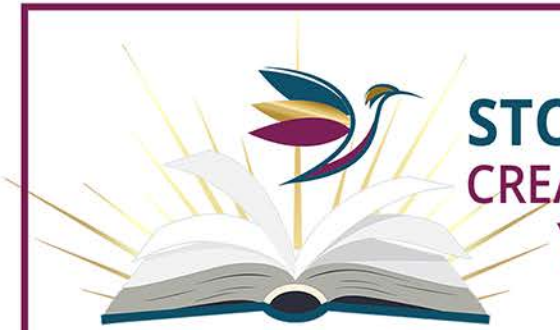


STORY MATTERS
CREATIVELY EXPRESS YOUR STORY

Stories are vital to community. They are how we connect and learn about who we are, why we're here, and how we belong. Story preserves history and elicits laughter. It plunges us to the depths of ourselves and sets us soaring across the skies.

Story is the tale of our lives -- and it matters.

Yet finding ways to express the story we've lived can be challenging and sometimes doesn't seem worth the time and effort. Add chronic illness, and wrestling our thoughts into order on a page can seem impossible.

Where do I start? What do I write? Will anyone care? Does it even matter?

We've been there. We've asked those questions. Often. And we've discovered, to our surprise, that our stories are who we are, where we begin. They connect us, tearing down walls and shattering isolation.

Every story matters, for all of our stories are woven together into the fabric of God's story. Our stories help us understand who we are, where we began. Stories connect us, tearing down walls, and shattering isolation.

For story is where hope begins.

As we jot down ideas, draw a picture, write poetry, meet with God in prayer, or sit quietly remembering the threads of our story, our perspective shifts and we begin to see from a distance what we were unable to see in the moment.

Taking the first step in expressing our stories is sometimes the most daunting. These questions and tips are a great place to begin.

HELPFUL TIPS

- There is no right or wrong way to creatively express our stories. The most important thing is to be authentic.
- Use metaphors for things others may not understand; e.g., few have heard of DHE, infusions that make patients feel incredibly sick, but most people are familiar with chemotherapy.
- Write about specific moments rather than your story from the very beginning. Over time, those moments can be strung together.
- Provide just enough details to add vibrancy and depth.
- Give your story some breathing room. Let it percolate. Play with it. Some of the most powerful stories arrive in the rewrites, the do-overs, the third, fourth, or fifth take.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU BEGIN

1. What is your typical day like?
2. What was your life like before chronic illness?
3. How are you different today?
4. What is the most challenging part of your life?
5. What loss has been most significant?
6. What has been your lowest point?
7. If you could have one thing back, what would it be? Why?
8. How are your relationships impacted by illness?
9. How have your expectations of yourself and others changed?
10. How has your walk with God changed?
11. Where have you found hope?
12. How have you experienced God's grace in illness?
13. How do you celebrate the small victories?
14. What is the most unexpected blessing of chronic illness?
15. What character quality have you gained through illness?
16. What does courage look like to you?
17. What does strength look like in illness?
18. What do you wish others knew about your illness?
19. Describe your illness in five words? Why did you choose those words?
20. What encouragement can you offer someone else walking through illness?
21. What unexpected circumstance in your life became a blessing?
22. How do you cope with pain and disappointment?
23. How has God turned your weaknesses into strengths?