

# TREE OF LIFE WORKSHOP

## **building stories, enriching lives**

**MARCH 2010**

***Story Studio Fremantle***

### **Facilitators**

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As this work is based on narrative ideas and practices we would encourage those who are less familiar with these to read further. Narrative Therapy takes a particular approach, a storied approach to the work which is quite different to other therapeutic approaches. It pays very particular attention to the language we use to tell the stories we do about our lives. Websites which give you both an introduction to and also provide access to books, journals, articles and DVDs, including some free articles include <http://www.narrativeapproaches.com/> <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/>

**Happy Travelling!**

## OVERVIEW OF THE THREE SESSIONS

### SESSION ONE

Introduction to the tree of life idea in its many forms  
Development of the *Narrative Tree of Life* with acknowledgements  
Drawing the *Tree of Life*  
Second Story Development  
*support and stability established*

### SESSION TWO

The Forest / Bush of Life  
*interconnectedness and support of trees & people*  
The Storms of Life  
*what has sustained us in hard times*  
Preferred Directions  
*when the storms pass*

### SESSION THREE

Celebration  
Write a Song  
*how we survive the storms*  
Write a letter to someone who has been important  
*someone who has recognised and responded to us*  
Re-engaging With Our Hopes & Dreams  
*steps to the realisation of one of these*  
Witnessing  
*inviting someone in to witness the work you have done*  
Your Next Adventure with The *Tree of Life*  
*how you might use this in your life*  
Certificates

**SESSION ONE**  
**March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2010**

**Drawing Your *Tree of Life* from the roots up using words, symbols or both using the process developed by Ncazelo Ncube from REPSSI, Eastern & Southern Africa in collaboration with David Denborough from Dulwich Centre Adelaide.**

An overview of the aspects of the tree we will be considering:

**Roots**

*the place or places you come from  
people who have contributed to your roots, nourished you*

**Ground**

*where you live at present, who & what is in your life now  
favourite places, things you enjoy*

**Trunk**

*knowledge & skills you've used or demonstrated in your life*

**Branches**

*hopes, dreams and wishes for the direction of your life*

**Leaves**

*people, pets or things which are important to you  
living or not, real or fictitious*

**Fruit, Nuts & Flowers**

*gifts which provide nourishment, regeneration & beauty*

Now we will consider each of these in greater detail as you fill in the details of your tree.

## ROOTS

What are the roots that have been important to you?

You might think about the roots as  
the place or places that you come from,  
the language you first spoke,  
the name you were first called by.

You may wish to put the names of people who might be contributors to your roots. However as this is your Tree of Life you only include people who nourished you and assisted you to develop your roots.

What ways of living did you develop that were nourishing of yourself? eg. Talking to a neighbour; sitting in a tree dreaming; reading a book; playing with your dog.

Either write these in or draw a symbol of these places, people or events who were/are part of the roots of life.

Put only people who are important to you, you are not obliged to include anyone.

Do you still have any link to these roots?  
eg You were born in the country, and you still like walking amongst trees and listening to the birds. Or by the sea and you still love to walk along the sand and jump through the waves.

Can anyone tell us about this?

## GROUND/EARTH

On the ground, represent in some way where you live at present.

Maybe you have a favourite place you go to that you would like to draw or write on the earth.

That could be a place you go with others or it might be a place you go to just to be alone.

You could include special holiday places you have been to and that have happy memories for you.

What were some of the things you enjoyed there?

Now add to this any daily routines or activities you undertake regularly.

What are some of the things you enjoy at present?

Who in particular are you enjoying spending time with?

## TRUNK

On the trunk include any Knowledge or any Skills that you have used or demonstrated in your life.

These could be:

### *Physical Skills*

mending toys; fixing cars; sewing; growing flowers or vegetables

### *Mental Skills*

reading books; doing crosswords; identifying birds

### *Relational skills*

- caring for others; loyalty to friends;
- thoughtfulness for neighbours, colleagues.
- being the Tea -maker.
- shopping for others. Helping in the garden etc

### *Self Care Skills*

- taking regular exercise;
- sharing with someone when you don't feel so good or
- making sure you have a good meal every day

At first you may have trouble starting to think of these. Those of you who know each other may have been the recipients of some of these skills, and you could remind people of what they have experienced or observed during your interactions with them.

## BRANCHES

These represent hopes, dreams, wishes etc.  
for the direction of your life.

They may be ones that you have tried out and would like to make bigger; they may be ones that you have not yet shared but have thought about; or they may be ones you have kept very secret and they haven't grown because they have not yet been nourished by the light or the sun.

Sometimes we may wish we had been an Opera Singer.  
We could take the first step by asking people if they know of a nearby choir.

### *Ask yourself*

- about the history of these hopes, dreams and wishes
- have you substituted or changed the hopes and dreams over time?
- how have you managed to hold on to some of them?
- have they sustained you through difficult times?

## LEAVES

Leaves indicate people, pets or things that are important to you.

These people can be living or no longer living.

They could be fictitious, from a book, film or TV show.

They could be an animal that has been significant to you or a toy, ornament etc.

*In the group, discuss the following questions*

- Why are these persons significant to you?  
Write the characteristic, value etc. next to their name.
- How do you think this person or pet would like to be remembered?
- What might they say about you (assuming you speak fluent dog or cat language) if they were here?
- How might you hold them in your memory or your heart?

## FRUIT, NUTS, SEEDS & FLOWERS

They provide nourishment, regeneration and beauty.

These could correspond to gifts that you have been given.

These may be

- material gifts;
- physical gifts eg strong teeth; service gifts, good education: or
- gifts of kindness, encouragement, care and love.

Sometimes it is hard to think of how the gift giver may have seen us and chosen to give us a gift.

*Each person take a turn to ask themselves*

- Why do you think that person gave you this gift?
- What did they appreciate about you that would have led them to do this?
- What do you think you may have contributed to their lives?
- How might you treasure this gift?

**Session Two**  
**March 9th 2010**

**Activity 1**  
***Reflection on the week***

Julie asked a bit about the week, the last session and further thoughts people might have had with:

- Has everyone had a good week?
- How was last week for everyone?
- Were people comfortable doing the exercise?
- Did anything stand out for people?
- That is surprised, delighted, captured you or even puzzled you?
- Did you add anything to your Tree?

People had been travelling with their trees, it seemed, the whole week and stories bred further stories. Or maybe the trees were travelling with them?

**Activity 2**  
***Values***

Values or what people hold dear are central to the work of narrative. Look at your tree and consider the following questions:

- Did you recognise any Values that you hold dear?
- Have these values been important for a long time?
- Can you identify where they originated?
- Is there a story associated with this?
- Is there someone who would not be surprised that you hold close to these values?
- If they were present today what might they add to this discovery?
- Would you like to have this value more present in your life?
- What difference would this make to your future?

**VINES**

***A WA addition!***

Now you have drawn Your Tree of Life.  
You have added various details to it.

In a previous workshop participants noticed connections between some of the important people represented by their leaves and some of what they were doing now (on the ground). Others could see that their gifts had come from people and places they had placed in the roots of their tree. These connections they represented using vines, which hung so beautifully, reaching down to the ground and roots below.

Can you see connections on Your Tree?

What is the history of these connections?

How are these connections maintained?

How might they contribute to your life now, perhaps sustaining you in difficult times?

Did a particular story come to mind when you added the vines?

Remind people they are supported in this by other trees/people.

Gradually have the storm die down and people relax sitting on the floor or chairs.

Then we gathered in two small groups and considered the following questions:

- Name some of the stormy problems of life?
- What effects do they have on our lives?
- How do we respond to these storms of life?
- Create a conversation about what happened when the storm came through?
- Are there some ways of responding that are more helpful than others?
- What help us not get too wet or be blown away?
- Are they able to get in touch with some of the words and symbols on their Tree of Life which they could hold onto?
- Could you share some of this knowledge with the whole group?

Another option:

Collect on a tree outline on the board these special skills and knowledges, suggested by the group, that will help protect us to face up to difficulties when a storm blows up through the forest or the bush.

Invite people to add these to their pictures if they feel they would be helpful.

**Session Three**  
**March 9th 2010**

**Activity 1**

***Preferred Directions***

With more time you might do this exercise in the second session as it links with the Storms of Life. Use the following questions in pairs or small groups:

- Are storms always present in our lives?
- Can we name times when our lives are free of storms?
- How do you know the signals that a storm may be approaching?
- Maybe a leaf may drop off, but Referring to your Tree of Life what skill or memory or person or gift is helpful
- Have you noticed a difference weathering this storm?
- Have you noticed anything different with people in the room?

Include stories of people who make them happy and offer support.

How do you in turn contribute to others happiness?

**Activity 2**

***Write a Song***

Often taking people's words and setting them to music or to a familiar tune is a special way of giving recognition to what they value and hold dear.

Songs have been important in many Narrative Therapy Projects as providing a way of holding on to some step people have accomplished.

A song may also mark membership of a group which has been important to them.

Be a way of helping a person who does not read.

Can you think of any other things that might be helped by putting it in Sung form?

We invite you to write a song/verse(s) that tells in some way what has sustained you through life's stormy weather/times.

You may wish to compose your own tune or you may wish to use a well known tune.

In pairs/threes/fours write your verse(s) then perform it, with actions if you wish, to the audience.

After your performance you may wish to share the words with the audience, who also join in lustily.

### Activity 3

#### Linking Lives Around Shared Themes & Values

##### *Others Tree of Life*

Look around at the other Trees of Life to see if there was anything that you're interested in particular. You might be thinking about something someone said during the values exercise about what values they saw reflected in their trees.

Pair off with someone with whom you feel a connection, a kindred spirit or for whom you have a question about something on their tree.

The following questions were used as a guide as they were asked by their partner about their (the partner's) tree of life:

1. Name what captured your interest?  
Why was this important to you?
2. What image came to mind?  
What impression do you get about what might be important to .....?
3. Do you know why you were drawn to this?  
How does this resonate in your life?
4. Where has this moved or taken to in your thinking by what you have seen?  
What place might you be in right now that you were not in at the beginning of this conversations?

Julie then highlighted that the conversation they had just had followed some of the responses that a Narrative Reflecting Team might use in order to stay curious and reflective, rather than being analytical or advice giving. The four stages of this reflective process are:

1. Naming
2. The Image
3. Resonance
4. Transport / Moved To

Further questions that could be used:

- What took place through the shared questioning?
- Would what you have shared lead to a story you have recalled/remembered?
- Could you share this story?
- What might the telling of this story suggest that you think is important in life?
- Can you explain to us how you have been able to hold on to this?
- Would you say this has sustained you throughout your life?

#### Activity 4

##### The Forest of Life / The Bush (for Aussies) of Life

Gather together the trees to form a forest / bush and then reflected on:

- Trees usually grow with other trees.
- We may have groves, forests or bush
- We now have ... trees, so we might say we have a forest/bush of trees? How might we create a forest/bush?
- What advantages do you see in having a forest/bush?
- What support do we experience, what is possible?
- After collecting the Trees of Life together, people may like to say some thing about the exercise that they were surprised by or enjoyed?

#### Activity 5

##### The Storms Of Life

The work so far with the *Tree of Life* has enabled people to establish a different place to stand, a firmer place, the continent Michael White spoke about when the islands (isolated stories) join to form archipelagos (connected to people & places and time) then these coalesce to form a continent.

As we look at our trees we recall the roots - people and places; where we live now and daily routines associated with this or holiday places; we named our particular knowledge and skills; gifts we have received; people who encouraged and been important to us; finally naming hopes and dreams we have held onto; people and values that have sustained us.

Then consider that despite the beauty, stability and strength of the trees they are vulnerable, face hazards. What are some of the dangers, hazards forests face? Can list them.

Then consider how forests / bush withstand the hazard and survive them.

We have likened ourselves to these wonderful trees. Would it be OK to say that you also face storms, worries and difficulties in your everyday lives? We then gathered together with our trees such things may not be able to 'blow us away'? (Tree of Life in front of us.)

Storms are usually accompanied with sounds. We each took an instrument and made a noise like an approaching storm.

Encourage people to make a movement that would suggest a storm passing through.

### **Activity 3**

#### ***Re-engaging with Hopes & Dreams***

Thinking back to the BRANCHES of your tree, on the branches you represented hopes, dreams, wishes etc. for the direction of your life.

- they may be ones that you have tried out and would like to make bigger;
- they may be ones that you have not yet shared but have thought about;
- or they may be ones you have kept very secret and they haven't grown because Storms have prevented them from being nourished by the light.

Think of your hopes, dreams and wishes again.

Ask yourself about -

- The history of these hopes, dreams and wishes
- Have you substituted or changed those hopes and dreams over time?
- How have you managed to hold on to some of them?
- Have they sustained you through difficult times?

### **Activity 4**

#### ***Taking Steps Towards Realising Hopes & Dreams***

Have you taken any steps towards one of these hopes, dreams or wishes?

Sometimes like me, we may have a secret desire to be an Opera Singer, that may not be feasible, or it may be too big a first step, however you could do something, we could take the first step by asking people if they know of a near by choir.

STEPS -

- Think about the first step you may take?
- Beside your tree draw a step.
- Write on your step a small move you could make soon
- Maybe you would like to put one or two more steps and where you would like to be sometime from now?

Consider carefully how big these steps might be or what would they look like?

### **Activity 5**

#### ***Letter to Someone Important***

Write a letter to someone you have identified on your *Tree of Life*. This may be someone who is alive. You may or may not like to send it or deliver it. It may be someone who is no longer living but you feel close to.

When writing this type of letter we suggest you tell the person what was, and still is, important to you.

Try and recreate the relationship when and where it took place.

Some of the triggers you could use are –

- I can still hear you saying.....
- I see you .....
- I have held onto.....
- I clearly remember.....
- I can still taste.....
- I still hear you saying.....

Can you think of anything else that would heighten the memories of this relationship?

Decide what you will do with your letter, where you might keep it etc.

### **Activity 6**

#### ***Witnessing***

Introduce us to someone you would like to have here with you tonight, someone you know would support the work you are doing, the steps you are taking, someone who in knowing you would not be surprised at what you have achieved.

This can be brief or contain more detail. It depends on the time.

### **Activity 7**

#### ***How might the Tree of Life be present in your life after tonight?***

Exploring how people might use this.

### **Activity 8**

#### ***Certificates***

A time to celebrate and acknowledge the work

*Wishing you well as you build stories and enrich lives.*

*Julie & Martina*

*March 2010*

## Apology

We today express our deepest regret for the pain and sorrow  
Of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sisters here today,  
And all those who are not here:  
their mothers and grandmothers,  
their fathers and grandfathers,  
their brothers and sisters,  
their aunts and uncles  
and their ancestors.

It has taken us so long to begin to listen to understand.  
We are sorry for all that you experienced.  
Please accept our apology.

*Written by Frazee de Geer WRNSE / 1997*



Kevin Rudd, PM Apology to the Stolen Generations & Memorial in Reconciliation Place, Canberra

## In This Land

Red sand of the desert  
White sand by the sea  
All the land between them,  
Rivers calling me.

*Chorus -*  
*In this land*  
*My feet are walking.*  
*In this land, my eyes can see.*  
*In this land, I feel the power.*  
*In this land, my spirit's free.*

People in this country,  
Long before my birth.  
Ancestors in Ireland,  
One same mother earth.  
Family crossing oceans  
Seeking promised land.  
Generations later,  
I begin to understand.

I've seen a lot of country,  
Centre to the sea.  
Felt another meaning,  
Spirit calling me.  
Met with kindred spirits  
Walked with Koori friends.  
Learnt about true country,  
Now I understand.



Red sand of the desert  
White sand by the sea  
All the land between them,  
Songs rise up in me.

Red sand of the desert  
White sand by the sea  
All the land between them,  
Spirit calling me.

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