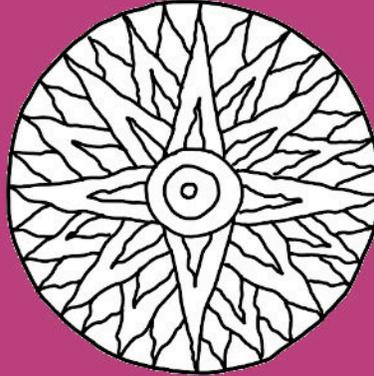


Become the Heroine of



Your Story



“Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other’s memory. This is how people care for themselves.”
-Barry Lopez

We need stories.

Whether we journal, talk to friends or daydreaming--we are always interpreting, meaning-making and storytelling based on the events of our lives. When we rewrite our stories we have an opportunity to free ourselves from trauma, outdated familial patterns and habitual societal reenactments.

We all carry a personal mythology made up of our beliefs--whether we are conscious of those beliefs or not. When we write out our stories, it sheds light on those archetypal and mythic themes that influence the course of our lives.

What is an archetype?

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung brought awareness to the concept of “archetype”. Archetypes are innate, universal prototypes for ideas that are used to interpret observations. Jung viewed the ancient gods and goddesses as archetypes for human behavior, desires and dreams. He recognized the deep human stories repeatedly playing out in mythology through the personification of these subconscious “forces.” Much of the work of Joseph Campbell has been recognizing, honoring and interpreting common held archetypes from mythology. An example of a common archetype is “home”. We all have a sense of what “home” is. We search for home, find comfort at home, sometimes we feel “at home” and sometimes we do not. (Other common archetypes are mother, the fool, the hero and victim.)

Jung explained that, “Meaning makes a great many things enduring—perhaps everything. No science will ever replace myth, and a myth cannot be made out of any science. For it is not that “God” is a myth, but that myth is the revelation of a divine life in man.”

We all weave our own personal mythology each time we interpret the events of our day. Do we cast ourselves as a hero or a victim of the day? Is life for or against us? Will we succeed in the end?

Murray Stein warns how unconscious content can “live us” if we are not paying attention to how we narrate our own personal myth. The surefire way to diagnose this issue is by the psychological issue of “inflation.” He writes in his essay, “Facing the Gods”:

“...The connection of personal experience to myth can produce or consolidate a psychological inflation (assimilation of the ego by the unconscious, often archetypal, content). The individual is unconsciously living a myth rather than a life. More accurately, an unconscious content is living him, rather than he it. ... one telltale clue is **the individual’s inability to reflect in a novel way on his experience, his thoughts, and behavior patterns.** Inflation closes the doors to such reflection; and the person becomes “locked in” to a restricted field of vision.”

To avoid inflation and the living out of unexamined archetypes it benefits us to spend some time investigating and shaping our own personal stories. When we begin to investigate the stories that shape our lives we can actively envision our future instead of passively accepting whatever archetypes have dominated our unconscious psyche or ancestral influence. Discovering your own personal mythology is a way to actively engage with identity and see ourselves in a new light.

DISCOVERING YOUR PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

Here are some questions to consider as you write your story/myth. In the myth of your life:

- ▼ Who are your heroes?
- ▼ Who are your villains?
- ▼ Who are your supporters?
- ▼ What are your biggest fears?
- ▼ What major events have influenced your life?
- ▼ What were/are your family rituals (birthdays, weddings, holidays)
- ▼ What are/were your family's religious influence on your personal life?
- ▼ How did the location you were raised in shape your identity?
- ▼ How does your family recognize life changes? (For example, the transition from adolescence to adult)
- ▼ How does your interpretation of events differ from that of others who witnessed them?
- ▼ Is that phase of life characterized by shedding or protecting? expanding or contracting?
- ▼ How has ritual played a part. Do you need to honor a transition consciously?
- ▼ What have been your biggest struggles?



1 => First write a brief story of your life. Keep it one or two pages in length. This first version of the story is going to be just the facts. Leave out adjectives and judgment. Make this version the facts that anyone could confirm. Try to avoid subjective understanding. Do not reflect too much, just write quickly, with the first details that come to mind. You can write memories, but keep them to memories of facts. Example, "Every week my mother would take us to a diner to get milkshakes."

Include in your story the classical structure of story telling:

- a) the beginning
- b) the thickening of the plot
- c) ending

example beginnings

"I was born a second child in a middle class home in the midwest. My father was a banker and my mother worked as a waitress. I became highly involved in my soccer team as I grew older. My brother was often found in his tree house in the back yard."

“My mother always told me that she had hoped she would have a boy. I was an only child and spent the majority of my days with my grandparents growing up. They ran a small grocery store and I spent time reading the magazines and enjoying the free candy.”

thickening of the plot

“My migraines began at my first period when I was 13 years old. I noticed that I would get very dizzy before them and pulled away from my friends at this time.”

“After my boyfriend and I broke up I was unsure of what to study at college.”

examples of endings

“I realized that I did not want to have a job like my mother’s so that is how I ended up at here at University of Arizona.”

“And after all the pain that I endured growing up it encouraged me to work with other abused kids and now I work as a therapist in hospitals with kids.”

2 ➔ Next write the same story as a victim. Take the facts you wrote in step one and rewrite the same story but this time write is as a victim, meaning as if all the events of your life were happening to you and you did not make them happen. A victim is someone who is in a reactive state and not empowered or in control of their life. A victim is someone who has been harmed by what happened. The script of the victims life is forced upon and imposed upon the victim.

Feel free to use adjectives and adverbs to describe the feelings of victimhood. We all have ways that we were unseen, forgotten harmed and wounded. Continue to write your story until you feel you are expressing a truth that could be found in the victimhood of your story.

**(Be sure not to stop the writing exercise here,
or it will not be good for your mood!)**

3 ➔ Now, tell the same story again, but as the hero. This means you write the version of the story where you are active in shaping your life and making things happen. A hero or heroine learns from the trauma, has a vision, takes control and chooses the life they want. The hero understands that the difficulties in life are not by chance, but an opportunity for exciting transformation to the myth.

4 => Spend some time in your journal processing the exercise. Were you surprised at what facts you chose to include. What did you notice that you included or excluded? How did you feel when you wrote the second and third versions of your story. How do you envision your future after this exercise? Did you gain any awareness about the victim archetype or hero archetype? What has this shown you about where and how these energies are present in your life currently?