

Ep #9 Own Your Story



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Welcome to the stay or go podcast where we're changing the dialogue around divorce so that no woman ever stays in her marriage out of fear. Get ready to dispel myths, learn life changing tools, and build a solid foundation in yourself from which to make your decision. And now your host, me, Britta Jo.

Welcome y'all back up and running on the podcast. It's been a little while since I recorded. The episodes that have been coming out have been ones that I'd recorded a couple weeks ago. So, it feels really good to get back up and behind the mic. And I am delighted to talk about what came through earlier today, I was on a session with a dear friend of mine that I am coaching.

And she brought up this beautiful phrase, which was having a mindset of storytelling. And that session we had together just. So much beautiful stuff came through and so I asked her afterwards

if she'd be willing to let me share a little bit about her journey and talk to you guys about this concept of storytelling because it's something I Thank you.

What I really have noticed is key with my clients, with myself taking back authorship of our own stories. And she was so gracious and said I could. So you guys get to go on a journey with me today with my beautiful friend, getting to share some of her story and tying it back into the importance for each of us.

I mean, whether you're considering divorce or not, owning your story. And being the author of your story is something everybody needs. So, this will have some, far reaching application for all of us. Okay. So I want to start by telling you a little bit about this dear friend of mine.

I'm going to take my time with this. She's someone very special to me. So, um, we were friends back in Oakland. I lived in Oakland for seven years, and we became very close there. Our oldest children are really close in age, and so we had a lot of beautiful memories in Oakland being first time moms together, and we have I think similar, some similar trauma with our families of origin and getting to talk about that with her in Oakland you know, just like being very real.

I've always felt like I could be very real with her and very honest. And then I moved out to Texas eight years ago and while I was away, she was diagnosed with cancer and that was really shocking. She's only about five or more years older than me. She has three children. It was a huge shift for her, for her family.

And while she was going through that, I was really going through all the explosions happening in my family as well. Over the last three years, we really weren't able, you know, we'd be in touch occasionally, but not nearly like it was when we were in Oakland. But in the last probably four or five months, I, she kept coming to mind and I ended up reaching out to her and saying, you know, I just feel drawn to you right now.

And I feel, if you're open to maybe being coached while you're going through this. I would love to do that. And so graciously, she accepted my offer. And I just have to say like quick side note. That is such a place that so many of us feel uncomfortable, especially as women, right, like receiving help, but I'm learning more and more how important it is to give and to receive in our relationships and to feel comfortable.

Thank you. The joy that comes in both of those places, a lot of us tend to be stuck in giving and we only feel comfortable in being the one in that kind of, I have my stuff together and I can give to you kind of space and the last few years have really shown me. The importance of balancing that with receiving and the gift that you also give to another when you can receive What they're giving to you.

Yeah, I think some of you will know like when you're in a relationship with someone where they can only give to you, and they can never receive it Starts to feel kind of yucky. You're like no like I want to also give here. So, it just was a beautiful match in that moment and it isn't always, but in that instance it was and she was able to say yes and I was able to give.

And so the last four months we've been coaching together and she's this really intense and incredible point in her journey where she has been accepted into this clinical trial that's very, I would say rare and kind of difficult to get into. And I got to have the experience of coaching her pre, Thinking, about the trial, then getting accepted and just going through that whole journey with her has been amazing.

And now we're on the cusp of her actually going and doing it. And today I was exploring with her where that confidence to go and do this is coming from for her. And that was when she said this beautiful line where she said, I think it comes from this mindset of storytelling. And she went on to share with me that.

Prior to being diagnosed with cancer she was working for a nonprofit that was focused on refugees and sharing their stories. And she said in that experience, she got to see Many people who were coming from horrific, in so many instances, like unimaginable pain, suffering, trauma, loss, and with some of them, you could see this just strength and grit and kind of tenacity in them, and she said it would come from the way they had framed their stories, and I just was eating this up while she's telling me this, because I've seen it over and over in my coaching.

What we go through really, it's that, I think I've said it in the podcast before, two people can go through the same experience and have completely different futures coming out of it purely based off of what they make those experiences mean. And we really, I like to think of it as, these different lenses.

If we were writing a story and we're putting on these glasses, how do we view our life? Are we viewing it through a lens of tragedy? Are we viewing it from a lens of triumph? Are we the villain? Are we the victor? And ultimately, it's going to be more gray than that, right? There's going to be a lot.

There's a lot of different genres, a lot of different places that you can, and characters that you can play in your life if you'll let yourself, I know one of my favorite genres to write in is the romance, right? I love the experience of falling in love and getting to be the one that's falling in love, or that's all the different pieces.

that we get to play if we understand we're the one writing the story. In her world she'd gotten this beautiful example of seeing these people go through hard things. And then, soon after that she would be diagnosed with cancer. And in the, as we took a moment to pause and think over her journey with cancer, it hasn't just been the like, oh, I have cancer story.

Like there's been all these chapters within that story as well and realizing

We're gonna come up against triumphs and tragedies throughout our whole life. And we get to decide what we're going to call each of those. So I want to give you an example that she said I could share, which was early, I actually don't know exactly what point it was, um, in her journey, but she had an opportunity to get a transplant and that was just, the story shifted right into this journey of like, okay, we're going to get this transplant.

It's going to, this is going to be the answer. This is going to be the fix. And it ultimately culminated in it not working out. and in that moment, she was given, you know, you don't realize it when you're going through it, but you are given a choice of am I going to let this define my journey forever after as, well, that was the big moment.

That was the big loss. That was the big heartbreak. And obviously it takes time. It's a nuanced experience as you're writing the story, and it involves all the feelings. It's not like we just instantly stand up and go, Yay! It's a triumph! But looking back from where she is now, we were able to see how through the process of staying with herself, grieving that, allowing opening to, Okay, I guess this isn't my story.

I guess there's something else here. She's been led into this clinical trial journey. And I think it's an important lesson when life doesn't end or, you know, whatever chapter you're in doesn't end like you thought it would, which wink wink to all of you considering divorce right now. Talk about a huge moment of the story possibly not ending like you thought it would.

I'm not just throwing your hands up and going, okay, well it's all gone to shit, so. Whatever, I, I don't care anymore or, or defining yourself in these negative terms or staying, right? Even though everything's pointing towards maybe there's another chapter coming that is not a chapter with my spouse, closing your eyes and going, no, no, no, no.

The story has to end like I always thought it would, which is us staying married, living happily ever after, on and on and on, right? But for a lot of us, the circumstances of our life. Don't end up matching the stories we thought that were gonna happen and what do we do then?

In my friend's example Of her life, you know, I think it's a powerful one because with cancer there was no choice, she doesn't get a like do I stay or I go this is this is it You don't get a choice.

And that's when it becomes really clear that the only choice you ever really have is what is the story I'm going to tell myself about this experience that I'm going through. I was talking with her and using this analogy, like this visual of. Oh, so she's, she's on this big journey, you know, for, if we're reading a storybook, she's on her horse, she's, riding and she thinks that where she's headed is to get to this castle that's the transplant castle.

And then all of a sudden, the storyline shifts and it turns out she's not going to end up at the transplant castle and she's actually headed into this dark, scary forest. How do you get through? The dark scary forest. You have to change the story. You have to realize, oh, wait a second. I just thought we were headed to the transplant castle, but now we're headed on this other journey and to be beautifully transparent.

She has told me this last year of refiguring out, okay, what is my journey? What am I doing here? It has been difficult. It is for all of us when our lives don't go the way we thought they would. That is filled with some of the darkest nights of the soul, like having to meet yourself in these places of, oh my God, life is not what I thought it was going to be.

Am I still in? Do I still want to do this? Am I still here for this? Um, which I'm really reflecting more of my journey. That's, that's what it's been like for me. Those deep questions of is it still? A journey I want to take, even if it comes with these really difficult, unexpected twists and turns and ultimately not knowing where I'm headed.

And what Sarah shared with me that was so inspiring is that through that last year of really having that, those inner dialogues and those inner wrestling with her soul. She's come to this incredibly, and I see it in her, this beautifully surrendered place of acknowledging, I am not in control and I am here for this.

And she described it as being fully like we landed on this idea that she's fully in this chapter. And right now, this chapter is this clinical trial. That's the chapter she's in and she's not going to the place of, okay, so what happens after the trial? Does it work? Does it not? She's released that and she's just staying beautifully in this moment, this chapter, which was just like, as a coach watching someone come to this space of Enough, like, love, groundedness, certainty in themselves from going through the hard things to be able to face something that will be one of the hardest things she has ever gone through in her life and to be able to kind of be the calm in the storm, to see the storm and to look at it with a grounded certainty and yet have no guarantees on what's gonna happen.

I mean, that is the culmination of what I'm always working towards with my clients is this deep self love, self trust that is powerful enough that you can stand in the face of something like this and know you are held, know you are loved by yourself and not have to have assurances that it's going to turn out a certain way, which is In so many ways, this beautiful metaphor, if you'll let it be for what you're doing when you're considering divorce, because so many of you want the reassurances, right?

Want to be told, I can promise you, this is what's going to happen after. And it's just not the case. It never is with life. So I loved this whole idea of taking our life in chapters rather than, I mean, yes, having this overarching theme of your life, which I choose like the main theme for my life is love.

I've learned that about myself. I had a coach who helped me a couple of years ago, really realize that what I am, what my essence is, what I'm most passionate about in this life is just love, feeling love, sharing love, being love. So, I'd say that's like the genre I'm in. But then. Allowing yourself to really be present with whatever the chapter is that you're in and fully like enjoying and developing that character arch throughout that entire chapter instead of living your life in the future, or like some of us do, we end up living our life in the past chapters the what ifs.

And while I was writing this episode, I thought of a woman in Oakland who I want to share, her story here because I think she provides some really beautiful contrast. She was an older woman in my church who I would go visit. She was probably in her late eighties, early nineties when I would go see her.

And one of the things that stood out to me. the most about her And I have so much compassion for her because I saw how painful this was, was here she was living in this home in Oakland on

this beautiful property. I mean, she could have sold it. She could have, there were so many options, so many things she could be doing with her life.

And yet everything in her life was tainted by this, anger and this resentment and this pain from her past. So, I can remember her telling me multiple times this really, really painful story of how I believe it was somewhere in like her 30s or 40s she had had a husband who was a doctor and it sounded like she had given up, a lot of her dreams to put him through medical school and could have been, I mean she was brilliant.

I could see she could have been very successful herself, obviously was probably limited a lot by the times and the day and age and dang patriarchy. God, uh, um, whoo, I'm the nominations for Barbie just came out this week and I'm like, I'm just so it's just so ironic. Anyways, I digress. So her husband was a doctor and ended up having an affair.

With one of his secretaries and ended up leaving her to go be with this woman. And that moment in her forties, let's say it was the forties. You're her forties. Defined her for the next 45 plus years of her life. I mean, I'm meeting her 45 years after this has happened. And this is the story she is coming back to and continuing to tell me over and over and over, and I could see.

That was the lens of tragedy that she had chosen in that moment that was the tainted the rest of her life. When you pick that lens, and this is why you have to be so aware of what lens you're picking for your life, you pick that lens. That lens comes with a certain character story, a certain character arch, and in that moment of picking tragedy, she has to pick the character arch of victimhood.

And I saw that. I saw that for her. I saw so many missed opportunities, and I saw how even the opportunities she had were always like tainted because there was this resentment and anger about what had happened to her. Now, obviously, everybody gets to pick their story. And I, I like to really hold other people's stories with so much openness.

I'm using her as an example because I think it's super powerful. And I also want to acknowledge everybody gets to pick their path. Like, who am I to judge that that was not a great story for her? Maybe in this life that was the exact story she wanted to have. Realize Everybody's stories are their own.

We're not here to convince other people to pick different stories. What we are here to do is pick our own stories. And to also like, I think, illustrate even more, because I love using examples for you guys. I want to use myself as the example as well, because I was thinking the stories I was given growing up.

really did not fit my life four or five years ago when I was in the thick of considering divorce. And those were stories, mainly from my religion that divorce was horrible. I had I believed that so deeply that I know my ex-husband and I had promised each other divorce was never gonna be an option.

That's how solidly I believed that was not a part of my story. Never! Oh my god, I'm having, like, a freak out moment where I'm, like, my 16-year-old self. If you had told her I was gonna be divorced she would I don't think she would have gone on. I think she would have been like, I'm out. I'm out So, you know divorce is bad marriage is the best.

That was all I wanted to be when I was younger, I just wanted to get married. I just wanted to have kids. And if I had kept those stories, I would be feeling really shitty about myself right now Or, or even the stories that like, oh, marriage is what's best for kids in a two parent household is what's best.

If I had kept those stories and ended up getting divorced, I would a hundred percent be the villain in my story right now. And guess what happens when you think you are the bad guy in your story. You are going to show up as the bad guy because you are shaming and guilting and hating yourself so much.

All of that creates this nasty mix of self-hatred and self-loathing that then ends up spilling out onto everybody else, and it's like a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I see this in my clients who are having affairs. All the time. So, I haven't done an episode on this yet, but I am like, so excited to when I do I am super neutral about affairs because I know it's just It's all stories and everybody gets to tell their stories and everybody's adults, everybody gets to make their choices.

So what I see though in my clients who are having affairs is if they don't work on taking responsibility for the story, they will keep doing an action. which is having the affair that they are actually deep down keeping a really terrible story about. Because most of us, especially if you were raised religiously, like, have being someone who has an affair is horrible.

Like you are a really bad person. You are, I think of those names, you know, a harlot, you're the Jezebel. There are just so many mean names about people who, have experiences outside of their marriage when the reality is. The majority, not the majority, but I would say a, a larger amount than most of us know do welcome to being human.

And yet we all want to pretend like that's this anomaly kind of thing. And actually, yeah, if I think about the like percentage of the women that I've coached where they've been having an affair, it's probably about 30 percent of my clients. It's not this rare thing that nobody else does and you're this horrible person because you're the one that did it.

But. A lot of those who are doing it believe that about themselves and this creates this incredibly caustic and painful environment internally because you keep externally doing something that deep down inside you are hating yourself for. And what, and this is where I want to like really emphasize this piece because this really bugs me.

What bugs me so much is that there are people out there. Who if, you know, if this was the, if this is the instance you find yourself in, they would rather you subscribe. Like, keep your subscription to their story that an affair is horrible and you're a bad person for doing it and you need to stop and you need to stay in your marriage and hate yourself for all of that, then let go of the stories and figure out genuinely what kind of life you want for yourself.

It happens all the time and I've worked with enough clients, I've seen it in my life enough to know that. I think that's one of the cruelest things you can do to a human is judge them so harshly and keep feeding them stories that tell them to hate themselves for the choices they're making without ever addressing the underlying pain that is so obviously there, which is where I always come back to, which is yeah, if you're seeking connection outside of your marriage.

There probably isn't connection there. So maybe we start with that piece. We start with what are you looking for rather than just shaming you for looking. What's missing here? And I want you to realize there will always be people outside of you who want to tell. Your story for you, they would love to tell your story for you.

And I feel like that is what religion was trying to do to me all along. Here's who you need to be. Here's what a good life looks like. Make sure you fit into these boxes. And then we can label you a good person. Nobody during that whole process ever asked me, what do you want your story to be? What lights you up?

What makes you excited? What are you drawn to? It was just, How can you fit into our story? And then labeling that story as, It's not even our story. It's, it's God's story. So be very cautious, Suspicious even, of people who are interested in telling you what your story is. And trying to get you to buy into a story that if you check in you may not have even picked for yourself.

Because here is the most amazing and mind-blowing reality at the center of all of this. You always have the right to tell your story exactly how you want to. And being someone who came from a religion that brainwashed me heavily into believing there was this greater story outside of me. That ultimately was, and I'm throwing up some air quotes here, truth.

Um, you know, and not only truth, but a truth set down by God, this huge omnipotent being that created me. Ooh, just, it makes my blood boil that we do this as humans when we have no proof that, that is actually true. When the reality is you get to choose, I believe that is truly what God has given each one of us.

I call it the universe. People call it God, source, whatever you want to call it, but that gave you the right to have a mind that can choose for itself what your story is. And I, till I give my last breath, I am always going to encourage you to tell your story in a way that supports you in loving yourself and living your biggest, Life.

You have the right to tell yourself a story that is actually loving and supportive and all in on you. That is not about sacrificing yourself for others, or for ideas, or for concepts, or for a marriage, or for a husband, or for kids. And the real secret hidden in all of this is that when you do that, when you tell the story that supports you, Most, guess what?

You show up, you show up as the biggest, most beautiful, most amazing you possible. You want to know how I Made the last four years of my life the best I've ever had. It was by telling the story that made me the hero of my journey. By telling a story that, you know, as I get deeper, which these next episodes coming, I am gonna, I'm, I feel ready and I want to dive deeper into

talking about trauma and some of the childhood trauma I experienced because I'm seeing how much that impacts everything later on in life.

But there is no way I would have come through The horrors of the things I went through in the last three years with my family, without constantly being able to update that story and being able to, with each new trauma, with each new experience continuing to define myself through the lens of triumph, through the lens of what I always tell myself, which is that I'm a generational chain breaker.

And that really started for me in therapy like seven years ago, realizing the extent of the trauma in my family. Seeing how it had passed from generation to generation to generation and how no one had dealt with it and that because of that I was now having to face this massive shit ton of trauma that had just built, built, built, built, built until it, you know, all kind of collapsed in my life and instead of letting that destroy me, having it define me and define me as yeah, yeah, Of course, it's, it's happening because I'm the one that's going to break these chains.

I'm the one that refuses to stand back and pass it along and let it go to my children. So I want you to really consider that. Your story is your own and it is the opposite, so many voices, cultures, religions will tell you to fear owning your story that you know God owns your story or somebody outside of you owns your story or your story needs to you need to have input from everybody else around story and it's just not true.

It is it is probably one of I think the biggest lies of the patriarchy that keeps women trapped is believing somebody else outside of us knows our story better than we do. And It is the shame and the hurt and the guilt we have from not being able to live a story that was never ours to begin with that makes us so confused about who we are.

Because when we are burying ourselves in shame and guilt about how we're not achieving these levels or being this person that we think we should be. We just show up even worse. I know I did this a lot when I was considering divorce seven years ago in my marriage. I was trying to be this perfect Mormon housewife and just with each day spiraling into more and more depression and anxiety and watching myself yell and scream and lose my shit.

It was not getting better, and I thought the problem was me. I really did, because they had done such a good job convincing me that it couldn't be that the story was a lie, or that the story was wrong. It had to be that I was the problem. And the last seven years have been that work of reclaiming my story.

Knowing it is mine and mine alone, no one else gets to come in and tell me who I am in my story. No one gets to tell me what I'm supposed to be doing in my story. And that is so fucking empowering when you get to a point where you don't take bullshit from people wanting to tell you your place. In your story, and I want that for so many of you, and I hope that this episode gives you some insights into the power of storytelling.

I hope it encourages you and calls you towards what my beautiful friend, Sarah, said, which is having a mindset of storytelling. Understanding the power of your stories, understanding the

right you have to write your own story, however you want to write it, and just me advocating again to write your story with love for you first.

And always. All right, my dears, that's all from me this week. Remember to like and subscribe to the podcast. I've heard from so many of you that you're enjoying each week. We look forward to it coming out. That just makes me. Giddy, giddy with excitement knowing we're getting to hang out every week. So please continue sharing it.

Please go rate it if you hadn't. Every bit helps. I will see you next week.