

Storying and Re-Storying Elders and Their Narratives

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Plan for the Session

The following will be discussed:

- The importance of stories / narrative
 - Disruptive changes alter stories
 - Throughout lives, narratives are re-authored
 - Bibliotherapy as a perspective and tool
 - Examples of enhanced / informed use of stories
 - Metaphors and bibliotherapy
 - Pitfalls to avoid when practicing bibliotherapy
 - Hope as an essential part of grief care
-
- After the overview – discussion with all



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Assertions

Which Inform This Session

Humans are Story-tellers

You don't have anything if you don't have the stories.

Laguna writer Leslie Silko

Stories and Words are Ambiguous

Someone might read what I wrote and discover something there that I myself did not see but which might just as valid as my original thought.

Henri Nouwen

Stories evoke Stories

If I tell my story anything like right, the chances are you will recognize in many ways it is also yours

Frederick Buechner

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**Storying And Re-storying
After Loss or Disruptive Change
Involves Grieving The Old Story**

**Before Creating The Next
(Not Necessarily New) Story**



Listen For

**Major Components/Themes/Values
Of The Old Story**

**How Can They Be Reframed In
The Next Story**

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Both Direct and Indirect Methods Are Useful in Grief Care

Direct methods are those that invite the person to tell or address their own story, using questions, life review, nostalgia, and other methods

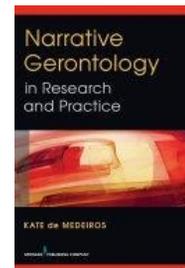
Indirect methods involve the use of prompts (someone else's words – poetry, memoir, other sources) to elicit reactions, comments, or stories

For this session, indirect methods, especially bibliotherapeutic methods will be emphasized

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Narrative Types

- Autobiography
 - Biography
 - Diary and Journal
 - Guided Autobiography
 - Interviews
 - A Life History
 - A Life Review
 - Life Stories
 - Memoir
 - Master Cultural Scripts
 - Narrative Medicine
 - Oral History
 - Reminiscence
- From *Narrative Gerontology* by
Kate de Medeiros



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Threshold or Thin Places

Conversations at threshold places (also called thin or hinge places...the borderlands) are:

conversations that include any information which seriously and/or adversely affects an individual or family's view of its own or someone else's future – assumed worlds can be altered. Impermanence is present!



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**Change
Change
Change**

**Is A Time When
Predictability Breaks Down**

**Our Predictable Ways
Of Thinking About And Doing Things
Are Interrupted By Change**

Change Results

In Uncertainty



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Grief in Later Life
Can, If Not Careful, Become the
Dominant Narrative

Rapidity of Losses

Finality of Losses

The Ever-Present Character of Loss

Losses Are Cumulative

R. Scott Sullender

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The Guest House

**This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning is new arrival.**

**A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.**

Welcome and entertain them all!

Beginning lines of a poem by Rumi



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Assumptive Worlds

All of us from the moment of our birth, have been building inside ourselves a model of the world, a set of assumptions on the basis of which we recognize the world that we meet and plan our behaviour accordingly. Because this model is based on reality it is, most of the time, a valid and useful basis for thought and behaviour. We rely on the accuracy of these assumptions to maintain our orientation in the world and to control our lives. **Anything which challenges this model incapacitates us.**

C.M.PARKES



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Accounts of Disruptions to Assumed Worlds

Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends (Didion, 2005).

He will glare at his son's persistence with the anger the sick have for what a healthy body can't know. He will force you to smell the blossoming of his terrible resolve. He would rather die (Eady, 1995)

I know that it is a classic symptom...this turning against the person you love most, and this knowledge is secure above my eyebrows, but very shaky below. I want my mother to be my mother. And she is not. Not any more. Now every again. (L'Engle, 1974)

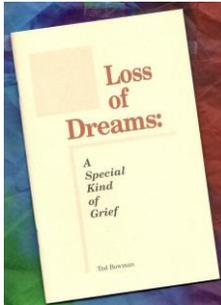
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Narrative Surrender

The story of illness that trumps all others in the modern period is the medical narrative. The story told by the physician becomes the one against which all others are ultimately judged true or false, useful or not...I understand this obligation of seeking medical care as a *narrative surrender* and mark it as a central moment in modernist illness experience. The ill person not only agrees to follow medical regimens that are prescribed; she also agrees, tacitly but with no less implication, to tell her story in medical terms. "How are you?" now requires that personal feeling be contextualized within a secondhand medical report.

- *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (1995) by Arthur W. Frank.

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Shattered Dreams

**Losing An Emotionally
Important Image
Of Oneself, One's Family,
One's Life, One's Work,
Even One's Death**

**Losing The Possibilities Of
"What Might Have Been"**

**Abandonment Of Plans For
A Particular Future**

The Dying Of A Dream

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Re-Authoring Lives

Grief educator Tom Attig (1996) asserted that after disruptive changes, such as bereavement, many persons describe a process of **relearning their world**.

Narrative therapist Michael White's (2007) concept of **reauthoring stories** began as he perceived the parallels between literary stories and those he saw in therapy. Effective therapy, he asserted, is about engaging people in the **reauthoring of the compelling plights of their lives**

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Inquiries About Shattered Dreams

- *When you pictured this time in your life, what did you picture?*
- *When you thought about being _____, what did you picture?*
- *How is what you pictured aging from afar similar or different than the way it is?*
- *If and when you thought of losses in your family, how did you think it would be, how would it happen?*
- *Tell me about the plans you and (the name) of the person had?*



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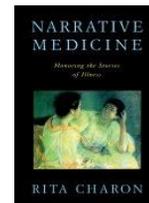
Examples of Shattered Dreams and Elders

- the dream of retirement
- the dream about how or where a home
"should be"
- the dream of time for self (autonomy/control)
- the dream of being or seen as competent
- the dream that the family relationship could
withstand any stress or challenge
- the American dream of "social security"
- the dream that plans would be sufficient
- the dream of dying and death



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Narrative Medicine
Whole Person Care
Palliative Care



Each of these foci, in differing ways, emphasize the person, not the condition or diagnosis

Tools include narratives in medical records

Conversations with patients about aspects not directly related to a medical/mental health condition

Listening to the person and their stories

- *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (2006) by Rita Charon

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What is Bibliotherapy?

- Bibliotherapy (also referred to as poetry therapy or therapeutic storytelling) is a creative arts therapy modality (see <http://www.nccata.org>) that involves storytelling, the reading of specific texts or writing with the purpose of healing.
- Since stories evoke stories, the use of stories in grief work is for the purpose of prompting responses from the grieving person.

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Bibliotherapy

The effectiveness of bibliotherapy depends on the facilitator's ability to choose material that speaks to the individual participant's needs and interests; to make accurate, empathic interpretations of the participant's responses; and, through literature and dialogue, to draw out deeper self-awareness or validation. In short, a good bibliotherapist is a skilled listener.

Literature as Catalyst in the Therapeutic Process
 Recognition
 Examination
 Juxtaposition
 Application to Self



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**There Are Theories That Explain
Symptoms, Verifiable Diagnosis,
Effective Medicines, And Protocols Of
Treatment,**

But It Is The Calming Alliance

**And The Mutual Retelling
And Revising Of The Personal,
Family And Community Stories
That Are At The Center Of The
Work.**

Adapted from Edward Rynearson



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The Path You Followed

Crossroads where you faced a major decision or made an important choice

Side roads that were attractive, but that you didn't explore

Sharp curves where you changed your direction completely

Places where you found yourself back where you started or dead ends where you had to retrace your route

Significant mileposts

Stopover points

Sites of wonderful experiences

Destinations you headed for...before you decided to bypass them and keep going...washouts, detour and roadblocks

Places where you broke down, ran off the road or had a collision



From William Bridges

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Medicine of Friendship

"I know of no medicines that I can give at this point to help you."

We sat in heavy silence.

Barbara shook her head. "No, Doctor" she said. "You do have something to give. You have the medicine of friendship."

From Jerome Groopman, *The Anatomy of Hope*

If a grieving person spoke of being isolated, alone, might you use this account to explore what the medicine of friendship might look like?

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What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode? Langston Hughes



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Hope, it's True

I have only one small grain of hope...
I need more
I break off a fragment
To send you.
Please take this grain of hope
So mine won't shrink
Please share your fragment
So that yours will grow
Only so, by division,
Will hope increase.



Denise Levertov

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Contrasting Narratives

What do you have to do?
Pack your bags,
Go to the station without them,
Catch the train,
And leave your self behind

Wei Wu Wei

Finally I am coming to the conclusion that my highest ambition
is to be what I already am.
That I will never fulfill my obligation to surpass myself unless I
first accept myself,
and if I accept myself full in the right way,
I will already have surpassed myself

Thomas Merton

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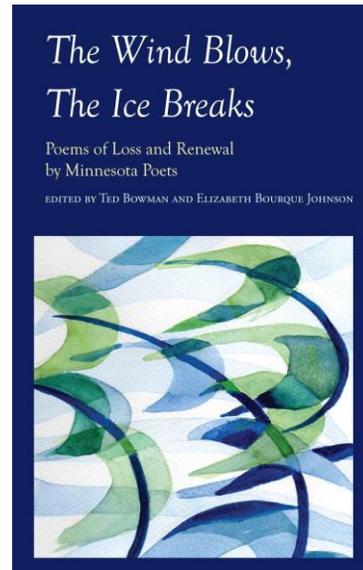
Metaphors for Loss and Grief

...grief never leaves only changes, it waits
outside doors keep a place at the table
Susan Williams

One morning, cereal. The next day, cancer.
Richard Solly

...disaster sucks all the air from the room,
swings shut doors in our brains' corridors
Heid Erdrich

All I have is a broken voice,
a heart immense with sorrow
Wang Ping



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Follow Metaphors Kopp Framework

- 1) Notice metaphors
- 2) Invite the client to explore
- 3) "If I were seeing it the way you see it, what would I see?"
- 4) Practice curiosity
- 5) Describe feelings associated with the metaphor
- 6) Invite transformation
- 7) "What if the metaphor were a....?"
- 8) Connect metaphor and life issues



Metaphor Therapy by Richard Kopp

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Potential Misuses Of Bibliotherapy

- Use of over-use of your own favorite readings instead of listening to the grieving person and making selections accordingly
- Use of readings to manipulate a "desired response" instead of prompting the client to create responses with you
- Naiveté about culture, language, developmental maturity
- To show off



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Reasonable Hope

- Reasonable hope is relational
- Reasonable hope is a practice
- Reasonable hope maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable
- Reasonable hope seeks goals and pathways to them
- Reasonable hope accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair



Kathe Weingarten

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Examples of Hope Prompts

It does not seem to be the case that joy and grief can occur simultaneously, but they can occur alternately...it may happen that even in the deepest grief, I may still see and feel joy

Nel Noddings

When despair for the world grows inside me ...I go into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the peace of still water...

Wendell Berry

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom

Anais Nin

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from Great Summons Wang Ping
A ritual song from 300 B.C., China, to call the souls of the dead to return home

All stories are personal.

**must be told,
 and retold till they blossom
 between our lips, take roots
 in the belly buttons, till the currents
 of sap, thicker than blood,
 roar in our veins, till eyes
 can open again to the blazing sun,
 and the moon no longer weeps in the dreams
 of children, till every name, face,
 every shattered hope, calls
 from the womb of memory:**

*“Let some goodness
 come out of our deaths.
 Let the pain of the living
 bear some fruit.”*

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If you wish to pose questions, make a comment,
or receive a bibliography of some related
resources, contact Ted Bowman at:

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www.bowmanted.com