



for the families who rewrote it

The Official Story Was Wrong

when a family edits a death — and what to do with the truth you carry

—

A free guide from Heart of Care.

Written for Uncle David, and for everyone whose grief was filed under the wrong cause.





What we mean by “the official story”



Every family that loses someone hard tells two versions. There is the version on the death certificate, the obituary, the casserole-line conversation — clean, brief, survivable. And there is the version that actually happened: the calls that didn’t get picked up, the sister who hung up the phone, the years of trying, the silence at the end.

When the second version is uncomfortable, families edit. They reach for a softer cause of death. They reach for “he was sick.” They reach for anything that doesn’t name the part the living played.

That edit is not love. It is protection — of the editor, not of the dead.





Why families do this



It is rarely a conspiracy. It is usually a flinch. The truth is heavy and it indicts somebody — often the person doing the telling. So the story gets softer with each retelling, until it is unrecognizable, until the person who died is unrecognizable, until your memory of them feels like a separate event nobody else attended.

Some common edits:

- “He was sick” — when the sickness was addiction nobody answered the phone for.
- “He chose this” — when the choices were made inside a silence the family built.
- “We did everything we could” — when what was done was waiting for him to stop calling.
- “It was peaceful” — when it was not.





What it does to the people who remember the real version



If you are the one who remembers what actually happened, the official story does a specific kind of damage. It makes you feel crazy. It makes you feel cruel for bringing it up. It makes the grief homeless — there is nowhere inside the family story for what you actually feel, because the family story has been edited to remove the reason for the feeling.

You end up grieving twice: once for the person, once for the truth of how they were lost.

This is a real and recognized form of grief. It has a name: *disenfranchised grief* — grief that the people around you will not let you have out loud.





You are allowed to keep the real version



You do not have to argue the official story down. You do not have to correct anyone at the funeral. You do not owe the editors a debate. But you also do not have to swallow the edit. You are allowed, quietly, to keep the version that is true.

Keeping the true version sounds like:

- Writing the real story down somewhere private — a notebook, a letter to them, a single page in a drawer.
- Telling one person who can hear it without flinching — a sponsor, a therapist, a peer, a friend who has lost someone the same way.
- Saying their name out loud, with the real cause of death, in a room where nobody will edit you.
- Refusing, gently, to repeat the edit yourself when asked.





A practice: the unedited page



Sit somewhere you will not be interrupted. Get one sheet of paper. At the top, write:

The official story is _____.

What actually happened is _____.

Write the second one. Not for anyone else. Not to publish, not to confront. Just so the true version exists somewhere on paper, in your handwriting, where it cannot be edited out.

Fold the page. Put it somewhere safe. You have just refused, in private, to let the silence win.





When the editors are still in your life



Sometimes the people who rewrote the death are people you still see at holidays. Sometimes they are people you still love. You do not have to cut them off to keep the truth. You only have to stop volunteering for the edit.

That can look like:

- Not finishing their sentence when they soften it.
- Saying “that’s not how I remember it” and changing the subject — without a fight.
- Leaving the room when the edited version is being told, if you need to.
- Keeping a separate, private community — peer, recovery, faith, friendship — where the real version is allowed to be spoken.





a closing word

Your memory is not a problem to be managed.

It is a record. It is, in some cases, the only honest one. Keeping it — quietly, stubbornly, without permission — is its own form of love for the person the family edited out.

You are allowed to remember them whole.



If this guide met you, the companion guide — When the Living Won't Pick Up — lives in The Resource Barn at heart-of-care.life. The full workbook is coming to the shop.

Written for Uncle David. — Briana, the Honey Badger

sit on the porch a moment

What now?

You just finished The Official Story Was Wrong.

Holding the unedited version is heavy work. It's also the work that keeps the person you lost a real person.

Tender Ground — the keepsake workbook

Slow, grounding practices for the in-between season — for the version of you who knows what really happened and still has to keep living.

Sit on the porch →

heart-of-care.life/after/the-official-story-was-wrong

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