

The Power of Story



Guidelines for Writing Your Personal Myth

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Imagine you are sitting with your grandchildren and telling them about your life. Or, imagine you are telling your life story to your favorite, most compassionate, therapist, or imagine you have just received a mysterious email from some alien intelligence beyond Earth, and they want to know about you and your life.

What would you tell them?

Who are you? What does it mean to be a human being? Where did you come from? Now that you are here, what is the purpose and meaning of your life? When it's all over, what will happen to you, where will you go?

The way we answer these questions decides the meaning we give to our lives.

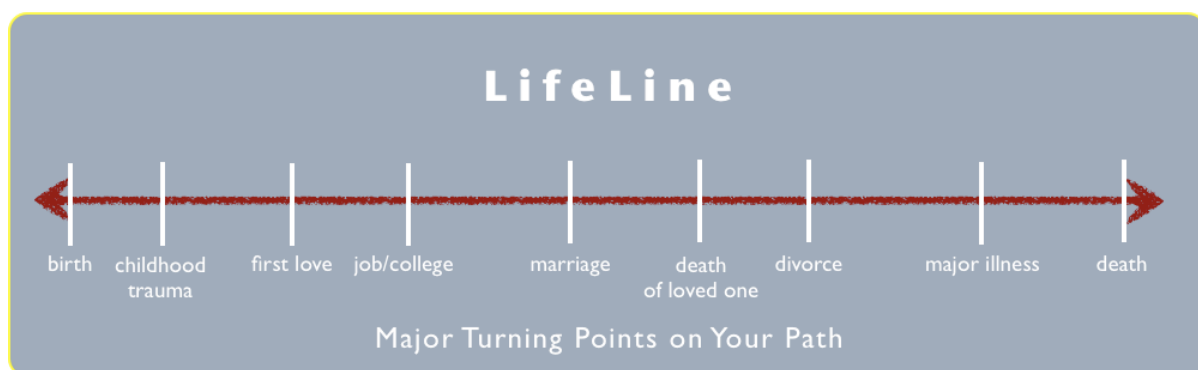
Each of us has a story to tell. Each of us *lives* a story—the story we believe about ourselves and about the world. The way we answer these questions shapes the meaning we give to our lives.

Stories reveal how things came to be the way they are. They tell of beginnings, and of middles, and, if they don't always have endings, they point, and leave the way open.

The story that is your life impacts everything you do and dream. Connecting with your story is the first step on the path to transforming yourself and your world. Writing your **Personal Myth** reveals who you are and how you came to be.

The most effective and empowering way to create change in the world is through self-transformation. The Key: Express your deepest self through the power of story and realize who you are beyond your story.

Begin by creating your **LifeLine**. On a large sheet of paper, draw a long line from left to right, and then mark out the most significant events on your life's path—from your past on into your future (e.g., birth, first love, college, first job, marriage, major illness, divorce, job loss, death of a loved one, your own death . . .)



"My own death?" you ask. Yes. This is *your* LifeLine—take it to the limit. Create the whole picture. "But I don't know what my future will be," you say. True. But you do have a say in what your future will be. Creating your LifeLine and Personal Myth is an act of imagination.

Don't get entangled in the so-called "facts" of your life. Retelling the story of your past, how you got to be where you are today, is just as much an act of imagination as envisioning your future. *Memory is imagination focused on the past. Intention is imagination focused on the future.* What matters is *authenticity*—being true to your own sense of self and what is real for you.

As you create your LifeLine, note dates, people, and places.

Your LifeLine is a graphical representation of your life from birth to death. Now use your LifeLine to start writing out your story as though you were telling your most trusted friend or therapist. Be ruthlessly honest. Be authentic (if you feel inauthentic, then be authentic about *that*).

Yes, each of us has a story to tell—and our stories can empower or limit us. *We live* our stories and they shape what we believe about ourselves and about the world.

The Power of Paradigms

Our personal stories are embedded in the larger story we inherit from society—the “dominant paradigm.” In modern Western culture, our paradigm is shaped by science—which, in turn, is shaped by a set of generally unquestioned metaphysical beliefs. In short: metaphysics shapes science, science shapes society, and society shapes our personal beliefs. And so we create our personal myth—who we believe we are and who we believe we can be.

Most of this takes place below the level of awareness. Not only are we often unconscious of the beliefs we hold, we are also often unconscious of how society's paradigms shape our beliefs. Furthermore, the deep metaphysical assumptions that shape science and society are themselves often unconscious and unquestioned.

We inherit our stories—from our parents, from our teachers, and by a kind of social “osmosis.” But sometimes—especially in periods of profound social change—elements of the dominant story no longer seem to work for us. We can feel uncomfortable with the paradigm because it does not seem to have a place for the full range of our experiences and personal beliefs. At such times, our personal stories or myths clash with the dominant paradigm or myth. Something has to change. Do we change our personal beliefs or does the dominant paradigm have to change? Perhaps both?

Myth Archaeology

To answer these questions we need to do some “myth archaeology”—we need to dig deep into our heritage of beliefs and excavate those hidden assumptions that have given shape to our society’s paradigm. We must learn to identify and understand the fundamental assumptions that have given shape to our culture’s beliefs about the nature of reality, and what it means to be human.

But that is only half of the task. We must also do the same “archaeological” work on our own personal stories. We must dig deep into our belief systems to reveal the assumptions that form the soil for our own personal myths.

That’s where creating your LifeLine and writing your Personal Myth can really make a difference—opening a path to transformation.

Stories matter and matter stories. Who you are, and what you believe, really matters. Each of us has a special gift, a natural way of knowing and being in the world. Accessing and cultivating this gift is the most effective way to transform your life and make a difference. Your way of knowing is a deep intelligence expressed through your archetypes of consciousness. *Intelligence seeks expression.*



You already have the basic qualifications: *You are a human being*. You can think, remember, and imagine. You can put pen to paper (or fingers to keys). That's all it takes—oh, and a commitment to being authentic about your own transformation.

So, begin by contemplating and answering the questions posed above . . .

Who are you? What does it mean to be a human being? Where did you come from? Now that you are here, what is the purpose and meaning of your life? When it's all over, what will happen to you, where will you go?

. . . and start to tell your story for your grandchildren or your distant ET.

But don't just rely on facts—especially not the facts you have learned from your culture. Write your story in the third person, as though you were writing about a fictional character. What are this character's aspirations? Show how this person's story has brought her or him to this point in life. Now, use your imagination to unfold the future, to tell the rest of the story in a way that honors your own personal myth.

Be concise. Focus on the main highlights and turning points in your life. Tell the story in 500 words (that's about two pages of double-spaced text).

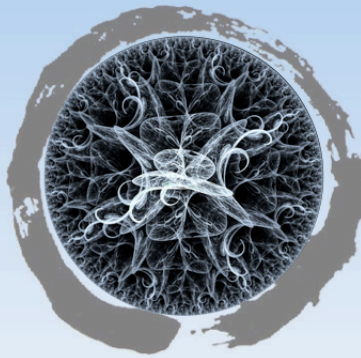
Who Am I?—Personal Myth & Time Capsule

Begin now, thinking and writing about it. Start to document the highlights and turning points of your life. Be honest. Don't hold back. Notice if your writing lacks authenticity. But keep doing it anyway. This is private, and will not be seen by others.

After a while, you should have 20 or 30 pages (perhaps more, perhaps less). Now focus on the essentials. On 2-3 pages, write out the main points that express the essence of who you are, and who you see you can be. Write for your *time capsule* (to remind yourself of who you are now for some future incarnation). Go all out: No-one else will read this but you and your future self.

Now put that aside, and write another 2-3 pages expressing who you are and who you see you can be—this time writing for others to hear. Your second “Who Am I?” is your Personal Myth that you would like the world to know about you (your first “Who Am I?” is your own private “time capsule”).





Further Guidelines

For some people, writing and sharing their Personal Myth can be a source of anxiety because they want to be authentic but also wish to protect their privacy. Here's what I suggest (echoing the guidelines above): First, write out your own story as you would tell it to your favorite therapist, or as a "time capsule" for your future-self to discover and read at some unspecified time in the distant future. *This version is entirely private.* Next, condense it down to one or two pages. *Still for your eyes, only.*

If you have difficulty editing out the parts you would prefer not to share with others, remember this: *It is all a story in any case.* We construct our history in our memories, and our memories are notoriously selective. (That in no way reduces the pain—or the pleasure—we still carry within us.) However, since it all is a story, we can let imagination run free. To a great extent, all the stories about ourselves are creations of our own imaginations (which is not to say they can be dismissed as mere fictions). *Memory is a form of imagination.*

The point of this exercise is to get us to become more aware of the stories we tell about ourselves (our "personal paradigms"), and to realize we can take responsibility for how those stories continue to live in us and shape who we are today. Writing out your Personal Myth is an opportunity to realize the extent to which your own *imaginative creativity* shapes your story. If you have any hesitation about sharing your story as you remember it, then exercise your own creative imagination and visualize an *alternative* story (the "road not taken"). Write *that*. Memory is imagination directed toward the past. Intention is imagination directed toward the future.

In any case, writing your Personal Myth is an opportunity for authentic self-expression. You may have to dig a little deeper to find and express that authentic part of you that is whole, powerful, and magnificent. I have no doubt it is there.

Let your creative imagination have free play, and tell your story as though you were God creating the narrative of your life.

Whatever is true about *your* story is also true—one way or another—about everyone of us. Having the courage to authentically express ourselves can be liberating—for us and for others. However, choosing the limits of self-revelation is entirely up to you. Remember, too, it may be easier to write your Personal Myth in the third person—as though you were telling someone else's story from a God's-eye view—you are!