What’s your story?

By Andrea Lyle, RN

We all enjoy a good story. Books, movies, magazines, and news programs all sell stories to us -- some true, some fiction, some we enjoy, some we don’t. Similarly, our lives are made up of stories we tell ourselves -- some true, some fiction, some we enjoy, some we don’t. We tell ourselves stories about what’s happening in our lives, about other people, about ourselves. These stories affect us at all levels of our being -- mind, body, emotions and spirit.

Have you ever made up an outlandish story in your mind based on circumstances? I sure have. A simple he/she “didn’t call” can quickly turn into a “they don’t love me anymore, probably found someone new, it is over” depression. Then the phone rings with an apologetic voice on the other end saying “So sorry, got stuck in traffic, I love you,” and the disaster you created in your mind and felt throughout your entire body melts away instantly.

Or imagine the kids are a few minutes late getting home. In an instant, your mind imagines some horrible accident they have been in. Your body swells with anxiety as you plan your route to the hospital and wait expectantly for the call from the police. Then the door swings open, the kids come in laughing, and they ask why you look so distraught. Relief floods over you. You hug them as if you were never going to see them again. They exchange glances -- certain mom has lost her mind.

Creating stories is a natural human trait that helps us make sense of and give order to the experiences we have. But our stories are based on perceptions that may or may not be accurate. Very often our stories -- like those mentioned above -- are created in fear and are not based on facts. Stories created in fear can bring about unhappiness, relationship problems, frustration, anger, disappointment, and can even manifest major health problems. Stories based in truth can lead to a positive life perspective, more fulfilling relationships, and happier, healthier, more joyful lives.

One of the most debilitating stories I created in my life was around love. Sometime in early childhood I pieced together a story that told me getting too close to someone was not safe. People that get too close leave and that hurts. I believed I was unlovable. I learned to guard my heart and keep others at arm’s length, all the while craving love. I didn’t realize I created this story, or even where that story came from. Needless to say, this story did not serve me well when it came to having successful relationships.

I was in my fifties and married with children, when I finally became aware that I had a very real problem. It was then I began the journey that would help me dismantle the story I had created around love, tear down the walls around my heart, and allow intimacy into my life. Although I slip back into the old story from time to time, today I choose to tell a totally different story. One that is true. A story that is healthier for me, healthier for my relationships and one that is far more fulfilling.

Like mine, many of the stories we create are from perspectives we had as young children. Once formed, we rarely re-examine these stories for validity. Oftentimes we are not even aware of the stories or the effect they are having on us. We just keep telling them because that is what we have programmed ourselves to do.

The good news is that stories can be rewritten. As Dan McAdams, Northwestern University psychology professor and author of [*The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*](http://www.amazon.com/The-Redemptive-Self-Stories-Americans/dp/0195176936?tag=thehuffingtop-20) says, “By understanding how we create these stories and how they are structured, we can alter our own stories and rewrite our own scripts in ways that improve our lives.”

Here are three keys to help you tell stories that help rather than hinder:

1. Become aware of your stories. Notice what you are telling yourself about every situation and when you are “getting stuck” in a story.
2. Question the stories you tell. Byron Katie, a renowned author and teacher of “The Work” gives us four questions to help determine if our beliefs and stories are beneficial or detrimental:
3. Is it true? (Yes or no. If no, move to 3.)
4. Can you absolutely know that it's true? (Yes or no.)
5. How do you react, what happens, when you believe that thought/story?
6. Who would you be without the thought/story?

The meaning of “true” is that it is always true, in every situation, for everyone, always. Very few things are actually “true” in the purest sense of the word. Most things are just “our truth,” which is ever-changing.

1. Choose to change the stories no longer serving you. All experiences are neutral. How you interpret and respond to them is what gives them meaning. Past stories can only affect your future if you choose to keep telling them. Choose to tell the good ones.

The past is gone forever, but the future is a blank slate. You are the author of your story. You have the freedom to create new, better stories that serve your highest good every single day. Living a good life means living a good story. So what’s your story going to be? Make it one you want to live and one you want to tell.

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