

A LIGHT IN THE MIST

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...the very act of storytelling,
of arranging memory and invention
according to the structure of narrative,
is by definition holy....

Telling our stories is what saves us;
the story is enough.

—James Carroll

An American Requiem

Throughout all ages and cultures, man has been impressed with the power of story. In this issue we explore the healing power of stories from multiple perspectives—from scholarly storyteller Robert Coles to well-known novelists Virginia Woolf and Isabel Allende. We are reminded of the healing power of poetry, of plays, of myth and of memoir.

We suggest that illness may be illumined by placing it in the larger context of one's personal story or odyssey; that loss may be softened by the process of immortalizing loved ones on paper. Even organizations may be revitalized and renewed by chronicling the stories which illustrate their core values.

Finally, we urge you, our readers, to take pen in hand and write your own story. For your story holds a unique gift for the world and those you love. Each of us has a story to tell—a story that can heal us as well as others.

Let us begin today.

—KS

AN EXCERPT FROM
WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING
BY LOUISE DESALVO

What You Can Do Now

Start writing. Write by hand. In a beautiful notebook you buy expressly for this purpose or make for yourself, or on whatever you have handy. Notecards, say.

Or write on a typewriter or on a computer—but print what you write so you can touch it, see it, read it.

Write for about twenty minutes a day. But write more if you want, or less. Try not to censor yourself. But if you're not ready to write about something, don't, yet; you will when you're ready.

Write what you need to write or want to write. Or write what you don't want to write.

Write what troubles you or what delights you. Can you link these feelings to events in your life? Write what you see, smell, taste, touch.

Write quickly if you choose, or write slowly and deliberately.

Write in long elegant sentences with lots of commas and semi-colons (like William Faulkner). Or in short, choppy sentences (like Ernest Hemingway). However you write is fine.

Write without knowing what will be next. Write to surprise yourself. Or write and ponder and write and ponder some more.

Write outside or inside. Write leaning against a rock, a pad on your knees, or write at the kitchen table late at night after a long day's work.

Write in the morning or in the afternoon or in the middle of the night. Write when you're feeling rested or when you're exhausted after a long day's work.

Write when you're sick or when you're well. When all's serene or when it's chaotic.

Write lying on a sofa or propped up in bed or in the bathtub. Write in a library or on a subway or a bus or in a car sitting in traffic (like Isabel Allende did when writing her story "Two Words").

Save everything you write in a safe place. Read it, or don't. At first, it's probably best not to show your writing to anyone. Writing only for yourself will let you write more freely.

*Begin
today...*

THERE IS A VITALITY, A LIFE FORCE,
AN ENERGY, A QUICKENING THAT IS
TRANSLATED THROUGH YOU INTO ACTION.
AND BECAUSE THERE IS ONLY ONE OF YOU
IN ALL TIME, THIS EXPRESSION IS UNIQUE.
AND IF YOU BLOCK IT, IT WILL NEVER EXIST
THROUGH ANY OTHER MEDIUM...
THE WORLD WILL NOT HAVE IT.
IT IS NOT YOUR BUSINESS TO DETERMINE
HOW GOOD IT IS, NOR HOW VALUABLE,
NOR HOW IT COMPARES WITH OTHER
EXPRESSIONS. IT IS YOUR BUSINESS TO KEEP IT
YOURS CLEARLY AND DIRECTLY,
TO KEEP THE CHANNEL OPEN.

Martha Graham

THE STORY CURE

No one attests to the healing power of story more eloquently than child psychiatrist and Harvard professor Robert Coles.

In fictional and autobiographical narratives alike, Coles finds the *reservoirs of wisdom* his parents first pointed out to him in the novels of such writers as George Eliot, Dickens, Tolstoy and Faulkner. The psychoanalytic tradition of the *talking cure* becomes for Coles the *story cure*, wherein the incidents of our lives, in all of their complexity and originality, serve as the ground for transformation and personal redemption.

We at Healing Environments have been longstanding fans of Dr. Coles, heartened by the compassionate nature of his psychological inquiry and by his abiding faith in human character. Thus, when we came across a video featuring several of Coles' famous Harvard lectures, we passed it around the editorial board, savoring and delighting in it as though it were the latest Harry Potter release. What follows are Kate, Traci and Sam's reflections on the stories from this videotape that touched them the most.

—DA

It comes as no surprise to me that Robert Coles has been called a secular saint. When I watched his video I was struck by his humility, his integrity, and his authenticity. No wonder he is held in reverence by his Harvard students. What an antidote to the aloofness of academic life!

Another word that comes to mind is accessibility. Robert Coles sees life as a level playing field. Each of us has a story to tell and each of our stories is of equal merit. The little six-year-old Ruby has as much to teach us as the erudite ivy league professor. The seeming simplicity of the stories he recounts belies the weight of their truth. They could almost be called secular sermons.

Twelve years ago, when I was writing an annotated bibliography for *Commonweal*, I reviewed *The Doctor Stories* with its introduction by Robert Coles. I felt I had found a kindred spirit in his sharing of his personal odyssey. While in medical training he had read and been inspired by Thomas Merton. So inspired that he drove night and day to meet him at his monastery.

I, too, had been inspired by Merton. And so I dared to write the Harvard professor a personal note. Never did I dream that he would find the time to reply, adding that he hoped to meet one day.

When asked to write of the story which touched me the most deeply, I would have to say it was something he recounted in his book *The Call of Stories*. One of the groups of suffering children with whom Coles once worked was comprised of the young polio

victims of the nineteen fifties.

He was sent to counsel a young boy who had just learned that he was to spend the rest of his life in an iron lung. Morose and despondent (as anyone handed such a “living death sentence” would be) the boy seemed unreachable. Robert Coles left him with a copy of *Huckleberry Finn*. When he returned the boy’s eyes lit up. He had discovered that through the power of story he could live a vicarious and “limitless” life.

—KS

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE CALL OF STORIES
BY ROBERT COLES

I can still remember my father’s words as he tried to tell me, with patient conviction, that novels contain “reservoirs of wisdom,” out of which he and our mother were drinking. A visual image suddenly crossed my mind—books floating like flotsam and jetsam on Houghton’s Pond, near Milton, Massachusetts, where we lived. I never told my father what had appeared to me but he knew its essence by my glazed eyes. He made his pitch anyway: “Your mother and I feel rescued by these books. We read them gratefully. You’ll also be grateful one day to the authors.” Grateful! I was most certainly grateful, seconds later, when I felt my father’s facial stubble on my cheek. No more moral explanation—only that last, Yorkshire-accented “Good night, Bobby,” and my ever-optimistic rejoinder: “See you in the morning.”

from *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, by Robert Coles, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), xii.

I reviewed a video of Robert Coles’ work hoping to become more familiar with his style of teaching and wanting to learn more about this Harvard professor’s acclaimed method of storytelling. Little did I realize the power of one person’s verbal portrayal of a single soundbyte of history. The story that most caught my attention was the story of Ruby. Through his style of storytelling he opens a portal, vividly describing the setting, bringing the listener to the place and time. Many of you may remember the story of a young African-American girl who became the first to become integrated into a white public school during the era of Civil Rights, 1963. The raw emotion and lack of tolerance expressed toward this child on her way to school is unimaginable. It is not the type of pestering abuse that many suffer from their peers during their school years. It is a wild and fierce hatred that accompanies her on her journey to and from school, directed at her by grown adults who do not support her rights as a person.

Dr. Coles tells this child’s story from a perspective of friend and counselor to Ruby during this very time in her life. He goes on to describe the level of police security needed to protect her from the vile demonstrators that line the streets—a virtual security procession that must surround her from home to school every day. The story takes an even more dra-

matic turn when one day Ruby stops in front of her oppressors and begins to talk to them for the first time in three months of this processional journey. The crowd goes wild, pouring forth verbal abuse; the charged energy of the moment creates such a physical reaction that her band of armed security guards reach for their guns. As Dr. Coles tells the story, my heart is at once racing in fear and yet wanting to know more. I am literally on the edge of my seat. Dr. Coles returns to his place as counselor in Ruby’s story and asks her, “Why? Why did you stop today and do that, provoking such a dangerous situation?” Her answer is an incredible testimony to faith and prayer and forgiveness. The reason for Ruby’s change in behavior is that her journey usually began every day near the school, a few blocks away, with a prayer, and that day she had forgotten to say her prayer. Coles asks, “What was your prayer?” Ruby’s prayer is to ask God to forgive the people who are actively demonstrating against her because they do not know what they are doing.

I am so grateful for this story — it stirs something deep in my heart for the many people in my own past who, for whatever reason, couldn’t see beyond their own limitations when seeing me. Ruby’s story of faith, determination and forgiveness seems immense to me. This is a story I wish every student could hear in his or her quest for understanding history and tolerance. It is also a story that speaks to our own current need to continue to practice these qualities. Thank you Dr. Coles for using the power of story to inspire and stir your students.

—TT

FORGIVENESS

Robert Coles stands before his class at Harvard and describes a realization of truth.

In the hospital he watches his mother pass away and move into darkness. Almost immediately after, he thinks of all the paper work that we are all obligated to do. As he rises to leave her, a tender voice objects. I wonder is it that of the attending nurse or is it God?: “Didn’t your mother just pass on? What’s your hurry? Can’t you spend a few minutes with her?”

Was it the nurse, at that moment, or was God speaking to him through her? Why do we rush through life and miss those pivotal moments in our lives? Shall we acknowledge the wonderful process of living or leave it a blank? Awaken.

—SS

Awaken

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE CALL OF STORIES
BY ROBERT COLES

Afterward there was a different kind of silence in the room, for I was thinking about what I’d heard, and he was remembering what he had experienced. Finally he gave me a brief lecture that I would hear in my head many times over the next three decades: “The people who come to see us bring us their stories. They hope they tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is *their story*.” He stopped there, waited for me to speak. But I had nothing to say. I hadn’t quite thought of my patients as storytellers and was letting that settle into my mind.

from *The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination*, by Robert Coles, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989), 7.

TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW,
TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW FOR SURE,
AND ONE OF THEM IS THAT
TO GO ON LIVING I HAVE TO TELL STORIES,
THAT STORIES ARE THE ONE SURE WAY
I KNOW TO TOUCH THE HEART AND
CHANGE THE WORLD.

Dorothy Allison

TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW FOR SURE

A REVIEW OF
THE RIGHT TO WRITE

I will forever be indebted to an anonymous writer in a woman's magazine who once wrote: "The difference between writers and the rest of us is that they simply do it."

I had wanted to be a writer ever since I wrote my first story on my mother's pink note paper at the age of six. Four pages long and entitled "Golden Girl," it told of a rich little girl who ran away.

But my perfectionistic parents impressed on me that one could only become a writer if one held the promise of one day receiving the Pulitzer Prize.

And so I put away my dreams of writing until I was convinced I could help people by sharing my story in *A Light in the Mist*.

Now I owe a second debt of thanks to Julia Cameron, author of *A Right to Write*. In it Julia systematically demythologizes writing—both the process and the product. Like those of us at *A Light in the Mist*, she believes that all of us have a story to tell—a story that can help us, a story that can help others. A story that only we can tell.

All that is required is that we loosen up, get to know ourselves, silence our inner critic (Julia gives us the tools) and find our authentic voice. Above all that we simply do it!

—KS

AN EXERCISE FROM *THE RIGHT TO WRITE*

Connection: Initiation Tool

This is another tool of spiritual companionship, a tool that affords us a deeper sense of personal connection to the journey of our own life. For this tool, you will one more time need to set aside a quiet hour, this time in a gentle private space. You may want to light a candle and cue up some soothing music like Michael Hoppe's album *The Yearning*. You are going to use this hour to connect to a younger you, someone you might think of as Younger Self. Just as you did with your eighty-year-old Older Self, you are going to give this Younger Self the chance to speak to you directly through a personal letter. So set your hand to the page, drop down the well, and let your Younger Self speak to you of its wishes, hopes, thoughts, concerns, and dreams. Do not censor anything your inner youngster has to tell you. Sometimes these letters can provoke strong emotions. Be prepared for that and keep your hand moving across the page. Write for at least a half hour. Take a few deep breaths, then read and absorb what your inner youngster had to say. Your connection to this part of yourself is an important part of your writing life. It's good that we are getting acquainted.

from *The Right to Write: An Invitation and Initiation into the Writing Life*, by Julia Cameron, (New York: J.P. Tarcher, 1999), 98.

A REVIEW OF
WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING

Every new issue of *A Light in the Mist* begins with a trip to the bookstore. In researching the story issue I learned an important lesson. Our local large bookstore chain was laden with books on the benefits of writing, but my favorite small independent bookstore had already done my research for me. One of its books on writing as a way of healing was worth more than an armload of books from its mainstream competition.

Louise DeSalvo's book, *Writing As a Way of Healing*, is a veritable goldmine of references and excerpts attesting to the power of story to heal (see our extensive excerpts from her book in this issue).

We find in it a multitude of stunning examples drawn from the writing of such well-known writers as Virginia Woolf and Isabel Allende. DeSalvo makes these writers both human and accessible and we come away inspired by them to pick up a pen, rather than intimidated by their stature.

DeSalvo also offers valuable advice as to how to go about writing to heal. While warning that such writing must be done with care, DeSalvo strongly urges us to overcome all obstacles to begin. In the inspired section entitled "What You Can Do Now" (see our first page), she systematically addresses all possible reservations until we are left no choice but to begin.

—KS

I became
a writer out of
desperation...
When I was young,
younger than
I am now,
I started to
write about
my own life and
I came to see
that this act
saved my life.

Jamaica Kincaid
MY BROTHER

Isabel Allende

In Isabel Allende's *Paula* (a memoir about her daughter's terminal illness and death), Allende describes how she began writing *House of the Spirits*, the novel that catapulted her to fame.

Not meant to be a work of fiction, intended for publication, the book was written more personally, because of her profound grief.

She started it as a letter to her grandfather when he was nearly one hundred. He was dying in Chile in the Santiago mansion where the novel is set. Allende was raised there but couldn't return to keep her promise to attend him, for she was in exile in Venezuela after the murder of her uncle, the former Chilean president Salvador Allende.

Until she began this "letter" to her grandfather, Allende didn't believe she could be a writer. For she had been trained to think women weren't supposed to be creative. But after learning of his impending death, she needed "to say good-bye" in writing.

...

As the stories poured out, Allende wrote as if in a trance. She felt she was "unwinding a ball of yarn."

That personal letter to her grandfather grew to a five-hundred-page manuscript that Allende carted in a canvas bag everywhere she went. Still, though, she couldn't admit she had begun a novel. That idea "seemed presumptuous."

"Writing *House of the Spirits*," says Allende, "saved my life." She began her career for the purely private motive of expressing her grief, as a form of self-care. Through writing, she said, "the world became more tolerable. Living with myself was more tolerable too."

After Allende's daughter, Paula, lapsed into a coma, apparently because her treatment in a Spanish hospital during an attack of porphyria had been bungled, Allende rarely left her daughter's bedside. Carmen Balcels, her literary agent, sensing Allende's desperation and pain, arrived at the hospital one day, bearing gifts. Dozens of red roses. Nougats from Alicante. An "obscene-looking sausage." And, most important, "a ream of lined yellow paper," which Carmen deposited into Allende's lap.

"My poor Isabel," Balcels said. "Here, take this and write. Unburden your heart; if you don't you are going to die of anguish."

"I can't," Allende protested. She told Balcels that something inside her had "broken," that she felt she'd never write again.

But Balcels commanded Allende to "write a letter to Paula. It will help her know what happened while she was asleep." She told her to write instead of suffering wordlessly, insisting that her friend avail herself of the help that writing had offered her in the past. Balcels knew that without the release of words, Allende's health would be seriously compromised, that she was herself, literally, in mortal danger, for the chance of getting a serious illness in the wake of a family member's serious illness is very high.

And so Allende began writing a letter to her comatose daughter, Paula, to tell her about the life she was missing: "this is how I entertain myself in the empty moments of this nightmare."

"My soul is choking in sand. Sadness is a sterile desert," Allende wrote. "I plunge into these pages in an irrational attempt to overcome my terror. I think that perhaps if I give form to this devastation I shall be able to help you, and myself, and that the meticulous exercise of writing can be our salvation."

The personal letter Allende wrote to Paula soon grew into a more ambitious undertaking

to explain herself and her past and their family history of political oppression and exile to her daughter when she awakened. And to explain it, too, to herself. For although Allende had written of her past fictionally, she hadn't yet taken time to discover her feelings about past events in a way that would allow her to understand and integrate the terrible, ongoing losses she had sustained—of a country, of friends and family through political persecution, of landscape, of language, of cherished personal possessions.

Her daughter's illness impelled her to understand her life differently. "You, Paula," Allende writes, "have given me this silence in which to examine my path through the world, to return to the true and the fantastic pasts, to recover memories others have forgotten, to remember what never happened and what still may happen. Mute, paralyzed, you are my guide....I spend my hours by your side, writing."

Allende describes her work as "therapy." Other people "go to a therapist...to talk about the world and about life and the pain of living. I do it through my writing." (Since Paula's death, though, Allende has begun therapy to help her with her loss.)

Before, Allende believed her past had "little meaning"; "I can see no order to it, no clarity, purpose or path, only a blind journey." After, though, Allende realized her life had been one of perpetual loss that began with the disappearance of her father after a sexual scandal—he was caught wearing women's clothes making love to a man—when she was three. She examines the end of her innocence—how, at age eight, being molested by a fisherman whom the next morning she found dead from a blow on the head had "left a scar" she never before understood.

But throughout her life, painful events had always been muted by the act of storytelling—first, her mother's compensatory stories of "an imaginary world where we were all happy," then, later, her own.

Though Allende could not save her daughter—she died a year later in Allende's arms—giving form to her pain allowed Allende to feel her despair, allowed her to connect it to the events in her life that occasioned it, even as it kept her despondency manageable.

"I had a choice," Allende says. "Was I going to commit suicide?...Or was I going to write a book that would heal me....I went on writing because I could not stop. I could not let anger destroy me." So, through writing Allende chose to live; through the act of writing, she began to integrate this and other traumatic experiences into her life. She believed, too, that there was a lesson in Paula's dying that she learned as she wrote: the virtues of "patience, courage, resignation, dignity in the face of death."

"To lose Chile and all of my past because of the military coup and being forced into exile pushed me to write *The House of the Spirits*." Losing her political innocence, becoming aware of "the disappeared, the tortured, the dead, the brutal repression throughout Latin America, impelled me to write *Of Love and Shadows*." And losing her daughter impelled Allende to write *Paula*. Writing, though, for Allende, "is a way of recovering what is lost." Though all Allende's writing comes from painful, deep, long-standing emotion, she says "the process of writing even if the theme is heavy is wonderful."

Allende's work show how creative writers use writing as a way of healing, of transforming despair into understanding and (in time) acceptance. It shows how writing that springs from intensely personal motives can be useful to others. For loss is a universal human experience, something we all must learn to deal with. Sharing our stories of loss, and accepting loss as a common feature of life, Allende says, helps us "enjoy the good moments all the more."

AN EXCERPT FROM
WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING
BY LOUISE DESALVO

Virginia Woolf

When Virginia Woolf contemplated the literary works she had created, she realized that in writing each she had tried to recover something or someone she had lost. Using the term *novel* for her creations, she realized, was inadequate. Instead, she believed each of her works, more properly, should be termed *elegy*—a lamentation for the dead.

In writing *Jacob's Room*, her third novel, in which she discovered her authentic narrative voice, she based Jacob, her central character, upon her brother Thoby, who, after a trip to Greece, died young from typhoid fever incorrectly diagnosed as malaria. To inspire her, and to record the source of her art, she copied into her notebook the last line of Catullus's elegy for his dead brother, "Ave Atque Vale" ("Hail and Farewell"), and then wrote the words "Julian Thoby Stephen 1881-1906."

As she worked, though, the novel became a remembrance, too, for all the young men of her brother's generation who died during World War I, a fate that Thoby Stephen was spared. For in her novel, Woolf imagines that Thoby/Jacob has died fighting for his country. Through writing *Jacob's Room* to honor her brother and lament his death, Woolf also created a profound work of cultural criticism, one that denounced war and mourned a generation of promising young men who had been eradicated.

AN EXCERPT FROM
JACOB'S ROOM
BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

Jacob's room had a round table and two low chairs. There were yellow flags in a jar on the mantelpiece; a photograph of his mother; cards from societies with little raised crescents, coats or arms, and initials; notes and pipes; on the table lay paper ruled with a red margin—an essay, no doubt—"Does History consist of the Biographies of Great Men?" There were books enough; very few French books; but then any one who's worth anything reads just what he likes, as the mood takes him with extravagant enthusiasm. Lives of the Duke of Wellington, for example; Spinoza; the works of Dickens; the *Faery Queen*; a Greek dictionary with the petals of poppies pressed to silk between the pages; all the Elizabethans. His slippers were incredibly shabby, like boats burnt to the water's rim.

from *Jacob's Room*, by Virginia Woolf, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1950), 38.

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE INTRODUCTION TO
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE
BY JULIA BRIGGS

To *the Lighthouse*, then, provided a form of therapy in which she came to terms with her mother's loss by deliberately recalling her presence in a portrait that, according to her sister Vanessa, was wonderfully lifelike (Vanessa was herself a painter and something of her practice, though little of her personality, may be glimpsed in Lily Briscoe):

you have given a portrait of mother which is more like her to me than anything I could ever have conceived of as possible. It is almost painful to have her so raised from the dead. You have made one feel the extraordinary beauty of her character, which must be the most difficult thing in the world to do. It was like meeting her again with oneself grown up and on equal terms...as far as portrait painting goes you seem to me a supreme artist.

(*The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1923-8, 1977)

The pain of that loss, vicariously experienced by Lily Briscoe as 'a hardness, a hollowness, a strain...to want and not to have—to want and want', was at last laid to rest.

Woolf, always intensely self-aware, recognized the extent that her fictions were intimately bound up with her sense of loss. Her mother had died when she was thirteen, her half-sister Stella when she was fifteen, her father when she was twenty-two and her brother Thoby, two years her senior, when she was twenty-six. The untimely death of her brother provided

the starting-point both for *Jacob's Room* (1922) and for *The Waves* (1931), but it was in the course of writing *To the Lighthouse* that, in an attempt to characterize her latest project, she defined her art in terms of the mourning process: 'I have an idea that I will invent a new name for my books to supplant 'novel'. A new — by Virginia Woolf. But what? Elegy?' (*The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, vol. 3, 1925-30, 1980)...

AN EXCERPT FROM
TO THE LIGHTHOUSE
BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

She bore about with her, she could not help knowing it, the torch of her beauty; she carried it erect into any room that she entered; and after all, veil it as she might, and shrink from the monotony of bearing that it imposed on her, her beauty was apparent. She had been admired. She had been loved. She had entered rooms where mourners sat. Tears had flown in her presence. Men, and women too, letting go the multiplicity of things, had allowed themselves with her the relief of simplicity.

from *To the Lighthouse*, by Virginia Woolf, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 46-47.

AN EXCERPT FROM
A WRITER'S DIARY
BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

Tuesday, February 23rd, 1926

I am blown like an old flag by my novel. This one is *To the Lighthouse*. I think it is worth saying for my own interest that at last, at last, after that battle *Jacob's Room*, that agony—all agony but the end—*Mrs. Dalloway*, I am now writing as fast and freely as I have written in the whole of my life; more so—20 times more so—than any novel yet. I think this is the proof that I was on the right path; and that what fruit hangs in my soul is to be reached there. Amusingly, I now invent theories that fertility and fluency are the things. I used to plead for a kind of close, terse effort. Anyhow this goes on all the morning; and I have the devil's own work not to be flogging my brain all the afternoon. I live entirely in it, and come to the surface rather obscurely and am often unable to think what to say when we walk round the Square, which is bad I know. Perhaps it may be a good sign for the book though. Of course it is largely known to me: but all my books have been that. It is, I feel that I can float everything off now; and “everything” is rather a crowd and weight and confusion in the mind.

AN EXCERPT FROM
PAULA
BY ISABEL ALLENDE

It is so difficult to write these pages, Paula, to retrace the steps of this painful journey, verify details, imagine how things might have been if you had fallen into more capable hands, if they had not immobilized you with drugs, if..., if... How can I shake this guilt? When you mentioned the porphyria I thought you were exaggerating and, instead of seeking further help, I trusted those people in white; I handed over my daughter without hesitation. It isn't possible to go back in time. I must not keep looking back, yet I can't stop doing it, it's an obsession. Nothing exists but the unremitting certainty of this hospital, the rest of my life is veiled in heavy mist.

...Nothing exists but you, Paula, and this space without time in which we both are trapped.

In the long, silent hours, I am trampled by memories, all happening in one instant, as if my entire life were a single, unfathomable image. The child and girl I was, the woman I am, the old woman I shall be, are all water in the same rushing torrent... So it is with my life, a multilayered and ever-changing fresco that only I can decipher, whose secret is mine alone. The mind selects, enhances, and betrays; happenings fade from memory; people forget one another and, in the end, all that remains is the journey of the soul, those rare moments of spiritual revelation. What actually happened isn't what matters, only the resulting scars and distinguishing marks. My past has little meaning, I can see no order to it, no clarity, purpose, or path, only a blind journey guided by instinct and detours caused by events beyond my control. There was no deliberation on my part, only good intentions and the faint sense of a greater design determining my steps. Until now, I have never shared my past; it is my innermost garden, a place not even my most intimate lover has glimpsed. Take it, Paula, perhaps it will be of some use to you, because I fear that yours no longer exists, lost somewhere during your long sleep—and no one can live without memories.

AN EXCERPT FROM
POEMCRAZY
BY SUSAN GOLDSMITH WOOLDRIDGE

Home Song

When my mother's mother, Rosel Frank, was in her nineties she lived in the Self-Help Home in Chicago created by Jewish refugees from Germany. Many of her friends from the old neighborhood were there. I remember seeing them years ago on the grey wooden steps and rickety back porches of Rosel's old apartment on University Avenue, where she'd shake out the dust rag, hang clothes and kibbitz with Hansel Levi, Paula Baer and Emma Fisher. In the communal life of the old apartment (that smelled always of my grandpa Theodore's cigars), Rosel was known for her shrewd card playing.

When she first moved to the Self-Help Home Rosel played a mean game of canasta or gin rummy with Harry Fisher and other old neighborhood friends. But when she turned ninety-four her condition deteriorated, and though still in decent health, Rosel was moved to the dreaded "seventh floor," where everyone knew that self-help and gin rummy were no longer possible. Rosel became despondent.

One morning a few months after my grandmother's move, I sat on the bed in my daughter Elisabeth's room in Chico. Something compelled me right then to write a poem to Rosel, or G.G.—for Great-Grandma—as my kids called her. I chose Elisabeth's room because of morning light. Early sun streams through two

windows, casting small blue-and-green squares on the walls from a stained-glass piece she made in school.

I wrote a simple poem in this morning cathedral and then a melody came to mind. I found myself singing what I called "Home Song" to Rosel.

Oh lord the quiet
beyond the quiet
my pale cocoon lord
so slow the weaving

I've known dark tunnels
with roaring traffic
now I need rain lord
so soft and windblown,
my lord so warm light
I'm coming home.

Lie down in sweet grass
breathe deep the tanned earth
my home the forest
my home the sea....

The next evening Rosel died in her sleep. My friend Rob tells me that in Viking times every man was expected to be a poet. If a captured Viking could compose and recite a skillful poem to please a rival king, the Viking's life might be spared. To be slain in battle composing a poem recognizing the valor of your opponent was considered the most honorable way for a Viking to die. Rob remembers reading these words in an Icelandic saga, "I see your bright sword / is sharp today / home to my heart it comes."

Poems are needed at times of passage like birth, marriage and death. Like candles and psalms, poems not only help celebrate or clarify, but they can open or ease the way.

When I was going through a particularly painful two-year period in my own life, I discovered the healing power of writing poetry. I found that giving form to anguish helped me to bear the unbearable.

I urge you who are suffering to take pen in hand. Silence your inner critic. Find your authentic voice. Speak your truth.

For your own sake, WRITE.

I met Bill, husband of a friend of a friend, when I was going through a painful divorce and he was ravaged by cancer. Our friendship was brief but deep.

To comfort him, I told Bill the story of my father's having appeared to me the night of his death. Bill asked me to put the story on tape, for he knew his damaged brain could not retain it.

I sadly left for a conference in Brazil knowing that Bill was unlikely to live until my return. He did, indeed, die while I was gone. But Jan, his widow, told me he had listened to my tape over and over again.

BILL

What did he mean to me
this man who came into my life
every so briefly
and yet left an imprint
on my soul?

Oh God I said
don't let me love
this man who is dying
I can't bear to suffer
another loss.

What was it about him?
He wasn't so
handsome
or brilliant or clever.
But illness had made him
honest and kind.

He had tried so very hard
to be a good partner and parent
and felt he had failed.
As had I.

He had tried so very hard
to find God
and felt he had failed.
As had I.

When I met him
suffering had sweetened his voice
to the timbre of angels
and out of his eyes shone
purity of heart.

At the service
I sobbed without ceasing
so filled with the weight
of his humanity
and with my loss.

—Kate Strasburg

the
timbre
of
angels

EACH HUMAN BEING IS A GALAXY.
PARENTS, FRIENDS, ENEMIES,
FICTIONAL CHARACTERS, EXPERIENCES, FEARS,
UNCERTAINTIES CIRCLE WITHIN US LIKE PLANETS.
STARS BURST INTO LIFE AND DIE WITHIN US.
YET WE LIVE MOST OF LIFE SUPERFICIALLY,
UNAWARE OF OUR VAST INNER WORLD.
STORIES CAN AWAKEN US TO THAT WORLD WITHIN.
THEY INVITE THE AUDIENCE TO BE ACTIVE,
TO CREATE. AND THAT, IN TURN, AWAKENS
IN THEM A SENSE OF THEIR OWN STORY.

Jay O'Callahan,
Storyteller and Performance Artist

"A-MAZING STORYTELLER WANTS TO LET YOU INTO HIS 'LABYRINTH'",
SPOTLIGHT, MARCH 6, 2003

AN EXCERPT FROM
OUR TOWN
BY THORNTON WILDER

The American classic, *Our Town*, was written by playwright Thornton Wilder in 1938. It is the story of small-town America at the turn of the century, and of Emily, who dies in childbirth.

Emily is allowed to relive one day of her short life. Choosing her twelfth birthday, she is overcome by the realization of how wonderful life is, and how little the living appreciate it.

—KS

Emily: *Softly, more in wonder than in grief.*

I can't bear it. They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? Mama, I'm here. I'm grown up. I love you all, everything. —I can't look at everything hard enough.

Emily: *With mounting urgency.* Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally's dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it—don't you remember? But, just for a moment now we're all together. Mama, just for a moment we're happy. *Let's look at one another.*

Emily: *In a loud voice to the stage manager.*

I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another.

She breaks down sobbing.

*The lights dim on the left half of the stage.
Mrs. Webb disappears.*

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back—up the hill—to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look.

Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners...Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking...and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths... and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly, through her tears:

Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?

Emily: I'm ready to go back.

Emily: ...I should have listened to you. That's all human beings are! Just blind people.

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE AFTERWORD TO
OUR TOWN
BY TAPPAN WILDER

In the last act of "Our Town" the author places upon the stage a character who—like the member of the audience—partakes of the "smallest events of our daily life" and is also a spectator of them.

She learns that each life—though it appears to be a repetition among millions—can be felt to be inestimably precious. Though the realization of it is present to us seldom, briefly, and incommunicably. At that moment there are no walls, no chairs, no tables: all is inward. Our true life is the imagination and in the memory.

Tappan Wilder, afterword to *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder, (New York: Perennial Classics, 2003), 172.

AN EXCERPT FROM
SMALL WONDER: ESSAYS
BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

I am sitting on your lap, and you are crying. *Thank you, honey, thank you,* you keep saying, rocking back and forth as you hold me in the kitchen chair. I've brought you flowers: the sweet peas you must have spent all spring trying to grow, training them up the trellis in the yard. You had nothing to work with but abundant gray rains and the patience of a young wife at home with pots and pans and small children, trying to create just one beautiful thing, something to take you outside our tiny white clapboard house on East Main. I never noticed until all at once they burst through the trellis in a pink red purple dazzle. A finger-painting of colors humming against the blue air: I could think of nothing but to bring it to you. I climbed up the wooden trellis and picked the flowers. Every one. They are gone already, wilting in my hand as you hold me close in the potato-smelling kitchen, and your tears are damp in my hair but you never say a single thing but *Thank you.*

AN EXCERPT FROM
SMALL WONDER: ESSAYS
BY BARBARA KINGSOLVER

Your mother is dead. She was alive, so thin that Granddad bought her a tiny dark-blue dress and called her his fashion model and then they all went to the hospital and came home without her. Where is the dark-blue dress now? I find myself wondering, until it comes to me that they probably buried her in it. It's under the ground with her. There are so many things I don't want to think about that I can't bear going to bed at night.

It's too hot to sleep. My long hair wraps around me, grasping like tentacles. My brother and sister and I have made up our beds on cots on the porch, where it's supposed to be cooler. They are breathing in careless sleep on either side of me, and I am under the dark cemetery ground with Grandmama. I am in the stars, desolate, searching out the end of the universe and time. I am trying to imagine how long forever is, because that is how long I will be dead for someday. I won't be able to stand so much time being nothing, thinking nothing. I've spent many nights like this, fearing sleep. Hating being awake.

I get up, barefoot and almost nothing in my nightgown, and creep to your room. The door is open, and I see that you're awake, too, sitting up on the edge of your bed. I can make out only the white outline of your nightgown and your eyes. You're like a ghost.

Mama, I don't want to die.

You don't have to worry about that for a long, long time.

I know. But I'm thinking about it now.

I step toward you from the doorway, and you fold me into your arms. You are real, my mother in scent and substance, and I still fit perfectly in your lap.

You don't know what Heaven is like. It might be full of beautiful flowers.

When I close my eyes I discover it's there, an endless field of flowers. Columbines, blue asters, daisies, sweet peas, zinnias: one single flower bed stretching out for miles in every direction. I am small enough to watch the butterflies come. I know them from the pasture behind our house, the butterflies you taught me to love and name: monarchs, Dianas, tiger swallowtails. I follow their lazy zigzag as they visit every flower, as many flowers as there are stars in the universe. We stay there in the dark for a long time, you and I, both of us with our eyes closed, watching the butterflies drift so slowly, filling as much time as forever.

I will keep that field of flowers. It doesn't matter that I won't always believe in Heaven. I will suffer losses of faith, of love and confidence, I will have some bitter years, and always when I hurt and can't sleep I will close my eyes and wait for your butterflies to arrive.

...THE EARLY HASIDIM PRIZED
THE WORTH OF STORIES
—SIPURIM (WHOSE HEBREW WORD
BEGINS WITH SAMETH)—
TO NOURISH OUR SOUL AND
GIVE US A GREATER APPRECIATION FOR
THE HOLINESS EXISTING AROUND US.
SUCH LEADERS AS RABBI NACHMAN
OF BRATSLAV CHERISHED STORYTELLING
AS A VALUABLE WAY TO AROUSE PEOPLE
FROM THEIR INNER SLUMBER.

Edward Hoffman

THE KABBALAH DECK: PATHWAY TO THE SOUL

AN EXCERPT FROM

WRITING AS A WAY OF HEALING

BY LOUISE DESALVO

Ethiopian Healing Storytelling

Ethiopia has a thousand-year tradition of using words and images to cure illness or heal the spirit of the stricken person if a physical cure isn't possible.

If I were sick in Ethiopia, the process of making my scroll would involve me in a therapeutic journey or quest. A cleric would ask me questions about how and when I became afflicted, about why I think I became ill, about my present condition, about my life before my illness, about my relationships with others, about my feelings and thoughts—anything that could help unravel the mystery of my current ailment. For illness is viewed as a mystery to try to fathom (though it might not yield its secrets) rather than as a puzzle to be solved (as it tends to be viewed in North America).

I wouldn't be alone in dealing with my illness. The cleric and I would form a healing partnership. This is because my illness is understood in communal, mind-body, and interactive terms rather than in individual, physiological, and singular terms. It might be an outgrowth of social causes; it might be an outgrowth of my state of mind or soul or psyche; it might be an outgrowth of people who have wanted the worst for me.

I wouldn't be left alone to contemplate my illness, nor would I be told of its meaning by someone surer than I of what my body was experiencing. My headlong journey, then, would constitute a collaboration. I would tell my story; the cleric would listen. Together, we would ponder the conundrum of what I was experiencing.

Together we would try to understand its meaning. After hearing my story and assessing my circumstances, the cleric would devise a scroll for my personal use, drawing upon his knowledge about efficacious signs and symbols. Reviewing my life in the context of my illness would constitute the single most significant part of my healing journey. For it would invite me to impose a kind of narrative order on what had happened, on the seeming chaos and destabilizing effect of my illness. It would invite me to think of possible cause and plausible effect. It would invite me to link my present with my past; to ponder how I might have come to harm; to imagine what my future might now hold. It would give me something to do now—a present-day task that I could effectively fulfill. Most important, it would involve me as an active participant in my journey to wellness. Being involved would make me feel less victimized, more efficacious. And thinking of myself as capable would require restoration of belief in myself, a belief that had been seriously undermined by my illness.

Rather than assuming that a specialist in the care of the body knew more than I ever could about the message my illness was conveying, I would be seen, instead, as an important repository of knowledge about myself and my illness. It would be assumed that I could "read" the text of my body and that I could help write the text that would heal me. In Ethiopia, then, it is believed that telling stories helps people heal.

Tapping in to that deeply personal and singular wisdom about the self would be considered an essential part of my eventual cure. Reminding me that I knew much and that I could help myself, too, would be useful during a time when I might feel great despair. The scroll, too, would act as a permanent record of my journey.

In reading the text of my scroll, in contemplating its images, I would help myself heal.

AN EXCERPT FROM
THE HEALING OF AMERICA
BY MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

David and Goliath

One of the greatest religious tales is the biblical story of David and Goliath. Like all powerful allegories, “it is true even if it didn’t happen” to use the words of Jack Kerouac. It reveals an eternal truth about the nature of man, the nature of God, and the nature of the world.

David was a young boy when God first looked into his heart and chose him to become the King of Israel. During the years of his circuitous route to the throne, he was, among other things King Saul’s personal musician and a shepherd.

As a youth, and with no professional military training, David seemed an odd choice to kill a giant. Yet Goliath threatened the nation, and none of Israel’s warriors were brave enough to confront him. They all trembled at the sound of the giant’s roar, and only young David volunteered to take him on.

Goliath was not only a giant; he was also equipped with 150 pounds of armor, carried a massive spear, and “had a javelin of bronze slung between his shoulders.” He had the ego and bravado of a warrior villain. He taunted and mocked David, who had no armor or ammunition except a sling with five smooth stones. Yet David solemnly proclaimed that he would win victory over the giant, “that all the

earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with the sword and spear, for the battle is the Lord’s and he will give you into our hand.”

With that, David shot his sling, landing one smooth stone right in the middle of Goliath’s forehead. Goliath was dead. David then used the giant’s own sword to behead him.

For the spiritually motivated activist, that story is everything we need to know, revealing the Achilles’ heel of a monstrous status quo. *Its meanness, but also its vulnerability, is its disassociation from its own soul.* When its conscience is struck, it is automatically transformed.

David had the power of God’s love on his side. Contrary to appearances, the giant was the one who didn’t stand a chance. There is one power that a mean, soulless, worldly juggernaut cannot defend against or effectively destroy. That is the power of love, and its weapon of faith.

...

David is a musician, which symbolizes the intuitive, mysterious power of the right side of the brain. He is a shepherd, symbolizing the caretaker, or those who “take care of the lambs of God.” The great artists of the world make manifest the subconscious yearnings of the human race.... That ideal, weaving through the Bible, Michelangelo’s hands, and now our own souls, beckons us to dig ever more deeply into the miraculous possibilities of our being. David is one of the most powerful symbols of who we are, what we struggle with, and what God wants us to achieve.

David’s youth and faithfulness gave him the courage and power to confront the giant and to have victory over him.

ANYONE CAN SLAY A DRAGON,
HE TOLD ME, BUT TRY WAKING UP
EVERY MORNING AND LOVING
THE WORLD ALL OVER AGAIN.
THAT’S WHAT TAKES A REAL HERO.

Brian Andreas

WWW.STORYPEOPLE.COM

Storytelling is as ancient as humanity. Its rhythm serves many purposes in our culture—to entertain us, to heal us, to inspire us, to help us understand the human spirit... The beckoning call I hear from our culture is an unmet need for stories that connect us.

World events and daily life lived at a rushed pace leave many with a sense of disconnection. It is not surprising that all around us, people are sharing their true stories—everywhere from television programming to church groups. Although we know the inherent value of storytelling, there is little research on the process of storytelling, and more specifically, on what makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection.

Six years ago, I began developing a storytelling process called Living Stories. Living Stories is a collaborative and creative way of engaging in meaningful autobiographic storytelling that expresses the teller's story from a place of authenticity, sharing it with others as a means of engaging the human need for connection, and creating an opportunity for transformation. The goal of Living Stories is to honor the storyteller and story with unconditional acceptance and love. The idea behind this goal is that if we have an opportunity to understand one another and be understood deeply, barriers of separateness and prejudice will fade. We will awaken to a sense of interconnectedness. I decided to focus my doctoral research at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California, on the art form and process of storytelling.

In 1997, Charlotte and I were drawn into each other's paths and began what was to become a five-year creative collaboration to share her story of confronting breast cancer; our storytelling process became the basis of my research. She had weathered a mastectomy a few months earlier and had just completed her second round of chemotherapy when we began our storytelling gatherings. In my role as storiographer, I was there to gently bear witness to her story and facilitate a process where she was the leader in the telling of her story. Our most deeply meaningful stories benefit from an advocate—to remind us of the treasure others may find through their telling.

With clumps of hair scattered throughout her house, Charlotte bravely bared her nearly bald head. She wanted me to photograph her changing body, complete with mastectomy scar, and to capture her emotional states of sadness, anger, fear, and the will to reach out and claim life as her choice. Black and white photography has long been my creative means of collaborating with the power of the image to convey our stories and capture the essence of those photographed. Our meetings also yielded the sharing of her dreams and poetry, paintings, and music...multifaceted expressions of her story. We met at intervals over several years, each time documenting a different phase of her story.

Last fall...Healing Environments...hosted a public mixed media exhibition of Charlotte's story entitled *Just One Life*. The soulful, homey environment of the space proved the perfect nurturing frame for her story. The exhibit served as the culmination of my storytelling process with Charlotte, as well as a means of collecting research data on visitor response to the exhibit.

Visitors entered the exhibition space after being asked to first take a moment of silence.

Natural light flooded the room overlooking a garden. Lit candles and flowers created a sense of sacred space. Visitors viewed black and white photographs of Charlotte taken during several stages of her story and a breast casting created before her surgery. They could put on headphones and listen to a voice recording of Charlotte, choose and listen to a piece of music she found soothing during chemotherapy treatments, and read her poetry. Visitors were also invited to stand in front of a mirror and try on the hats Charlotte wore after losing her hair, tucking in their own hair to imagine themselves bald. A large table in the middle of the space was covered with drawing and writing tablets and colored pens and pastels; visitors were invited to express their responses to the exhibit and leave them in the exhibit for others to view as part of the evolving story.

By unspoken agreement, visitors maintained reverent silence while in the exhibit. Through their presence, they created a storytelling experience and became collaborators in the process begun by Charlotte and me. They left poetry, drawings, written messages to Charlotte, and reflections about their own lives. Many expressed gratitude that Charlotte shared her story. Time and time again they called out the vulnerability and honesty with which she shared her story as courageous. Thankfully, today Charlotte is cancer-free and thriving six years after her mastectomy.

The research yielded many insights about the nature of storytelling—a few of them are offered here. Both Charlotte and I experienced positive impact from our storytelling and study participation. Charlotte felt held in her healing process and empowered through sharing her story. I experienced deep alignment with life goals and a greater understanding of living a fully present, authentic life.

The study showed that a compassion-based storytelling process led to responses of compassionate connection from those who participated in the storytelling—including the storyteller, storiographer, and exhibition visitors. In answer to the research question *what makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection*, the response offered by the study is: *creative expression of our authentic selves makes storytelling elicit compassionate connection*. By expressing ourselves creatively, we bring forth our authentic selves and an opportunity for others to experience our stories through many senses. Visitors perceived the teller as authentic in the expression of her story through the exhibit. They reported experiences of compassionate connection along a continuum. Some received insights about embracing their own lives more fully. Others, including men, claimed ownership of the story as their own—they saw the life and death struggle portrayed in the story as their struggle, too. Some reported spiritual knowing—a sense of universal interconnectedness among all life.

The study identifies storytelling as an art form intertwined with story content... It is not only our stories that are important but also how we share them that matters greatly—environment, attitude, and means of expression. All aspects of the storytelling process combine to create a unique experience for each individual.

By applying study findings about storytelling to types of storytelling happening in our communities, the cultural need for compassionate connection may begin to be met. Grassroots storytelling projects, family sharing time, and television programming, for instance, may positively impact the lives of others by actively engaging in storytelling that is rooted in love. For in the end, it all comes down to love...

AN EXCERPT FROM

“THE SELF-KNOWING ORGANIZATION: HOW ONE COMPANY IS DEVELOPING A GREATER SENSE OF MISSION THROUGH THE SHARING OF STORIES CONNECTED TO ITS VALUES AND PRINCIPLES”

BY RICHARD STONE

In my work with individuals using storytelling as a healing tool, I see time and again the role personal narratives can play in helping people understand better who they are. While the process of telling intimate stories with others is often filled with its share of “ah ahs,” there is something more important happening that has ramifications in all areas of one’s life. I believe it also has implications for organizational culture. My work with companies has shown me repeatedly that the process of sharing stories may be important to many of the indicators we use to measure a company’s health—the productivity of individuals and teams, employee satisfaction, clear values that are understood and embodied by all staff, outstanding leadership, an atmosphere of respect and collegiality, and, last but not least, profitability.

To illustrate, in the summer of 1997, I was asked by Teresa Lever-Pollary, CEO of Nighttime Pediatrics, to craft a process of collecting and developing stories based on staff and patient experiences over the past fifteen years. This organization is one of the country’s largest pediatric practices and has a unique niche in the Salt Lake City market. It provides emergency after-hours care strictly for children. Their hours are from 5 PM to midnight, and noon to midnight on weekends. Recently, they opened a midnight to 8 AM service at one of their locations. Anyone who has had a child knows that symptoms frequently don’t get

worse until early evening. Normally, a parent would have only one option—the emergency room, an environment that is hardly friendly to adults, much less children.

The five clinics saw nearly 80,000 children in this past year. Through their fifteen years of operation, they have ministered to the needs of over a million children in the Salt Lake valley.

When Nighttime was started in 1983 by Rod Pollary, one of his goals was to provide a better atmosphere for sick kids. He took great interest in designing his clinics with children in mind. There is no waiting room. Examining rooms have a couch where the doctor can sit with a mother and examine her infant while she holds the child. For older kids, the examining tables are built into the walls to look like another piece of furniture. In each room there is a TV with Disney animated feature films playing. If the parent has to bring other children along, he or she can take them to a play room adjacent to the receptionist’s desk. In the corner of this room is a video camera whose picture shows up in a small corner of the TVs in the examining rooms—a nice way for a parent to keep an eye on another child. Finally, doctors and nurses wear casual clothing in order to make kids feel at home. You won’t see any white coats at Nighttime.

...

...One area that has been perplexing and intransigent, though, has been aligning each of the clinic’s staff with the values and culture that the founder and CEO originally envisioned....

The CEO of Nighttime, Teresa Lever-Pollary, recognized that many of these values had their roots in significant events that occurred during her and other staff members’ careers with the organization. She suspected that there was something important about these experiences,

and that they might hold the key for the perpetuation of the company’s culture. Together, we embarked on a journey of collecting and capturing these stories for posterity, for sharing, and for organizational learning.

...

The resulting product has been compiled into a book entitled *Nighttime Stories*. Over sixty tales were included in this preliminary effort. This is only the first step as Nighttime begins to explore avenues for applying these stories to the teaching and perpetuation of the organization’s values. Recently, at a corporate-wide gathering to commemorate Nighttime’s fifteenth anniversary, many of these stories were shared, and each employee received a copy of the book....

...

I believe though, that my work with individuals reveals many of the important ways storytelling can be relevant to the corporate environment. Without sharing our stories with others, it’s nearly impossible for us to fully grasp who we are. Something important is revealed in our stories—even to us as we tell them—that can help guide us in our life’s journey. Our experiences can be equally relevant to others as they look for models of how to live a good life. Where we once thought we were fearful and weak, we may discover in our stories hidden reservoirs of courage and resolve. Where we felt aimless and helpless in our lives, we can uncover a thread of purpose that can lead us forward into the future. The process of storytelling can give our lives both a rootedness and sense of trajectory. Without our stories, how can we know where we have come from, or have a sense of confidence about where we are going?

Interestingly, the word *narrative* has its roots in the Greek word *gnoscere*—to know or understand. Through constructing narratives, we

create knowledge and understanding that can help us now and in the future. These narratives are a pathway to our soul. Soul may be an elusive concept; no one has ever seen a soul, as far as I know. Yet, we know when we are so out of touch with our deepest meaning and purpose that we have lost heart, and at such times we can feel as though we have lost our soul. Retrieving our soul in the midst of change may be our only saving grace, the only pathway back to what heartens us. Angeles Arrien, a noted anthropologist, speaks of different pathways to the soul that traditional cultures have identified—song, dance, silence, and storytelling. Each of these activities can return us to a life of vitality and heartfelt living. Without them, we can become disheartened, discouraged, and depressed. Physical disease can even result. Through telling and listening to stories, we can find ourselves again. Storytelling may, in fact, be one of the best (and oldest) methods for healing what ails us.

Without sharing our stories with others, it’s nearly impossible for us to fully grasp who we are. Something important is revealed in our stories—even to us as we tell them—that can help guide us in our life’s journey.

WHAT TRANSFORMS
THE MERELY SAD
INTO SOMETHING TRAGIC—
AND THEREFORE BEAUTIFUL,
AND THEREFORE SAVING, AND THEREFORE,
IN SOME ODD WAY, JOYFUL—
IS THE TELLING OF THE STORY.
IT'S WHAT MAKES US HUMAN BEINGS.

James Carroll

THE BOOK THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

THE BOOKSHELF

STORYTELLING

Traveling Light: Stories & Drawings for a Quiet Mind,
BY BRIAN ANDREAS

Story People, BY BRIAN ANDREAS

The Right to Write, BY JULIA CAMERON

Writing as a Way of Healing, BY LOUISE DESALVO

The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination,
BY ROBERT COLES

Robert Coles: Teacher (VHS),
BY SOCIAL/MEDIA PRODUCTIONS

When Memory Speaks, BY JILL KERR CONWAY

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius,
BY DAVID EGGERS

Old Friend from Far Away: How to Write Memoir,
BY NATALIE GOLDBERG

The Book That Changed My Life, EDITED BY DIANE OSEN

Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others,
BY JAMES W. PENNEBAKER

Kitchen Table Wisdom, BY RACHEL N. REMEN

My Grandfather's Blessing, BY RACHEL N. REMEN

Legacy: A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Personal History,
BY LINDA SPENCE

The Healing of America, BY MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

Poemcrazy: Freeing Your Life With Words,
BY SUSAN GOLDSMITH WOOLDRIDGE

FICTION

The House of the Spirits, BY ISABEL ALLENDE

Our Town, BY THORNTON WILDER

To the Lighthouse, BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

Jacob's Room, BY VIRGINIA WOOLF

ILLNESS

Paula, BY ISABEL ALLENDE

The Lively Shadow: Living with the Death of a Child,
BY DONALD MURRAY

WEBSITES

WWW.FOLKSTORY.COM

WWW.LIVINGSTORIES.COM

WWW.STORYPEOPLE.COM

WWW.STORYWORK.COM

WILLIAM MORRIS (1834 - 1896) was a British artist, designer, craftsman, writer, typographer, and publisher working for the renaissance of the decorative arts. His work was radical in its emphasis on rich, natural forms and quality hand craftsmanship during an age that embraced mechanization and mass-production. A great inspiration to the Arts and Crafts Movement, as well as Art Nouveau, Morris' work can be seen throughout this issue in the form of textile designs used as beautiful textured backdrops to our text.

Dear Readers,

Forgive us for our long silence. Our summer was consumed with moving our resource center from Palo Alto to San Francisco (see enclosed card). And our fall was filled with a conference we conducted for a group of hospitals in the Midwest. In a future issue we will tell you more about our promising new location as well as our process of transformation.

If you would like to send a message of encouragement to a friend or loved one, please check our website (www.healingenvironments.org) where you will find beautiful e-cards with words of hope, faith, gratitude and love which you can send to those in need.

We wish for all of you peace and joy in the coming season.

Kate, Traci, Doree & Sam

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TOGETHER
WE
WILL
COMFORT
THE
SUFFERING

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to aid the current movement toward holistic medicine — toward treating the whole patient (mind, body, spirit) and encouraging hospitals, hospices and individuals to nourish patients, families and caregivers with healing environments. What is a healing environment? We believe a healing environment is one that offers sustenance to the soul and gives meaning to experience. It is one that enables those who are suffering to transcend their pain by connecting to the universal through the transformative power of beauty and art, and that gives comfort through this connection.

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