

## Unearthing Your Own Story/Writing a Memoir for Your Descendants

### INVITATION

If you are a dreamer, come in.  
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,  
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer ...  
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire,  
For we have some flax golden tales to spin.  
Come in!  
Come in!

- Shel Silverstein

**STEP ONE:** Watch the film (one hour).

**STEP TWO:** Which filmed stories/storytellers reflect your own story and/or inspire you? Write about a memory or a feeling that one of the storyteller's experiences brought up for you. Describe your experience or feeling in as much detail as you can, so that another person could experience this from your sharing it. *(If you are working with another journaler or a group, plan to share these with one another at your next meeting/conversation.)*

**STEP THREE:** Cast back over your own life, using the Storytelling Timeline chart. See Step 4 for additional ideas to help unearth your stories.

- Who and what experiences have been seeds for your own values and concerns about social, economic and environmental/climate justice throughout decades of your life? What places may have provided inspiration? Who have been role models? Are there moments that transformed you/set you on a new path of justice activism?
- Has there been a moment or moments (Methodist founder John Wesley calls it a sanctification moment; Thomas Berry speaks of his "meadow moment") when you have felt called to some greater purpose or you have felt at one with all life/with the universe? *(Throughout his life, the late Thomas Berry, Passionist priest and Earth scholar, spoke and worked extensively on behalf of the planet. That work is rooted in what he calls his "meadow" experience at age 11 in Greensboro, N.C., where he had recently moved with his family. Berry was roaming the woods and fields near town. He describes the experience: "The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to me something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember." More than the lilies "it was the singing of the crickets, and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in the clear sky..." He goes on to say: "This early experience has remained with me ever since as the basic determinant of my sense of reality and values. Whatever fosters this meadow is good. What does harm to this meadow is not good...It was a wonder world that I have carried in my unconscious and that has evolved all my thinking.")* How did such an experience impact your life?

**STEP FOUR:** Here are some exercises/questions for reflection that can help you dig deeper into your past and find the storylines that help to define who you are and what you believe.

- Getting in touch with childhood memories: Close your eyes and imagine a room in your home or some place where you felt most "at home" as a child. What do you see, hear, smell, feel? Pay attention to details....favorite objects, colors, pictures,

placement of furniture...who comes into this space? What is special about that place? From this exercise, visit people who were important to you at that time/you looked up to? What did you learn from them in what they said or did? Were there any moments you can remember as a child when you felt it was important to stand up for a friend, to speak out about justice, to realize that something was unjust, to be compassionate. What was your relationship to the Earth as a child? Did you play/walk/recreate outside? Were there places that you loved and felt connected to? How have these affected your life?

- You can do this similar remembering exercise through various stages of your life presented on the Storytelling Timeline to unearth some of the seeds of your activist journey. You may be surprised at what comes bubbling up from your past!
- There are several books on creating your memoir and storytelling. In the section on resources, I have listed a few that I have read or skimmed for ideas. In a recent conversation with Susan MacKenzie, a spiritual director and environmental policy professor at Colby College, she shared an exercise she's found useful for retreats. It's from a book entitled **Remembering My Story** (see the Resource page for author and book information). Each person identifies the wellspring from which their life story has evolved and then follows that stream of water over the rocky places (challenges and how they were overcome) and divides, etc. She suggests that you draw this image of your life flowing like a stream. I can imagine using the timeline chart in this workbook to capture some of the details that you could then turn into the picture suggested above. A graphic might help to show where early parts of your story may circle back to feed later experiences, much more like a spiral than a straight time line.

## Food for Thought

Whenever I look around me, I wonder what old things are about to bear fruit, what seemingly solid institutions might soon rupture, and what seeds we might now be planting whose harvest will come at some unpredictable moment in the future. The most magnificent person I met in 2013 quoted a line from Michel Foucault to me: "People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does." Someone saves a life or educates a person or tells her a story that upends everything she assumed. The transformation may be subtle or crucial or world changing, next year or in 100 years, or maybe in a millennium. You can't always trace it but everything, everyone has a genealogy. Rebecca Solnit Tom Dispatch:

In her forthcoming book [The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery](#), Sarah Lewis tells how a white teenager in Austin, Texas, named Charles Black heard a black trumpet player in the 1930s who changed his thinking -- and so our lives. He was riveted and transformed by the beauty of New Orleans jazzman Louis Armstrong's music, so much so that he began to reconsider the segregated world he had grown up in. "It is impossible to overstate the significance of a 16-year-old Southern boy's seeing genius, for the first time, in a black," he [recalled](#) decades later. As a lawyer dedicated to racial equality and civil rights, he would in 1954 help overturn segregation nationwide, aiding the plaintiffs in [Brown v. Board of Education](#), the landmark Supreme Court case ending segregation (and overturning [Plessy v. Ferguson](#), the failed anti-segregation lawsuit launched in New Orleans 60 years earlier).

People, places, events inspiring my social/environmental justice concerns/actions	Age 1-5	Elementary Sch	Teens (Jr. Hi/HS	College/Post-HS	20's decade	30's decade	40's decade	50+
<b>People</b>								
<b>Places</b>								
<b>Events</b>								
<b>Spiritual Transformation/ "sanctification moment"</b>								