

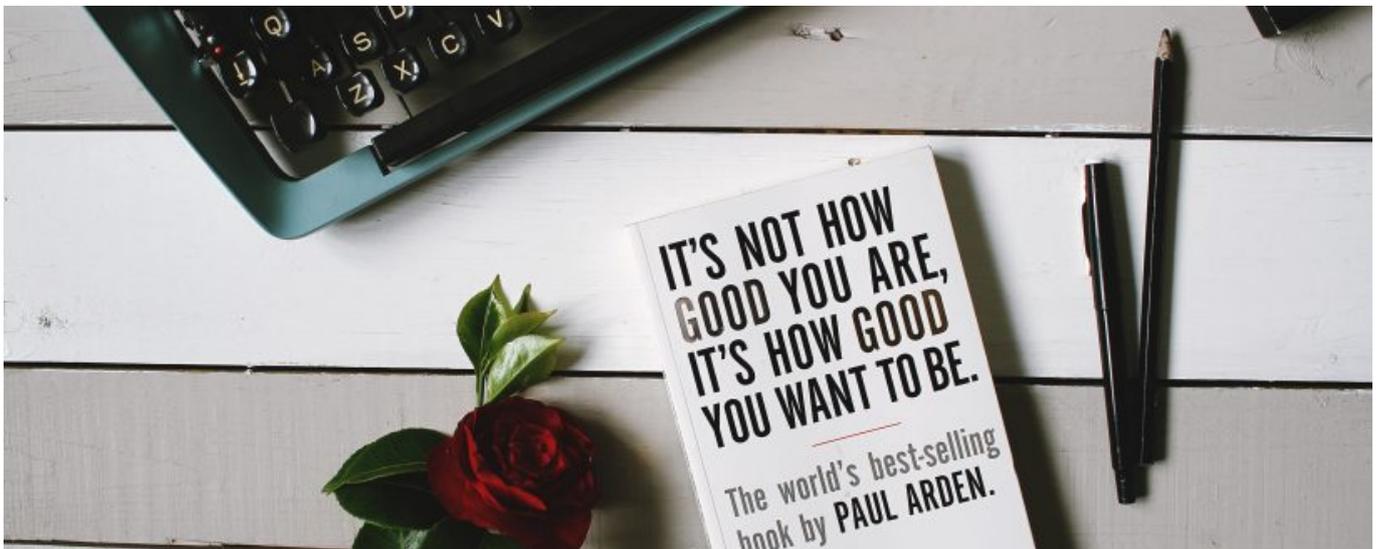


KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

How to Empower Your Healing Story (By Reimagining These Five Stories)

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | AUGUST 27, 2019



Change the Stories that Get You Stuck

Just look at us! We've come so far! The pieces of our savvy, personal self-care plans crafted so brilliantly just for us—*by us*—are coming together.

But, wait... many of us have been here before. How come we can't make our genius plans work? Why can't we get through the starting gates or pass the finish line?

That's right—we're stuck.

Why, with all our sophistication about what we need to do to recover our energy, can't we make it work? Why can't we heal? Why do we continue to suffer?

It's All in Our Stories

The answers are right here—in our very own minds. And the stories they tell. The stories we believe and let get in our way. The stories that get us stuck. Hang on, dear ones, you're in for a ride!

Stories Have Helped Us Survive

Our minds are our greatest tools and advisors but understanding them is never simple. Our brains were designed to keep us alive by telling stories. Our stories have great power—they can strengthen us, or they can stop us soundly in our tracks.

We must honor the stories of our lives and how they may have served us at one time and helped us survive.

But it's now time to scrutinize our stories for their value and truth as we step into our power and potential. We must release the toxic stories that hold us back.

We're entering the realm of the human mind—of neural networks and neuroplasticity—the biology of stories—and the promise of our brains to change to create new, intentional, powerful healing stories. Stories that get us unstuck. Leading us to? You guessed it—energy, potential, healing.

Our Life Stories Are Not Fixed

We're never trapped by our stories, the "truth," or "the way things are."

Understand that this is not a choice to see things through rose-colored glasses. It's a conscious choice to reframe the facts as we know them and to allow that we don't have *all* the facts. It's the perspective shift of a mature mind.

"I am stuck," "I don't have time," or "I am hopeless" are all stories we tell ourselves when we've run out of creative solutions to our problems. But they are not the truth, are they? At least not the whole truth.

Each of these can be reimagined to become:

- *"I may feel stuck right now, but I'll regroup and find someone to help me," or*
- *"If I let go of time-wasters, I will have time for what I care about," or*
- *"I feel hopeless at this moment, but this will pass as I affirm my infinite potential to*
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heal.”

We are Not Our Stories

We do not have to be limited, defined, or maligned by our stories. While we are powerfully influenced by them, *we* are not our beliefs or our stories. They are *constructs* of our brains. We create them, but they are not *us*. And this is our ultimate point of control over our lives and our potential to claim our energy and healing.

Five Life Stories that Slam the Brakes on Healing

- The Story of Our Power
- The Story of Our Worth
- The Story of How We Belong
- The Story of Fear About Uncertainty and Change
- The Story of Not Having Enough Time

The Story of Our Power

“I am the expert on me.”

We’ve Handed Our Power to the “Experts”

We have lost the idea that we can heal ourselves. We turn to others who know more than we do, who have more experience than we do, who do this “for a living.”

But none of those “experts” knows us better than we know ourselves. None of them has more experience in being us than we do.

Our healthcare professionals are certainly skilled and valued. I honor them all. But, none of them are an expert on *me*. They practice for the masses. They have to. And if in times of acute crisis, I need their help, I turn to them gratefully.

But the world is changing. As we know, most of our illnesses are now chronic.

Acute Care Medicine is Not Our Long-term Solution

The very real need for fast short-term treatments that drove the development of modern acute-care medicine through the last century is no longer what most of us need. But we still turn to the principles and players of acute care every day.

We turn to the experts. We look for the single cure. But if we don't find it, we're out of luck. Who do we turn to then? Who's the expert?

We Gave Up Being in Charge of Our Own Healing

In the past, before the voices of those many experts drowned out our own, we *knew* who to turn to—*ourselves*. We *knew* what we needed and *knew* how to heal. Our own inner wisdom guided us through all but the most acute and catastrophic of illnesses.

None of us are immune to our culture, to the stories that tell us “how things are.” But in the modern world, many of the most destructive stories lead us to believe that forces beyond ourselves and out of our control are in charge of our health and healing.

As a physician with nearly three decades of experience, working with clients with complex chronic illnesses (for which chronic fatigue is the common denominator), often referred from the universities who don't know what to do with these folks, I don't believe any of these myths. Not only are they untrue, they sit squarely in the way of healing.

To Heal, We Must Reclaim Our Power

Only by claiming our power and agency over our own lives can we capture the healing and energy recovery we seek.

The Story of Our Worth

“I deserve and must have my reverent attention and care.”

Stories of Judgment, Blame, and Toxic Shame

Stories of judgment, blame, and toxic shame are things we've learned from our tribe or soaked up from our culture. We have adopted them as our own, but they're not ours. And they're *never* true. Not ever.

They Slam the Door on Our Healing

And these stories of judgment, blame, and toxic shame slam the door on our healing every time:

- *Who am I to make my needs a top priority?*
- *Who am I to ask for help ... yet again ... when everyone else has said there's nothing wrong?*
- *Being chronically ill makes me less valuable to my family, friends, and tribe.*

We Don't Need to Be "Fixed" or Given Permission

Know this: We're born worthy. Inherently complete, lovable, and whole, just as we are. We don't need to be "fixed," or given permission from someone else.

Sick as we may be, exhausted as we are, we are worthy of the very best care and resources for healing. And further, the world needs us to heal.

To Heal, We Must Reclaim the Wisdom of Our Inherent Worth

Our inherent worth is here, right inside us, having just gotten lost and fallen out of sight. Buried beneath fatigue and overwhelm or drowned out by the noise of our dominant stories about our unworthiness that we practice over and over and over.

We've strengthened the neural networks of shame, while the intrinsic knowledge of our deepest inner wisdom—wisdom that we are whole and holy—is beyond our ears to hear. We must reclaim this wisdom to heal and find our true potential.

Permission Slip: Permission to Be Your Whole True Self

We begin here: Permission.

Permission to acknowledge our worthiness and wholeness. Permission to unwind the mind pathways of shame and strengthen those of love and self-acceptance.

Write yourself this permission slip (or your own version) and read it out loud when you're done. I have many such permission slips written on sticky notes that I carry around with me.

Dear [your name here],

I give you my full permission to be your whole, true, authentic self—just as you are, right now. Already whole. Already lovable. Already beautiful. Already complete. Welcome home. You belong here. Safe. No guilt. No shame. Already enough. Only love.

The Story of How We Belong

“I stand tall and strong and courageous in my personal healing journey”

We’re Wired to Belong

Survival

We’re genetically wired to belong to our families, tribes, and communities. Strong communal ties kept our ancestors alive when being left behind or ostracized meant certain death.

For most of us, the reality of our modern world is that our survival is not so fragile. Whether we live on the edge or in more comfortable surroundings, our evolutionary experience has shaped the development of our brains so feeling safe and secure is strongly tied to the bonds of our births, allegiances, shared beliefs, and ways of living.

Social Communities

Beyond survival, we find comfort belonging to the friends who share pizza and beer together on Friday nights. We gain strength belonging to the work community who collaborate, share stories by the water cooler, and burn the midnight oil together. We grow along with our bad-assed comrades pounding it out at the gym. We cherish belonging to the families who love one another through food or seal their ties through shared beliefs and behaviors. It feels good. It feels comfortable. It feels safe.

Our deepest inner beingness thrives through these connections.

As We Take a Stand for Our Own Healing

But this healing life we’ve chosen asks us to make new choices.

We *must* change the things that need to be changed.

We may choose not to eat pizza or drink beer. We may choose to create a more balanced life of work and play and self-care. We may make choices that go against the grain of our pack.

Our Healing is Radical

But to claim healthier choices in the face of what our friends, co-workers, and family are doing can seem radical, challenging those relationships, inspiring scrutiny and criticism, breaking seemingly vital bonds.

However good and imperative our choices may be, we may feel lonely and scared as we bravely take a stand for our own healing.

To Whom Do We Belong?

This is one of the tests of our healing life: To whom do we belong?

How do we survive when our path to healing challenges us to stand apart from the crowd? How do we quiet their voices so we can hear our own? How do we make choices and take actions that are best for us but make us stand out or leave us behind?

Beyond the healing choices we make and the outcomes we expect, we still wonder:

- What happens when we become well?
- How does our vibrant new energy, happiness, or ideal body weight effect our relationships?
- Will our friends and family support us and cheer us on?
- Or will we get backlash from their misplaced jealousy, anger, or their own feelings of abandonment?

Our Healing Story: Strong and Brave

But while these feelings are normal, they're not our whole story: *we are also strong and brave.*

The end to our suffering means courageously embracing our true authentic selves. To live a healing life we are called to *belong to ourselves*. We must use that [strong center] we've worked so hard to find, connect to, and nourish. We must shine a bright light on our lives and use our own minds and hearts to decide what's best for our healing.

Brave souls called to belong to themselves soon learn:

- Loneliness is temporary and not fatal.
- The backlash of others is not personal.
- Our anxiety is just energy.

- The rewards are eternal.

Remember what happens when we care for ourselves first?

The Rewards of Our Healing Life

Yes, we're stronger, wiser, more resilient, and vibrant. We live and lead through the radiance of our healing lives. We pave the road for others.

We Share the Healing Path with Others

And, we soon realize there's a reward we may not have expected: we're surrounded by companions living their own healing lives. We take this journey both alone and with the strength, nourishment, and companionship of others.

While we may let go of those who no longer support us, we're joined by new travelers in this healing life. This can be hard, but it's the only true life. It's the only life in which we can claim the healing and potential that are ours.

Exercise: Expedition to the Terrain of our True Authentic Selves

What if you could practice the call to belong to yourself? To prepare for those times when the way is unclear or when the road gets treacherous? To stand up to the scrutiny of your critics?

We've practiced this before: we slip into our strong center. This is the strong center we know well, that we've already claimed as our own. It's the space of belonging to ourselves. Everything we've learned to do to support it makes us strong and brave in the face of life's challenges.

Let's drop into our strong center now. Place your hands over your midsection. Take a few slow deep breaths into your core. Ah, yes, this is me. This is us. This is our strength.

Say this: I can stand alone here. I can weather any storm, any journey, any challenge from this place of strength. In choosing to be here, I belong. I belong to myself. I belong to my tribe of companions on this healing journey. I choose what's best for me without distraction or interference. I trust my strength and wisdom to fortify me as I become more and more my whole, true, authentic self. As I steadily rise into my true potential, I trust my light, which I radiate all around me. This is the light that allows my travel companions to find me, and for me to see them. In being true to myself—belonging to myself—I am never truly alone.

The Story of Fear about Uncertainty about Change

“My potential for growth, healing, and successful change are infinite.”

We’re Always Walking into the Unknown

All efforts to heal require change, and that means an unknown outcome. Always.

We see our problem—we’re not where we want to be yet. We know what we *aspire* to (energy recovery, getting our lives back). We know *what* we want to change (starting with our life stories). We know there is a roadmap ([The Nine Domains of Healing-Your Beautiful Energy Roadmap](#)). that will guide us. And we know there is a community that will be with us to support us and share our journey. We know that others (many others) have succeeded at doing this.

Change is Scary

But change still scares us. It’s been said that all change begets mourning. Change is a loss. We have to give something up, abandon our old familiar ways, whether they serve us well or not.

No matter how bad something is, it’s ours, it’s comfortable, it’s the way things have been. We know it. We can count on it. We’ve built our life around it. We know how to survive with it. And maybe all our energy has gone into surviving by keeping things the same.

To change, we are challenged to learn something new. To change, we may be called upon to do something hard. To change, we must step up to an unknown outcome—we might fail.

Change is Our Only Source of Untapped Potential

In his book *The Discoverers*, Daniel Boorstein writes a different story about change: “The most promising words ever written on the maps of human knowledge are terra incognita, unknown territory.”

What he’s saying is that moving into the unknown is the only thing that releases us, giving us the promise of untapped potential. It’s our freedom. It’s how we change our story to find our energy and healing.

It’s important to remember that change is not only what we can do now, it’s what we’ve been

doing since the day we were born. Just as healing and love are parts of us, so too is succeeding at change. When you learned to walk—wow, what a change. What amazing new potential!

Fear of Change Stories May Be Hidden

Our fear-of-change stories often operate on a subconscious level, making them more destructive because we often aren't aware that they're sabotaging our efforts to create positive change. But if we follow the fear to that story, if we can unpack it and see it for what it is—the product of our imagination and assumptions—we open up the opportunity to create a better story. A story that supports our healing.

What Our Fear-of-Change Stories Look Like

Think about some ways in which fear can get in the way of healing. Think of some ways fear might make you question the decision to focus on your health.

Here are Fear-of-Change Stories I've Heard in My Consultation Room:

- *What will be required of me if I feel really good? Will I have to go back to that job I hate?*
- *How will feeling well change my relationships? Will my loved ones still take care of me? Will they still love me?*
- *How will succeeding at feeling well change me? I'm afraid of who I will become.*
- *If I am strong and healthy, will others feel jealous of me? Will I still belong?*
- *If I am strong and healthy, I will be amazing and powerful. That scares me.*

Are you squirming yet?

These commonly held unconscious stories can be the most difficult because they expose areas of our lives where we feel profoundly vulnerable.

At the root of these stories are assumptions about our physical and emotional safety and survival. About our place within our tribes, our families. About our worth and lovability. About our personal power and creativity.

But All These Fearful Stories Can Be Rewritten:

- *What will be required of me if I feel really good? What new exciting opportunities will show up that I haven't even thought of yet?*
- *How will feeling well change my relationships? How much richer will they be when I have this extra energy to put into them?*
- *How will succeeding at feeling well change me? When I build on this success, what other tasks can I take on and succeed at?*

- *If I am strong and healthy, I can be a role model for those I love.*
- *If I am strong and healthy, I will be amazing and powerful. That excites me.*

Our minds and brains are amazing in the ways they innately step in to protect us from danger and deep suffering.

However, to heal, we must transform our fearful stories with gentle self-awareness and loving softening. The smallest shifts can open the doors to hope, love, and infinite potential.

The Story of Not Having Enough Time

"I always have time for what I care about."

Time Stealers: Distraction

Our lives are filled to the brim with [distractions] that sap our time, leading us to the false conclusion that we don't have enough of it. We [discussed] simple ways to create more time by letting go of the barrage of distractions and disruptions we often allow into our lives.

I'm Scared

We also use "having no time" as an excuse for not taking the steps we need to create change. What's with that?

It all ties back to what we've just discussed—disempowerment, unworthiness, belonging, and fear of uncertainty.

"I have no time" is often our euphemism for "I'm scared."

No More Excuses

No more. We can't use that excuse anymore. We may consciously choose to put off the change we need. It may be all too much right now. Often times those baby steps are best. But no way are we going to lie to ourselves.

We now know those untrue stories dismantle our power and our futures. To heal, we must become truth warriors. No excuses. No lies.

And beware of pretending *not* to suffer by numbing ourselves into oblivion—this saps *all* our time.

Create Time

To make conscious choices about our healing, we must stand strong in our centers—whole, true, authentic, worthy. In this way we create time. We *always* have time, and we revere and amplify it by ditching distractions and excuses.

Is There a Tenacious Story Standing in the Way of Your Healing?

How do we know what's stalled our healing? How do we know if our "reality" is a story that's not supporting us? What do we look out for? This is not easy. Our minds can be tricky.

For some of us, getting unstuck is a matter of finding the resources and support that we need but haven't had thus far. New information, education, or ideas may be just what we need to jumpstart a new phase to our healing. We may revitalize a stuck healing journey through a new perspective or direction of a new resource, mentor, or consultant. We can add new members to our team or call in the support of family and friends to help us.

But remember all the dangerous stories that we've discussed in this section.

What if we're stuck with a tenacious story and can't see it? Let's look at some clues.

Clues to Tenacious Stories Standing in the Way of Your Healing:

- You know precisely how to solve your problem but just can't get it done.
- You feel stuck. *"I'm stuck" is always a story.*
- You're afraid to commit to change you know you need. *Fear is a story about an unknown future.*

- You feel unlovable, undeserving, guilty, hopeless, or shameful. *Always a story!*
- You worry your loved ones won't support your healing. *Big assumptions. Big story.*
- You've done it all but are still suffering. *This is the most tenacious story of all. This is a story of fatigue, of suffering, of not seeing the way forward. I know you've worked hard and it's been a long road, but I promise you haven't done it all. There is always a path forward. There's always space for change, for compassion and love, for progress.*

Power Tools for Story Mining

If you feel stuck, scared, or unable to move forward with your healing, there is *always* a tenacious story getting in your way.

You need power tools to evaluate how your ideas about the “truth,” “the way things are,” or how you're stuck may not serve you well. And how they can change.

Join me in the next article of my Empower Your Healing series to explore these powerful perspective changers in more depth, [How to Empower Your Healing Story: Lessons in Story Mining.](#)

Resources

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Empower Your Healing Story: Lessons in Story Mining.](#) 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Empower Your Healing Story: A Manifesto.](#) 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Empower Your Healing Story: What are Stories?](#) 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Empower Your Healing Story: Rewrite Your Failure Stories.](#) 2019.

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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom

gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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