

NOTES from the COUCH

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Because Sometimes...You Need More Than a Friend

Are the Stories You Tell Yourself the Best Ones?

When it comes to the experiences of our lives, we may not necessarily think of them as "stories." Stories, after all, are in children's books, novels and movies.

But seeing your life as being made up of stories that are every bit as interesting and meaningful as any published work is a powerful way to recognize the significance of your life.

And importantly, it also can help awaken you to the false stories you tell yourself about yourself.

No less than the success of our life is at stake, says Jim Loehr, author of *The Power of Story: Rewrite Your Destiny in Business and in Life*.

That's because the stories we tell ourselves about our work, relationships, accomplishments and shortcomings...become our destiny. Thus, it's important that we bring the core stories of our lives to consciousness.

We tell stories to ourselves about being powerful and deserving, about being capable and in control, and we also tell them about being a victim or worthless or powerless. We tell them to ourselves for a day, a month or a lifetime. Far too many of our stories undermine us. See if you recognize yourself in any of these dark tales:

- Life is supposed to be hard.
- Marriage gets dull after a while; I just have to live with it.
- Who am I to expect attention?
- I can't trust men.
- I can't trust women.
- It doesn't matter how hard I work. I'll never get ahead.
- Life is easier if I don't make waves.
- It's normal to feel a little run down at my age.
- Dreams are for people with money.

Those "stories" don't really serve us. And we don't actually know that they are absolutely, without exception, true. We may never actually know.

If the story you've been telling isn't serving you, perhaps your story needs some rewriting. Here are a few exercises to facilitate awareness of the stories that shape your life, and to diminish the influence of stories that work against you:

Discover your significant stories.

Explore how you see yourself in five areas: Work, Family, Health, Money, and Love. Write a page on each subject. How do you feel about this area of your life? What did you learn as a child? Does the story you tell in one area sabotage your values and beliefs in another?

Explore the lessons of your life stories.

Divide a piece of paper into two columns. On the left, list significant stories—your version of events that occurred—from all stages of your life. In the right-hand column, write a brief description of what you learned or decided as a result of that experience.

Heal past experiences by transforming the stories beneath them.

Choose a difficult incident from your childhood, or one that prompted you to form an unhelpful belief, and write it down. What happened? How did you feel? Now, rewrite that story with a different ending. Be imaginative. Any outcome is possible.

Seeing your life as a story is a powerful way to emotionally connect with your experiences. And when you recognize that the negative stories you tell yourself can be altered, you have the power to improve your life. *

10 Ways to Calmly Handle Economic Uncertainty

Economic volatility and uncertainty make the ground fertile for financial anxiety, which makes a worrisome situation feel even worse. Below are some tips can help you create a sense of calm and well-being in the midst of uncertainty and inflation.

- 1. Give yourself a break.** Accept your feelings and talk to yourself in soothing ways.
- 2. Focus on the good.** When fear arises, remind yourself of the stability that does exist in your life.
- 3. Exercise.** Physical activity can raise your mood and discharge anxious energy.
- 4. Try yoga and meditation.** Both have been proven to lower stress.
- 5. Spend time in hot water.** Warm baths and hot tubs can soothe the nervous system.
- 6. Talk to peaceful friends.** People in a different frame of mind can remind you that contentment is possible.
- 7. Find engaging sources of recreation.** A light-hearted or funny movie can shift your entire mood.
- 8. Seek out other sources of income.** Bringing in even small amounts of money, such as with consignment, can remind you that you are resourceful and that you will be okay.
- 9. Tap into creativity and curiosity.** Take a class, brush up your skills or pursue creative projects. Feeling creatively fulfilled shifts energy.
- 10. Plan for the future.** Deal with the realities of today, but keep making plans for the future. Assure yourself that things will get better. *

A Letter From *Cynthia A. Henrie*



We all have stories we tell ourselves about who we are and life in general. Too often, these stories are negative and have their roots in childhood, such as a person whose parents struggled telling herself as an adult that life is supposed to be hard.

To help you uncover your core stories, the article offers exercises, which also help you discover what you've learned from your stories and how you might transform them.

Finances are a common topic of ill-serving internal stories. The Top 10 article explores the issue of financial anxiety and offers tips for coping with money worries. The quiz on this page asks how well you take care of yourself after you've been disappointed.

On page 3, we explore how divorce can zap our self-assurance and leave us feeling less than desirable when we re-enter the daunting process of dating again. If you or someone you know is in this situation, the article's suggestions can provide guidance and encouragement, as well as things to watch out for, to help make dating a positive experience.

And with the holidays coming fast, now is a good time to assess our relationship with food, specifically overeating. Often fueled by anxiety, addictive eating can lead to serious health consequences. The back-page article includes warning signs of the disorder as well as a path for recovery.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

How Do You Respond When You Feel Let Down?

Feeling let down by a person, an expectation or a hope is a normal response that everyone experiences. But all too often, when we're disappointed and especially need caring attention, we beat ourselves up instead. Take this quiz to see how well you take care of yourself after a disappointment.



True False

- 1. If I am disappointed by a person, I don't reflexively end the relationship. When I feel more centered, and if the situation is safe, I enter into a dialogue with the person.
- 2. With a therapist or in another safe setting, I work through other feelings that feeling let down brings to the surface. These feelings often include shock, hurt and anger.
- 3. When I have suffered a let-down, I let myself have my feelings. I realize that when you give feelings the time and attention they need and deserve, they tend to fade on their own.
- 4. While the feelings of disappointment are fresh, I avoid any conclusions about my behavior or role in the situation. Self-analysis has its place, but in the early stage it's more likely to be destructive self-recrimination.
- 5. I take steps to prevent disappointment from turning into depression or bitterness. These include eating healthfully, getting plenty of sleep, exercising and seeking support from family, friends and my therapist.
- 6. I don't make major life decisions until my strong feelings subside and I begin to feel some enthusiasm or hope again.
- 7. I recognize that disappointment is a part of life. When I experience a disappointment, it doesn't mean I'm a bad person or that I deserved it.
- 8. When the intensity of the feeling has faded, I ask myself if there's anything that I can salvage or learn from the situation.
- 9. Also, when I am feeling more hopeful, in order to gain insight, I ask myself, "What if this is not a setback, but actually what I want?" Among other things, my response will reveal any ambivalence I may have had and may help make future endeavors more successful.
- 10. If I am repeatedly disappointed by life or other people, I am willing to consider what actions or beliefs of mine might be contributing to those experiences.

Disappointment doesn't have to stop you from getting what you want in life. If you answered false to several of these, you may want to explore ways to better cope with disappointment. Please don't hesitate to call. ✱

Getting Back into Dating After Divorce—Confidently!

Jane hasn't had a date in 25 years, and her divorce has left her feeling insecure and completely out of touch with her sensual side. She's dabbled in online dating and been on a few fix-ups, but couldn't enjoy herself. She felt so nervous about doing or saying the wrong thing, she was convinced she would never get a second date. Her low self-esteem showed, and she wasn't able to make a strong connection with anyone.

Whether you're male or female, if you can relate to Jane's struggles with dating after divorce, try these tips to dip a toe back into the dating pool. Before you know it, you may be diving right in.

Explore Your Playful Side

After divorce, your self-confidence may be low and you may not feel attractive. A great way to reawaken your senses is to explore your playfulness. Put yourself out there, engage with your social network in a light way. Focus on eye contact and open body language. Laugh readily and re-learn how to have fun.



Boost your confidence by making an extra effort with your appearance. Most of all, think of this as an experiment and the whole world as your laboratory.

Leave Your Baggage at the Door

Approach each new person as a beginning. Don't ignore warning signs (see below), but do take the time to find out who someone really is.

Focus your attention and conversation on your own interests and the positive aspects of your life. Avoid talking about the divorce or your ex.

Use Your Common Sense and Be Safe

Find out as much as you can about the person before you meet. Plan a short, daytime meeting for your first date, and arrange for your own transportation. If anything about the person or the date makes you uncomfortable, cut it short and move on.

Don't Take Everything Too Seriously

Don't put too much importance on any one date (especially at the beginning). Focus on having fun and deciding if you like this person enough to get to know him or her better. And remember, you can always opt for just a friendship.

Don't Involve Children Too Quickly

Don't introduce your children right away. Of course

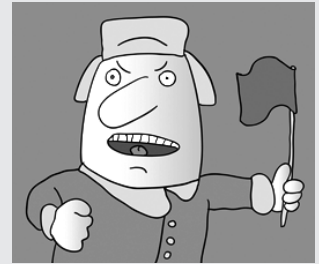
you shouldn't keep them a secret, and you can answer any questions honestly, but focus more on who you are as an individual and how the two of you might fit. If there's no fit, the rest won't matter.

Pay Attention to Red Flags and Romance Warning Signs

If your self-confidence is low you might think you don't deserve a fulfilling relationship or that you won't be lucky enough to find someone who likes you.

Don't let those feelings gloss over any red flags about a new romantic interest.

If you find yourself thinking, "Well, I guess I can live with that," or "I can change him/her," stop and consider whether you would want to be with that person exactly as he or she is. Remember, those traits will only be amplified as that person becomes more comfortable with you.



How to Meet Someone New

1. Follow your interests. Volunteer or take a class. You'll make new contacts in a circle of people who share common interests and values. Plus, you may add fulfillment and purpose to your own life while helping your community.

2. Ask for referrals. Let family and friends know that you're dating. An introduction from someone you both know doesn't guarantee a fit, but it takes away some of the risk, and there's greater potential that you'll have something in common—if only the person who introduced you!

3. Go online. There are plenty of websites—free and for a fee—specifically for dating. Or, explore your shared interests with people on other sites. This can lead to new friends who could be potential romantic partners or introduce you to one.

This is an exciting time, and you're bound to have some fears. But if you keep things light and use these experiments as a way to improve your fun-loving abilities, dating after divorce may just be your next great adventure. *



Overeating During the Holidays: Is It About the Food or the Anxiety?

The holidays of winter often bring to mind the image of a full table—and a full stomach. We gather with friends and family and feast merrily on pies and potatoes, turkey and ham and all of the fixings that many of us dearly enjoy.

There is another side to that pretty picture, however.

What if our extra consumption of calories during the winter is fueled not by good cheer and companionship, but by anxiety? And, further, what if it's not the gathering of loved ones that we most look forward to, but the food that we can't get out of our minds?

Also, while we may welcome gatherings with friends and family, they do bring with them extra stress and preparation. Add to the mix the anxiety caused by a sputtering economy, and many of us might find ourselves reaching for "comfort" food.

An anxiety-provoked behavior, such as overeating, is an attempt to cope with that anxiety, but as with

most such behaviors, it can become a problem itself. Overeating can become a compulsion and lead to health issues such as diabetes and obesity.

This is not to say that you should always turn down a second piece of pumpkin pie, but if you were dreaming of that pie for days, and if, in fact, you care more about that pie than the people around you, you may have a problem that needs attention.

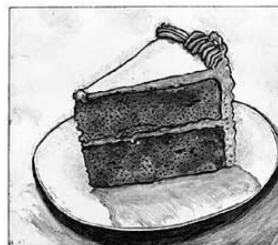
According to Overeaters Anonymous, here are a few other common markers of compulsive eating:

1. Do you eat when you're not hungry?
2. Do you go on eating binges for no apparent reason?
3. Do you have feelings of guilt and remorse after overeating?
4. Do you look forward with pleasure and anticipation to the time when you can eat alone?

5. Do you resent others telling you to "use a little willpower" to stop overeating?

6. Do you eat to escape from worries or trouble?

7. Does your eating behavior make you or others unhappy?



If you think you might be overeating compulsively, it is possible to recover. Help is available through the 12-Step programs Overeaters Anonymous and Food Addicts Anonymous, as well as a mental health professional.

With the help and support of others, you can uncover the reasons behind your compulsive eating, find other strategies for coping with anxiety and get on a food program that can sustain and, even, restore your health.

You can live a healthy and fulfilling life without that second piece of pumpkin pie. *

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Serving the Los Angeles, Santa Monica & Long Beach communities

Ms. Cynthia A. Henrie is a Licensed MFT & Board-Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress. She graduated from Antioch University with her MA in Clinical Psychology with a focus on Adolescence & Feminist Theory.

Ms Henrie specializes in helping women, adults, teens & their families. She works with women's issues, life crisis or life transitions, trauma of all types, gay & lesbian issues, teen/adult survivors of childhood abuse, incest/sexual abuse, sexual assault/rape, victims of violent crimes, adolescent issues, gender identity issues, & dissociative disorders.

Ms. Henrie uses a variety of treatment modalities, which include talk therapy, sandplay, art & creative therapies, EMDR, TAT & Developmental Needs Meeting Strategies.

Recognized by popitan Who's Who, 2007.

Melissa Sanchez-Garcia, MFT - LA & Torrance offices. Specializes in anxiety & anxiety disorders, PTSD, trauma & dissociation, & depression. Works with children, adolescents, adults, couples & families, LGBTQI & gender-variant communities, as well as adult survivors of childhood abuse (sexual, physical & emotional abuse, incest, & neglect), and victims of violent crimes, rape and sexual assault. Transpersonal process-oriented therapy, combining talk therapy & body-oriented therapy, relaxation & guided imagery, art & body therapy, play & sandplay therapy. Fluent in Spanish. Groups include: Coping with the Self-Absorbed, Sexual Abuse/Assault Survivors, TransWomen, Multiplicity, Young Adults & PTSD/Trauma.

Stephanie Groom, MFT - LA office. Stephanie is a licensed MFT in the state of California. She has worked in clinics with patients experiencing severe mental health issues. She works with clients dealing with a range of issues including: anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, PTSD, trauma, family discourse, psychosis, dissociative disorder, social anxiety, phobia, agoraphobia, attachment issues, borderline personality, hoarding behaviors, survivors of sexual assault, couples therapy and more. Modalities include: Psychodynamic Therapy, Humanistic & Family Systems with focus on Depth Psychology, Gottman Method Couples Therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, relaxation skills, guided imagery, sandplay therapy, Family of Origin therapy, integration of unconscious material into consciousness, art as a means for exploring true self and as an outlet for emotion and feelings, creative journaling, play therapy, & strength-based interventions.

Mimi Fayer, MFT - LA and Santa Monica office. Mimi specializes in mood disorders such as depression and anxiety as well as trauma; Survivors of all types of childhood abuse: sexual, physical, neglect, and emotional/verbal abuse; Relationship issues including separation and divorce; Self-esteem and empowerment; Depression; Anxiety; Infertility issues impacting mood and relationships; Self-harm; Utilizes psychodynamic approach, cognitive-behavioral therapy, client-centered therapy, and family systems depending on needs.

Sara Aracharya, LMFT - LA office. Graduate of Cornell University and The Wright Institute of Berkeley, Masters in Counseling Psychology, LMFT. Sara is certified in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy and child-parent psychotherapy. She works with children, adolescents, adults, couples and families. Specialties include: complex trauma and childhood abuse (children, adolescents and adult survivors), sexual abuse, incest, physical abuse, neglect, emotional/verbal abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorders. She also works with depression, adopting and women's issues.