



What's YOUR story?

THE POWER OF STORY

What's your life story?

I don't mean where you grew up, went to school, got your first job, the date you gave birth to your first child, etc. I mean what's your STORY? What narrative do you tell about the events of your life?

According to researchers specifically looking at the power of “narrative psychology,” the stories we tell about ourselves are essential to our well-being, including what we tell ourselves. If you've interpreted the events of your life to mean that you're unlucky or unwise, it's hard to look optimistically at the future. Conversely, if you acknowledge that you've made mistakes and faced difficulties but seek (or have already glimpsed) redemption, you'll feel a much greater sense of hope for your life.

That time you were laid off, for example, is it further proof that your career's going nowhere? Or is it the best thing that ever happened, liberating you to find work that suits you better?

There's also power in seeing and naming the events that have been “turning points” in our lives, whether they were time-specific - such as an event that happened at one point on one day - or extended events or relationships that can only be identified as significant hinge-points in hindsight.

The facts AND the narrative matter.

And - best of all - naming these things and telling our story helps us be ready to look forward, plan well, and dream big.

Sophie's Story: A Narrative

Once upon a time, an 18-year-old Frenchwoman named Sophie Serrano gave birth to a baby girl, who suffered from neonatal jaundice.

The baby spent her first days in an incubator under artificial light and was returned to her mother four days later. Unbeknownst to Sophie, it wasn't her baby. It was another 4-day-old with jaundice. The nurse had switched the babies by accident.

Sophie named her daughter Manon. As she grew older, Manon looked nothing like her parents. She had darker skin and frizzy hair, and the neighbors started to gossip about her origins.

But Sophie never faltered. The nurse had explained that the artificial light used to treat jaundice could affect hair color. Even more, Sophie loved Manon. She knew the story of her life: her cries, her coos, her first words.

It was only when Sophie's husband accused her of giving birth to another man's baby that she went for paternity tests and discovered that her husband was right (sort of).

The baby, then aged 10, wasn't his,

but she wasn't Sophie's either. She belonged to another set of parents, who had been raising Sophie's biological daughter in a town several miles away.

It's a typically fascinating "switched at birth" tale. But here's where it takes an unexpected turn.

"What makes a family is what we build together, what we tell each other."

A meeting was arranged for the two mothers and their daughters. Sophie saw that her biological daughter looked just like her in a way that Manon did not and never would.

But she felt no connection to this other girl. It was Manon she had nursed, Manon whose nightmares she'd soothed, and Manon whose stories she knew. This other daughter looked just like Sophie—but what did that even mean, when she didn't know her stories? The other mother felt the same way.

"It is not the blood that makes a family," Ms. Serrano told *The New York Times*. "What makes a family is what we build together, what we tell each other."

Our stories are everything. They are the heart of our common identity and how we knit our lives together.

So, today you get to tell your story.



First, name YOUR life's hinge-points. Think back from your childhood to the present and identify moments that have shaped who you are and have charted your course. This could be anything from the day you decided which university to attend, the day you meet a new friend who later became highly influential, or a day someone disappointed you and you can see how that disappointment drove your desires, etc etc etc. Simply list these on a page.



Second, tell your family's narrative. Imagine your family is an exhibit in a museum 100 years in the future. What would the plaque beside the exhibit say about you? How would your family be described? What makes your family unique (and likely weird in ways no one else knows about)? What are the small and quotidian ways that create your family identity (like the movie quotes you all can name together, the high fives you give each other each morning, the inside jokes you share, etc.)?

And most importantly, what do you tell each other? How do you tell each other your family story? Like telling a child their birth story on their birthday: "On the day you were born, it was snowing and we knew you were going to make a spectacular entrance...." what is your family's story?