

Bulletin for Family Stories

Business

Chalice Lighting

Each of us brings a separate truth here,
We bring the truth of our own life, our own story.
We don't come as empty vessels ...
But rather we come as full people—people who have our own story and our own truth.
We seek to add to our truths and add to our stories.
This room is rich with truth, rich with experience.
All manner of people are here: needy, joyful, frightened, anxious, bored
We all bring our truth with us.
May we all recognize the truth and the story in everyone's life.
And may we hear and honor the truths that we all bring as
we gather together.
Together we have truths.
Together we have a story.
Together we are a community.
—Penny Hackett-Evans

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence

Shared Readings

Family stories tell us who we are and to whom we belong. They cement us together in remembered intimacy. Our stories also point to the values we hold in common from family generation to family generation.—*Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer*

The family is our first map of the world. Family stories about life, the world, and ourselves are learned before we have words to explain them. Because we take in these stories without critical analysis, they live deeply, and often unquestioned, inside us. Unfortunately, these stories may contain negative information about ourselves or the world that limits our ability to live fully and effectively as adults.—*Nancy J. Napier*

A family is one of nature's masterpieces.—*George Santayana*

If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known.—*Carol Christ*

The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.—*Muriel Rukeyser*

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

Round I Share a favorite childhood story.

Round II Share more deeply memories of stories told within your family.

Round III Share additional thoughts or reflect on what others have shared as time allows.

Closing Words

For none of us ever really walks in another's shoes or knows the innermost rooms of a person's heart. None of us truly knows the lonely places of another's journey or the causes of the lines around another's eyes. Therefore, let us be gentle with one another. Let us listen more than we speak and accept more than we judge. Let our open, outstretched hands reach and touch that we may walk along together for a little while in friendship and in trust.—*Elizabeth Tarbox*

Song

The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group.
- to let the leader know if I will be absent or need to quit.
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others.
- to do the reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time.
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and tell only my own story to others.
- to honor the safety of the group by listening to what others share with an open heart.
- to refrain from cross-talk, judging, or giving advice.
- to share as deeply as I can when it is my turn.

Leader's Notes for Family Stories

Before the Session

This session focuses on family stories, tales about people, places, and events relation to members of the immediate family, grandparents, and their ancestors. Be aware that some group members may have only painful stories of their biological families that they don't wish to share.

Notice that before before Round 1, you are to read several paragraphs from the preparation work (printed below in Round 1)

Business

Chalice Lighting

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin.

Sharing of Joys and Concerns (each person about 2 min.)

Silence (3 min.)

Shared Readings

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening During your rounds of deep sharing/deep listening, pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure all get to share at least once.

Read this to the group before starting Round 1:

In our preparation we read: While studying vocabulary related to family, a tutor and her ESL student realized that in the student's culture, "family" included many to whom the student was not related by blood. To honor this concept, they now talk about Blood Family and Family of the Heart. We cannot choose our Blood Family and for some of us, stories of that family may be too painful to share. But the Family of the Heart expands to include all whom we wish to invite in. In this family there are many cherished stories.

This is a place open to stories from both Blood Families and Families of the Heart.

Round I (each person about 2 min.)

Briefly share a favorite childhood story.

Round II (each person about 5 min.)

Share more deeply memories of stories told within your family.

Round III (each person about 2 min.)

Share additional thoughts and feelings on family stories or reflect on what others have shared as time allows.

Closing Words

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—*Elizabeth Tarbox*

Song

Preparation for Family Stories

Family stories are tales about people, places, and events related to members of our immediate family, our grandparents, and their ancestors. The memorable stories of our lives and of others in our family take on special importance because they are true, even if everyone tells different versions of the same event. These tales, no matter their content, are family heirlooms.

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Every life is a story, and life begins in families - no matter their size or shape. The stories our family members tell us impact and color how we receive all other stories throughout life, and in turn, these stories color the stories we choose to tell.

Christiane Brems, University of Alaska, tells us that storytelling allows families to transmit family lore and values. Family narratives are stories made up by family members and may be based on real occurrences, embellished events, or fantasy material. Some family stories cross generations and give strong messages about the historical background of the family, the hardships they have endured, and the values that have helped them carry on. All family stories are told for a reason, even if that reason is purely for entertainment. Many families have cherished family stories that are cause for laughter year after year.

There is an ancient African teaching that "we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us." A deep respect for one's ancestors is an integral part of many cultures. Retelling the stories of our roots enables us to touch the past, obtain a new and different perspective on the present, and enables us to look to the future with renewed hope.

Family stories – every family has them. Told at gatherings of the relatives or the extended family, they are those stories about "the time when" that help family define their identity and stay in touch with who they are.—*Donald Davis*

A lie hides the truth. A story tries to find it.—*Paula Fox*

There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.—*Willa Cather*

If you ever had to wear hand-me-down clothes, you know that the style, color, and fit may have been great for the person who had them originally, but not for you. You may have had to squeeze into them or convince yourself that you looked fine, when in fact they were all wrong for you... Like hand-me-down clothes, those ideas are really about someone else: they reflect the stories and myths someone else learned to live by. It's a relief to know that you have the right to say, "No, this doesn't fit me. I'm going to return it to its owner."—*Nancy J. Napier*

Questions to Ponder

1. Think of a story from your childhood that has meaning for you, positive or negative
2. Think of your family, your parents, siblings, if you have them—aunts, uncles, and grandparents. Remember the stories you heard as a child, about where your grandparents and their parents came from, how they lived, about your parents' lives as children.
3. Think of stories told within your extended family (family of your heart). Stories may have been told at holidays, weddings, and funerals, or they may have been part of your everyday life as a child. Who was the primary storyteller in your family?