

“My Story” Mini-Workbook Group

The goal of this group is for you to write your life story. This is generally very helpful and healing in many ways. This group will meet biweekly starting Tues. July 23 from 6:30 to 7:20 at St. Timothy’s Lutheran Church before the regular Naperville ACA meeting at 7:30pm. After that meetings are biweekly: August 6, August 20, and Sept 3. Optionally, on Sept 10th people may meet to share their stories if they wish as described below. Questions? Contact Wally B. 630 301 0006 walter.baehrend@gmail.com. An RSVP would be helpful but is not necessary.

Agenda:

- Prior to the first meeting, list the major events of your life in the **“Major Life Events Timeline (Meeting 1) Worksheet” on page 2**. Note the simple example on page 4.
- Meeting 1: Review our **“Major Life Events Timeline (Meeting 1) Worksheets.”**
- Homework: Fill out the **“Updated Major Life Events Timeline with Defining Moments, Epiphanies, & Crucible Events Worksheet” on pg 3**. Note the definitions below & the example attached on pg 4. Try to expand on impacts & include feeling descriptions.
- Meeting 2: Review our **“Updated Major Life Events Timeline with Defining Moments, Epiphanies, & Crucible Events Worksheets (Meeting 2)”**.
- Homework: Write first draft version of your life story using the timeline.
- Meeting 3: Discuss our experience doing our first drafts.
- Homework: Answer the **“ACA Life Story Reflections Questions”** on pages 5 to 8.
- Meeting 4: Review our **“ACA Life Story Reflections Questions”** answers.
- Homework: Write second version of your life story starting with your first draft and adding materials from your question answers.
- Meeting 5: Optionally, there may be a fifth meeting where people can share their stories. The final format of this meeting, including whether it occurs at all, is left to the group conscious.

Timeline Events: Defining Moments, Crucible Experiences, and Epiphanies

Some major life events can fall into the following categories:

- Defining Moments: These are points that define our character going forward or are key decisions that choose our life path for us. For example, joining the Army.
- Crucible Experiences: These are very difficult, very transforming, painful experiences that affect us from that point onward. For example, the death of a parent for a very young child.
- Epiphanies: These are the appearance of a sudden and striking realization in our lives. For example, suddenly realizing that you are adopted.

A single event may be more than one of the above.

[illegible]

SIMPLE EXAMPLE

Timeline (Phase 1 - Meeting 1)		
Age	Event	Impact
7	Home is conflicted: I decide I am a machine - I am logical with no feelings. -	Stuff Feelings/Emotionally Frozen
12	Mom and Dad Divorce after years of Dad moving in and out.	I feel abandoned
17	I start U of C summer school	I choose to study biz
23	Dad makes me choose between him and Bell: I choose Bell	I give control to Bell
52	Bell moves out, files for Divorce	I am devastated

Updated Timeline calling out Defining Moments, Epiphanies, and Crucible Events (Phase 2 - Meeting 2)			
Age	Event, Defining Moment, Epiphany, and/or Crucible Event	Impact	DM, E, C
7	Home is conflicted: I decide I am a machine - I am logical with no feelings. -	I Stuff my Feelings because I can not handle them / I get Emotionally Frozen	
12	Mom and Dad Divorce after years of Dad moving in and out.	I feel abandoned	C
17	I start U of C summer school	I choose to study biz	DM
23	Dad makes me choose between him and Bell: I choose Bell	I give control to Bell	DM
32	I get healed at healing service - I am shocked it works. God Exists?	I have to believe God exists. But where was he during all this Hell??????	E
39-43	Bell and I in counseling - escalation, enmeshment, delusion, fighting fair, Gottman/Bell stonewalling, I am emotionally shut down – I start ACA.	I try desperately not to be abandoned	
43	Suddenly, Bell has a new love for me and things are great. I can't abandon my family/can't be abandoned -	I fall back into denial.	
52	Bell moves out, files for Divorce	I am devastated	C, DM

ACA Life Story Reflections Questions

(Answer for meeting 3)

Note: In this exercise, please feel free to add your own questions or refer to questions from previous workbook groups.

Adapted from University of Maine Life Story Commons:

<http://usm.maine.edu/olli/national/lifestorycenter/guidelines.jsp>. with additions from ACA materials.

Create Your Life Story

As a method for understanding ourselves and connecting with others, there may be no equal to telling your life story. A life story is the story we tell of our entire life experience, remembering as much about our life as we feel is important now and want others to know about us. More important than historical reconstruction in telling a life story is how we see ourselves and want others to see us.

Our stories contain the same enduring elements, motifs and archetypes that express the common twists and turns of the path of life. They are made up of many repetitions of the pattern of beginning, muddle, and resolution, which describes the process of transformation common to all lives. We can therefore see this as a sacred pattern, or a blueprint, that offers a structure forming the plot of a life story and facilitating lifelong growth and development.

The life story provides a practical and holistic method for making sense of our lives in the context of this timeless and universal framework. The resulting first-person narrative brings forth the voice and spirit of the storyteller. This approach is built upon a respect for individual storytellers and a regard for the personal meaning carried within their stories (Atkinson, 1998).

You can use this interactive protocol to write your own life story. Go topic by topic through the suggested questions. You could also start with a brief introductory opening section, a short overview or life summary in the form of a few of highlights that make sense to you to bring the major threads of your life into focus.

Birth and Family of Origin

It can be very important in really knowing ourselves to know the circumstances of our family of origin. Our parents and ancestors have a great deal to do with who we become.

The more we know about what was going on around us at the time of our birth, the more we will know about who we have become.

- What was going on in your family, your community, and the world at the time of your birth?
- Were you ever told anything unusual about your birth?
- Are there any family stories told about you as a baby?
- What do you remember most about your parents, grandparents, or other family members?
- How would you describe their qualities, attributes, or characteristics?
 - What do you think you inherited from them?
 - What feelings come up when you recall your parents or grandparents?
 - What is your earliest memory?

Cultural Settings and Traditions

After our genetic makeup, perhaps the strongest influence on us is our cultural heritage, our family's beliefs, traditions, and customs. We all have some cultural background that is either actively or passively passed on to us as children.

We also get direct or indirect messages from our family that may have their origin in our cultural frame of reference. Culture can be the source of both healthy and unhealthy viewpoints and patterns that we pick up and carry out in our lives.

- What are your most important cultural, ethnic, or religious influences?
- What family celebrations, traditions, or rituals were important in your life?
- Was your family different from other families in your neighborhood?
- Was religion important in your family?
 - Is religion important to you now?
- What other cultural influences are still important to you today?

Social Factors

As the sphere of influence upon us widens, new elements from our community, social structure, and mass culture have a greater impact on us. Our added experience in the social world can either stimulate, deter, or deprive us of our growth. Experience becomes the meaning-maker in our lives. Our own experience of the world around us can also have a major impact on who we become.

- Did you feel nurtured, supported, or encouraged, as a child?

- Did you feel shamed, abandoned, and damaged as a child?
- What were some of your struggles as a child?
- What was (is) being a teenager like?
- What was the most trouble you were ever in as a teenager?
- Did you get along with your family members?
 - Brothers?
 - Sisters?
- What was the most significant event in your teenage years?
- What was your first experience leaving home like?
- Did your family keep secrets?
- Were you exposed to inappropriate sexual conduct in your childhood?

Education

Most of us get some kind of education at home, whether we are aware of it as such or not. We all get some amount of education in our community schools and beyond. The informal as well as the formal settings in we receive an education become the matrices for many of our most important experiences in life. And for all of us, education continues in some form throughout our lives.

- What is your first memory of attending school?
- What were your early school years like?
- Did you have a favorite teacher in any of your educational experiences?
- What are your best memories of school?
 - Your worst?
- What accomplishments in school are you most proud of?
- How far did you go with your formal education?
- What do you remember most about college?
- What was the most important book you ever read?
- What has been your most important lesson in life, outside of the classroom?

- What is your view of the role of education in a person's life?

Love and Work

The two characteristics of a mature adult are said to be the ability to love and to work. Exploring who we are at our essence begins the task of becoming independent; after that, in love and work, we realize our interdependency with others. These are the themes we carry with us throughout the rest of our lives, though the forms and shapes may change as we do.

- Do you remember your first date?
 - Your first kiss?
- What was the most difficult thing about dating for you?
- Are you married?
 - How would you describe your courtship?
 - What was it about her/him that made you fall in love?
 - Is there anything else about your marriage you would like to add?
- What does intimacy mean to you?
- Do you have children?
 - What are they like?
 - What values or lessons do you try to impart to them?
- Did you have any dreams or ambitions as a child? Or in high school?
- What were your hopes and dreams as you entered adulthood?
- What events or experiences helped you understand adult responsibilities?
- Did you feel shamed, abandoned, and damaged as a child?
- Did you harm, abuse, neglect, or mistreat someone in the same way you were treated as a child?
- Do you tend to react in anger or peacefulness in difficulties?
- Have you exhibited inappropriate sexual conduct in your adulthood? Is it similar to what you experienced as a child?
- How did you end up in the type of work you do/did?

- Is/was your work satisfying to you?
- What is most important to you in your work?

Inner Life and Spiritual Awareness

An inner life, for some, may be the essence of life. What goes on inside us is often more vital than what is happening around us. Often our inner thoughts guide and direct what we do next, or how our life is carried out. Many people feel that we carry within us a higher self that itself is guided by love, wisdom, detachment, compassion, and courage. It is important to express our understanding and experience of this part of us, as well.

- What role does spirituality play in your life now?
- Have you ever had a “spiritual experience”?
- What is most important to you about your spiritual life?
- How do your spiritual values and beliefs affect how you live your life?
- Have you ever felt the presence of a spiritual guide within you?
 - How has this guide helped you?
- Has imagination or fantasy been a part of your life?
 - Do you feel you have inner strength? where does that come from?
- How would you renew your strength, if you felt really drained?
- What values would you not want to compromise?
- Do you feel you are in control of your life?
- What single experience has given you the greatest joy?
 - Do you feel at peace with yourself? How did you achieve this?

Major Life Themes

It seems appropriate to bring a life story to a close by reflecting back over the whole of our lives. Taking a look at our lives as a whole will give us a better understanding of what the major themes and influences of our lives have been.

- What were the crucial decisions in your life?
- What has been the most important turning point in your life?
- Have there been any mistakes in your life?

- How have you overcome or learned from your difficulties?
- What have been your greatest accomplishments?
- Is there anything in your experience of life that gives it unity, meaning, or purpose?
- How do you feel about yourself at the age you are now?
- What is your biggest worry now?
- What has been the most awe-inspiring experience you ever had?
- Is the way you see yourself now significantly different than it was in the past?
- When you think about the future, what makes you feel most uneasy?
- What gives you the most hope?
- What do you see for yourself in the future?
- What do you want most to experience before you die?
- How long do you believe you will live?
- How would you like to die?
- What three things would you like said about your life when you die?
- Do you have any advice or wisdom for the younger generation?
- At this point in your life, how do you feel about yourself?
- What would the title of your life story be?