

# How Your Story Can Help You Find Hope and Healing

By Jessica Isom, MD, MPH

Like many of you, as a young person of color I often wondered where my life journey and the stories it holds fit into the larger history of my community. While I recognized that storytellers have long held the power to inspire hope and resilience, I questioned whether my own narrative might do the same.

My comfort with storytelling began in the small, intimate spaces – first with people I trusted and then in larger circles. With time, I received affirmation and support and realized sharing my story wasn't just a personal act – it was a contribution to a rich legacy of narratives that have uplifted our community. I accepted then, and embrace now, my role as a storyteller. In telling my story, I not only honor the past but also actively inspire hope and resilience in myself and others.

Stories are bridges connecting you to your past, present, and future selves. Stories offer glimpses into your resilience, strength, and possibilities. When you share your story, you invite others to witness your experience and truth – the joys, struggles, and triumphs that shape your life and understanding of yourself.



Here are three key practices that have supported me in tapping into the power of my stories while encouraging me to lead with vulnerability.

### 1. Build a Daily Storytelling Practice.

- **Daily Journaling:** Writing about moments of resilience and hope each day helps you cultivate a consistent habit of reflecting on your story positively.
- **Affirmation Practice:** Starting the day with affirmations reinforces the importance of your experiences and strengthens your mindset for sharing.
- **Daily Reflection Prompts:** Using structured prompts provides focused reflection on daily challenges and coping, encouraging regular storytelling.

### 2. Practice Self-Expression and Vulnerability.

- **Storytelling in the Mirror:** Practicing aloud in front of the mirror helps you grow comfortable with hearing yourself express vulnerability.
- **Voice-Record Your Story:** Recording your thoughts allows you to practice sharing in a low-pressure setting, while also becoming familiar with your storytelling voice.
- **Talk to Yourself:** Conversations with yourself can strengthen your comfort with vulnerability and help you articulate personal experiences clearly.

### 3. Track Progress and Build Confidence through Action.

- **Start a Private Blog:** A private blog offers a space for ongoing storytelling without the pressure of public exposure, letting you build confidence at your own pace.
- **Track Your Story's Impact:** Reflecting on how your story has influenced others helps you recognize the value in sharing, increasing your motivation and confidence.
- **Share in Small, Safe Spaces:** Sharing with trusted individuals or groups in low-risk environments helps build confidence and creates a supportive foundation for wider sharing.

### The Takeaway

Your stories matter! As you raise your voice, share your truth, and listen to and affirm others, you gain understanding of yourself and your experiences. Building our storytelling skills, practicing self-expression and vulnerability, and taking action to increase our confidence helps us find the hope and healing we need for the next step on our soul-care journey.

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### About My Digital Sanctuary

My Digital Sanctuary brings information and creativity together to support soul care, a holistic approach to emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being from the Steve Fund. Created by mental health experts who specialize in serving young people of color and their families, My Digital Sanctuary shares the help, hope, and healing we need to not just survive but to thrive.

# Your Story Matters, and Sharing It Does Too!

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Throughout the histories of communities of color, narratives have always held power. The sequence of creating a story about your personal journey can help you to clarify your thoughts, process your emotions and experiences, and create connections.

Whether you share your story in person, through a video, social post, or in writing, telling your story can also help others who may be going through a similar experience. And if your personal narrative is one you hold too close for public consumption, creative writing can be an alternative for sharing with others – until you're ready!

## Seven Thought Starters and Writing Prompts

To help you get started, here are some questions to prompt your writing or storytelling process. Grab a pen or your phone and get ready to jot down the memories and ideas that come to you. You can write down your responses or create a video or audio recording on your phone.

- 1 Can you share a time when you felt overwhelmed by stress while pursuing an important goal?** How did you navigate those difficult moments? How did you care for your mental health?
- 2 How has hope played a role in your life, particularly during times of adversity?** Are there specific moments or experiences where you felt and acted with high levels of hope despite the odds?
- 3 How do you set goals and identify pathways for your future despite barriers you may face?** How does this process empower you to take control of your narrative and shape your future?
- 4 Can you reflect on a time when you challenged negative self-talk or internalized messages of inferiority?** How did you overcome these thoughts? How did you cultivate a sense of hope, healing, and self-worth?
- 5 How do you find strength in your cultural identity and community connections?** Are there specific cultural practices or traditions that bring you comfort and support your mental health and resilience during challenging times?
- 6 What tips would you give to other young people of color** who may be struggling with experiences of discrimination, oppression, or challenges to their mental health and emotional well-being? How can they tap into their reservoirs of hope and resilience?
- 7 Describe some of your happiness habits,** like having a positive morning routine, eating healthy food, getting regular exercise, playing a musical instrument, practicing kindness, expressing gratitude, and spending time with friends.

## Share Your Story With Us!

We'd love to possibly include your story on My Digital Sanctuary. Once you have a short story or video, please share it with us by emailing us at [info@stevefund.org](mailto:info@stevefund.org) If the video is more than 2MB, let us know, and we'll provide a DropBox link where you can drop the video.



# Meditating on Hope and Motivation

What sources of motivation do you draw on to care for your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health? Soul care for each of us can sometimes begin with reflecting on our experiences or the stories of others. Spending time in a moment of pause to consider goals from our past, present, and for the future, can allow new ideas, goals, or action steps to come into focus.

As you color the graphic below, allow yourself to breathe mindfully. After a few minutes, take a break, jot down any ideas, and acknowledge the feelings that come to you. When you finish coloring, pause to think about positive steps you can take. Trust that you can take small steps to care for yourself and move toward your mental health and soul care goals.

