

Changing Our Stories

“Keep some room in your heart for the unimaginable.”

– Mary Oliver

I'd venture to guess that like me, you have faced a relationship or two you came to see as beyond healing. Perhaps you tried everything, then reached a point where giving up seemed to be the only next step. Your experience may have convinced you the other party just could not or would not change.

As a coach, I frequently hear similar narratives, so I know they are common. It is interesting that in reaching what appears to be a point of no return, we create an ending to the story (at least from our perspective). Sadly, this limits what can be, and we close the door to infinite possibilities.

I have a story like this, and it involves the father of my daughters. For nineteen years, we have not spoken. This has been painful to our daughters, who have led dual lives between their parents. Over the years, any attempts I made to move past old stories were met with distrust. About a year ago, I came to the realization that his distrust may very well have stemmed from areas I still needed to heal. It was my wish to reach a place in which I could, with all honesty, be open-hearted and in a position to receive.

In the meantime, two important things happened. The girls' father decided to move to the Austin area, and not long after that, both girls announced their engagements. Clearly, we were moving into a new chapter as a family. Last fall, we approached the first celebration, and suddenly everything shifted. The old stories were dropped, and new stories began. We just became two middle-aged humans navigating this thing

called life – who happened to share two really amazing daughters.

Just last week, we all joined together in our new home and shared Easter brunch. While everything appeared normal, in truth it was quite significant. As I joined my family members around our table, I soaked in every detail. There they all were – Joachim at my side, Sebastian complaining about upcoming finals, Meghan and her fiance, Justin, discussing last minute wedding to-dos, and Kate and her husband, Joe, sharing stories from their weekend getaway to Mexico. All pretty status quo – until I made it around the table to the places set for two additional members. And there sat the father of my daughters and his girlfriend, who we animatedly engaged, enjoying it all. To an outsider, it looked as if we had been doing this for years. But the truth is, this was the first holiday in nineteen years that my daughters did not have to make a choice in which part of their family they would be with. This year marked the start of a new way of being for all of us – a step toward wholeness and inclusion.

In my sharing of this very personal story, I encourage you to take your inner skeptic off duty and embrace the idea that all things are possible. Place your attention on yourself, and work on your own ability to remain open and unattached to the outcome. By doing this, we can allow for a resolution more magnificent than we could imagine. That has certainly been true in this situation.

Author and psychologist Mary Pipher shares this advice in her latest book, *Women Rowing North*: “We can’t change our pasts, but we can still change our stories. It isn’t just long histories that influence our lives; it’s also the narratives we tell ourselves about that history.”

I hope my experience might encourage you to consider stories you hold about painful relationships. Instead of writing your own end to the story, might you consider the possibilities of

another narrative?