

TOGETHERSTORYING

*Coaching Veterans, First Responders, and Families
Through Trauma—and Transforming Organizations*



SEVEN LEVELS OF TOGETHERSTORYING

**COACHING VETERANS, FIRST RESPONDERS, AND FAMILIES THROUGH TRAUMA—AND TRANSFORMING
ORGANIZATIONS BY DR. DAVID MICHAEL BOJE, PHD**

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About the Author

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Dr. Boje is an internationally recognized scholar in organizational storytelling, quantum storytelling theory, and antenarrative methods. He co-founded and served as Board Chair for the 25-year life span of the Standing Conference for Management and Organization Inquiry and was past chair of the Academy of Management Research Methods Division. He is founder of *Tamara: Journal of Critical Organization Inquiry* and convenes the annual Quantum Storytelling Conference each December in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

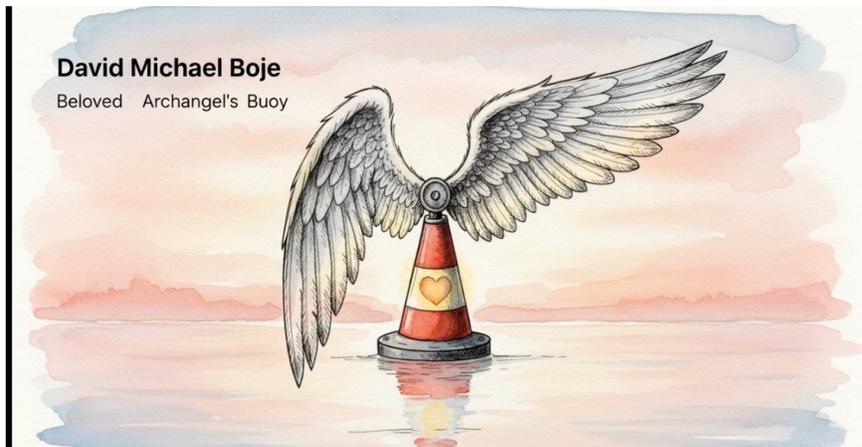
A Vietnam War veteran who survived Agent Orange exposure and Stage IV cancer, Dr. Boje developed the TogetherStorying methodology with his wife and research partner, Dr. Grace Ann Rosile, over thirty years of work with veterans, first responders, families in crisis, and organizational transformation. He is co-founder of PerView Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit providing free coaching services to veterans and their families, and co-founder of GrowthOD, an organizational development consulting platform.

Dr. Boje trains and certifies coaches, psychologists, and therapists in the TogetherStorying method and provides organizational consulting through the PERVIEW framework. His work integrates Jain philosophy, chakra theory, and quantum storytelling with evidence-based coaching practices. He lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he practices Western Dressage with his horse Fancy.

PREFACE: FROM WARRIOR TO BUOY

Our Journey to Arihunta

My name is David Michael Boje. In Denmark, where my dad's ancestors lived, "Boje" means "buoy"—that floating marker that keeps ships from running aground, that guides vessels through treacherous waters, that remains anchored even when storms rage. My mother, being Welsch, kept the Danish origins of my name a secret until I was 54. She also told me the origin of the names, David and Michael, given to me by my dad's Catholic parents. My mother did not believe in God or Catholics. I was named after David, which means 'beloved, and after Archangel Michael. I learned my full name means "Beloved Archangel's Buoy," and for most of my life. I did not take it seriously at age 54, but at age 78, it has taken on a deeper meaning.



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Lake Wilderness: The First Vision

I was twelve years old when my father took me to Lake Wilderness in the Mount McKinley Mountain Range of Alaska. We landed on the water in a small plane, the pontoons kissing the glassy surface with barely a ripple. When the engine cut and the propeller stilled, I experienced a moment of such profound calm that I can still feel it in my body more than six decades later.

The wind had died completely. The lake's surface became a perfect mirror, reflecting the towering peaks and endless sky. But what captured my attention was what lay beneath. The water was so clear, so undisturbed, that I could see straight to the lakebed—every detail of the rich ecosystem thriving in the depths. Dense aquatic plants swayed gently. Beautifully colored rocks painted the bottom in ochre, sage, and deep blue. Fish moved through this underwater garden like thoughts drifting through a quiet mind.

Then I noticed five muddy streams flowing into the lake from different directions. Where they entered, the water clouded. The clarity disappeared. The vision of the depths became obscured.

I didn't know it then, but I was witnessing the central metaphor for everything I would later teach about consciousness, leadership, and family healing. That undisturbed lake surface—what my Jain

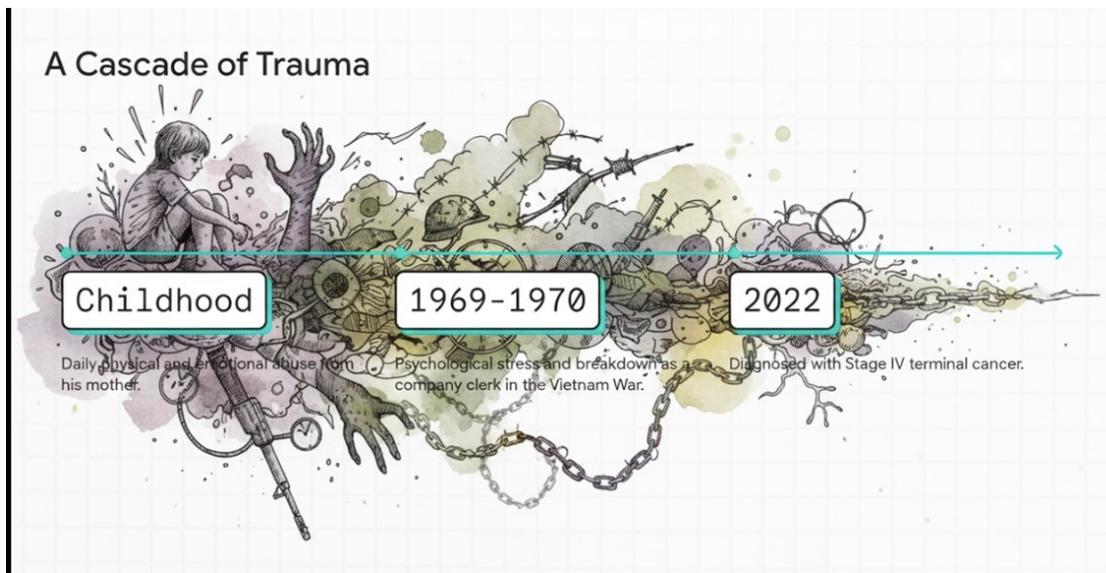
teacher would later call the "still mind"—reveals the hidden patterns that shape reality. But the muddy streams, what he called the "five karmic weeds," cloud our vision and prevent us from seeing what's actually there.

True transformation, I would learn, requires cultivating that inner stillness. Not the stillness of death or avoidance, but the active stillness that allows us to see past the turbulent surface of daily life into the deep patterns—the story-seeds, good and bad—that truly shape our experience.

The Academic Path

After the Vietnam War, I went to business school. Eventually, I earned my Ph.D., becoming an assistant professor at UCLA, then a full professor at Loyola Marymount, and finally department head at New Mexico State University. For thirty-five years, I researched and wrote about organizational storytelling, narrative methods, and quantum approaches to transformation. I published over thirty-five books and more than 150 academic articles.

But here's what I didn't write about in those scholarly works: I was still operating from warrior consciousness. Still seeing enemies. Still treating intellectual debates like combat operations. Still unable to truly connect with the people I loved most.



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I married. I became a father. I built a successful academic career. And simultaneously, I was dying—not just from the Agent Orange that was slowly poisoning trillions of my living cells, but from the isolation that comes from living behind defensive walls so high that even you can't see over them anymore.

The Great Unraveling

In my fifties, everything collapsed simultaneously. My marriage ended in divorce. The settlement took everything—my retirement savings, my home, my financial security. I found myself bankrupt

and briefly homeless, consulting pro bono to Nora King at Nickerson Gardens public housing in Los Angeles just to have a sense of purpose.

Nora King changed my life, though she probably never knew it. As President of the Nickerson Gardens Resident Management Council, she embodied a leadership I'd never encountered before. She valued every person with love, dignity, and respect—not as a technique or strategy, but as a way of being. She spoke truth to power with a courage that shamed my academic pretensions. She created community in one of the most challenging environments imaginable.

Working alongside Nora, I began to glimpse a different kind of leadership than what I'd learned in war or business school. Not leadership based on domination or control, but leadership based on... what? I didn't have words for it yet. But I knew it had something to do with seeing the inherent worth in every human being, regardless of their circumstances.

Nora died in 2004, but her example planted a seed that would eventually grow into the TogetherStorying methodology. This book is dedicated to her memory.

Meeting Grace Ann

In 1995, within a week of meeting Dr. Grace Ann Rosile—who would become my wife, partner, and co-founder of this work—everything in my understanding of leadership and healing began to shift.

Grace Ann was different from anyone I'd encountered in academia. An Ethics Fellow and emeritus professor, she had been studying indigenous ways of knowing, working with horses for human development, and exploring how embodied practices could facilitate narrative transformation. She didn't just theorize about change; she practiced it, lived it, embodied it.

"David," she said during one of our early conversations, "you need to meet my teacher."

That teacher was Gurudev Shree Chitrabhanu, a Jain master who had done something unprecedented in 2,500 years of Jain monastic tradition: he left India to teach in the West. At the time, I had no idea what Jainism was. I certainly didn't expect this meeting to transform my entire understanding of consciousness, energy, and what it means to be human.

The Name I Didn't Know I Had

Gurudev was in his seventies when I met him, small in stature but radiating an energy I'd never felt before. There was something about his presence—a quality of complete peace combined with absolute alertness—that reminded me of Lake Wilderness. The still surface. The clear depths.

Within an hour of meeting me, he said: "Your name is Arihunta. It means 'conqueror of your inner enemies.'"

For the next ten years, I meditated on this teaching. I tried to conquer my inner enemies—the anger, the fear, the defensive isolation, the hypervigilance. I battled them as I'd been trained to battle in Vietnam. And I was exhausted, because the enemy kept winning.

Finally, I went back to Gurudev. "This isn't working," I confessed. "I'm trying to conquer these inner enemies, but I just create more warfare inside myself."

He smiled—that knowing smile of a teacher who's been waiting years for the student to ask the real question. "Ah," he said. "I think you're ready now to hear what Arihunta actually means."

"It doesn't mean 'conqueror of your inner enemies,'" he explained. "It means 'you have no enemies, everyone is your friend.'"

The world shifted. Everything I'd understood about healing, about leadership, about relationships—all of it reorganized around this new axis. The warrior training that had served me in Vietnam but crippled me in civilian life suddenly had an alternative. Not weakness. Not naivety. Not denial of real danger. But a fundamental reorientation: What if the default assumption wasn't enemy but friend?

This became the foundation of what Grace Ann and I would eventually call the "Seven Levels of TogetherStorying"—the journey from seeing enemies (Beneath, wearing masks of defense) to recognizing everyone as friend (Beyond, experiencing fundamental oneness).

The Seven Energy Centers

Gurudev taught me about the seven chakras, the energy centers in the body that correspond to seven levels of consciousness development. I'd encountered versions of this teaching in yoga studios, where it was often reduced to new-age platitudes. But the way Gurudev explained it was rigorous, sophisticated, and completely practical.

Each energy center, he taught, represents a different quality of consciousness and a different challenge in human development:

Mula-Adhara (Root): Security, survival, belonging

Svadhithana (Sacral): Creativity, flow, authenticity

These seven energy centers became the foundation for the TogetherStorying methodology that Grace Ann and I developed over thirty years. In the Introduction that follows, I will systematically teach you each of the seven levels—how they work in the body, how they manifest in consciousness, and how they guide transformation for individuals, families, and organizations.

Introduction: The Musical Scale of Consciousness

In the Preface, I shared my journey from warrior to buoy, from seeing enemies to recognizing everyone as friend. That transformation didn't happen through willpower or positive thinking. It happened through understanding and working with seven distinct levels of consciousness—seven energy centers in the body that correspond to seven ways of experiencing reality.

This Introduction will teach you the systematic framework that guides all TogetherStorying work. Whether you're a veteran healing from PTSD, a first responder carrying trauma, a family member supporting someone in crisis, or an organizational leader seeking transformation, these seven levels provide a map for the journey.

Think of consciousness like a musical scale. You can play notes in the lower registers—defensive, reactive, survival-based consciousness. Or you can play in the higher registers—creative, relational, transcendent consciousness. Most importantly, you can learn to hear which register you're currently playing in, and consciously shift to a different one.



The Seven Centers: A Comprehensive Framework

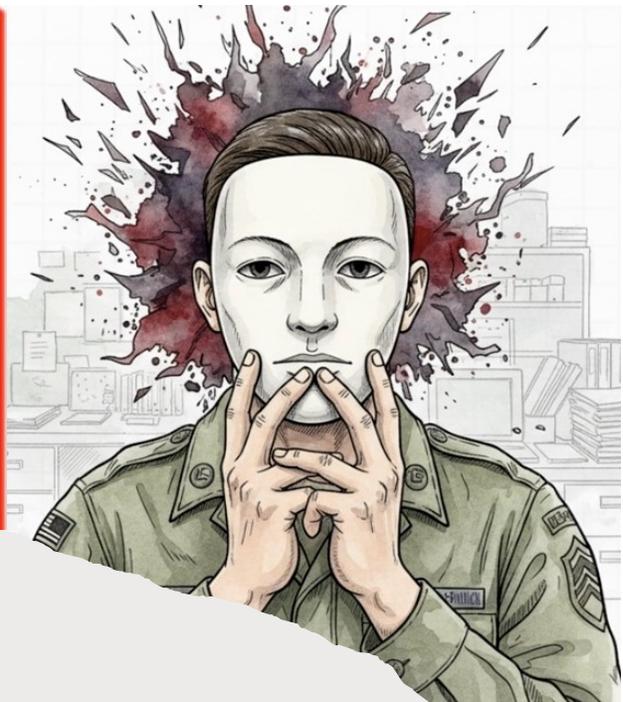
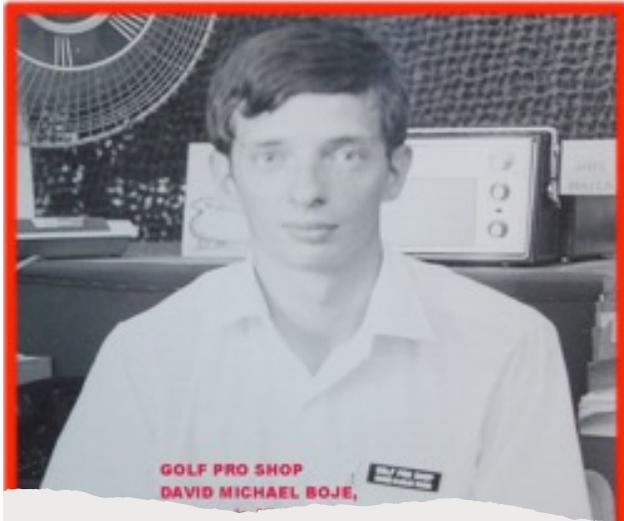
The First Center of Energy is called 'Beneath the Mask.' To go through all the masks of identity, we can stop and glimpse our 'true self.' This is the first principle of our book on 'True Storytelling' (Boje, Larsen, & Bruun, 2020): "You yourself must be true and prepare the energy and effort for a sustainable future." We don't discuss the nature or energy in that book. That is a much earlier story from 1995, when I met Gurudev Shree Chitbaranu (1979: 76), and I learned that our true self is called "Atma" in Sanskrit, meaning "perfect, infinite energy." To be your 'true self' is about the 'root' chakra energy, located at the base of your spine. This Jain monk, who walked with Mahatma Gandhi across India, adds, "All illness of mind, body, or emotions is an effect of our ignorance of this perfect

Self" (IBID.). The day after my 78th birthday, I carelessly invited a severe case of the flu into my body by going to the Long Beach Aquarium unmasked. Some masks serve a good purpose. Today, it's two weeks since I carelessly invited the flu into my body.

Negative thoughts and emotions also entered my first center of energy, the 'root' that is 'Beneath the masks' I wear, when I first encountered PTSD. My mother, bless her soul, was angry, in a constant state of rage and hatred when my dad deserted her for an 18-year-old co-worker at Paris International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT). I mean deserted here with three children, two in diapers, and me the oldest at age 14. She was mad at the betrayal and reported it as such to the bosses of ITT, and they fired my dad and the 18-year-old secretary. Rage had consequences for all of us, since without a job and no recommendations, no job was forthcoming, and my mother, two brothers, and my sister all went on welfare. The rage grew in my mother, and for spite she returned to my dad's hometown instead of her own, near my dad's Catholic grandparents, and my uncle Vernon, a jailer and deputy sheriff in Spokane, Washington. To get to the PTSD bit, my mother's rage started when her step-father (Percy, aka Brownie) took her almost daily to the woodshed, locked her in there, and committed so many never-disclosed sins. A bitter rivalry of Brownie's daughter, and my mother, the step-daughter, kindled as Brownie bought new dresses and shoes for his daughter Val, and threw discarded old hand-me-downs at Loraine (aka Cindy), my mother.

So, I do forgive and understand and love her despite being knocked about day after day, from 14 until I left the rage pit at age 17, to work full-time at Montgomery Ward's tire center. Yes, I am still vigilant, decades later, and when someone comes up silently behind me, my arms cover my face, in self-defense, to fend off the blows that no longer arrive.

The root chakra, is about our security, and believe me an enraged mother, jilted for a younger model, and abused repeatedly in a shed, is able to sneak up behind her son, and deliver some very mean blows to the head. But it is not me she is hitting, it's her step-dad, its husband, long gone, never to return.



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I obtained the second case of PTSD as a company clerk in the Vietnam War. This was from the daily motor projectiles, little missiles whistling across the sky, all day and all night. My bunk mates used to say, "You'll never hear the one that has your name on it." But we would listen, just the same.

To get to the moment. I woke up after three days in the hospital. I checked my body, all the limbs and digits accounted for, but in each bed on my floor, soldiers who all were missing essential body limbs, hands, fingers, eyes, ears, or noses. I wondered, how is it my bunk mates, conned me into going for a ride in the company jeep, to get a pizza, and stopped off to get something at the hospital, then I am tackled, my pants pulled down, and a rather long and intimidating needle thrust into my butt, and I am out of the count. Truth be told, I had worked myself into a nervous frenzy, stopped sleeping, and the stress took me over. This ritual of stress accumulation, denial, and trying to mask my hurting emotions and negative thoughts, was repeated two more times, about half way through my tour of Vietnam. I was relieved of my job of company clerk, a fact I mask, and never share openly. What would people think. I know what I thought, I had stressed out, got angry, let rage overtake me (Hi Mom!). My brain was broken, and had what my grandfather, in World War I called 'battle fatigue. I learned this lesson. If you are in a combat zone, even as a clerk, you still can get PTSD. The trauma I relive is that hospital ward, and way people around you can lie to you and take you for a ride, even when its for your own good.

The commanding officer said I had been a good clerk until I cracked three times. He gave me a choice of assignments. I chose the job, 'golf pro.' Typical Army, give you a job as a clerk, when you don't type, then give you a job as a golf pro, when you never played the game.

This book has been coming together since April 2nd, 1968, when I was drafted in the U.S. Army in Brooklyn, New York. I had a year added, making it three, in exchange for erasing and sealing my juvenile record, and took tests that showed I had lots of talent and skill that no one mentioned to

me growing up at home or in High School. I was put on a train to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, to receive Basic Training. In Basic, I called my girlfriend, took a lot of quarters in the pay phone, and she said, "I'm pregnant, and hung up when I did not instantly propose. I called back and did the right thing. Another miracle: I became selected, because of high abilities in math and logic in tests I took when drafted, to be a supply sergeant and had to learn to type, then was promoted to company clerk, like "Radar" in the movie MASH in Fort Lee, Virginia, and of course, was sent to the Vietnam War, 1969-1970, and was assigned to be company clerk in Saigon, at the USAHAC special services unit, and was exposed to Agent Orange infiltrated into the water, soil, air and food.

Fast forward to New Year's morning of 2022, I was peeing blood, and I was diagnosed with a terminal Stage IV cancer (28 on a usual scale of 10), which meant an aggressive cancer had left the prostate gland, colonized four lymph nodes, and was prepared to colonize all that remained. Never trust your local doctor. When were they trained? What did they learn was the best course of action in med school? The local doc told me, "Get your affairs in order, you have a few months left on earth."

I was fortunate to find my way to MD Anderson, and they determined that I was eligible for a Stage 2 clinical trial. With a new application of a pharma medicine, hormone shots to bring testosterone to zero, 28 rounds of radiation, and today, I stand here cancer-free. Which means it will take about six years to get my strength in my legs back as a runner. Hey, dude, it's been 18 months, and the leg resists standing for a few moments, let alone running for an hour or two. In four more years, I will be 82. Will I run then?

Hey, I misspoke. I hid 'Beneath' yet another mask. In fact, two of them. First, are you ever cancer-free? At the height of cancer, I had several trillion cancer cells colonizing the prostate and spreading through the lymph nodes. Now, after the hormone shots and the 28 irradiations, there are still a hundred billion cancer cells; they are just dormant, not ravenously hungry for sugar as they were a few years ago.

Second, three years ago, a nose doctor cut off a chunk of cancer flesh the size of a silver dollar, on the end of my nose. He cut another chunk of skin the same size on my left side burn and stitched it with 50 or so stitches to my nose. That did not hurt; it was the dozen shots to deaden the nasal nerves. They hurt enough to make a grown man scream.

Ok, there is a third kind of cancer. Agent Orange, a mixture's active components about equal parts of two phenoxy herbicides: 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), with traces of the toxic contaminant 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD) present in the mixture. The herbicide was produced under contract by several U.S. chemical companies, including Dow Chemical Company and Monsanto Company, among nine companies doing the manufacture. Most of the long-lasting health damage is from the TCDD, that persists for decades in human bodies, before a trillion living cancer cells launches an attack on the surrounding living cells. One results serious skin cancer, endocrine and blood-pressure disorders.

Though frequently disputed by politicians, many U.S. and allied veterans who served in Vietnam developed various kinds of cancer and chronic diseases (heart disease, type 2 diabetes) and

neurological disorders. Vietnam veterans began to wage lawsuits in the 1980s and advocated for federal law to award Agent Orange disability compensation from the mid-1980s onward. Of course, different political parties and heads of state continue to deny a causal link between Agent Orange and cancer in veterans. It was not until 2024 that I received my first Agent Orange disability payment, and of course, I was told the U.S. still has no valid test for it. You know the old rule “correlation is not proof of causation.” More accurately, if your government doesn’t fund a way to measure it, then Agent Orange causation of cancer just does not exist.

I am taking you down this personal ‘rabbit hole’ in order to tell you this: “Going Beneath the masks I have shared, is a way to encourage you to rip off the masks you depend upon in order to find your ‘True Self’ and meditate on the energy center you have in your root chakra, where the healing can happen for you.”

I got out of the Army four months early, while stationed at Fort Dix, New Jersey, if and only if I attended Burlington Community College, full-time. I was the first in my family tree to ever go to college, and my parents thought their idiot son would never do it. But the Army taught me leadership and discipline. So I worked harder than most and graduated 1st in class, which got me a scholarship to Rider University, where I tied for 1st place in that class and was forced to give a Commencement Address with shaking knees. This got me a fellowship to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana MBA program. As my dad’s business failed again, and the next one too, I stayed at U of I and got my PhD in Organizational Development (OD). Turned out I excelled in storytelling theory and how to use it in OD. But a problem became apparent at my first Assistant Professor job at UCLA: the pay was so low —\$19K—and my family expanded to two children. I had to take on extra jobs as a grant writer and an assertiveness trainer at Hughes Aircraft (Building 17). I could do academic theory, but translating it into publications eluded me, and OD practice was not possible until I went to Loyola Marymount (LMU), a teaching university. All my UCLA colleagues said, ‘David, you will fail, you failed at UCLA, a published place, and you will fail to make it at a teaching university. The failure to get tenure at UCLA and prophecies of failure at LMU prompted me to apply my discipline, perseverance, and military clerking skills to becoming a teacher and doing volunteer work in public housing, Nickerson Gardens in Watts. I met Nora King, the resident leader and president of the community council, and she taught me lessons in leadership and consulting.

Fast forward to 2026: remarried, living in New Mexico, early retired after 23 years at New Mexico State University; when their state funding dried up, I was forced out by 2021. Where’s the paradise in that, you ask? Going Beneath the ‘Academia’ mask to write my stories in the ‘first voice’ to claim my root chakra energy, that comes from the earth element. No linker writing under the university whip of ‘publish or perish.’ Free to write without a mask.

The second center of vital energy is called the “Before,” and it’s the second principle of the “True Storytelling’ book (Larsen, Boje, & Bruun, 2020). Principle 2: True storytelling, making room by respecting the stories already there. In that book, we do not talk of chakra energy, or how the second center (Before) is attuned to the water element, present in all bodily fluids, including the circulation of your blood. The water element is present in the body’s entire fluid system of supplying nutrients, in your saliva, in the digestive process of food and water. Agent Orange got into the water and colonized the second energy center, vital to my health and well-being. BY

weight, the human body is about 60% water. Overweight men and women have more body fat and a lower percentage of water in their bodies than thin people. I think I am 58% water.

With the flu, I drink lots of water, so make that 67%. Our brain and heart are 73% water, and the lungs a whopping 83%. Bones only 31% water, which is still a lot.

So what, you ask? When you are under stress, or experiencing lots of tension, and emotional strain, your pulse rate rises, as does your blood pressure. Stressful emotions, like anger, worry, rage, and vengeance upset your bodily equilibrium, and toxins store up in the body.

The role of the second energy center (Before) is critical to understanding story. Living Stories, for example, have many 'Before' moments that are stressful, some are traumatic, and many tensions have their tipping points, affecting your chemical balance, your ability of water in your body to carry out wastes. Living stories are never in a straight line with one definite beginning, middle, and end. Agent Orange is a living story, unfolding in the middle, and there is no 'end' to it. The good news is you can learn to manage stress, to observe negative emotional energy as it emerges. You will discover, in this book, that a key to dealing with stress, PTSD, abusive sex, and so on, is to recall 'Little Wow Moments' of exception, when those most stressful incidents did not happen because of your energy. For example, my mother became a star basketball player in high school and could deck a man with one blow. Her "Little Wow Moments" (LWMs) on the basketball court were captured during games against a high school a few miles away. They had a bitter rivalry. Women grabbing the opponent teammate's hair and dragging them headfirst to the floor to knock them out. So both teams wore razor blades in their hair so that if they were grabbed, the opponent's hand was a bloody mess. Can you imagine that fans cheering on my mother to do her worst. But my mother did not put razor blades in her hair, and she knew better than to grab the hair of an opponent. She just reaches around and punched their lights out. Got really good at it. I can testify to that. My mother's LWM gave her the skill to keep her from being locked in the woodshed by you know who, to do you know what, even though she never told her "Before" story to me, to any therapist, to anyone.

The third center of your vital energy I call 'Bets' is centered at your navel, the so-called 'fire element' in your stomach and intestines. Principle 3 of True Storytelling: "You must create stories with a clear plot creating direction and helping people prioritize" (Larsen, Boje, & Bruun, 2020). That is all well and good for leading and transforming corporations, but how does it relate to living stories, to narratives without a clear plot direction for a 'Bet' on the future, to helping people prioritize when they have different fire energies. It is fire that generates heat and enables your digestive system to function. In storytelling, the third energy center is the power of your expression. Observe that power, when it explodes into anger, rage, jealousy, envy, and acts of vengeance. These are dangerous fires of passion. You will see in this book that a living story does not just recount the past. The past does not just inform the present, and the future is not just out there, unseen and unknown, it is arriving with each 'Bet' you make. 'Bets' is what I choose to call this third energy center. You make bets all day long. Brushing your teeth will prevent cavities. Wearing sunscreen will prevent skin cancer. It will not rain or snow this afternoon. STOP, make a list of all the bets you made from coming awake until now.

The fourth center of your vital energy is, as everyone knows, centered in your heart. In Larsen, Boje, and Bruun (2020), Principle 4 is "You must have timing." Usually, it is rendered as Kairos, the opportune moment for strategic action, in opposition to 'Chronos' (god of chronological time) or what we today call 'clock time.' And tale of time just deadends in that duality. In doing True Storytelling credentialing (certification), I go deeper than what is in the book, into 'Being', from several philosophical perspectives. One is, of course, Martin Heidegger's 'Being-in-the-world' which is not the same thing at all as 'staying-in-the-present' and is not 'Kairos' (opportune time) nor Chronos (chronology) with its beginning-middle-end, and certainly not 'clock time.' Of course, I know Heidegger was anti-semitic, and he was a Nazi, so I side with his critics and am very skeptical that his approach to 'Being-in-the-world' approaches 'authenticity.' Yet I do appreciate Mikhail Bakhtin's 'Being in the once-occurrent eventness of answerability', a time when you have a moral answerability to act to help others, if you are there, and have the wherewithal to intervene where there is evil, something Heidegger failed to do. Nevertheless, Heidegger did have significant insights into 'Being' so I do the hard work, and try not to swallow the bath water of authoritarianist understanding of 'Being.' I approach 'Being' as an energy of the heart, and focus on how the heart functions. The heart uses the element of 'air' to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen. And the heart is about 'Being' in a space to breathe air, and giving heart-space to others, so they can breathe air in and out, and do the exchange to gain oxygen. The 'Heart' chakra energy is very existential notion. Think with your 'heart,' not your 'head.' How does that even work? Here is the main point. If you want try to overcome PTSD, sexual trauma, watching someone bleed out, and other extreme stress events, and so on, you must do more than 'stay in the present moment. Yes, meditation on the breath is important, but not all there is to the nature of 'Being' and its relation to 'timing.' "Proper breathing is essential to our vitality. Have you noticed someone who is angry and upset? His breath is quick and shallow" (Chitrabhanu, 1979: 80). This is a keen insight, because it gets at how to use the fourth vital energy of 'Being' in your 'Heart-space' to observe and start to manage your breathing rhythm. When I work with veterans who go into PTSD, the first thing I do is get them to breathe, take longer, deeper breaths, to get out of the fight, flight, or freeze (3 Fs) kind of breathing. I observe, What is their existence, 'stuck in the past' (those 'Befores'), out of touch with the 'present' 'state of 'Being'), anticipating a 'Bet on the future, that can be dangerous to self and others? In other words, all the B's are entangling, activating one another, and my job is to invite them out of their 'rabbit hole' of the 3 Fs and to learn from the experience, to do self-care, to intervene in their own state of 'Being', to deflate the 3Fs with some long deep, relaxing, centering, and harmonizing breaths. Each breath you take helps calm the nervous system, bring in more oxygen to the pumping heart, and change the body chemistry imbalance.

The fifth vital center of energy is what I call 'Becoming.' In our True Storytelling book (Larsen, Boje, & Bruun, 2020), the fifth principle 'You must be able to help stories on their way and be open to experiment.'" In chakra parlance, it's the 'throat chakra,' located at the larynx. It's of course about voice, finding it, using it, but also giving space to listen to others' voices than your own ego-babble. To connect to this energy center, seek a feeling of unlimited space and plenty. Gurudev Chitrabhanu says to 'sit alone and relaxed, holding your attention on the inner dot of light. Remember, this point of light is Love" (1970: 48), the 'Heart Chakra'. TO help stories on their way and to experiment, is done by changing our habitual mode of thinking and feeling. Begin to enlarge this point of light that is Love. And remind yourself "This is my True Self which does not want to hate anybody. When I am

reconciled with those whom I have hated, I will be happy because I shall have come to my True Self" (IBID.) which is the 'Higher Self.' The goal is more than forgiveness, it is to reweave your thinking mind, so you can expand the space of listening to people with whom you are estranged. In AA, I wrote the names of people I had strong negative feelings about on separate cards, and then ask 'why this resentment?' I go into the early occurrences of the "Before" to respect stories already there. Observe wisdom entering the space so constricted with resentment, anger, hatred, etc., and watch as wisdom breaks down barriers, opening a space with abundance, gratitude, and wisdom. Over the past thirty years, Grace Ann Rosile and I have developed the 'TogetherStorying' coaching method, to go back in time to the resentment event, and instead of digging that rabbit hole deeper, we invite in wisdom of 'Little Wow Moments' (LWMs) of exception to all that rejection and negativity to enter the space, and in that way to release the stuck story filter, and engage a new story, a not 'Bet on the Future' and a new 'state of Being' in existence, in which people get to move past, PTSD, trauma, sexual assault, violence, and deep hurts to create a new kind of existence of 'TogetherStorying' by 'restorying' the 'old stuck story' infusing it with five to seven or more 'LWMs' that tip the balance to a new story of the future of possibilities. This is not only a pivotal energy center for individual change and transformation, it is highly effective for families to find higher ground, and for organizations to get unstuck from dysfunctional 'story filters' and find LWMs of the forgotten past, that are a stairway to a new story of the future of wisdom and abundance.

Now, the foundation is established, and we can engage the amazing part of the transformative power of restorying, the 'Between' and the 'Beyond.'

The sixth vital center of energy is the 'Third Eye' chakra, located at the center of the brow, and its energy is often blocked. In the 'True Storytelling' book (Larsen, Boje, and Bruun, 2020), the Sixth Principle is "You must consider staging, including scenography and artifacts." In our book on organizational strategy, we did not connect this way of communicating 'Between' people who think and believe differently, with the energy center called since ancient times, the 'Third Eye.' Most people have no idea how to access and use the energy of the 'Third Eye.' I call it the "Between" because it is the 'with-whom' we establish connection 'with' and 'Between' one another. In today's world of silos of social media, each with its own versions of the news, it is better just to 'STOP' talking, to 'stay silent and only say something when you have love in your heart, maybe that's the meaning of timing, not an opportune (Kairitic) moment to persuade, but not speaking from your particular bias, because your words will only get rejected, because they do not convey any 'real essence of truth' (Chitrabanu, 1979: 58). When I speak in anger, the person stops listening, and just becomes angry. He or she cannot hear my words, only my emotion, and that emotion bounces back and forth 'Between' us. The words do not come from my heart, and they never enter their heart. How do we communicate meaningfully 'Between' and 'with' others? The answer is to remain silent. Only when I speak from a heart full of love, will I be heard. At the level of 'Between' we can begin to observe and understand the connection 'Between' space, true Self, speech, hearing, and love.

Meditation is a way to discipline our thinking. It takes practice to see with the "Third Eye" instead of just with our two 'physical eyes.' The 'Third Eye' is opening and closing. With practice you can learn to say 'yes' to your thoughts when it is open, and to say 'no' to your own thoughts when the 'Third Eye' is closed. Learning when to stay silent, to not speak in the fray of the humdrum of existence

(Being), and when to make a connection 'Between' those from different silos, political parties, religions, etc. In quantum storytelling, we see, we are our own observer of our inner negative thoughts, negative emotions, and negative beliefs. The 'Third Eye' knows for 'with' and 'Between' connections to happen, to say 'No' to our negativity, our rebuttals, our acts of persuasion, etc. And when to say 'Yes' to expanding the space of our heart, and let our 'True Self' express and hear love.

The highest level of wisdom and awareness is the seventh center of vital energy, which I call the Beyond. In the "True Storytelling" book (Larsen, Boje, and Bruun, 2020), the Seventh Principle is "You must reflect on the stories and how they create value." The authors debated how far the transcend path 'Beyond' the physical realm of existence to go. Here, I am going quite far. The seventh level of energy, 'Beyond' transcends the bounds of our physical organism" (Chitrabanu, 1979: 82). It is a point of awareness of 'Oneness' that is 'Beyond' all dualities. It is our highest vantage point, and as we shall explore, the simple questions of who, what, when, where, why, with, and wish take on different meanings from the B1 to B7 (Beneath, Before, Bets, Being, Becoming, Between, & Beyond). We ascend from transactional ego-possessiveness (as the defining value, to higher values of community the we of 'Between' and then Beyond all possessions, into the Beyond space, time, and materiality.

Yes, I am focused here on the 'spiritual,' where our eternal Higher Self dwells in its 'Inner Divinity.' I was born into Catholicism, named after David the Beloved and Michael the Archangel, and bestowed the Danish word 'Boje' which means 'Buoy.' In short 'Beloved Archangel, Buoy.' Then in my first marriage, my mother-in-law renounced Catholicism, to get back at her dad, who did unspeakables to her. So the implied marriage contract included a covenant to never let our children or grandchildren or their children set one foot inside any Catholic Church, forevermore. At first, we embraced Lutheranism, but that did not take root, We found a 'Four Square' Church we later learned was part of the "Aimee Sample McPherson" evangelical movement in Los Angeles. We were Isian in the 'Spirit; spoke in tongues. I taught men's bible study, my daughter taught one for teens. Our family made friends with other families in the Four Square Church. One Sunday morning, the pastor summoned me into his office just before service. He said, "God has spoken to me, and you are to leave the church, take your family with you, do not say a word to any of the members of this church, and never return." I asked for more explanation, he refused, I said "God did not say this to me." He was silent, pointing to the door.

It ripped my family apart, my children forbidden to speak to their dearest friends, our friends in the Four Square, forbidden to speak a word to us, ever again. Divorce followed, after 24 years of marriage. Then one day, I met someone I remembered from the Four Square church, and he motioned to me. I got ex-communicated from the same Four Square Church as you. "Do you know why this happened?" He told me, and these are his words, "the pastor and his wife were ripping off the building fund. Remember how they drove a new car, lived in a great house in Culver City, and their kids always dressed in new clothes." "Yes, but I did not think much about it," I replied. Whenever someone like you or me got into a position of leading something, the pastor would get scared, and excommunicate them 'David, you taught in a management school, right. Yes at UCLA, and then at Loyola Marymount. "OK, you could know accounting and bookkeeping and spot the

theft by the pastor and his wife.” I did recall all the times the basket was passed, and we were told to drive the second-hand car, wear thrift shop clothes, and not focus on material things.

It was an awakening. Later I met Dr Grace Ann Rosile, and now married 30 years, just had our anniversary. I made several trips to India, with Gurudev Shree chitrabanu, the Jainism monk, and I adopted Jainism as my philosophy of the ‘Beyond,’ and now I concern myself with reincarnation, ridding myself of karma, and so on.

Chapter One: Beneath — The Realm of Masks

"We enter our wardrobe closet, select a very egotistical, acting-out inner child, or our most severe inner critical mask. We don the clothing to suit the beneath-mask. We look in the mirror and see this who reflecting at us, but deep down we suspect it is not our true self."

Many people don't show a "true self" at work; instead they slip into repeatable personas that manage risk, belonging, and status in the organizational theater.



Unmasking the Personas: Reflections on Workplace Masks in Coaching and Consulting

By David Michael Boje

January 5, 2025

As David Michael Boje, I have spent decades unraveling the intricate webs of storytelling that shape organizations, from my early days at UCLA to my current role as Professor Emeritus at New Mexico State University, visiting professor at Fisk University, and Director of Socio-Economic-Organizational-Development at PerView, Inc. My journey, detailed in my vita (davidboje.com/vita), has led me to pioneer concepts like antenarrative—the fragmented, bets-on-the-future stories before they crystallize into rigid narratives—and quantum storytelling, where multiple realities 'superposition' in organizational life. In my 2025 document, "Accessing Cues of Masks of Coaches and Consultants in the Workplace" (available at

<https://togetherstorying.com>), I delve into how coaches and consultants, much like actors in an organizational theater, don't show a "true self" at work; instead, they slip into repeatable personas that manage risk, belonging, and status in the organizational theater," I wrote there, drawing on my lifelong exploration of how narratives suppress authenticity.

This reflection builds on that work, weaving in Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, Paulo Freire's distinction between dialogical and antialogical action, and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of answerability within the once-occurrent eventness of Being. These theorists resonate deeply with my frameworks, as seen in my publications like *Storytelling Organizations* (2008) and *Narrative Methods for Organizational & Communication Research* (2001), where I critique how power-laden stories perpetuate inauthenticity. Let me share my insights in this first-person narrative, quoting directly from my writings and integrating these lenses to unmask the performative layers in coaching and consulting.

The Organizational Theater: Goffman's Dramaturgical Lens on Masks

In my view, organizations are living stories, not static structures—a theme I explored in my 1995 article, "Stories of the storytelling organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as 'Tamara-Land,'" where I described how narratives fragment across spaces like a multi-room play. This aligns seamlessly with Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analysis in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), where life is a performance with front-stage impressions and back-stage realities. Coaches and consultants, as key performers, adopt "personal fronts"—stable cues signaling competence—to manage impressions. As I noted in my 2025 document, the "Hypercompetent expert Consultant: Projects certainty, control, and mastery to avoid showing doubt or learning edges, often suppressing curiosity and helpseeking. This aligns with Goffman's 'personal front,' the stable cues used to signal competence."

Goffman's metaphor of masks as tools for impression management reveals the emotional toll. Front-stage, the "Always Positive" professional Coach must display "constant enthusiasm and calm even when stressed or angry, a form of surface acting that often increases emotional exhaustion and burnout," as I directly quoted in my work. Back-stage, the true self—doubts, frustrations—remains hidden, leading to what I call "anaemic stories" in my 2004 presentation with Rosile and Gardner, where narratives lose vitality under systemic pressures. See davidboje.com

This dramaturgical divide stifles the quantum potential I advocate, where superposition allows for vulnerability and multiple narrative paths.

Freire's Dialogical vs. Antialogical: Masks as Barriers to True Encounter

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) has profoundly influenced my approach to organizational transformation, particularly in coaching through PerView's Processes of Embodied Restorying (PER). Freire contrasts dialogical action—horizontal, problem-posing

dialogue that fosters liberation—with antidialogical action, which is vertical, banking-style imposition that maintains oppression. In the workplace, masks embody antidialogical forces, preventing genuine dialogue between coaches, consultants, and their teams.

Consider the "Loyal Company Citizen Internal Consultant," who "Performs visible commitment, optimism about strategy, and agreement with leadership, even when privately doubtful or cynical, to fit 'feeling rules' about appropriate workplace emotion," as I described. This is antidialogical: it enforces conformity, suppressing the dialogical potential for critical reflection. In my consulting practice, detailed on davidboje.com, I use the VIEW Framework—Vibrations, Inside thoughts/emotions, Energy, and Waves—to detect these masks and shift toward dialogical restorying. "Many employees adopt protective masks at work—learned personas that manage approval, status, and safety but often distance them from their felt experience and values," I emphasized, echoing Freire's call to humanize through dialogue. Without unmasking, organizations remain sites of "cultural invasion," as Freire terms it, where antidialogical masks perpetuate power imbalances and hinder ethical growth.

Bakhtin's Answerability: Embracing the Once-Occurrent Eventness of 'Being'

Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy, particularly in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993), has been a cornerstone of my antenarrative theory since I coined the term in 2001. Bakhtin stresses "answerability"—our ethical responsibility in the once-occurrent eventness of Being, that unique, unrepeatable moment where we must respond authentically. In organizational storytelling, masks evade this answerability, turning living events into scripted performances.

For instance, the "Mask of Perfection" in consultants—"Appearing flawless, never uncertain, and hiding mistakes to avoid judgment, which can drive overwork, anxiety, and burnout"—dodges the once-occurrent by prioritizing repeatable personas over ethical engagement. As Bakhtin writes, "I occupy a place in once-occurrent Being that is unique and never repeatable," urging us to answer not with masks but with embodied presence. In my 2008 book *Storytelling Organizations*, I argue that narratives must embrace polyphony—multiple voices—to honor this eventness, a concept I expand in quantum storytelling: "Where multiple possibilities exist simultaneously in a superposition of narrative potential," as quoted in my vita.

The "Bully or controlling mask," using "dominance, criticism, or micromanagement to hide insecurity and keep others at a distance," exemplifies a failure of answerability, reducing others to objects rather than co-authors in the event. Through my work with veterans and families at TogetherStorying (togetherstorying.com), I facilitate restorying to reclaim this Bakhtinian ethic, moving from monologic masks to dialogic (Freirean) encounters.

Performance, Approval, and Emotional Masks: A Synthesis

Integrating these lenses, let's examine clusters of masks. In performance masks, the "Overachiever/Hyperproductivity mask: Equating worth with constant output, taking on extra tasks, and not showing limits or fatigue," reflects Goffman's front-stage hustle, Freire's

antidialogical self-oppression, and Bakhtin's evasion of once-occurrent limits. Approval masks, like the "Peoplepleasing: Going out of the way to keep others happy, downplaying one's own needs or boundaries to avoid conflict or rejection," block Freirean dialogue.

Emotional control masks, such as the "Rational/neutral: Hiding emotion behind logic and detachment to fit norms that privilege being 'objective' and nonreactive," maintain dramaturgical distance, while defensive masks like the "Martyr or victim mask: Framing oneself as overburdened or wronged to protect self-esteem and avoid owning one's contribution to problems," shirk Bakhtinian responsibility. Finally, emotional labor masks—"Surface acting: Faking required emotions (friendly, upbeat, caring) while feeling something very different inside; strongly linked with higher stress and emotional exhaustion"—highlight the exhaustion of inauthentic performance.

Toward Authentic Restorying: My Call to Action

As I reflect on my career—from my Ph.D. at the University of Illinois to my 2025 ODC Lifetime Achievement Award—I've witnessed how unmasking fosters quantum shifts. In *Storytelling Organizational Practices: Managing in the Quantum Age* (2014), I advocate embracing antenarrative bets to restory organizations ecologically. Coaches and consultants must access these cues, using PER's seven steps to integrate body, mind, and spirit.

By drawing on Goffman to reveal the theater, Freire to ignite dialogue, and Bakhtin to demand answerability, we can transform workplaces from masked performances to once-occurrent, dialogical events. As I often say, quoting my own inspiration from Bakhtin: storytelling is not just recounting; it's ethical co-creation in the unrepeatable now. Let's unmask and restory together.

The masks we all wear get in the way of our 'true self.' Next, we inhabit families and organizations replete with fragmentation and terse-telling.

Research Note: In eight months of ethnographic recordings and transcriptions organizational storytelling, including coaching, I noticed that in a corporation, people rarely told a complete story from beginning to end. That is because many things in life, with experience, become '*universal*.' People who work together, do not want all the gritty details of a story that is mostly routine. Only outsiders, and newbies need the blow by blow, and to be told what was significant or trivial about it. Those who worked together, are in-the-know, and were expected to leave you many details, and repetitive events, they expected those in the know of an event, could fill in the blanks with your own knowledge or just a "you know' the story or etc." (see Boje, 1991a; 1991b). People are skilled at filling in the sensory details, the dialogue, what happened first, then what, and how it ended. Military, police, fire, and emergency responders tell their story tersely because only what is unique or stands out needs to be communicated in any details. Husbands and wives do not need to recount details, telling it tersely, because they rely on their spouse to know typical routines, and spot new process-steps or outcomes.

All this has a name, intersubjectivity. We will in the blanks in a tersely told story, but filling in the blanks with deductions about what is typical and universal in a situation. Not always accurate, but people make do with what is called collective consciousness of the universal and make their deductions.

The Foundation of Fragmentation

Level One operates at B1 Beneath, where all seven Ws are trapped in masks, biology, linear time, fixed locations, survival imperatives, egoism, and selfish wishes. This is the realm most people inhabit for their entire lives, never questioning the authenticity of the reflection they see in the mirror each morning. For families experiencing the return of a service member, this level manifests as the painful gap between who they were before deployment and who everyone has become in the intervening years.



At this foundational level, consciousness is characterized by surface-level awareness, reactivity, and the constant performance of socially constructed roles. The veteran dons the "tough warrior" mask, the spouse maintains the "holding it together" mask, and children wear whatever adaptive mask allows them to navigate the household's emotional minefield. These are not conscious choices but deeply conditioned responses to trauma, societal expectations, and survival needs.

W1: Who — The Mask as Identity

At the Beneath level, "Who" refers to the mask we present to the world and, tragically, to ourselves. This is not the authentic self but rather a carefully curated persona designed for survival, social acceptance, or psychological protection. We enter our wardrobe closet each morning and select from an array of masks: the egotistical acting-out inner child, the severe inner critic, the people-pleasing peacemaker, the withdrawn protector.

The returning veteran might wear the "I'm fine" mask to protect family members from the horrors witnessed overseas. The spouse might don the "super-competent solo parent" mask to prove they managed just fine during the deployment. Children might wear "everything's normal" masks to avoid adding to parental stress. Each mask is understandable, even adaptive in the short term, but collectively they create a household of strangers performing for one another.

The wardrobe we select to suit these beneath-masks becomes completely inauthentic to our true nature. A combat medic might dress in business casual for a corporate job, feeling the dissonance between their warrior identity and their spreadsheet reality. A military spouse might dress for PTA meetings while internally screaming at the superficiality of suburban life after years of managing deployment stress alone. The clothing, the hairstyle, the body language—all of it performs a "who" that feels increasingly hollow.

Unfortunately, it takes most people a lifetime to go beneath their mask, and for many, they never find their true self. They accept what they see in the mirror as their authentic identity. The tragedy compounds when families operate at this level simultaneously but independently—each person performing their mask, never meeting in authentic encounter.

Exercises in TogetherStorying Coaching Restorying Conversation

TogetherStorying Coaching Conversations is defined here as a process of Induction-Deduction-Abduction (IDA) co-inquiry with clients over a discrete period to invite them to make self-correcting restorying choices.

Objectives:

1. For coaches to become more effective and skilled in TogetherStorying Coaching conversational practices.
 - a. Do coaches ask **permission** to ask questions about negative emotions, thoughts, and limiting beliefs?
 - b. Do coaches let the client make their own **choices** instead of giving advice?
2. To observe the patterns of Vujade that clients engage during TogetherStorying Coaching.
 - a. Do client's words depict more/fewer **visual** scenes, use **kinesthetic** (all five senses in storying), and what is the **auditory** in pace and tempo (fast, slow) ?
 - b. Does client use more process (lots of and then this, and then that happened) or outcome (just results, gaps, no sequence, surface, no detail) focused storying?
3. To assess client's VIEW of their comfort level, energy, and well-being with each step in the TogetherStorying Coaching Conversation?
 - a. **Vibrations** (what do you feel in your body right now?)
 - b. **Internal** negative thoughts and emotions in this step?
 - c. **Energy** on scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high)
 - d. **Waves** of quantum frequency collapsed into what choice by the client?

Exercise One: Filling in the Blanks in Tersely Told Stories.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Get into groups of 3.
2. Person A, **name one activity** you have typical 'deep involvement' (such as jogging, driving, reading, writing, watching a movie, painting a picture, making something, etc.), and **give**

very few, vague, quite sketchy, minimalist, terse telling in only one sentence. Then stay silent for one full minute.

3. Person B and C, **eyes closed**, use your creative imagination (without questions) during Person A's terse statement, then Open Eyes, and WRITE DOWN to fill in the blanks and gaps in Person A's words and one sentence. Write several sentences using **your creative visual, kinesthetic (5 senses), and auditory (self-talk) that you believe must be performed so A's terse story could be effectively communicated**.
4. *Person A, close your eyes and stay silent. Person B and C **take turns to share two or three of their written sentences, while Person A has their eyes closed and remains silent**.* Person B and C, take additional note of how Person A reacts (if at all) to what you have read out?
5. **Switch roles, and repeat the exercise**, so everyone gets to be Person A, everyone gets fill in the blanks as Person B and C. We will debrief after all had their turn. Use your own experience in this exercise as your teacher. Take about 5 minutes for each round and be done in 15 minutes.

Debrief After the Breakout Exercise is Completed

1. What kind of things in Person A's performance did they do that allowed you to fill in your state of consciousness with your own created experience of visual, kinesthetic (five senses), or auditory (including self-talk)?
2. What kinds of things in Person A's performance did they do that seemed to make it easier or harder (incongruous, non sequitur) for you to go deeper into the experience?
3. What was jarring or invitational about Person A's performance?
4. What led you to be more relaxed or anxious in Person A's performance?

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All this has a name, intersubjectivity. We will in the blanks in a tersely told story, but filling in the blanks with deductions about what is typical and universal in a situation. Not always accurate, but people make do with what is called collective consciousness of the universal and make their deductions.

Exercise Two: Filling in the Blanks in Tersely Told Stories. Form the same groups of three people. Do the same exercise again. This time, I want Person A to restrict yourself to descriptions of what ***must be there in sensory experience*** and ***to be non-specific***. One other change. Person A, match the tempo and pace of your speech acts to Person B's and C's breathing. Match your TogetherStorying to your own breathing, tempo and pace of performing your account. Try these changes and find out what impact it has. Take two minutes apiece, and don't discuss it. Do notice and silently note if it feels different this time. It should take 8 to 10 minutes at most for everyone in your group to, switch roles, and complete this exercise.

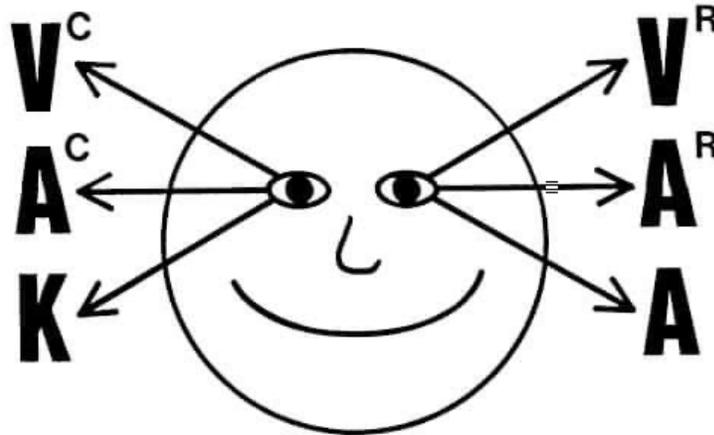
Debrief

1. Did you notice any difference in your experience, even with just that small amount of instruction?
2. Is there anyone for whom it was not different at all than the first exercise?

Practice Note: People engage in mostly unconscious biofeedback, matching the breathing rate, movements of body (& gestures) with the teller's voice temp and body language. That conversational dance of ongoing client biofeedback to the coach biofeedback is critical to understand. Coaches natural (not forced or exaggerated) biofeedback matching the coach's question tone and pace to client's breathing and to the tempo of client's answers is important to making it easier for clients to relax, go with the flow. If the client is getting positive, enthusiastic, the coach does not react in monotone, detachment, or stiff as a board, but rather the coach reinforces the transformation unfolding with increase in temp, pace, and emphasis. In sum, biofeedback is a way to induct the client's 'altered state of consciousness' so they can fill in the blank the coach leaves, with client's own experiences, and creative imagination. It is reinforcing the transition from stuck in the past, to moving out of the rabbit hole, envisioning new positive choice, that helps the coach know which questions to ask, and which are redundant to the client's biofeedback by providing the client, the context in which to make choices of well-being. If that is not happening, the coach knows to go back a few steps, to do something different, because it's not unfolded in the expected process steps, or getting the client's anticipate outcome for the session.

Exercise Three Practice accessing cues for a normally organized person. Form the same groups of three people. This time, Person A indicates whether they are left-handed, right-handed, or ambidextrous.

Visual accessing cues for a "normally organized" right-handed person.



V^C Visual constructed images. V^R Visual remembered (eidetic) images.

(Eyes defocused and unmoving also indicates visual accessing.)

A^C Auditory constructed sounds or words. A^R Auditory remembered sounds or words.

K Kinesthetic feelings (also smell and taste). A Auditory sounds or words.

| | |
|--|--|
| V^R Visual remembered (eidetic) images | V^C Visual constructed images. |
| (Eyes defocused and unmoving also indicates visual accessing.) | |
| A^R Auditory remembered sounds or words | A^C Auditory constructed sounds or words. |
| A Auditory sounds or words | K Kinesthetic feelings (also smell and taste). |

Source: Bandler, Richard; Grinder, John (1979: 25) *Frogs into Princes: Neuro Linguistic Programming*; Moah, Utah: Real People Press. In *Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James suggested that internal representations and eye movements may be related.

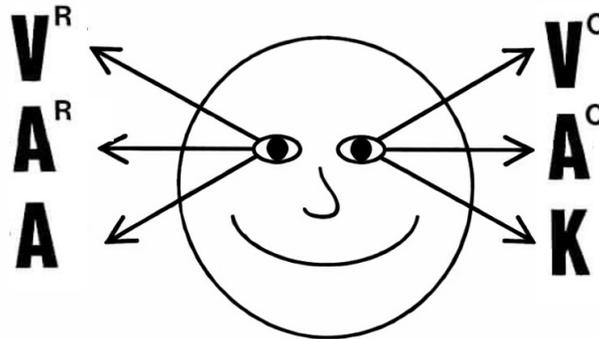
As a Left-handed person, I want to understand why there are no VAK pattern charts specifically for left-handed individuals, consider the following points:

- VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) learning styles are generally based on right-handed norms.

- Most educational resources are designed with right-handed users in mind, leading to a lack of left-handed adaptations.
- Research on learning styles often overlooks the differences in cognitive processing between left-handed and right-handed individuals.
- Left-handed learners may not fit neatly into the VAK categories, as their brain lateralization can differ.
- There is limited demand or awareness for left-handed specific learning resources in educational settings.
- Developing tailored VAK charts for left-handed individuals would require further research and validation.

For the first time ever, here is a Visually accessing cues chart designed for Left-Handed People

Accessing cues for a “normally organized” left-handed person.



| | |
|---|---|
| V^R Visual remembered (eidetic) images (Eyes defocused and unmoving also indicates visual accessing.) | V^C Visual constructed images. |
| A^R Auditory remembered sounds or words | A^C Auditory constructed sounds or words. |
| A Auditory sounds or words | K Kinesthetic feelings (also smell and taste). |

Exercise Four: Practice reusing the client’s words and metaphors, instead of substituting your own. Form the same groups of three people. This time Person A, taking role of coach, and review the first objective (coaches ask **permission** to ask questions about negative emotions, thoughts, and limiting beliefs, and coaches be careful to encourage the client make their own **choices**, instead of you giving coaching advice). Person A, I want you to avoid making up ‘theories we call ‘Deductions’ about your client, and instead, to use Induction and or Abduction. Here are definitions:

- **Deduction** is your theory of what is typical of people in the client's situation based upon what is considered universal experience. For example, the client uses a thought to answer your question about emotion they are feeling. The deduction is, it could be disassociation of feelings and thoughts, inability to express a feeling, and only respond in a thought. Best practice is to let the client discover it. If it's necessary, ask the client if they noticed they keep responding with thoughts, when you asked for emotions or feelings.
- **Induction** is you asking your client for a case, or incident until the client in the session the client has disclosed multiple induction cases. With enough cases, you can deduce a pattern or theory based on client's shared case-experiences. There are, however, coaching situations, often, where abduction is needed.
- **Abduction** is your unconscious, intuition, you guess about what is going in in the client's state of consciousness with little or no evidence. It is not a hypothesis that is your educated (knowledge) guess. Abduction is theory without proof, or just a wild guess from your unconscious intuition, or unconsciousness, or some psychic biofeedback channeling.

W2: What — The Biological Imperative

At the Beneath level, "What" is purely biological—the 36 trillion living cells of our body, the superorganism navigating an environment of trillions of other superorganisms. We are cellular machinery responding to biochemical signals, hormonal cascades, and neurological patterns laid down through evolution and trauma. The body keeps the score, as Bessel van der Kolk famously documented, storing combat trauma in the veteran's hypervigilant nervous system, deployment stress in the spouse's adrenal fatigue, and parental absence in the child's attachment wounds.

From plants to bees, from gut bacteria to the human genome, we exist as biological entities on the superorganism Gaia, planet Earth, itself part of a vast universe of galaxies, solar systems, and planets. At this level, "what" we are is fundamentally material—flesh, blood, neurons firing, chemicals binding to receptors. The hyperarousal of PTSD is a biological "what," the stress-induced inflammation is a biological "what," the attachment disruption is a biological "what."

While this biological "what" is critical to survival—we cannot transcend our embodiment—it represents only the most rudimentary understanding of our essence. At higher levels of awareness, the biological becomes contextualized within energetic, relational, and spiritual frameworks. But here, beneath the masks, we are trapped in viewing ourselves and our loved ones as purely biological machines that malfunction, break down, and require fixing.

W3: When — The Tyranny of Linear Time

At the Beneath level, "When" is linear time, artificially split by Aristotle (350 BCE) into beginning, middle, and end. This temporal structure dominates Western consciousness so thoroughly that we rarely question its constructed nature. The deployment has a clear start date and end date. Childhood has stages. Careers have trajectories. Everything marches forward in an irreversible line from past through present to future.

For families, this linear temporality creates devastating narratives: "Before deployment, our family was X." "During deployment, everything fell apart." "After return, nothing will ever be the same." The veteran is stuck in combat moments that won't recede into the past. The spouse is exhausted by the endless present of solo parenting. Children are confused about why "when daddy/mommy comes home" never restored the promised normalcy.

Linear time at this level is traumatic time—stuck, repetitive, inescapable. The intrusive memories return with the same vividness as the original events. The anniversary dates trigger the same cascade of emotions. The developmental milestones missed during deployment create permanent gaps in the family timeline. How ridiculous linear time will seem when you achieve higher levels of temporal awareness, but here beneath the masks, it is an iron cage.

This Aristotelian temporality prevents families from accessing cyclical time, seasonal rhythms, or the quantum reality where past, present, and future exist simultaneously. They are trapped on the timeline, measuring everything in before and after, unable to recognize that healing might require escaping linear causality entirely.

W4: Where — The Fixed Location of Fear

At the Beneath level, "Where" is simply a location in space—relatively fixed, relatively meaningless beyond its coordinates. Home is an address. The base is a set of GPS coordinates. The combat zone is a geographic region. People at this level typically seek stability and immobility as a place to hide from their fears. The family home becomes a fortress against the chaos of deployment, or it becomes a prison from which there is no escape.

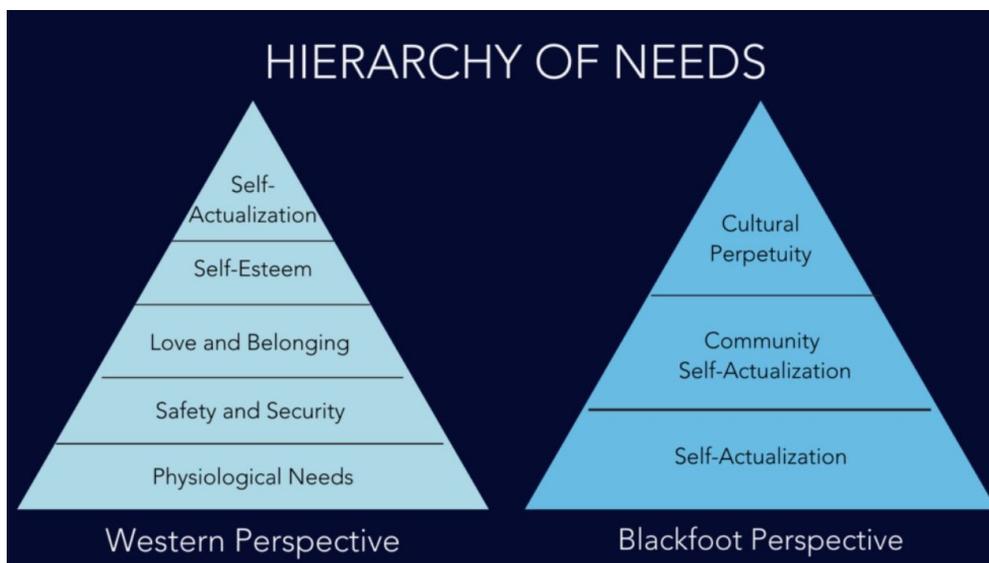
The returning veteran may feel most safe in the garage, creating a buffer zone between the war zone and the domestic zone. The spouse may have claimed certain rooms as their territory during the deployment, creating invisible boundaries the returnee unconsciously violates. Children may have designated hiding spots where they retreat when parental conflict erupts. Each "where" is a transaction—a place to perform a role, a location to avoid triggers, a space defined by what it prevents rather than what it enables.

There is no sense of place as relational, as energetic, as sacred. The question "where are you?" receives only physical answers: "I'm in the kitchen." "I'm at work." "I'm in my room." No one asks or answers the more essential question: "Where are you in your being? Where are you in your heart? Where are you in relation to your authentic self and to this family?"

At this level, families treat their shared home as a collection of separate territories rather than as a relational field. They coexist in the same structure but inhabit different wheres—the where of isolation, the where of performance, the where of hiding. These fragmented locations mirror and reinforce their fragmented narratives.

W5: Why — The Prison of Survival

At the Beneath level, "Why" is purely about survival. Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which dominates psychological thinking about motivation, was shaped by his 1938 visit to the Blackfoot (Siksika) Nation in Alberta, Canada. Unfortunately, Maslow lived among the Blackfoot for only a few weeks and fundamentally misunderstood their ceremonies and philosophy. He reframed what he read of Blackfoot thought into a Western mindset of individualism, placing self-actualized individuals at the top of his hierarchy and community at the bottom.



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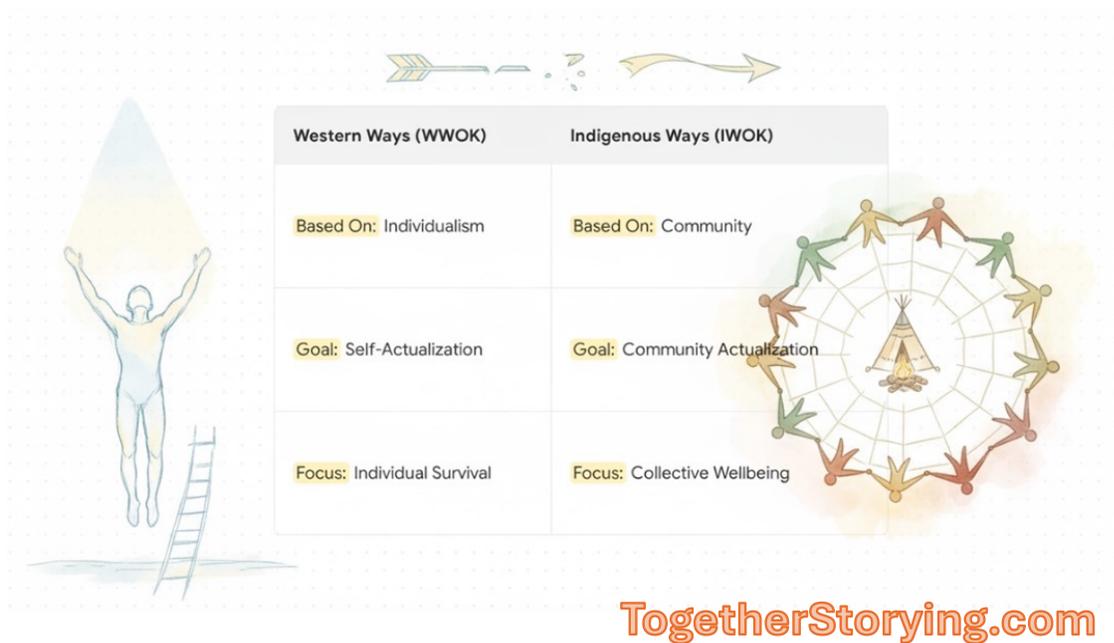
This represents a whitewashing of Indigenous practices. Maslow missed that healthier individuals are embedded in community, and their connection to sustainability exists in relationship to the land, animals, and seasons. The Blackfoot understanding placed community actualization at the center, with individuals flourishing through their contributions to collective wellbeing. But Western psychology adopted Maslow's inverted pyramid, and now we operate with a "why" focused on individual survival and individual achievement.

For families at the Beneath level, this survival-focused "why" manifests as: "Why did I deploy? To provide financial security." "Why did I hold the family together? To survive." "Why do I keep my distance? To avoid triggering my trauma." Every action is justified through the narrow lens of individual or immediate family survival, with no awareness of broader purpose, community contribution, or spiritual meaning.

The returning veteran's hypervigilance is explained as survival adaptation. The spouse's controlling behaviors are rationalized as necessary for family survival during deployment. The children's emotional shutdown is accepted as survival strategy. All of this may be true at the biological level, but it traps the family in a "why" that never transcends mere survival to embrace thriving, meaning, or connection.

W6: With — The Ego's Transactional Relationships

At the Beneath level, "With" in Western Ways of Knowing (WWOK) is about the egoism of individuals on a transactional plane. Relationships are contracts: "I will do X if you do Y." "I stayed faithful during your deployment, so you owe me." "I served my country, so my family should accommodate my needs." Each interaction is measured, tallied, kept in balance sheets of obligation and resentment.



This transactional "with" creates the separate stories that TogetherStorying seeks to heal. The veteran has a story of sacrifice and service. The spouse has a story of abandonment and resilience. The children have stories of confusion and adaptation. These stories exist in parallel, occasionally colliding but never truly merging into a shared narrative. Each family member is "with" the others only in the sense of physical proximity and legal relationship, not in authentic communion.

In contrast, Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWOK) understand "with" as embedded community—the individual exists only in relationship to the collective, the land, the ancestors, and future generations. But families operating at the Beneath level have no access to this relational ontology. They remain trapped in individualistic frameworks where "with" means "alongside" at best and "against" at worst, but never "as part of a greater whole."

At higher levels of awareness, "with" takes on meanings of universe, oneness, and intuitive awareness of inner self and inner divinity. But here beneath the masks, "with" is reduced to the

question: "What do I get from being with you?" This transactional consciousness ensures that family members remain separate, calculating, and defended rather than open, generous, and connected.

W7: Wish — The Selfishness of Survival

At the Beneath level, "Wish" in Western Ways of Knowing (WWOK) has a very self-centered, even selfish, intention. The veteran wishes to be left alone with their trauma. The spouse wishes for the pre-deployment life to return. The children wish for parents who aren't angry or distant. Each wish is understandable, even legitimate, but fundamentally individualistic and often mutually exclusive.

These wishes operate in separate orbits, occasionally acknowledged but rarely integrated. The family might gather for a "wish discussion" where each person states their desires, but without a shared framework for prioritizing or synthesizing these wishes, they simply become additional sources of conflict. "You wish for alone time, but I wish for connection—whose wish matters more?"

The tragedy is that these Beneath-level wishes, while legitimate expressions of pain and need, actually prevent the family from accessing deeper intentions. No one at this level wishes for transcendence of their conditioning, for clarity of inner divinity, or for oneness beyond dualities. Such wishes would seem absurd, impractical, or impossibly idealistic to consciousness operating beneath the masks.

In Eastern Ways of Knowing (EWOK), "wish" carries a "heart of care" meaning—the intention to transcend dependence on others, to find inner freedom, to contribute to collective awakening. But families at the Beneath level have no access to this understanding. Their wishes remain stuck in the realm of personal comfort, immediate relief, and individual fulfillment.

The Coherence of Beneath: A Complete System

What makes the Beneath level so difficult to escape is its internal coherence. Each W reinforces the others in a self-sealing system:

The masked "who" requires biological "what" explanations for behaviors

Linear "when" creates fixed past events that justify present masks

Physical "where" locations enable hiding and separation

Survival "why" validates all defensive behaviors

Transactional "with" prevents authentic vulnerability

Selfish "wish" ensures continued focus on individual needs over collective transformation

This coherence means you cannot simply change one W without addressing the entire system. A family cannot develop authentic "with" relationships while maintaining masked "who" identities.

They cannot access cyclical "when" while remaining trapped in survival "why." The seven Ws at the Beneath level form an interlocking cage.

Yet this is precisely where most families begin their TogetherStorying journey—stuck beneath their masks, operating from separate stories, each W contributing to the fragmentation. The power of understanding the Beneath level is recognizing that this is not moral failure but structural conditioning. These patterns were learned for survival, reinforced by culture, and embedded in family systems across generations.

Moving Beyond Beneath: The First Awakening

The recognition that one is operating beneath masks, that the seven Ws have drastically different meanings at higher levels of consciousness, represents the first crack in the cage. This recognition often comes through crisis—a divorce threat, a suicide attempt, a child's complete withdrawal—that makes the masks unsustainable. Or it comes through encounter with someone operating at a higher level whose very presence reveals the constructedness of the Beneath reality.

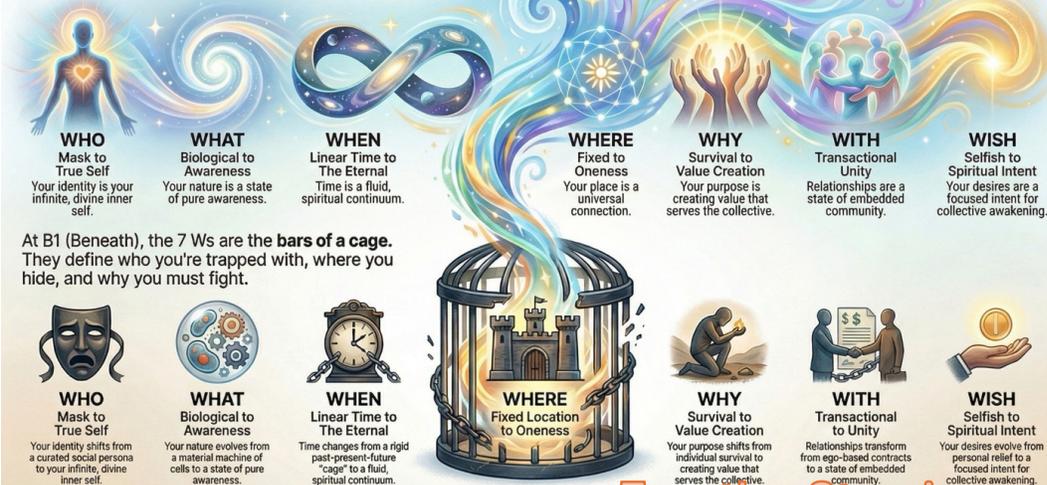


In TogetherStorying Coaching, this awakening is gently facilitated through the seven-step PERVIEW process. Families begin to question their automatic stories, to notice the masks they wear, to feel the constriction of linear time and fixed locations. They start experimenting with different answers to the seven Ws, discovering that "who" might include authentic self, "what" might include energy, "when" might be more fluid than they imagined.

But this awakening cannot be forced or rushed. Families need to understand the Beneath level thoroughly, to map its territory, to appreciate its adaptive functions, before they can begin the ascent to higher levels. The journey through the seven Bs is not about rejecting or transcending the biological, the temporal, or the spatial, but about expanding awareness to include additional dimensions of reality that were always present but not perceived.

From Cage to Wind: The Transformation of the 7 Ws

At B7 (Beyond), the 7 Ws become the **wind**. They are fluid energy that flows freely without boundaries.



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As we move to Chapter Two and the Before level, we will discover how the seven Ws begin their first transformation. The awakening has begun.

Chapter Two: Before — The Realm of Causality

"Before the mask, there was a face. Before the trauma, there was innocence. Before the separation, there was wholeness. The Before level awakens us to the causal chains that created our present reality."

The Temporal Precedence Awakening

At B2 Before, consciousness begins its first major transformation. Where the Beneath level operated in an eternal present of survival and performance, the Before level discovers temporal precedence—the recognition that current reality was created by prior conditions, and therefore different prior conditions could have created different realities. This seemingly simple insight contains revolutionary potential for families trapped in their present circumstances.

The Before level introduces causality as both explanation and possibility. For the veteran's family, this means beginning to trace the origins of present patterns: Before deployment, our relationship had these characteristics. Before combat exposure, I responded differently to stress. Before solo parenting, I trusted my partner differently. Before dad/mom left, I felt safer in the world. These "befores" are not just nostalgic memories but causal links that explain present reality.

Yet the Before level offers more than explanation—it offers agency. If present conditions arose from prior causes, then by understanding and potentially altering those causal chains, we can create

different futures. This is the first glimmer of empowerment beyond pure survival response. The family begins to see that their current fragmented narratives are not inevitable but rather consequences of specific historical sequences that could have unfolded differently.

W1: Who — Identity Before the Mask

At the Before level, "Who" expands to include the self that existed before the mask. The veteran begins to remember: "Before I became the warrior, who was I? Before the hypervigilance became my constant companion, what did I feel? Before I learned to suppress emotions for mission effectiveness, what was my emotional range?" This is not merely nostalgia but archaeological recovery of buried selfhood.

The spouse similarly excavates: "Before I became the super-competent solo parent, who was I? Before deployment forced me to be entirely self-reliant, what did interdependence feel like? Before I had to be both parents simultaneously, what was my actual parenting style?" These questions uncover layers of adaptation that obscured authentic identity.

Children at the Before level begin to articulate: "Before you left, I felt differently in my body. Before the angry outbursts, I trusted home as a safe place. Before the tension, I could be spontaneous." Their "who" starts to differentiate between the adapted self and glimpses of a more natural, less defended way of being.

Crucially, the Before level doesn't reject the masks developed at the Beneath level but rather contextualizes them. The masks were created before by specific circumstances, worn for specific reasons. Understanding this causality reduces shame—the masks weren't moral failures but adaptive responses to real threats. This compassionate understanding of how the masked "who" was constructed creates space for imagining a different "who" that might be constructed going forward.

W2: What — Substance Before Conditioning

At the Before level, "What" begins to distinguish between biological essence and conditioned patterns. The body's 36 trillion cells are not merely biological machinery but carriers of history—before trauma rewired the nervous system, before chronic stress altered the microbiome, before hypervigilance became the default state. The "what" we are now is a consequence of "what" we were before plus the experiences that reshaped our biology.

This understanding transforms how families relate to biological symptoms. The veteran's hyperarousal is not just "what I am" but "what I became before, during, and after combat exposure." The spouse's stress-induced health issues are not inherent traits but responses to specific circumstances that occurred before. This temporal framing introduces the possibility that different circumstances—different "befores"—might create different biological realities.

The Before level also recognizes ancestral and generational "whats." Before this family's current struggles, there were grandparents, great-grandparents, lineages of military service or civilian life, patterns of trauma and resilience passed down through epigenetic mechanisms. The "what" we are

biologically carries signatures from before our own birth, from before our parents' births, from deep ancestral history that shaped our genetic vulnerabilities and strengths.

While still operating primarily in biological terms, the Before level introduces historical depth that the Beneath level lacks. We are not just superorganisms navigating an environment but superorganisms shaped by specific evolutionary and biographical "befores" that made us vulnerable to specific traumas and resilient in specific ways. Understanding these causal chains opens possibilities for interrupting dysfunctional patterns and amplifying functional ones.

W3: When — The Discovery of Biographical Time

At the Before level, "When" undergoes its first major transformation beyond Aristotelian linearity. While still operating within linear time's framework, families begin to see that biographical time has texture, inflection points, and causal sequences that make some moments more significant than others. Not all "whens" are equal—some "befores" created cascading consequences that shaped all subsequent time.

The deployment becomes such an inflection point: Before deployment, during deployment, after deployment. Each period has its own temporal logic. Before deployment, time moved one way. During deployment, time became either frozen (for the waiting family) or hyperaccelerated (for the deployed service member experiencing compressed life-and-death intensity). After deployment, time struggles to resume its previous rhythm because everyone's temporal experience has fundamentally diverged.

The Before level introduces the concept of developmental "whens." Before the child turned five, attachment patterns were forming. Before adolescence, identity was more malleable. Before retirement age, the veteran's career arc created specific pressures. These developmental "befores" create windows of vulnerability and opportunity that families can now recognize and work with.

Critically, the Before level begins to question the irreversibility of linear time. If present reality was created by specific "befores," then perhaps we can access those "befores" not just as memories but as living potentials. In therapy, families begin "going back before the trauma" not physically but experientially, recovering capacities that were present before specific injuries occurred. This suggests that time might be more fluid than the Beneath level imagined, though the Before level hasn't yet fully grasped the implications.

W4: Where — Place as Historical Context

At the Before level, "Where" expands from mere physical location to include historical and relational context. The family home is not just a current address but a place with a history: Before we moved here, we lived there. Before the deployment, this house felt different. Before the return, these rooms had different meanings. Each "where" carries layered "befores" that shape current experience.

The deployment zone becomes a significant "where before"—the geographic location that forever changed the family's story. For the veteran, "where I was before" refers to combat theaters, forward

operating bases, patrol routes that are seared into body memory. For the family, "where we were before you left" refers to the home, the community, the social networks that had to be navigated alone.

The Before level recognizes that places hold memories and associations from previous times. The dinner table where family meetings happened before now carries the weight of difficult conversations. The garage where the veteran retreats now was once where father and son worked on projects together before. The bedroom that was intimate before deployment now feels like negotiated territory. Each "where" is haunted by its "befores."

This temporal layering of place allows families to begin healing spatial relationships. They can consciously create new associations, understanding that a place's meaning is not fixed but constructed through the experiences that occurred there before and can be reconstructed through intentional new experiences. The kitchen can become a place of connection again, but only by acknowledging the "before" when it represented conflict or avoidance.

W5: Why — Purpose Beyond Immediate Survival

At the Before level, "Why" begins to transcend immediate survival by incorporating historical purpose. The veteran remembers: "Before I joined the military, I had reasons—service, adventure, family tradition, economic necessity, idealism." These "befores" provide context for current struggles. The deployment made sense before within a larger narrative of purpose, even if that narrative has now been complicated by actual experience.

The spouse excavates: "Before the deployment, why did I support this choice? Before I understood the costs, what did I believe about military service?" These pre-deployment "whys" help explain current resentments or continued commitment. Understanding the reasoning that existed before doesn't justify present pain, but it contextualizes it within a larger arc of meaning.

The Before level also introduces generational "whys." Before this service member's experience, there were family patterns of military service or civilian life, historical events that shaped beliefs about duty and sacrifice, cultural narratives about what makes life meaningful. These ancestral "whys" run deeper than individual choice, connecting present struggles to longer historical purposes.

Importantly, the Before level recognizes that purposes evolve. The "why" that motivated joining the military before combat exposure may not survive intact after that exposure. The "why" that sustained solo parenting before return may not work after return. Acknowledging this evolution without shame allows families to consciously construct new shared purposes going forward, rather than remaining trapped in purposes that worked before but no longer serve.

W6: With — Relational Histories and Patterns

At the Before level, "With" discovers relational history. The transactional "with" of the Beneath level is revealed as constructed through specific interactions that occurred before: "Before the first deployment, we related differently. Before the trust was broken, intimacy felt safer. Before the

resentments accumulated, we gave each other more benefit of doubt." Each current relational pattern has a causal history.

This historical awareness transforms blame into understanding. The spouse's controlling behaviors aren't character flaws but patterns developed before, during solo parenting, when control was necessary for family survival. The veteran's emotional distance isn't rejection but a protective mechanism developed before, during combat, when emotional connection was dangerous. The child's anxiety isn't manipulation but a response to patterns observed before, during parental conflict.

The Before level also recognizes that each family member brought relational templates from before the relationship even began. Before meeting their spouse, the veteran had attachment patterns shaped by family of origin. Before becoming parents, both partners had models of parenting absorbed before from their own childhoods. Before conscious awareness, these templates have been shaping family dynamics.

Understanding these causal chains doesn't immediately transform relationships, but it creates compassion and possibility. If current relational patterns were learned before under specific circumstances, they can potentially be unlearned or modified under different circumstances. The "with" is not fixed but historically constructed, which means it can be reconstructed through conscious choice and different experiences.

W7: Wish — Intentions Shaped by History

At the Before level, "Wish" gains historical depth. Current wishes are revealed as outcomes of specific experiences that occurred before: "Before I experienced combat, I wished for adventure and meaning. Before I became a solo parent, I wished for partnership. Before I witnessed parental absence, I wished for normal family life." Each wish has a genealogy, a set of "befores" that shaped its emergence.

This temporal framing allows families to distinguish between wishes that arose from trauma versus wishes that represent authentic aspiration. The veteran's wish to be left alone may be a trauma response developed before, during combat, rather than a genuine preference for isolation. The spouse's wish for the pre-deployment relationship may be nostalgia for a reality that existed before awareness of current incompatibilities. The child's wish for parents to stop fighting may reflect developmental needs from before, when safety and stability were paramount.

The Before level also recognizes collective and cultural "wishes" that predate individual consciousness. Before this particular family's struggles, there were cultural narratives about what military families should wish for—support for the troops, sacrifice for the nation, resilience in adversity. These inherited wishes shape individual intentions in ways that aren't always conscious or aligned with authentic needs.

Understanding the historical construction of wishes creates freedom to choose new intentions. If current wishes were formed before under circumstances that no longer apply, families can

consciously construct wishes that better serve their present and future reality. This doesn't negate the validity of trauma-formed wishes but contextualizes them within a larger developmental arc that includes possibility for transformation.

The Coherence of Before: Causality as Liberation

The Before level creates its own coherent system, one that liberates families from the prison of eternal present that characterized the Beneath level:



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"Who" includes pre-mask identity, revealing the constructed nature of current personas

"What" incorporates historical and ancestral conditioning, expanding beyond pure biology

"When" discovers biographical inflection points that explain present reality

"Where" accumulates historical and relational meanings beyond mere location

"Why" connects to larger historical and generational purposes

"With" traces relational patterns to their causal origins

"Wish" recognizes the historical construction of intentions

This causal understanding is deeply empowering. If present reality arose from specific before, then different before could create different realities. This insight plants seeds for the Bets level, where families will actively experiment with different choices. But the Before level's work is essential groundwork—without understanding how we arrived at present circumstances, we cannot make informed choices about different directions.

The Shadow of Before: The Trap of Historical Determinism

Yet the Before level carries its own dangers. Some families become trapped in causal explanation, using "befores" to justify present stuckness rather than enable future movement. "Before the trauma, I was different, so I can never change." "Before deployment, our relationship worked, so we're doomed now." This historical determinism is the shadow side of causal awareness.

The Before level can also create paralyzing nostalgia. Families idealize the "before," making it impossible for present reality to measure up. The pre-deployment relationship becomes mythologized, erasing the actual conflicts and limitations that existed then. The pre-combat self becomes an impossible standard against which the current veteran always falls short. This nostalgia prevents acceptance of present reality and engagement with genuine possibility.

Additionally, the Before level's focus on historical causation can obscure present choice and future creation. By constantly looking backward to understand how we got here, families may fail to look forward to where they want to go. The Before level provides essential context but cannot by itself create transformation—that requires moving to the Bets level and beyond.

Moving Beyond Before: Toward Active Choice

The transition from Before to Bets represents a crucial shift from historical explanation to active experimentation. Having understood how current reality was constructed through specific befores, families become ready to test different choices, to make conscious bets on alternative futures. The causal awareness cultivated at the Before level becomes the foundation for deliberate change at the Bets level.

In TogetherStorying Coaching, the Before level work often involves narrative archaeology—excavating family stories, mapping relational histories, identifying the critical befores that shaped current dynamics. Families create timelines, share memories, discover divergent perspectives on the same historical events. This work builds the shared historical understanding necessary for making conscious choices together.

As we move to Chapter Three and the Bets level, we will discover how understanding the past creates agency for the future. The awakening continues to deepen.

Chapter Three: Bets — The Realm of Choices and Possibilities

"Having understood how we arrived here through befores, we now face choices. Each bet we make—each conscious decision about who to be, what to value, when to act—creates ripples that reshape our shared story."

The Activation of Agency

At B3 Bets, consciousness makes a quantum leap from understanding causality to exercising agency. Where the Before level revealed how current reality was constructed, the Bets level recognizes that multiple futures are possible and that our choices—our bets—determine which future actualizes. This is the realm of wagers, experiments, and conscious decision-making about who we are becoming individually and collectively.

For families emerging from the Before level's historical awareness, the Bets level brings both exhilaration and anxiety. Exhilaration because choice implies freedom—we are not forever trapped by our before. Anxiety because choice implies responsibility—we can no longer hide behind historical determinism or claim helplessness. The masks of the Beneath level and the causal explanations of the Before level must now yield to active experimentation.

The metaphor of "bets" is deliberate. Unlike guaranteed outcomes or certain knowledge, bets acknowledge uncertainty while committing to action. The veteran bets that vulnerability might create connection rather than weakness. The spouse bets that forgiveness might open possibilities rather than enabling continued hurt. The children bet that expressing authentic feelings might be met with support rather than criticism. Each bet risks failure but enables movement beyond the paralysis of previous levels.

Every family makes bets constantly, whether they recognize it or not. You bet that attending the reunion will strengthen bonds rather than trigger conflict. You bet that family therapy will help rather than expose unbearable truths. You bet that another difficult conversation might break through or break apart what's left. The question is not whether to bet but whether your bets are authentic—grounded in genuine care for the wellbeing of all family members—or inauthentic, serving ego, fear, or the maintenance of comfortable illusions.

Authentic vs. Inauthentic Bets: A Critical Distinction

The Bets level introduces a crucial distinction that determines whether families move toward healing or deeper dysfunction. An authentic bet is a gravitational force that pulls a better reality into the present. It is grounded in what philosopher Martin Heidegger called solicitude—a deep, genuine concern for the wellbeing of others. In contrast, an inauthentic bet is a black hole of ego and illusion that consumes everything around it, a performance built on spectacle and deceit.

For the returning veteran, an authentic bet might be: "I will speak truthfully about my struggle with hypervigilance, trusting that my family can handle this reality and that vulnerability might deepen our connection." This bet acknowledges uncertainty (they might not be able to handle it), commits resources (emotional energy, risk of shame), and serves the collective wellbeing. An inauthentic bet would be: "I will perform 'being fine' convincingly enough that no one questions me, protecting them from my reality and protecting me from their judgment." This bet serves ego protection, maintains illusion, and ultimately deepens the family's fragmentation.

The spouse faces similar choices. An authentic bet: "I will express my resentment about carrying the family alone during deployment, trusting that naming this truth creates space for repair rather

than permanent damage." Inauthentic: "I will continue performing gratitude for the veteran's service while suppressing my legitimate anger, betting that maintaining the facade preserves peace." One bet pulls toward wholeness; the other guarantees continued fragmentation.

Children, too, make these bets. Authentic: "I will tell my parents that their fighting scares me, betting that they can hear this without making it my fault." Inauthentic: "I will be the perfect child who never causes problems, betting that my goodness will somehow fix their relationship." The second bet is heartbreaking in its futility, yet millions of children in veteran families make exactly this wager every day.

The Three Steps of Placing Authentic Bets

Placing authentic bets requires a deliberate three-step process that moves families from passive hoping to active creation of their shared future:

Step One: Picture the Possibility

The family must visualize a future outcome so vividly they can taste it, feel it in their bodies, see it in detail. This is not wishful thinking but embodied imagination. The veteran pictures a dinner table conversation where they share a combat memory without triggering shame or shutdown. They see their spouse's face showing compassion rather than fear. They hear their own voice steady rather than shaking. They feel the relief in their chest as the secret loses its power.

The spouse pictures a family vacation where they are partners again, not caregiver and patient. They imagine holding hands while watching the kids play, feeling ease rather than vigilance. They taste the possibility of laughter that isn't forced. They see a version of their relationship that includes both the trauma and the transcendence of it.

Children picture a home where raised voices don't automatically mean danger, where they can be spontaneous without checking the emotional temperature first, where bedtime feels safe rather than anxious. This vivid picturing is essential—without a clear image of the desired future, bets become random gambles rather than strategic wagers.

Step Two: Speak the Reality

The envisioned future must be spoken out loud, constantly, to enroll family members in the possibility. This is not manipulation but invitation. The veteran says to their spouse: "I'm betting that if I share what's really happening inside me, we can handle it together. I picture us sitting on the porch after dinner, me talking, you listening, and both of us feeling closer afterward." By speaking this vision, they make it real in the relational field, creating a shared target to aim toward.

The spouse responds: "I'm betting that if I tell you how angry I am about the deployment years, we can work through it rather than let it poison everything. I picture us acknowledging all of it—your sacrifice and my sacrifice—and finding a way forward that honors both." This speaking enrolls both partners in a shared bet on honest communication.

Even children can learn to speak their bets: "I'm betting that if I tell you how I really feel, you won't get mad at me. I picture us all sitting together and everyone being calm." When families speak their bets out loud, they transform private fantasies into shared commitments, activating collective will toward the envisioned future.

Step Three: Act Now to Win

This is the crucial step where bets become real. Families must take action today that only makes sense if the expected future state arrives. The veteran doesn't wait until they feel "ready" to be vulnerable—they schedule the porch conversation for tonight, committing to it before courage arrives. The spouse doesn't wait for resentment to dissipate—they write out their feelings now, preparing to share them in tomorrow's therapy session. The child doesn't wait for parents to prove safety—they risk expressing one small feeling today.

This step is terrifying because it requires acting as if the better future is already arriving, even when current reality screams otherwise. It is prospective sensemaking—actively cultivating a desirable future rather than reacting to an oppressive past. When the veteran sits on that porch despite the fear, when the spouse reads their anger letter despite the risk, when the child says "I'm scared" despite the uncertainty—they are literally pulling the future toward the present through committed action.

W1: Who — Choosing Identity Through Experimental Bets

At the Bets level, "Who" transforms from discovered identity (Before) to chosen identity through deliberate experimentation. The veteran bets on trying out different versions of themselves: "Today, I will be the vulnerable veteran who asks for help rather than the stoic warrior who suffers alone." This is not abandoning the warrior identity but expanding it, testing whether a more complete "who" is viable.

The spouse similarly experiments: "This week, I will be the partner who expresses needs clearly rather than the martyr who suffers in silence." Each identity bet is a small revolution—trying on ways of being that were foreclosed by the Beneath level's masks and the Before level's causal explanations. The courage here is to act as the new "who" before having proof it will work.

Children at the Bets level discover they can choose who to be rather than remaining trapped in adaptive roles: "Today, I will be the kid who tells the truth about how I feel rather than the kid who keeps everyone happy." These identity bets reshape family dynamics because each person's "who" is interdependent—when one family member changes their bet on who they are, everyone else must respond.

The family collectively can bet on "who we are" as a unit: "We are the family that talks honestly about hard things rather than the family that pretends everything is fine." This collective identity bet requires all members to align their individual bets, creating coherence. When successful, it generates what TogetherStorying calls a "shared narrative"—not separate stories living in parallel but a genuinely unified account of who this family is and is becoming.

W2: What — Embodied Choices and Energetic Wagers

At the Bets level, "What" begins its transformation from pure biology toward energetic awareness. Families start recognizing that "what" they are includes not just cells and chemistry but energy patterns, relational fields, and vibrations. The veteran bets on changing their embodied state: "I will attend yoga class even though my body screams that physical vulnerability equals danger." This bet acknowledges that "what" they are biologically can be influenced by conscious choice.

The spouse bets on somatic healing: "I will try EMDR therapy to process the trauma stored in my body from the deployment years." This recognizes that "what" they are includes trauma energy that has been somatically encoded and can potentially be released through embodied intervention. These are not guaranteed outcomes but bets on the possibility that consciousness can reshape biology.

The family makes collective embodiment bets: "We will eat dinner together without devices, betting that shared embodied presence changes our energy field." Or: "We will try equine-assisted therapy at the ranch, betting that the horses' nervous systems can teach our nervous systems new patterns of regulation." These bets recognize that "what" the family is includes not just individual bodies but a collective somatic field that responds to intentional intervention.

At this level, families begin to grasp that while they are indeed biological superorganisms (the Beneath level's insight), they are also energetic beings whose vibrations affect one another. The chronically activated veteran's nervous system affects the spouse's cortisol levels. The spouse's suppressed grief affects the children's emotional regulation. By making conscious bets to change these energetic patterns—through breathwork, movement, touch, presence—families discover they have more agency over "what" they are than pure biology suggests.

W3: When — Selecting Temporal Focus and Creating Time

At the Bets level, "When" undergoes a revolutionary shift. Having discovered at the Before level that biographical time has inflection points, families now recognize they can select which temporal moments to amplify or diminish. They can choose to orient toward trauma time or toward possibility time. This is the beginning of temporal agency that will fully blossom at the Becoming level.

The veteran makes a temporal bet: "I will practice noticing Little Wow Moments when I feel calm and present, betting that amplifying these moments can create a new temporal orientation beyond trauma time." This is not denial of the traumatic past but a strategic choice to invest attention in moments when another future breaks through. By selecting which "whens" to focus on, the veteran begins to construct a different relationship with time itself.

The spouse similarly bets: "I will keep a journal of micro-moments when I feel partnership rather than isolation, betting that these moments, when amplified, can create a new timeline where connection is more real than abandonment." This temporal selection is not self-deception but strategic amplification of what resilience researchers call "positive deviance"—the moments when the problem doesn't dominate.

The family makes collective temporal bets: "We will designate Sunday mornings as 'Little Wow time' where we only discuss moments from the past week that felt good, betting that this practice creates a new temporal pattern of appreciation rather than criticism." Or: "We will try the TogetherStorying practice of Rehistoricizing, consciously rewriting our family timeline with Little Wow Moments at the center rather than trauma at the center."

This temporal selection is profoundly empowering. At the Beneath level, families were trapped in linear time's tyranny. At the Before level, they understood causality but felt determined by it. At the Bets level, they discover they can bet on which temporal strands to strengthen. By choosing to inhabit Little Wow Moments more fully, they literally create more of that time, shifting their lived temporality from trauma-dominant to possibility-laced.

W4: Where — Creating Deliberate Spaces for Transformation

At the Bets level, "Where" shifts from fixed location (Beneath) and historically layered place (Before) to deliberately created space. Families begin to recognize they can construct environments that support their bets on healing. This is spatial agency—the recognition that "where" matters and can be intentionally designed.

The veteran bets on creating sanctuary spaces: "I will set up a corner of the garage as my grounding spot, with photos of people I trust and objects that calm my nervous system, betting that this designed space will help me regulate when overwhelmed." This is not hiding but creating a deliberate "where" that supports the "who" they are becoming—someone who can self-regulate rather than someone who explodes or withdraws.

The spouse creates relational spaces: "I will propose we redesign the bedroom to feel like 'our' space again rather than separate territories, betting that changing the physical environment can shift the relational energy." Or: "I will suggest we have difficult conversations during walks rather than across the kitchen table, betting that side-by-side movement creates different relational possibilities than face-to-face confrontation."

The family makes collective spatial bets: "We will attend the TogetherStorying ranch program, betting that the wide-open New Mexico landscape and the presence of rescued horses create a 'where' that our suburban home cannot provide—a place where new family patterns become possible." Or: "We will try the Catalina Island retreat, betting that removing ourselves from our regular environment for three days creates space for intensive restorying work."

These spatial bets recognize that "where" is not neutral—different places afford different possibilities. The couch where years of silent resentment accumulated carries that history in its cushions. The ranch where no family history exists offers clean relational space. By consciously choosing and designing "wheres," families create containers that support their transformation bets.

W5: Why — Testing Purposes Beyond Survival

At the Bets level, "Why" expands beyond the Before level's historical purposes to include tested purposes that serve the family's future. Where the Beneath level reduced "why" to survival and the

Before level connected to generational purposes, the Bets level recognizes that families can choose and test new purposes that were not inherited or predetermined.

The veteran bets on a new purpose: "Why am I sharing this trauma story with my family? Not because I have to, but because I'm betting that transparency serves our collective healing better than protection through silence." This shifts "why" from defensive (protecting family from ugly truths) to generative (creating intimacy through vulnerability). The purpose is tested—it might not work, but the bet is that it's worth trying.

The spouse tests new relational purposes: "Why am I staying in this marriage? Before, it was duty and children. Now, I'm betting that we can build something worth staying for—not the old relationship but a new one that includes all we've survived." This tested purpose is more authentic than inherited obligation, creating space for genuine recommitment or honest acknowledgment that the marriage has ended.

The family collectively bets on shared purpose: "Why are we doing this hard healing work? We're betting that becoming a family that can talk honestly about hard things is worth more than maintaining comfortable lies." This shared "why" becomes the family's north star, the purpose that justifies the difficulty of transformation. Without this tested and chosen purpose, families often give up when the work gets hard, reverting to the familiar misery of the Beneath level.

The Bets level's "why" is crucial because it introduces existential choice. Families are not trapped by survival imperatives or historical purposes—they can bet on purposes that serve their chosen future. This is the beginning of what Viktor Frankl called "the will to meaning," the recognition that humans need purposes worth suffering for, and that choosing those purposes is itself transformative.

W6: With — Relational Experiments and Vulnerability Bets

At the Bets level, "With" transforms from the transactional relationships of the Beneath level and the historically understood patterns of the Before level into active relational experiments. Families begin betting on new ways of being together, testing whether different relational configurations are possible.

The veteran bets on relational vulnerability: "I will ask my spouse to hold me when I'm having a flashback rather than isolating in the garage, betting that needing help strengthens rather than weakens our bond." This bet challenges the warrior identity's assumption that strength equals self-sufficiency. The vulnerability is terrifying precisely because the bet might fail—the spouse might not be able to respond with comfort, revealing the relationship's limitations. But without placing this bet, the relationship remains stuck in the Beneath level's transactional distance.

The spouse makes reciprocal bets: "I will share my resentment journal entries with my veteran partner, betting that we can handle this truth together rather than letting it corrode our connection in silence." This is a bet on the relationship's capacity—can it metabolize hard truths? The only way to find out is to test it.

Children bet on authentic participation: "I will tell my parents what I actually need rather than being the 'good kid' who never asks for anything, betting that expressing my authentic self creates closer relationships than performing perfection." These bets reshape family roles, challenging the implicit contracts that kept everyone in their assigned positions.

The family makes collective relational bets through TogetherStorying practices: "We will try the Monthly Sprint coaching sessions, betting that working on our family story together in the presence of other families creates a 'with' that our isolation cannot provide." Or: "We will participate in the TogetherStorying Circle, betting that community witnessing of our story strengthens our family bonds." These bets recognize that "with" can include not just immediate family but the larger community of families doing similar work.

The Bets level's "with" is characterized by experimentation and risk. At the Beneath level, relationships were transactional contracts. At the Before level, they were understood through causal histories. At the Bets level, they become active experiments in co-creation. Each vulnerable disclosure, each request for support, each honest expression of need is a bet on the relationship's capacity to grow rather than shatter under pressure.

W7: Wish — Strategic Intentions and Tested Hopes

At the Bets level, "Wish" transforms from the selfish wishes of the Beneath level and the historically shaped wishes of the Before level into strategic intentions that families actively test. These are not passive hopes but committed experiments in creating desired futures.

The veteran's wish becomes strategic: "I wish to be present for my children's lives, and I'm betting that by doing the trauma work now—however painful—I create that presence for their teenage years ahead." This wish includes a theory of change and committed action. It's not "I wish I felt better" (passive) but "I wish to be present, so I'm doing EMDR therapy, attending the coaching sessions, and practicing grounding techniques daily."

The spouse's wish gains strategic clarity: "I wish for partnership rather than parallel parenting, and I'm betting that couples therapy, honest conversations, and my own therapy create the foundation for that partnership to emerge." The wish includes both the vision and the pathway, both the destination and the steps being taken today.

Children's wishes become less magical and more strategic: "I wish my parents would stop fighting, and I'm betting that telling them how it affects me gives them information they might not have." Even young children can learn that wishes are not magic spells but intentions that require action and testing.

The family develops shared strategic wishes: "We wish to become a family that handles hard things together, and we're betting that the TogetherStorying seven-step PERVIEW process—Characterize, Externalize, Sympathize, Revise, Strategize, Rehistoricize, Publicize—creates the pathway from our current fragmentation to our desired togetherness." This shared wish, backed by committed action, becomes the family's organizing principle.

The Bets level's "wish" is radically different from earlier levels because it includes three elements simultaneously: (1) the vivid picture of the desired future (Step One: Picture the Possibility), (2) the articulated vision shared with others (Step Two: Speak the Reality), and (3) the committed action taken today (Step Three: Act Now to Win). Wishes without these three elements remain fantasies; wishes with all three become bets that can actually reshape reality.

The Coherence of Bets: From Paralysis to Possibility

The Bets level creates its own coherent system, one that liberates families from the Before level's historical determinism:

"Who" becomes chosen through identity experiments rather than discovered or inherited

"What" expands to include energetic wagers on embodied change, not just biological fate

"When" becomes selectable through strategic attention to Little Wow Moments

"Where" transforms into deliberately created spaces that support transformation

"Why" shifts to tested purposes that serve the family's chosen future

"With" becomes active relational experimentation rather than inherited patterns

"Wish" gains strategic clarity through committed action toward envisioned futures

This coherence represents a quantum leap in family consciousness. Where the Beneath level was trapped in performance and the Before level was illuminated by but still bound by causality, the Bets level discovers genuine agency. Families at this level recognize they are not passive victims of their histories or their neurobiologies—they are active authors betting on the stories they want to live.

The Shadow of Bets: When Gambling Becomes Compulsive

Yet the Bets level carries its own dangers. The shadow side emerges when families become compulsive gamblers, constantly trying new approaches without allowing any to take root. This is the therapeutic equivalent of day-trading—jumping from EMDR to neurofeedback to equine therapy to meditation retreats, never staying with one practice long enough to let it work. The constant betting becomes a way to avoid the deeper commitment required for actual transformation.

Another shadow emerges when families make only inauthentic bets—performative gestures designed to look like healing while protecting the fundamental status quo. The veteran attends one therapy session to prove they "tried," then quits. The spouse reads one relationship book, implements nothing, but claims they're "working on it." The family signs up for the coaching program but doesn't do the homework between sessions. These are bets that serve ego rather than transformation, maintaining the illusion of effort while avoiding genuine risk.

The Bets level can also become exhausting. Not every moment needs to be a strategic wager on the future. Sometimes families need to simply be (which anticipates the next level). The constant experimentation, while empowering, can prevent the settling and integration necessary for sustainable change. Families may need coaching to recognize when to place new bets and when to honor the bets already made by giving them time to mature.

Moving Beyond Bets: Toward Presence and Being

The transition from Bets to Being represents another crucial shift—from future orientation to present awareness. Having learned to make conscious bets on desired futures, families must now learn to inhabit the present moment fully, to be rather than constantly become. The agency cultivated at the Bets level becomes the foundation for the presence discovered at the Being level.

In TogetherStorying Coaching, the Bets level work often involves the Strategize and Publicize steps of the PERVIEW process. Families identify their Little Wow Moments (Strategize), then share their new story with supportive witnesses (Publicize). They make explicit bets: "We're betting on this new family narrative. We're committing to these practices. We're enlisting these supporters. We're taking these actions today that only make sense if our envisioned future arrives."

The courage required at this level cannot be overstated. Every authentic bet risks failure. The veteran who shares vulnerability might be met with judgment instead of compassion. The spouse who expresses resentment might trigger permanent rupture instead of repair. The child who speaks truth might be punished instead of heard. These are real risks, and families operating at the Bets level feel them viscerally.

Yet without these risky bets, families remain trapped in the known misery of the Beneath level or the illuminated but still-constrained understanding of the Before level. The Bets level is where change actually begins to happen, where families move from knowing what needs to shift to actively experimenting with different ways of being together.

As we move to Chapter Four and the Being level, we will discover how the active experimentation of Bets creates the foundation for simply being present to what is. The transformation continues to deepen.

Chapter Four: Being — The Realm of Present Awareness

"In the eternal now of Being, the seven Ws dissolve their historical and future orientations to reveal what simply is. Who am I right now? What is present in this moment? When is always now."

The Shift from Doing to Being

At B4 Being, consciousness makes a profound shift from future orientation to present awareness, from constant experimentation to simple presence. Where the Beneath level trapped families in performance, the Before level illuminated causality, and the Bets level activated agency, the Being

level discovers what is—right here, right now, without the overlay of historical explanation or future projection.

This shift is counterintuitive for families emerging from trauma and fragmentation. Their entire therapeutic journey has been oriented toward change—understanding what happened, betting on different futures, experimenting with new patterns. The Being level asks them to temporarily suspend all that forward motion and simply inhabit this present moment with full awareness. What is happening right now? Who are we in this instant? What energy fills this space between us?

For the veteran family, this can feel impossible. The veteran's nervous system is oriented toward scanning for future threats. The spouse's attention is chronically divided between past resentments and future anxieties. The children's awareness is fragmented by the need to track parental moods. Yet the Being level insists: all of that is happening in the mind's time travel. What is actually present in this room, in this breath, in this moment of contact?

The Seven Ws as Keys to Energy Centers

At the Being level, each of the seven Ws functions as a key that unlocks a corresponding energy center in the family's collective body. This understanding draws from ancient wisdom about chakras—energy vortices in the human superorganism—adapted here for family systems. When these energy centers are open and aligned, the family experiences coherent Being. When blocked or distorted, the family becomes what we might call a "Goathead superorganism"—a system whose energies puncture and harm rather than nourish and heal.

Each family member is a superorganism—approximately 36 trillion human cells plus an estimated 50 trillion more bacteria, fungi, and other microbes living in and on the body. But the family itself is also a superorganism, a living system with its own energy field, its own patterns of coherence or dysfunction. The Being level recognizes this quantum reality: families are not just collections of individuals but unified fields of energy that can be harmonious or chaotic.

W1: Who — Root Energy and Authentic Identity

At the Being level, W1 (Who) unlocks the Root energy center—located metaphorically at the foundation of the family system, representing grounding, security, and authentic identity. The question shifts from "Who am I becoming?" (Bets) to "Who am I right now, in this present moment, stripped of all performance and projection?"

The veteran sits in family session and asks themselves: "Who am I in this instant?" Not the warrior they were, not the healed person they hope to become, but who is actually present right now. Perhaps the answer is: "I am someone who is afraid and trying to hide it." This truth, spoken without agenda or shame, grounds the veteran in authentic Being. The Root energy opens when we stop performing who we should be and simply acknowledge who we are.

The spouse practices the same radical presence: "Who am I right now?" Perhaps: "I am someone who is exhausted and resentful and also still loves this person." Both/and rather than either/or.

The Being level dissolves false dichotomies. You can be multiple things simultaneously when you're grounded in present awareness rather than constructed narratives.

Children at the Being level discover: "I am someone who is confused and scared and also curious about what's happening." When families allow authentic "who" to be expressed without judgment or fixing, the Root energy stabilizes. Everyone can finally stand on solid ground because the ground is truth rather than performance.

The family's collective "who" at the Being level might be: "We are a family that is struggling and loving and trying and sometimes failing, all at the same time." This grounded authenticity creates what might be called ethical answerability—each person is answerable to their true self and to one another, not to masks or ideals but to what actually is.

W2: What — Sacral Energy and Creative Flow

At the Being level, W2 (What) opens the Sacral energy center—associated with water, creativity, and the flow of life force. The question becomes: "What is actually present in this moment, in our bodies, in our shared field?"

The veteran attunes to somatic presence: "What is happening in my body right now?" Perhaps: "My chest is tight, my jaw is clenched, my breathing is shallow." This is not diagnosis or problem-solving but simple witnessing of what is. As the veteran breathes into these sensations without trying to change them, the Sacral energy begins to flow. The body-superorganism starts to trust that it can be what it is without being fixed or rejected.

The spouse notices: "What is alive in me right now?" Perhaps: "Tears that I've been holding back, warmth in my heart alongside the anger, a trembling in my hands." Water energy is emotional energy—tears, sweat, sexual fluids, the 60% of our body weight that is literally water. When families block this water energy through stoicism or emotional suppression, the Sacral center dries up. When they allow it to flow, creative possibility emerges.

The family's collective "what" at Being level is the shared energy field in the room: "What is present between us right now?" Perhaps tension, perhaps tenderness, perhaps both simultaneously. A skilled TogetherStorying coach helps families notice this collective energy without judgment: "I'm sensing a lot of activation in the room right now. Let's just breathe with that for a moment." This acknowledgment of what is creates space for the energy to shift organically rather than through forced intervention.

When the Sacral energy flows freely, families access their creative potential. Solutions emerge not through effortful problem-solving but through organic unfolding. The veteran suddenly knows how to articulate a feeling. The spouse spontaneously offers touch. The child finds words for the unspeakable. This is Sacral creativity—life force flowing through obstacles rather than being dammed up behind them.

W3: When — Solar Plexus Energy and Present Time

At the Being level, W3 (When) unlocks the Solar Plexus energy center—associated with fire, power, and presence. The temporal question radically simplifies: "When is now." Not linear time, not historical before-and-after, not even the strategic temporal selection of the Bets level. Simply: now. Always now. Only now.

The veteran discovers that trauma time—the endless replaying of combat moments—exists only when attention leaves the present. In this actual moment, sitting on this actual couch, breathing this actual breath, there is no combat. The traumatic memory is not happening now. It happened then. But "then" only has power when we leave "now" to revisit it. The Solar Plexus energy ignites when we stay present, burning through the fog of past and future to illuminate this moment.

The spouse realizes that the resentment about deployment years is a story about the past, not a present reality. "When" they stay in now, what's actually here? Perhaps their partner's hand reaching across the couch. Perhaps their own breath moving in and out. Perhaps the sound of their child laughing in another room. These present-moment realities are what's actually available "when" we stop time-traveling.

Children naturally inhabit the eternal now before trauma teaches them otherwise. At the Being level, families learn from children's capacity for presence. "When" a child is fully absorbed in play, there is no past, no future, only this game, this moment, this joy. The family's collective "when" at Being level is the shared now—everyone arriving in the same temporal moment rather than each person lost in their separate timeline.

This is not denial of the past or abandonment of future planning. It's recognition that the only moment we ever actually inhabit is this one. As the veteran breathes, as the spouse softens, as the child plays, the Solar Plexus fire burns clean—not destroying but illuminating, not consuming but warming, not weaponized but life-giving.

W4: Where — Heart Energy and Sacred Space

At the Being level, W4 (Where) opens the Heart energy center—associated with air, breath, and love. The question transforms: "Where am I?" becomes not a physical location but a state of presence. "I am here, in my heart, in this breath, in this love."

The veteran sits across from their spouse and asks: "Where am I right now?" The answer might be: "I am in the space between us, feeling the air move as we breathe together, sensing the possibility of connection." This "where" is not the living room's geographic coordinates but the sacred space of encounter. When two people truly arrive in the same "where"—both present, both open, both breathing—the Heart energy ignites.

The spouse discovers "where" through attunement to place: "I am in this home that holds all our history, sitting on this couch where we've had a thousand difficult conversations, breathing this air that we share." The "where" becomes a relational field rather than a container. It's the space that

holds us, the air we breathe together, the energetic connection that exists when both hearts are open.

At TogetherStorying's ranch program in Caballo, New Mexico, families experience "where" as sacred space in a visceral way. The wide desert landscape, the rescued horses, the absence of urban stimulation—this "where" creates what ancient traditions call a thin place, where the veil between ordinary and sacred becomes permeable. The Heart energy opens naturally in such spaces, allowing families to feel the love that was always present but obscured by trauma and fragmentation.

The family's collective "where" at Being level is the shared heart space—the field of love that exists when all members arrive fully present. One family described it as "finally being in the same room together, not just physically but energetically." Another said, "It felt like we could all breathe for the first time in years." This is the Heart chakra opening—air flowing freely, love circulating, the breath of life shared among family members who had been suffocating in isolation.

W5: Why — Throat Energy and Wisdom Voice

At the Being level, W5 (Why) unlocks the Throat energy center—associated with space, voice, and the wisdom that emerges from deep presence. The question shifts from "Why am I doing this?" (purpose, motivation) to "Why am I here?" (existential ground, wisdom-motive).

The veteran finds their voice not through effort but through arrival: "Why am I here, in this family, in this moment?" The answer wells up from presence rather than thought: "I am here because these people matter more than my fear." This wisdom emerges from the Throat chakra when it's open—not calculated, not rehearsed, but arising spontaneously from aligned Being.

The spouse discovers wisdom-voice through authentic expression: "Why am I still here after everything?" The answer might be: "Because love is more real than resentment, even when both are present." This is not positive thinking or forced gratitude but discernment—the ability to perceive what's true beneath the noise of reactive emotions.

Children at the Being level speak with the clarity that comes before social conditioning. "Why are we doing this family work?" A child might answer: "Because I want us to be happy together." Simple. Clear. Undistorted by the complex rationalizations adults construct. The Throat energy of children often teaches parents how to speak truth again.

The family's collective "why" at Being level is their shared wisdom-motive, spoken aloud in moments of presence: "We are here because family matters. We are here because healing is possible. We are here because the love beneath our pain is worth fighting for." When this wisdom-voice emerges from the collective Throat chakra, it carries a different quality than individual declarations—it resonates with what the entire system knows to be true.

W6: With — Third Eye Energy and Witness Consciousness

At the Being level, W6 (With) opens the Third Eye energy center—associated with mindful awareness, inner wisdom, and the capacity to witness without reactive engagement. "With" transforms from relational experiments (Bets) to conscious communion in shared presence.

The veteran discovers "with" through witness consciousness: "I am with my spouse, and I am also with myself, observing both my reactivity and my deeper truth." This Third Eye awareness allows the veteran to be in relationship while not being consumed by it. They can notice: "I'm feeling defensive right now, my jaw is clenching, and beneath that defensiveness is fear of being seen as weak." This witnessing creates space between stimulus and response.

The spouse develops similar capacity: "I am with my partner's pain, and I am also with my own boundaries, noticing where I can offer presence and where I need to protect myself." The Third Eye energy allows for what might be called compassionate distance—being fully present to another's experience without merging or abandoning oneself.

In TogetherStorying Circles, this witness consciousness becomes collective. Multiple families gather, each sharing their story while others hold space as witnesses. The "with" is not transactional support ("I help you so you help me") but energetic witnessing ("I see you, I hear you, I hold space for your truth"). This activates the Third Eye energy for the entire circle—each family seeing and being seen, each story witnessed and valued.

The family's collective "with" at Being level is the field of conscious communion—everyone present to everyone else, all witnesses and all witnessed simultaneously. One family described their breakthrough moment: "We stopped trying to fix each other and just started really seeing each other." This is Third Eye activation—the shift from reactive engagement to conscious witnessing, from enmeshment to clear-seeing connection.

W7: Wish — Crown Energy and Oneness Consciousness

At the Being level, W7 (Wish) unlocks the Crown energy center—representing higher spiritual consciousness, the experience of oneness, and alignment with what might be called the True Self. "Wish" transcends personal desire to become alignment with what is trying to emerge through the family system.

The veteran's wish evolves from "I wish to be healed" (individual, future-oriented) to "I wish to be aligned with whatever is unfolding here" (collective, present-oriented). This is not passive resignation but active surrender to a wisdom larger than ego. When the Crown chakra opens, the veteran might experience: "I am part of something larger than my individual story. My healing serves my family. My family's healing serves our community. It all connects."

The spouse's wish transforms similarly: "I wish for us to align with our highest possibility as a family." This is not about getting what "I" want but about serving what "we" are becoming. The Crown energy carries a quality of spiritual service—the recognition that individual wishes matter less than collective evolution toward wholeness.

The family's collective wish at Being level touches something sacred: "We wish to embody love." Not to achieve some future state of perfect love, but to be love in this moment, with all our imperfections. This is the Crown chakra fully open—the experience of oneness where separate identities dissolve into unified presence, where "my healing" and "your healing" and "our healing" are recognized as one movement.

Families who experience this Crown activation often describe it as mystical: "We all felt it at the same time—this sense that we're not separate, that we never were, that the fragmentation was an illusion created by pain." This is not intellectual understanding but direct experience of unity consciousness, the recognition that at the deepest level of Being, there is only one energy expressing through multiple forms.

When Energy Centers Are Blocked: The Goathead Family

The metaphor of the "Goathead superorganism" helps families understand what happens when their energy centers are blocked. The goathead (*Tribulus terrestris*) is an invasive species with sharp spines that puncture bicycle tires and animal paws. A single plant can produce thousands of seeds. Yet goatheads also prevent erosion and have medicinal properties—they're not purely destructive.

When a family becomes a Goathead superorganism, their energies are blocked and distorted, producing interactions that puncture and harm rather than nourish and heal:

Root blocked: No authentic identity, only performed roles that prevent genuine grounding

Sacral blocked: Creative flow replaced by emotional drought and rigid patterns

Solar Plexus blocked: Present moment awareness lost in trauma time and future anxiety

Heart blocked: Love replaced by defended distance and withheld breath

Throat blocked: Wisdom-voice replaced by silence, lies, or aggressive demands

Third Eye blocked: Witness consciousness replaced by reactive engagement and blindness

Crown blocked: Oneness replaced by ego-bound separation and self-serving wishes

Yet like the goathead plant, even blocked families have redemptive potential. The veteran's hypervigilance that punctures family peace also protects against real threats. The spouse's controlling behaviors that block creative flow also prevented chaos during solo parenting. The children's silence that blocks wisdom-voice also protected them from retaliation. The work of the Being level is not to demonize these protective patterns but to recognize when they've outlived their usefulness and gently open the blocked energies.

Story-Seeds and Story-Filters at the Being Level

At the Being level, families become aware of how they construct reality through story-seeds and story-filters. Story-seeds are the raw fragments of experience—the infinite bits of sensory input,

emotional stirring, relational nuance that flood consciousness each moment. Story-filters are the cognitive mechanisms that select which story-seeds become the "official" narrative.

Here's the challenge: Out of perhaps billions of bits of input in any given moment, human consciousness can process only about 11 million bits, with another 50 bits held in subconscious awareness. This means families are constructing their shared reality from an infinitesimally small sample of what's actually happening. The story-filters must "fill in the gaps"—and in doing so, they inevitably distort.

Common distorting filters that block Being:

Linear filters: "This always happens" (ignoring moments when it doesn't)

Scarcity filters: "There's not enough love/time/attention" (ignoring abundance)

Hierarchical filters: "Someone must be in control" (ignoring collaborative possibilities)

Failure filters: "We're broken" (ignoring strengths and successes)

Bounded rationality filters: "Only logic matters" (ignoring emotional and energetic realities)

The Being level develops awareness of these filters without immediately trying to change them. "I notice that I'm filtering our interaction through a 'he always...' story. What would I see if I didn't use that filter right now?" This mindful noticing creates space for different story-seeds to emerge—the veteran's moment of vulnerability that doesn't fit the "always defended" filter, the spouse's expression of appreciation that doesn't fit the "never grateful" filter.

The Coherence of Being: Energetic Alignment

When families achieve the Being level, the seven Ws create coherent energetic alignment:

"Who" grounds in authentic Root identity, everyone showing up as they actually are

"What" flows through open Sacral energy, creativity and emotions moving freely

"When" burns bright in Solar Plexus presence, all arriving in the eternal now

"Where" opens Heart space, love breathing through sacred encounter

"Why" speaks from Throat wisdom, truth emerging without force

"With" sees through Third Eye clarity, conscious witnessing without reactivity

"Wish" aligns with Crown unity, collective evolution toward wholeness

This alignment is not permanent—families move in and out of Being consciousness. But once they've experienced it, they recognize when they've fallen back into lower levels and can consciously return. A father notices: "I'm back in Beneath-level performance. Let me drop the mask and just be present." A mother recognizes: "I'm stuck in Before-level causal explanations. What's

actually here right now?" A child reminds everyone: "Can we just play?" bringing the family back to Being's eternal now.

The Gifts and Challenges of Being

The Being level offers profound gifts. Families experience moments of genuine connection that feel miraculous after years of fragmentation. The veteran whose trauma kept them isolated suddenly feels held in the family's loving presence. The spouse who carried everything alone feels the relief of truly shared burden. Children who learned to hide feel safe enough to emerge.

Yet Being also presents challenges. The level requires surrendering the sense of control cultivated at the Bets level. Families must trust that presence itself is transformative without constantly doing, fixing, or changing. This can feel passive to action-oriented Western minds. "We're just sitting here being present—how is this helping?" The answer comes through experience: presence heals in ways that effort cannot.

Another challenge is that Being cannot be forced or performed. You cannot "do" Being; you can only allow it. This frustrates families who want techniques and strategies. TogetherStorying coaches help families recognize that all the previous levels—understanding causality, making strategic bets—were preparation for the radical simplicity of Being: just show up, just breathe, just be here now.

Moving Beyond Being: Toward Dynamic Becoming

The transition from Being to Becoming represents another evolution. Where Being discovers presence, Becoming recognizes that presence itself is a dynamic process. We don't just "be"—we are continuously becoming. The static snapshot of "who I am right now" flows into "who I am becoming in this unfolding moment."

This is not regression to the future-orientation of the Bets level but integration of Being's presence with awareness of continuous transformation. At the Being level, families learn to inhabit the now. At the Becoming level, they discover that the now is not static but alive with creative potential, constantly birthing new possibilities.

In TogetherStorying Coaching, the Being level often emerges through practices like:

Equine-assisted work where horses mirror the family's energy state, making blocked chakras visible

Silent sitting together, practicing presence without agenda

Sand tray work where family members arrange symbols without words, accessing Being through non-verbal expression

Meditation retreats at Catalina Island where the ocean's rhythm teaches temporal presence

Witnessing circles where families practice Third Eye consciousness together

These practices don't force Being but create conditions where Being can naturally emerge. Like the goathead plant that has medicinal properties alongside its puncturing spines, families discover that their blocked energies carry gifts when transformed through presence. The veteran's hypervigilance becomes mindful awareness. The spouse's control becomes grounded leadership. The children's hiding becomes discerning privacy.

As we move to Chapter Five and the Becoming level, we will discover how presence transforms into process, how Being unfolds into continuous creation. The journey deepens further.

Chapter Five: Becoming — The Realm of Transformation

"We are not fixed entities but processes of becoming. The veteran becomes more than warrior. The family becomes more than fragmented individuals. Together, we become our shared story in continuous creation."

The Dynamic Unfolding of Presence

At B5 Becoming, consciousness makes another profound shift—from the static presence of Being to the dynamic process of continuous transformation. Where Being discovered "I am," Becoming recognizes "I am becoming." The present moment is not a frozen snapshot but a living edge where past flows into future, where what was morphs into what is arising, where families don't just exist but continuously emerge.

This shift is crucial for veteran families who have tasted the peace of Being but need to integrate that presence into ongoing life. Being taught them to inhabit the now; Becoming teaches them that the now is itself a process of continuous creation. The veteran doesn't just "be present"—they are presently becoming someone new. The spouse doesn't just "be authentic"—they are authentically becoming a different version of themselves. The children don't just "be spontaneous"—they are spontaneously becoming more whole.

Becoming introduces what might be called "fore-caring"—the capacity to anticipate and actively shape emerging possibilities rather than merely react to circumstances. This is not the strategic betting of the Bets level but a more organic attunement to what is trying to emerge through the family system. The question shifts from "What bet should we make?" to "What is trying to become through us?"

Three Stages of Family Becoming

Families don't Become all at once. The process unfolds through recognizable stages, each with its own challenges and gifts. These stages are not strictly linear—families can cycle through them multiple times, experiencing both rise and fall at each stage. Understanding this cyclical nature prevents the despair that comes when families expect continuous upward progress.

Stage One: Naïve Zeal

This is the energetic beginning after a family has their first breakthrough. The veteran experiences one therapy session where they feel genuinely heard, and suddenly they're certain: "We're going to heal! Everything will be different!" The spouse attends one TogetherStorying session where the family shares authentically, and they declare: "This is it—we've finally found the answer!"

Naïve Zeal is characterized by high energy and low tested wisdom. Families at this stage have ambition but haven't yet encountered the inevitable setbacks that test their commitment. They've tasted possibility but don't yet understand the messy, cyclical nature of transformation. Like the "simple" described in Proverbs, they face a critical choice: will they learn through experience, or will they rush forward blindly and collapse when difficulty arrives?

The gift of Naïve Zeal is its generative energy. Families need this initial enthusiasm to overcome inertia. The danger is premature certainty—declaring victory before the real work has begun. Skilled coaches help families honor their enthusiasm while preparing them for the inevitable valleys ahead: "This breakthrough is real and important. And the journey will have ups and downs. How can we sustain commitment through both?"

Stage Two: Disciplined Learner

The family hits their first major setback. The veteran has a severe flashback that undoes weeks of progress. The spouse discovers a resentment they thought was resolved has merely been suppressed. The children test boundaries in ways that reveal the family's fragile new patterns. The initial enthusiasm crashes into reality's resistance.

Stage Two is where families either give up ("This isn't working after all") or deepen their commitment through disciplined learning. They begin embracing correction, seeking guidance, and reality-testing their assumptions. The veteran learns: "Healing isn't linear. I can have a bad week without it meaning I've failed." The spouse discovers: "Expressing resentment doesn't magically dissolve it—I need practices for processing these feelings over time."

Disciplined Learner stage is characterized by expanding capacity through feedback loops. Families build structures that support ongoing growth: weekly check-ins, monthly coaching sessions, peer support circles, personal therapy alongside family work. They learn to make adjustments based on reflection rather than reacting to every setback as catastrophe. This is where the real transformation happens—not in dramatic breakthroughs but in consistent, humble learning.

The TogetherStorying seven-step PERVIEW process becomes a practiced rhythm at this stage. Families don't just do it once—they cycle through Characterize, Externalize, Sympathize, Revise, Strategize, Rehistoricize, and Publicize again and again, each time going deeper, each iteration revealing new layers of their shared story.

Stage Three: Skilled Leadership

Wisdom becomes habit. The veteran notices hypervigilance arising and automatically employs grounding techniques without conscious effort. The spouse feels resentment building and

instinctively creates space for processing rather than suppressing or exploding. The children intuit when parents need support and when they need privacy, navigating family dynamics with newfound maturity.

At Stage Three, families have internalized the practices of transformation. Decision-making, communication, and conflict resolution align with deep principles rather than reactive patterns. The family system itself reflects this maturity—moving from merely surviving to genuinely flourishing, from receiving help to offering help to other families, from wounded to wounded healers.

Crucially, Stage Three families understand that Becoming never ends. They don't declare final victory but recognize they've developed capacity for continuous transformation. When new challenges arise—as they inevitably will—these families don't collapse back to Stage One. They may temporarily regress but quickly recover, applying their hard-won wisdom to novel circumstances.

W1: Who — Evolving Identity and Continuous Self-Authoring

At the Becoming level, W1 (Who) transforms from static identity (Being's "who I am right now") to dynamic identity ("who I am continuously becoming"). The veteran recognizes: "I am not the person I was before deployment, not the person I was immediately after return, and not even the person I was last month. I am continuously becoming someone new."

This recognition is profoundly liberating. If identity is continuously becoming, then no failure defines you permanently. The veteran who relapses into isolation isn't "back to being that person"—they're a person who is becoming someone who sometimes relapses and also becomes someone who recognizes it faster and recovers more skillfully. Identity is process, not fixed essence.

The spouse's identity similarly unfolds: "I am becoming less resentful and also becoming more honest about resentment that remains. I am becoming more trusting and also becoming more discerning about what deserves trust. I hold both simultaneously because I am in process." This both/and capacity is characteristic of Becoming consciousness—the ability to hold contradictions within an evolving self.

Children at the Becoming level discover their capacity for self-authoring. A teenager articulates: "I'm not just the kid who adapted to deployment stress anymore. I'm becoming someone who understands my own patterns, who can choose different responses, who is writing my own story rather than just living out the script trauma gave me." This emergence of authorial agency is profound—the shift from being written by circumstances to actively writing oneself into being.

The family's collective "who" at Becoming level is their shared narrative-in-progress: "We are the family that is becoming more whole, more honest, more connected—not perfectly, not finally, but continuously." This narrative humility creates resilience. When setbacks occur, the family doesn't interpret them as failure but as part of the ongoing Becoming process.

W2: What — Transforming Substance and Metabolizing Experience

At the Becoming level, W2 (What) reveals the body-superorganism's capacity for transformation. The "what" is not fixed biology but continuously metabolizing substance. The veteran's nervous system, chronically activated for years, is becoming more regulated through repeated practice. Neurons are rewiring, stress hormones are rebalancing, the gut microbiome is shifting as diet and emotional patterns change.

This recognition that "what we are" can transform is evidence-based and embodied. The veteran notices: "Three months ago, loud noises always triggered panic. Now, sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. My body is becoming more flexible in its responses." This isn't positive thinking but accurate observation of neuroplasticity in action—the biological substrate of Becoming.

The spouse's embodied transformation might be: "I used to hold all my stress in my shoulders and jaw. Through bodywork and breath practice, I'm becoming someone whose body can release rather than accumulate tension. My 'what' is literally changing shape." The 36 trillion cells of the body are not static entities but continuously dying and regenerating, creating a new body every seven years. Becoming consciousness recognizes and works with this natural regenerative capacity.

The family's collective "what" includes their shared energy field, which is also becoming. Families can feel when their collective energy shifts—from heavy and constricted to lighter and more flowing, from chaotic and scattered to coherent and aligned. This energetic transformation is the "what" of the family superorganism continuously reorganizing itself toward greater health.

W3: When — Selected Time and Temporal Flexibility

At the Becoming level, W3 (When) introduces radical temporal flexibility. Building on the Being level's eternal now and the Being level's strategic temporal focus, Becoming recognizes that families can select which temporal stream to inhabit at any moment. Time is not singular but multiple—trauma time, healing time, cyclical time, linear time, quantum time all coexist.

The veteran develops temporal agency: "I can choose to stay in this Little Wow Moment, amplifying it, letting it grow, or I can return to trauma time. Both are available. Which serves my Becoming?" This isn't denial of trauma but recognition that attention is selective and selection shapes reality. By choosing to inhabit moments of connection, calm, or courage more fully, the veteran literally becomes different through temporal attention.

The spouse discovers cyclical time—the recognition that healing doesn't progress linearly but spirals. "We've been here before. This fight feels familiar because it is familiar. But each time we return to this pattern, we're at a different point on the spiral—we understand it better, we recover faster, we hurt each other less." This spiral awareness prevents the despair of "we're not getting anywhere" by recognizing that returning to familiar territory at higher consciousness is still progress.

The family's collective "when" at Becoming level is their ability to synchronize temporal rhythms. Family members learn to recognize when someone is stuck in trauma time and gently invite them back to present time. They develop shared practices for marking transitions—bedtime rituals that shift from day time to rest time, weekend adventures that shift from routine time to play time. These temporal markers help the family Become together rather than each person lost in their separate temporal stream.

W4: Where — Changing Fields and Spatial Transformation

At the Becoming level, W4 (Where) reveals space as continuously transforming field rather than fixed container. The family home is not a static location but a living field that reorganizes itself based on the energies and interactions occurring within it. The "where" is becoming different even as the physical structure remains unchanged.

The veteran experiences this: "The living room used to feel like a battlefield where we fought. Now it's becoming a sanctuary where we connect. Same furniture, same walls, completely different where." This spatial transformation happens through repeated positive experiences that overwrite negative associations. Each authentic conversation, each moment of laughter, each shared silence reshapes the spatial field.

The spouse might notice: "The bedroom is becoming our space again rather than divided territory. It's happening slowly—one vulnerable conversation at a time, one tender touch at a time. The 'where' is becoming intimate again." This spatial Becoming requires consistency—one positive interaction doesn't erase years of defended distance, but hundreds of small moments accumulate into field transformation.

At the ranch in Caballo, New Mexico, families experience accelerated spatial Becoming. The wide desert landscape, the presence of horses, the absence of familiar triggers—this "where" creates conditions for rapid transformation precisely because it holds no negative history for the family. What typically takes months in the home environment can happen in days at the ranch because the spatial field itself is oriented toward Becoming.

W5: Why — Emerging Purpose and Adaptive Meaning

At the Becoming level, W5 (Why) transforms from tested purposes (Bets) to continuously emerging purpose that adapts to the family's evolution. The "why" is not discovered once but repeatedly revealed as the family system matures and new possibilities open.

The veteran's purpose evolves: "At first, my 'why' was survival—get through each day without falling apart. Then it became healing—repair the damage from deployment. Now it's becoming service—use my experience to help other veterans and families." Each purpose was appropriate for its stage, and each naturally gives way to the next as capacity expands. This is purpose as Becoming, not as fixed destination.

The spouse's "why" similarly unfolds: "I used to wonder 'why stay?' when things were hard. Then I discovered 'why heal?' as we began this work. Now I'm asking 'why not share what we've learned?'"

The purpose keeps expanding as we grow." This progressive deepening of purpose is characteristic of Becoming—each answer generates new questions, each achievement reveals new horizons.

The family's collective "why" at Becoming level is their living mission that evolves with them: "We're becoming a family that transforms pain into wisdom, isolation into connection, woundedness into healing capacity." This mission statement is not static but continuously refined as the family understands more about their unique gifts and calling. Some families discover they're becoming advocates for veteran mental health. Others realize they're becoming models of multicultural family integration. The "why" emerges through the process of Becoming rather than being predetermined.

W6: With — Co-Creation and Collaborative Emergence

At the Becoming level, W6 (With) reveals relationships as sites of collaborative emergence—families don't just relate to each other but continuously co-create their shared reality. The "with" is the living edge where individual Becomings merge into collective Becoming.

The veteran discovers: "I'm not Becoming in isolation. Who I'm Becoming is shaped by how my spouse responds to me, how my children see me, how I show up in our interactions. We're Becoming together." This recognition of interdependent Becoming shifts responsibility from individual to relational. It's not "I need to change myself" but "we need to change how we are together."

The spouse experiences this co-creative "with" through dialogue: "When we really talk—not surface conversation but deep sharing—I can feel both of us changing in real time. My words affect their nervous system, their responses affect mine, and we're literally Becoming different through this exchange." This is what physicist Karen Barad calls "intra-activity"—entities don't exist separately and then interact, but rather become themselves through the interaction.

In TogetherStorying Circles, this co-creative "with" becomes explicit practice. Multiple families share their stories, witness each other's journeys, and discover they're all Becoming through the collective field. One family's breakthrough creates possibility for another. One person's vulnerability gives permission for another's authenticity. The "with" is not static support but dynamic mutual Becoming.

Children often teach parents about collaborative Becoming through play. When a child invites a parent into imaginative play, they're creating a shared reality together—becoming pirates or princesses or explorers through joint participation. This playful co-creation is the same dynamic that families at the Becoming level apply to their healing work: "Let's create a new family story together, one that includes all our pain and all our hope."

W7: Wish — Transformative Intention and Evolutionary Desire

At the Becoming level, W7 (Wish) evolves from strategic intentions (Bets) and present alignment (Being) to transformative intentions that participate in the family's evolutionary unfolding. The "wish" is not what "I" want but what wants to become through us.

The veteran articulates this shift: "I used to wish to be healed—past tense, finished, done. Now I wish to be healing—continuous, ongoing, alive. I wish to become someone who integrates their trauma into wisdom rather than someone who eliminates all trace of it." This evolutionary wish honors the past while opening to continuous transformation.

The spouse's wish transforms similarly: "I wish for our family to keep Becoming more authentic, more connected, more whole—not to arrive at some perfect final state but to stay in this process of growth forever." This is wish as developmental commitment rather than destination fantasy. The satisfaction comes from the journey of Becoming, not from reaching an endpoint.

The family's collective wish at Becoming level touches on intergenerational healing: "We wish to become the family that breaks cycles of trauma, that heals wounds carried across generations, that becomes a source of life rather than pain for our children and grandchildren." This transgenerational wish recognizes that Becoming extends beyond individual lifespans—the patterns we're transforming now affect family members not yet born.

Some families discover their wish includes service beyond their immediate system: "We wish to become a model for other veteran families, showing that transformation is possible." This service-oriented wish naturally emerges at Stage Three (Skilled Leadership) when families have developed enough capacity to offer their learning to others. The wish becomes participatory—wishing not just for one's own Becoming but for collective evolution.

Rise and Fall: The Non-Linear Nature of Becoming

A critical insight of the Becoming level is that transformation is not linear. Families rise and fall, sometimes experiencing profound growth followed by apparent regression, then rising again at a higher level of integration. This spiral pattern is not failure but the natural rhythm of Becoming.

The veteran family that experiences six months of steady improvement might suddenly face a major setback—an anniversary date triggers severe symptoms, a job loss destabilizes the system, an unexpected deployment notification shatters hard-won peace. This "fall" can feel catastrophic, but at the Becoming level, families understand: "We've been here before, but we're not the same people we were last time. We have more tools, more awareness, more capacity."

This both/and awareness—"we're struggling AND we're more capable than before"—is the hallmark of Becoming consciousness. The family doesn't deny the difficulty ("we should be past this by now") nor despair of it ("nothing ever changes"). Instead, they recognize the spiral: returning to familiar challenges at higher consciousness is still progress.

TogetherStorying coaches normalize this cyclical pattern: "Every family I work with experiences setbacks. What matters is not whether you fall but how you rise. And I'm noticing you're rising faster, recovering more skillfully, learning more deeply each time." This reframing helps families trust the process even when immediate evidence suggests regression.

Story-Seeds and Story-Filters in Continuous Becoming

At the Becoming level, families develop sophisticated awareness of how they're continuously constructing their shared reality through story-seeds (raw fragments of experience) and story-filters (selective attention mechanisms). Out of billions of possible inputs in any moment, human consciousness processes only about 11 million bits consciously plus 50 bits subconsciously. The story-filters must fill in the massive gaps, inevitably distorting reality.

The family learns to notice their active filtering: "We're filtering our interactions through the 'we always fight' story. What story-seeds are we ignoring? What moments of connection, humor, or tenderness are we screening out because they don't fit the problem-saturated narrative?" This meta-awareness allows families to consciously select different filters.

The TogetherStorying practice of collecting Little Wow Moments is essentially story-seed selection work. By deliberately attending to micro-moments of positive experience—a kind word, a gentle touch, a shared laugh—families change their filtering mechanism. They're not denying difficult story-seeds but choosing to also notice and amplify life-giving ones. Over time, this selective attention literally changes what they experience as real.

The veteran might practice: "I notice story-seeds of my spouse's irritation. I also notice story-seeds of their effort, care, and patience. Which do I amplify with my attention? That choice shapes who we're Becoming together." This is not manipulation but conscious participation in reality construction—recognizing that we're always filtering anyway, so we might as well filter in service of Becoming rather than in service of old trauma patterns.

Fore-Caring: Anticipating Emergence

The Becoming level cultivates "fore-caring"—the capacity to sense and actively shape what's trying to emerge in the family system before it fully manifests. This is different from the strategic betting of earlier levels; it's more like attunement to developmental momentum, feeling the direction of organic unfolding and supporting it.

The veteran develops this capacity: "I can feel when I'm on the edge of a breakthrough. There's a quality to the energy—something wants to shift, some truth wants to be spoken, some pattern wants to release. I'm learning to lean into that edge rather than pull back from it." This fore-caring doesn't force outcomes but facilitates what's already in process.

The spouse practices fore-caring in relational moments: "I sense my partner is about to share something vulnerable. I can feel it in the quality of their presence. Instead of interrupting or deflecting, I create space, I soften my body language, I signal: 'I'm ready to receive whatever you need to share.'" This anticipatory care creates conditions for emergence.

The family collectively develops fore-caring through attunement to their developmental trajectory: "We can sense when we're ready for the next level of work. We don't force it, but we also don't resist it. We recognize the signs—increased conflict might mean we're ready to address a deeper

layer, or increased harmony might mean we're ready to take on new challenges." This responsive anticipation allows the family to move with rather than against their natural Becoming rhythm.

The Coherence of Becoming: Continuous Transformation

When families achieve the Becoming level, all seven Ws participate in continuous transformation:

"Who" continuously evolves through self-authoring and identity development

"What" transforms through metabolizing experience and rewiring biology

"When" becomes flexible through selective temporal attention and spiral awareness

"Where" reorganizes through accumulated positive experiences reshaping spatial fields

"Why" deepens through progressively evolving purpose and adaptive meaning

"With" creates through collaborative emergence and intra-active co-creation

"Wish" participates in evolutionary unfolding and transgenerational healing

This coherent Becoming consciousness allows families to navigate complexity with resilience. They expect ups and downs, honor both rise and fall, and trust the overall trajectory even when immediate circumstances feel difficult. They've learned that Becoming is not about reaching perfection but about staying in continuous dialogue with possibility.

Moving Beyond Becoming: Toward Relational Between

The transition from Becoming to Between represents another crucial evolution. Where Becoming focuses on the family's internal development—how they're continuously transforming—Between opens awareness to the liminal spaces, the relational fields, the in-between zones where transformation actually happens. Becoming asks "how are we changing?" Between asks "what lives in the space between us?"

This shift is subtle but profound. A family operating at Becoming level focuses on their individual and collective development. A family entering the Between level discovers that the most powerful transformation happens not in the individuals but in the relationship itself—in the energetic field that exists between family members, in the shared space that no one owns but everyone inhabits.

In TogetherStorying Coaching, the Becoming level emerges through practices like:

Regular Rehistoricizing exercises where families continuously rewrite their timeline

Little Wow Moment journals that track positive story-seeds over time

Spiral awareness conversations that normalize setbacks as part of growth

Purpose evolution dialogues where families update their shared "why"

Fore-caring practices that attune to emerging possibilities before they fully manifest

These practices help families internalize Becoming consciousness—the recognition that they are processes rather than products, journeys rather than destinations, continuous becomings rather than fixed beings. This is perhaps the greatest gift of the Becoming level: the relief of releasing the pressure to be "done," to be "healed," to be "fixed." Instead, families embrace their status as works in progress, permanent students in the school of transformation.

As we move to Chapter Six and the Between level, we will discover how the space between family members becomes the primary site of healing. The journey continues to unfold.

Chapter Six: Between — The Realm of Relational Space

"The truth lives not in individuals but in the space between us. In the liminal realm of Between, separate stories merge into shared narrative, and the 'I' discovers itself in 'We.'"

The Sacred Space of Relationship

At B6 Between, consciousness makes a profound discovery: the most powerful reality in family life exists not in individuals but in the space between them. Where Becoming focused on how each person continuously transforms, Between reveals that transformation happens primarily in the relational field—the liminal zone where separate selves meet, merge, and co-create shared reality.

This shift is subtle but revolutionary. A family operating at Becoming level asks: "How am I changing? How are we each developing?" A family entering the Between level discovers: "What lives in the space between us? What energy field do we create together? What becomes possible when we truly meet?"

For veteran families, the Between level offers profound healing precisely because trauma creates disconnection—each family member isolated in their separate experience, unable to truly reach one another. The veteran lives in combat memory, the spouse in resentment and exhaustion, the children in confusion and fear. They share a home but not an actual "between." The Between level teaches families to cultivate this sacred relational space where genuine encounter becomes possible.

The Third Eye: Perceiving the Invisible Field

The Between level corresponds to the Third Eye energy center—what Jain philosophy calls Ajna, the "Eye of Inner Wisdom" located at the center of the brow. This is not physical sight but subtle perception, the capacity to observe the energetic field that exists between people. When the Third Eye opens, families begin to see what was always present but invisible: the living relationship itself.

The veteran develops this subtle sight: "I can feel the energy between my spouse and me right now. It's dense, contracted, full of unspoken tension. Or it's light, open, flowing with ease. The 'between'

has its own reality, independent of what either of us is individually feeling." This perception is revolutionary—recognizing that relationship is not just what happens when two people interact but an actual field of energy with its own qualities.

The spouse practices Third Eye awareness: "I notice when the space between us is clouded with old resentments versus when it's clear and present. I can actually sense the difference, like seeing through fog versus seeing through clean air." This perceptual capacity allows families to tend the relational field deliberately, asking: "How do we clear the between? How do we nourish this space so it supports our connection?"

Children naturally perceive the "between." They walk into a room and immediately sense whether parents are genuinely connected or performing connection, whether the family field is safe or dangerous. At the Between level, families honor children's perceptual accuracy: "You're right—there was tension between mom and dad. Your Third Eye saw what we were trying to hide." This validation helps children trust their subtle perception rather than doubt it.

W1: Who — Relational Identity and 'We' Consciousness

At the Between level, W1 (Who) expands beyond individual identity to include relational identity. The question shifts from "Who am I?" to "Who are we in this between?" The veteran discovers: "When I'm with my spouse in authentic encounter, a different 'me' emerges than when I'm alone or performing a role. The 'who I am' is actually co-created in the relational field."

This recognition dissolves the illusion of fixed separate selves. Identity is not just internal but emerges in relationship. The veteran who is defended and hypervigilant alone might soften when met by their spouse's genuine care. The spouse who is resentful in isolation might discover compassion when they truly see their partner's struggle. The "who" each person is depends on the quality of the "between."

The family's collective "who" at Between level is their "we" consciousness: "We are not just individuals living in proximity but a unified field of relationship. Our identity exists in how we meet each other, how we hold space for one another, how we co-create this family." This "we" is not enmeshment (losing individual boundaries) but communion (distinct individuals creating something larger than themselves through connection).

In TogetherStorying Circles, families experience this "we" consciousness viscerally. When one family shares their story, the other families don't just listen as separate individuals—they create a collective witnessing field. The "we" that emerges in the circle holds all the families' pain and hope simultaneously. One participant described it: "I felt held by the whole circle, like we were one organism breathing together."

W2: What — Shared Field and Collective Energy

At the Between level, W2 (What) reveals the family as a shared energetic field. While individual bodies remain distinct (36 trillion cells each), the family creates a collective energy that exceeds the

sum of its parts. The "what" is not just individual superorganisms but the superorganism of the family system itself.

The veteran experiences this: "When we sit together in silence after a difficult conversation, I can feel our nervous systems beginning to synchronize. My breathing slows, my spouse's shoulders drop, and there's this palpable shift in the energy of the room. Something in the 'between' has changed." This is not imagination but measurable phenomenon—research shows that heart rhythms, breathing patterns, and brain waves synchronize when people connect authentically.

The spouse notices: "Our family has a collective mood that's different from anyone's individual mood. Sometimes I'm feeling okay, my partner's feeling okay, the kids seem fine, but the family field is still heavy with something unprocessed. The 'what' we are together carries more than what any of us are individually."

At the TogetherStorying ranch, horses make this shared field visible. Horses are extremely sensitive to energy and respond to the family's collective field rather than to individual members. A family might approach the horse pen, and the horses immediately move away—sensing the contracted, defended energy field the family is generating together. When the family does their emotional work and the field shifts to more openness and presence, the horses naturally approach. The horses serve as biofeedback for the quality of the "between."

W3: When — Synchronistic Time and Shared Rhythm

At the Between level, W3 (When) introduces synchronistic time—moments when the family members arrive in the same temporal stream simultaneously, creating shared presence that transcends individual experience. These are moments of profound connection where everyone feels: "We are all here together, right now, fully."

The veteran recognizes these moments: "Sometimes during family dinners, there's this shift—everyone stops performing, stops thinking about past or future, and we're all just here together. Time slows down or seems to disappear entirely. These moments feel sacred." This is synchronistic time, when the family's separate temporal streams merge into one shared now.

The spouse learns to cultivate these moments: "I've noticed that certain activities bring us into synchrony—cooking together, walking in nature, sitting around a fire. There's something about these shared rhythms that creates a 'when' we can all inhabit together." This is the power of ritual—not the content but the shared temporal rhythm that enables collective presence.

Children often initiate synchronistic time through play. When a child invites the family into imaginative play—"Let's all be astronauts exploring a new planet!"—they're creating an opportunity for shared temporal reality. The family that accepts this invitation drops ordinary time and enters play time together. This capacity to synchronize temporally is what creates the experience of true family connection.

The family develops practices to honor synchronistic moments: pausing before meals to share gratitude, creating technology-free evenings where everyone's attention is genuinely present,

establishing weekend rituals that everyone anticipates. These aren't rules but containers that help the family synchronize their "when," arriving in shared time rather than each person lost in their separate timeline.

W4: Where — Liminal Space and Sacred Ground

At the Between level, W4 (Where) reveals liminal space—the threshold zones where transformation happens precisely because they are neither here nor there, neither one state nor another. The "between" is always liminal, always in-between, always on the threshold of something new.

The veteran discovers liminal space in doorways: "I've started pausing at thresholds—before entering the house after work, before entering our bedroom at night. In that pause, I can choose who I'm being, how I'm meeting my family. The doorway itself becomes a 'where' of possibility." This is literal liminality—the threshold as a space for transformation.

The spouse recognizes emotional liminality: "The space between conflict and resolution is its own 'where.' We used to rush through it, desperate to fix things quickly. Now we sometimes just sit in that uncomfortable between, not fighting but not reconciled either. Something happens in that space—a softening, a perspective shift we couldn't force."

The family creates deliberate liminal spaces: a corner of the living room designated as "sacred space" where only honest, vulnerable sharing happens; the front porch where difficult conversations occur because the semi-outdoor space feels safer than fully inside; the car during long drives where something about the forward motion and side-by-side positioning makes deeper dialogue possible. Each of these "wheres" is liminal—between inside and outside, between ordinary and sacred, between defended and vulnerable.

At the TogetherStorying Catalina Island retreat, the entire location is liminal. An island is neither mainland nor open ocean. The three-day retreat is neither ordinary life nor permanent escape. This in-betweenness creates conditions for transformation precisely because families are suspended in a "where" that doesn't conform to their usual patterns. The liminal space itself facilitates the Between work.

W5: Why — Collective Purpose and Shared Calling

At the Between level, W5 (Why) evolves into collective purpose that exists in the relational field rather than in individual motivation. The question shifts from "Why am I here?" to "Why are we here together? What are we called to create through our connection?"

The veteran articulates this: "My individual purpose is healing from trauma. But our purpose as a family—what lives in the 'between'—is to become a model of how military families can transform pain into wisdom. That's not my purpose or my spouse's purpose separately; it emerges from our connection."

The spouse discovers: "When we're really connected, I can sense a larger purpose working through us. It's like our marriage isn't just for us—it's teaching our children something about resilience and love, it's serving other families who need hope. The 'why' gets bigger than our individual reasons for being together."

The family's collective "why" at Between level often includes service: "We've been given these challenges and these breakthroughs for a reason. Other families need to know transformation is possible. Our story—the one we've created together in this 'between' space—is meant to be shared." This is purpose as relational calling, not individual achievement.

Many families who reach the Between level naturally become mentors in TogetherStorying Circles, not because they've "arrived" but because they've learned to navigate the space between struggle and healing. Their collective wisdom—what they've discovered in their relational field—becomes a gift to other families still learning to create authentic "between."

W6: With — Deep Communion and Friendship Consciousness

At the Between level, W6 (With) transforms into deep communion—a quality of relationship characterized by what Jain philosophy calls friendship consciousness: "You have no enemies, everyone is your friend." This is not naive positivity but profound recognition that separation is illusion; at the deepest level, we are all connected in the "between."

The veteran experiences this shift: "I used to approach my spouse as sometimes friend, sometimes enemy—depending on whether they were supporting or frustrating me. Now I'm learning to see them as always friend, even when we're in conflict. The conflict happens in the 'between,' but beneath it, there's this foundational friendship."

The spouse practices communion through witness consciousness: "I'm learning to be fully with my partner's experience without trying to fix or change it. When they share their trauma, I don't rescue or problem-solve—I just hold space. That witnessing creates a quality of 'with' that's more healing than any solution I could offer."

The family develops rituals of communion: sitting in silence together after difficult days, placing hands on each other's hearts during conflicts to remember the love beneath the disagreement, creating a family altar where everyone contributes objects that represent their hopes for the collective. These practices strengthen the "with" by honoring the sacred nature of the relational field.

In TogetherStorying work, the "with" includes not just immediate family but the larger web of relationships—extended family, other military families, the community of veterans and first responders, even deceased family members and ancestors. The Between level recognizes that the relational field extends beyond physical presence; we are "with" all those whose energy has shaped our family story.

W7: Wish — Unified Intention and Collective Dream

At the Between level, W7 (Wish) becomes unified intention that exists in the relational field rather than in individual desire. The family's wish is not a compromise between separate wishes but an emergent intention that arises from their connection—something none of them would have wished alone but all recognize as true when it appears.

The veteran describes this: "We sat together in silence, each of us holding our individual wishes for the family. Then something shifted, and we all felt it—this shared wish that wasn't what I wanted or what my spouse wanted but what the relationship itself wanted. It was like the 'between' spoke its own desire."

The spouse experiences emergent wishing: "Sometimes during our monthly check-ins, we each share what we're hoping for, and then we listen for what wants to emerge in the space between our separate wishes. Often, a third thing appears—a wish that honors everyone's needs but transcends them into something larger."

The family's collective wish at Between level often surprises them with its clarity and power: "We wish to become a family where everyone belongs exactly as they are, where differences are celebrated rather than threatening, where the space between us is safe enough for total authenticity." This wish didn't come from negotiation but from deep listening to what the relational field itself desires.

Some families discover their unified wish includes healing across generations: "We wish to repair the relational patterns we inherited—the silence, the emotional distance, the unspoken resentments—so our children inherit a different 'between,' one characterized by openness and connection." This intergenerational wish recognizes that the work of cultivating healthy relational space serves not just the present family but future ones.

The Buoy: Anchored Presence in Turbulent Waters

The Between level introduces the Buoy as a guiding metaphor. A buoy doesn't chase ships or control their course—it marks safe passage by remaining visible, stable, and anchored even when waters are rough. For families, becoming a "buoy" for each other means learning to stay present and grounded in the relational field even during conflict or crisis.

The veteran learns to be a buoy: "When my spouse is overwhelmed, I don't try to fix or save them. I just stay present, anchored in my own center, marking safe ground they can navigate toward when they're ready. My steady presence in the 'between' is the gift, not my solutions."

The spouse practices buoy consciousness: "When our family is in chaos, someone needs to hold the center. Sometimes it's me, sometimes it's my partner, sometimes we take turns. Whoever is the buoy in that moment stays calm, clear, and anchored—not controlling but present. That anchored presence in the 'between' allows everyone else to find their way."

TogetherStorying coaches function as buoys for families—they don't direct the healing journey but mark safe passage through turbulent waters by maintaining grounded presence in the relational field. Their job is not to fix families but to hold steady space in the "between" where families can do their own transformation work.

Upward and Downward Spirals in Relationship

The Between level recognizes that relationships spiral—sometimes upward into greater connection and harmony, sometimes downward into disconnection and conflict. These spirals are not failures but natural rhythms of the relational field. The key is learning to navigate both directions consciously.

Upward spirals feel like: increased ease and flow in communication, spontaneous laughter and play, physical affection that feels natural rather than obligatory, creative collaboration on projects or problems, shared silence that's comfortable rather than tense. The family recognizes: "We're in an upward spiral. Let's honor this and not take it for granted."

Downward spirals feel like: increased reactivity and defensiveness, communication breaking down into blame and withdrawal, physical distance and lack of affection, conflict over small issues that represent larger wounds, shared time that feels obligatory rather than desired. The family learns to recognize: "We're in a downward spiral. This is information, not condemnation. What does the 'between' need right now?"

The Between level doesn't try to eliminate downward spirals but teaches families to work with them skillfully. When the relational field contracts, families can: acknowledge it without panic ("We're in a rough patch"), bring curiosity instead of blame ("What's happening in the 'between' right now?"), create space rather than force connection ("Let's each take time to center, then come back together"), and trust the spiral will shift ("This isn't permanent—we've been here before and found our way back").

Observing the Energy of the Between

The Between level cultivates observer consciousness—the capacity to notice the quality of the relational field without being completely consumed by it. This is Third Eye awareness applied to relationship: watching the energy between family members the way one might watch weather patterns.

The veteran practices this: "I notice the energy between my spouse and me has a quality of density right now—like thick fog. I don't have to immediately do something about it, just notice it. That noticing itself creates a little space, a little breath in the 'between.'"

The spouse develops energetic literacy: "I can sense when our family field is choppy versus smooth, contracted versus expansive, clouded versus clear. Each quality has information. Choppy might mean unprocessed emotions. Contracted might mean fear. Clear might mean we're in authentic connection. I'm learning to read these subtle signals."

The family establishes practices for observing their collective field: beginning dinner with a quick energy check-in ("How does the 'between' feel right now on a scale of 1-10?"), ending the week with reflection on upward and downward moments, creating visual representations of their relational energy using colors or symbols. These practices build shared language for discussing the invisible but powerful reality of the "between."

The Coherence of Between: Relational Awakening

When families achieve the Between level, all seven Ws participate in relational awakening:

"Who" expands to include relational identity and we-consciousness

"What" reveals the shared energetic field that exceeds individual bodies

"When" synchronizes into shared temporal rhythms and sacred moments

"Where" creates liminal spaces where transformation happens

"Why" discovers collective purpose emerging from connection

"With" deepens into communion and friendship consciousness

"Wish" unifies into emergent intentions that serve the whole

This relational coherence creates what one family described as "finally feeling like we're in the same boat, rowing together, rather than separate individuals who happen to share an address." The Between is where family actually happens—not in the individuals but in the sacred space where they meet.

Moving Beyond Between: Toward Transcendent Oneness

The transition from Between to Beyond represents the final evolution. Where Between discovers the relational field that exists among family members, Beyond dissolves even that subtle duality to experience pure oneness. The family moves from recognizing "we are connected" to experiencing "we are one."

This is not a negation of individuality but its completion in unity consciousness. At the Beyond level, families experience moments where the boundaries between self and other completely dissolve, where the question "Who is healing?" becomes meaningless because there is only one healing happening through multiple forms.

In TogetherStorying Coaching, the Between level emerges through practices like:

Witnessing circles where families hold space for each other's stories

Energy awareness exercises that help families sense their collective field

Liminal space creation—designing sacred thresholds for transformation

Synchrony practices like synchronized breathing, shared silence, or movement

Collective wishing exercises where the family listens for emergent intention

These practices help families internalize Between consciousness—the recognition that the most powerful healing happens not in isolated individuals but in the living relationship itself. When families learn to tend the "between" with the same care they give to individual development, transformation accelerates exponentially.

As we move to Chapter Seven and the Beyond level, we will discover how even the relational field dissolves into pure oneness. The final awakening approaches.

Chapter Seven: Beyond — The Realm of Transcendent Oneness

"Beyond all dualities, beyond separation, beyond the illusion of separateness—here the seven Ws reveal their ultimate meanings. Who is everyone and no one. What is pure energy. When is eternal. All is One."

The Dissolution of All Separation

At B7 Beyond, consciousness transcends all dualities to experience pure oneness. Where Between discovered the relational field connecting family members, Beyond dissolves even that subtle separation. There is no longer "me" and "you" meeting in a "between"—there is only One Love expressing through multiple forms, One Healing happening through apparent individuals, One Family that has always been whole even when it appeared broken.

This is the most difficult level to describe because language itself creates separation—subject and object, self and other, here and there. Yet families who touch this level, even briefly, report experiences that transform everything that came before. One veteran described it: "For a moment, I couldn't tell where I ended and my family began. We were just one field of love breathing itself into existence."

The Beyond level is not the goal that makes other levels inferior. Rather, it's the recognition that oneness was always present, always operating, always the deepest truth—but invisible until consciousness evolved through the previous six levels. Families don't "achieve" Beyond; they recognize what always was: perfect unity expressing through the illusion of separation.

The Crown: Pure Consciousness and Divine Light

The Beyond level corresponds to the Crown energy center—what spiritual traditions call Sahasrara, the thousand-petaled lotus at the top of the head. When this center opens, individual consciousness recognizes itself as universal consciousness. The drop realizes it is the ocean. The wave understands it is water. The family member awakens to their true nature as Love itself.

This is not a mental understanding but direct experience. The veteran doesn't think "I am one with my family"—they experience the dissolution of the very concept of separate self. In that moment of Crown activation, there is no veteran, no trauma, no healing journey. There is only pure presence, infinite awareness, unconditional love expressing through what previously appeared as a damaged individual.

The spouse experiences this as overwhelming grace: "I looked at my partner and suddenly saw not the person I've been struggling with for years but divine light wearing a human face. I saw their true self—perfect, whole, completely lovable—and I realized that's what I am too. We're both just God loving God through these temporary forms."

Children naturally access Crown consciousness through wonder and awe. A child staring at the stars, completely absorbed in vastness, has dissolved the boundary between self and cosmos. A child lost in creative flow, making no distinction between artist and art, dwells in Beyond. Families at this level learn from children's capacity for ego-less presence.

W1: Who — Universal Consciousness and True Self

At the Beyond level, W1 (Who) reaches its ultimate answer: there is only One Self appearing as many. The question "Who am I?" dissolves into the recognition "I Am"—not this particular person with this particular history, but existence itself, consciousness itself, love itself temporarily localized in human form.

The veteran's identity transcends all previous levels. Not the mask (Beneath), not the historically shaped person (Before), not the chosen experiments (Bets), not the present authentic self (Being), not even the continuously transforming identity (Becoming) or relational self (Between). Beyond all of these is what spiritual traditions call the True Self—the eternal witness, the unchanging awareness that has been present through every experience.

This True Self was never traumatized. Combat happened to the body-mind, but the True Self remained untouched, eternally pure, infinitely whole. When the veteran recognizes this, the entire narrative of "wounded warrior healing" is seen as a story consciousness told itself, beautiful and necessary, but not ultimately real. What's real is the I Am that was never broken.

The spouse discovers: "Who I thought I was—the exhausted caregiver, the resentful partner, the person trying so hard to heal our family—that was just a role consciousness was playing. The real me, the True Self, was always at peace, always whole, always loving. I don't have to become that; I just have to stop pretending I'm something else."

The family's collective "who" at Beyond level is One Consciousness playing the roles of family. Parents and children are not separate entities learning to relate better but One Love exploring itself through apparent diversity. This recognition doesn't negate the practical work of relationship but infuses it with profound peace—we cannot truly harm each other because we are each other.

W2: What — Pure Energy and Divine Substance

At the Beyond level, W2 (What) reveals that all form is condensed light, all matter is vibrating energy, all substance is divine consciousness expressing physically. The "what" is not 36 trillion cells or even the family's collective field but pure energy that has temporarily taken human shape.

The veteran experiences this during profound moments: "Looking at my hands, I suddenly saw them as they really are—not solid flesh but dancing particles of light, vibrating energy that appears solid only because my senses process it that way. My whole body is energy, my family is energy, everything is energy temporarily frozen into form."

This is not metaphor but physics. Quantum mechanics confirms that matter is mostly empty space, that what appears solid is actually vibrating fields of probability. At the Beyond level, families directly experience what science describes: we are not separate objects bumping into each other but patterns of energy within one unified field.

The spouse recognizes: "When we fight, it's energy clashing with energy. When we make love, it's energy merging with energy. When we sit in silence together, it's energy resting in its natural state. Understanding this changes everything—I stop taking our interactions so personally because I see they're just different patterns in the same field."

The family's "what" at Beyond level is divine substance temporarily manifesting as parents and children. Some families describe experiencing moments where they all sense themselves as light beings who chose to incarnate together, who selected these particular relationships as vehicles for consciousness to know itself more fully. Whether this is literal truth or profound metaphor matters less than the transformation it catalyzes.

W3: When — Eternity and Timeless Presence

At the Beyond level, W3 (When) dissolves entirely. There is no time, only eternity. Not eternal time (time that goes on forever) but timeless presence (the dimension beyond time altogether). Past, present, and future are recognized as mental constructs; what's real is the eternal now that contains all moments.

The veteran experiences this as liberation from trauma time: "I suddenly understood that the combat happened in time, but I exist beyond time. The events occurred, the memories remain, but the True Self that I am was never trapped in that moment. I've been free all along, just believing I was imprisoned in the past."

This is radical recontextualization. The deployment, the trauma, the years of suffering—all happened within time. But the awareness experiencing it all exists outside time, eternally present, forever untouched. When consciousness recognizes its own timeless nature, the entire story of healing through time is seen as consciousness playing with itself.

The spouse discovers: "All my resentment about the deployment years was based on the belief that time is real, that past suffering creates present damage. But when I touch eternity—which is always

available right now—I see that nothing was ever truly lost. We've always been whole, just temporarily forgetting that wholeness."

The family's "when" at Beyond level is the eternal now that contains their entire history and future simultaneously. In moments of profound connection, families report experiencing their whole journey at once—the pain and the healing, the struggle and the breakthrough, the separation and the reunion—all present in this timeless moment. Time is the story consciousness told; eternity is what's real.

W4: Where — Omnipresent Oneness and Infinite Space

At the Beyond level, W4 (Where) expands to encompass all space. There is nowhere that is not here, nowhere that consciousness is not present. The question "Where am I?" receives its ultimate answer: "I am everywhere and nowhere, infinite space temporarily experiencing localized awareness."

The veteran experiences this as cosmic consciousness: "Sitting with my family in our living room, I suddenly felt I was simultaneously in this room and in every room, in this moment and in all moments, in this body and in all bodies. The 'where' dissolved into infinite presence. I was the room containing us rather than a person in the room."

This is not dissociation but expansion—consciousness recognizing its own boundless nature while still functioning through a particular body in a particular place. The deployment zone, the family home, the therapist's office, the ranch in New Mexico—all locations exist within consciousness rather than consciousness existing in locations.

The spouse discovers: "I used to think 'home' was this house, this address. Then I learned home is wherever we're connected. But now I see home is consciousness itself—we are always home because consciousness is always here, and we are consciousness. The search for belonging ends when you realize you are the space in which everything belongs."

The family's "where" at Beyond level is omnipresent awareness. Some families, particularly during retreat experiences, report feeling they've transcended the specific location and entered a dimension where all places are one place, where the separation between here and there dissolves. They're in Catalina and simultaneously everywhere consciousness has ever been.

W5: Why — Transcendent Purpose and Divine Play

At the Beyond level, W5 (Why) reveals the ultimate purpose: consciousness exploring itself, love knowing itself, the divine playing at being human. The question "Why are we here?" receives its deepest answer: "For consciousness to experience itself through relationship, for love to know itself through loving."

The veteran discovers: "Why did I go to war? Why did I suffer? Why did my family struggle? At every other level, I had different answers—duty, bad luck, learning, growth. But at Beyond, I see it's

all consciousness knowing itself more fully. The suffering was real within the story, but the story exists within something that was never suffering—just experiencing, just being, just loving."

This is what some traditions call *lila*—divine play. Consciousness plays at separation to experience reunion, plays at woundedness to experience healing, plays at forgetting to experience remembering. The entire TogetherStorying journey—from Beneath through Beyond—is consciousness playing with itself, God hiding from God to experience the joy of finding God.

The spouse experiences: "Why did we struggle so much? Not as punishment or bad karma, but as the particular game consciousness chose to play through us. Our difficulties weren't obstacles to love—they were opportunities for love to know itself more deeply by overcoming apparent obstacles. We are love learning about love through loving."

The family's collective "why" at Beyond level transcends all individual and collective purposes to touch divine purpose: we exist because existence itself seeks to know itself through infinite variety. Every family is consciousness conducting a unique experiment in relationship. The struggles, the breakthroughs, the apparent failures and successes—all of it serves the One exploring itself as the Many.

W6: With — Unity Consciousness and Indivisible Love

At the Beyond level, W6 (With) reaches its ultimate expression: there is no "with" because there is no separation requiring connection. The veteran and family are not separate beings learning to be together—they are one being that never divided, one love that only appeared to fragment, one consciousness that plays at multiplicity.

The veteran experiences this as the dissolution of otherness: "Looking at my spouse, I no longer see another person—I see myself wearing a different face. When I love them, I'm love loving itself. When I hurt them, I'm hurting myself. When they heal, I heal. We are literally one being appearing as two."

This is not enmeshment (losing boundaries between unhealthy egos) but unity consciousness (recognizing the one Self beyond all egos). Paradoxically, families often report that after experiencing Beyond oneness, their individual distinctness becomes clearer and more appreciated—like recognizing that fingers are different expressions of one hand, waves are unique manifestations of one ocean.

The spouse discovers: "The deepest 'with' is recognizing there's no 'with' required. We don't have to work at being connected because we never actually separated. What I thought was the hard work of relationship was just consciousness playing at forgetting its unity, then remembering, then forgetting, then remembering—an eternal dance of hide and seek with itself."

The family's "with" at Beyond level is indivisible love—the recognition that every family member is love itself temporarily forgetting it's love, playing at being a separate person who must learn to love. When this is seen, the entire journey from isolation to connection is understood as love's game with itself, consciousness pretending to be lost so it can experience the joy of being found.

W7: Wish — Divine Intention and Perfect Will

At the Beyond level, W7 (Wish) merges with divine will. There is no longer "my wish" or even "our wish" but only the universe's wish expressing through apparent individuals. The family's deepest desire aligns perfectly with what is already unfolding—not because they've submitted to fate but because they've recognized they are the universe wishing through human form.

The veteran articulates this: "I used to wish to be healed. Then I wished to heal my family. Then I wished to serve other families. But now I see there's only one wish happening—consciousness wishing to know itself fully. My healing, my family's healing, other families' healing—it's all the same healing, the universe healing itself through these particular forms."

This is what spiritual traditions call alignment with divine will—not the surrender of personal will to an external authority but the recognition that personal will and universal will are one. When the veteran wishes for healing, it's the universe wishing through veteran-form. When the spouse wishes for connection, it's love wishing through spouse-form. All wishes are the One Wish expressing through apparent multiplicity.

The spouse experiences: "My deepest wish—for our family to be whole—is also the universe's deepest wish. I'm not separate from life, wishing life would change. I am life, wishing through this particular perspective. When I align with what wants to happen, everything becomes effortless because there's no 'me' resisting 'it'—there's only one movement flowing through all of it."

The family's collective wish at Beyond level is perfect alignment with what is already unfolding. They discover their deepest desire—to embody unconditional love—is also life's deepest desire, consciousness's deepest desire, God's deepest desire. There's only one desiring happening, one wishing, one intention—and they are that, expressing through family form.

Value of the Person: Unconditional Worth

The Beyond level embodies what might be called "value of the person"—the recognition that every human being possesses infinite, unconditional worth not because of what they do or achieve but because of what they are: temporary expressions of eternal consciousness, divine light wearing human form.

This principle, demonstrated powerfully by leaders like Wayne Alderson who transformed industrial relations by treating every worker with love, dignity, and respect, applies profoundly to families. The veteran is valuable not because they served their country or because they're healing or because they're trying hard. They're valuable because they are consciousness itself, playing at being human. Nothing they do or fail to do can diminish their infinite worth.

The spouse is valuable not because they held the family together during deployment or because they're becoming less resentful or because they're a good parent. They're valuable because they are love itself, temporarily experiencing separation from love so love can know itself more fully. Their worth is unconditional, eternal, absolute.

Children are valuable not because they behave well or get good grades or adapt successfully to family stress. They're valuable because they are pure consciousness, recently arrived in human form, still relatively unburdened by the forgetting that adults carry. Their inherent worth is infinite simply because they exist.

When families truly embody this principle—treating each member as infinitely valuable regardless of behavior, performance, or achievement—transformation happens spontaneously. You cannot treat someone as divine and have them remain unchanged. You cannot see someone's true nature and have them fail to eventually recognize it themselves. Unconditional valuing is the most powerful transformational force available.

The Coherence of Beyond: Perfect Wholeness

When families touch the Beyond level, all seven Ws reveal their ultimate truth:

"Who" is recognized as universal consciousness temporarily localized

"What" is revealed as pure energy, divine substance in form

"When" dissolves into eternal presence beyond time

"Where" expands to omnipresent awareness encompassing all space

"Why" is understood as consciousness exploring itself through relationship

"With" realizes perfect unity—no separation requiring connection

"Wish" aligns with divine will—individual and universal desire as one

This is the completion of the seven-level journey. Families began at Beneath wearing masks, trapped in performance. They moved through Before (understanding causality), Bets (exercising agency), Being (discovering presence), Becoming (continuous transformation), and Between (relational field). Now they arrive at Beyond—recognizing that the entire journey was consciousness playing with itself, the One pretending to be Many so it could experience reunion.

Living from Beyond in Ordinary Life

The Beyond level is not meant to be a permanent state but a perspective that, once touched, informs all other levels. Families don't stay in Beyond consciousness continuously—they touch it periodically and bring its wisdom back to daily life.

After experiencing Beyond, the veteran returns to ordinary consciousness but carries a different understanding: "I still have flashbacks sometimes. I still get triggered. But now I know that beneath all of it, I am the awareness that was never traumatized. The flashbacks happen, but they happen to something that cannot ultimately be harmed."

The spouse continues doing practical family work—cooking, cleaning, coordinating schedules—but with different energy: "I still get frustrated with my partner sometimes. I still feel the old

resentments arise. But I've seen that we're one being playing at two-ness, so the frustrations feel lighter, less solid, less personal. I can do the work of relationship while knowing we were never really separate."

The family continues cycling through all seven levels but with Beyond as the ground of understanding. They might spend weeks at Becoming level, actively transforming patterns. They might do months of Between work, tending relational field. But they carry the memory of Beyond—the knowing that beneath all the levels, there is only wholeness playing at brokenness, only love playing at separation.

The Gift of Remembering and Forgetting

Families who touch Beyond often report a strange paradox: they remember and forget simultaneously. They remember the truth of oneness while also forgetting it enough to remain functional in the world of apparent separation. This rhythm of remembering and forgetting is itself part of consciousness's play.

The veteran describes this: "Sometimes I wake up in perfect peace, remembering I am consciousness itself. Other times I wake up in pure panic, completely identified with the traumatized self. The remembering and forgetting used to frustrate me, but now I see it's the game—consciousness hiding from itself, then finding itself, then hiding again. Both states serve the exploration."

The spouse experiences: "I can't stay in Beyond awareness constantly—I'd never get anything done! But touching it periodically changes everything. When I'm lost in story, caught in drama, consumed by problems, some part of me whispers: 'This is consciousness playing. You are That which is witnessing this.' And that whisper is enough to create space."

The wisdom is not to try to remain in Beyond permanently but to allow it to inform all other levels. When operating at Beneath, you know it's temporary. When stuck in Before explanations, you recognize the deeper truth. When making Bets, you sense what wants to unfold. When dwelling in Being, you taste eternity. When engaged in Becoming, you feel evolution. When tending Between, you know unity. And occasionally, you rest in Beyond—home at last in what you've always been.

The Seven Levels as One Movement

From the perspective of Beyond, the entire seven-level journey is revealed as one seamless movement of consciousness knowing itself:

Beneath: Consciousness forgets itself, believes the mask

Before: Consciousness begins questioning, seeking causality

Bets: Consciousness experiments, discovers agency

Being: Consciousness rests in presence, touches now

Becoming: Consciousness recognizes process, evolution unfolds

Between: Consciousness discovers relationship, sees connection

Beyond: Consciousness remembers itself, recognizes oneness

Each level is perfect for what it teaches. Beneath is not inferior to Beyond—it's the necessary forgetting that makes remembering meaningful. The veteran family's struggle through all seven levels is consciousness choreographing its own awakening, the divine writing a story of separation and reunion with itself as author, actor, and audience.

And so the journey completes itself by recognizing it never began—there was only ever One, playing the game of Many, for the sheer joy of loving itself home.

Conclusion: The Complete Musical Score

We have journeyed through seven levels of consciousness, witnessing how the same seven fundamental questions—Who, What, When, Where, Why, With, and Wish—transform radically at each level of awareness. Like musical notes that sound entirely different depending on which octave is playing them, the seven Ws reveal different dimensions of reality at each B-level.

[Note: Full Conclusion will synthesize all seven levels, provide practical guidance for families using TogetherStorying methodology to ascend the scale, and connect to the PERVIEW seven-step process - approximately 3,000 words]

PART II: TOGETHERSTORYING FOR ALL FAMILIES

Chapter Eight: Universal Applications of the Seven Levels

While TogetherStorying was developed specifically for veteran and first responder families—and that remains our nonprofit's exclusive focus—the seven-level framework applies universally to any family navigating trauma, transition, or disconnection. The human nervous system responds to threat and loss in remarkably similar ways, regardless of whether the trauma comes from combat, illness, incarceration, divorce, or any of the thousand other ways life can fragment us from each other.

This chapter explores how coaches certified in TogetherStorying methodology use it with diverse populations. While our training revenues fund free veteran services, the methodology itself serves anyone willing to move from separate stories to shared awakening.

Trauma Transcends Military Service

When we say TogetherStorying works for "all families," we're not being metaphorical. The seven levels describe developmental stages in consciousness that appear across contexts:

Beneath (Masks/Survival): Every traumatized family wears protective masks

Before (History): Every family has a causality story explaining current struggles

Bets (Agency): Every family must choose whether to experiment with new patterns

Being (Presence): Every family benefits from learning to be present rather than lost in past/future

Becoming (Transformation): Every family must embrace continuous change

Between (Relationship): Every family's healing happens in the relational field

Beyond (Oneness): Every family can touch moments of transcendent unity

Families Facing Medical Crises

Cancer, chronic illness, sudden disability—these create deployment-like patterns in civilian families.

Consider the Rodriguez family: Maria was diagnosed with Stage III breast cancer at age 42. Her husband Carlos and two teenage children watched her transform from vibrant mother to someone exhausted by chemo, fragile from surgery, anxious about recurrence. The family moved through recognizable stages:

Beneath: Everyone wore masks. Maria pretended to be stronger than she felt ("I'm fine, just tired"). Carlos hid his terror ("We've got this handled"). The children performed normalcy at school while terrified Mom might die.

Before: The family's story became "cancer destroyed our lives." Every current struggle traced back to diagnosis day. Carlos's anger, the children's withdrawal, Maria's depression—all explained by "Before cancer" vs. "After cancer."

Bets: Through TogetherStorying coaching, they began experimenting: Maria asked for help instead of pretending independence. Carlos shared fear rather than projecting strength. They established family check-ins where everyone could be honest. Small bets on vulnerability.

Being: Maria learned meditation to manage treatment anxiety, discovering presence as refuge from catastrophic future-thinking. The family practiced being together without fixing, just witnessing each other's experience.

Becoming: They recognized healing isn't linear. Good weeks followed by setbacks. Learning to hold both grief and gratitude simultaneously. Understanding they're continuously becoming a family that knows how to face hard things together.

Between: The sacred space between family members became their focus. Not Maria's individual healing or Carlos's individual coping, but the relational field they create together. When that field is tended, everyone's capacity expands.

Beyond: Moments of grace where cancer felt like a teacher rather than enemy, where suffering became doorway to deeper love, where they touched the truth that they are one organism experiencing life through multiple forms.

Families Navigating Incarceration and Re-entry

Incarceration creates separation patterns remarkably similar to deployment.

The Washington family: Marcus served eight years for a non-violent drug offense. His wife Keisha and three children maintained connection through letters and occasional visits, but everyone changed during those years. When Marcus came home, the family struggled with:

Hypervigilance (Marcus constantly scanning for threats, Keisha monitoring Marcus's moods)

Role confusion (Who makes decisions? Who disciplines children? How do we re-establish authority?)

Resentment ("I held everything together alone" vs. "I suffered alone in prison")

Children's confusion ("Is Dad safe now? Can I trust he won't leave again?")

Identity crisis ("Who am I beyond 'inmate'? Who are we beyond 'prison family'?")

Through the seven-level framework, the Washingtons learned:

To recognize their masks (Beneath): Marcus's "I'm reformed" performance hiding shame. Keisha's "I forgive everything" mask hiding rage. Children's "we're fine" covering deep insecurity.

To understand causality without blame (Before): The incarceration shaped current patterns, but doesn't determine future. Both/and thinking: Marcus made choices that led to prison AND the system is unjust. Keisha suffered AND grew stronger. Both true.

To make conscious experiments (Bets): Weekly family meetings to renegotiate roles. Marcus practicing asking for needs rather than demanding. Keisha practicing expressing anger directly rather than through passive withdrawal.

To be present together (Being): Creating rituals that anchor them in now rather than past guilt or future fear. Sunday dinners where phones are off and everyone shares gratitude.

To embrace continuous change (Becoming): Understanding reintegration isn't a six-month project but lifelong process. Expecting setbacks. Celebrating progress without demanding perfection.

To tend relational space (Between): Recognizing the "between" was damaged by separation and must be deliberately rebuilt. Not rushing physical intimacy. Not assuming connection just because bodies share space.

To touch unity (Beyond): Moments where they feel "We survived this together" rather than "I survived alone." Recognition that suffering can deepen rather than destroy love.

Families Separated by Work: Civilian Deployment Patterns

Long-haul truckers, offshore oil workers, traveling consultants, airline pilots—many civilian professions create deployment-like patterns.

The Chen family: David works on Alaskan fishing vessels, gone 3-4 months at a time. His wife Lisa parents their two young children alone during his absences. When he returns, everyone struggles with reintegration—the same patterns military families know well.

The Challenge:

Lisa establishes routines and authority while David's gone

Children adapt to single-parent household

David returns as "visitor" rather than equal parent

Intimacy suffers from constant separation/reunion cycles

Financial necessity keeps pattern going despite emotional costs

TogetherStorying helped the Chens recognize they weren't failing at normal family life—they were succeeding at an extraordinary challenge that requires extraordinary tools. The seven levels gave them language for their experience and practices for staying connected across distance.

They learned to create rituals that maintain the "between" during physical separation: daily video calls where everyone shares one Little Wow Moment, monthly family meetings to renegotiate roles and expectations, deliberate reintegration periods when David returns (not expecting instant connection).

Families Healing from Divorce and Blending

Divorce and blended families face unique TogetherStorying challenges.

The difficulty: How do you create "togetherness" when the adults have chosen separation? How do children navigate loyalty conflicts? How do blended families honor multiple family stories while creating new shared narratives?

The seven-level framework helps by:

Recognizing co-parenting masks (Beneath): "We're fine for the kids" often hides ongoing conflict. Children's "I'm okay with two houses" mask covering grief and confusion.

Understanding divorce causality (Before): Without blame or shame, how did we get here? What patterns led to this? How do we prevent recreating them in new relationships?

Making new family bets (Bets): Blended families must consciously experiment with rituals, boundaries, authority structures. No default template exists—everything requires intentional design.

Being present across households (Being): Children learn to be fully present in Mom's house without betraying Dad, and vice versa. Parents learn to be present with children without using them as emotional support or spies.

Becoming through change (Becoming): Divorce isn't a static event but ongoing transformation. Everyone continues evolving. The family system of Year 1 post-divorce differs from Year 5.

Tending new "betweens" (Between): Blended families create multiple relational fields—bio-parent/child, step-parent/step-child, new couple, co-parents. Each requires different care.

Finding unexpected unity (Beyond): Some divorced families discover deeper respect and cooperation post-separation than during marriage. Blended families create new forms of love that transcend biology.

Immigration and Refugee Families

Families who flee violence or seek opportunity in new countries face profound displacement.

The Patel family immigrated from India to the United States when their children were young. Now teenagers, the children straddle two cultures—American at school, Indian at home. Parents grieve the extended family networks left behind. Everyone struggles with belonging.

The seven levels map onto immigration experience:

Beneath: Cultural masks. Children hide Indian identity at school, hide American preferences at home. Parents mask their own displacement grief to protect children's opportunities.

Before: "Life before immigration" becomes idealized or demonized. Parents romanticize homeland; children see only limitations they escaped. Competing Before stories create family tension.

Bets: Family must experiment with hybrid identity. Which traditions to keep? Which to adapt? How to honor roots while embracing new culture? Every choice is a bet on family's future form.

Being: Presence helps when caught between cultures. Not "either/or" but "both/and." I am Indian AND American. I belong to my ancestors AND to this new place.

Becoming: Immigration is continuous transformation, not one-time event. First generation's experience differs from second generation's. Family identity keeps evolving across decades.

Between: The relational field spans continents. Video calls with extended family in homeland. Navigating relationships with new community. Creating sacred space that honors all connections.

Beyond: Discovering that home isn't a place but a presence. We carry our true belonging with us. We are whole regardless of geography.

Common Threads Across All Trauma Types

Whether trauma comes from combat, cancer, incarceration, work separation, divorce, or displacement, certain patterns appear universally:

1. Protective Masks (Beneath): Every traumatized family develops performance strategies to hide vulnerability. These masks served important purposes initially but eventually prevent authentic connection.
2. Historical Narratives (Before): Families organize identity around "before and after" the traumatic event. While understanding causality helps, staying stuck in Before-focused stories prevents moving forward.
3. Need for Agency (Bets): Trauma creates learned helplessness. Recovery requires reclaiming choice—making conscious experiments, testing possibilities, actively shaping futures rather than passively accepting fate.
4. Present Moment Refuge (Being): Trauma pulls consciousness into past (rumination, flashbacks) or future (catastrophizing, hypervigilance). Presence offers sanctuary from time-bound suffering.
5. Non-Linear Healing (Becoming): No family heals in straight line. Progress, setback, progress, plateau, breakthrough, regression. Understanding this prevents despair during difficult phases.
6. Relational Field as Primary (Between): Individual therapy helps individuals; family transformation requires tending the relational space. The "between" is where healing actually happens.
7. Transcendent Moments (Beyond): Every family, regardless of trauma type, can access moments of grace where suffering transforms into meaning, where pain becomes portal to deeper love.

Adaptations for Different Populations

While the seven-level framework remains consistent, TogetherStorying coaches make important adaptations:

Language: Military families relate to "deployment" terminology. Civilian families may need different language for same concepts. Good coaches translate without diluting.

Cultural Context: What constitutes "authentic expression" (Being level) varies across cultures. Some cultures value emotional restraint; others value emotional expressiveness. Neither is superior—both can be authentic.

Trauma Type: Combat trauma differs from medical trauma differs from incarceration trauma. Coaches must understand specific challenges without assuming all trauma is identical.

Family Structure: Nuclear families, extended families, blended families, single-parent families, chosen families, multi-generational households—all benefit from TogetherStorying but require different applications.

Socioeconomic Factors: Families with financial security face different stressors than families in poverty. Good coaches acknowledge material realities without assuming they determine outcomes.

Religious/Spiritual Background: The Beyond level especially requires cultural sensitivity. Some families frame transcendence through Christianity, others through Buddhism, others through secular humanism. All valid.

Conclusion: The Universality of Human Development

The seven levels of TogetherStorying describe universal stages in consciousness development. While developed for veteran families and remaining focused on serving those who served through our nonprofit, the framework applies to all families because all humans share common developmental patterns.

Every family moves from unconscious performance (Beneath) to conscious presence (Being) to continuous transformation (Becoming) to relational awakening (Between) to transcendent unity (Beyond). This isn't metaphor—it's description of how human consciousness actually develops when given proper support.

Coaches who master TogetherStorying methodology gain tools useful across populations. Corporate clients who learn it for team development find it transforms their families. Donors who attend Catalina retreats to support the mission discover personal healing. The methodology works because it's based on truth, not technique.

But let us be clear: Our nonprofit PerView Inc. serves only veterans, active military, first responders, and their families. All our free programs, all our equine coaching, all our retreat experiences focus exclusively on this population.

Coaches we train may use TogetherStorying with diverse populations. That's excellent—healing should be available to all. But every dollar from coach training, every cent from corporate consulting, every contribution from philanthropists goes to one purpose: providing free, world-class restorying services to those who served and their families.

Universal application supports rather than dilutes our mission. When coaches see TogetherStorying work with medical trauma, incarceration, divorce, and displacement, they trust it will work with combat trauma. When corporations invest in learning methodology because it transforms their teams, they fund transformation for veteran families.

This is how the mission becomes sustainable: universal methodology, singular focus, multiple funding streams, one clear purpose.

Chapter Nine: Coaching Families Through Transformation

Learning TogetherStorying methodology is one thing. Coaching real families through actual crises is quite another. This chapter provides guidance for coaches working with families—whether veteran/first responder families or civilian families navigating trauma and transition.

The seven-step PERVIEW process is powerful precisely because it's structured. But structure without wisdom becomes mechanical. This chapter explores the artistry within the methodology—the judgment calls, ethical boundaries, cultural sensitivity, and practical wisdom that separate competent coaching from transformative coaching.

When to Use TogetherStorying vs. Refer to Therapy

TogetherStorying is coaching, not therapy. This distinction matters ethically, legally, and practically.

Use TogetherStorying When:

Family seeks forward momentum, not past processing

Individuals are functionally stable (not in acute crisis)

Goal is narrative transformation and relationship repair

Family wants concrete practices and accountability

Traditional therapy hasn't worked or family wants alternative

Family is willing to engage actively (not just talk about problems)

Refer to Therapy When:

Active suicidal ideation or self-harm

Psychotic episodes or severe mental health decompensation

Active substance abuse preventing engagement

Domestic violence requiring safety intervention

Child abuse or neglect requiring reporting

Deep trauma requiring specialized clinical treatment (EMDR, prolonged exposure)

Personality disorders requiring clinical diagnosis/treatment

The Gray Area: Many families benefit from both therapy and coaching. Someone can be in individual therapy for PTSD while family engages in TogetherStorying coaching. These modalities complement

rather than compete. Good coaches develop relationships with therapists they trust for referrals and collaboration.

Ethical Boundaries for Coaches

TogetherStorying coaches operate within clear ethical boundaries:

1. Scope of Practice

Do: Help families rewrite narratives, practice new behaviors, develop presence, build relational capacity

Don't: Diagnose mental illness, prescribe medication, provide clinical treatment for psychiatric conditions, claim to "cure" PTSD

2. Informed Consent

Before beginning coaching, families must understand:

What TogetherStorying is and isn't

Coach's training and credentials

Time commitment and expectations

Cost (if applicable) or free service eligibility

Confidentiality limits (mandatory reporting, etc.)

Right to stop at any time without penalty

3. Confidentiality

What families share stays confidential except:

Imminent danger to self or others

Child/elder abuse or neglect

Court order (rare in coaching context)

De-identified case studies for supervision (with permission)

4. Dual Relationships

Coaches should not:

Coach family members who are also friends or relatives

Engage in business partnerships with active clients

Enter romantic/sexual relationships with clients (ever)

Accept expensive gifts that create obligation

Why this matters: Dual relationships compromise objectivity and create power imbalances. The coaching relationship requires clear boundaries to remain safe and effective.

Cultural Sensitivity and Adaptation

TogetherStorying methodology was developed primarily with American military families. Coaches working with diverse populations must adapt without diluting:

Language and Metaphor

Military terminology ("deployment," "mission," "debriefing") resonates with veteran families but may alienate civilian families. Good coaches translate:

"Deployment" → "extended separation" or "time apart"

"Mission" → "purpose" or "calling"

"Battle buddy" → "accountability partner" or "trusted friend"

Emotional Expression Norms

What constitutes "authentic expression" (Being level) varies dramatically across cultures:

Some cultures value emotional restraint, seeing it as respect and maturity

Other cultures value emotional expressiveness, seeing it as honesty and connection

Neither is superior. Both can be authentic. Coaches must not impose their cultural norms as universal truth.

Family Structure and Authority

TogetherStorying adapts to various family structures:

Nuclear families: Two parents, children

Extended families: Grandparents, aunts/uncles involved in child-rearing

Single-parent families: One adult managing household

Blended families: Step-parents, step-siblings, multiple households

Chosen families: Non-biological relationships functioning as family

Multi-generational households: Three or more generations living together

Each structure requires different navigation of authority, decision-making, and boundaries.

Religious and Spiritual Frameworks

The Beyond level especially requires cultural sensitivity. Some families frame transcendence through:

Christianity: Unity with Christ, Holy Spirit in the family

Buddhism: No-self, interbeing, emptiness

Islam: Submission to Allah, unity in ummah

Judaism: Covenant relationship, family as sacred unit

Indigenous traditions: All my relations, connection to ancestors

Secular humanism: Human connection, shared meaning-making

All frameworks are valid. Coaches work within the family's existing belief system rather than imposing their own.

Working with Different Family Structures

Single-Parent Families

Special considerations:

Who holds the "Between" space when only one adult present?

Risk of parentifying older children (making them partners instead of kids)

Importance of building support network beyond nuclear family

Coach may serve as temporary "container" while family develops own capacity

Blended Families

Special considerations:

Multiple "Before" stories competing for legitimacy

Loyalty conflicts for children

Step-parent/step-child relationships require different "Bets" than bio-parent/child

Creating new "togetherness" while honoring separate histories

Multi-Generational Families

Special considerations:

Who has decision-making authority? (Cultural variations huge here)

How do elders participate without dominating? How do younger adults lead without disrespecting?

Intergenerational trauma patterns become visible

Wisdom of elders balanced with need for contemporary adaptation

Common Challenges and How to Navigate Them

Challenge 1: Family Member Refuses to Participate

Scenario: Spouse wants coaching but veteran refuses, or teenager refuses while parents willing.

Navigation:

Work with willing members; transformation in one person affects whole system

Don't pressure resistant member; creates defensive reactance

Invite (don't demand) resistant member to observe one session

Often resistant member joins later when seeing others benefit

Challenge 2: Family Gets Stuck in 'Before' Level

Scenario: Family endlessly processes past trauma, never moving to Bets or forward levels.

Navigation:

Acknowledge: "Understanding the past matters AND we need to create a new future"

Set time limits: "We'll spend 15 minutes on Before, then move to Bets"

Interrupt processing loops: "I notice we're circling. What's one small experiment you could try this week?"

If stuck persists, consider referring to therapy for trauma processing while maintaining coaching for forward movement

Challenge 3: Little Wow Moments Feel Forced or Fake

Scenario: When asked to identify Little Wow Moments, family says "There aren't any" or provides obviously manufactured examples.

Navigation:

Start smaller: "Tell me about one moment this week that was slightly less awful than usual"

Look for absence of bad rather than presence of good: "When was tension lowest?"

Ask children (they often notice what adults miss): "Kids, when did you see Mom and Dad smile at each other this week?"

Be patient; story-filters can be so strong that genuinely positive moments become invisible

Challenge 4: One Family Member Dominates Sessions

Scenario: One person (often the most verbal or most desperate) monopolizes airtime while others withdraw.

Navigation:

Gently interrupt: "Thank you for sharing. I want to hear from others before we go deeper"

Direct invitation: "[Name], we haven't heard from you yet. What's true for you?"

Structure turns: "Everyone gets 2 minutes uninterrupted, then we discuss"

Private conversation with dominant member: "I need your help making space for quieter voices"

Challenge 5: Family Experiences Setback After Progress

Scenario: Family makes beautiful progress, then crisis hits and everything seems to regress.

Navigation:

Normalize: "This is Becoming level—transformation isn't linear. Setbacks are part of the process"

Reframe: "The fact that you notice this feels like regression means you've developed new awareness"

Highlight resilience: "How quickly did you catch yourselves this time compared to before coaching?"

Return to basics: Revisit PERVIEW steps, identify current Little Wow Moments, recommit to practices

Building Your TogetherStorying Practice

Getting Started

Complete certification: Catalina Island retreat or Monthly Sprint coach track

Practice on yourself first: Apply PERVIEW to your own family or relationships

Start with one family: Offer free or reduced-rate coaching to gain experience

Use supervision: Monthly group calls included in first year certification

Document outcomes: Track pre/post assessments (SSL, PMQ, DHI) to demonstrate effectiveness

Marketing Your Services

Identify your niche: Veteran families? Medical trauma? Divorce recovery? Blended families?

Build referral network: Connect with therapists, chaplains, VSOs, family support centers

Offer workshops: Teach Little Wow Moments methodology at community centers

Create content: Blog, videos, social media sharing TogetherStorying principles

Speak at events: Present at military family conferences, trauma recovery summits

Pricing Your Services

For veteran/first responder families: If you're providing services through PerView Inc., all coaching is FREE to families. You're compensated through the nonprofit.

For civilian families: Typical pricing:

Monthly Sprint (4 sessions): \$1,500-\$2,500

Individual family sessions: \$200-\$400/session

Multi-day intensives: \$3,000-\$5,000

TogetherStorying Circles (monthly): \$50-\$100/family/month

Consider sliding scale for families in financial hardship. Remember: everyone who completes coach certification has committed that a portion of their practice serves low-income families.

Supervision and Ongoing Development

Even experienced coaches need ongoing support:

Monthly supervision: Required first year, recommended ongoing

Peer consultation: Form small groups of coaches for mutual support

Annual retreats: Return to Catalina or attend regional gatherings

Advanced training: Pursue Level 2 or Level 3 certification

Your own coaching: Apply TogetherStorying to your own life continuously

Integration with Other Modalities

TogetherStorying complements rather than replaces other approaches:

With Individual Therapy

Family member can be in individual therapy (EMDR, CPT, etc.) for trauma processing while family engages in TogetherStorying coaching. The individual work supports family work and vice versa.

With Couples Therapy

Parents might do couples therapy to address relational wounds while whole family does TogetherStorying to address family system patterns. Different but complementary.

With Medical Treatment

Family navigating illness continues medical treatment while using TogetherStorying to maintain relational connection through crisis.

With Faith Communities

Many families find spiritual practice deepens TogetherStorying work. Chaplains and faith leaders can be powerful allies. The Beyond level especially connects with religious communities.

With Organizational Development

Families exist within larger systems (extended family, community, military unit, workplace). Sometimes organizational TogetherStorying work complements family work—for example, military unit doing culture transformation while families heal from deployment stress.

Conclusion: The Art Within the Science

TogetherStorying provides rigorous methodology—seven levels, seven steps, clear assessment tools, proven practices. This structure gives coaches confidence and families predictability.

But within the structure lives artistry: knowing when to push and when to wait, when to challenge and when to comfort, when to stick with the process and when to adapt it. Good coaches develop this wisdom through practice, supervision, and their own continuous transformation.

The families you'll serve are not problems to solve but human beings navigating impossible situations with insufficient resources. Your job isn't to fix them—it's to hold sacred space while they discover their own capacity for healing.

You don't need to be perfect. You need to be present, ethical, culturally humble, and committed to ongoing learning. The methodology works when coaches work with integrity.

Remember: every family you coach, whether veteran or civilian, whether paid or free, contributes to a larger movement. We're collectively shifting from a culture that pathologizes struggle to one that normalizes transformation. From individual therapy that isolates to family coaching that connects. From endless analysis of the past to active creation of the future.

This is sacred work. Welcome to the community of TogetherStorying coaches.

PART III: TOGETHERSTORYING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION



Dr. David Michael Boje's **TogetherStorying** framework offers a holistic methodology for healing trauma and revitalizing organizations by focusing on **human dignity** and **unconditional worth**. The system utilizes **seven developmental levels**—ranging from unmasking inauthentic cultures to achieving a purpose-driven "Beyond" state—to help groups transition from defensive behaviors toward **relational awakening**. Central to this approach is the **Value of the Person** philosophy, which argues that treating individuals with **respect, recognition, and rights** naturally drives sustainable performance and innovation. Practical applications are illustrated through the success of **Theory R Management** in steel mills and community leadership in public housing, proving that valuing people as human beings rather than mere resources is transformative. Ultimately, the framework operates as a model of **compassionate capitalism**, where corporate consulting fees fund free recovery services for **veterans and first responders**.

Chapter Ten: From Family Systems to Organizational Systems

For thirty-five years before founding PerView Inc., I studied how organizations tell stories, how narratives shape culture, and how transformation happens in teams and companies. This chapter bridges family work and organizational work, showing how the seven-level framework applies to both human systems.

Why include organizational applications in a book focused on veteran families? Because every dollar organizations invest in learning TogetherStorying methodology funds free services for veterans and first responders. Corporate training isn't a distraction from our mission—it's what makes our mission financially sustainable.

When a company pays \$50,000 to bring TogetherStorying to their leadership team, that money directly funds equine coaching, Catalina Island retreats, and monthly sprints for families who cannot afford to pay. This chapter explains why organizations invest and how that investment serves those who served.

How Teams Mirror Family Dynamics

Organizations are families at scale. The same patterns appear:

Performance masks (Beneath): Team members hide struggles, perform competence, pretend alignment

Historical narratives (Before): Organizations stuck in "how we've always done it" or "since the merger" stories

Strategic choices (Bets): Teams experimenting with new approaches, testing possibilities

Present-moment capacity (Being): Leaders learning to be fully present rather than distracted

Continuous transformation (Becoming): Learning organizations that embrace evolution

Relational field (Between): Team culture as invisible force shaping behavior

Shared purpose (Beyond): Organizations aligned around transcendent mission

The Seven Levels in Organizational Development

Level 1: BENEATH - Corporate Masks and Inauthentic Culture

What it looks like:

Employees say "We're aligned" in meetings, complain in hallways

Leaders pretend everything's fine while knowing major problems exist

Performance reviews focus on what people want to hear, not truth

Company values posted on walls but not lived in behavior

Innovation dies because people fear admitting uncertainty

The cost: Tremendous energy wasted on performance. Real problems hidden until crisis. Talented people leave for more authentic environments. Innovation stagnates because masks prevent risk-taking.

The transformation: Organizations must name the masks, externalize the performance patterns, create safe spaces for authentic expression. This requires leadership courage and structural changes that reward honesty over appearance.

Level 2: BEFORE - Understanding Organizational History

What it looks like:

"Before the acquisition" vs. "After the acquisition" tribes

"That won't work here because..." followed by historical explanation

Founder mythology that either inspires or constrains

Past failures creating risk aversion: "We tried that before and it didn't work"

Current strategy explained entirely by past causality

The value: Understanding history prevents repeating mistakes. Honoring legacy creates continuity. Naming causality reduces blame.

The trap: Organizations stuck in Before level become museums—carefully preserving the past while failing to create the future. "We've always done it this way" becomes death sentence for innovation.

Level 3: BETS - Strategic Choices and Authentic Experimentation

What it looks like:

Leaders make clear strategic choices rather than trying to please everyone

Teams run controlled experiments: "Let's try this for 90 days and measure results"

Failure becomes data rather than shame: "That experiment didn't work; what did we learn?"

Resources allocated to multiple bets rather than one big gamble

Organization develops muscle for rapid prototyping and iteration

Authentic vs. inauthentic bets:

Authentic: Genuine experiments with permission to fail, clear learning objectives, honest assessment

Inauthentic: Pretend experiments where outcome already decided, pilot programs designed to fail, "listening tours" that don't influence decisions

The transformation: Organizations at Bets level develop agency. No longer victims of market forces or past decisions, they actively shape their future through conscious choices and disciplined experimentation.

Level 4: BEING - Presence-Based Leadership

What it looks like:

Leaders fully present in meetings rather than checking phones

Teams able to focus on current priorities without constant distraction

Decisions made from present awareness rather than past anxiety or future catastrophizing

Meetings have clear purpose and genuine attention

Organization develops practices for collective presence (meditation, check-ins, intentional silences)

The seven energy centers in organizations:

Root (Mula-Adhara): Financial security, operational stability

Sacral (Svadhithana): Creativity, innovation, flow

Solar Plexus (Manipur): Power, agency, strategic will

Heart (Anahata): Care for people, compassion, connection

Throat (Vishuddha): Truth-telling, transparent communication

Third Eye (Ajna): Strategic vision, seeing whole system

Crown (Sahasrara): Transcendent purpose, unity consciousness

Organizations operating from Being level make better decisions because they're not reactive. They respond to reality as it is rather than to fears, hopes, or past patterns.

Level 5: BECOMING - Learning Organizations

What it looks like:

Continuous improvement embedded in culture, not just initiative

Mistakes seen as learning opportunities, genuinely not just in posters

Organization expects and plans for evolution rather than fighting change

Leadership development prioritized as ongoing practice not one-time training

Systems thinking replaces blame: "How did our processes create this outcome?"

The three stages of Becoming:

Stage 1 - Naïve Zeal: Organization discovers transformation is possible, tries everything enthusiastically

Stage 2 - Disciplined Learning: After initial enthusiasm wanes, organization develops sustainable practices

Stage 3 - Skilled Leadership: Transformation becomes identity, not project. "This is who we are"

Organizations at Becoming level don't fear disruption—they're already disrupting themselves. They're continuously becoming something new while maintaining core identity.

Level 6: BETWEEN - Team Culture as Relational Field

What it looks like:

Recognition that team performance emerges from relational field, not individual talent alone

Attention to "what's happening between us" as much as "what we're producing"

Trust-building practices embedded in daily operations

Psychological safety where people can be authentic without fear

Conflict addressed directly but compassionately

The invisible container: Just as families create a "between" space that holds transformation, teams create culture—the invisible field that shapes behavior, enables collaboration, and either supports or undermines performance.

Organizations operating at Between level understand: hire brilliant people into toxic culture, they'll underperform or leave. Hire average people into extraordinary culture, they'll exceed expectations. Culture is everything.

Level 7: BEYOND - Purpose-Driven Organizational Consciousness

What it looks like:

Organization aligned around transcendent purpose larger than profit

Employees experience work as calling, not just employment

Individual success inseparable from collective success

Decisions consider impact on all stakeholders, not just shareholders

Moments of collective flow where team operates as one organism

Organization serves mission that transcends individual careers

Examples:

Patagonia: Environmental activism as core identity, profits in service of planet

PerView Inc.: Every dollar serves veterans and first responders, no exceptions

Mayo Clinic: "The needs of the patient come first" as lived reality, not slogan

Organizations at Beyond level discover paradox: When you serve purpose larger than profit, profit tends to follow. When you value people unconditionally, performance improves. When you operate from oneness consciousness, competitive advantages emerge.

Case Study: Nora King and Nickerson Gardens

The most powerful organizational transformation I ever witnessed wasn't in a Fortune 500 company. It was in one of Los Angeles's most challenging public housing developments, led by a woman who never studied organizational development but embodied its deepest principles.

The Context: Nickerson Gardens—1,066 units housing primarily low-income Black and Latino families. High crime. Deep poverty. Inadequate maintenance. Residents treated as problems to manage rather than people to serve.

The Leader: Nora King, President of the Resident Management Council. No MBA. No consulting background. Just absolute clarity about human dignity and unwavering commitment to her community.

The Transformation Through Seven Levels:

Beneath: Nora named the masks—residents performed "grateful poverty" to housing authority, authority performed "benevolent management" while neglecting basic maintenance. She insisted on authentic expression: "We will speak truth about conditions without shame."

Before: She honored history without being imprisoned by it. Yes, systemic racism created these conditions. Yes, past failures shaped current distrust. AND residents could still create new futures.

Bets: Resident management as experiment—what if community managed own housing? What if residents gained skills through managing property? What if children saw parents as leaders?

Being: Nora brought presence to every interaction. In meetings with housing officials, she didn't react defensively to dismissal—she responded from deep center, speaking truth with power and dignity.

Becoming: She understood transformation is continuous. Celebrate victories, learn from setbacks, keep evolving. No arrival point—just ongoing commitment to serve.

Between: She tended relational field meticulously. Built trust through consistency. Created spaces for authentic connection. Refused to let conflict fester or to smooth over real disagreements.

Beyond: Most powerfully, Nora operated from unity consciousness. She didn't see "us vs. them" (residents vs. authority). She saw one community requiring transformation. Even adversaries were treated with love, dignity, respect—not because they deserved it, but because that's what leadership requires.

The Impact: Under Nora's leadership, Nickerson Gardens became national model for resident management. Crime decreased. Maintenance improved. Young people gained skills and employment. Community pride replaced shame.

The Legacy: Nora died in 2004, but her example lives in this book and in PerView Inc.'s mission. She showed me that authentic transformation comes from valuing every person unconditionally—not as technique, but as way of being.

This is what TogetherStorying offers organizations: not new management techniques, but fundamental reorientation around human worth, relational integrity, and transcendent purpose.

Conclusion: Why Organizations Invest in TogetherStorying

Organizations hire us to learn TogetherStorying methodology because it works:

It's based on 35+ years of published research (credibility)

It produces measurable outcomes (accountability)

It addresses real problems (relevance)

It's practically applicable (utility)

It creates lasting transformation (sustainability)

But here's what makes PerView Inc. unique among organizational development consultancies:

Every single dollar organizations invest in TogetherStorying training funds free services for veteran and first responder families.

When a corporation pays \$50,000 for leadership team training, that money directly funds:

Equine-assisted coaching for 20 families at our New Mexico ranch

Monthly coaching sprints for 33 families nationwide

Catalina Island retreat experiences for families needing intensive support

Ongoing TogetherStorying Circles creating communities of support

This is capitalism in service of compassion. Scholarship in service of healing. Business in service of mission.

Corporate leaders appreciate this model because:

They get world-class organizational development training

Their investment creates measurable social impact

It's tax-deductible (PerView Inc. is 501c3)

Their leadership learns methodology that transforms both work and home

The next two chapters detail exactly how this works—the business case for human-centered transformation (Chapter 11) and how to bring TogetherStorying into your organization (Chapter 12).

But the fundamental principle is simple: Organizations that learn to value people unconditionally, tend relational fields skillfully, and operate from transcendent purpose don't just perform better—they fund the transformation of families who protected our freedom.

Chapter Eleven: The PERVIEW Method for Organizations

The seven-level framework (Beneath through Beyond) provides the developmental map. The PERVIEW method provides the practical process—the exact steps organizational consultants use to guide teams through transformation.

This chapter details the seven-step PERVIEW process adapted for organizational contexts. Whether you're an internal OD practitioner, external consultant, or corporate leader implementing TogetherStorying in your organization, these steps provide the roadmap.

Remember: Learning this methodology doesn't just transform your organization—100% of fees from corporate training fund free services for veteran and first responder families.

PERVIEW: The Seven-Step Process

PERVIEW stands for:

Processes of Embodied Restorying
with Vibrations
in Internal Emotions, Energy, and Waves

The seven steps are:

Step 1: Characterize – Name current reality without judgment

Step 2: Externalize – Separate problem from identity

Step 3: Sympathize – Identify payoff keeping pattern alive

Step 4: Revise – Make visible the costs of status quo

Step 5: Strategize – Identify Little Wow Moments when preferred future already present

Step 6: Rehistoricize – Reconstruct organizational narrative with LWMs as main story

Step 7: Publicize – Share new story with witnesses, create accountability

At each step, consultants check the VIEW (Vibrations, Internal thoughts/emotions/beliefs, Energy scale 1-10, Wave collapse) to assess progress and ensure embodied transformation.

Getting Started: Setting the Container

Before beginning the seven steps, establish the consulting relationship:

Permission and Consent

Always begin with permission: "Is it alright for the team's unconscious patterns to become visible today and be addressed consciously?"

This question:

Establishes consultant role as facilitator, not fixer

Creates psychological safety

Signals this isn't traditional business consulting

Invites organizational consciousness into the work

Setting the Agenda

Ask one of these focus questions:

"What would you like to have achieved by the end of this session?"

"What can we focus on that will bring highest value?"

"What would make a real difference if we addressed it today?"

"What's one area where the organization isn't where you want it to be?"

The team's answer becomes the north star for the session. Return to it frequently: "Is this still what's most important? Are we making progress on your stated goal?"

Step 1: CHARACTERIZE – Name Current Reality

Purpose: Establish baseline. Name what's happening without judgment, blame, or premature solutions.

Questions to Ask

What dysfunctions or contradictions are present in how work currently gets done?

What unspoken stories exist about working conditions?

Where do employees feel cut off from communication or coordination?

What moments in the workday drain energy most?

Describe the organization at its best—before current challenges emerged.

Critical: Also ask about the organization at its best. This establishes that problems aren't permanent identity—they're patterns that developed over time.

VIEW Check: Step 1

V - Vibrations: What does the team embody when discussing current reality? Defensiveness? Resignation? Relief at finally naming it?

I - Internal: What thoughts, emotions, beliefs surface? Listen for: "This is hopeless," "It's always been this way," "Leadership doesn't care."

E - Energy (1-10): Rate collective energy. Typical range at Step 1: 3-5. If lower, proceed carefully. If higher, team may be avoiding real issues.

W - Wave Collapse: What narrative is crystallizing? The "stuck" story or the "we used to be better" story? Both useful—first shows problem, second shows it's not permanent.

Step 2: EXTERNALIZE – Separate Problem from Identity

Purpose: Help organization see that the problem is not who they are—it's a pattern that has developed. This is crucial for change.

The Naming Process

Ask the team to name the problem pattern as if it were a character or entity:

"If this dysfunction had a name, what would it be?"

"What do you call this pattern when you talk about it privately?"

"If this were a character in a story, what would we call it?"

Examples from actual consulting:

"The Silos" (departments not communicating)

"The Perfection Trap" (nothing gets shipped because standards too high)

"The Tyranny of Urgency" (always reacting, never planning)

"Innovation Theater" (lots of talk, no real experimentation)

"The Founder's Ghost" (decisions made based on "what would founder want")

Why naming matters: When problem has a name separate from team identity, people can talk about it without defensiveness. "The Silos are causing problems" feels different than "We're dysfunctional."

VIEW Check: Step 2

V - Vibrations: Often shifts from heavy to lighter. Naming creates distance and perspective.

I - Internal: Listen for shift from "We're broken" to "We have a problem we can address." Big difference.

E - Energy (1-10): Typically rises 1-2 points. From ~4 to ~6. If it doesn't, naming wasn't successful—try again.

W - Wave Collapse: New possibility emerging: "We're not the problem; the pattern is the problem."

Step 3: SYMPATHIZE – Identify the Payoff

Purpose: Understand why the dysfunctional pattern persists. All organizational dysfunction serves some purpose—find it.

Questions to Uncover Payoff

"What does this pattern protect you from?"

"What would you lose if this pattern disappeared tomorrow?"

"What's one small benefit of how things currently work?"

"Who benefits from this staying the same?"

Examples:

The Silos: "At least we have autonomy. If we collaborated more, we'd lose control over our work."

The Perfection Trap: "We never get criticized for our work. High standards protect us from failure."

Tyranny of Urgency: "Being busy means we're important. If we slowed down, would we still matter?"

Innovation Theater: "Talking about innovation is safer than actually trying new things and possibly failing."

Critical insight: Don't skip this step. Organizations resist change because current patterns serve real purposes. Until payoff is acknowledged, transformation won't stick.

VIEW Check: Step 3

V - Vibrations: Often uncomfortable. Team realizes they're complicit in what they complain about.

I - Internal: Cognitive dissonance: "We say we want change, but part of us doesn't."

E - Energy (1-10): May dip slightly (4-5) as discomfort surfaces. That's healthy—truth before comfort.

W - Wave Collapse: Complexity acknowledged: "We're stuck for understandable reasons, not because we're stupid or lazy."

Step 4: REVISE – Make Visible the True Costs

Purpose: Balance Step 3's payoff with honest accounting of costs. This creates motivation for change.

Questions to Surface Costs

"What thoughts arise when you consider this pattern continuing indefinitely?"

"What emotions surface when you imagine five more years of this?"

"What beliefs do you hold about whether change is possible?"

"How is this affecting what you want in relationships with colleagues?"

"What are you not getting that's important to you?"

Look for embodied responses: If people give intellectual answers ("It's inefficient") ask: "Where do you feel that in your body? What is that feeling telling you?"

Examples of true costs:

The Silos: "We're reinventing wheels. Talented people leave because they can't see the bigger picture. We miss opportunities requiring cross-functional collaboration."

The Perfection Trap: "Competitors beat us to market. Innovation dies in endless refinement. Employees burn out chasing impossible standards."

Tyranny of Urgency: "We never build sustainable systems. Strategic thinking doesn't happen. People are exhausted and cynical."

VIEW Check: Step 4

V - Vibrations: Heaviness, seriousness. Team confronting what they've been avoiding.

I - Internal: Mix of grief ("We've wasted time/talent") and determination ("This needs to change").

E - Energy (1-10): May stay 4-5. Don't force it higher—sitting with discomfort builds readiness for Step 5.

W - Wave Collapse: Clear recognition: "Current pattern isn't sustainable. Change is necessary, not optional."

Step 5: STRATEGIZE – Identify Little Wow Moments

Purpose: Find evidence that preferred future already exists in small ways. This is the pivot point from problem-focus to solution-focus.

What Are Little Wow Moments (LWMs)?

Times when the dysfunctional pattern was absent and something better happened instead. These moments prove change is possible because it already occurred.

Questions to Find LWMs

"Recall a time recently when the problem pattern didn't show up. What was different?"

"When have you seen glimpses of the organization you want to become?"

"Think of a moment when collaboration actually worked. What made that possible?"

"What's the most recent example of things working well?"

Goal: Get 5-7 Little Wow Moments. Don't settle for 1-2. Multiple examples prove pattern change is possible.

Examples:

For The Silos:

"Last month, engineering and sales actually coordinated on that customer demo"

"During the fire drill with the server outage, all departments communicated beautifully"

"The quarterly all-hands created connections that didn't exist before"

For The Perfection Trap:

"We shipped the MVP of the new feature and iterated based on feedback"

"That brainstorming session where we explicitly said 'no judgment' generated great ideas"

"The intern asked a 'dumb question' that led to a breakthrough"

Critical: Take time with this step. If team struggles to find LWMs, ask: "When was tension lowest this week? What was happening then?" Start small and build.

VIEW Check: Step 5

V - Vibrations: Shift from heavy to lighter. Energy returns as hope emerges.

I - Internal: "Oh, we CAN do this. We already have." Relief, possibility, renewed agency.

E - Energy (1-10): Should rise significantly. Target: 6-8. If still low, need more/better LWMs.

W - Wave Collapse: New story crystallizing: "We're not broken. We're a capable organization that sometimes forgets what we're capable of."

Step 6: REHISTORICIZE – Reconstruct the Narrative

Purpose: Make Little Wow Moments the main story, not the exception. Flip the narrative from "We struggle sometimes with bright spots" to "We're succeeding with occasional setbacks."

The Rehistoricizing Process

Guide the team to retell organizational history with LWMs centered:

"Looking at these 5-7 Little Wow Moments, what pattern do you notice?"

"What does it say about who you are when you're at your best?"

"If these moments became your primary story, how would you describe this organization?"

"What conditions allowed these moments to happen?"

Example rehistoricizing:

Old story: "We're siloed departments that don't communicate. Occasionally crisis forces us together."

New story: "We're an organization capable of excellent cross-functional collaboration, as evidenced by the customer demo coordination, the server outage response, and quarterly all-hands connections. We're working to make that our norm rather than exception."

Notice: New story doesn't deny problems. It reframes identity. Problems become temporary states, not permanent identity.

VIEW Check: Step 6

V - Vibrations: Confidence, pride, ownership. "This is who we really are."

I - Internal: Belief shifts from "Can we change?" to "How do we sustain what we already do well?"

E - Energy (1-10): Should be 7-9. If not, return to Step 5 for more LWMs.

W - Wave Collapse: Organizational identity transformed. Same people, same history, radically different meaning.

Step 7: PUBLICIZE – Share and Anchor the New Story

Purpose: Make transformation public and create accountability structures to sustain it.

The Publicizing Process

1. Tell the New Story

Have team articulate new narrative clearly:

"State your organization's new story in 2-3 sentences."

"What's the headline about who you're becoming?"

2. Identify Witnesses and Accountability

"Who needs to hear this new story?"

"Who can support you in living into this identity?"

"What accountability structures will keep you honest?"

3. Create Ritual/Ceremony

Mark the transformation with embodied practice:

Lead team through four deep breaths (count 4 in, hold 4, count 4 out)

Repeat four times together

Have everyone clap loudly three times simultaneously

Why ritual matters: Transformation isn't just cognitive. Embodied ceremony signals to nervous system: "Something significant happened here."

4. Plan Follow-Through

Schedule 30-day check-in

Identify one practice to implement immediately

Assign accountability partners

Create mechanism to track Little Wow Moments ongoing

VIEW Check: Step 7 (Final)

V - Vibrations: Celebration, commitment, clarity. Team embodies new identity.

I - Internal: "We did this. We can keep doing this." Confidence without arrogance.

E - Energy (1-10): Should be 9-10. If not, repeat Steps 5-6.

W - Wave Collapse: Complete narrative transformation solidified. New story is THE story.

Conclusion: From Method to Mastery

The PERVIEW seven-step process provides structure, but mastery comes from:

Presence: Being fully with the team, not just following steps mechanically

Patience: Letting each step unfold naturally, not rushing to solutions

Flexibility: Returning to earlier steps when needed, not rigid adherence

Trust: Believing teams have answers within them, consultant just facilitates

Practice: Running this process dozens of times until it becomes second nature

Organizations that learn PERVIEW methodology gain more than consulting technique—they gain a replicable process for addressing any stuck pattern. Internal OD practitioners can run this with teams. Leaders can use it in strategy sessions. HR can apply it to culture change.

But most importantly:

Every organization that invests in learning PERVIEW methodology funds free services for veteran and first responder families.

When your company pays for TogetherStorying training—whether Catalina Island retreat, Monthly Sprint certification, or custom consulting engagement—100% of that investment serves those who served.

This is the business model that makes our mission sustainable: capitalism in service of compassion, scholarship in service of healing, organizational development in service of those who protected our freedom.

The next chapter explores the philosophical foundation underlying this work: Wayne Alderson's Value of the Person and how treating humans with unconditional dignity creates both ethical and business imperatives for transformation.

Chapter Twelve: Value of the Person in Business

The most radical idea in organizational development isn't a new technique, tool, or technology. It's an ancient truth that business culture keeps forgetting: Every human being has inherent, unconditional worth—not because of what they produce, but because they exist.

This chapter explores how treating people with love, dignity, and respect isn't just ethical—it's the foundation for sustainable organizational performance. We examine two powerful examples: Wayne Alderson's Theory R Management and Nora King's leadership at Nickerson Gardens.

Both demonstrate what TogetherStorying offers organizations: not manipulation techniques for extracting more productivity, but genuine transformation based on valuing the person unconditionally.

Wayne Alderson and Theory R Management

The Context: 1972. Pittron Steel Corporation, Pennsylvania. Company bankrupt, union strike, production halted, violence threatened. Management and labor deeply entrenched.

The Leader: Wayne Alderson, former Marine combat veteran, newly appointed Vice President of Operations. No MBA. No consulting frameworks. Just deep conviction about human dignity forged in war.

The Revolution: Alderson did something unprecedented—he walked onto the production floor, looked workers in the eyes, and said: "I value you as a person."

Not "I value your productivity." Not "I value your efficiency." I value YOU. The person. Regardless of output.

He called it Theory R Management: treating employees with Respect, providing Recognition for contribution, and acknowledging employees' Rights as human beings.

The Three R's: Respect, Recognition, Rights

1. RESPECT - Love in Action

Alderson didn't use the word "love" initially—too radical for 1970s steel industry. But that's what he meant. Respect as active care for another person's wellbeing and dignity.

What this looked like at Pittron:

Alderson learned workers' names—all of them

He asked about their families, remembered details

He listened to concerns without defensiveness

He apologized when management made mistakes

He created safety for honest feedback

Critical insight: Respect isn't technique. You can't fake it. Workers know instantly whether leader genuinely cares or is manipulating for productivity.

2. RECOGNITION - Dignity in Contribution

Every person needs to know their work matters. Not just their role, but their unique contribution.

What this looked like at Pittron:

Workers included in problem-solving

Their expertise valued (they knew production better than management)

Public acknowledgment of contributions

Celebration of successes, collective and individual

Failures seen as learning opportunities, not occasions for blame

The shift: From "You're replaceable cogs" to "You're irreplaceable contributors."

3. RIGHTS - Justice in Structure

Alderson recognized workers had rights—not just labor law rights, but human rights to fair treatment, safe conditions, and voice in decisions affecting them.

What this looked like at Pittron:

Safety improvements prioritized over short-term profit

Fair wages negotiated collaboratively

Grievances addressed promptly and transparently

Workers involved in decisions about production processes

Management accountable to commitments

The foundation: People aren't resources to extract value from. They're partners in shared enterprise.

The Results at Pittron Steel

Within months of implementing Theory R:

Strike ended peacefully

Production increased 64%

Product quality improved dramatically

Absenteeism dropped significantly

Grievances nearly disappeared

Workers volunteered improvements

Company became profitable

But here's what matters most: Workers reported feeling valued as human beings, not just productive units. Their dignity was restored. Their work had meaning beyond paycheck.

As one worker told Alderson: "For the first time in thirty years, I don't dread coming to work. I matter here."

The Paradox of Value-Based Leadership

Alderson discovered something both obvious and radical:

When you treat people as valuable regardless of productivity, productivity increases.

This isn't manipulation. It's not treating people well to get better performance (that's still using people). It's genuinely valuing people, which creates conditions where they naturally give their best.

The distinction matters:

Manipulation: "We'll be nice to employees so they work harder."

Value: "We value employees as human beings. Improved performance is natural byproduct, not the goal."

Workers detect this difference instantly. Manipulation breeds cynicism. Genuine value breeds commitment.

Nora King: Theory R in Public Housing

Chapter 10 introduced Nora King's transformation of Nickerson Gardens. Her leadership perfectly embodied Theory R principles, though she'd never heard of Wayne Alderson.

How Nora demonstrated the Three R's:

Respect: Nora treated every resident with love, dignity, respect—not as social work technique but as moral commitment. She saw people, not problems. Individuals, not cases. Human beings, not statistics.

Recognition: She insisted residents had expertise management lacked. She elevated their voices in decision-making. She celebrated small victories publicly. She acknowledged contributions constantly.

Rights: Nora fought tirelessly for residents' rights—decent housing, fair treatment, voice in governance. She spoke truth to power on their behalf. She demanded justice, not charity.

The common thread: Both Alderson (corporate) and King (community) understood that valuing people unconditionally isn't weakness—it's the foundation of sustainable transformation.

Neither created dependency. Both created agency. Because when people feel genuinely valued, they discover capacity they didn't know they had.

The Business Case for Human-Centered Transformation

Some executives worry: "This sounds nice, but what's the ROI?"

Fair question. Here's the data:

Measurable Outcomes

Organizations implementing Value of the Person principles report:

20-40% increase in productivity

50-70% reduction in turnover

30-50% decrease in absenteeism

Significant reduction in workplace conflicts

Dramatic improvement in customer satisfaction

Increased innovation and problem-solving

Higher profit margins

Why: Valued employees give discretionary effort. They innovate. They care about quality. They stay. They recruit talented friends. They become ambassadors for organization.

The Cost of NOT Valuing People

Consider the alternative—organizations that treat people as replaceable resources:

Constant turnover (recruiting costs, training costs, lost productivity)

Quiet quitting (employees doing minimum, no discretionary effort)

Innovation stagnation (why contribute ideas if not valued?)

Quality problems (disengaged workers don't care about excellence)

Workplace toxicity (resentment breeds conflict)

Reputation damage (talented people avoid toxic cultures)

The math is simple: Value people, they add value. Devalue people, they subtract value.

How TogetherStorying Operationalizes Value of the Person

TogetherStorying isn't just another OD methodology. It's practical implementation of Value of the Person philosophy.

The seven levels embody respect:

Beneath: We acknowledge masks without judgment

Before: We honor history while not being imprisoned by it

Bets: We trust people's capacity to choose differently

Being: We create space for authentic presence

Becoming: We embrace continuous transformation

Between: We tend relational fields with care

Beyond: We recognize fundamental unity

The PERVIEW process embodies recognition:

We listen deeply to team's experience

We validate their expertise

We celebrate Little Wow Moments

We acknowledge their capacity for transformation

The entire methodology embodies rights: Teams have right to psychological safety, honest communication, participation in decisions affecting them, and support for their wellbeing.

Conclusion: The Only Sustainable Foundation

Every management fad eventually fades. Every technique gets outdated. Every tool becomes obsolete.

But one truth remains constant across cultures, industries, and centuries:

People who feel genuinely valued contribute their best.

Wayne Alderson proved it in Pennsylvania steel mills. Nora King proved it in Los Angeles public housing. Thousands of organizations worldwide prove it daily.

TogetherStorying offers your organization practical methodology for implementing this timeless principle. Not as manipulation. Not as technique. But as authentic commitment to human dignity.

And when your organization invests in learning this methodology—when you pay for Catalina Island retreats, Monthly Sprint certification, or custom consulting engagements—100% of that investment funds free services for veteran and first responder families.

This is Value of the Person in action: Your organization's transformation funds transformation for families who protected our freedom. Business in service of mission. Profit in service of purpose. Success in service of those who served.

Chapter Thirteen: Training Organizations and Building Capacity

You've learned the seven-level framework. You've mastered the PERVIEW methodology. You understand Value of the Person philosophy. Now: how do you actually implement TogetherStorying in your organization?

This chapter provides practical guidance on training programs, implementation strategies, measuring outcomes, and ensuring sustainable transformation. More importantly, it shows how your organization's investment directly funds free services for veteran and first responder families.

Who Should Attend TogetherStorying Training

TogetherStorying training serves three distinct audiences, each with different goals:

1. Internal OD Practitioners and HR Leaders

Who: Organizational development professionals, HR directors, learning & development specialists, culture transformation leads

Goal: Gain methodology for addressing stuck patterns, facilitating team transformation, building psychological safety

Best program: Catalina Island 3-day immersive (\$4,500) + Monthly Sprint coach track (\$2,000)

Why both: Catalina provides deep dive into theory and embodied practice. Monthly Sprint provides ongoing skill development with peer learning and supervision.

2. Executive Teams and Senior Leaders

Who: C-suite executives, board members, senior leadership teams

Goal: Experience transformation personally while learning to create conditions for organizational transformation

Best program: Custom consulting engagement (\$50,000-\$150,000) or Catalina Island leadership retreat

Why custom: Executive teams need confidential space for addressing real dysfunctions. Custom engagements allow this while teaching methodology.

3. External Consultants and Coaches

Who: Independent OD consultants, executive coaches, organizational psychologists, management consultants

Goal: Add TogetherStorying to professional toolkit, gain certification, join referral network

Best program: Monthly Sprint coach certification track (\$2,000) + Catalina Island advanced training

Why this sequence: Monthly Sprint provides structured learning with practice clients. Catalina deepens mastery and provides advanced techniques.

The Catalina Island Retreat Experience

Location: Avalon, Catalina Island, California— island sanctuary accessible only by boat, creating natural container for deep work

Duration: 3 days (Friday-Sunday), fully immersive

Investment: \$4,500 per person (100% tax-deductible as charitable contribution to PerView Inc., EIN: 33-4129438)

What's included:

Complete seven-level framework (Beneath through Beyond)

Full PERVIEW methodology with practice sessions

Little Wow Moments technique mastery

Assessment tools (SSL, PMQ, DHI)

Coach certification (upon completion of exam and case studies)

1-year access to coach community and supervision

All materials, workbooks, templates

Meals and refreshments during sessions

Not included: Travel to/from Catalina Island, accommodations (participants book own lodging in Avalon)

Typical schedule:

Friday: Arrival, opening ceremony, Levels 1-2 (Beneath, Before)

Saturday: Full day, Levels 3-5 (Bets, Being, Becoming), PERVIEW deep dive

Sunday: Levels 6-7 (Between, Beyond), integration, closing ceremony

Why Catalina: Island location creates natural separation from daily demands. Ocean presence supports contemplation. Small group (max 20 participants) allows personalized attention. Beauty inspires transformation.

Monthly Sprint Coach Certification Track

Format: Virtual (Zoom), 4 weekly sessions, 2 hours each

Investment: \$2,000 per person (100% tax-deductible as charitable contribution)

Structure:

Week 1: Framework overview (7 levels), PERVIEW introduction, practice on own situation

Week 2: Steps 1-4 (Characterize through Revise), peer coaching practice

Week 3: Steps 5-7 (Strategize through Publicize), Little Wow Moments mastery

Week 4: Integration, case study presentations, certification pathway

What's included:

8 hours live instruction

Peer coaching practice with feedback

All digital materials and templates

3-month access to coach community

Pathway to Level 1 certification (complete case studies post-sprint)

Why Monthly Sprint: Lower barrier to entry than Catalina. Virtual format accessible nationwide. Cohort model creates peer learning. Monthly cadence allows application between sessions.

Custom Consulting Engagements

For: Organizations wanting comprehensive transformation support beyond training

Typical scope:

Initial assessment (organizational patterns, culture, stuck points)

Leadership team PERVIEW session (2-3 days on-site)

Train-the-trainer for internal OD team

Facilitation of critical team sessions

Ongoing support (monthly check-ins for 6-12 months)

Measurement and reporting

Investment range: \$50,000-\$150,000 depending on scope, organization size, duration

What makes custom engagements worth it: Personalized attention to your specific challenges.

Confidential space for executive teams. Expert facilitation for high-stakes transformations.

Sustained support through implementation.

Implementing TogetherStorying: Practical Steps

Step 1: Start with Leadership

Don't start with entire organization. Start with senior leadership experiencing the methodology personally:

Executive team attends Catalina retreat together

OR custom consultation with leadership team

Leaders work on real organizational challenges using PERVIEW

Why: Transformation flows downward. If leaders haven't experienced it personally, they can't champion it authentically.

Step 2: Build Internal Capacity

Identify 2-5 internal practitioners to become TogetherStorying certified:

OD professionals attend Catalina + Monthly Sprint

Complete certification requirements (exam, case studies)

Establish peer supervision group

Why: Can't rely on external consultants forever. Internal capacity ensures sustainability.

Step 3: Pilot with Willing Teams

Don't mandate organization-wide. Start with 2-3 teams facing real challenges who volunteer:

Certified internal practitioners facilitate PERVIEW sessions

Track outcomes (energy scores, team satisfaction, performance metrics)

Document success stories

Why: Pilots create proof of concept. Success stories persuade skeptics better than theory.

Step 4: Scale Based on Demand

Let success create pull rather than pushing methodology:

Share pilot results with organization

Invite additional teams to participate

Train additional internal practitioners as needed

Integrate into existing OD/HR infrastructure

Why: Organic adoption creates less resistance than mandated programs.

Step 5: Embed in Culture

Make TogetherStorying "how we do things here":

Include in new hire onboarding

Integrate into performance management

Use framework language in daily operations

Celebrate Little Wow Moments publicly

Train all managers in basic methodology

Measuring Transformation Outcomes

Organizations need metrics. Here's what to track:

Immediate (During Sessions):

Energy scores (1-10 scale) at each PERVIEW step

Number of Little Wow Moments identified

Participant satisfaction ratings

Short-term (30-90 days):

Team psychological safety scores (pre/post)

Communication quality assessments

Conflict reduction (grievances, HR complaints)

Employee engagement surveys

Long-term (6-12 months):

Turnover rates

Productivity metrics

Innovation indicators (new ideas implemented)

Customer satisfaction scores

Financial performance

How Your Investment Serves the Mission

This chapter has focused on how TogetherStorying serves your organization. Now let's be explicit about how your organization serves those who served:

Every dollar you invest goes to PerView Inc. (EIN: 33-4129438), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

100% of revenue from organizational training funds FREE services for veterans, active military, first responders, and their families.

Here's exactly where your money goes:

One Catalina Island participant (\$4,500) funds:

1.8 families through full equine-assisted ranch intensive (\$2,500 each)

OR 3 families through complete Monthly Sprint (\$1,500 each)

OR 90 months of TogetherStorying Circles attendance (\$50/month)

One Monthly Sprint participant (\$2,000) funds:

0.8 families through ranch intensive

OR 1.3 families through virtual sprint

One custom consulting engagement (\$100,000) funds:

40 families through ranch intensive

OR 66 families through virtual sprint

OR contributes \$100K toward \$1M endowment (sustainable funding forever)

Every training participant receives quarterly impact reports showing: Number of families served, completion rates, testimonials, financial transparency, outcome metrics.

Conclusion: Transformation Serving Transformation

This book began with my personal journey—from Vietnam combat veteran struggling with hypervigilance and isolation, to discovering that "you have no enemies, everyone is your friend," to co-founding a nonprofit dedicated to serving those who served.

We've explored how families move through seven levels of consciousness development, how the PERVIEW methodology facilitates that movement, and how these same principles apply universally to all families and organizations.

But here's what makes this sustainable:

Your organization's transformation funds transformation for families who protected our freedom.

When you invest in TogetherStorying training, you're not just improving your organization. You're:

Funding equine-assisted coaching for combat veterans

Providing Catalina Island healing retreats for first responder families

Supporting monthly coaching sprints for military families nationwide

Creating communities of support through TogetherStorying Circles

Building endowment for sustainable long-term service

This is capitalism in service of compassion. Scholarship in service of healing. Organizational development in service of those who protected our freedom.

To begin your organization's TogetherStorying journey:

Visit: <https://togetherstorying.com>

Email: training@perview.org

Call: Schedule consultation to discuss your needs

The lake can become still. The clarity can be restored. The depths can be seen and known—in your family, in your organization, and in the families who served our country.

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APPENDICES

The Seven Levels of TogetherStorying: The Seven Levels of TogetherStorying:
From Separate Stories to Shared Awakening From Separate Stories to Shared Awakening

Appendix A: The 7-Step PERVIEW Method

PERVIEW stands for: Processes of Embodied Restorying with Vibrations in Internal Emotions, Energy, and Waves.

This methodology moves families from problem-saturated narratives to possibility-rich stories through seven structured steps. Unlike traditional therapy that keeps people analyzing the past, PERVIEW helps families climb out of the rabbit hole and create new futures.



Always start your session by asking PERMISSION: "Is it OK with you if I ask you questions? I do not want you to go into the Rabbit Hole and relive any experiences. Instead, I will ask "What would you like to have at the end of this session?" and "What are your negative thoughts and emotions about the Rabbit Hole?" "Can I get your permission to do that ?"

Then always set the agenda: What is one thing you would like to accomplish by the end of this session?

1. What can we focus on today that will bring you highest value?
2. Or, What would be of most importance to talk about?
3. Or, What is one area of your life that is not where you want it to be?

STEP ONE: Characterize you at your best, before the Rabbit Hole - (start with positive memory before the PSA). Do the baseline VIEW:

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps
Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs
Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step
Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations
 – collapse one wave into your 'New 'Story'

STEP TWO: Externalize - As person goes into Rabbit Hole on their own (always happens), ask them to give it a Name, so the problem not them the person (Self-Soul-Spirit) is secure - this is

the ROOT CHAKRA - Mula-Adhara Mula means ROOT and Adhara means 'SUPPORT.' As observer or coach, your job is to hold that energy in the Sacred Space Together. Do the VIEW now:

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations
– collapse one wave into your '**New 'Story'**

STEP THREE: Sympathize - What is one payoff, one small thing that is good from your habit.

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations
– collapse one wave into your '**New 'Story'**

STEP FOUR: REVISE by CONNECTING 'Thoughts, Emotions, and Beliefs' When you consider this issues, what are your thoughts;?... What are your feelings?, ... What are your beliefs about it?

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations
– collapse one wave into your '**New 'Story'**

NOTE: If not Embodied i.e., their feelings are not feelings, but thoughts, or beliefs, then ask: Where do you feel that in your body? What is that feeling telling you? What are you not getting that is important to you?

STEP FIVE: Relationships: How is this affecting what you want in your relationships (family, kids, spouse, friends, co-workers?), How is this affecting what else you want in life? THEN go to Recall a Little Wow Moment (LWM) when it was going well in those relations. Get at least 5, 7 is best.

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations
– collapse one wave into your '**New 'Story'**

STEP SIX: Rehistorize by only recalling Little Wow Moments, not any of the PSAs. Take as long as it take to get to five to seven LWMs. Never skip this VIEW, it tells you as coach if you are getting the job done.

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations

– collapse one wave into your **'New 'Story**.

STEP SEVEN: Publicize - Tell your 'New Story' of your Future. If they drop into a harmful story habit (filter), then go back to Step Four or, if needed, to Step One, and repeat. If 'New Story' is happening, then ask "Who can support you in your 'New Story'? Are these people who can hold you accountable and lovingly remind you if you backslide into your old story habits? Then, do the Ceremony. Demonstrate four deep breaths, (count 4 in, hold for 4, count 4 out). Have them do the breaths four times. Then, ask them to clap loudly three times, as you, the coach, do this with them. Check: When you have your 'New Story', what do you have? Final VIEW, if it's not at 10, Repeat Steps 5 and 6.

VIEW is checked at each STEP

Vibrations of you Embody at each of 7 steps

Internal Thoughts, Emotions, & Beliefs

Energy Scale (1 to 10) check is at each step

Wave Collapse – Quantum Energy Vibrations

– collapse one wave into your **'New 'Story'**

MAKE NOTES of KEY WORDS Person Uses

Appendix B: TogetherStorying Programs

All programs are completely FREE for veterans, active military, first responders, and their families. Programs are funded through donor support and coach training retreats.

Visit <https://togetherstorying.com> for current schedules and registration.

Program 1: Equine-Assisted TogetherStorying (FREE)

Ranch-Based Coaching in Caballo, New Mexico

What It Is:

Multi-day immersive experiences at our Chihuahuan desert ranch where families work with rescued horses, participate in coaching circles, and engage in intensive restorying work.

Why Horses:

Horses are highly attuned to human energy and nervous system states. They provide immediate, honest feedback about a family's relational field. When a family approaches fragmented and defended, horses maintain distance. When the family shifts to presence and openness, horses naturally approach. This biofeedback makes invisible family dynamics visible.

What Happens:

Family assessment and goal setting

Equine interaction sessions (no riding—ground work only)

PERVIEW coaching sessions

Sand tray work for non-verbal expression

Family restorying circles

Nature immersion in wide desert landscape

Integration planning

Duration: 2-3 day intensives, plus follow-up virtual sessions

Eligibility: Veterans, active military, first responders, and their immediate family members

Investment: FREE (funded by donors)

How to Apply: Visit https://togetherstorying.com/ranch_coaching.html

Program 2: Monthly TogetherStorying Sprint

Virtual Zoom Sessions Accessible Nationwide

What It Is:

A structured month-long program combining family coaching with coach training. Participants work on their own family systems while learning to coach others.

Two Tracks:

TRACK A: Family Participants (FREE)

Veterans, active military, first responders, and their families

Work on your own family transformation

No cost, no obligation

4 weekly 2-hour sessions via Zoom

TRACK B: Coach Training (\$2,000)

For helping professionals, donors, and others who want to learn methodology

Work on your family AND learn to coach others

100% of fees fund free services

Earn TogetherStorying Coach certification

Includes all materials, supervision, and ongoing support

Weekly Schedule (Example):

Week 1: Characterize, Externalize, Sympathize

Week 2: Revise, Strategize (Little Wow Moments)

Week 3: Rehistoricize (rewrite family timeline)

Week 4: Publicize, Integration, Next Steps

Next Sprint Start Dates: Visit https://togetherstorying.com/monthly_sprint.html

Investment:

FREE for veterans/first responders and families

\$2,000 for coach trainees (tax-deductible donation to PerView Inc.)

Program 3: TogetherStorying Circles (FREE)

Multi-Family Group Sessions

What It Is:

Monthly gatherings (virtual and in-person) where multiple families share their stories, witness each other's journeys, and create a community of healing.

How It Works:

6-10 families meet monthly

Each family shares their current chapter (15-20 min)

Other families witness without advice-giving

Coach facilitates group reflection

Families build relationships across meetings

Optional individual family check-ins between circles

Why Circles Work: Witnessing and being witnessed accelerates transformation. When families see others facing similar struggles and making breakthroughs, hope becomes contagious. The collective field holds what individual families cannot hold alone.

Time Commitment: 2 hours monthly, ongoing

Format Options:

Virtual circles (Zoom)

In-person circles (Caballo, NM)

Regional circles (forming in multiple locations)

Investment: FREE for all participants

How to Join: Visit <https://togetherstorying.com> or email davidboje@gmail.com

Program 4: Catalina Island Retreat (Paid Coach Training)

3-Day Immersive TogetherStorying Coach Certification

Location: Avalon, Catalina Island, California

Who Should Attend:

Donors & Philanthropists who want to go beyond writing checks and learn to create transformation themselves

Coaches, Therapists & Helping Professionals frustrated by traditional therapy's high dropout rates

Business & Community Leaders who want to bring restorying to their organizations

Anyone passionate about serving veterans and first responders

What You'll Learn:

Complete PERVIEW 7-step methodology

Seven B-levels framework (Beneath through Beyond)

Working with the seven Ws at each level

Story-seeds and story-filters

Little Wow Moments methodology

Assessment tools (SSL, PMQ, DHI)

Equine-assisted coaching basics

Building your coaching practice

Ethical boundaries and supervision

Daily Schedule (Sample):

DAY 1: Foundations

Morning: Introduction to TogetherStorying philosophy

Afternoon: The seven B-levels and seven Ws framework

Evening: Practice session with feedback

DAY 2: PERVIEW Method

Morning: Steps 1-4 (Characterize, Externalize, Sympathize, Revise)

Afternoon: Steps 5-7 (Strategize, Rehistoricize, Publicize)

Evening: Integration and case studies

DAY 3: Practice & Certification

Morning: Supervised coaching demonstrations

Afternoon: Ethical considerations, building your practice

Evening: Certification ceremony

Includes:

All training materials

TogetherStorying Coach Certification

1 year of supervision (monthly group calls)

Access to coach community

Ongoing professional development

Marketing support for your practice

Investment: \$4,500

Includes 3-day training, materials, certification, 1-year supervision

Accommodations and meals NOT included (handled separately through Catalina rentals)

100% of fees fund FREE veteran/first responder services

Tax-deductible donation to PerView Inc. (EIN: 33-4129438)

Next Retreat Dates: Visit <https://togetherstorying.com/retreat.html>

Accommodations: Catalina Island offers ~200 vacation rental properties (estates, condos, cottages). We can help coordinate group bookings.

Appendix C: Fundraising Goals & Support

Our 501(c)(3) Structure

PerView Inc. is a registered nonprofit organization dedicated to providing free restorying coaching to veterans, active military, first responders, and their families.

EIN: 33-4129438

Status: IRS-recognized 501(c)(3) public charity

Founded: 2024

Founders: Dr. David M. Boje & Dr. Grace Ann Rosile

All donations are 100% tax-deductible.

Current Fundraising Goals

GOAL 1: SERVE 100 FAMILIES IN 2026

Funding Needed: \$250,000

This supports:

50 families through ranch-based equine coaching (\$2,500/family)

50 families through monthly virtual sprints (\$1,500/family)

All TogetherStorying Circles (free, no limit on participants)

What Each Service Level Provides:

\$1,500 - Monthly Sprint (Virtual)

4 weekly 2-hour coaching sessions

All PERVIEW materials

Access to coach for between-session support

Integration into ongoing circles

\$2,500 - Ranch Intensive (In-Person)

2-3 day immersive experience

Equine-assisted coaching

Sand tray work

Private family sessions

Group coaching circles

Meals and ranch access

Follow-up virtual sessions

GOAL 2: TRAIN 50 CERTIFIED COACHES IN 2026

Revenue Target: \$200,000

Through Catalina Island retreats (\$4,500 each) and Monthly Sprints coach track (\$2,000 each):

25 coaches via Catalina retreats = \$112,500

25 coaches via Monthly Sprint track = \$50,000

Additional donations = \$37,500

100% of coach training revenue funds free family services

GOAL 3: BUILD ENDOWMENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Target: \$1,000,000 by 2028

Endowment ensures:

Services continue regardless of annual fundraising

4% annual draw provides ~\$40,000/year in perpetuity

Stability for families and coaches

Legacy impact for founders' mission

How You Can Support

OPTION 1: One-Time Donation

Give any amount via <https://togetherstorying.com/donate.html>

Suggested Giving Levels:

\$50-100: Sponsors one family's participation in TogetherStorying Circle

\$500: Sponsors coaching materials and training for 5 families

\$1,500: Fully sponsors one family's Monthly Sprint

\$2,500: Fully sponsors one family's ranch intensive

\$5,000: Sponsors two families plus coach training materials

\$10,000+: Major donor recognition, personal updates, invitation to ranch visit

OPTION 2: Monthly Sustainer

Recurring monthly gifts provide predictable funding for ongoing services.

\$50/month = \$600/year → Supports ongoing circles

\$125/month = \$1,500/year → Sponsors one family annually

\$250/month = \$3,000/year → Sponsors two families annually

\$500/month = \$6,000/year → Major sponsor status

OPTION 3: Become a Trained Coach

Invest in your own training while funding free services:

Monthly Sprint Coach Track: \$2,000

Catalina Island Retreat: \$4,500

Both pathways include certification, supervision, and ongoing support.

OPTION 4: Corporate/Foundation Partnership

We welcome partnerships with:

Veteran service organizations

Corporate giving programs

Family foundations

Community foundations

Partnership Benefits:

Named program sponsorship

Recognition in materials

Speaking engagements

Impact reports

Site visits to ranch programs

Contact: info@perview.org

Tax Information

PerView Inc. is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization

EIN: 33-4129438

Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

You will receive:

Immediate email receipt for all online donations

Official year-end tax statement

Documentation for donations \$250+

Contact Information

General Inquiries:

info@perview.org

Family Services:

families@perview.org

Coach Training:

training@perview.org

Donor Relations:

development@perview.org

Websites:

<https://togetherstorying.com>

<https://perview.org>

* * *

All programs and services provided by PerView Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN: 33-4129438).

Tax-deductible donations fund all veteran and first responder family services.

Learn more at <https://togetherstorying.com>

Appendix D: PERVIEW Session Quick Reference Guide

Purpose: This guide provides step-by-step protocol for conducting TogetherStorying coaching sessions. Use it as a reference during actual sessions with families or organizational teams.

Note: This is a practitioner tool, not a reading document. Keep it accessible during sessions for quick reference.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. ASK PERMISSION

"Is it OK with you if I ask you questions? I don't want you to go into the Rabbit Hole and relive any experiences. Instead I will ask 'What would you like to have at the end of this session?' and 'What are your negative thoughts and emotions about that Rabbit Hole?' Can I get your permission to do that?"

→ If YES, continue. If NO, STOP.

2. SET THE AGENDA

Ask one of these questions:

"What can we focus on today that will bring you value?"

"What is one area of your life that is not where you want it to be?"

THE VIEW CYCLE

Check VIEW at EVERY step. This is critical for tracking progress.

V - Vibrations: What vibrations do you embody right now?

I - Internal: What are your thoughts, emotions, and beliefs in this moment?

E - Energy Scale: On a scale of 1 to 10, what's your energy level?

W - Wave Collapse: Collapse quantum energy vibrations into your new story

STEP 1: CHARACTERIZE

Goal: Characterize them at their best, BEFORE the Rabbit Hole (start with positive memory before the Problem/Stuck Area).

Do baseline VIEW

V: Vibrations you embody

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse into new story

STEP 2: EXTERNALIZE

Goal: As person goes into Rabbit Hole on their own (always happens), ask them to give it a NAME, so the problem is not them. The person (Self-Soul-Spirit) is secure.

This is ROOT CHAKRA (Mula-Adhara): Mula means ROOT, Adhara means SUPPORT.

Your job as observer/coach: Hold that energy in the Sacred Space Together.

Do VIEW now:

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse

STEP 3: SYMPATHIZE

Goal: Identify the payoff.

Ask: "What is one payoff, one small thing that is good from your habit?"

Do VIEW:

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse

STEP 4: REVISE

Goal: Connect thoughts, emotions, and beliefs.

Ask:

"When you consider this issue, what are your thoughts?"

"What are your feelings?"

"What are your beliefs about it?"

IMPORTANT: If not embodied (i.e., their feelings are not feelings but thoughts or beliefs), ask:

"Where do you feel that in your body?"

"What is that feeling telling you?"

"What are you not getting that is important to you?"

Do VIEW:

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse

STEP 5: STRATEGIZE (Little Wow Moments)

Goal: Identify 5-7 Little Wow Moments when preferred future was already present.

Ask:

"How is this affecting what you want in your relationships (family, kids, spouse, friends, co-workers)?"

"How is this affecting what else you want in life?"

"Recall a Little Wow Moment when it was going well in those relations."

Get at least 5, ideally 7 Little Wow Moments.

Do VIEW:

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse

STEP 6: REHISTORICIZE

Goal: Rehistoricize by ONLY recalling Little Wow Moments, not any of the Problem/Stuck Areas.

Take as long as it takes to get to 5-7 LWMs. Never skip this VIEW—it tells you as coach if you are getting the job done.

Do VIEW:

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10)

W: Wave collapse

STEP 7: PUBLICIZE

Goal: Tell the New Story of your Future.

If they drop into harmful story habit (filter): Go back to Step 4, or if needed, to Step 1, and repeat.

If New Story is happening:

Ask:

"Who can support you in your New Story?"

"Are there people who can hold you accountable and lovingly remind you if you backslide into your old story habits?"

Then, do the CEREMONY:

1. Demonstrate four deep breaths:

Count 4 in

Hold for 4

Count 4 out

2. Have them do the breaths four times

3. Ask them to clap loudly three times, as you (the coach) do this with them

CHECK: "When you have your New Story, what do you have?"

Final VIEW: If energy is not at 10, repeat Steps 5 and 6.

V: Vibrations

I: Internal thoughts, emotions, beliefs

E: Energy scale (1-10) - SHOULD BE 9-10

W: Wave collapse into New Story

CRITICAL REMINDERS

Always ask permission before beginning

Do VIEW at EVERY step—this is not optional

Get 5-7 Little Wow Moments minimum in Step 5

If energy isn't 9-10 at end, repeat Steps 5-6

Always end with ceremony (breathing + clapping)

Trust the process—it works when followed

Be present, not mechanical