

# *Phoenix Rising*

*The Art and Science of Telling  
Personal Stories in Suicide  
Prevention*

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THE PHOENIX HOPE, CAN WING HER WAY THROUGH THE  
DESERT SKIES, AND STILL DEFYING FORTUNE'S SPITE;  
REVIVE FROM ASHES AND RISE.

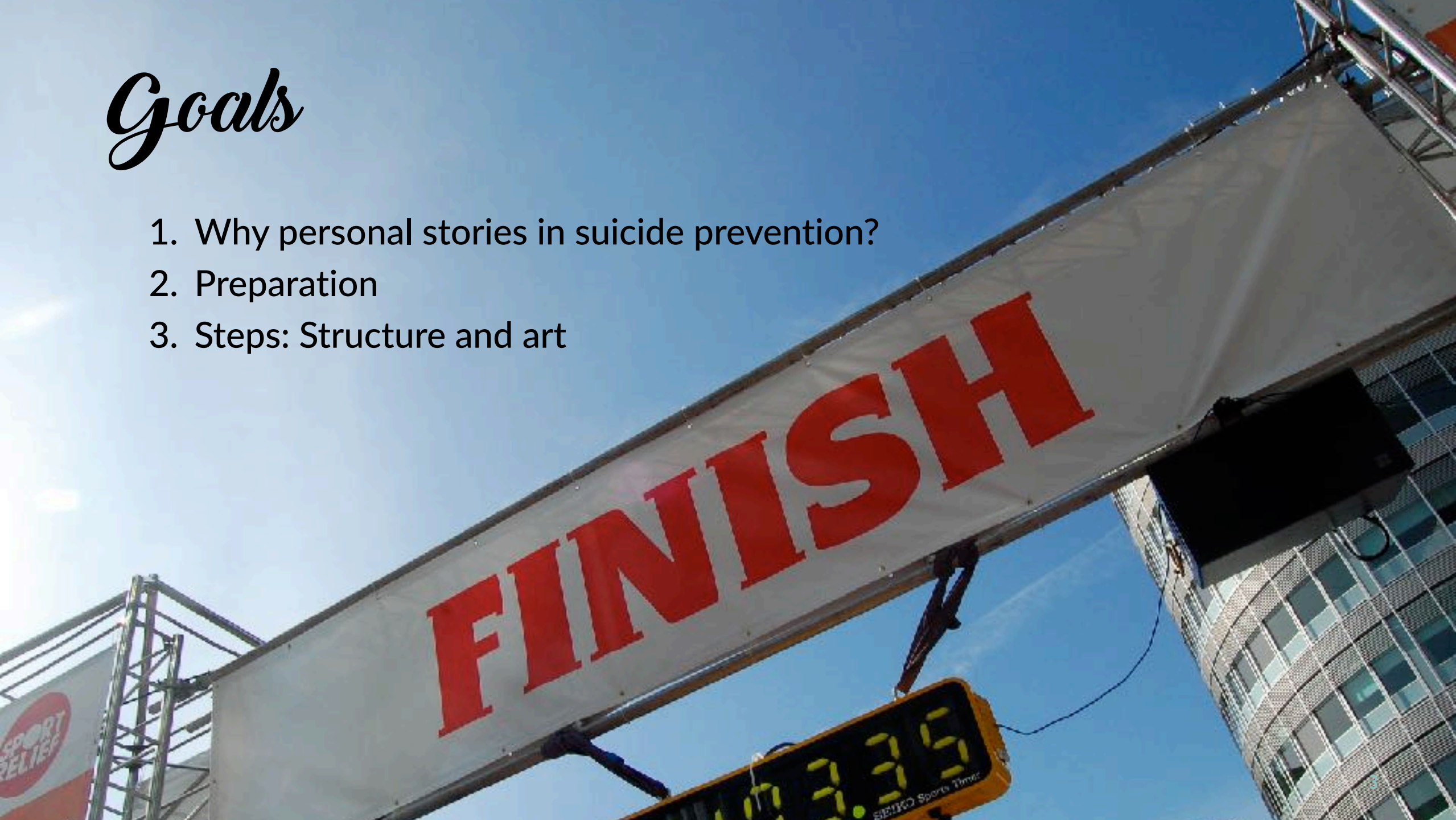
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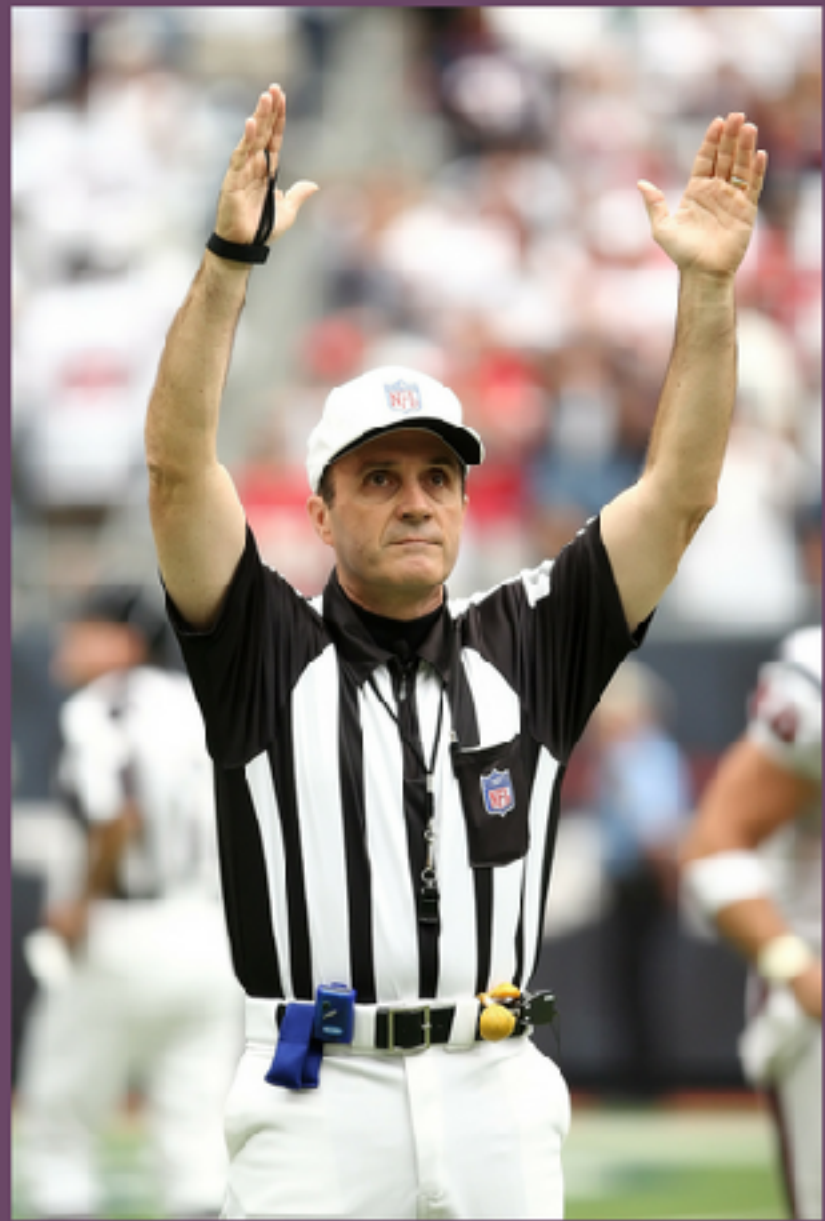
# Goals

1. Why personal stories in suicide prevention?
2. Preparation
3. Steps: Structure and art



# GROUND RULES

*#ElevateTheConvo*



*A candle loses nothing from lighting another candle*



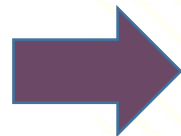


# *Why Do We Tell Our Stories?*

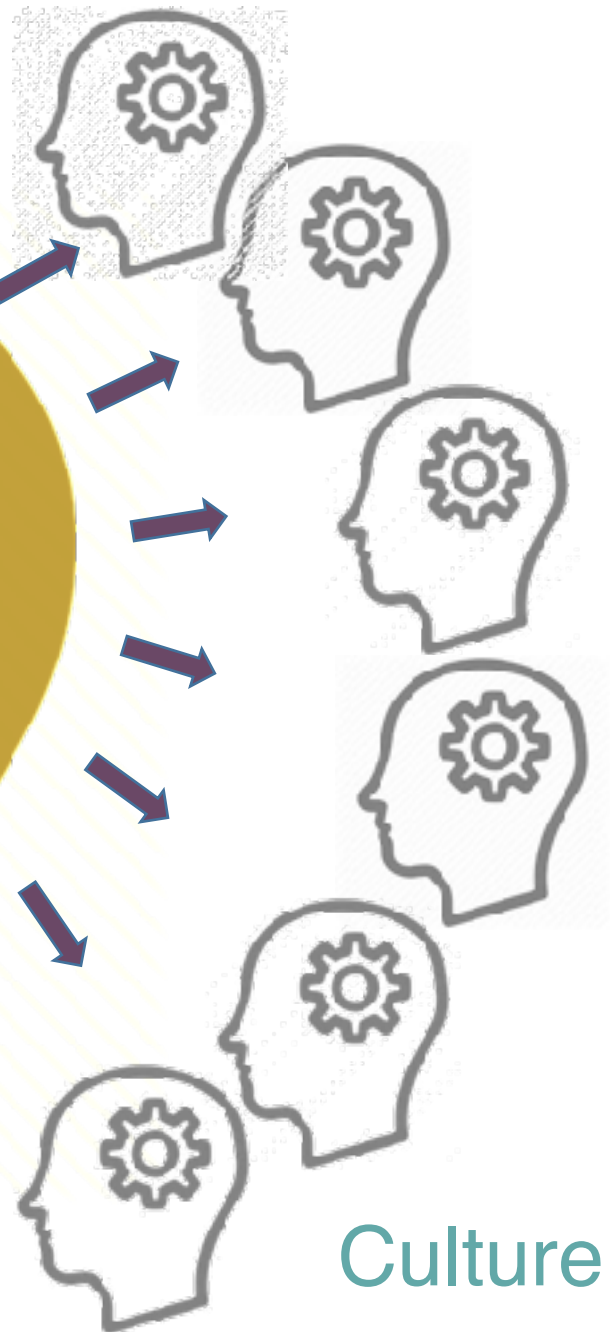
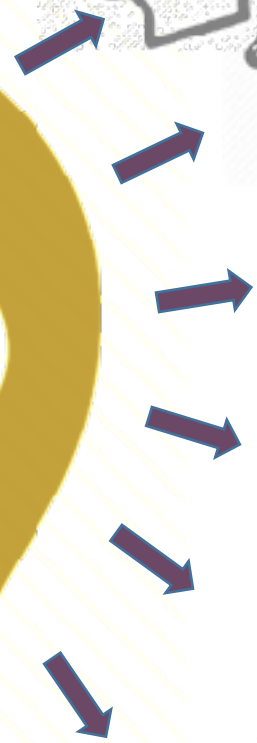


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Storyteller

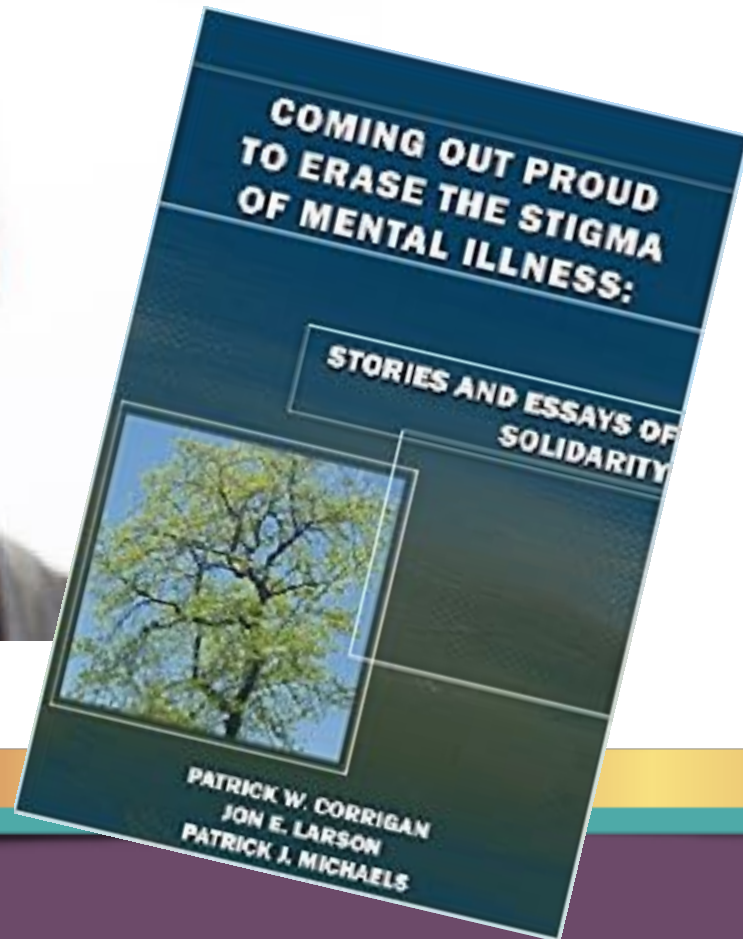


Listener



Culture

# Science and Stigma





# *Good for the Storyteller*

Narrative Psychology

Impose structure on chaos

Self-empowerment

Build community

Coherent and redemptive = healing



*Good for  
the Listeners*

“Angel’s Cocktail” (David Phillips) -  
hormones release

**Dopamine** increases focus and motivation  
when we build suspense

**Oxytocin** increases bonding and trust when  
we create empathy

**Endorphins** helps people relax and become  
more creative when we make them laugh

# *Brains Hardwired for Stories*



- 150K years of evolution
- Neural story net
- “Makes sense” mandate





A desert landscape at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and light blue. In the foreground, several tall saguaro cacti stand prominently. The middle ground shows a valley with green fields and a winding road. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a hazy sky.

# **GAINING MASTERY OVER THE VOICES OF THE SELF ALLOWS EMPOWERMENT**

**LEWIS MEHL-MADRONA #ELEVATETHECONVO**

# Good for culture

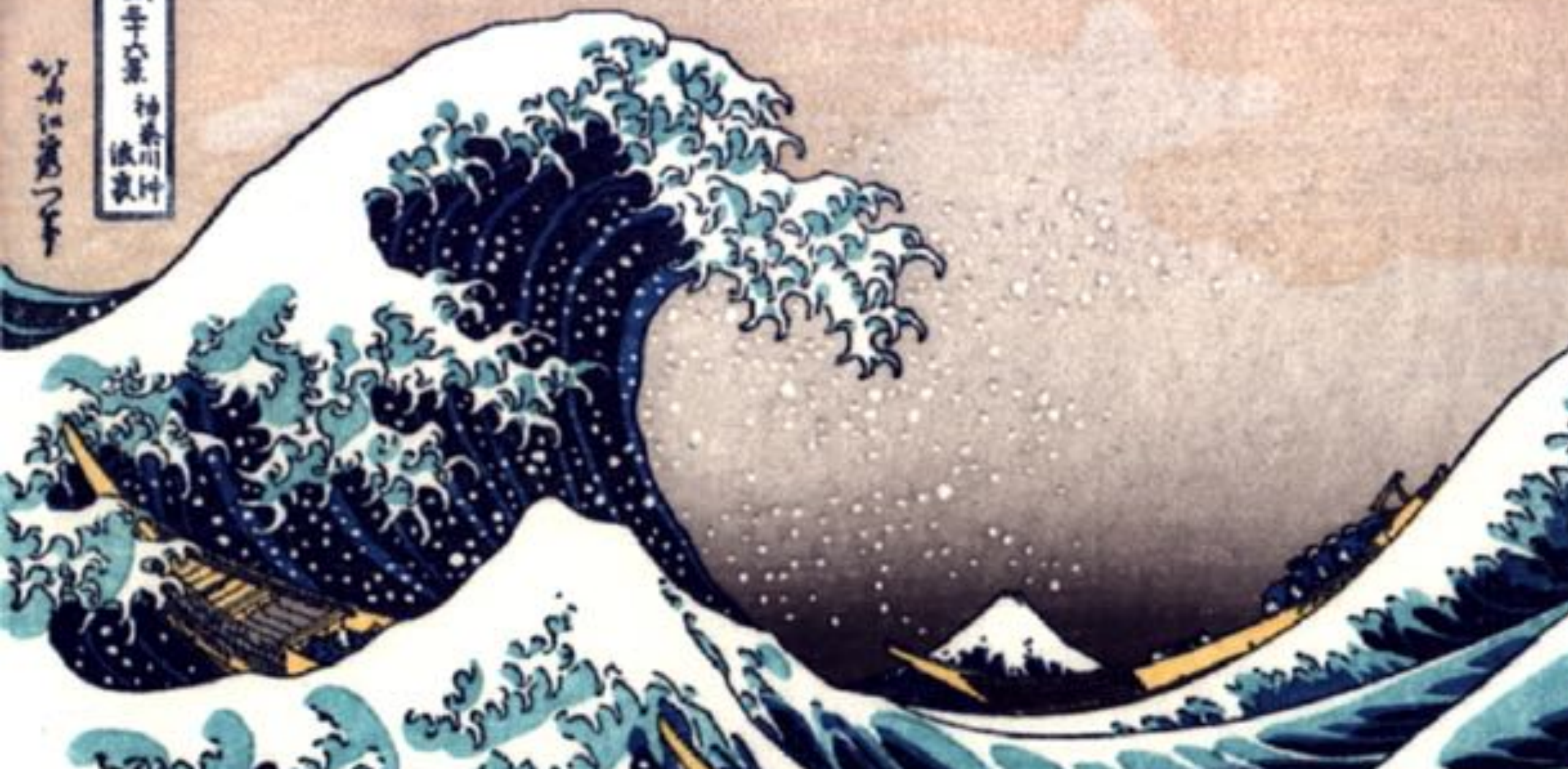
*“Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a more powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story...” ~Ivan Illich*





西風平六景 神奈川沖  
波裏

江戶 葛飾 錦洲





# *Discernment Question #1*

## **WHAT IS MY WHY?**

- What is my motive?
- When I think about sharing my story, what do I feel?
- What do I want to accomplish by telling my story?

**Magic Wand — you've told your story for it's biggest impact: What is different?**



# Discernment Question #2

## AM I READY?

- Where am I in my recovery and healing journey?
- What does “going back into the forrest” look like?
- Have I told my sponsor/therapist?
- Have I created a self-care and safety plan?
- How will I know when I’m being helped by storytelling? I will I know it’s not the right time?



# *Discernment Question #3*

## **HAVE I THOUGHT IT THROUGH?**

- Once it's out, you can't reel it back
  - Possible benefits and consequences to me
    - Jobs, relationships, housing, parenting
    - Filter all behavior gets seen through
  - Consequences on others
- Are there parts where I need to ask permission to share?
- Are there parts to keep for myself?







# *Before you start*



- **Tell therapist or sponsor**
- **Get speaker buddy (NSA/Toastmasters)**
- **Self-care**
- **Get supplies: notebook, recording device**
- **Sculptor mindset**



# *Structure of Story*

- Core message
- Three support stories to support three main points (short, medium and long versions)
- Heart story: Hero's Journey
- 20/80 – despair to hope ratio
- Bring recovery to life



# *What is the Message of You?*

- What is the point?
- Why should people listen to you
- What's in it for them?
- Core promise: What is your call to action that will help or convince your audience

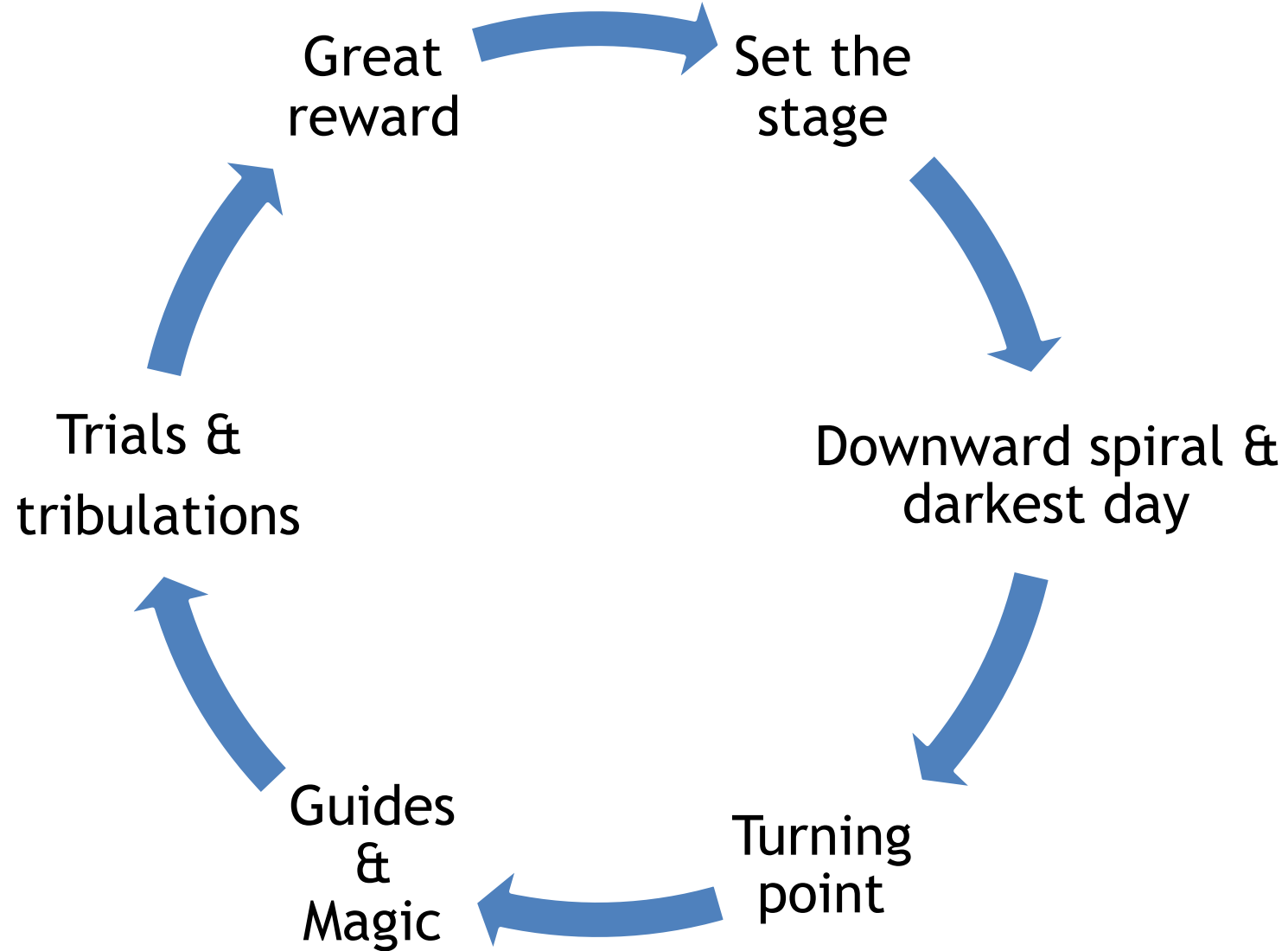


# Heart Story

- Intense intimacy and solidarity
- Speak to a dear friend
- Walk right up to tears
- Conclude with single call to action that inspires and motivates



# *Hero's Journey*





# *What is Your Hero's Journey?*

## **OUTLINE**

- Set the stage? (what was life like before?)
- Downward spiral/darkest day
- Turning Point
- Guides and magic
- Trials and tribulations
- Great reward



# *Qualities of effective stories*

- **Engagement**
- **Transportation**
- **Relevance**
- **Influence**





# *Art of Storytelling*

- Sensory details: including taste and smell
- Present tense
- Conversation with dear friend
- Authentic
- Metaphor
- Dialogue - inner and outer
- Humor: comedy is in the details
- Hook and unhook:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> 30 seconds
  - Leave them with goosebumps





# *Words Make Worlds*

<b>Say this</b>	<b>Instead of this</b>
Died of Suicide	<del>Committed Suicide</del>
Suicide Death	<del>Successful Attempt</del>
Suicide Attempt	<del>Unsuccessful Attempt</del>
Person Living with Suicidal Thoughts or Behavior	<del>Suicide Ideator or Attempter</del>
Suicide	<del>Completed Suicide</del>
(Describe the Behavior)	<del>Manipulative, Cry for Help, Suicidal Gesture</del>
Working with	<del>Dealing with Suicidal Employee</del>

# *Sculpt Your Story*

- Pick a scene of your heart story (turning point moment)
- Mind map sensory experiences
  - Setting (details — see, hear, smell, taste)
  - Characters (what wearing, how sound, facial expressions)
  - Inner and outer dialogue
- Draft a paragraph



# Practice

- Write story out
- Practice and record
- Practice in front of safe audience:  
seek critique
- Practice in front of strangers

# Review

- Thesis is lesson learned
- 20/80 ratio despair to hope
- Hero's journey stages covered?
- Helpful resources/healing action explained: why did they work?
- NO: pejorative language, glamorizing, romanticizing, description of means or "hotspot"

# *Optional Practice*





# *Books and Resources*

- TED Talks
- Judy Carter “The Message of You”
- Judy Carter “Comedy Bible”
- Doug Stevenson “Story Theater Method” and “Never Be Boring Again”
- Lewis Mehl-Madrona – Coyote series, “Healing the Mind through the Power of Story”

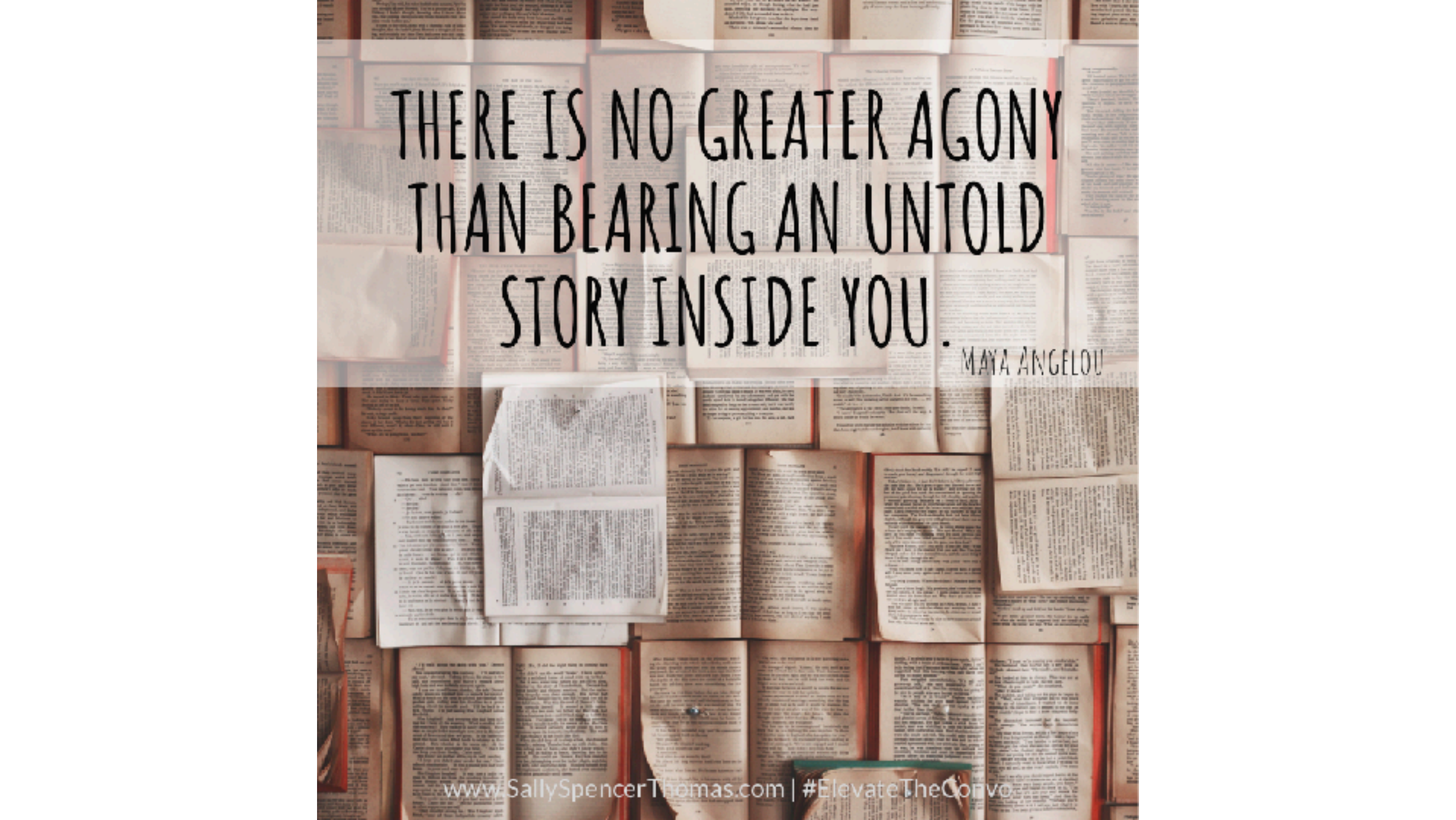
# Join United Survivors

- [www.unitesurvivors.org](http://www.unitesurvivors.org)
- Twitter: @UniteSurvivors
- Facebook: @UniteSurvivors
- YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/K58P8Cu8pql>



United Survivors





THERE IS NO GREATER AGONY  
THAN BEARING AN UNTOLD  
STORY INSIDE YOU.

MAYA ANGELOU

**THANK YOU!**  
**Stay connected**

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