



DO TELL!

Why your life stories matter and how to capture them

Sharing stories from our lives can be a spiritual act. Eugene Peterson, author of the biblical paraphrase *The Message*, says this in *Run with the Horses*: “Our lives are not a puzzle to be figured out. Rather, we come to God who knows and reveals to us the truth of our lives. The fundamental mistake is to begin with ourselves and not God.”

Are there stories from your own life would you like to share with your family and friends, or with people you desire to disciple or mentor? Consider first prayerfully asking God for discernment both in gathering and in sharing the stories that are your life’s legacy.

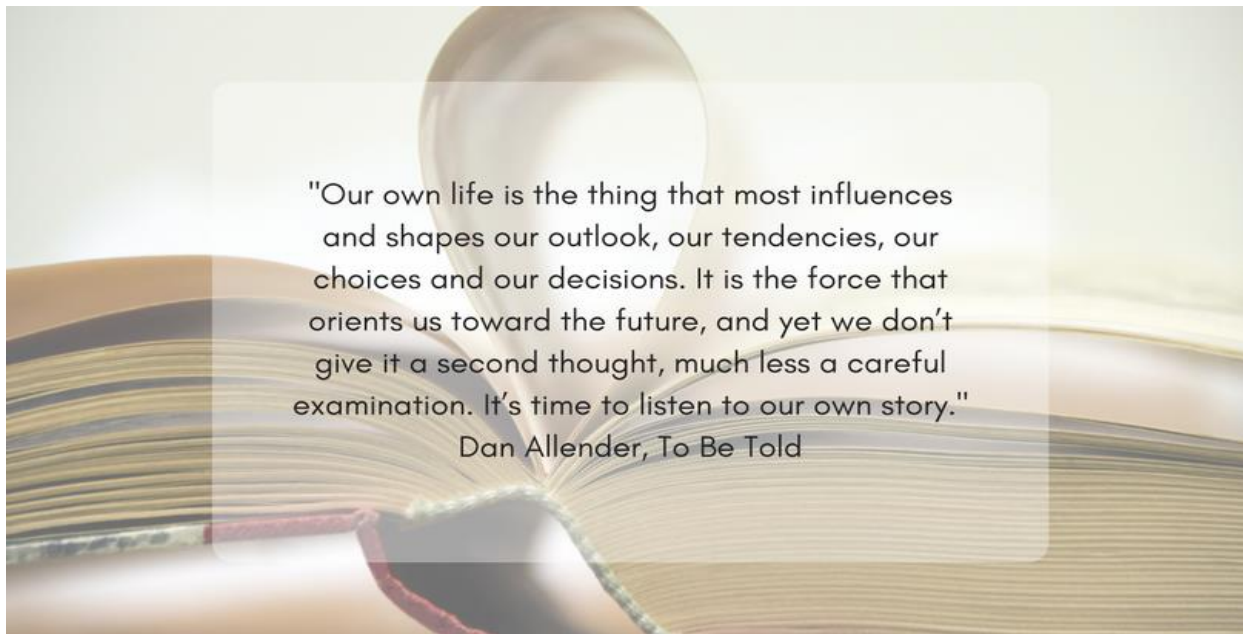


I spent 20 years as a news reporter and my favorite part of the job was telling other people’s stories. We called them “people features”. I interviewed folks with interesting stories and shared them with our readers.

Drawing from that experience, I’ve created a tool for interviewing **yourself** and crafting a “people feature” that can become part of your life legacy, whether it’s as written word – a blog, essay, journal, a book – or as a verbal record or even visual art.

The basic template for gathering facts to create a news article is to ask **the 5 Ws and 1 H: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How**. The same 6 questions will be your guide for capturing your life stories (**Just the Facts**). In addition to answering each question with facts from your life, you’ll use the questions for discerning when, where, why and how to share your stories (**Do Tell**).

Grab a pen and a journal or notebook and let’s begin!



"Our own life is the thing that most influences and shapes our outlook, our tendencies, our choices and our decisions. It is the force that orients us toward the future, and yet we don't give it a second thought, much less a careful examination. It's time to listen to our own story."
Dan Allender, *To Be Told*

WHO?

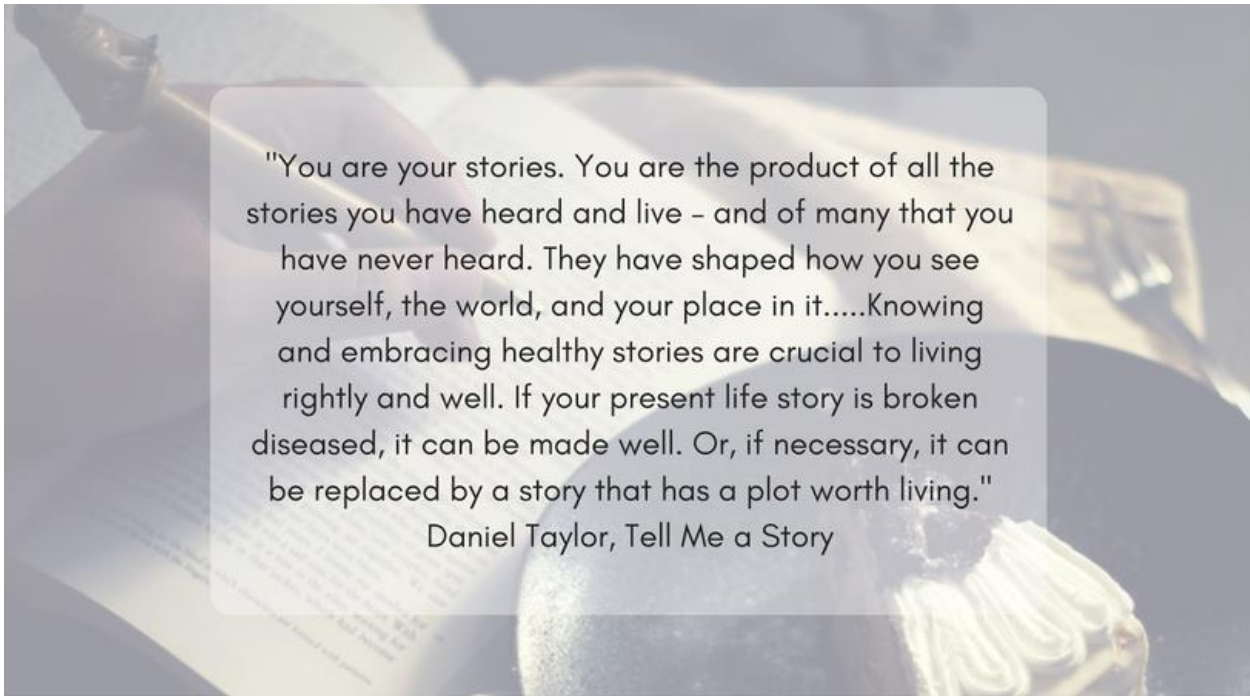
Just the Facts: Identify the key people in your story. Is it a personal story, with you as the main character? Is a friend or relative involved? Remember that the stories we have to tell are really our stories. We shouldn't tell others' stories without their permission. Can you mask the story in fiction in a way which protects the identity of someone you need to protect? Now look at your role in the story. What were your reactions? How did the events impact you?

Do Tell: Who is the intended audience for the story? Someone you are mentoring? A family member with whom you want to share a memory? The general public?

WHAT?

Just the Facts: What happened in your story that is worth telling? Describe the action. Include the outcome. What is safe to share and how can you get your message across while protecting others and yourself? If people you love are not aware of certain facts or aspects of your story, prayerfully consider how and if you are ready to share them. If the story is theirs to share, you may simply choose to record it for your own use, as in journaling and prayer. (Again, always ask permission to share someone else's story.)

Do Tell: What is the "value" in the story? Identify the theme – forgiveness, grace, surprise, love. Is there a moral lesson? If so, as you share the story, consider letting the story itself reveal the moral lesson. As in the parables Jesus told, the moral should be held within the tale. What is your theme or moral lesson?



"You are your stories. You are the product of all the stories you have heard and live - and of many that you have never heard. They have shaped how you see yourself, the world, and your place in it.....Knowing and embracing healthy stories are crucial to living rightly and well. If your present life story is broken diseased, it can be made well. Or, if necessary, it can be replaced by a story that has a plot worth living."

Daniel Taylor, *Tell Me a Story*

WHEN?

Just the Facts: When did the story happen? If it was years ago, what “signs of the times” can you share that will add humor, interest?

Do Tell: Timing is everything. Consider whether you are ready to share this story with others. Some stories are meant to be told only to ourselves. Record them in a journal or computer file and let them rest. If it’s an especially difficult story, you may need more time for healing or to feel comfortable sharing it. Capture your story, but don’t feel the need share it immediately.

WHERE?

Just the Facts: Where did the story take place? Is the location relevant to the telling? If it is, include vivid detail. For example, the house where I grew up is covered in stones and rocks, gathered from around the country. When I talk about sharing our life stories, I share that I began writing stories when I was a little girl, surrounded by stories held in all those beautiful rocks, each with their own history.

Do Tell: Where do you see yourself sharing the story? Around the family dinner table? As a devotional message? In conversation with someone you are mentoring spiritually? Would you like to share your stories in a blog or perhaps in a book? We’ll talk more about that in the “HOW” section.



WHY?

Just the Facts: You do not need a profound reason for capturing your stories. Begin with happy moments or memories, sweet stories that are precious to you. If you're capturing and sharing stories for your family, perhaps this is as far as you'll go. If you have hard stories that God is leading you to share, prayerfully dig into those but understand this: you may learn new things about yourself and you may come away changed.

Do Tell: The greatest "why" behind telling your stories is because your life *is* a story. If any part of it is to have significance, your story should be told. As you capture specific stories from your life, consider doing so a spiritual responsibility. "Telling your stories is the central part of a spiritual legacy," says Daniel Taylor in his book *Creating a Spiritual Legacy*. He calls it "the fulfillment of a responsibility – the responsibility to pass on wisdom. It doesn't matter whether you feel you have wisdom – your stories do."

I shared my memories of our mother leaving the family when I was a young child in the essay "Why I'm Confused by Mother's Day". It became an act of self-discovery as God dealt with me regarding my adult relationship with my birth mother. I held that story for a long time before it was shared, and I learned much in the telling. In his book *Dancing with Words*, author Ray Buckley says this: "...there is both physical and psychological healing associated with the telling of our personal stories....we seem to be able to offer and identify the positives in our stories and confront the conflicts. In the same sense, others who hear our stories and relate to our experiences cease to be others and are pulled into community with us. It is through the act of sharing our stories that all are made aware that 'I am not alone.' "



HOW?

Just the Facts: Stories can be captured in many formats – personal journals, published books, online websites or blogs, print magazines or newspapers.

Would you like to self-publish your stories in a format that you can share with other family members? Are you willing to share stories with the general public on a blog? On websites or in online literary journals? I'll explore some of those options on my blog www.ingridlochamire.com in future posts.

Do Tell: Over the years, my own stories have shown up in all these places. Some of my father's stories, published by me in *One Man's Work*, were first captured on video. I sat down with him at his kitchen table and asked him to tell me stories about his many jobs in and around his hometown, with the video camera running. I first wrote Dad's stories in a column for our local newspaper and later published them in a book (available on my blog). Consider an oral telling of your story or someone else's stories, recorded before you ever put them on paper. A less traditional way to share a story is through art – drawings, paintings, sculpture. If you are gifted in this way (or if you just enjoy art), consider this format. A visual representation of your story can serve to unlock thoughts or memories that will add depth and color when you put words to the story.

My friend Kathy wrote essays about her journey with ALS on a blog, which became a book, a spiritual legacy she left for her family. Kathy is with Jesus, but her message lives on in her little book and at www.stones424.wordpress.com.



Tell Your Stories

There are many excellent resources that you can use to help you tell your stories. The first and most important is a collection of good stories, well-told. I've listed some options below. Let these stories inspire you as you begin sharing your own. I've also listed just a few books that are guiding me as I tell my own life stories, as well as a couple of blogs I think you'll enjoy.

Good Stories, Well-Told

- *So Many Africas* by Jill Kandel
- *Roots & Sky: A Journey Home in Four Seasons* by Christie Purifoy
- *The Crosswick Journals 1, 2, 3 and 4* by Madeleine L'Engle
- *Telling Secrets* by Frederick Buechner
- *Growing Up* by Russell Baker (long out of print, but worth the search)
- *The Holy Bible*, Jesus' parables found in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke

Help for Telling Your Life Stories

- *Tell Me a Story and Creating a Spiritual Legacy* by Daniel Taylor
- *To Be Told* by Dan B. Allender, PhD
- *The Soul Tells a Story* by Vinita Hampton Wright
- *Redeemed: A Tool for Sharing Your Story of Redemption* from IF:Gathering
- *Dancing with Words: Storytelling as Legacy, Culture and Faith* by Ray Buckley
- *Run with the Horses* by Eugene Peterson

Noteworthy Blogs

- www.tracesoffaith.com Author Traci Rhoades shares her faith journey and more
- www.lesleylandfields.com Author Lesley Leland Fields writes from her home in Alaska
- www.annvoskamp.com Author Ann Voskamp writes one of the most popular blogs on the internet
- www.themudroomblog.com Women from across the country contribute their life stories here

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