

A Story You



Tell Yourself



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What Do You Say About Yourself?

Your life is a story you tell yourself.

Once upon a time...

A little girl was born to parents who weren't quite sure how to parent. One coped by avoiding the girl some of the time, though other times he taught her things and played games with her. The other coped by telling the girl frequently that she wasn't wanted and was too much trouble.

The little girl got older, and people did things to her that they shouldn't have done. One of the parents told the little girl it was her fault, and she needed to stop whining.

The little girl tried to make friends, but other kids made fun of her. Some ignored her. Some called her names said she was too bossy or too weird to play with. They told her to leave them alone. One of the little girl's parents told her to stop being so bossy and stop being shy, because that was why people didn't like her.

Sometimes the little girl had a hard time talking, because adults either wanted her to hurry up and speak or didn't want to listen. Sometimes both. When she had a hard time talking, it made people mad because she wasn't speaking fast enough or she didn't quite make sense. They interrupted her or told her to be quiet unless she had something important to say.

She got older. More people harmed her. More people made fun of her. Some told her she was crazy. Some told her she would never be worth anything. Some told her no one would ever want her. She married someone because he asked, even though she didn't love him, because she believed he was the only one who would want to marry her. She stayed because even though they weren't good for each other, she believed him when he said she couldn't take care of herself and that there wasn't anything wrong with the marriage or him anyway. It was all her fault, and she needed to be medicated.

Eventually, she realized the marriage was harming her children. She left her husband, and tried to find friends she could fit in with. But she was still shy. She was still "weird." And people still made fun of her and called her names, though usually behind her back instead of to her face.

She didn't do things she strongly wanted to do, because she believed she couldn't. She barely talked to people, because she was too weird and no one would want her anyway. When people acted like they were her friends or said they loved her, she didn't believe them.

She put up roadblocks at every turn, and then wondered why she didn't get anywhere.

Once upon a time... that was me. And those were the stories I told myself.

When I say "stories," I don't mean I made them up. The things that happened to me really happened. The things that were said were really said, and the way I reacted was how I really reacted. But the thing is, what I learned to believe about myself wasn't really my story. It was the story other people told about me and to me, over and over, until it *became* my story. After all, when I was a child, it was what all the adults said and did, and adults had to be right, didn't they? So many other kids said things that they had to be true. And so that was the story I learned.

Now let's look at the story another way.

Once upon a time, a little girl was born to parents who weren't quite sure how to parent. She had a hard time making real-life friends. People bullied her and made fun of her even when she became an adult.

But as a child, she had a huge imagination. She made up incredible tales, and entire worlds in her mind. One of her best friends was a mermaid who lived in her back yard, which magically turned into the ocean if the little girl flipped the hook on the gate just right.

Her "invisible friends" played with her and took care of her, and told her they loved her. They talked to her and taught her a lot of things. As for non-invisible people, aside from her parents, she had several people who loved her and wanted great things for her. One of them talked about taking her on a trip to Wales, her favorite country. One taught her very, very basic carpentry and praised her for building a bench almost sturdy enough to sit on.

She wrote stories and shared them, sometimes, with people she thought maybe she could trust. And some of those people were amazed, and told her how good the stories were and that someday, she would be published.

People looked out for her, and sometimes stood up for her. People learned from her. She went to college, and became a teacher who worked with many different children, and did her best to help those children learn not only "school stuff," but that they were valuable, important people.

She gave birth to two beautiful children, and loved them and took care of them as best she could. She taught them some of the things she knew. She encouraged their dreams and tried to make sure they knew they could do anything they put their mind to.

A while after she and her husband split up, she met a man who told her she mattered, and who took care of her and helped take care of her children. Some of her stories were published. She started to learn to speak up for herself when people put her down.

She helped a lot of people by listening to them, and by helping them feel calm. She learned energy healing and shared wisdom from her “invisible friends,” who were really her guides, and both of those things helped people too.

She made mistakes as a parent, but she did good things too, and she tried to make sure her children never doubted that they were loved and they mattered. They grew up and found different paths, and they believed in those paths and shone on them.

She met others who loved her and told her she mattered. She found people who understood her and encouraged her dreams and her “weirdness.” She found a place where she fit. She learned to shove those roadblocks out of the way, and she rewrote her story. And then she shared it here, in this book.

Our lives and our inner selves are formed over years of experiences, thoughts, actions, and words. Everything that happens to us adds to who we are and who we become. Sometimes those things are positive, sometimes not. And everything becomes part of the story we tell ourselves.

Let me be clear. You aren’t making anything up or saying anything untrue. In the past, people might have accused you of lying when you talked about your experiences. They were wrong. Everything that’s happened to you and everything that you’ve done is part of your reality. No lies, no make-believe.

But over time, some things become part of us, just as when an author writes a novel, certain things become part of the plot and character. Our lives aren’t novels, but in some ways they might resemble one. We are the main character. The protagonist. The hero. And every event in our lives is part of the plot.

As a child, your story is written in large part by the adults around you, especially parents or parental figures. Children are taught that their parents and other adults know everything, so of course whatever they tell us must be true, and whatever they do to us must be right, even if it *feels* wrong. We learn not to trust our instincts, because those go against the stories the adults tell us.

Those stories become part of us. Even if we’re no longer around those adults, the stories remain, because we have internalized them to the point where we can no longer separate ourselves from them. The “dialogue” written by the adults becomes our inner self-talk, and we might not even remember the source after a while. We remember only the words and the belief that they must be true.

As we grow up, leave home, form relationships and perhaps a family, people add to our story. We also add to theirs. And just as when we’re a child, some of those additions to our stories are positive, and some are not, but all of them become part of us.

Somewhere along the way, we might learn that the story of our lives isn’t entirely accurate. More importantly, we might come to realize that we are the ultimate author of our story. We can change it. Obviously we can’t change things that have already happened or that we’ve already heard, but we can rewrite the dialogue we hear in our minds. We can write our own future, instead of letting others write it for us.

If you’re reading this book, it’s because you’ve realized the story you’re telling

yourself isn't working for you. Something about it is just plain off, and you need to find a new story to tell. One that features you as the hero who makes things happen.

Have you ever seen the movie *Big Fish* or the musical play based on it? The lead character, Edward Bloom, writes his own story. He tells grand tales of the adventures he's had and the things he's done. He's happy with himself, and proud of his accomplishments, though whether or not those accomplishments are true is something his son can't quite figure out. And then the son learns that the greatest thing his father ever did was never included in the stories his father told to others, and that some of his father's stories that he didn't believe were actually true.

In Edward's mind, one might assume, *all* of the stories were true. Not necessarily the specifics, but the way he helped people. How strong and brave and intelligent he was.

In the musical, the opening song is called "Be the Hero." I got to see the play when someone I'm close to had a role in the ensemble of a community theater production, and that song immediately resonated for me, to the point that I memorized it and copied some of the lyrics onto notecards to hang on the wall above my desk. I even talked my friend into giving me his cast T-shirt, which says "Be the hero of your story." Because that's what all of us should be. The hero of our own stories, written and told only by us, in which we do amazing things.

Think about the story you tell yourself. Are you the hero or the villain? Or are you just a minor character who wanders onto the page from time to time so things can happen to them?

On the next couple of pages, write that story. Don't worry if you don't believe you can write an actual story. Just write the things you most often tell yourself about you and your life.

What Did Your Child Self Learn?

“You’re too bossy. No one wants to play with you.”

“Why are you always so dirty? No one’s going to want you if you don’t keep yourself clean.”

“Stop daydreaming and get out there and play with the other kids. If they won’t let you, that’s your fault.”

“You’re so weird. No one likes you.”

And so on. Those are things I heard frequently as a child from the adults and some of the other kids in my life. That isn’t all of it, but this book isn’t about things other people said. It’s about what we say to ourselves.

The thing is, the stories we tell ourselves start when we’re children. When we’re very young, we don’t necessarily tell ourselves any stories. We simply take it for granted that we’ll be fed, changed, sheltered, and loved. Babies and very young children have no sense of others as something separate from them. Everyone is there because we need them there, right?

We learn differently pretty quickly. Some of us have exactly what we need: food, cleanliness, shelter, and love. Those who have those things usually learn in fairly gentle ways that other people are... well, others. They aren’t you, and they don’t exist solely for your benefit. It isn’t an easy lesson to learn, and you might get angry when you don’t get what you want because other people don’t have to give it to you, but you learn.

Sadly, some of us learn in more painful ways. You lie in a crib for long stretches of time wearing a dirty diaper because your mother doesn’t feel like changing you. Your stomach is growling because there’s no food in the house, or because whoever’s supposed to prepare the food hasn’t done so and you don’t know how. A cherished toy is taken away from you because someone else wants it, and you never get it back.

You’re told people don’t love you or want you.

When those things happen or are said over and over, they become imprinted in your brain. They're part of you, and therefore part of your story. Over time, we might not even remember where or when we first learned those things. They're just there, in our minds, playing over and over in an unending loop, until we recognize that loop and end it ourselves.

For far too long, I believed the stories I told myself because so many people had reinforced them that I didn't fully realize there were other stories I could create. In my imagination, in the fictional stories I wrote in my notebooks, and in my dreams, I created entire worlds and entirely new stories, but I was rarely the hero of them. I made up stories about other people who lived lives similar to what I wanted but believed I could never have. They weren't stories about me.

The ones about me were along the lines of the examples I gave earlier. I didn't always understand why those things were true, and I definitely didn't like that they were, but they were. Or at least I believed they were, because what else could I believe when I heard the same narrative from so many sources?

As a child, I didn't like hearing those things. They're certainly not things I would ever say to any child. But I said them to myself constantly as a child and as an adult. The little girl inside me who still yearned for love and acceptance was told she would never have it and didn't deserve it—and I was the one telling her this.

That was an incredibly hard realization, but it was a necessary one. If I wouldn't say those things to other children, or other adults for that matter, why did I say them to myself? Why did I tell myself a story I hated, that made me feel worthless and weak?

Why do you tell yourself those stories?

My answer, when I first asked myself that question, was, "What else can I say?" As a writer, dialogue is my strength, but when it came to writing new dialogue for my own personal story, I drew a blank. I was still in situations where I was hearing the same old narrative from external sources, and the internal dialogue was deeply entrenched. What other story could I tell?

That wasn't my only struggle. When I thought about the story I was telling myself, I got angry, but that anger didn't go to the right place.

It's perfectly okay to feel angry with those who have caused us pain. Holding onto that anger over time doesn't serve us and ends up harming us, but in the beginning of rewriting our stories it's okay to feel whatever emotions arise. This is emotional work, and part of rewriting our stories is allowing ourselves to experience emotions we might have been told were "bad" or "wrong." Once the emotions are there, we can work through them, with the help of a therapist or counselor if need be, to learn how to let go of them before they cause us more pain.

The problem when I started trying to tell myself a new story was that I wasn't angry with the people who caused me pain. I was angry with myself. More specifically, I was angry with the little girl inside me who was the main character of that negative story. She'd been through and heard these things, and now I had to clean up that mess. I would never

blame any other child for experiencing bullying or abuse, but I blamed my child self for exactly that.

It took time for me to let go of that anger and realize that little girl—I—was not responsible for the story’s plot or dialogue. Other people had made choices that had caused me harm and pain, but that wasn’t my fault. As an adult, I could understand that and almost believe it, but that little girl was still there, and didn’t believe it in the slightest.

To write a new story for myself, I first had to write a new story for “her.” And believe me, it’s a work in progress. I’ve been doing this work through meditation and journaling. Through meditation, I visualized myself speaking to my child self and telling her the things she deserved to hear. That she was loved, and she wasn’t responsible for what other people said and did. That she deserved good things, and that people did love and want her. I wrote letters to her saying the same things, and I stopped thinking of her as the problem and began to look at her as one of the heroes of my new story.

Imagine yourself as a child. Picture yourself in as much detail as you can, the way you looked, spoke, and moved when you were young. Think about your surroundings and the people around you.

The next bit in this paragraph might be hard, and it might be triggering. If you don’t feel that you can handle it, please skip over it. Honor yourself more than the words in this book. But if you can manage it, think about the dialogue you heard as a child. The things people said or did that contributed to forming your story.

Remember as you do this that you are not in the past. You’re an adult now, and those people are no longer able to cause you pain. You’re writing a new story where you’re the hero, and that means you are in control of these memories and of your life now.

Now look back at the story you wrote in the last section. Read those negatives as if you were saying them to someone else. To a child. Think about whether those are things you would say to another person...and then consider why you say them to yourself.

How did you feel about those actions and words when you were a child? How do you feel now as you think about them and read the negatives you wrote in the last section? You can write the answer here or in your journal if you keep one, or you can choose not to write it down at all.

What Story Will You Tell?

In the first section of this book, I told you two different stories. Both about me. Both completely true. Two different ways of looking at the same life.

For a long time, I didn't fully understand that I was writing my own story. After all, other people did and said things that caused me to act and think in certain ways. That wasn't on me. That was on them.

As a kid, I cried a lot. "Why won't anyone play with me? Why do people hate me? Why is Grandmother so mean?" In my mind, where no one other than my invisible friends could hear me, I thought, "Why do people always want to hurt me? Why did those people touch me like that? What's wrong with me?"

Those questions became part of my story. I wrote a life in which no one liked me. People were mean to me and treated me poorly. People hurt me on purpose, because something was horribly wrong with me and I didn't deserve any better. I was unloved and unwanted, and I had to accept any type of affection or so-called love that came my way, because it was the only chance I had to have anything of the kind.

Sometimes I had glimmers that maybe there was a different story for me. I had successes in some areas of my life. Sometimes people came into my life for a while who treated me well and caused me to examine the story I was telling myself. If I liked and respected these people, and they liked and respected me, that had to mean I was worthy of being liked and respected.

I often rejected that part of the story, though. The idea that I might be able to succeed at more than one thing scared me, because in order to experience success, I had to try new things, and that might lead to failure instead. It was too much to risk. Being liked and respected scared me too, because that meant people would notice me. It was safer to hide in the corner and blend in with the wall, because if people noticed me, they might hurt me instead of liking and respecting me.

As I got older, and more things added to the story I told myself, seeing the positives became more difficult. I lived in a situation that was painful and toxic for me and for the

other person involved, but I couldn't leave, because I didn't deserve anything better. I'd chosen to be with this person, and that meant I had to take what I could get. When a new character entered my story and told me I *didn't* have to accept the status quo, that I *could* write a new story, I tried. I moved into a new chapter away from that toxicity.

But I still wasn't consciously writing my own story. I blamed the people in my past for the story I told in my present. I created a life in which I couldn't do certain things because of mental or physical illness, or because other people wouldn't let me or wouldn't accept me. I went around saying a whole lot of things like "I can't do that, what would people think?" or "I can't do anything about the panic attacks, they just happen because of what happened to me when I was a kid."

It is true that mental and physical illnesses can prevent people from doing things. As someone who has lived with these conditions most of my life, I don't negate or deny the impact they can have. The problem wasn't that I was unable to do certain things because of my illnesses; it was that I used my illnesses as justifications to avoid doing things, or as excuses or obstacles, rather than trying to find alternative ways to do things or doing the things of which I was capable.

When someone said something hurtful and I had an anxiety attack or just burst into tears, I came up with excuses for it. The things I said were valid. Things like "That makes me panic because of this thing that happened when I was growing up." But still excuses.

The difference between a reason and an excuse is that a reason is simply an explanation of why something happens. An excuse is an attempt to deflect responsibility. Knowing the reason for my panicking would have been fine if I hadn't felt the need to tell everyone else that reason. It also would have been fine if I'd used the knowledge to do something about the reaction. But I did tell everyone, and I didn't make the effort to change. I used those reasons as excuses. If someone else had done these things to me, obviously I couldn't do anything about them. I wasn't my responsibility.

That isn't a typo. When I was writing the first draft of this book, I thought it was. "I wasn't my responsibility" was meant to be "IT wasn't my responsibility." But to be honest, "I wasn't" is more accurate. I didn't believe anything about my life was my responsibility, because that would mean having to change. It would mean going through the work of writing a new story for myself, and that seemed too hard and too scary.

What I was missing in all of that was the fact that each of us really does write our own stories. That does not mean we choose to have horrible things happen to us. When we're living a life we believe is written by others, we aren't making any choices. We're just following a story someone else is telling us.

We don't have to follow those stories, though. That's sometimes the hardest thing to realize. No, we can't change the past. It's already happened. No matter what we write, it will still have happened.

But we can change the impact it has on us. Instead of writing a story where your life isn't your story at all, you can write one where you triumph. Where you kick the past to the curb and say to the people in it, "You aren't allowed to write my story anymore. I'm going to write it myself."

In your life, you have the power, and you can use that power to consciously create a new, happier, better story for yourself. The old story will still be there. You can't unwrite it. But you can start a new chapter, or even close that old book and start an entire new one. It's completely up to you.

That means it's up to you to write it, as well. I can't write your story for you. Nor can anyone else, even if they—and you—believe they can. In the song "Be the Hero," there's a line about not depending on others to write for you. You can choose to be the hero of your own story again and again, starting a new chapter any time the current one isn't working for you. You can tell yourself the things you always wanted to hear, or even better things. Again, it's all your choice—and your responsibility.

You can write a story in which you achieve one of your childhood dreams. Maybe you always dreamed of singing on stage. That was one of mine, actually. I'm not a famous singer, but I did release two singles at one point, and I'm pretty well-known at one of my local karaoke nights. People like hearing me sing, and like watching me enjoy it. I'm not the world's greatest singer, but I am singing on stage. That didn't just happen. I had to work for it, and make the choices that led to meeting the person who helped me record those singles and the person who started bringing me to karaoke. I have to practice singing if I want to be good at it, and I have to ignore the occasional pangs of stage fright to get up in front of people at karaoke night. I wrote a story where those things were possible, and where in some way, though maybe not the way I originally envisioned, I achieved that dream.

You can write a story where you find the people and help you need to keep writing something new. Where instead of people hurting or disliking you, you're surrounded by people who love and accept you, and want you to be happy. That's also part of my story now. Of course there are still people around who might not think a lot of me, but another piece is that I don't care what they think. Their opinions of me don't create me or impact my story, because I've chosen not to let them.

Meanwhile, I have people around who think I'm pretty freaking awesome, and enjoy spending time with me. I allow their opinions to impact my story, because those opinions are positive. They reflect the way I now choose to see myself. I'm writing a story in which I have friendship, love, respect, and acceptance, and I'm really happy with that story.

I've written a story in which I've learned that I do have control of my life. That I can't change the past, but I can change what I do and say as a result of it. I can write a better life for myself, and be pleased and proud to live it, instead of wallowing in the part of the story that I wrote in others' words.

You've thought and written about the stories you most frequently tell about yourself. The negatives and the positives—at least I hope there have been positives! You've also taken some time with your child self. You've seen the impact your past had, and you've told that child the things you wish had been part of your life at the time.

What story do you want to tell that child? If you were sitting with them and talking about your life, what would you want to share? What achievements, accomplishments, dreams, and goals? The possibilities are almost infinite, because you can write anything you choose. Believe that you have the power to tell yourself a new story, and embrace that power. You deserve not only a happy ending, but an entire happy story.

Thanks for taking the time to read and work with this book. I hope you've found it helpful. If you're interested in continuing this work, or want support as you write your new story, please feel free to email me at river@riverevolutions.com or visit <http://www.riverevolutions.com>. I'm an energy healer, coach, and channel, but I am not a licensed professional. I can listen and offer suggestions, but I strongly recommend also seeking professional help or support when needed.

You deserve to live a story that brings you happiness. I hope the exercises in this book will help you create that story.

River Lightbearer, also known as Kim Ramsey-Winkler is an energy worker, channel, coach, and author in Boston, Massachusetts. Over the course of her life, she's been fortunate enough to have several people, including two now-adult offspring and her husband and partner, help her create a new story to tell herself. Under the pen names Jo Ramsey and Karenn Colcroft, she has had nearly 80 novels, novellas, and short stories published over the past decade. (Some are now out of print, but that's another story... See what I did there?)

River's passion for helping others, and her own experiences as a trauma survivor, have led her to work in which she has the opportunity to guide people to telling their own new stories.

