

FANTASTIC STORIES

AND WHERE
TO FIND THEM

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FINDING GOD ON DENALI

BRITTANY ROGERS, BYU MAGAZINE

<https://magazine.byu.edu/article/finding-god-on-denali/>

Heider, F., & Simmel, M. (1944). An experimental study of apparent behavior. *The American Journal of Psychology*

- What did you see?
- 34 subjects watched it;
33 described a story of
people

Watch Video Here:

<https://youtu.be/8FIEZXMUM2I>

Stories are how we
make sense of the
world around us.

WHAT IS A
STORY?

The Elements of Story

- ▶ **Setting**

- ◉ Where does it happen?

- ▶ **Character**

- ◉ To whom does it happen?
- ◉ Who makes it happen?

- ▶ **Plot**

- ◉ What happens?

Story Arc (*plot*)



Once upon a time... when suddenly... and then... and then... until finally... happily ever after.

Ira Glass, *This American Life*

"All plot is is a series of actions where one thing leads to the next. . . . Once you have any sequence of actions . . . that creates

narrative suspense because

you wonder what happened next."

"And then you can just take them on a journey and walk them through all kinds of feelings and ideas—even on subjects that they don't think they want to hear about."

WHAT IS A ^{NOT} STORY?

Not a Story

It's 7:35 on a drizzly Friday evening, and friendly chatter fills the Sarah Berret Summerhays Planetarium in BYU's Eyring Science Center. Some 18 people—students, astronomy buffs, and interested observers—relax into new reclining seats, and voices reverberate off the curved ceiling to allow easy eavesdropping from distant portions of the room. The familiar silhouette of Utah Valley's rugged horizon runs around the rim of the ceiling. Soon the door closes, the lights dim, and the stars and constellations of the April sky appear. For the next hour spectators are treated to the first planetarium show at BYU in more than two and a half years.

BYU's Hall of Wonders

By Jeff McClellan, BYU Magazine, Summer 1998

<https://magazine.byu.edu/article/byus-hall-of-wonders/>

Story

In the darkening California evening, two runners led the way around a track in the women's steeplechase finals at the 2004 U.S. Olympic Track and Field Trials in Sacramento. Though the exhibition event was not on the docket for the Athens Olympics, it would count as a U.S. championship.

The front-runner, however, would not be claiming the title, having been disqualified on the first lap. The second runner, and de facto leader, wore a navy blue BYU jersey. In her last lap of the race, Kassi Andersen (BS '04) was running strong, on pace for a new personal-best time. She had won the NCAA championship in the event in 2003 and surpassed that time earlier in 2004.

Clearing the water barrier for the last time, Andersen landed hard on the side of her foot. Somewhere down in the water, her ankle rolled, foot bones broke, and she fell.

Lying in the water pit, she looked up. Ahead of her loomed one more hurdle and 200 meters of track. She rose and began to run, limping down the track. She cleared the final barrier, sending a stronger jolt of pain through her body, and kept going. Somewhere in those final 200 meters, a runner passed her, but Andersen pushed herself across the finish line for second place at 9:45.52, only one second off her personal best, despite the injury and the fall. She had pushed herself to her limits—past her limits, perhaps—in a quest for excellence.

Being More

By Jeff McClellan, BYU Magazine, Summer 2008

<https://magazine.byu.edu/article/being-more/>

Not everything should be a story.

Not all great writing is storytelling.

**But storytelling is a powerful tool
we should use more often.**

ONE IN A MILLION

<https://youtu.be/WlupO5-F-28>

WHY DO
STORIES
WORK FOR US?

The Neuroscience of Story

Paul Zak

Neuroeconomist

Claremont Graduate University

Sources: *Cerebrum*, Feb. 2015; Future of StoryTelling ([youtube.com/watch?v=q1a7tiA1Qzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1a7tiA1Qzo))

The Neuroscience of Story

Cortisol  PLOT

- Stress/distress
- Attention, memory
- Action

Oxytocin  CHARACTER

- Personal connection
- Care, empathy
- Prosocial behaviors

CONTROL VIDEO: No Increase in Cortisol or Oxytocin

The Neuroscience of Story

**“Heightened empathy
motivated participants to offer
money to a stranger.”**

The Neuroscience of Story

- ▶ **Replicated, ruled out other factors**
 - ◉ "They don't matter; it all comes down to story."
- ▶ **PSAs, Super Bowl ads, StoryCorps**
 - ◉ In PSA study, donations increased 261%
- ▶ **Transportation**
 - ◉ "If you pay attention to the story and become emotionally engaged with the story's characters, then it is as if you have been transported into the story's world."

The Neuroscience of Story

“Narratives that cause us to pay attention and also involve us emotionally are the stories that move us to action.”

HOW CAN YOU USE
STORIES?



What Gets in the Way of Stories?

- ▶ **We aren't looking for them**
- ▶ **Too much information**
- ▶ **No time to find/write**
- ▶ **We bury the story**
- ▶ **Space constraints**

Stories Don't Have To Be Long

**For sale: Baby shoes,
never worn.**

(attributed to Ernest Hemingway)

The Implied Story

Seventeen people killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida; 12 shot to death at a bar hosting a student line-dancing night in Thousand Oaks, California; 11 killed when a man opened fire in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; four deaths at a Mercy Hospital and Medical Center in Chicago; three dead at a Madden '19 video game competition in Jacksonville, Florida – and those are just a few of the shooting incidents from 2018. Hearing such news and participating in active shooter trainings in schools, workplaces and public venues have become part of everyday American life. But, rather than getting used to mass shootings, what can we do to stop them?

How Can We Prevent Mass Shootings?

Trevor Stewart, July 1, 2019, UC Davis Magazine

<https://magazine.ucdavis.edu/how-can-we-prevent-mass-shootings/>

How Can You Use Stories?

- ▶ **Introduce a topic**
- ▶ **Provide an example**
- ▶ **Illustrate an abstract concept**
- ▶ **Flesh out a person's character**
- ▶ **Provide context/history/background**

While growing up in Iowa, John McNeil experienced some pretty harsh winters. However, at the age of 8, he learned that other children had it worse than he did.

“This was a lesson I learned in the 3rd grade,” McNeil recalled. “It was cold as the dickens in Iowa, below zero. My mother had put a string on my mittens so I wouldn’t lose them. I hung them up in the cloakroom [at school], these brand-new mittens. And then one day, they weren’t there. I got angry because someone took my mittens, I made a big fuss for two or three days. Finally, the teacher called me over. ‘Do you want your mittens?’ she asked. ‘You bet I want my mittens.’

“So, she told me where to go, and I went trudging through the snow. I came upon this little house that had a tar-paper roof. This little lady came out with all these

kids, and she held these mittens. I realized right away that that woman was in a desperate situation. I just felt ashamed of myself for making a big noise, not knowing what I was doing. This little boy in my room had taken them, of course. I never forgot that.”

An awareness of those who need help has been a common thread throughout McNeil’s career. For the last three years, the World War II veteran and UCLA professor emeritus of education, who turns 99 today, co-taught a course with UCLA lecturer and former student Octavio Pescador on entrepreneurial philanthropy. UCLA undergrads worked on projects of their own invention that address issues including health, the environment, and reducing inequality.

John McNeil: Lessons from a Life Well-Lived
Joanie Harmon, October 29, 2018, UCLA Newsroom

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/99-year-old-ucla-education-professor-shares-lessons-from-a-life-well-lived>

Where Can You Use Stories?

- ▶ Advertisements
- ▶ Annual reports
- ▶ Constituent reports
- ▶ Fundraising solicitations
- ▶ Magazine articles
- ▶ Marketing programs
- ▶ News releases
- ▶ Photo essays
- ▶ Podcasts
- ▶ Social media posts
- ▶ Video

John Rossi—husband, father, 10-year naval veteran, and senior nursing student. Due to circumstances many nontraditional students face, last semester he became financially overwhelmed while trying to balance home, family, and the need to work extra hospital shifts as a medical technician with the demands of his class schedule.

A caring professor became aware of his situation and asked if any scholarship

monies were available. Surprisingly, a donation had arrived that morning with a note from a kind couple that stated they felt prompted to make an additional gift without knowing why. The funds became a partial scholarship and were given to John for assistance, which allowed him to reduce his workload and focus on his studies while still taking care of his wife and five children.

The Spirit of Giving (back-page fundraising advertisement)
Learning the Healer's Art, BYU College of Nursing, Spring 2014
<https://www.nursing.byu.edu/content/development/spring2014-online.pdf>

Types of Stories *(schools are a gold mine)*

1. **Overcoming the Monster:** Harry Potter
2. **Rags to Riches:** Cinderella
3. **The Quest:** The Lord of the Rings
4. **Voyage and Return:** The Wizard of Oz
5. **Comedy:** The Three Amigos
6. **Tragedy:** Romeo and Juliet
7. **Rebirth:** Sleeping Beauty

The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories
Christopher Booker

I fell out of a three-story window ...

and broke my neck when I was a freshman. Paramedics took me to Harborview Medical Center. The doctors told me, "You broke your neck, you broke your back, you have a spinal cord injury, and you will never walk again."

I went to a dark place mentally.

There was a moment when my mom kneeled next to me and said, "It's going to be OK." I kind of lashed back and said, "This isn't going to be OK, and it's not worth living if you can't walk." I was at a crossroads: I could either stay in this darkness and let life pass me by, or shift my trajectory and focus on the things I still have. That was the route I chose.

After that, I re-enrolled ...

in mechanical engineering. When I graduated from the UW in 2002, I landed a job soon thereafter as a mechanical engineer with the Federal Aviation Administration. I just finished working there.

At a Christmas party ...

in 2011, my friend Darin Donaldson told me he had set a goal: "I'm going to make a shoe." I told him I had an idea for a shoe, too. Since I had broken my neck, I wasn't able to put on my shoes. I just don't have the dexterity to do the laces or step my foot into the shoe. My thought was to put a zipper around the toe so the whole upper part of the shoe folds over and you can put your foot in flat and zip it up. That's how BILLY Footwear got started.

Our shoes sell at Nordstrom, Zappos and our website BILLYFootwear.com. One of our slogans is "Making a measurable difference in the world, one foot at a time."

Parents are so excited ...

because kids now are putting shoes on themselves. It's really cool to hear stories like, "It has been a battle to get my child to want to put his shoes on—now he loves it."

Two big things contributed ...

to the success that I've had. One is the concept of engineering. The biggest thing I got out of it was problem-solving. The other part was making a choice to not stay in that dark place I was at. Being able to associate with people who not only empower you but are door-openers.

We also offer a product ...

called BILLY Cares. It allows me to make presentations at schools, clinics or hospitals or one-on-one, talking about attitude, reminding people of the capacity they have to do great things much more than they can possibly imagine.

It's really incredible ...

what each and every one of us has within us. We truly have the ability to do great things if we apply ourselves.

Character: Inventor Billy Price takes it 'one foot at a time'

As told to Jim Caple, March 7, 2019, University of Washington magazine

<https://magazine.washington.edu/character-inventor-billy-price-takes-it-one-foot-at-a-time/>

HOW DO YOU FIND
STORIES?



Interview How To

1. How much research do you do before an interview?
2. Do you prepare questions beforehand?
3. Do you record audio?
4. How do you take notes?
5. Do you edit quotes?

Audie Cornish, NPR

I don't . . . have the luxury to go on a fishing expedition. So **I often write my questions in advance wherever possible. I rewrite and noodle around with the language** even though I know for fact I won't necessarily read it word for word. And I always have more questions than I need.

Larry King, CNN

I hate interviewers who come with a long list of prepared questions . . . because they're going to depend on going from the fourth question to the fifth question without listening to the answer. . . . **I concentrate solely on the answer, and I trust my instincts to come up with questions.**

Source: Columbia Journalism Review, *The Turnaround* (cjr.org/special_report/qa-nprs-audie-cornish-on-the-intimacy-of-interviewing.php and cjr.org/special_report/larry-king-interviewing-tips.php)

Interview for the Story

What you do

- ▶ Research
- ▶ Choose the setting
- ▶ Be observant
- ▶ Build the relationship



Interview for the Story

Katie Couric, News Anchor

I think people can sense a genuine interest and curiosity from the interviewer. I know when I'm talking to someone, **I want them to feel—and I feel—that they're the only person on planet earth in that moment in time, that I am completely locked in, to them,** what they want to talk about, what they're interested in, and that I approach them with respectful curiosity, **that I'm genuinely interested in what they have to say.**

Source: Columbia Journalism Review, *The Turnaround* (cjr.org/special_report/qa-katie-couric-on-authenticity-humility-and-a-date-with-larry-king.php)

Interview for the Story

What you say

- Prep questions (?)
- Ask open-ended questions
- Let silence work its magic
- Listen intently
- Follow up/dig deep
- Ask for/prompt for stories/examples
- Interview for the laugh or the tear

20 QUESTIONS FOR A STORY

1. What were you like as a child/student?
2. What triggered your interest in ____?
3. What challenges have you faced?
4. What have you learned from ____?
5. What was the best/worst/hardest...?
6. How did you feel when ____?
7. Who or what inspires you? Why?
8. How did you get the idea for ____?
9. What problem are you trying to solve?
10. Tell me about someone who benefits from your work.
11. What are you most proud of?
12. What would you do differently?
13. Who has been your biggest influence?
14. What was your moment of triumph/discovery/despair/resolve?
15. What funny stories do family members tell about you at Thanksgiving?
16. Tell me about a time when ____.
17. What are your hobbies?
18. How do you hope to be remembered?
19. What is next for you?
20. What question did you hope I would/wouldn't ask?

TELL MORE STORIES

(please; your audience wants to read them)