

The Seeing "I"

Empowerment through storytelling

Vol 2 No 3

September 2005

LOOK AROUND! Grief is always hard work and difficult to manage. Loss can vary, depending on expectations – which change over time. For example, while life expectancy has risen sharply in recent decades and infant mortality dropped, we now expect greater losses from divorce, substance abuse, HIV-AIDS, wars and terror. And our fast-paced world often replaces familiar ways with strange new ones. This too is hard work – *Look around!*

Stories of Grief — Stories of Healing

As both a mental health consultant specializing in aging and a hospice volunteer, Jane Armstrong helps others deal with grief and loss on an almost-daily basis. Yet despite her years of professional training and experience, her own coping skills were put to the test when she was confronted recently with the deaths of her parents in a tragic automobile accident. “My own experience reinforced the fact that grief is a normal, necessary, and unavoidably painful emotional response to a loss. It also underscored the importance of understanding and accepting the dynamics of the grieving process as a step toward eventual healing,” she says.

Life inevitably brings each of us face to face with loss. Whether it’s the loss of a job, a marriage, home, health or a loved one, the universal human response to a significant loss is grief. Not everyone exhibits or experiences grief in exactly the same way, however. Armstrong’s background has taught her that an individual’s overall outlook greatly influences his or her approach to grieving. “People need a reason and a purpose to get up every day,” she says. “When confronted with the stress of a significant loss, a person’s attitude becomes even more important.”

Naturally, the older we become, the greater the likelihood that we’ll experience loss. People who handle aging successfully, says Armstrong,

continued on next page



Life and loss are closely intertwined. Sometimes in too many ways we all come face to face with death, divorce, exile, disfigurement or failure – business, school or personal. Grief, on the other hand, is often as different as the individuals who experience

it – a complex combination of thoughts, emotions, and reactions.

The following deceptively simple story shows how loss is a common heritage, but grief has many faces.

A father went into the forest with his young son to look for food. They were set upon by a bear and the little boy was killed. How could the father go home now? What could he tell his wife? How could he deal with his guilt – or shame? Carrying the dead child, he trudged back in anguish. He left the boy’s body outside the house, went in and asked his wife to borrow a big pot from a neighbor to cook the food he brought. But only a pot that had never been used for a sad occasion. The unsuspecting wife went from house to house, but not one household had been free of misfortune. When the wife came back empty handed, the husband revealed that like their neighbors, tragedy had now come to them.

The following dialog about this story illustrates StoriesWork questions and listener answers.

After she learned of her child’s death, did the wife find comfort in her neighbors’ misfortunes?

- *She realized that was her husband’s purpose.*

continued on next page

“Stories”...continued from previous page

are better prepared to deal with loss and the grieving process. Such people typically have social interests, a positive attitude toward life, a sense of personal independence, resilience in the face of change, and patience. “Grief is a healing process. So it makes sense that the stronger we are to begin with, the better our recovery,” she says.

The consequences of failing to adequately resolve grief can be severe. Armstrong points to statistics suggesting that 10 to 15 percent of those who pass through the mental health system are struggling with unresolved grief issues.

One of the keys to resolving grief successfully is accepting that it is natural, and that others have not only experienced it, but survived. “That’s where therapeutic storytelling has so much to offer,” Armstrong says. “It allows people who are grieving to project their own voices through someone else’s situation. Stories allow us to observe what others have faced, examine how those individuals responded, and discuss the consequences of their particular decisions. Doing so often establishes models for appropriate and inappropriate response to a loss and helps us process our own feelings in the context of analyzing another’s circumstances.”

Storytelling also emphasizes the variety of ways in which grief can manifest itself in different individuals, Armstrong points out. She notes that well-meaning caregivers often tend to project their own feelings on others, drawing from their own experiences with grief. “The worst thing you can say to someone is ‘I know what you’re going through,’” she says. “Stories remind us that although the circumstances of loss may be similar, each person’s grief experience is unique.”

Armstrong’s experiences as both a professional and as a mid-life orphan have taught her many lessons about grief. “Sometimes the most helpful thing to do is simply be there for the grieving individual and say nothing at all,” she says. During her own grieving period, a neighbor simply knocked on the door, walked in, and sat quietly with her for more than an hour. “It was an incredibly supportive and comforting encounter,” she says. ■

“Bereavement”...continued from previous page

- *She may feel she has more in common with her neighbors now.*
- *No, no! The loss of a child is so painful, these things would matter little to her until much later.*

Why, then, did the husband send her to borrow a pot before telling her about the child?

- *He was afraid to tell his wife directly.*
- *He felt guilty and didn’t want her accusing him of not protecting their son.*
- *He wanted to focus attention elsewhere.*

You think he was really protecting himself?

- *Maybe he thought he was being kind to her.*
- *He probably couldn’t admit his preoccupation with his own feelings.*

What did the wife think of his request after learning the truth?

- *Maybe she thought that he was a kind person.*
- *I don’t think she thought that at all. I think she would be angry about it.*

Why would she be angry?

- *She felt like a fool being sent to ask about pots when her child lay dead.*
- *Her husband treated her like a child, not as an adult, an equal.*
- *She now had to deal with inner conflicts - sadness over the child and maybe resentment toward her husband.*

What were the husband’s feelings?

- *Certainly he mourned for his son.*
- *He also felt shame about not saving his child.*
- *He might have to deal with an angry wife.*
- *He could feel confused and not appreciated.*

Will the loss of their child improve or weaken the husband-wife tie?

- *That depends on their earlier life together.*
- *They do not seem to be equals dedicated to facing difficult truths together.*
- *The different nature of each one’s grief can further complicate their relationship.*

By evaluating the bereavement struggles of storybook people, StoriesWork offers a safe place in which to seek insight, develop empowerment and move forward at one’s own pace. ■

STORIESWORK INVITES YOU TO A
THEATER PARTY FEATURING THE
AMERICAN PREMIERE OF

A Theatre Or/StreetSigns Production

WOMEN'S MINYAN

a drama of love, conflict
and deception

by Naomi Ragen

BENEFIT PERFORMANCE



*Stay for a post-performance discussion
with representatives from StoriesWork, cast
members and domestic violence survivors*

Friday, October 14, 2005 at 7:30 pm

Reynolds Auditorium
Bryan Center, Duke University

Ticket price: \$20

\$10 of the ticket price is a tax deductible
contribution to StoriesWork

Tickets are available at

Durham: Regulator Bookshop -
720 Ninth St.

PeaceFire Galleries -
105 E. Chapel Hill Street

Raleigh: Quail Ridge Books -
Ridgewood Shopping Center
3522 Wade Ave.

Chapel Hill: Cameron's Gallery -
University Mall

Also at the Reynolds Auditorium door
the night of the performance. Check our
web site (www.storieswork.org) for
other outlets.

Set in an ultra-orthodox Jewish commu-
nity in modern day Israel, yet resonating
throughout the world, the play tells of
Chana, a mother who abandoned her chil-
dren two years earlier and is now forbidden
to see them. She begs her female relatives
and friends to listen to her saga before judg-
ing her. As the women struggle to confront
Chana's painful revelations, this heart-mov-
ing, disturbing story moves relentlessly to a
startling conclusion.

**STORIESWORK, a Durham non-profit
organization, pioneered therapeutic
storytelling—a unique tool for empow-
ering those who suffer the effects of
domestic violence.**

StoriesWork is a 501-c-3 non-profit tax exempt organization

For information: Mary Ann Rood 919-349-5781 rood_mary@yahoo.com

Upcoming Events

StoriesWork Board of Directors Meeting

September 16, 2005 12 noon
Radisson - Governor's Inn
Research Triangle Park

October Is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Theatre Party – Benefit Performance:

Oct. 14, 2005 7:30 pm
Reynolds Auditorium, Bryan Center
Duke University, Durham, NC
For details, see page 3.

Other October events

Vigils, walk-a-thons, training, conferences and more. See the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence site at www.nccadv.org/dvam_events.

November is Grief and Loss Awareness Month

StoriesWork Workshop on Grief and Loss,

November 10, 2005
Co-sponsored by the Durham Council for Senior Citizens. Duke Street Senior Center Auditorium (JJ Henderson Towers) 807 South Duke Street, Durham, NC 27713. For details, see page 5.

StoriesWork Annual Fund-Raising Campaign

December 2005
Please save money for us. We need you for our heroic growth and accomplishments. Detailed information in our December newsletter.

Hurricane Katrina Touches StoriesWork

The Louisiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence, at which Lenora Ucko was to present a StoriesWork workshop, canceled its annual conference. The storm destroyed four New Orleans women's shelters, forcing emergency relocation of women and children across the state. The devastation has made it all but impossible to reach other women in dire need of help. As is typical under such stress, domestic violence is on the increase across the area. We have sent a financial contribution to the LCADV along with our good wishes in their struggle

For information about sending a personal contribution, see www.lcadv.org

Welcome new board members

Raquel Dominguez is a bilingual specialist, who has conducted StoriesWork seminars in Spanish for Latino audiences and has translated training materials into Spanish.

Laura Price has been with us for over a year in accounting and finance. She is our new Board Treasurer.

Welcome new volunteer staff

Mary Ann Rood recently joined StoriesWork as our new Administrator. A North Carolina native, she worked in large organizations in the past and brings her expertise in innovation and organization to our work. Feel free to contact Mary Ann at rood_mary@yahoo.com/919-286-0494.

Suzanne Valdivia joins us as a development and fundraising specialist. For many years, she worked at the YMCA in Oakland, California.

We are delighted to welcome everyone! We look forward their help as we expand the StoriesWork scope.

The Seeing "I"

is a publication of StoriesWork

Executive Editor	Lenora Ucko
Graphic Designer	Lance Kozlowski
Copy Editor	Diane Lennox
Contributing Writer	Chas Schmidt

Board of Directors

Margie Rose (chair), Raquel Dominguez, David Greenbaum, Diane Lennox, Kay Phillips, Laura Price, Lenora Ucko

Advisory Board

Esther Flashner, Shayne Goodrum, Felicia Grant, Enid Handler, Dan Hudgins, Lance Kozlowski, Sally Peterson, Frances Presma

The Seeing "I" is published by StoriesWork, PO Box 51693, Durham, NC 27717.

info@storieswork.org • www.storieswork.org
Copyright 2005

Therapeutic Storytelling Workshop on Grief and Loss

Co-sponsored by the Durham Council for Senior Citizens
Duke Street Senior Center Auditorium (in JJ Henderson Towers)
807 South Duke Street • Durham, NC 27701

November 10, 2005 • 9am-4:30 pm
Fee: \$100



Lenora Ucko, PhD, workshop leader and StoriesWork executive director, created and taught one of the first courses in “Social Aspects of Aging” in the New York City area. She has done research and published in the field of aging over many years. She pioneered the Therapeutic Storytelling technique for use in such fields as domestic violence, rehabilitation and aging.

Co-leaders are skilled in leading practical exercises in Therapeutic Storytelling.

For grief counselors, health educators and other staff and volunteers:

Learn Therapeutic Storytelling, a safe, non-threatening, non-judgmental technique that improves effectiveness in dealing with grief and loss.

Therapeutic Storytelling uses a multicultural approach to empowerment, insight and sound decision making. Appropriate for leading grief-support groups and one-to-one sessions.

Role-play exercises provide participants with hands-on learning.

Register today

Therapeutic Storytelling Workshop on Grief and Loss.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone (work) _____ (home) _____

Email address _____ Fax _____

Please enclose your check for \$100 to StoriesWork to reserve your place.

Fee includes training materials, certificates, lunch and refreshments.

Mail to: StoriesWork PO Box 51693, Durham, NC 27717

StoriesWork (www.storieswork.org) is a 501 (c) (3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization

Dated Material

COMING TO TERMS

Grief—Feelings of yearning and anxiety associated with separation distress.

Bereavement—Time between a death and a survivor's acceptance of the loss.

Mourning—A period of gradual adaptation to a loss.

