

Ep #7: The Stories We Tell



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With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode seven, The Stories We Tell.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief to grow, evolve, and create a future you can actually look forward to. Here's your host, certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey there. Welcome back to the podcast. It's a lovely Friday morning in my neck of the woods and I am going to record this podcast for you and then have a whole day packed full of coaching. My one-on-one *Widowed Mom* clients, which I just love.

So before we jump into the content today, I want to read you a couple of reviews. And the first one is from Jensen225 and Jensen wrote, "I'm recently a widowed mom of two. Krista's podcasts provide real feelings and authentic, achievable skills in how to navigate through this road. Looking forward to future podcasts."

Thanks so much for that review. The reason I do this is I want you to know, number one, that you're seen, that I hear you, that what you have to say and what you're going through matters to me, and so I love doing listener shout-outs for that reason. Also, I'm doing this work because I want it to benefit women like you and the more you rate and review the podcast, the more searchable it becomes.

And so I want to encourage that, which is why I've been doing a giveaway, which is still going on. The odds of winning are good. I'm giving away five \$1000 gift cards to Amazon. You can find all of the instructions for that on coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch.

Okay, one more review. This one is from Lina010795 and Lina wrote, "When you think you're the only one feeling these emotions and you don't

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know where to put them, Krista helps you see you're not alone. I've been a widow six months and I decided I needed help. Baby steps, right? So thank you for the podcasts and emails. They really help."

Yes Lina, baby steps for sure and I'm so glad that podcast has been useful to you and that my emails are useful to you. Glad to have you as a listener. Okay, so in today's episode, we are going to talk about the stories that we tell. Whenever we tell a story about something that's happened in our lives, whether we're telling the story to another person, or even and maybe more importantly, when we're telling the story to ourselves inside our own minds, we think that the story we're telling is what it is.

We think that when we're telling a story, we're recalling it exactly as it happened. We think the way that we experience the story was the only way that it could be experienced, but this isn't true. What's actually happening when we tell a story is that we are recounting some facts and a lot of interpretation.

So we often end up telling these stories in a way that doesn't serve us, but we never question it because we don't realize that we have a say in the matter. And we don't know that the way we interpret the facts of what happened is the reason we feel the way we do about what happened. So I'm going to say that again. It's not the facts of what happened in our past that cause us to feel anything. It's how we interpret the facts of what has happened that determines our experience of it.

And so I'm going to tell you today the same story three times. I'm going to tell three different versions of the same story. I want you to hear what it sounds like when I tell the default story, the story that came to me and probably could come to you most naturally. That version of the story doesn't serve me at all. In fact, it leaves me feeling helpless and powerless and victimized and weak and guilty and ashamed. And the way I tell that story is optional.

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Then I'm going to tell it a second way and I'm going to tell it with no opinion, with no interpretation. I'm going to tell it as factually as I can. And then I'm going to retell it a third time and I'm going to tell it the way I choose to tell it. So I want you to pay attention to the three different ways that I tell this story.

Now, I will warn you, I'm going to tell you the story of the day that my husband died. And I thought long and hard before I decided that this is the story I wanted to tell you. I thought maybe I should just pick a story that isn't so emotionally charged. Maybe this would be - and I hate to use the word, triggering. I really don't like that word. I'll tell you all about it in another episode. I don't think it's useful at all.

But I really have given this thought about whether this story would be triggering, and here's what I have decided. I'm giving you forewarning that I'm going to tell the story of the day my husband died. I'm not doing it to upset you. I'm doing it so you can learn what I have learned, which is that there are ways to tell stories that create less of what we want in life, and there are ways to take those same facts and tell that same story in a way that helps us create more of what we want in our lives.

So with that, this is version number one. So we were coming back from Heather's Camp, which is a camp for kids who are blind or visually impaired and in and of itself, that was so upsetting to me because it was the only year that Hugo ever got to experience camp. It's something that's incredibly important in my life and even though it was just his first experience, I could tell that he loved it and it is such a loss that he will never get to experience that camp again.

I had had a flat tire, pulled my car off to the side of the road, and in retrospect, I know I should have pulled up more and kept going on that highway until I could find the widest part of the shoulder, but I just pulled over and got to what seemed like a safe spot. Hugo pulled up behind me

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and even though we had AAA, I didn't insist that we call them. And when he said he wanted to change the tire, I just rolled over and let him, and I knew that the cars were just flying by on the highway.

It didn't feel safe to me, but I didn't stand up for what I thought was right in the moment and I let him change the tire. So I was standing on the side of the road, he was getting the tire out of my trunk and he was in between my car, of course, and his. And I was looking down at my phone trying to text my daughter to tell her about the flat tire so she knew that we would be late.

And I heard no brakes, just the most unforgettable, horrifying crashing noise, and turned around to see something that I will never forget. Three cars piled up. My husband nowhere to be seen, and it was like the whole world just stopped. And I remember trying to get my bearings and watching the man who caused the accident stumble out of his car and just - I don't know if I was saying it out loud or just in my head, but I remember just thinking oh my god, oh my god, oh my god.

And I panicked. I screamed. I couldn't orient myself. I knew what highway I was on and I remember calling 911 but I didn't know exactly where on the highway I was, which was really unfortunate because I couldn't tell them specifically what exit and I started looking for a highway sign or a mile marker and I couldn't see anything. I couldn't focus.

There were people running up to the accident and I know I sounded like a complete lunatic to the 911 operator. I was yelling at people who were coming up to the accident trying to just get anyone to tell me what exit I was near. And while we were waiting for EMS, I called my mom. My heart was racing in my chest, I remember it being so tight and I was crying and I had to tell my mom my name at least three times because I was so upset that she could not recognize her only child on the phone, even with caller ID.

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And then stupid me, definitely not in the running for mom of the year, I called my daughter to tell her what was happening, which was a really dumb thing to do because even though I tried to be calm, she could hear the fear in my voice and almost instantly she started to cry and I felt awful about that and it was just a really horrible situation to have put her in.

It took an eternity for EMS to arrive and once they finally did, it seemed like forever for them to decide how to get him out of the wreckage, to get him out. I grabbed some stuff out of my car and I sat in the ambulance waiting and waiting for them to get him stable enough to transport to the hospital. The ride to the hospital was so scary.

I just couldn't understand why they wouldn't smash the gas pedal and go faster. It felt like we were moving so slowly in my mind. Finally we got there and they got him inside and then the highway patrol officer took me into a little room and asked me for a statement, which I just thought was so callous and I didn't feel like it was appropriate.

I was in such a fragile state and they already had the guy. I mean, he was injured and he was with us at the hospital and I didn't understand why they would be asking me at a time like that to get myself together and give them data. I felt like it could have waited. And then from there it just kept going downhill. It was like this awful rollercoaster of waiting and tears and feeling scared, and then doctors would come out and they would tell me things, and then I would wait some more and then I would cry some more.

And then the next morning it went from downhill to unimaginable and they came to tell me that he wasn't doing well and they didn't know why and that his heart stopped. And so I had to stand there and watch all of it. I remember feeling just helpless and really the only thing I knew to do was just to pray. And just beg that he wouldn't be taken from me, and it was truly the worst 20-hour period of my life. I will never forget it as long as I

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live. I lost the love of my life in the most unfair way possible, and then I had to go home and tell my kids.

Okay, so that was one version of the story, and now I'm going to tell it again and this time I'm going to tell it in the most factual way possible. So I'm not going to use opinions, I'm not going to be subjective. I'm just going to stick to the facts.

We were on our way back from Heather's Camp, which is a camp for children who are blind or visually impaired, and it was Hugo's first year at the camp. We had a membership to triple AAA and I asked Hugo if we should call. He said he preferred to change the tire himself so that we could get done faster.

So he was getting the tire out of my trunk, standing in between the two cars, and I was standing beside our cars on the highway texting my daughter to tell her we'd be late. Someone driving a car crashed into the back of my husband's car and I heard the noise and I looked up. I called 911, I asked people where we were on the highway, and then I told the 911 operator.

Then I called my mom. It took eight minutes for EMS to arrive. They assessed the situation, got Hugo out of the wreckage and into the ambulance, I got some of my belongings from the car. On the way to the hospital I called family, Hugo's first wife, my pastor, and Hugo's boss. When we got to the hospital, I gave a statement to the highway patrol person.

The doctors came in several times and gave us updates about what was happening. The next morning they told me Hugo wasn't doing well and that they didn't know why, and then his heart stopped. I stood with my father, my stepson and my pastor, and watched from outside the room as they worked on him. At 12:07 they pronounced him dead. The doctors came in

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later and told me what happened and then I left the hospital and went home and told my children what had happened.

Very different versions of the story, yes. The first interpretation, the factual version, and the third version that I'm going to tell you, and this is the version that I have chosen to tell myself and that I'm choosing to tell you. The facts are the same in all three versions. They are factually the same story. But I want you to listen to the difference in the third story and see how you can use this in your life and in the stories that you tell. So here we go.

We were coming back from Heather's Camp, which is a camp for kids who are blind or visually impaired. It's such a passion for me and it was so amazing to have Hugo there. It was his first year at camp. He absolutely loved it. He loved it so much in fact that later, the camp made an award in his honor for the first year counselor of the year award, and then later the company that we worked for even created a memorial scholarship in his name to the camp.

So I was so grateful that he got to experience Heather's Camp as a volunteer that year. And we were driving back, I had a flat tire, and I could tell that the tire went flat. I pulled over to what I thought was the safest place I could find and I turned my hazard lights on before I got out of the car.

We talked briefly about AAA and even though we had a membership he said, "Baby, no, I just want to get home and I just want to cuddle you and drink some wine and see Sadie, our dog, and talk about the weekend. It'll take forever for AAA to get here so it's no problem. I'll change the tire. It's no big deal."

And one of the reasons I loved him so much was because he was so independent and so stubborn and just capable of doing those types of

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things on his own. So he started to get the tire out of the trunk. Fortunately, my daughter who was on the trip with us had ridden the bus, and so she wasn't actually there with us in the cars.

So she had ridden the bus, so I was going to text her and I had walked to the side of the road, safely away from the highway to text her when the accident happened. I had the wherewithal to call 911 immediately. I knew even before going to him that the best thing I could do was to call for help because I knew he was going to need immediate help.

And so that's the first thing I did, and as scared as I was, I was able to make that call even with my hands shaking. I knew the highway I was on and I had some people around me help me figure out where I was so that I could give instructions to the 911 operator. We were close enough to the city thankfully because we had been quite a ways away, a couple of hours away.

We were close enough to the city that it only took EMS eight minutes to get there. And one of the women who stopped at the accident, she was so wonderful. She told me she was a nurse and she took Hugo's pulse and she told me he was still breathing and he had a heartbeat. And she was such a gift in helping me try to stay as calm as I possibly could.

I called my mom, I told her what happened so she could come to the hospital, and then I called my daughter. And when I recognized that my daughter was upset, I asked her to hand the phone to my friend Melanie, who I knew was with her and I explained what had happened to Melanie, who thank goodness, helped calm down my daughter.

And Melanie and so many of my other friends rallied around me, not only that day but in the weeks and in the months to come. I don't know that I'll ever be able to repay them but I am certainly blessed beyond measure to have the amazing group of friends and sorority sisters that I have. I don't

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really know how, but I almost feel like someone was guiding me that day because I was really able to think clearly enough in the moment in all of that chaos to get back in the car, to get my insurance information, to get my bag, my purse, my wallet, my phone charger, all the things I would need at the hospital I was able to get them.

And I got in the ambulance and they were working very hard to stabilize him quickly so that we could get on the road. Fortunately it was a highway almost the entire trip to the hospital was a highway and there was almost no traffic so the drive was much faster than it could have been.

The ambulance driver was very kind. He removed his charger so I could charge my phone and while we were on the way to the hospital, I was thinking clearly enough that I made some important phone calls. I called my family and I called Hugo's first wife and my pastor and Hugo's boss and people that I thought would need to know immediately what happened or would want to know.

Then when we arrived at the hospital, the highway patrol officer in the lobby introduced himself and I found out that he was the cousin of a good friend of mine and sorority sister who was also at Heather's Camp with me that weekend. And she arrived at the hospital not long after, so it was nice to have it be someone that I knew or at least was related to someone that I knew.

I found comfort in that and even during such a stressful time, I was strong enough to give a solid statement and to recall details that the officer told me would be helpful. The doctors in the hospital were incredibly kind and caring. They came out regularly to tell me what was going on and give me updates. Several of my family members are health professionals and it seemed like these doctors were well known.

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I was told several times that if they could handpick someone to take care of someone that they loved, that these would be the doctors that they would pick, and so I felt grateful to know that I was in good hands. And when they came to tell me that he wasn't doing well and they were trying to save him, I was so grateful that my dad was there holding me up, that my pastor Tim, who had married Hugo and I was standing on the other side of me, that my stepson Lance was right there.

And after it was all over, they came, the whole staff came and talked to all of us. It was very emotional. We all hugged, and I will never forget how kind the staff were in the hospital. I was so grateful to have my family and friends all there to support me, people from work, everyone came to the hospital and then my parents came home with me so that I didn't have to tell my children alone.

I truly have a village of people who love me and while I would never wish this type of experience on anyone, I really am proud of myself and how I handled it. It was hard and I have risen to the occasion, and I have become stronger and more resilient as a result of it, and now I get to use this information and my own personal experience to help other widows who are maybe in similar situations or struggling with the same types of things that I did.

Okay, there were all three stories. Last one honestly is a little bit emotional for me to tell, but can you tell the difference between the three stories that I told? They're all true. What are the stories that you are telling? That first story, I can find the truth in all of those things that I said. I can find the truth in all of the would've, should've, could've's, that I should have pulled up further down the road, that I upset my daughter, that I was hysterical. All of it. I can find the truth in it.

But it doesn't take me anywhere productive. I can find the truth in all the things that were upsetting to me and losing the love of my life and losing

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him in such an unfair way. That all feels very true to me, but it really doesn't serve me. It doesn't help me. Doesn't create anything empowering. It just keeps me stuck in feeling helpless and victimized and wronged.

And that second version, I stripped out all of the opinion and I just told you the facts because I wanted you to see where the interpretation was. I wanted you to see how my thoughts were making that story challenging for me. How my thoughts about something that's not even happening now were still creating suffering for me.

So you heard the version with just the facts, then I told you the version that I've chosen to tell. All of it is true in all three stories. But that version, that's the strengthening version. That's the version where I give myself credit. That's the version where I show myself grace and compassion. That's the version where I find the truth of what I have to be grateful for. That's the version I want to remember.

So I have a feeling that there might be some stories that are coming to your mind as you have listened to me tell this story. It might not be the story of your husband's passing. That's not what I'm getting at. I want you to think bigger than that even. What are the stories that you're telling yourself about the facts of life that has happened? And are you telling stories that strengthen and empower you? Stories that are loving towards you?

Or are you beating yourself up? Are you putting yourself in the role of the victim? Are you feeling helpless? Are you feeling guilty or shameful? You get to decide, my friends, the stories that you will tell. You don't need permission from anybody. Your story will be grounded in fact, but facts aren't what caused the pain. Facts aren't what caused the suffering. It's the interpretation that serves us or doesn't.

So I want you to think about it so that you can choose it wisely and tell stories in a way that serve what it is you want to create more of going

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forward. Okay, that's what I have for you today. Thank you for joining me on another episode of the podcast. If you haven't yet, I would love it if you would subscribe. If you subscribe, you don't have to actually remember the podcast that comes out every Monday.

It will just automatically show up on your device, which if you are a busy mom like me is super helpful. So I would encourage you to subscribe, also to rate and review if you would be so kind. That is tremendously appreciated, and I hope you have an amazing day. I will see you next time here on the podcast. Remember, I love you and you've got this. Take care.

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