

Soul Matters Theme: Story
Pagan Holiday: Yule →Imbolc
January 12, 2025

Story: told at Poison Control conference in 2021.

The little girl was grievously ill. Her parents had travelled 4000 miles from their home in Qatar to bring her to the finest doctors in London, but her condition baffled all who examined her. Without any answers, everyone feared that her life might come to an abrupt end.

The 19-month old was lethargic at best, and often blacked out without warning. Her little arms and legs could barely allow her to sit upright, and often showed no sign of any feeling at all.

One of her nurses was a woman named Marsha Maitland, and she thought some of the little girl's symptoms sounded familiar. She suggested testing for the presence of poison, but the doctors assured her they had run tests for all of the common compounds that an infant might ingest.

Marsha asked if anyone had tested for thallium. Running out of options, the hospital asked for help from Scotland Yard, and sure enough, they found signs of thallium in the child's blood and began the measures that would save her life. Her parents had been using the poisonous salt to kill cockroaches in their home, and the baby had found it.

When asked about her guess, Nurse Maitland told the hospital about the story she had just been reading - an Agatha Christie mystery called "Pale Horse." Christie's description about the effects of the poison was both detailed and accurate enough that, fifteen years after she wrote the book, a reader matched up those symptoms and helped save a little girl's life.

This is the power of story. Had the nurse read those details from a fact sheet, had she been told them in a lecture, she might or might not have recalled them when the little girl's case came up. But because she had learned those symptoms wrapped inside a story, they had stuck with her almost as if she had experienced them firsthand.

This is the Power of Story

- Story
 - is as old as humanity itself
 - weaves its threads through every tradition, every culture
 - is at the heart of what it means to be human
- Pagan—and others: story is lifeblood of spiritual practice
 - Yule season continues
 - Ancestors gathered indoors
 - Long, cold, dark nights
 - Storytelling became paramount
 - songs of ancestors
 - myths that shape our beliefs and ceremonies
 - wellspring filled with meaning, connection, transformation
- We ALL tell stories:
 - Pitching ideas to bosses/spouses/children
 - Presentations
 - Sharing accounts of the weekend
 - Eulogies
 - Jokes
 - Education
 - Lead-in to any presentation – builds connections. (What I did here today).
- Stories have been shown to be up to 22 times more memorable than facts/data
 - Stories allow you to enter someone else's brain
 - Stories stick in a holistic way, better than charts, numbers and concepts.
 - probability that the message will impact behavior goes up.
 - If you want people to remember ideas
 - If you want to help people change
 - If you want to help them get better results
 - Tell them stories!

- Stories have everything that facts wish they had but never will
 - color, action, characters, sights, smells, sounds, emotions
 - stuff that we can easily relate to.
 - We imagine ourselves doing, or not doing, or having already done, what the story describes.
 - Stories put facts into a meaningful, and therefore memorable, context
- Stories
 - not just entertainment
 - shape our identities
 - connect us to one another
 - provide a framework to understand
 - vastness of world
 - our place within it
 - vehicles of meaning
 - vessels for truth
 - catalysts for transformation
- Sacred Stories
 - Myths of deities and ancestors are not static relics of the past
 - living things, imbued with the power to guide us here and now
 - not just stories to be heard; they are to be lived
 - we find ourselves within their narratives
 - We are part of something vast, ancient, and profoundly interconnected
 - Gods are not distant beings
 - archetypes within us, waiting to be awakened
 - Calling upon the stories calls forth qualities within ourselves.
 - Pandora's box
 - Medusa and Perseus
 - Persephone and Hades
 - Myths need not be ancient to be effective stories!
 - Wizard of Oz
 - Lion - Courage
 - Witch and the wizard - warnings about certain types of people
 - Harry Potter
 - Nancy Drew, Sherlock Holmes, Huckleberry Finn (and Jim)

- Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Han Solo
 - Capt Picard, Lt Worf
 - What myth will you live this week?
 - Will you be the seeker on a quest?
 - The healer bringing balm to the wounded?
 - The guardian standing at the threshold?
- Stories shape us
 - Each of us is a living library, filled with stories
 - Some are gifts
 - memories of love, triumph, and beauty
 - new beginnings
 - bold decisions
 - unexpected kindness
 - Others may feel like burdens:
 - tales of pain, sorrow, loss, or regret
 - Honor ALL stories, for they make us who we are
- Personal Story: Reflection
 - By understanding the stories we are living, we can better align ourselves with finding our true purpose and realizing our potential
 - What brought you to this moment, to this place, to this gathering?
 - invitation from a friend?
 - yearning for community?
 - quest for deeper meaning?
 - your journey here is a story—one that continues to unfold
- Reclaiming and rewriting stories
 - Our lives are not just made up *of* stories; they are also made *by* stories.
 - stories write us as much as we write them.
 - Who hasn't felt controlled by a story?
 - Stuck in a story?
 - Hopeless about the way our story will end up?
 - Example: friend that tells us that her family "clings to the story about how I'm the clumsy one."
 - Rewriting the Narrative
 - Not all stories serve us
 - Some are like invasive weeds, choking our growth

- narratives we tell ourselves that are limiting or harmful
- Such stories become prisons
 - I'm unworthy, powerless, alone, not enough
 - I don't deserve love
 - My voice doesn't matter
- Magic of transformation
 - Just as the alchemist turns lead into gold, we can transform the stories that no longer serve us.
- “When we deny the story, it defines us. When we own the story, we can write a brave new ending.”
 - author Brené Brown
- Owning our stories—even the painful ones—gives us the power to transform them.
 - work of spiritual growth: to reclaim our narratives and find the courage to write new chapters
- Example: Persephone: written vs oral
 - Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest, was kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld, and taken to be his bride.
 - When Demeter learned of her daughter's abduction, she became very sad and stopped caring for the harvest, causing plants to wither and die.
 - Zeus sent Hermes to retrieve Persephone, but she could only return if she hadn't eaten any food in the underworld. Hades gave Persephone a pomegranate to make it more difficult for her to leave, but she only ate six seeds.
 - Zeus allowed Persephone to return to Earth for six months of the year, and the seasons began. When Persephone returned in the spring, the plants regrew with joy. When she left for the underworld in the fall, her mother mourned and winter came.
- What if:
 - Persephone wanted to go with Hades, and Demeter prevented her?
 - Hades did not want to take Persephone as his bride, and Zeus convinced him?

- Could telling one of these versions help someone who's going through something similar in the modern world?
 - A story is not "told wrong" - it is applied to the situation at hand
- Our stories are NOT predetermined.
 - Are you an actor conforming to the scripts handed to you?
 - Or have you found your own way of becoming a director, a screenwriter, an author?
 - How are you struggling right now to regain control of the storyline of your life?
 - How are you and your friends working to regain control of the storyline of our community? Our country?
- Community
 - Storytelling is one of the oldest and most powerful devices for building community.
 - For thousands of years, human beings have gathered in communities to share their stories, to listen and learn about themselves, to what their lives are about, and how their common values are acted out in the world.
 - Power of Stories to Connect
 - Stories are not only personal; they are communal
 - sharing our stories = weaving web of connection
 - shared stories can transform a group of strangers into a community
 - Stories reinforce shared values
 - As the community changes, so does the story
 - story can invite us to live boldly
 - to expand the circle of inclusion
 - to seek justice in a world too often fractured by division
 - The Stories of Our Community
 - What story are we telling as a community?
 - Every time we gather to celebrate, share a meal, whatever, we weave a collective narrative
 - Let ours be a story of welcome and inclusion
 - one that honors diversity
 - one that celebrates our many paths

- one of stewardship, where we care for the Earth as a sacred temple
 - one of courage, where we face the challenges of our time with wisdom and strength
- Let us be intentional about the stories we create together
 - When we open our doors to those seeking refuge, we tell a story of ***hospitality***
 - When we advocate for the marginalized, we tell a story of ***justice***
 - When we gather to sing, to light our chalice, and to hold one another in times of joy and sorrow, we tell a story of ***love***
- Living Into the Story
 - great story of interconnectedness
 - the story that reminds us that your liberation is bound to mine, that your joy amplifies mine, and that your pain diminishes mine
 - What story will you live this week?
 - What story will you tell?
 - How will your story intertwine with the stories of those around you?
- Closing: Weaving a New Chapter
 - As we leave this sacred space, let us
 - carry the power of story with us.
 - listen deeply to the stories of the Earth, the ancestors, and one another.
 - honor the stories that have shaped us, release those that no longer serve us, and boldly write the next chapter of our lives.
 - go forth from this place inspired to live fully, to listen deeply, and to tell the stories that matter
 - stories that heal, uplift, and transform.
 - remember that in the great unfolding narrative of life, we are both authors and characters
 - co-creating a world of beauty, justice, and love.
 - we are the storytellers, the story-keepers, and the storymakers.
- 'There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories' (Ursula K LeGuin)

My Storyteller's Prayer (adapted from Peninnah Schran)

Gods and ancestors, spiritual forces of the universe, listen to my heart and my voice as I stand before you, wanting to tell our story.

Help me to understand and find the right feelings and words with which to transmit the tale.

Make my voice expressive and clear so that the collective wisdom of our people can reach the hearts of those who listen.

May I merit to hear well with my ears and heart.

Keep me from the jealousy of other tellers, and from my jealousy of them, so that we may be able to share and hear each other with open hearts.

Allow me to assume this responsibility as my ancestors did before me—to continue to retell our stories.

Help me to choose my stories wisely and let my words live.

Make me worthy to be a storyteller of our people.