and come to terms with a situation.

Communion with others is also common to all stories, with the teller either drawing on others in the narrative or wanting to share the narrative with others. This relates to the narrator's aim of self-exploration, which is an element of most of these narratives and it relates to the social nature and relatedness of being human.



Coherent resolution may be an intended or unintended outcome of the narrative process. I have suggested this is a feature of most of our stories. Resolution may involve effecting change or derive simply from acceptance of the circumstances once events have been fully understood. My interpretation of the stories finds change present in half of the narratives.

While we read of some negative events, they are turned into positive experiences, but we do not have any examples of 'contamination', though some readers might view the death of Harry's scrumping accomplice as one.

Turning to a horizontal reading of Table 1, we see that multiple constructs coexist within a narrative, and that this is both when narratives are for personal use, and when narratives form part of a therapeutic approach. We do, however, note one significant difference between 'everyday' story telling and narrative therapy: the latter examples all incorporate an expectation that a change in behaviour will be effected. This justifies the adoption of such therapy.

## The 'how' of narratives

In his invitation to offer a narrative, Norman asked writers to include how they went about their story telling, considering especially which technologies are used.

Our examples include the full range, from traditional scrap-booking by Paul Klein's mother through to use of the latest technologies to produce illustrated books (Chrissi, Harry, Norman and myself). In between, we all make use of today's equivalent of pen and paper, the computer and its enabling software, cameras, and use technologies to communicate with our collaborators. So far might have been predicted.

What interests me, though, is less the technology than the medium of narratives. Contributors have not confined themselves to prose narrative: Chrissi and Maja include poetry and visual art, all examples of how emotional pain is directed into creating artefacts which both help soothe their anguish and produce works of art that inspire and move others. This brings in the idea that the very act of creating a story, in whatever medium is being used, is an act of creative self-expression that again taps into the fundamental essence of what it means to be human.

But the medium also takes me back to my question of why we need to leave something to show we have existed. Harry plans to publish his narratives in Lulu; Norman and I have published our family stories; Eamon has produced a book on his experiences; Chrissi hopes to create an illustrated record. With the exception of Eamon, who specifically wanted to help practitioners and service users understand more about mental illness, these permanent records are not for public distribution. They are for a select family audience, including future generations. Conversely, the trees produced in the process of therapy are not designed to be artefacts, though they may become such; rather, they are tools in the process of recovery. And we must not lose sight, here, of that most fundamental medium of all: dialogue. Narrative is, by definition, a conversation, be it with ourselves or with others.

This intimate collection of narratives offers much food for thought. I, for one, will continue to reflect on these stories that are full of deep personal meaning and learn from the events and experiences shared. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this moving and enlightening edition.

**INVITATION THE READERS – if you have been inspired by any of the stories in this issue, and you would like to share your own story please get in touch with Norman and we will consider the possibility of adding your story to this collection.**



## Michael Eraut Obituary

### Neil Munro

**Michael Eraut was director of the Institute for Continuing and Professional Education at Sussex University from 1986-1991.**

My friend and mentor Michael Eraut, who has died aged 77, was a renowned professor of education at Sussex University. His research into learning in the workplace, non-formal learning and professional

development continues to have global influence across a range of professions.

Michael's early work in educational technology and curriculum development at the university's Centre for Educational Technology, which he helped develop, soon gained international acclaim and brought invitations to do consultancy work in many countries. He spent the rest of his academic career at Sussex, including six years as director of the Institute for Continuing and Professional Education (1986-91). His best-known book, *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence* (1994), remains a seminal text in the field. He was latterly involved in the evolution of the new Sussex and Brighton Medical School.

I first met him as a mid-career medical practitioner studying for a doctorate at Sussex. Like many others I benefited from his academic prowess and intellectual incisiveness, and he will also be remembered for his insights and personal warmth.

Michael was born in Rawalpindi, then in British India, now Pakistan, while his father, Ruarc Eraut, was a lieutenant colonel serving with the British army. His mother, Frances (nee Hurst), was a Froebel-trained teacher, and significantly guided his early education.

He first came to the UK with his family in 1947 on the Empire Windrush, which started the Caribbean run the following year. He was a scholar at Winchester college, where he came to love classical music and Russian literature, and also won prizes for athletics and gymnastics. In 1959 he won a scholarship to Trinity Hall, Cambridge, to read natural sciences. Through a shared love of music he met Cynthia Wynne, who was reading classics at Girton College and who played the violin. They married in 1964.

He completed his PhD in organic chemistry at Cambridge in 1965. During this time his interest in teaching and learning emerged, when he was asked to supervise some deaf undergraduates. While this experience contributed to his lifelong studies in education, his scientific background enabled him to interact with a range of scientists in later years. After two years as a Fulbright scholar at the University of Illinois, Chicago, Michael joined Sussex in 1967.

He retired in 2006, and did consultancy work for Surrey University, the Royal College of Surgeons of England and the Australian National University.

He retained an interest in music and sport all his life, and also loved walking on the Sussex Downs near his home in Lewes.

He is survived by Cynthia, their sons, Patrick and Christopher, grandchildren, Ayane and Mishka, and by his brother, Dennis.

***Published in the Guardian November 22<sup>nd</sup> 2018***

***Published with the approval of the author & Cynthia***

## My Tribute to Michael

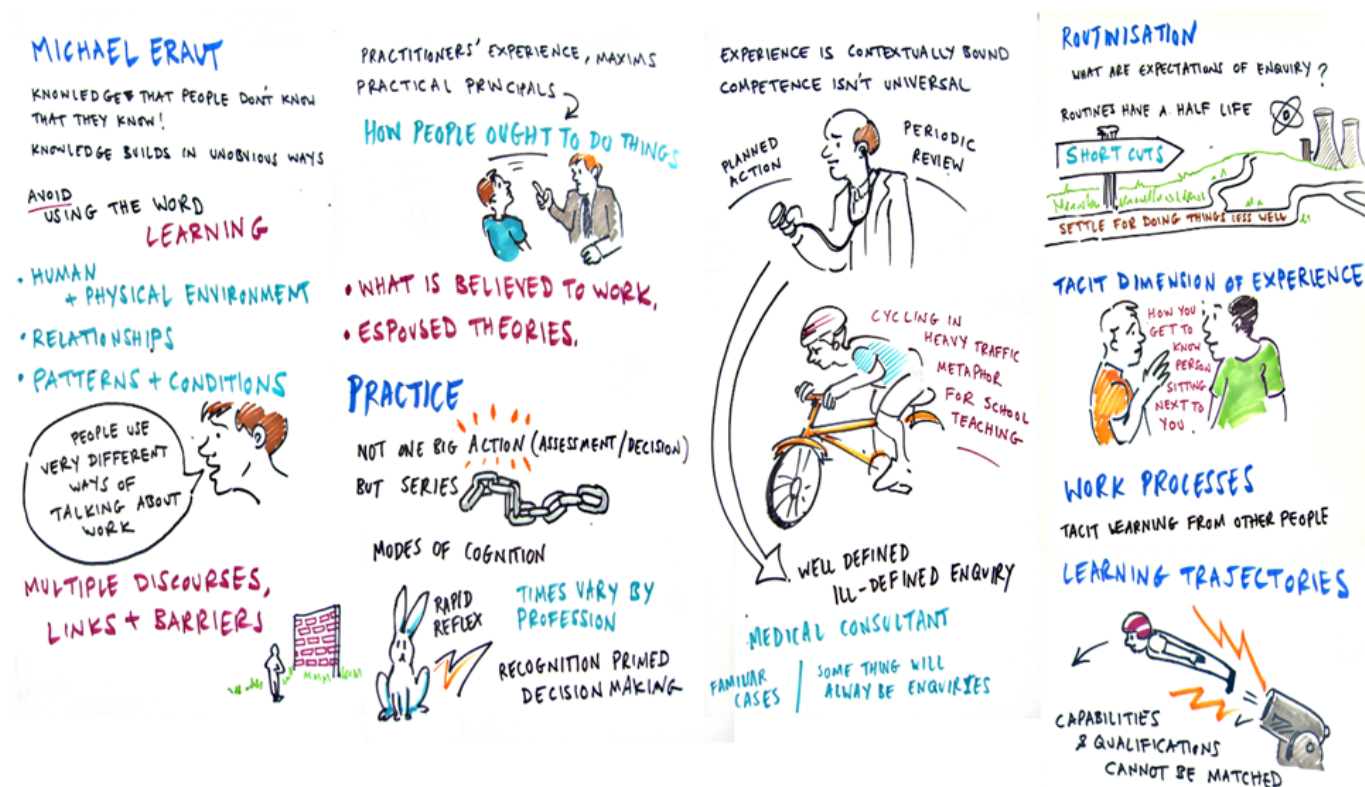
I was very sad to hear the news that Michael had died. He had been a good friend to me and to the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTre) at the University of Surrey, when I had been its Director. One of our educational concerns was the development of students as novice professionals, as they participated in their year long placements, and their part-time jobs. His research into how early career professionals learned in the work environment, provided a much needed evidence base on which to develop our educational thinking and practices. He cared a lot about making his scholarship and research available and accessible to higher education practitioners so that it might benefit students in their own professional development. He contributed to our publications, our research and our conferences (right). Through his contributions he enabled the SCEPTre team to appreciate the particularities of learning and developing in the work environment and in this way helped us develop our concept of lifewide learning and a lifewide curriculum.



In 2010 SCEPTre made a 'Lifetime of Learning and Achievement' award to Michael in recognition of his contributions to this important field of educational research and practice. We will celebrate Michael's contributions in a future issue of Lifewide Magazine, which we will devote to the ecology of learning and practice in the work environment.

**Norman Jackson**  
Commissioning Editor

This image is a representation of a talk that Michael gave at SCEPTre



**Editor:** Lifewide Education & Creative Academic have found a new partner in Canada. The Centre for Imagination in Research, Culture and Education (CIRCE) which is based at Simon Fraser University. Dr Gillian Judson, who Directs the Centre, is a member of the Lifewide Community. CIRCE shares the same educational values that we hold and we look forward to working with the Centre in the coming years.




## The Centre for Imagination in Research, Culture, and Education (CIRCE)

Executive Director Dr. Gillian Judson (gcj@sfu.ca)  
Academic Director Dr. Mark Fettes (mtfettes@sfu.ca)

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**FACULTY OF  
EDUCATION**



*celebrating and supporting  
imagination, creativity,  
innovation*

### What is CIRCE?

**CIRCE** [sur-see] is an international network of researchers, educators and other practitioners who see imagination as a key to making this world a better place to live in. Or, to put it another way, we believe that a lively and well-nourished imagination is needed for living well. To advocate attention to the imagination, to produce a variety of practical aids to stimulating and developing imaginations, and to create and enlarge the spaces where imagination can flourish, is our hope and our mission.

### Support CIRCE

Would you like to **sponsor** CIRCE and be formally affiliated with an international organization that champions imagination, creativity, and innovation?

Would you like to **donate** to a grassroots movement working to create spaces where imagination can flourish in schools, communities and workplaces?

Would you like to **fund imaginative projects and programs** involving educators, cultural workers, researchers, children and communities worldwide?

(DONATIONS to CIRCE are tax deductible).

### To begin with a story...

The perils and promises of imagination are threaded throughout world literature. As so often, a story may best convey what we mean. Circe, you may recall, is a goddess or enchantress in the *Odyssey*, one of the most ancient tales of Western culture, originally passed on from bard to bard long before there were tools to write it down. Circe appears first as a figure of menace and darkness. When men offend her, she transforms them into wild beasts. Odysseus, the hero of the story, must confront her to win the release of half of his crew who have been turned into pigs for their gluttonous behaviour.

Fortunately, Odysseus was counselled by Hermes, the messenger of the gods. Armed with sword and wits, along with a magical herb provided by Hermes, Odysseus becomes Circe's lover and protégé. It is with her help that he later visits the land of the dead and receives the advice he needs to eventually make it home. Hermes' intervention is crucial. Without the help of this god of travellers and traders, of interpreters and tricksters, Circe would remain Odysseus' enemy, his men would remain swine, and Odysseus himself would continue to wander, lost and alone.

It is his embrace of imagination in these various guises that lets Circe reveal her qualities of magnanimity, creativity, and wisdom.





### Building better worlds

We share Maxine Greene's conviction that imaginative development is crucial to the building of societies characterized by empathy and solidarity, societies genuinely inclusive of people from different backgrounds, of different abilities, and with different ways of seeing the world. At the same time, we recognize that imagination can be deeply marked by people's fears and antipathies. To work with imagination is, like Circe, to work with darkness as well as light.

Imagination is, likewise, deeply interwoven in the relationships between human beings and the rest of the living world. The ecological crisis that threatens societies worldwide is the product, in part, of imagining the Earth as a limitless resource, and the species with whom we share it as little more than raw materials. To heal the planet, we need to find different images and metaphors to guide our actions.

This is the work of educators, but also of poets and artists, scientists and business leaders, architects and designers, playwrights and novelists, politicians and policymakers. In the end, it is the work of our communities and societies.

### CIRCE in the schools

CIRCE continues to be directly engaged with schools in more than a dozen countries. The **Imaginative Schools Network (ISN)** is a diverse and international professional learning community that provides space for all educators to grow their imaginative practice. **Learning in Depth (LiD)** is a program that engages children in the long-term study of a single topic alongside the regular curriculum. Our **Imaginative Leadership Learning Community** connects educational leaders worldwide in dialogue and shared learning around how imagination and creativity can impact school leadership and school culture in positive ways.

At our home institution, SFU, CIRCE continues to be involved in **Degree Programs in Imaginative Education**, including a graduate diploma, an online graduate certificate, and Masters of Education (MEd) programs (focusing on curriculum and imaginative leadership). Graduates from the M.Ed. are invited to remain involved through the **imaginED Mentoring Program**, enabling them to deepen their knowledge of imaginative practice and share their knowledge with other educators.

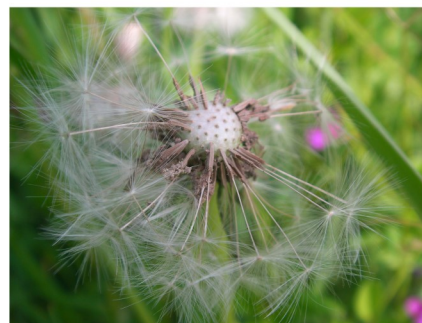
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### CIRCE worldwide

CIRCE began as an international group of educators drawn to the work of Kieran Egan, a professor at Simon Fraser University (SFU). Egan's books portray children as energetically imaginative thinkers and learners, and argue that teachers should make that understanding central to their work in schools. Under the label of "Imaginative Education," Egan's work continues to inspire a range of CIRCE's activities, for learners of all ages from preschool to postsecondary.

Today, CIRCE's members come from scores of countries around the world, and our sources of inspiration are equally diverse. Current educational foci include Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM), Ecological & Place-Based Education, Museum Education, and Learning Technologies. We are interested in creativity and leadership in all domains, and in the intertwining of culture, language, history and land in the shaping of beliefs and worldviews. Throughout education and across other fields and disciplines, we see storytelling and other imaginative and arts-based approaches to understanding as vitally important to our teaching, learning and research.

CIRCE's active members are part of the **CIRCE Academic Council / Research Network**, which connects institutions worldwide for the collaborative exploration of imagination in a range of contexts. We are active developing **CIRCE OnLine Learning Communities** to facilitate access to knowledge and resources related to CIRCE's mission. We host monthly Twitter chats, a podcast series and ongoing conversations in online forums. Our website (circesfu.ca) and blog (educationthatinspires.ca) provide teachers around the world with a wide range of free resources for imaginative cross-curricular teaching (K-12 to post-secondary). We are committed to the ongoing development of free resources and informal learning opportunities for professionals, parents, and the public at large.



**When it was over, Rudolph and  
Santa reflected on a very busy day**



**Wishing all lifewiders & creative academics  
a happy & creative Christmas & New Year**

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