

Sharing Your Story

The Power of Storytelling

By: Dr. Michael Burcham

You are a survivor. And you have a story. Moreover, your story has power. Your experiences, your lessons learned, your insights - they delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, and challenge. Sharing your story helps others understand. Your story will imprint a picture on the mind of the listener. Your story is the way to reach out to other kindred spirits and emotionally connect.

At this year's SURVIVORville conference, we are going to focus on this important aspect of our survivor journey - telling stories that help, inspire, educate, heal and renew. There are three great reasons to share your story:

1. You Light a Path for Others to Follow

There's someone out there just like you. There is a person out there who likely has a similar diagnosis or a similar life situation. They may be a few months or a year or so behind you in their own journey - and they feel alone. They are frightened by what they read on the web. They fear what's next. They may have limited family support. They may feel like a pawn being moved along the board by the healthcare industry.

Sharing your story - and your own insights and lessons learned will inspire. It lights a pathway - sometimes to a cure; but always to healing.

2. You Have Knowledge to Share

In dealing with a serious medical condition - you faced decisions about your health, your body, your treatment, your family. It was the fusion of all things - some days you felt like (or were treated like) the illness rather than the person with the illness.

Looking back, you're wiser. You know the intended and unintended consequences of choices made. You know exactly how to answer the question of "what would I do differently knowing what I know now..." Storytelling is a way to share that knowledge to help others.

3. Sharing Your Story is Therapeutic

Getting your story out of your head - and out of your heart - is a powerful form of therapy. Giving voice to your emotions and feelings promotes healing. Sharing your insights and lessons learned with others amplifies how you've changed and personally grown. Storytelling allows us to release anger, grief, sadness - and give ourselves grace. You will find that - through storytelling - you learn more about yourself than your audience will learn from your story.

When we tell stories to others that have really helped us shape our thinking and way of life, we can have the same effect on them too. The brains of the person telling a story and listening to it can synchronize, says Uri Hasson from Princeton.

Sharing your story helps with a very basic human need to understand patterns of life — not merely life as an intellectual exercise but as a highly personal, emotional journey - a collection of joy and sadness - and the scars that prove we were indeed in the battle - and we survived.

Preparing to Share Your Story

So, how do you go about crafting the story you want to share? There are some easy steps to follow to get started.

1. **Identify Your Target Audience.** Establish your starting point by asking yourself this basic question: Who is the audience you want to reach - Other survivors? Family members? Healthcare providers? Legislators? Knowing who you want to reach is the first step in storytelling.
2. **Establish Your Goal.** What is your goal in telling your story? Are you sharing a lesson learned? Are you sharing an experience of treatment? Are you trying to inspire someone to support a cause? Having a well-defined goal will help you shape your story such that your voice cuts through all the "noise" out there.
3. **Make it Personal.** The most memorable stories are about real people facing real issues. People connect with other people, so make sure you focus your story on the real-life aspects of your story.
4. **Open with a "Grabber."** In a world of soundbite media, attention spans are strained. You must engage people to get interest. Begin by posing a question, a thought, a controversy. Grab their attention.
5. **Paint the Picture.** When telling your story, get your audience engaged: make them wonder "what happens next?" or "how is this going to turn out?" Share the obstacles, surprises, and emotions that makes your audience sit up and take notice. Let your audience "feel" what you feel. Good stories have a sequence (building blocks), they have suspense (What's going to happen!), they have a roller coaster (the ups and downs of the ride).
6. **A Moment of Truth.** Your story should have at least one "moment of truth." The best stories show us something about how we should treat ourselves, others, or the world around us. Call it an "Aha" moment – that point when your story conveys a message that really makes your audience say, "Yes! That's a powerful idea."
7. **Close with the "Sticker."** When the final line of your story is heard, or read, your audience should know exactly why they took this journey with you. Leave your audience with something to always remember. What do you want the audience to feel? What do you want the audience to remember? Make sure you know what message you want your audience to come away with, so that the story you've told is one your audience can retell, too.

Step out from the background, get ahead of the numbers, and put your name, your face, and your personality behind your story. Harness the power of the personal. People forget facts, but they never forget a great story.

Maya Angelou once said, "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." And what's the best way to make people feel? By sharing your compelling story.

My Story Outline

Story Components:		My Notes and Thoughts:
A	Who is my target audience - with whom do I want to connect?	
B	What is my goal for this story? To inform? To share a lesson learned?	
C	The Opening: What thought or question will get the audience's attention?	
D	Part 1: The Sequence - What are the building blocks of this story?	
E	Part 2: The Suspense - What the Heck is Happening?	
F	Part 3: The Roller Coaster - The ups and downs, the good and bad, the ultimate outcome.	
G	The Closing - the "Ah Ha" moment our thought to remember. Key take away.	