

Alive! ³⁶⁵

365 ALIVE! Find your voice. Claim your story. Start living your brilliant life.

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365

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Live your brilliant life.

MARY ALICE ARTHUR

Foreword by Juanita Brown

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A people are as healthy and confident as
the stories they tell themselves. Sick
storytellers can make nations sick.
Without stories we would go mad.
Life would lose its moorings
or orientation...

Stories can conquer fear, you know.
They can make the heart larger.

BEN OKRI

WEEK 3

Make a story health check



Think about...

Make your own story health check this week.

Considering the stories you observed around you last week, which ones reflected a healthy environment? What did the stories say about how people see their well-being? Focus specifically on the kind of stories being shared in the community you live in or the place you work. What do they say about how people see their well-being? How “healthy” are these stories for the connection and respect between people? What story could you add to the mix that raises the level of health and well-being?

It's a fascinating thing to focus on health and take a look at its parameters. From a physical point of view, vitality of the body is an indicator of a person's health. All parts of the body need to be functioning well, separately and together, for high vitality. Over a period of time some parts can take up the slack for others, but over a longer period, this wears the system out.

From a permaculture point of view, the indicators of a healthy ecosystem are found in its boundary territories — a higher diversity in the boundaries of one area to another indicates a healthy ecosystem. A natural ecology that is more diverse in its boundary region is also more robust.

From humanity's point of view, stories are an indicator of the health and vitality of human systems. Are the prevailing stories based on lack, suspicion, control or fear? Or are they stories of possibilities, trying something out, hope,

Stories are an indicator of the health and vitality of human systems. Consider yourself a Story Archaeologist.

inclusion? What is the mix of positive and negative stories? What themes do you hear across stories? Which people feature in the stories? Who is telling them? How? Where? Whose stories get told and whose get listened to? How do groups of people show up (or not) and what are the prevailing stories asking us to know about them? For example, within your social group, has someone dropped away? What story is implied about that person in their presence or absence?



Consider yourself a Story Archaeologist. Pretend you're about to enter a new tribe and learn about its way of operating. Take careful note of the stories that are told around you in the office, in the boardroom, in the bank, in the community, in the café, at the dinner table. What are you hearing? What kind of stories are people sharing? Is there a common thread or theme? Since stories provoke other stories, see if you can follow the thread as it moves from person to person. What is your overall sense of the kinds of stories alive in the places where you are right now?

Reflect on what this means. Consider the stories you've been listening to this week:

- **Who** told stories in the groups you were in? Whose stories were listened to and whose were not? Whose stories seemed to have more weight or importance? Why is that?
- **What** kind of stories did you hear? Were they intended to share experience? Reinforce a point of view? Direct something? Reflect or reject something?
- **How** were stories shared? Informally? As a presentation? Digitally? One to many or in a group? What was the impact of these different modes?
- Since stories are a reflection of **culture**, what kind of culture(s) have you been experiencing?
- Make a note in your journal about how this research has impacted you and what you now see as a result.



Have a look...

Images and stories are closely linked. Our Western culture, driven by the internet, is becoming more and more image driven. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, but an image is a holder for the stories we place on it. It is also a carefully curated piece of reality.

Reflect for a moment on the movement of images through history around famous people. In the time of President Kennedy in the early 1960s, crowds who came to see him and other famous celebrities wanted autographs and often displayed them. A few decades later people wanted to take photos of their icons and the red carpet was full of flashbulbs. Now the most predominant form of image on the internet is the selfie.⁵ What does that say about how our storylines are shifting? What does it say about our personal and societal health?

Images are used to provoke the senses and evoke emotion. What powerful images have you noticed lately and what stories do they bring up in you?



Here's the story

I got hooked on stories from the first moment I saw a book. I was the kid who kept reading after lights out and walked to school reading two books at once (fortunately, I grew up in a flat place!). I now look back and realize that my first travels were journeys of the imagination. During school holidays the family piled into the car and took to the roads, and that gave me an itchy foot. Before long I was seventeen. Becoming an exchange student gave me my first taste of the wider world. By the time

I was nineteen I had enough fluency in another language to study abroad and work as a translator. This experience gave me a somatic sense of the power of language. The stage was set for a love of wondering coupled with a delight in wandering — the ideal attributes for a storyteller and a self-professed citizen of the world.

Working with an international student organization during my university years taught me the power of passion and the strength that comes from working across diversity. I learned about the compelling nature of purpose, the importance of a spark of vision and the power of cohesive practice. I began to think — and work — around the world.

I caught the story bug in earnest while living in New Zealand. It happened at the 1992 Glistening Waters, the first international storytelling festival. That was the moment when I saw the power of storytelling for the first time. I started hanging out in the library gathering as many stories as I could. I still remember another storyteller telling me she told “stories that fit on my tongue” and learned how accurate that was as a measure for choosing which stories to tell. I performed as a storyteller, but I soon realized I wanted to hear others voices more than just my own. There seemed to be something important in sharing stories and working with them. That's why I was part of the first gatherings of organizational storytelling practitioners a decade later:

At the same time I was honing my craft as a facilitator, working with everyone from the Treasury and government departments to volunteer organizations. I worked to connect teams, support groups to get strategic, I even facilitated a successful telecommunications merger. In 2007 I found out about the Art of Hosting community

and began to more strongly integrate my work as a practitioner. Then I met a futurist at a conference who told me one of the top upcoming trends would be “leader as storyteller” and I began to dream of the day my process work and my love of stories would unite.

One day, I watched a short interview with New Zealand actor Cliff Curtis as he talked about how good stories make you want to take action, get committed, do something. *That’s it*, I thought, I’m a *Story Activist!* The journey since then has been a discovery of how story and hosting blend to help change arise, compelling stories be created and people to work together.

After almost thirty years in New Zealand, I spent more than five years on the road with no fixed address. I called myself an intentional nomad, and I defined that as moving between people and places to witness and enliven them. I found myself picking up stories in one place and taking them to the next place that needed them. It has been an excellent training as a StoryCatcher and storyteller.



Find and share
STORIES of us
at our best as a
humanity.

Let them **FLY** and see
what we grow together.

MARY ALICE ARTHUR

Life is all about the stories
we tell and how we bring
them alive.

Now I join StoryWork with a leading-edge skill in using participatory practice to help groups become high-performing communities, able to step up, co-create a compelling story, and from it, wise sustained action. I've worked around the world with leaders in all levels of public and private organizations and communities. As an international steward of the Art of Hosting network, I teach StoryWorking skills and participatory practice, and host participatory gatherings all over the globe.

While storytelling has always been an art and a skill that is lived face-to-face and practiced heart to heart, I am incredibly heartened to know that it also flourishes online, bringing us closer, no matter where we happen to be.

Here's the serious stuff

Mary Alice Arthur is a Story Activist, using story to create positive systemic shift and for applying collective intelligence to the critical issues of our times. Her art is in creating brave and transformational spaces where people can find their most compelling stories and develop the practices to live into them. Joining StoryWork and participatory practice means people can make wiser choices together. She is a sought-after process consultant and a favorite at events. In her client and coaching work people develop the skills and practice to engage others in leading-edge conversations about the power and potential in our world.

Connect with Mary Alice

Web: www.getsoaring.com Explore the website and see other offerings and products that can help you take this work deeper. Subscribe to my newsletter and get the latest information on story and how you can expand your skills.

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/mary-alice-arthur/

Twitter: @StoryActivist

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/getsoaring>

Instagram: <http://instagram.com/maryalicearthur>

365 ALIVE! Resources

Visit www.365alive.org and find additional resources to support your story journey, including the 365 ALIVE! card deck, opportunities to meet with the 365 ALIVE! Community and more.

