Heal Write:
The Personal and Professional Power of Writing

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* Writing with a Body, as a Body: An Embodied Process

Paintings by Laura Ferguson
http://www.lauraferguson.net/body-narrative-galleries
The Role of Narrative in Health Care
And Its Impact on the Well-being of Patients
“Becoming seriously ill is a call for stories.”

“Stories have to repair the damage that illness has done to the ill person’s sense of where she is in life, and where she may be going.”

“...because its present is not what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely unthinkable.”

*From The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics,*
Arthur W. Frank
I am looking at a helmet.
My best friend is wearing it.
I don’t know why.

He’s going to hunt for treasures;
the treasure of knowledge.
He’s going despite being told he shouldn’t.

His family is telling him he shouldn’t,
because the journey would be too long.
He’s going to do it anyway,

Even though it’s long,
because he found a map.
And because I’m going

on the journey with him.
I don’t need a helmet,
because I have curiosity.

To be continued...
“Thinking with Stories”
I always had physics as one of my top choices to major in and that tipped it: An old autobiography of one of my ancestors from the early 1900s. He was an amateur astronomer who developed a method to surface mirrors for telescopes. He would give free public classes and set up telescopes. There’s a plaque in an observatory in Pittsburgh with a memorial to him: “I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.” It’s from an old poem, “From an Old Astronomer (To His Pupil).” It will be my first tattoo after chemo. Originally, I was thinking of putting it on my back. But I want to see it. So I think it will be on my side under my arm with a picture of a telescope; just in black, no color. It will be a celebration once I’m healthy again, Or a memory to symbolize the next stage of my life.
Health-care providers “need the expertise to listen to their patients, to understand as best they can the ordeals of illness, to honor the meanings of their patients’ narratives of illness, and to be moved by what they behold so they can act on their patients’ behalf.”

“...narrative knowledge and practice are what human beings use to communicate to one another...[they are]a major source of both identity and community.”

From *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness*, Rita Charon
WHEN CANCER MOVES IN

By JO ELLEN COPPERSMITH

We’re in this squishy little apartment.
We love it! It’s vintage,
a two-bedroom in Murray.

We moved from Tooele, a multi-level
large home--not too large--four bedrooms.
Everyone thinks that would be difficult...

The C word is terrifying.
It’s our new normal.
Jay’s been dealing with it for three years.

But I just think it’s freeing
to say it’s a difficult time in our lives.
It’s been very, very liberating.

The reality is that I’m 74
going on 75 and sense my own
change in what I can physically do.

I’d have to go down two flights of stairs
and up two flights of stairs, steep stairs,
when our laundry was in the basement.

I’ve condensed three rooms into a cubicle
Jay built between the walk-in closet
and the bathroom. It’s just perfect

for his bookcases and a desk.
He’s done more writing there
in three months than during years before.

But the glorious thing about the squishy little
apartment
is a piggy back washer and dryer. I go out of the
bedroom
and pop the clothes in and step back into the
bedroom.

It’s the first time Jay said he’s heard me singing
when I do the laundry.
*Bearing Witness*
He wants *time* to fall to the floor; imagines it face down at his feet.

Word play is interesting, he says. *Evil* is the opposite of *live*.

Humans have the odd idea that if you can name it, you know what it is.

*Time* is the most used word; but something even physicists don’t know what it truly is.

Time must not exist, suggests a new theory. When you work the equations, time drops out. But I’m getting ahead of myself, he says, realizing he just dated the receipt for his chemo three days into the future.
The Power of Narrative to Aid in Professional Identification and Relieve Moral Distress
Physiological
* Heightened immune system
* 50% drop in monthly visitation rates to physicians

Psychological
* Insight improved 80%
* Reduced Stress
* Positive mood changes

Occupational Survival
* Resilience
* Work efficiency
* Connection to others

* From Opening Up, James W. Pennebaker; Expressive Writing, James W. Pennebaker and John F. Evans
Moral Distress
* **Moral distress:** “negative feelings that arise when an individual believes he or she knows the morally correct response to a situation, but cannot act because of hierarchial or institutional constraints” (Loomis, Carpenter, and Miller 2009)

* **Effectiveness of reflective writing:** “People who tell stories of illness are witnesses, turning illness into moral responsibility” (Frank 1995)
“...No one told her that she had done the best she could, that she was a good mother. No one told me that I had done the best I could, that I was a good doctor. She probably still lives with the guilt. It took me six years and an infectious diseases fellowship to ease mine. She was misjudged as a mother. I was misjudged as a resident.

I practice now trying to avoid both of these mistakes.”

*From “Opinion” by Carrie L. Byington, M.D., in Health Sciences Report*
“From that moment the resident’s question, ‘Why are we giving up?’ became a different question for me: ‘Why do I not feel like I’m giving up when I advocate end-of-life care rather than further chemotherapy?’ In a phrase, I have prepared myself for journeys of compassion.”

“Is there any more profound choice we physicians make than to encourage persons with life-threatening illnesses to attend to their life goals with the explicit realization that life is ending?”

From “Giving Up,” Larry D. Cripe, M.D., JAMA 301, 17 (2009)
Finding meaning in *being*
THE POWER OF Writing

* Your turn...
Thank you!
Any questions?