

IDENTIFYING YOUR STORY

Time Line

	Family	Friends	School/ Work	Sex/ Partners	Health	Hopes/ Plans	Troubles/ Faith Fears
Birth to 7 years							
7 to 14 years							
14 to 21 years							
21 to 28 years							
28 to 35 years							

Beliefs

"I must be perfect."

Expectations

"I can never do anything right."

"I am not adequate."

Perceptions

"I am responsible to fix it.."

"I am bad."

Habits

"Bad things always happen to me."

"The joker of the family."

Role

Ask yourself the following questions to bring to awareness the story and stories you live by.

- Who are your heroes?
- What do you think is important to life?
- What do you most value?
- What does death mean to you?
- What does your work mean to you?
- What does God mean to you?
- What role did you play in your family?
- How would you start to tell someone who you are

Why Know Your Story?

Identifying your story, understanding and bringing it into a sharper awareness can be very powerful. It will give you the ability to have a clearer perception of the direction and meaning to your life. It will define your values and shape your view of yourself and of your world.

What may be the end result?

Being aware of your story can help to free you from any *limitations* that it creates and any *untruths* that it maintains. Thus giving you the opportunity to be aware of needed changes that will impact your quality of life. Externalizing your story will separate you from your illness and you can have control over the story instead of being controlled by it.

Sick and Tired of Feeling Sick and Tired, by Donoghue & Stegel
Managing Chronic Illness, by Patricia Fennell

Positive outcomes as a result of a life review:

- *Gaining perspective on your life and yourself.*
 - Will be more able to see more clearly that there is more to life than this chronic illness.
- *Facilitates contradicting core beliefs that were acquired in early life or the chronic illness.*
 - For example, we might identify evidence that challenges our belief that we are worthless, have never contributed to life, or have never experienced love or happiness.
- *Creates a better balance to life.*
 - Assessing your life realistically, you may rediscover what is really important and how you want to live the rest of your life. Paying attention to your life makes your life richer and renews cherished ideals.
- *Improving comprehension of your life purpose.*
 - Examining your life helps you to better understand why you are who you are. When you “get it all off your chest”, you not only discharge emotions but gain a chance to make sense of the memories.
- *May find memory gaps, sometimes indicating dissociated material.*
- *Allowing more acceptance of yourself and your shortcomings.*
 - In reminiscing about life, one woman gave herself a diagnosis of “extenuating circumstances” in crediting herself for doing her best and surviving, even if it is done imperfectly. When the life review is shared in a group, you also gain a “comfortable acceptance of the life cycle”, as you see that all people go through ups and downs in their short lives.

Suggestions on how to do a Life Review¹

The goal is to learn more about who you truly are. You will look for strengths that have gotten you through thus far. You will be reviewing your life with an eye of inspecting that can reveal available choices that can bring acceptance and peace more powerfully into your life. You will discover that there is more to your life than you habitually notice. By honest, do not worry about judgment from others. One purpose of this exploration is to reclaim some of the territory of yourself that you may not be using now—to remember that it is also part of your identity.

- Imagine your life as a road and you are observing from a hill, a reconnaissance.
Note ten key events, important events in your life, beginning to end.
 - o Identify the feelings associated with the events.
 - o This will give you clues about where you are paying attention and where you are not. Application to the future will give more control.
 - o May notice among the events that there is unfinished business. These are clues where to direct future peacemaking activities.
- Searching for Inner Peace. Look for a specific type of scenery that made a difference. Place where you achieved balance. Look for experiences that held some quality of nourishment, connectedness, or impactfulness as you lived them.
 - o There is nothing too trivial, you have chosen to learn just what kind of story you are telling yourself about you.
 - o You have located some experiences in your past that tell you what makes it feel good to be alive. They may help you face decisions about how to live now. Example: if you remember a time when you felt very relaxed, you can help yourself relax now.
- Searching for Inner wounds. Look at some ugly scenery, the places you lost your balance. Write down key words where you find places where pain or other ugliness happened and made a difference.
 - o Make a record of what you were thinking/feeling if strong reactions occur.
 - o If the feelings are too intense, break off the exercise and return later.
 - o There dark times need to see the light of day in order for growth and healing to occur.

¹ Life review developed by Dr. Benjamin Colodzin.

- *Searching for the Open Heart.* Look for scenery where love occurred inside you. Where any type of love made a difference. How it turned out is not the issue.
 - o Find those experiences and record key words.

This exercise will help people to reconnect all aspects of their lives. You may choose to use this inward scanning method to fill in other parts of your story. Choose any subject that is important to you as the “filter” you place on your scan. Example: anger, relationships, money, work or your body. Your road belongs to you: you can retrieve what you need from it when you are ready.