

Transcript to Class 1:

# Choosing Your Story

By Inspired Living Publisher Editor Bryna Rene

For your convenience, the following is the transcript to accompany Inspired Living Publishing's "Choosing Your Story" audio class hosted by Editor Bryna Rene.

## About Editor Bryna René

**Bryna René** is an experienced editor, published author, yoga instructor, musician, photographer, and "general creative" with a passion for helping others live in greater awareness and joy. Her editing portfolio includes numerous successful non-fiction titles, including all of Inspired Living Publishing Best-selling print anthologies, *Inspiration for a Woman's Soul: Choosing Happiness, A Juicy, Joyful Life, and Embracing Your Authentic Self*. To learn more about Bryna and her current projects, please visit [www.brynarene.com](http://www.brynarene.com) and [www.wordsbyaphrodite.com](http://www.wordsbyaphrodite.com).

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**Hello and welcome!** My name is Bryna René, and I'm the Editor for all of *Inspired Living Publishing's* best-selling print anthology books. I've created this audio series to walk you through and support you in understanding Inspired Living Publishing's Authentic Storytelling model. Please be sure to listen to all the audios BEFORE writing so that you are sure to create a powerful story that is a match for the project, and that your story will make the maximum impact on those who read it. Whether you are writing your story for one of our high-profile print projects or our empowering Kindle series projects, these classes will support you through your writing process.

Today's class, the first in our series, is entitled "**Choosing Your Story.**" In this class, we'll explore how you can identify the most appropriate moment of your personal experience to share through your story, and how you can best communicate the message of your story to the readers.

Some of the topics we'll be covering today include

- Defining your moment of realization — your "Ah-ha" moment

- Creating a story around your moment of learning,

- The particular requirements of a teaching story,

All of the stories featured in Inspired Living Publishing's projects are, at their heart, teaching stories. They allow our authors to share their experiences with our readers in a way that helps readers grow as they have grown. In this class we'll talk about negative versus positive drama and emotion in storytelling, and how to choose which details to share in your story.

**Let's begin with the first step in your story creation process: Defining the moment.**

When creating a story of this kind, choosing the moment around which to base the story is often the most challenging part. For many of us (myself included), our journey toward happiness, contentment, fulfillment and all of these other great things we've experienced was actually a series of small moments that culminated in a massive change over the course of months or years. Therefore, it's not a bad thing if one giant "ah-ha" moment doesn't come to mind. You'll simply go through a sorting process in which you'll examine those small moments and decide which one is going to be most appropriate for you to shape your story around.

The moment you chose to write about does not need to be accompanied by massive external events in order to be an effective story for your readers. A lot of times we do create change in our lives in response to external events—but not always. It's possible that your monumental shift occurred while you were doing something as simple as raking leaves in your backyard, or driving in your car. This doesn't mean that your story is going to be less effective because there was no big external drama accompanying this internal shift. It simply means that your story will need to be crafted in a way that illustrates your internal drama and/or struggle prior to your shift, and the resolution and easing of struggle after your moment of change.

**What's really going to make your story effective for readers is the *emotional impact of the story and the information that you're sharing*.** As human beings, we have vastly different experiences in terms of our exterior surroundings, our upbringings, and our experiences in the world. However, we all share this common bond of human feeling.

When you write from a place of human feeling—especially when you write from a place of transitioning unpleasant feeling, suffering, or “stuck-ness” into positive feeling, happiness, and momentum—regardless of the reader's personal life experience, she is going to be able to relate to your experience in some way.

One of the first things to ask yourself in your story sorting process is, “What was I feeling prior to this shift, and how did I feel after?” When we write from that place of internal connection, rather than trying to shape the story around external events, the impact of the story is deeper and more profound. This remains true even if your decision to change was a product of major life events and external drama. The emotional connection remains the most important part of the story for every reader.

If you intend to write your story centering around a major life event, trauma, or some other massive external shift, keep in mind that the emotional content of the story is still going to be more important to the reader than the external circumstances, especially with external events which are really unusual, such as psychic experiences or paranormal experiences. What makes those relatable even to people who have not had those experiences is the emotional context: how you felt before they happened, how you felt while they were happening, and how you felt after they happened.

I'd like to share a little bit about the stories I've encountered in my journey as editor for Inspired Living Publishing's first three best-selling anthologies, *A Juicy Joyful Life*, *Embracing Your Authentic Self* and *Inspiration for a Woman's Soul: Choosing Happiness*.

The stories that were contributed to those three anthologies were incredibly powerful, emotional tales from women who had lost children or a spouse, who'd survived cancer and bankruptcy and homelessness. On the other side, there were stories that didn't have that external drama, but still really stuck with me. I remember one story in

particular from a beautiful woman who experienced a massive shift in awareness by staring into her own eyes in the mirror. Even though her moment of transformation wasn't centered around a big life event, her story was no less powerful than any of the others. What made it special was what she *felt*, not what she *did*.

So if you're feeling, as I'm sure some of you are, that "I don't have this big "aha" moment to share," let that thought go, because you do. You absolutely do. If you've created positive change in your life, you have a powerful and relatable moment to write about—as long as you approach it from that place of emotional intelligence, and ask, "How did I feel previous to this event, how did I feel during it, and how did I move forward when it was over?"

### **Now that you know what to look for, how do you choose the moment?**

First, the moment around which your story centers should be one that is powerful for you. Don't think about how other people might view your moment, or whether it will seem "big enough" to them. If you feel strongly about it, your readers will too.

Second, be sure that you can identify a definite shift in feeling or awareness from "before" to "after." The moment you choose should be powerful enough to create a shift in your emotions, behavior, or circumstances. Even if this shift starts out small, you should be able to pinpoint where it started.

If these two criteria are in place, the field of opportunity is wide open.

**That brings us to the next piece of our class today, which is creating the story around your moment.** We'll talk more about story arc in class two, which will be centered around story crafting, but I'll give you some basics here.

Every story has an arc. You start off in one place. The action builds. You end up at a climax, which, of course, is your moment of transformation, the moment when you decided to make a significant change or experienced an "ah—ha" moment, and the resolution that happens after.

The difference between how you'll craft your story for this project and how, for example, we might craft an adventure story or a psychological drama is that we're focused just as much on the resolution, or the after effects of your transformation, as we are on the journey up to that transformation.

In classing storytelling, the action builds until the moment of climax or crisis, then drops off sharply to the resolution. (As in, "And then, they lived happily ever after.") The resolution doesn't take up much room in the story because the problem or crisis in the plot has been solved, and the story has nowhere else to go. If a new problem arises, it becomes its own story: this is the classic setup for a sequel.

However, with a teaching story, the climax and resolution are where the learning happens. Therefore, I like to see equal or almost equal energy devoted to the post-transformation story as to the pre-transformation story. If we're focused only on the drama leading up to the moment of climax or transformation, but we don't see the resolution and resulting change, the teaching story loses impact.

That doesn't mean that the events leading up to the moment of transformation are any less important. One of the things that I see quite often with writers—especially with new writers—is that it's challenging for them to access the emotional piece of the pre-transformation story because they no longer feel the way they felt when they were in that transition.

**When you are crafting the details of your story around your moment of transformation,** it's very important to spend some time meditating, in prayer, or in whatever practice you choose which allows you to go back and access the emotions, the feelings in your body, and the thought processes which characterized the time before your moment of transformation.

For some of us, it's really painful to go back to that place. However, this is not intended as an exercise in torture. It's simply intended to help make your transformation more real to the reader. For example, if you want to write about your journey out of an abusive marriage, but you're talking about your experience in distant and clinical terms, just listing off events like bullet points, it's going to be really hard for the reader to relate to what you were going through, and your moment of choice won't have the same impact. But if you can really speak to the challenges, the desperation you felt, or whatever it was that pushed you to the edge and to your change, even readers who haven't been there will be able to put themselves in your shoes.

As much as we are trained and encouraged in our personal growth processes to let old feelings go, when you're writing, I think it's very important to be able to be honest and real about whatever it was you were feeling pre-transformation. You may actually find, if you're still hanging onto any lingering thoughts or emotions tied to that pre-transformation you, this writing process might be cathartic for you, and help you release any last remnants of old feelings.

On the flip side, we don't want to make the pre-transformation emotions and challenges the focus of the entire story. We simply want to present them as a tool, a window into your life and a glimpse of a "you" that the reader can relate to. Because, let's face it, many people reading your story are going to be in their own pre-transformation phase, and where you are now, on the "resolution" side, may feel a little inaccessible right now.



Speaking to the thought processes, emotions, and feelings of restriction or lack that characterize a pre-transition experience is going to be a powerful tool to draw readers into your story. Don't be afraid to go there and go deep. Then, when your moment of transformation comes, the reader lives it with you, right beside you, as if it were her own.

**The teaching part of the story comes after your moment of transformation.** You've had your experience. You've had this culmination of thoughts and experiences and emotions and other stuff that led you to a point where you needed to make a choice. You chose this positive path. You chose something different for yourself and your life. The lightbulb turned on. But then what happened? What changes did you create in your life as a result of your choice? What shifted in your relationships? What shifted for your family? What shifted in your body? What shifted in your habits and patterns that made this change, which took place on the inside, manifest in the exterior world?

So now, we've talked about internal shifts pretty extensively. But when we make an internal change, it always—in some way, shape, or form—results in an exterior manifestation. Part of your story resolution might be to talk about not only the internal shifts, but the external shifts which happened as a result of your moment of change or choice.

When you approach the resolution this way, you'll have pieces in your story which not only allow the reader to relate to you emotionally, but which also give her some concrete evidence that your "ah-ha" moment did net measurable results.

**One of the classic tools of story crafting, whether you're working in fiction or creative non-fiction, is the idea of action and consequence.** Your climactic moment, is both a consequence and an *action*. Something happened as a result of the build-up of everything that was going on for you, and you chose to act on it. Your resolution is a description of the *consequences* of that action.

Let's talk about action and consequence in terms of story drama. I think most conscious people believe that we call into our lives the experiences necessary for us to follow whatever path we've chosen in the most integral and empowered way.

But even if we believe it's for a reason, life is full of drama. Drama is really, at its core, a resistance to something we find unpleasant or unfavorable. When something happens that hurts us, or challenges us, or aggravates us, we resist—and drama ensues. Even if you're in a place where you're trying to weed out the drama from your life and come to a place of internal equanimity and balance, good writing requires some drama. There needs to be a certain amount of tension which gathers around you or your situation in order for the breakthrough to happen—because let's face it, if there was no tension or feelings of restriction or need to change, we wouldn't have a

breakthrough. There wouldn't be a need for one. And if there's no breakthrough, there's no story.

Looking at your story in a more clinical way can be really helpful when you're assessing which drama you're going to include, and which drama you're not going to go near. The question I like to ask is, "Is the drama necessary for the reader's mental or emotional understanding of the situation?" If the answer is yes, then even if you don't really want to go there, the drama is necessary—because, again, these are teaching stories, and we need to be honest about both the "before" and "after." If you were embroiled in drama prior to your wake-up moment, then you'll need to give a snapshot of that dramatic situation to the reader.

For example, if, prior to your moment of transformation, you were going through a period of massive depression and struggling with suicidal thoughts, it's not going to be enough for the reader to read, "Yeah, I was kind of depressed. It was hard." It's really important to be honest and real, regardless of how "dramatic" that reality seems to you now that you're on the other side of that experience. Be vulnerable. Be authentic. It really will take your story to the next level.

**Then, there's drama that you DON'T want to include in your story.** That drama is of the blame and shame variety. Your story might have a "villain." There may have been someone in your life who contributed to a really negative experience for you, or created an external situation that was really painful for you. If that's the case, go ahead and talk about it—but don't let your story focus on their actions over and above your own. We don't want to read "Well, my life sucked because so-and-so did this, and everything was really hard, because of X, Y, and Z that this person did." There definitely is a line there between describing a situation accurately and foisting the blame for the situation onto your story villain.

The exception to this is *if you felt at the time* that this person was creating your suffering. It's fine to write something like, "I blamed this person for everything that had gone wrong for me. I felt like it was all his fault and I was trapped by his actions." In this example, it's clear that the blame and shame were part of your mental state at the time. If something like this is a factor in your story, be sure to write about how your feelings of victimhood have shifted in your resolution.

Another type of drama that we want to avoid in these stories is gratuitous drama. We only want to include those dramatic events which contribute to the reader's understanding of where you were prior to your moment of realization.

So, if your focus is a moment of transformation in your marriage, some description of what was going on in your relationship prior to your transformation will absolutely be necessary to the movement and impact of the story. However, if your story revolves around a transformation in your professional life, relationship drama probably doesn't



much of a place in that story, *unless* it was the interplay between your relationship and your work environment which caused you to have a breakthrough.

We will delve into the concept of story drama more in our second class, as well, but I do feel compelled to mention here that if you do have a "story villain," whether it was a really mean boss, someone in your family, or a partner in a relationship who participated in a situation that was tense or painful for you, it may be a good idea to change names and omit identifying details for that person. This is a story told from your perspective, not a tell-all or an exposé, so we want to respect the privacy of everyone involved.

Obviously, if your best friend reads your story, she's probably going to know who it is that you're talking about. However, we don't want readers who don't know you personally to be able to recognize the antagonist in your story from the details that you give. So, it's all about finding balance. We want to give the reader enough to feel emotionally connected to the story, but not enough to be able to pick out your antagonist on the street.

If there are other people in your story who play a more minor or a positive role, my suggestion is that you get their permission before using their name and identifying details in your story. If they're not comfortable with that, then you can change their name. Easy as that.

In the final portion of our class today, we'll focus on the particular requirements of teaching stories. As you know, there are many, many different types of stories out there. There are adventure stories and drama stories and comedic stories and memoirs, etc., etc., etc.

**The story that you're contributing to this sacred project is a combination of two things.** It's a teaching story and it's a memoir. It is a story based on your real-life experience, but it's also designed to trigger some sort of realization for the reader. It might be a small realization on the reader's part, maybe just an understanding that eventually they might be able to get to where you are and find that a desirable place. It might be a huge, profound realization. We don't, as teachers, have control over the rewards that any student reaps from our teaching. So I'm going to invite you to disengage from any attachment to the results of the teaching of your story. We don't want to use the story as a soapbox. Instead, just imagine what *potential* your story has for a reader who is open to receiving a teaching moment.

One technique we can use for integrating teaching into a memoir story is the perspective of the future self. When you're writing about the dramatic buildup, the tension, the events that happened prior to your moment of realization, you may choose—sporadically, and with care—to interject that "future self" perspective.

This means that you will be creating the story drama, and simultaneously examining it from a reflective perspective. You might write something along the lines of, "I felt so trapped in that situation. I just couldn't see a way out. I woke up every morning feeling like there was no reason to get out of bed." Then, you might choose to interject a message from your future self, saying something like, "At the time, I couldn't see that what was really happening was X, Y, and Z."

We want to be careful with that because we don't want to overanalyze or nitpick our own story. But at the same time, a little bit of perspective can really be helpful, because in general, when we go through life drama or challenging situations, there's always this underlying question of, "Why is this happening?" Sometimes the question is, "Why is this happening to me?" Sometimes the question is, "Why is X, Y, and Z person or thing doing this to me?"

Whatever questions you were asking yourself during your most difficult moments, you can answer them from the perspective of your future self. In doing so, you'll give the reader a little bit of extra perspective on why you were struggling in the first place, and that just makes your breakthrough point more tangible for the reader.

Again, we don't want to get too analytical with that future-self perspective, because everything is clear in hindsight. We do want some mystery so that the reader doesn't preempt the moment of transformation, but rather experiences it with you. We want her to say "ah-ha" right beside you.

Most of the teaching in your story is going to take place in the resolution portion of your story. Once the breakthrough has happened (maybe with a little bit of extra information from your future self), then you'll ease into the resolution. You'll write about what you learned from your pivotal moment, and from all the events which led up to that moment. You'll also write about any physical, tangible changes which took place as a result of your transformation.

While realization does happen in a moment, the consequences of that realization can manifest over a period of weeks, months, or even years. Again, that future-self perspective is vital to this part of the story because you'll want to speak simultaneously about the immediate results of your moment and also the long-term results of your shift (whatever long-term means in your situation).

**In crafting the teaching portion of your story, there are many, many ways in which you can make your story effective.** The sky is the limit, so allow your writing to flow naturally.

There are also a few things you don't want to do and I'll tell you about those right now.

The first is writing your story like an article. It needs to be much more personal than that. We don't want to see bullet points or lists of "things you can do to have the breakthrough that I had." That might be appropriate for a magazine article or a blog, but not for a personal story. We don't want action steps. We don't want criteria. We don't want anything that resembles a lecture or a workshop. We want to keep these stories personal, emotionally charged—and most of all, relatable.

If you're re-reading your story and it starts to sound like you're lecturing the reader as opposed to sharing your story, it might be time to go back and infuse a little bit more emotion into the narrative.

You can also keep in mind that, if you're contributing to one of our print anthologies, your story will be followed by three journaling questions, so you don't need to touch on all the teaching points in the narrative.

This concludes our first class, "Choosing Your Story." Thank you so much for sharing this time with me. I hope this information was helpful to you.

I'll leave you with just one more thought on your story creation process. Sink deeply into your own authenticity. Your story, whatever it is, is beautiful and valid because it comes from you. You don't need to compare your story to any of the other stories in previous anthologies, or in other books out there. Your situation is unique, just as you are unique. You were invited to contribute a story to this project because you have something important to share with our readers. When in doubt, just come back to that authentic spark inside you and write from that place. When your story and your writing originate from that place, it gives you a beautiful and solid platform to work from. Language can be refined, but feeling can't be duplicated!

Happy writing!