



The stories

WE TELL Are you living someone else's script?

BY LEONARD CARR

WE ALL LOVE STORIES, AND FROM THE TIME WE were small children, we enjoyed listening to stories. Stories are really our first introduction to organised ideas about how the world works. If you think about a story, it has characters, and those characters have personalities. It has a plot. And so stories really teach us about life, either in literal form or, in the case of fairytales, in symbolic form.

As we grow up, we are taught to make a distinction between stories and real life, as if stories and real life are separate realities and different contexts that somehow don't belong together, and are two different spheres of existence.

As we grow older, we discover that living in what we are told is the 'real world' usually, if not inevitably, means relegating our stories to mere entertainment, distraction, or pastime. We might even be told when we're children and we try and relate an incident, "Don't tell stories," meaning, "don't tell lies". And, as children, maybe we tried to express what we meant in symbolic form through the story. But, when we're told that our stories are lies and that we shouldn't tell them, then we get to see stories as something separate, or something that's not acceptable. And so we stop telling stories.

Stories then become to us what is referred to as fiction. And, strangely, the real world or truth, so called, is described as non-fiction. Whatever is not a story or a fiction, in other words, a non-story or non-fiction, is real and valid, and therefore worth taking seriously.

This phenomenon is as strange as it sounds, and yet we all oblige and give up our stories in the name of growing up or in the name of being sensible and rational. Very often, when small children share their

stories with us, when they share their fantasies, their daydreams, or their ideas, we laugh at them or ridicule them or patronisingly say things like, "That's so cute." Seldom are the stories told by children heard for their wisdom or their messages in symbolic form that they convey about the child's experience, or about the child's view of the world; it is embodied in the story.

The older we get, the more we become shy and self-conscious, if not outright embarrassed or even ashamed about telling our stories. Because stories are seen as something unreal and not something that mature people tell; to tell stories actually requires courage. And very often, people only start to tell their stories when they have had a fair bit of alcohol. And even with fictional stories or jokes, people find it difficult to tell and

feel shy or embarrassed when they have to tell even a joke, let alone talk about their own life story. We are led to believe from early on that taking our stories seriously, let alone explicitly and consciously living our stories and our dreams, is somehow less valid, less worthy a reality than the so-called real world that we are conditioned to and instructed to inhabit by our schooling and authority figures, who undermined our stories throughout our lives.

People in authority, including so-called experts, gain power over our lives by specifying for us what aspect of our lives, experience, thoughts, feelings, tastes and behaviours are valid and acceptable and what are not. Just picture the bookshelves of bookstores that you like to look at and think about all the books on self-help, on



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