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★ The Healing Power of Storytelling: Using Personal Narrative to Navigate Illness, Trauma, and Loss

Annie Brewster
Rachel Zimmerman, Contributor
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Annie Brewster's transformative self-help book *The Healing Power of Storytelling* begins with a personal story: Brewster, confronted with a multiple sclerosis diagnosis, found that sharing her tale helped. Her book covers why and how storytelling is healing, citing scientific research and sharing examples, including the story of contributor Rachel Zimmerman losing her husband to suicide. Throughout, it demonstrates that organizing one's key experiences, and then reframing and sharing those experiences, can be therapeutic. Practical steps for replicating the method, including thoughtful writing prompts to begin the storytelling process, are shared—both at the end of the first part of the book, and at the end of each subsequent chapter.

Specific narratives that demonstrate the profound impact that storytelling can have come in the book's second part. These are compelling tales from people who dealt with major illnesses and who found their experiences transformed by writing and sharing their stories. Michael, a man with a terminal brain tumor, found that the process of storytelling gave him a sense of purpose, community, and gratitude in a situation that might otherwise have been overwhelming; Tracey, a diabetic, worked with her doctor to develop a storytelling process, allowing them to understand one another better and communicate more effectively.

Though the book focuses most on written stories, it includes a chapter on sharing stories through other mediums, including painting and sculpture, for those who do not find writing to be their most meaningful form of self-expression. There is also a hopeful chapter about how storytelling can be the impetus for social change.

The Healing Power of Storytelling is a thoughtful self-help resource with guidance for finding meaning in the face of life-changing illnesses. Its work is profound and insightful, imparting genuine hope without false promises.

CATHERINE THURESON (January / February 2022)

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