



What's Your Story?

Self-Reflection and Self-Discovery
through your Personal Stories



Marianne Farag © 2015







Dedicated to the memory of Dr. Wayne Dyer



Prepared By Marianne Farag, Sublimity Pathways to Peace



<http://sublimitypathways.com>



info@sublimitypathways.com



<https://twitter.com/sublimitywpg>

The Power of Our Stories

Our stories can make us glad or sad.

Our stories can prompt us to sink or swim.

They can tickle our funny bone or make us feel so alone.

We have stories of our fearlessness, and stories of our fears.

Stories of judgements we make, and stories of pardons we gave.

The telling of our stories can sooth us or agitate us.

If we let them, our stories are our greatest teachers helping us to expand our wisdom and compassion for ourselves and others.

By Marianne Farag



Table of Contents

	PAGE
Introduction	7
Telling Your Story:	
1. Through Your Traits	9
2. Through The Roles You Play	11
3. Through the Lens of Mind, Body, Spirit	13
Closing Word	23

Introduction: What's Your Story?

Imagine you are at a social or work-related gathering of many people and someone who has never met you before comes up to you and asks, “who are you”? Where would you begin with such an open ended question? Pause and think about that for a moment. What comes to mind regarding what pieces of your life you would pull-out to share by way of response? Would what comes to mind depend on the nature of the gathering? For instance, if it is a work function, chances are, what would come to mind would be a response to do with the nature of your work. If you are at fund-raiser for a charity you support, you might speak of your role with the organization in question and your passion for their cause. On the other hand, if you were at someone's milestone birthday party you might answer that question by focussing on your relationship with the person for whom the party is being hosted.

You and your story are composed of so many dimensions and layers. In essence, you are made up of multiple stories, not just one story. So the answer to who you are is always complex and multifaceted even though you might consider yourself to live a straightforward, ordinary, unglamorous or undistinguished life. If you actually stop to give some serious reflection to the question of who you are, you will undoubtedly discover that there is much more to you than you may have recognized! Your stories reflect the person you are.

The Approach to Telling Your Stories

One way to tell your stories is by identifying things you've done and milestones in your life. That's a chronological retelling and listing of events and activities. Documenting significant occurrences in your life is only the starting point. The next step, which this resource guide is designed to help you achieve, is to describe your life's activities and events from a perspective that involves interpreting their meaning and significance for you.

To help you unpack your stories, and ultimately, who you are, this resource guide offers several approaches with examples to demonstrate how to uncover the layers of your own stories. These approaches are designed to enable you to view your life from a richer and deeper perspective.

Ways of Uncovering Your Stories

The resource guide is structured around three approaches for identifying and exploring your stories:

1. Your Traits,
2. Recurring Roles You Play, and
3. The Lens of Mind, Body, Spirit.

Each technique/approach is presented in a separate section with instructions and examples to guide you through the process of telling your life stories and exploring their significance.

The Power of Reflecting on Your Stories

By now you will be sensing that telling your stories is a vehicle to self-awareness. Telling your stories through the methods suggested here will move you along a path of new insight and understanding regarding what has impacted you in your life, what matters to you, and where your focus has been. Telling your stories as explained in this resource guide is therefore much more than memoir writing. After all, your stories reflect the person you are.

1. Telling Your Story: Through Your Traits

We all have certain traits or characteristics that typify our personality. Think of these traits as the adjectives that could be used to describe you. By using stories to illustrate our dominant traits we shed light on our understanding of ourselves.

<i>WHICH ARE YOUR DOMINANT TRAITS?</i>		
<i>If you have a trait that is not listed here, substitute your own to capture your stories.</i>		
<i>OPTIMISTIC</i>	<i>CYNICAL</i>	<i>HUMBLE</i>
<i>SELFISH</i>	<i>SAD</i>	<i>HOPEFUL</i>
<i>PLAYFUL</i>	<i>RIGID</i>	<i>FLEXIBLE</i>
<i>CURIOUS</i>	<i>ADVENTUROUS</i>	<i>CAUTIOUS</i>
<i>CONFIDENT</i>	<i>INSECURE</i>	<i>HESITANT</i>
<i>FORGIVING</i>	<i>UNFORGIVING</i>	<i>COMPASSIONATE</i>
<i>JUDGMENTAL</i>	<i>PRIDEFUL</i>	<i>MODEST</i>
<i>IMPATIENT</i>	<i>PATIENT</i>	<i>ENVOIOUS</i>
<i>COURAGEOUS</i>	<i>ANXIOUS</i>	<i>FEARFUL</i>
<i>SPONTANEOUS</i>	<i>METHODICAL</i>	<i>PASSIONATE</i>
<i>OTHER: ADD YOUR OWN</i>		

Template 1: Telling Your Stories Through Your Traits

Instructions	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin by choosing three or four of what you consider your most dominate <u>positive</u> traits and then identify stories from your life that illustrate each of these qualities. 2. Repeat No.1 selecting three or four traits you consider to be <u>negative</u> qualities or flaws. 3. After writing down each story identify how you felt recalling it. <p>Tip: You may want to combine related traits when telling your stories as in the example below.</p>	
Examples	How I Feel About the Stories (Physically and Emotionally)
<p>Trait: Adventurous and Spontaneous</p> <p>When I am traveling, I don't always feel obliged to follow the plan I have in mind for a given day. If I come upon an interesting looking street or building that peaks my curiosity I very much enjoy following that even though it throws off my original plan/schedule. Some of the most memorable travel experiences came about because I was willing to go with the flow rather than the script so to speak. For instance, the time I was travelling to meet up with a friend in Wales for an overnight stay and ended up spending a week exploring Wales because I fell in love with it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I could feel myself getting excited as I was writing. ▪ I smiled to myself.
<p>Trait: Unforgiving and Resentful</p> <p>My youngest brother was the favoured by my parents and when our father died, my youngest brother was given more from my Dad's estate even though he barely lifted a finger to help my parents especially towards the end of their life. Two years ago when my brother was diagnosed with a terminal illness he wanted to spend time with his siblings. I made him work for it: let him initiate any get-together; and made no effort to interact with him. He thought he could ignore me till he was ill then wanted to act like there were no issues between us from the past. The way I look at it, you make your bed, you lie in it.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It still makes my blood boil the gall he had – it never occurred to him he owed me an apology for how he treated me all those many years. ▪ A person needs to earn forgiveness; know they did wrong.

2. Telling Your Story: Through the Roles You Play

If you were looking at yourself as a character in a novel, a movie or a play, ask yourself, are there recurring patterns or situations that you find yourself in? These inform you about your roles and the themes of your life. What are the overarching role(s) you keep finding yourself “playing”? You may find that at one time in your life certain roles were dominant while at another time in your life others were more prominent.

To get you thinking about roles/themes that have played out in your life, consider these:

- Leader or Follower?
- Creator of the Life You Seek or Victim of Circumstance?
- Peacemaker or Initiator of Conflict and Drama?
- People-Pleaser/Martyr or Going After What You Want?
- Restless Seeker and Non-Committal or Grounded and Decisive?
- Action-Oriented or Passive Observer?
- Helper or Helped?

The list is meant to be for illustrative purposes; it is not intended to be comprehensive. Therefore, you may or may not identify with these roles/themes. If there are dominant roles/themes that apply to you which you don't feel are reflected in the list above, substitute your own.

Template 2: Telling Your Stories Through Your Dominant Roles

1. Identify and record stories that describe dominant roles in your life.
2. Describe what circumstances you think contributed to the key roles/themes you have lived.
3. Describe your reaction to each role you identified.

Tip: Remember, roles can change over time. Therefore, in selecting dominant roles choose those that have been central in your life whether in the past or the present.

Example of Roles:

Refer to the list on the previous page.

Example of Reactions to Your Dominant Role:

Proud, ashamed, content, distressed, surprised, or other reactions.

<p><i>Example</i></p> <p><i>Dominant Role/Theme</i></p>	<p><i>Possible Circumstances Contributing to My Taking on this Role</i></p>
<p><u>Go to Person/Fixer</u></p> <p><i>I was the oldest of four kids and helped take care of the younger ones; I pitched in with the chores, etc. In college, whenever there was a team project that I was involved in, I always ended up being team lead. My siblings often consult me. My friends come to me for advice. At work, people come to me when they are stuck/have a problem.</i></p>	<p><i>Father died when we were children. Mother had poor health throughout her life. There was lots of reinforcement by my mother and relatives about how good it was that I was so mature, responsible, mother's little helper etc.</i></p>
	<p><i>My Reaction to this Role</i></p> <p><i>Generally proud – I like how it makes me feel self-reliant.</i></p> <p><i>Feels good to have people look up to me and value my help and advice.</i></p> <p><i>Downside: being type cast as strong, so people tend to overlook that I have needs too (like it doesn't occur to them). It's been a challenge to break out of that mold and learn to help while sharing my vulnerabilities when I need help.</i></p>



3. Telling Your Story: Through the Lens of Mind, Body, and Spirit

Although we may not be actively conscious of it, we are composed of three closely inter-related dimensions: mind, body and spirit. By reflecting on the life of our mind, body and spirit, we can examine the extent to which these three dimensions are in alignment and working together – i.e., are in sync with each other.

Our stories are shaped by our attitudes, values and beliefs. The emotions we experience and the health/disease of our body are a mirror of our mental activity – i.e., our thinking. When our mental state is out of balance, such as when we are being pessimistic, cynical, rigid in our thinking, we decrease our ability to cope with the stress of life. This typically results in a ripple effect impacting our emotional and physical wellbeing.

There is also the voice of our inner knowing (which some refer to as our Spirit Self or Higher Consciousness) which is always with us. The more we are aware of and act upon the guidance of our inner knowing, the more balanced and in harmony we feel within ourselves. When we squash down what our intuition/gut tells us, it impacts on our physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

Essentially, the three dimensions – mind, body, and spirit need to work in concert with each other in order for us to feel that all is right in our world and that we can respond with relative ease to all that presents in our life. Exploring the stories of your mind, body and spirit can therefore inform you about:

- ✚ which of the three dimensions takes the lead in your life?
- ✚ whether you suppress any of these three aspects?
- ✚ what value you place on each of the three dimensions?

THE MIND

How in touch are you with the nature of your thoughts and the attitudes you hold? This section focuses on stories that reveal the values you hold dear. Understanding them is important because they shape your experience.

The first column of the graphic below identifies the two topics that are the focus in this section. The middle column provides examples in relation to each of the left hand column topics. The third column provides tips to help you in working with each topic when it comes to completing Templates 3 and 4.

TOPICS of Focus	Example	Tip
What principles/values have guided how you lead your life? TEMPLATE 3	Honesty, fairness, politeness, trust, cautiousness, self-compassion.	That which you react strongly to is a clue to the principle/value you hold dear.
What are the main messages you feed yourself/reinforce in your internal self-talk? TEMPLATE 4	I believe in myself. Change is risky. I lack confidence. I am unlucky.	Observe your self-dialogue; play back what you routinely tell yourself about yourself.

THE MIND

Instructions and Examples

Template 3 – Telling Your Stories Through Your Principles

1. Identify three or four dominant principles/values in your life and record the stories that reflect each of them.
2. Identify the significance of each principle/value – i.e., why is it important, what you get from practicing it?

Tip: One way to identify the principle(s)/value(s) that matter to you is to think of situations in your life where you have reacted strongly in support of or against something/someone and then ask yourself what principle/value was at issue for you.

Example of Principles/Values: being rational, putting yourself in someone else's shoes, striving to achieve one's best, having ambition/drive, being responsible with money, integrity, relying on your gut feeling in decision-making, not betraying another, etc.

<p><i>Example</i></p> <p><i>Principle/Value: Trusting my Gut</i></p>	<p><i>Why It Matters to Me</i></p>
<p><i>When I went to journalism school in Ottawa, I managed to find this great little apartment on the second floor of a house that was close to campus. But then, an acquaintance wanted to rent a house she'd fallen in love with and needed three others to be able to afford the expense. Although I had a bad feeling about this, nevertheless, I agreed to move in because I figured it would be a good way to meet people and not feel lonesome. It turned out to be a disaster. The other two quit the program and left me and the girl who had originally approached me to carry the rent – so I was paying far more than I would have had I followed my original plan and she was very temperamental to boot.</i></p>	<p><i>Intuition is like a built-in protector/guidance system and when I doubt it or try to replace it with what I think is logical thinking/ common sense, I get in the way of valuable advice from my gut. My decision ended up costing me more money than I had budgeted (I had to get a part time job instead of dedicating myself full time to the program and I had to put up with an unpredictable personality).</i></p>



THE MIND

Template 4 – Telling Your Stories Through Your Self-Talk

1. Identify three or four typical messages that you keep telling yourself and record stories that capture the situations in which this self-talk plays out.
2. Identify the ways in which your self-talk has either been a help or a hindrance – i.e., has it been supportive or held you back?

Examples of Common Messages we Feed Ourselves:

- I can realize my fondest hopes/goals.
- I'm pretty resilient.
- I'm resourceful.
- I'm deserving.
- I'm adaptable/not afraid of change.
- I have past successes to encourage me with new projects/objectives.
- I think I'm pretty swell.
- I'm such a scatter brain.
- I'm not anybody important in the organization.
- I'm not that smart.
- I'm not good at dealing with change.
- I'm not worthy enough.
- I'm not lucky – disaster follows me.
- I have no will power.

Example	
Self-Talk: I'm Not Good at Dealing with Change	How Self-Talk Impacts Me
<p><i>I hate change, I know I don't cope well at all with change. My Dad was in the military and we moved every few years and I have terrible memories of having to deal with that: like the first time I had to part from my best friend when we were living in Trenton – we used to write to each other and that was fun at first especially because I could share how awful it was to be in a new school and be the new kid on the block but eventually we lost touch. Then there was the change I had to deal with when my dog died when I was 14 years old and I thought I'd die of sadness. After being married for a year and everything was going just right, our house, which was a dream home, burned down and that loss sent me to therapy. In my job as a lab technician analyzing blood samples we were re-organized a couple of times and I really didn't like having to adjust to the new ways we had to do things including a move as part of a merger with another lab – nightmare!</i></p>	<p><i>It's good to know what you can and can't tolerate so you can avoid it – knowing I'm terrible with change I don't go looking for it! Friends, family and co-workers sometimes pressure me to do things that would require a change but I resent that they don't just leave me be and accept that the thought of whatever it is they encourage me to do is far scarier/riskier than keeping things as they are. I get that nothing ventured nothing gained, but I'm not up for it.</i></p>



THE BODY

This section lets you explore stories about your relationship with your body. The body retains all our experiences. It is a deep repository of our stories! How connected or disconnected are you with your body?

The first column of the graphic below identifies the two topics that are the focus in this section. The middle column provides examples in relation to each of the left hand column topics. The third column provides tips to help you in working with each topic when it comes to completing Templates 5.

Topics of Focus	Example	Tip
How well has your physical condition been? TEMPLATE 5	Physical stamina, medical condition, accidents, chronic pain, illness.	Consider what physical challenges you face. Reflect on how your physical condition has changed over time.
How do you feel about the way in which your body has served you? TEMPLATE 5	Appreciative, indifferent, content, proud, accepting, disappointed, constrained, resistant.	Consider how your body impacts you. Were certain life choices governed by your physical attributes/condition?

THE BODY

Instructions and Examples

Template 5: Telling Your Stories Through Your Physical Condition

1. Identify stories about the journey of your body's physical condition.
2. Describe how you feel about each physical condition you identified and how it impacts you – i.e., how each physical condition may have influenced your life/choices.

Tip: Consider what types of physical situations your body has faced, for example:

- A job that is physical
- Participation in a competitive sport/athletic activity
- Accidents
- Digestion problems
- Body image issues
- Quick to recover from illnesses
- Recurring medical condition
- Allergies
- Disease

<p><i>Example</i></p> <p><i>Physical Condition & Impact on Life Choices</i></p>	<p><i>My Reaction to the Physical Condition/Its Impact</i></p>
<p><i>From Grade 1 onward I've taken movement classes: tap, gymnastics, ballet, contemporary dance, and yoga. Movement came naturally to me with little effort but tons of practice!! I had the odd sprain or injury, but really nothing that stands out. As an adult I studied kinesiology and then trained as a yoga instructor which is now my line of work. After 10 years as an instructor, my body continues to co-operate.</i></p>	<p><i>Truth be told, I've never thought about how I feel about the fact my body has a talent for movement. I figured that's just what I'm good at, just like someone else is talented to sing or paint etc. I've taken my body's ability for granted.</i></p>
<p><i>Although I had trained as a pilot, after 2 years into my career, I was diagnosed with heart disease which in my case resulted in having to give up the work I love. I've had a couple of surgeries, the recovery time is huge; now I am on medication, regular monitoring and had to change my career.</i></p>	<p><i>I felt my body had let me down, I've always been healthy so was shocked and resentful. I am still very disappointed and angry. It's been such a disruptive force in my life not just work-wise.</i></p>



THE SPIRIT

This section gives you an opportunity to reflect on what spirituality means to you and whether it has a place in your life. It will also help you to uncover any stories you have that relate to the interconnection that exists between the life of the mind, body and spirit.

The first column of the graphic below identifies the two topics that are the focus in this section. The middle column provides examples in relation to each of the left hand column topics. The third column provides tips to help you in working with each topic when it comes to completing Templates 6, 7, and 8.

Topic of Focus	Example	Tip
What do you hold to be the meaning of Life? TEMPLATE 6	Do you connect with something greater than yourself?	What is your belief system regarding God, Divine energy, the soul, and death?
What is your life purpose? TEMPLATE 7	Your vocation, talents, what you feel called to do, who you feel drawn to be.	You can have multiple purposes and they can evolve/change over time.
Does sacredness have a place in your life? TEMPLATE 8	What is sacred: music, nature, dance, prayer, or other experiences?	Reflect on what makes an experience sacred and the types of experiences that feel sacred.

THE SPIRIT

Instructions and Examples

Template 6: Stories About the Meaning of Your Life

1. *Identify your personal philosophy (principles you hold to/live by) on the meaning of life and record stories that describe how you put your philosophy into practice.*
2. *There may be several aspects to your personal philosophy – capture each one separately if appropriate to do so and share stories that relate to each principle you hold dear/live by.*

Examples of Life Philosophies:

- *We are spiritual beings having a human experience.*
- *Life's journey is about developing understanding and compassion for all – i.e., we are one.*
- *There is no meaning/bigger picture to our existence – we only live once so we should just enjoy.*
- *We are part of the ecosystem and the natural life cycle.*

Examples

My Philosophy

I believe in the oneness of everything and that we are all interconnected. How that plays out in my life is that I enjoy finding and reading books on this subject which help inspire me and serve to periodically remind me of the oneness principle because believing it is one thing, practicing it is another! I try to put it into practice in various ways: mostly, I monitor my thoughts and attitudes about certain people and situations and when I catch myself having judgemental opinions I try to challenge my thinking, though not always successfully; I engage in community service that helps to remind me about oneness (I've volunteered at a food bank, a shelter for battered women, a children's camp); and I try to remind myself that everything I obtain (food, clothing, furniture, etc.) passed through many hands to reach me and I silently bless them and thank them for their part in the process of creating whatever it is I am consuming.

I believe I have a soul which lives on beyond this existence – energy never dies, it changes form. When I die, my essence/soul will return to the Divine realm. I try to stay connected with my soul through meditation, yoga, participating in an interfaith church, and spiritual reading.



THE SPIRIT

Template 7: Stories About My Life's Purpose

1. Identify your dominant life purposes and record stories that describe how you put each of your life's purposes into practice and where you feel you may have fallen short.

Tip: Your life's purpose is not exclusively one focus. Also, it can evolve/change over time.

Examples of Life Purposes:

- *Being of service to others.*
- *One's line of work/vocation.*
- *Learning to accept the hand life has dealt one, and to do the best one can with the limitations/hardships that one faces.*
- *Being a parent, teacher, mentor.*
- *Learning to practice compassion.*
- *Living according to one's inner knowing (Higher Consciousness).*
- *Bringing joy to the self and others.*

Examples

My Life's Purposes

Parent: *I am a father of two adult children. I love them deeply but I don't think I fulfilled my role as Dad as well as I could have. Being a grandfather now causes me to reflect back and I guess it's called wisdom or hindsight that leads me to see where I could have done a better job – been more of a role model. I never thought I had much to contribute compared to their mum and so left it mostly up to her. It never occurred to me that I could have been an enriching influence on my kids had I spent more time with them and given them the opportunity to know me better.*

Learning to Listen to My Higher Consciousness: *An overarching aspect of my life has been to learn to listen to my inner knowing. When I don't, I get in the way of the flow of my life. Finally, now in my 40s, I've woken up and check-in with my Higher Consciousness about everything and anything! Basically by learning to build quiet time into my life, time to reflect and contemplate and do some inspirational reading, I find things come into my life without effort or pushing or stressing. Some good examples are the way I got my second job in graphic design by running into an old friend from High School who put me in touch with the head of her company and it all just fell into place from there. Or the trip our family took to Hawaii even though we normally could not have afforded it were it not that a friend called to say she had to cancel her trip and offered us free use of the apartment she'd rented! Then there was the time my son needed a specialized surgery that was unavailable in our city and we were told the surgery was available in Atlanta. I found myself hesitating about taking my son there. In the interim, we found out a visiting medical doctor at our local teaching hospital would perform the surgery as a demonstration for interns!*



THE SPIRIT

Template 8: Stories About Sacredness in Your Life

1. Identify and record stories that describe how you practice sacredness in your life or moments in which you feel you experience sacredness.

Examples of Sacred Practices or Sacred Experiences:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| ▪ Gardening | ▪ Dance | ▪ Meditation |
| ▪ Singing | ▪ Religious worship | ▪ Yoga |
| ▪ Playing an instrument | ▪ Art | ▪ Prayer |
| ▪ Star-gazing | ▪ Retreats | ▪ Call of the loon |

Examples

My Sacred Practices/Moments

Meditation: I came to meditation late in life and it's had an amazing effect on all aspects of my life. What I learned from practicing meditation has infused every aspect of my life with heightened awareness – it's as though everything is brought into sharper focus, like when you get a new pair of glasses! That sharper focus is for me about gaining awareness of the sacredness of everything. I would have to say that meditation has resulted in me trying to make a conscious effort to approach my personal life and my job with an attitude of reverence and devotion – which I think are a part of sacredness. The more I attempt this, the more I feel it comes more naturally.

Dance: I love to dance, for myself, privately, in my home. I find it a great way to lose myself in the music and to be transported to an ecstatic state. The music and the movement are an experience of carefreeness, an opportunity to express my being so to speak without self-consciousness about how it looks. When I dance like that, it feels as though my mind, body, and soul have come together and the union is to me, a sacred one.



CLOSING WORD

Celebrate

Stepping back and looking at the totality of the picture that emerges from telling your stories you probably realize that this journey has given you a look into life's big questions of: who you are, what you are here to do, and the meaning of life. So take a moment to celebrate the multifaceted you that you have unpacked and captured from a variety of perspectives. Recognize what made you proud, what made you happy, what you feel you overcame, and accomplished.

Be Self-Compassionate

Recognize too that whatever sorrows, disappointments, mishandling of situations, that your stories may have revealed to you, are an opportunity to learn, grow and transform yourself as and when you wish. The key when examining your “unflattering” stories is to do so while practicing self-compassion – i.e., be gentle with yourself instead of harsh. The pieces of your stories that you may regret or that have caused you feelings of guilt, shame or other pain, can be healed by virtue of the awareness you now have through this journey of self-reflection and self-discovery.

Knowledge Is Power

Knowing yourself is a vital step to shaping your future stories. You can shape your future based on what you have observed about your past. Whatever patterns, behaviours or attitudes have served you well, hold on to them. If the process of reflecting on your stories also led you to be aware of any changes you wish to make, know that you are the creator of your experiences. This means, the shape, colour and flavour of your future stories is in your hands. It's all up to you!

