

Real Storytelling

The Persuasive Power of the spoken word

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Preface

Oral storytelling is back! It's big again for the first time in almost a hundred years. Everyone wants to learn how to do it: teachers, trainers, coaches. Public speakers particularly want to know how to use stories. The word is getting around. Clarisa Pinkola Estes, is right in stating: "Story is far older than the art of science and psychology, and will always be the older in the equation no matter how much time passes." For a while it seemed that oral storytelling was in its' dotage; beyond it, unable to communicate with enough sophistication and accuracy. Now it is realized that it is emotion which gets people to change, not facts and statistics.

This is a 'How to do it,' book. Within its pages you will find the advice, tips, hints and wisdom necessary if you want to excel as a real storyteller – an oral storyteller. And remember, there is nothing more powerful, more persuasive than a tale well told. The time to learn how to do this is now.

I wish you all success.

Arthur Thomas Ware – Storyteller.

Foreword

To the reader of this book:

My task...is to make you hear,
to make you feel – and, above all,
to make you see. That is all,
and it is everything.

Joseph Conrad
Preface to
"The Nigger of the Narcissus"

Chapter One

It is a foolish thing to make a long prologue, and to be short in the story itself.

Maccabees 2-11

"Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a land far away..." When these words are uttered we immediately become attentive. We are drawn to the speaker. Why? Because we know straight away that a story is to follow and there are few of us indeed who can resist listening to a story. If those few words are followed by a story-opening which, in the next ninety seconds or so can keep our attention, we will listen avidly, lost in the adventure of it. And if the person has the necessary skills to tell that story well, we will follow along with it, absorbed in the reverie of the storyteller's words until that tale reaches its end.

A story is the universal way to capture and keep the attention of a listener, be it one person or a couple of thousand persons. The man or woman who can tell a story well will, when telling that story - and presenting a point or moral revealed in that story - have something that every speaker, teacher, actor, or even poet wants: the power of real persuasion. This is the power of soul-to-soul communication which comes because it is using the only change agent we human beings are subject to - our emotions.

Stories are remembered

Stories have more going for them than any other method of delivering information. Lists of facts, mathematical formulae and explanations of these, points of so-called importance placed on a screen, statistics, none of these will make as much of an impact upon us as the story that accompanies these. The story will be remembered long after the facts have faded into the oblivion. However, the story, once brought back again into consciousness - perhaps by a chance remark, can also bring with it a general appreciation of those long forgotten facts. The emotions held within us because of the story will engender that.

The greatest teachers, statesmen, leaders, those that have changed the world, even had religions founded in their name, were people who could tell a story and tell it well. The famous French novelist and poet, Victor Hugo, stated that "No army can withstand the strength of an idea whose time has come." What he didn't elaborate on was that that idea

will not be carried into action in the world unless it is accepted into the hearts and minds of the many. And how is it accepted? By the *emotional* acceptance of stories told about that idea.

In the world of adults we do not necessarily start our stories with "Once upon a time," though as a storyteller who has told tales to thousands of adults, I certainly continue to open some of my yarns that way. Quite often I simply start off, after being introduced by the master-of-ceremonies with these words: "As - John, Harry, Mary - "says, I am a storyteller. And how does a storyteller start off? Once upon a time..."

People are immediately drawn to a story

You may wonder at the seeming simplicity and naiveté of such an opening, but when you see the smiles that immediately come to the faces of those in the audience, see them leaning forward in their seats to listen, you know you haven't gone too far wrong. Later, after a simple and rather short story which both makes a point and wins the audience over, you can get on with longer, and perhaps more complex information - interspersed of course, with stories!

In my role as a storyteller I often tell stories for forty, fifty, sixty minutes without a break. To present a speech without any stories in it for this long would have people nodding off, climbing the walls in frustration, or simply walking out. But with story this will not happen. I speak from experience. In the thirty-plus years I've been telling stories to audiences, and I'm talking getting on towards a thousand presentation and perhaps 50,000 people, it is rare indeed to have a storytelling session not well received. In fact I cannot recall a single incidence.

A story is a safe way to make a controversial point

A story is a safe way of making a very controversial point without upsetting an audience. This in itself warrants the learning the skills and techniques required to tell stories worthwhile. In the business community, where storytelling is at last beginning to receive the attention it deserves, the business executive, salesperson, human resources specialist - in fact anyone who deals directly with people - who is not actively learning how to tell a story well, is doing themselves a disservice.

The Art and Craft of Storytelling

So let us now look at the art and craft of storytelling. Yes, it is both an art and a craft. The art of it comes from the origin and ideas contained in the story, the craft in the telling of it. Both are of equal importance. A bland story without the necessary ingredients will not suffice to arouse and convert the thinking of the listener. Likewise, a brilliant story told very badly won't do it either. As in public speaking, structure, content and delivery are all important. The content is the art of it, if I might put it that way. The structure and delivery are the craft. Most of us have access to many stories which have impacted our own life. That art, that is, content, is readily available. We just need to be aware of this. Many of us have some idea of how to craft a story. Few of us, though, know how to do this really well. Generally, it is the craft side of things most of us need to learn.

How do we become expert?

Quite a number of times I've heard it said, and I believe it to be true, that in order to become expert at anything one has to put in a lot of time and effort. 10,000 hours of study and practice will put us in the 'expert' field in just about any subject. 20,000 hours and we'll have become a master in the field. But just as the 'journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step,' the journey towards becoming an expert and, eventually, a master in what we want to specialize in, begins with that very first, and often frightening, practical step.

In Storytelling it means getting out and telling a story; that first story in front of an audience. You have probably already been telling stories to colleagues at work, friends down at the hotel or over a beer at a backyard barbecue for years. You've told stories to family members whilst driving in your car. You've told stories both funny and serious, light-hearted and profound to people close to you. Now you need to take that very natural attribute and learn to become better at it – much better at it – if you wish to make changes in the lives of others.

This book will show you how to do this. May its reading and study bring you not only pleasure but something very, very valuable: the ability to touch others hearts.

Chapter Two

"The human race is governed
by its imagination."

Napoleon Bonaparte

Stories – Where to get them?

There are three ways in which we can come up with a story. The first is from our own imagination; we can make it up completely. The second is from researching, finding, and adapting the stories we've found out about. The third – and the best – are those stories which come from our own life experiences. Particularly is they've provided us with life-changing lessons.

However, these three ways of acquiring story are not, strictly speaking, separate or singular in their origin. When we come from our imagination we select from a multitude of stories, many of which are common to all human beings. We adapt what appeals to us. In stories from our own imagination we are recalling, from a subconscious level, much of what we have gleaned from our reading of books, listening to radio, watched on film or television or just heard from others. Our imaginative stories are *prompted* by subliminal messages beyond our ken. It would be fair to say that if we've done a lot of reading across a wide spectrum of subject matter, then we're likely to be more imaginative than the man or woman who has read or experienced little. This is particularly the case if we've read some good adventure stories. Non-fiction probably helps, but not to the same extent. Adventure takes us *into* story. It puts pictures in our minds.

It is our interpretation that makes us unique

In constructing stories on subjects in which we have some interest, but little practical experience, we rely on the experiences of others, their interpretation of events. We hope we can emulate the feelings associated with these second or third-hand experiences as tell our own yarns. But in both totally imaginative stories, and those we have researched but are not strictly our own, we still use our *own* interpretation of the world to bring these stories to our listeners. This is what makes us unique.

All of this might sound a bit academic so I'll take you on a closer look. Let us deal firstly with stories which come to us predominately from our imagination. We've 'thought these up,' or more accurately, the idea for them has arisen in us from somewhere and we want to use the idea in a story. How do we develop this capacity? How can we become more creative? How can we come up with good stories quickly?

How can we quickly come up with stories?

The Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle, made the following observation. He said,

"That man is most original who can adapt from the greatest number of resources."

What did he mean by that? *Most original?* Something different from the commonplace, obviously. In today's parlance, coming from a place 'outside the square.' *can adapt?* Here I think he means, 'take from' or 'take out of,' and *resources:* our areas of study, personal knowledge and experience. What Thomas Carlyle was saying, I believe, refers to my earlier remark about reading across a wide spectrum of subject matter; studying and even practising in several different areas of the Arts and the Sciences. The more liberal and widespread the education – especially our self-motivated education, the more creative we will become.

Everybody is creative. Everybody is innovative. Everybody is inventive. It is the degree to which we have these qualities that makes all the difference. Those of us who have made self-education and self-improvement a lifelong work will be ahead of those who have completed their formal studies at school or university – and then languished thereafter in the pursuit of life's baubles rather than self-growth and self-understanding.

Let us assume, though, that you, the reader of this, considers you're not wasting your life on the trivial. You wish to not only be a success in the worldly sense of recognition, but of wish to contribute something worthwhile to others. You feel you've found a life purpose. You are receiving more than a modicum of satisfaction from pursuing this purpose and wish to tell others of your findings in an effective way. Excepting that it is impossible to show by practical example personally – there are just too many people – you wish to teach others by speaking about what you know before audiences. The best and most effective way to do this is by way of Story.

The need to build a repertoire of stories

To enable you to become adept in Story you need to build a repertoire of stories. You'll probably need to cover a variety of subject matter, depending upon your audience. In order to construct these stories, you'll become observant; not only of what you witness but how you *feel* about what you witness. You need to become more sensitive. You need to become more understanding and empathetic.

It was William Shakespeare who said, "*The quality of mercy is not strained*," the inference being that we cannot force emotions upon ourselves that we do not feel. But we can most easily identify with the troubles, foibles and triumphs of others if we have experienced those things ourselves. So I reiterate: The best stories are those from our personal experience.

You might be thinking: "How can I identify with the limitless range of problems which beset we humans? The list is endless! How can I possibly experience even a small fragment of so vast a panorama? Life's experiences are infinite, the variety endless. Impossible!

And of course it is.

Feel the emotions you wish your listener to feel

But you do not have to have experienced the whole spectrum. All you need to do is be able to *emphasize with the emotions* that the experiencer of that situation has felt. Interpret what he or she probably felt. That is enough. To be able to feel it within yourself – and live it as you tell it – the fear, anguish, rage, loathing, disgust, pity, compassion, elation, euphoria, of the characters or the situation being depicted in your story. Like an actor you need to fall into the part completely at one level, and at another level be the observer, the witness who is able to tell that story. You need to be both inside and outside of it.

Be simultaneously both inside and outside of the story

However, this being inside of it and outside of it at the same time is not something we have to think about. This evolves automatically. After enough practice it becomes second nature to us to have part of ourselves immersed in the story and its characters and, at the same time, be able to keep an eye on the audience and monitor their reactions.

But to get back. We can gain this sort of emotional understanding by reading anything that moves us emotionally. If it whisks us away into the scene or environment we're reading about, it is of the right stuff. You can gain this quality especially well by reading poems by poets you enjoy reading. The poet is a master of both words and imagery. No words are wasted; none are superfluous. Study poets and you'll become not only a very good speaker but also a good storyteller. Below is a very short poem I remember from my schooldays of seventy years ago. It's the imagery that brings for the words.

"In Hans old mill his three black cats,
Watch for the bins for the thieving rats.
Whisker and claw they crouch in the night,
Their five eyes gleaming green and bright;
Then down they pounce! Now in! now out!
With whisker claw and sniffing snout!

"While lean old Hans, he snores away,
Till peep of light a break of day;
Then up he climbs to his creaking mill,
Out come his cats, all gray with meal,
Jessup, and Jekyll, and one-eyed Jill."

Why can I remember it word for word for years all these years later? To reiterate: because it is visual. Because it is a vignette, or short description or illustration of a situation. It is dynamic, dramatic, intense, and can be felt as one visualizes and internalizes the meaning of the words. Here, the several senses our are stimulated (if you concentrate and feel the atmosphere) They are vision, hearing, smell.

Poetry is the essence of thought and feeling

Poetry is the essence of thought and feeling, concentrated and distilled to the finest degree. Read it and digest it. It will sharpen your sensibilities and appreciation of the power of words.

The well-written essay

But if you're not into poetry in a big way – and I must confess I am not – then read the works of master storytellers, the novelist, the essayist, the short story writer.

Take a look at these few lines. They are the opening sentence of an essay written by the writer, Hilaire Belloc (1870 – 1953) called *The Mowing of a Field*.

"There is a valley in South England remote from ambition and from fear, where the passage of strangers is rare and unperceived, and where the scent of the grass in summer is breathed only by those who are native to that unvisited land..."

Can you see the scene? Smell the grass? Sense the atmosphere? By reading such material you become attuned to not only interpretation of words but in the deeply rooted feelings which go along with those words. We sense that here is a place the author loved.

This is what reading good essays can do for you. It can enable you to feel – and unless you feel, your audience won't either. As the saying goes: "You can only give what you've got."

The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow

Here is a piece from that famous yarn, *Treasure Island*, by that master of the written word, Robert Louis Stevenson. Here, the hero, young Jim Hawkins is talking about his first sighting of the old buccaneer, Billy Bones.

"I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the old inn door, his sea-chest following along behind him in a hand-barrow; a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man; his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails; and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white."

Billy Bones – can you see him!

Korean Christmas

And finally, here are a few lines from a short story I wrote in 1970. The story was called, *A Korean Christmas*. A young, inexperienced soldier is on sentry duty whilst the rest of his squad are celebrating in a bunker nearby.

"It was then that the Kid heard the sound; the slight squeak of a boot on fresh snow. The Kid raised his head, listening intently. There it was again. He could feel his heart beating rapidly somewhere up in his throat. No time to warn the fellows. Here they come—four; no five of them! The dim shapes moved slowly towards him. His hands trembled as he fumbled off his mittens and released the safety catch on the machine gun."

How can you not want to know what happened next?

Chapter Summary

So to summarize this chapter: We can come up with stories in three ways, purely imaginative; second-hand from sources outside of our self, and stories from our own life experience. The last are the most authentic and these we can probably tell best.

In order to become more creative, more imaginative, read poetry, novels – especially adventure stories, essays and short stories. Treat the business of storytelling seriously. It's mastery could well change your life in positive way.

Chapter Three

Structuring the Story

"If you tell me, it's an essay.
If you show me, it's a story."

Barbara Greene

So we have a story to tell an audience. Maybe we now have a lot of stories. But are they ready? Are we ready? Getting up in front of that audience with just a general idea of the story might work; then again it might not. As with the straight speaking engagement, such aspects as: How to open? How to close? What is my major point? That is, what do I want those listeners to take away from the story after it has drawn to a close?

We know that by using humour, we can get a laugh if we use certain tried and true techniques. For example, the old Englishman, Irishmen and Scotsman jokes, where the first two characters remarks set up to scene and the third and last adds that sudden incongruity which tickles or even shocks our normal interpretive brain functions and leaves us laughing at the ridiculous change in direction. Such jokes generally last no more than a minutes or so and some of our own very brief stories could fall into that limited time. But don't expect the audience to be moved emotionally by such short pieces.

However, if you want your audience to become really involved in the story you're telling, it is best to tell them something longer than that one-minute joke. The reason? By allowing time for the audience to familiarise themselves with the main character or characters in the story, the adventures that happen to that character become closer to the listener's heart. We find ourselves sort of 'adopting' as someone we know.

Letting the audience *own* the story

I tell a story of a four-month-old Labrador puppy which died in my arms. If I started off at the very *last scene* of me cradling the puppy in my arms as I sat on my chair on my front veranda, the story would be too short. Though a very moving, poignant moment, it would not arouse as much feeling in the audience than if I started earlier and added a little cute history as to the antics of this little dog prior to its getting sick. The story wouldn't have been full enough. But by adding more content, the listener now has more time to visualize

and form a sort of *claim* in their knowing it. It would become not just my pet but *theirs* as well. Acceptance and then, ownership, is an important part of storytelling. This is what brings on the emotions the teller wishes to arouse.

So in order to give that little pup a personality that will endear him to the audience, I tell of the time I was training him to sit and stay. I go through the motions of this. Then I have my wife call me in for lunch. I forget about the dog. An hour goes by. Then another. I come out onto the front veranda - and this little puppy is sitting stock still. He's alert but doesn't move! He is waiting patiently and loyally for me to say it is *okay* for him to move. My heart went out to him...

The audience's heart goes out to him also. *He's their dog as well now.*

I use the name of the pup: Simon, many times rather than the word dog or puppy. I describe his energy, his obvious love for me. All of this I do for three or four minutes before I bring the audience to the final scene where I notice that his back legs are dragging when he walks, his nose is warm, he is very lethargic and not his useful happy self. The audience is brought into the story and Simon, as I've said, has become their dog as well. I tell of discovering the tick. I tell them it is too late. The poison... Most people in the audience have lost an animal that loves them at some point in their lives so they identify and empathize with what is happening.

Three Story Structures

So how do we structure a story? There are several ways. We can take the very obvious Chronological approach. Here, we start at the beginning, the earliest happening. I will give you a few examples from some of the yarns I present later in this chapter. Or we can start at a high point in the story where, for example, the hero or main subject in the story is presented with the challenge. We can open somewhere in the middle, go back to the beginning, come back to the middle, then move through the rest of the story to the end. There are quite a number of ways, to ensure the structure of your story keeps it interesting all the way through.

In this book I will be presenting by way of illustration excerpts from some of the stories I've used over and over again. I'm doing this because I know that the *way* they are presented works. Some of these stories are as short as five minutes, others go for forty and fifty

minutes. Naturally, if you are to present one long story to entertain an audience for the best part of an hour, you need a story that will keep that audience listening intently from beginning to end. You'll be shown how to do this. Such *showing* – or written instruction, will involve not only structure, but techniques such as audience involvement, characterization, dialogue, sound effects, gesture and movement on the platform. Many aspects of communication come into presenting a story well. By using them well you will have the audience riveted, hanging on every word from start to finish. Do not think this is beyond you. You can learn these things. Once learned, practice will make you expert.

Story Openings – For the Chronological Story

But let us start off with a few examples of story openings which we would term a Chronological Story. The first of these is a story I call, *The Five Bells Hotel*. Here is how I open it:

"There was an innkeeper who owned a very old hotel called The King Alfred. The inn was situated on a busy highway between two great medieval cities. All day long the innkeeper would watch people pass by. Wagons would rumble by, coaching roll by, armies would march by – but hardly anyone ever stopped and came into the hotel. Trade was way down. The owner was going broke. He was desperate. He knew he had to do something but he didn't know what. He'd already gotten rid of most of his staff. Only one remained, and that was Martha."

This story, when I tell it, is almost like a fairy tale. It has deep woods, a snow-clad mountain and a wise old hermit. But what it also has is an unusual twist and an obvious message. The message is *most people are only too happy to tell other people that that person has made a mistake*. This, after consultation with the wise old hermit, is turned to the advantage of the innkeeper who, once he has gained that knowledge, prospers from thereon.

As I mentioned, this is a story with a chronological structure. It starts at a certain time and place and continues through time. It does not throw in any earlier information such as an interlude that happens earlier and then cuts back to the time line. The time line is continuous. It does, however, by way of a brief dialogue, refer to the earlier origins of the hotel and why it was named The King Alfred.

Because it is a short story and takes only about three minutes, I often use particular yarn at the beginning of a speaking gig of, say, forty or fifty minutes. It is an ice-breaker and is 'tried and true.'

Another Chronological Time-line opening

Another story using the Chronological Timeline is this. I've told it scores of times and it has always been successful. It's title: *Incident in Dubbo Airspace*, a rather innocuous title which doesn't give a lot away other than it is an aviation story. This is a story which goes for twenty-two minutes and starts off with the main character – in this case me – alone in the Dubbo Aeradio Station in country New South Wales, Australia, way back in 1961. It is an absolutely terrible night: raining, gale force winds, airports socked in across the state when, quite unexpectedly, I am called up by the pilot of an American military transport plane. Once again, the story is spread across chronological time. There are no flashbacks, or pieces taken from the middle and placed at the front for dramatic effect.

We will examine this particular story fully in a later chapter. This story has wide appeal for many reasons and we will go through that detail by detail. Such analysis will enable you to learn many aspects of storytelling just from a single yarn. You'll learn about setting the scene, introducing main player, presenting the confrontation or challenge, using humour and audience interaction, the use of dialogue, sound effects – the lot! Be sure to study it carefully.

Stories which start at a high point

Then we come to those stories where the listener is immediately introduced to a dramatic scenario and then the storyteller cuts back into the past, gradually bringing the story forward to the scenario he opened with. Cut backs, as I'm terming them, can bring real drama and a sense of impending action and drama, as I do so in my thirty-six minute presentation called, *The Stars Look Down*. The Stars Look Down is the story of the ill-fated RMS *Titanic*. Everyone knows the story. Everyone knows how it ends. It is the greatest sea story of all time and familiar to all. Nevertheless, people still want to hear it. For it is in the *telling* that the audience is transported by their own visual picturing as my words, sounds and actions bring the scenes to their minds.

In this story of the Titanic I start off like this:

"It was cold that night - bitterly cold. There was no wind, no cloud, no moon - and a million stars shone down reflecting like diamonds in the inky darkness of the sea. And upon that sea stood a great ocean liner, motionless, her eight accommodations decks ablaze with lights.

"Out around the ship, some distance away, you can hear the splash of oars being handled by inexperienced hands. You can hear also the creak of the davits as the ship's boats are being lowered. And every twenty minutes a rocket - Whoosh! rises up into the night sky above the ship - to burst in a blaze of stars... before it died into darkness. But the strangest sound that night, the most incongruous sound given the circumstances, is the sound of ragtime music coming from the poop deck..."

So you can see what is happening here. The ship has already struck the berg but the situation has yet to become fully realized by the passengers. The panic as the people onboard begin fully realize their peril has yet to begin.

I then add a bit more, referring to and imitating the sounds of the spark-gap radio transmitter sending its distress message. As an old radio operator I can do this with accurately and with the appropriate sounds. CQD, CQD, CQD. Any station, and ship. Any station any ship. Come quickly. She is sinking by the head."

I swing back to the past - twice!

All of the above takes, perhaps. two minutes - then I cut right back to the beginning with these lines, very dramatically and emphatically done.

"She was created in the minds' of men and born in the dockyards of Harland and Wolfe, in Belfast Ireland... And her labour was long. Her midwives? They were the hundreds of riveters, boilermakers, carpenters -the tradespeople who laboured over her hard and long. But when she was born..."

About a third of the way through this long story I introduce ice berg. Once again, it is a throwback to a much earlier age. I do it this way. It contrasts with the 'birth of the Titanic.'

"Created in the mind of God, and taking three thousand years to form, was something else was being born. For eons the snow had fallen upon the ice; trillions of flakes over centuries

of time. The snow packed down hard, harder than concrete, onto the glacier and the glacier moved, slowly, slowly towards the sea."

I eventually bring the ice berg "*So it floated across the very course the great liner was to traverse.*"

I come back into the 'present' and carry on

Everybody knows the collision is inevitable. Yet they still wait, almost with bated breath for those words uttered by lookout Freddie Fleet: "Ice berg! Ice berg! - right ahead!"

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Introduction and End Exactly the Same Way

A third way of structuring a story is to start with a general 'emotional scene setter and to finish in exactly the same way. This is very effective. I do this in my forty-nine minute presentation, *The Sixty Milers*, which is really a eulogy for the hundreds of men who lost their lives manning the colliers which brought the coal into Sydney Harbour. The coal-mines lay, in both directions, approximately sixty nautical miles north and south of Sydney. The journey were short but thwart with danger. Here is how I start.

"They brought the blue metal gravel from Shell Harbour to make the Sydney Railroads...They brought those massive, pre-cut granite blocks from the South Coast to make the Sydney Harbour Bridge. They brought black diamonds, the so-called smokeless coal from the Illawarra that fed the furnaces of the gasworks, the power houses, the boilers of the big ships...For a hundred year they plied the coast. Now they are gone; superseded, obsolete, of no further use.

What were they? - These were the Sixty Milers...

I use exactly the same at the end of the story. Finishing in exactly the same way but with different inflections in my voice... These, Ladies and Gentlemen, these -were the Sixty Milers."

Some more on openings

In my short story of Simon, my puppy-dog pet that died I start off with:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, there is an old saying that you can't buy true love for money...

Don't you believe it. I've bought true love several times - in a pet shop. You buy true, loyal, unconditional love when you purchase a puppy or a kitten, make no mistake about that..."

The idea here is to take a well-known saying and use it, if you can, to make a point. You can do this with just a short, throwaway sentence or two, or make it into an entire story.

Summary

In Summary, there are a number of different ways to structure your stories: Chronological, starting at the Challenge and then going back to an earlier moment; a setting the atmosphere opening then finishing with the same lines. The structure is dependent upon what you, as the storyteller, wish to achieve.

Chapter Four

"To begin is half the work. Let half still remain;
again begin this, and thou wilt have finished."

Ausonius - Epigrams

Story Openings

In this chapter I will deal primarily with ways in which we can open a story to immediately grab the attention of our listeners. Good openings are, as I've said earlier, absolutely essential. If you haven't got the audience listening intently within the first ninety seconds you'll probably never recapture it - save yelling Fire! and running for an exit. Here are some openings that not only grab immediate attention but also make a salient point.

You *can* buy true love for money!

In my short story of Simon, my pet puppy which died in my arms, I start off with:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, there is an old saying that you can't buy true love for money...

Don't you believe it. I've bought true love for money several times - in a pet shop. You buy true, unconditional love when you purchase a puppy - make no mistake about that..."

The idea here is to take a well-known saying and use it. You can do this with just a short, throwaway sentence or two, or make it into an entire story.

Don't judge a book by its cover

Here is another opening I've used to illustrate the adage, "Don't judge a book by its cover." It can be used to illustrate how years of practice can hone a natural talent to the point where we are ready for greatness. This is where preparation meets opportunity.

"Ladies and Gentlemen. Do you remember that plump, dowdy-looking woman, standing on stage, in that huge auditorium before thousands of people. She didn't look the part. She didn't look at all professional. Remember the cynical and amused looks on the faces of the contest judges and those of the audience - and then she began to sing... "I dream a dream of days gone by..." (I sing this - though not very well, of course) And Susan Boyle had arrived in our lives."

In this opening it is very important to give long pauses as you paint the scene in the audience's mind. Every comma above indicates a pause of at least two seconds. You need to enable time for the images to form in the listener. The pause is so important; probably the most important tool or technique in the toolbox of a speaker. But more on pausing later.

.....

"Words are things, and a small drop of ink,
falling like dew upon a thought. produces that
which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.

Byron - Don Juan

Opening a story with a quote

It is fairly common to open a speech with a quote. It is a little more difficult to find a quote suitable to the opening of a story – but not impossible

As I write this I'm thumbing through my battered on book of Popular Quotations For All Uses by Lewis Copeland and almost immediately came across this one: '*There are many lovely women, but no perfect ones*' – Victor Hugo. I don't have a story for that one, but I'm sure many a person in the world could make something of that.

Here is another, the very next one my gaze fell upon. It reads: '*There is no royal road to anything. One thing at a time, all things in succession. That which grows fast withers as rapidly; that which grows slowly endures.*' – J. G. Holland. That's a quote one could easily use to lead into a story of someone who has succeeded by dint of patience, persistence, and perseverance.

As I continue to peruse the pages of the above-mentioned book I'm overwhelmed what quote top pick next. There are so many, a great many of which could be the opening an introduction to a theme or a character in a story. '*Vexed sailors curse the rain for which poor shepherds prayed in vain*' – Waller. Surely an introduction to how we interpret our world by what we personally want or don't want in it.

Which brings me to the observation of that great student of inner life: Siddhartha Gautama, more commonly known as The Buddha and his observation that suffering is caused by only three things: Craving, aversion, and clinging. These three are the impetus to all our stories. Without them where would we be as far as Storytellers are concerned?

My Introduction to Airship Hindenburg Story

I suspect the most powerful introduction in my own repertoire of yarns is my story on the great airship, Hindenburg. I start this way, voice intense and low:

"The year is 1936, the place, the great Olympic stadium in Nuremburg, Germany. Eighty-thousand, blue-eyed, blonde-haired Aryans from the so-called master race are gathered to hear the words of the Fuhrer. All day long the gun carriages have rumbled by, the tanks have squeaked by, the storm troopers have goose-stepped by.

Up on the dais, flanked by fifty-foot high crimson banners bearing black swastika of Nazi Germany stands the Fuhrer himself...etc.

I then go on to imitate in a very small way Adolph Hitler as he finishes his speech.

I raise my voice and, in my best imitation of that man's guttural voice, say loudly and passionately as I pound my chest: Deutschland! Deutschland! Deutschland! Then I pause for a moment, raise my right arm in salute to the audience and say, Seig! - I comment, "a great roar comes from the crowd as they respond - then I immediately respond myself with the traditional reply: Heil! This I do three times. Then, lowering my voice, I say:

"A silence fell over the crowd. The silence went on and on. (long pauses here) What could follow now? What could follow the great words of the Fuhrer himself? The huge crowd began to mutter among themselves....*and then they heard it.*

Then, and only then, do I introduce the airship as it comes flying in over the rim of the stadium.

The Africa Boat

This is a fictitious story originally told to me by a friend. I thought it was factual until I questioned him No, it was entirely fictitious. Yet it could very easily have been true. I asked my friend if I could use it and, after his affirmation, re-wrote and started to tell it myself.

This is a story which has both moral and political ramifications, but it's main thrust is to point out, as Jesus Christ did 2,000 years ago: "Greater love hath no man than he who would lay down his life for his friend." In this instance I finish off with: "Greater love hath no man than he would *forsake his freedom* for his friend."

Here is how it starts off:

"As late as 1950, Portugal was still hanging onto the remnants of a once great empire. Back in the 16th Century Portugal's empire comprised the Eastern half of South America and many, many places around the globe. Even in 1950 it still held on to Angola, and Mozambique in Africa. It had Portuguese Timor and Macau in China. But it held, too, a tiny country on India's West Coast: GOA.

"Now we know that everyone desires freedom from oppression and the Goan people were no different..."

Easing into my twenty-two minutes aviation story, 'Incident in Dubbo Airspace.'

Here is an example of a slow, gradual, relaxing introduction that the audience know is leading into a story. However, they have no idea what that story will be. *Incident in Dubbo Airspace* - or *Quiz Show 123* as I usually refer to this story, starts with an invitation to the audience. It is one of my most popular yarns and always gets plenty of laughs and audience interaction.

I ask immediately for audience involvement:

"Hands up if you have ever lived in Outback Australia? No response. "Maybe on the Western Plains of New South Wales? No? Okay, anyone who lived *outside* of a big city? Come on now..."

If hands go up you look directly at that person and say something like. "Right, then you would know that 'Out West' it can be dry for weeks, months, years...and then the rains come. And when it comes, *it comes.*"

"You awake one morning, and a sky that has been absolutely clear of clouds for a long time is different this morning. You see those slim strands of cirrus high up, curling down like

slender hooks from the Southwest. As the day goes by they become mares tails and, as the day progresses further, the cloud fills out - a spiders web that slowly fills with yellow dust.

By evening the sky is now completely overcast, dark and leaden. Then the first few big spats of rain hit the tin roofs of the homes and you can smell the dust in the air!"

The picture has been painted, but it is a gradual moving picture, a movie created by words that evoke an ever-changing scene in the mind of the listener.

"Then the deluge begins..."

Introducing the main character with the opening lines

Here is how I open my story, *The Station Masters Bell*. The story is really about the bell itself - and what happens to it - but the main human character is the stationmaster.

"They'd kept him on because of the War. At sixty-seven, Gerald Ferguson was already three years past his retiring age. But employees were hard to come by in the Australian winter of 1942. Everyone had joined the army, or the navy, or the air force. And so, in the autumn of his years old Gerald Ferguson, the station master at Barcoo Crossing, had been kept on."

Then follows a brief history of Gerald's career with Queensland Railways. The transit changes with the advent of a troop train coming up from the south. (I make the appropriate sounds of a 1940 steam locomotive, the sound getting increasing stronger as the train approaches)

"The long, dusty train rattled up the narrow gauge line and with its two locomotives panting like exhausted Clydesdales, drew into Barcoo Crossing..." et cetera.

Here are two more story openings which also introduces the main character but this time reveal a bit more of the character straight off. In the first it could be likened to a group of sailors aboard a ship or in a pub talking about a former shipmate.

Sailor's Luck

"Our Joe Walsh was a 'ladies' man. Yep, a real Romeo, was Joe Errol Flynn had nothing on him. Women, it seemed, were putty in his hands." The crew aboard my old ship, HMS *Anonymous*, were well aware of that. So when Joe started to court the First Lieutenant's daughter he made a bitter enemy. No Royal Naval *officer* was going to have his daughter

running around with a lower-deck sailor- a stoker-mechanic moreover! It just wasn't done. Matter of class, you see."

Now to the opening lines from my six-minute story, **The Bigot**.

"There was a farmer who lived alone by a great river. He was a very religious man, incredibly religious. He was of the 'Callithumpian Faith. For this man there was only one Faith - his! He would brook nonsense from those other nonsensical religions. Heathens all, he reckoned. No, his was the *only* religion and he knew he was right.

"One day the rains came..."

This particular story is powerful in that, straight after it's finished, the audience is left thinking: "Is that final thought in the mind of that farmer true to life?" You can then follow up by asking the audience questions as to their opinion of that last statement. You can sound out the real beliefs of the audience. If you can finish a story in a way that immediately invites the audience's views - particularly in a seminar or workshop environment - you have opened a way to put your own message across.

So these, then, are some types of story openings you can use to ensure the audience and you are immediately engaged. For as I heard another storyteller say: "It is not about it is not about being heard, it is about *engaging* the audience."

Look towards your own story openings. Craft them to engage. Focus not so much on mind to mind as heart to heart. Establish at least the emotion of curiosity at the very least. And remember, our job as a speaker - and that includes you and your storytelling - is to trigger an emotional response. Emotions change minds! Emotions bring changes to behaviours. Emotions can and do, alter lives forever. And nothing does this more powerfully than a story.

Summary

There are many different ways to open a story. With a homily or well-known saying. A quote from someone famous - or from yourself if it is profound enough. An opening that immediately paints the location, the setting and quickly leads to what screen-writer, Syd Field, calls the set up. Introducing the main character with a description of him or her that reveals their character to some extent.

Chapter Five

Writing and Practising Stories

"Practice makes perfect"

Anonymous

Writing and practising a story you'll use in Oral Storytelling is very similar to writing and practising a speech – except that it is easier. It's easier because it takes far less effort to remember the progress of a story than it does the content of a speech. Remembering and presenting stories comes naturally to us because we do it all the time. We might not be perpetually narrating or acting out profound and meaningful stories, but we certainly do tell simple tales to each other every day. We do this as we talk to friends either face-to-face, on the telephone or over the Internet.

" You remember that guy I was telling you about? Yes? Well, I saw him down the street and he told me that.." and a little story is likely to follow. "Anyway, I was coming around this bend and this chap was way over on my side of the road, you know?... I was forced to go hard left and went right into the back of a parked van...et cetera." "They'd run out of milk at my usual store, so I had to drive all the way over to Bloggsville, only to find they'd run out, too. "What do I do now?" I asked. So I..." And away we go; countless stories in countless situations.

It is natural for us to include dialogue and body language

Not only do we narrate simple happenings which are actually stories, we often put in a dialogue and even some body language. Certainly the natural gestures are there. These quickly recollected tales might not be riveting. They probably won't put an audience on the edge of their seats eager to know the progression of events, but they are stories nevertheless. We relate the mundane happenings as well as the profound, life-changing or shocking events, in our lives as they arise in us in oral story form. It's almost as natural as breathing.

Moreover, we've communicated this way since we lived in caves, I suspect. It is the earliest form of verbal discourse.

"Mammoth had come very near to cave." says, old Ogg, the tribe's patriarch cave man as they sit around the family campfire. "We fled inside. Then we decided that that mammoth would be good to eat. Lot of meat. So we gathered our weapons and our courage and went out to hunt him."

Undoubtedly not those words, but I'm betting the cave-dwellers related their adventures and life events by oral story, augmented, in all probability, by a lot of facial expressions and theatrical body language – all of those things we use today as we continue to tell each other of what is going on in our lives.

Oral Story is natural to us

Oral story! It is natural too us. Far more natural than oratory or the presenting of a prepared speech or educational. And to reiterate, it is far easier both to do and to remember the content.

Yet if we want to tell a story well, so that it achieves more than just a cursory nod of it having been heard, but not necessarily listened to, we also need to prepare. Moreover, there needs to be something in that story memorable and meaningful to both the teller and the listener. It needs to grab and keep our attention. If, for example, my wife tells me. "I left my purse on a shop counter and the owner returned it to me." I would hardly call that a story.

"Really? Well, that's good, love." I might reply. The matter is brushed over and fades quickly from my mind.

However, if the same information was conveyed this way:

"You know, Tom, I arrived home and, my God! I checked in my handbag and my purse containing our fortnight's wages were gone! What am I going to tell, you? I'm thinking. You'll scream at me! I know you! Yes...and you would. So I picked up the telephone directory to find the number of that haberdasheries shop I'd been in. Panic! I couldn't find it. Couldn't remember the name of it, so I phoned my Clare. (a neighbour and friend)

Clare said she'd get back to me. I paced the house, worried sick. Then the phone rang. It was Clare. She'd found the number and called the shop, explaining what had happened. I was still on the phone when the front doorbell rang. I knew it couldn't be you. You'd let yourself in. I was glad it wasn't you. But who could this caller be?

Anyway, I go to the front door and there's a fellow standing there. His face looks familiar but I can't place him. He has a big grin on this face.

"Misses Ware?"

"Yes."

"I think this is yours."

He removes his hand from behind his back – as if he'd been keeping what he had there a secret. Then, still smiling, he places in my hand – my purse. *my purse!* Well, I nearly fell over!

"I think you'll find everything there, love." He says. "Luckily you had your address in the purse, otherwise I'd have had to take it up to the police station."

"Thank you, thank you!"

"You're welcome."

"You mean you came all this way out here to return it. Thank you so much."

And that's when I saw him heading up the road to the bus stop. He'd come all this way by *public transport*. Who said there aren't good people in this world..?"

Here, you *have* a story.

Being the recipient of a generous and unselfish act, if presented in detail – and so many of us have experienced them – makes for good story. There is also the 'takeaway' or moral in such a telling. It helps restore or reinforce our feelings of belonging to Humankind in a positive way.

Making our stories worth listening to

Below we'll look at how preparation can be made so that when the story is told, it has impact. The objective being that our stories come across as something *worth* attention in the opinion of the listener.

Like a speech, we need to know our definite objective, our *specific* reason for telling this particular tale. As with a speech, a story has firstly a *general* objective, and a *particular* objective. In public speaking our general objective falls under the following categories: speaking to inform, to entertain, to motivate or to inspire. Predominantly one of these will be at the forefront of our general objective. In oral storytelling the same applies. We might be telling the story to primarily explain something. Equally, our general objective might be simply to entertain – and I do a lot of this – or to motivate or inspire with the example illustrated in the story.

Also, like the prepared speech or oratorical presentation, there needs to be a specific or particular purpose in that story if it is to do anything other than to purely entertain. For example, in my story, *The Bigot*, the story ends with the audience's feelings and thoughts being directed to how most people are loving and caring – and will often risk their own lives for other people, even strangers, despite their differing religious beliefs.

In my much longer story, *The Sixty Milers*, though primarily delivered to entertain and secondarily to inform, it is also designed to leave the audience with feelings of gratitude and love. This done in both in the opening and closing of the story. If told right, the audience is left feeling spiritually uplifted.

Tell the stories which hold something special for you

It is quite likely that the stories that you pick as stories you *really want* to tell hold something special for you. You might not even consciously know why they appeal. The specific objective of that story might arise in you in such a way that it is never consciously realized, let alone defined. But if the story is a powerful one, one that has gripped you personally by its emotive content, then it will have some deeply held value that is personal to you – and probably personal to the feelings and values of the many.

In preparing a speech or seminar we gather all the relative data, then set it into an order in which we can present it – a *structure*. It has an opening, body and conclusion. An oral story can be prepared in the same way. But with the oral story it is best, I think, to present

the various aspects of that story as they arose in you during the preparation period. This is the natural flow of ideas around this story idea as it occurs because of the particular way you think and feel about things. It is your way habitual way of thinking.

Learning and Rehearsal – Allow your own style to develop

Once you have that story in mind, write it out. Read it and re-read it. Then transport the key sentences of that story to a single piece of paper or cardboard. Once you have that to keep you on track, present the story aloud to yourself, timing it to see how long it takes to tell it. Then play it back on a your audio or visual recording device. Once you've done this a few times you'll be able to dispense with the memory-jogging page or card and just go from memory.

Each time you tell that story, if it is more than a couple of minutes long, you'll find the actual words you say will be different. That does not matter. As long as the content of the ideas contained in those earlier written paragraphs are revealed, you're doing fine. After a while you will realize that certain phrases come up again and again. These are *your* phrases. This is the *way* your verbal processes work. This is your style. Do not try to change it. If any changes to your habitual phraseology occurs, let it well up from that great unconscious part of you. Your deeper self will not let you down.

If you miss something out, keep going

Also remember that if you're telling a long story and you miss part of it out – unless it is a part crucial to the story's outcome – your audience will never know. I have told long, forty and fifty minute stories where perhaps four and five minute segments in the middle of that story have been overlooked and it has not affected the story in an adverse way. If you find you've left something out and you can smoothly backtrack to fit it in, do so. But if you cannot, do not stop the train of thought of your listener by telling "Sorry, I missed out a bit there. I meant to tell you about."

Never interrupt the flow!

Never interrupt the 'movie' you are bringing to the mind of your listeners. You know how annoying it is when a commercial comes on television when you're in the middle of

watching a story in pictures. Your audience is watching a flow of pictures, along with the story and all of its emotional content as you tell it. Don't stop that flow!

After a story has reached its conclusion you might like to show a visual, such as a brief picture on PowerPoint, or an actual model of what you are talking about. Repeat -Do not interrupt the story you're telling it to do this!

I tell a number of historical stories which can also be shown as visual presentations. For example I have stories on shipping and aircraft incidents. When these are told, the listener's memory banks raise pictures in his or her mind. If I don't tell them exactly what that ship or plane looks like, their own mind creates the necessary picture for them. It is their creation. Let them own it.

Now to a matter of semantics.

Be aware of the semantic issues in your story

By semantics, I mean the way the same word or phrase is interpreted by a number of listeners, and how the meaning can vary enormously between those listeners. I mention the word *dog* and some people see a Beagle, others, a Scots Terrier, others, a German Shepherd, and - as it is said - "the list goes on." There are hundreds of different types of dog. It is up to us, as the storyteller, to provide just enough information - and not too much - so that it allows the listener to come up with *their* picture of that dog - or ship or aero plane.

"A big, shaggy grey dog," will suffice. "A dog," is not enough. "The black and white spotted Ridgeback-cross with blue eyes and yellow teeth which had had its tail lopped." is probably too much. So below is a way in which you can provide just enough information to allow your listener to create their own picture of events. You give them a bit. Then you give them a bit more.

When I say in my story, *Incident in Dubbo Airspace*. "Request aircraft type?" and the American pilot comes back with: "We're a C121 Globe master." It is doubtful if any - at best only a handful - of the audience would comprehend what sort of plane that is, so I, as the storyteller and in an *'think out loud aside'* I say to myself. "Oh, no! Not a Globe master! Then more to the audience. "They're a big, four-engine, Pratt and Whitney piston-engine

aircraft, notoriously underpowered." Then back to myself, "God, they're always breaking down. I have a feeling this is going to be one of those days..." Or words to that effect. That sets up both a visual picture and an expectation in the mind of the listeners.

And sure enough, the ensuing story does not let them down.

So, to reiterate, give them enough information for them to create a picture, but not so much that their own imaginative powers are dampened.

To Summarize this chapter.

Speech and oral storytelling preparation follow very similar lines but the preparation of a story is easier. Story is inherent in human culture. A story is easier to remember and present than a speech.

Do not interrupt the flow of the listener's 'movie in the mind' to tell them something, or show them a visual or model.

Be aware of semantic differences in the way people see things. Be descriptive, but not too descriptive. Leave the listener room to come up with their own creations in response to your words.

Chapter Six

Building Your Story List

"Where stories nestle in the
body, soul comes forth."

Deema Meltzer

How many stories do you need before you can claim you're a Storyteller? My answer: *one*. That's all you need – to get your started. The proviso being that the story is interesting enough – and long enough. If it's not interesting enough, no one will listen to it. If it's not long enough you won't be able to fill a time-slot atypical of most guest speaker spots. If you put your name forward – as you will have to before you start getting those 'word of mouth referrals – you'll probably be expected to fill in the best part of an hour. However, if you start off with the 'service' clubs such as Rotary, Lions, Jaycees, then thirty minutes will suffice.

You might be thinking, "One story – just one...and that's enough?" For most people it's a start. There have been people who have made a whole speaking careers out of just one story. The American Baptist minister, Russell Conwell told one story, '*Acre of Diamonds*.' He told it 6,152 times to audiences right around the world. With the payments he received from this he founded a university – Temple University, in Philadelphia. '*Acre of Diamonds*' is one helluva a story and, of course, it goes for quite a while time-wise.

My debut as an oral storyteller

My own debut as a storyteller started with a just one story. I was a member of my local Toastmasters' Club – Parramatta Club, in New South Wales – and, at that time, had been a member for about four years in total in this wonderful organization. During those years I prepared and delivered several speeches to members. My club assignments required me to. To me, these had been speeches. Then one day I overheard a couple of my Toastmaster friends talking about me. One fellow, said, "Oh, Tom – he's a storyteller," and at the moment of overhearing those words I knew it was true. Nearly all of my five to seven minute prepared speeches involved, in the main, a story. They were called speeches, but they all contained a major story.

If you were a member of Toastmasters' International prior to the 1990s, and you wanted to advance, that is, move up in your accreditations above a certain level or grade, a number of things were required of you. One was to present five speeches to audiences completely *outside* of the Toastmasters environment. To move beyond being a Competent Toastmaster or CTM as this award was then called, you had to go 'outside of the Toastmasters and present a minimum of five speeches to non-Toastmaster audiences. To obtain that coveted Able Toastmaster Award, and there were very few them in those days, you were obliged to obtain 'real world' experience. The term 'real world' referring to the speakers world beyond the friendly and supportive confines of Toastmasters.

I had but one story to tell

I had but one speech I could offer an outside-of-Toastmasters audience at that time. It was a condensed excerpt from a novel I'd written called, *The Sealers*. In that book, there were a number of scenes which I could amalgamate and shape, I believed, into a very tolerable twenty-minute story. This should be enough for those service clubs I intended to approach. Naturally enough, I called that presentation, *The Sealers*.

Would you believe some 'speaker-seekers' actually believed my presentation would have something to do with the Construction Industry! Sealers- sealing... They certainly weren't comprehending 'live and wild animals.' But eventually they understood what I meant.

So I had one story. For it was a story, not a speech. There was no particular moral in it, or point to be made. It was simply a story to entertain.. But *The Sealers* did have a lot going for it, including action, dialogue and drama. This twenty-minute sea-story was, over the years, added to, until it became a yarn which went for thirty minutes, as it stands at today. Certainly it was quite long enough for the audiences I initially sought out.

By the year 2005 I had a repertoire of over thirty stories, ranging from five-minutes to fifty. Everyone of those stories had personal appeal, that is why I wrote them, or found, amended and adopted them. But that places me ahead of what I'm revealing to you now. So to return.

First Story told in 'the real world'

My first 'outside of Toastmasters' audience were about a dozen business women, members of a Zonta Club. The setting was a local restaurant. Zonta is exclusively female. My Toastmasters Club was, at that time, exclusively male. The date was the 15th of March 1982. Would they be friendly or hostile? I felt more than a little apprehensive as I stood, after we'd eaten dinner, in front of this group. Would these worldly, sophisticated business women really like to listen to a 'tale of the sea'?

As it turned out, they did.

The next four presentations were to other service clubs. I spoke at Rotary and a number of the now defunct, Apex clubs. I got my Able Toastmaster accreditation and became the fourth member to ever to receive this award in my club- a very proud moment! But far more important than this. I found that I loved telling stories to audiences. I loved it so much that over time, although I'd added just one more story, I'd addressed *sixty-five* audiences 'outside of Toastmasters' in two short years!

So, with just two stories I was able to do a lot of storytelling to a lot of audiences. You, too, can do the same. But I stress that the stories must be good. They must be long enough to fill in the average allotted time that a speaker gets. And you need to know a bit about the background of that story or stories, because you could be asked questions about them at the end of your presentation. You'll be expected to be knowledgeable regarding your content. Though if you are not, simply admit it. Don't try to fool people by claiming to know more than you do. People forgive an admitted lack of knowledge. They resent a 'snow job.'

You need long and short stories

Quite frankly, my two stories by themselves were not long enough for some audiences. This duo was fine for those tightly scheduled programs you'll find in the service clubs such as Rotary, Lions and the like. The guest speaker is generally only expected to speak for fifteen to twenty minutes. But with many other organizations you're expected to go - as I said earlier - for an hour. So how did I manage with my twenty-minute presentations, you might be thinking? For I did get booked for longer speaking times.

The answer was that I augmented the presentation is a series of slides pertaining to that story. I'd tell the tale. Then I'd put up the slides, commenting on them as I showed them. I could do this on *The Sealers* for I had many pictures that I'd taken when I'd been an

expeditioner on Macquarie Island (in the sub-Antarctic) in 1976-77. And with my second story, *Incident in Dubbo Airspace*, I had a goodly selection of photos of aircraft, operations buildings, control consoles and the like, pertaining to the story.

This rather elaborate 'preparation of story followed by slide' eventually all came crashing down. It happened when I found myself in an auditorium where it was impossibly bright with natural light. Far too show my slides. I felt quite apprehensive. What to do!

"Can you pad the story out, Tom?" asked Christine Lewis, the lady who'd booked me to speak.

"I'll try."

And I did. I expanded the story. Moreover, I did it so successfully that that one story (by now I had a half-a-dozen presentations, all of which I'd presented several times) grew from twenty to forty-nine minutes! That story had more than doubled in length and yet the audience loved it! The time had flown. I had no idea how long I'd spoken until, Christine, who had timed it, told me. Yes, I could hold an audience for the best part of an hour. And yes, I was feeling very, very pleased with myself.

Visual Aids Jettisoned

From that time on the boxes of slides, the projector, the screen, the extension cords and all the paraphernalia I'd been obliged to lug from my car and set up each time I spoke were left at home. With a sigh of relief, I knew I had what it takes to simply tell a story and have the audience appreciate that by itself. Nothing further was required.

All of this has been a rather long-winded explanation of how you can start off as a guest speaker-storyteller with just one story; expanding that story as you go along. You can add other stories over time. You can expand on these also. And as you learn more about the subject of your story or stories you will do so naturally, easily. When you've got five or six or more hours of material behind you, have by far and away enough to keep you going indefinitely. I've been told on good authority by a number of professional speakers - those who travel the 'Speakers' Circuit' - that five or six hours of well practised material is enough. The fine tuning comes in determining who your audience going to be, and then

making a few adjustment to such items as 'openings' and 'closings' geared to the particular group.

Expanding Story Length

In everyone of the Public Speaking Teaching Organizations I'd belonged to prior to 1982, the chances of give a long presentation was pretty remote. They just couldn't allow the time. I'd been a member of Toastmasters International, Rostrum Clubs of New South Wales, and had attended some adult educational classes in both New Zealand and Australia. None of these provided opportunities to present *at length*. The reason being, of course, that there were other club members and other students. Each class or club member had to have their fair share of practice. At a club meeting, the program is generally tight; same with the evening college class. So I never got the opportunity to present for thirty, forty, or fifty minutes.

However, it became clear to me very quickly that this is what those audience in 'the real world' as it is so often referred to in Toastmasters, demanded. I had to adapt to what was required. Initially I did this by simply adding more story into the story I'd tell. To give you an example:

Padding Out The Story

When I gave my first speech on the *Titanic* it went for seven minutes. I delivered it at my regular Toastmasters' Club meeting. When I took it outside of Toastmasters to Zonta, Rotary, Lions and the like, I expanded it to twenty minutes. Later, when I took it to the huge audiences one can find in many retiree organizations such As Golden-A Clubs, Probus, and National Seniors, I lengthened further. Eventually it settled down as a full and detailed story of around thirty seven minutes.

When I presented my initial story on *The Sixty Milers* (dealing with the coal ships or colliers and the story of one of these in particular) it originally went for twenty minutes. It, too, was "expanded to meet the time available for it completion." to quote Parkinson's Law. And another long story, *The Sealers*, was also expanded in the same way.

This was relatively easy for me to achieve because I already had a great deal of knowledge on the content of these three stories. I'd been fascinated by the RMS Titanic story; bought

books on her short history. I'd had a passing relationship with the coal ships because I'd served in the Australian Navy for six years; seen many in and around Sydney Harbour. And *The Sealers* was a story of great fascination to me because I'd served a year on an island which had been exploited for its wildlife – particularly its fur seals.

To give you an example of how I expanded this last. With the shorter, twenty minute version, after the introduction, I would start with the sighting of the island itself. In the longer version I would follow the atmosphere-producing introduction with the ship at the centre of the story leaving not for the island itself – which its captain, Captain Frederick Hasselburg actually discovered in August 1810 – but with the ship leaving Sydney Town for the Bay of Islands in *New Zealand*. The ship was in for a long voyage! By adding this, I could cover the journey in some detail and not bring the story around to the sighting of Macquarie Island until the lookout on the foretop yelled:

"Land! Land ho!" – until the story had already been going for a good ten minutes.

The points being made here are: tell those stories which are of great interest to you. You will therefore more eagerly research, follow up, and learn further about your subject. Secondly with this sort of familiarity and knowledge you can easily add more detail – and interesting detail at that – into a story you already know well.

Contracting a long Story

It quite frequently happens that one's earlier allotted time before the audience has been cut down at extremely short notice. This might happen at the event itself. The business session went far longer than expected. The previous speakers went over time. The meeting started far later than it should have. So what are you to do?

In some cases there are two options, in others, only one. If, for example, you *haven't* been billed to present a certain subject, you can come up with another story entirely; a shorter one. This would depend, of course, on the story selected and its suitability for that audience. I've done this on many occasions.

However, if the audience are expecting you to tell a story on a certain subject; for example, it might have been advertised or promulgated in their club's newsletter or magazine, then you don't always have a choice. Some of those attending might have come specifically to

hear you present a yarn on the subject advertised. In these circumstances you must be able to *shorten* that longer story to fit into the shorter time you now have.

This is where familiarity with the stories in your repertoire becomes important. This is why the story you've told a dozen times, or a score of times, or even a hundred times is like an old friend. You can drop out bits and yet still maintain the essence, the drama of it.

With a storyteller, familiarity with one's material does not breed contempt: it engenders confidence. And the more familiar one is with his or her stories, the more confidence he or she has that they can adapt to whatever is required. Such ability, makes you a master of your craft.

Summary

You don't need a lot of material to get you started as an oral storyteller. You're advised to build up your repertoire of yarns gradually, selecting only those which really appeal to you. You need to be able to expand and contract particular stories without losing their impact.

Chapter Seven

Telling Techniques

"You cannot teach a man
anything; you can only help
him find it within himself."

Galileo

By teaching Telling techniques I infer two things: the way it is done, and how to make it *tell*, that is, be effective. Obviously the story itself needs to be interesting. As the old saying goes, "You can't make a silk purse out of a pig's ear." That aside, how can we make the stories we've decided to use even more interesting?

We have a number of things going for us here. The first and most important is simply our physical presence. Being in the same room, live and front of your audience, makes up an intangible extra which it is hard to describe. You can watch and hear the greatest speakers in the world on a video, that has been previously recorded, and it could well have less impact on you than a quite mediocre presenter addressing you live, that is in the same room as yourself.

The Extra Energy of the Live Performance

You've probably attended a function or event where, as you enter, background music is being played. It maybe the voice of a well known singer singing one of their most popular lullabies. You notice it, but you are hardly riveted in your attention. You simply pass through the foyer and into the auditorium where, perhaps, the same song is being sung. Your thoughts are elsewhere. Then onto the stage comes a band – a *live* band. They start to play. Their lead singer is up there. Now, the whole atmosphere has changed. It has changed not necessarily by the quality of the music or singing now going on. It might be nowhere near the high standard of excellence of that earlier background music – but now you are paying attention. Now, your focus is on what *going on* rather than it being lost in your habitual thought patterns. There is some extra here – but where did it come from?

The reason for this is that, whether we realize it or not, there are extra energies which we cannot see now radiating and re-radiating around the room. Physical presence provides

links which may not be seen but are certainly felt – albeit subliminally. This extra energy is what makes all the difference. So, if you're live, and out front of an audience – particularly if you're in the right location and at the right distance proportionate to the size and density of the audience, you are able to use, albeit, unknowingly, the energy of the audience as well as your own. "*When two or more are gathered together...*" When dozens, or scores or hundreds of people are gathered together that energy is enormous! When there are thousands it is stupendous!

"What? I don't believe that!" You might say. And that is fine. However, I ask that you at least keep an open mind to the possibility. In that way the energy is not liable to be thwarted by your own disbelief. For you need to bear in mind that there are people who not only believe in this energy which conjoins people, but who can actually *see* it. Barbara Ann Brennan, author of *Hands of Light*, and *Light Emerging*, not only explains this, but actually has illustrations of it in her books. Oh, and Ann is no weirdo New Ager. She at one time worked at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Centre. She is trained in bioenergetics and core energy therapy at the Institute of Physical Synthesis and the Community of the Whole Person in Washington D.C. It just so happens that she is a psychic.

But on a more mundane level, you can sense this energy at a great sports event such as an International soccer, rugby or football game; the simultaneous breaking into song, the standing wave which travels around the whole stadium. The energy is almost palpable.

Many studies have been done regarding the links between human beings which are outside of our five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. To me, it has been pretty well established as fact that we *do* have energies which connect us, and those energies are strongest when we are in close physical proximity. But I've said enough on this. What ways do we have to enhance the power of our stories and retain audience interest all the way through them as we speak? Let's look at some specifics.

Characterization

It has been said that the essence of a story is characterization. More, that the heart of characterization is dialogue. Not only dialogue, but what these characters actually do; their actions. So as a Storytellers we need also to become – to a certain degree – actors. We need to 'act out' the dialogue and, as much as is practicable, the actions of our characters.

We might not have taken formal acting lessons – I certainly haven't – but to bring the story to life in the minds' of our listeners we need to 'bring pictures' into their heads by creating scenes which are automatically converted by the listener into their own production.

In this book I will be continually referring to my own stories, for I know what works for me – and will probably work for you. In my earliest and most practiced story, *The Sealers*, there comes a part in which there is a great deal of dialogue. Here is where the crux of this story is covered. This dialogue, and the short explanatory narrative which accompanies it, brings this long and adventurous story to its climax and resolution.

By way of explanation, Captain Frederick Hasselburg, master of the sealing brig, *Perseverance*, has, along with his crew, discovered Macquarie Island. It proves to be the greatest discovery ever, as far as the probability of yielding massive profits for whoever can get sealing gangs ashore. But the greedy captain, desires to keep the location of the island to himself and his company. He is able to do this because although there are twenty men in his crew, only two had any navigational skills. In fact, only two are literate! These two are himself and his first mate, the young, Miles Holding. But Miles has been left behind on the island, deliberately marooned, so only Hasselburg knows the actual location of this newly discovered gem of an island.

However, the crew of the *Perseverance* can't keep their mouths shut about this fabulous place. The news of its discovery travels like wildfire around the tiny settlement which is Sydney Town in 1810. This news reaches the ears of Joseph and James Underwood. These two brothers are also into the Whaling and Sealing Business, so prevalent in those days. And the brothers are every bit as astute and sly as Hasselburg. Naturally, the brothers are keen to find out just where Macquarie Island lies. So they decide to set a trap. There is no way the Captain is going to tell them the location of that island...but maybe they can trick him into doing so.

The scene opens with Joseph Underwood pushing through the front door of a waterfront hotel, the *Royal George*, so he can meet with Hasselburg and, by subterfuge, find out the location of an island – which reputedly was the home to around 200,000 fur seals. Everyone being mindful, of course, that at that time a fur seal pelt fetched a full guinea in London, New York and Shanghai.

"Captain Hasselburg, You old sea dog – May I join ye?"

The captain is very drunk.

"Well, well. It be Joseph Underwood. Why, Joseph, of course you can. But we're right out of rum here. What about you get us some rum?"

"Aye, I'll do that."

Joseph Underwood goes to the bar returns, to return not with just a glass for the captain, or a bottle for the table, but with a whole earthenware jug containing half a gallon of raw rum. He bangs it down on the table with a flourish and says in a loud voice,

"There you are, gentlemen – the drinks are on me!"

So with a series of very short explanations, interspersed with me, as storyteller, keeping up a conversation which involves not two but a number of others players, and walking around as required, I keep the story moving forward until the climax. The climax being where our good captain is tricked revealing what Underwood – and so many others – want to know: the actual location of an island in *latitude and longitude*.

So, in an actual storytelling situation, you can increase the drama greatly by including characterization, dialogue, physical action and even sound effects.

Here are some of the words and sound effects I use frequently use:

Use of sound effects

The whine of aero-engines building to a crescendo as an aircraft taxis then does its 'do or die dash' down a runway to take off.

Boom! The sound of an old muzzle loading cannon being fired.

The low, sonorous blast of an ocean liner's fog horn as a ship is leaving for the open sea. Or the higher, toot, toot, toot, of a tug or collier signalling that it is about to go full astern.

The chirping of Morse Code in radio office as a radioman sends or receives a message.

The sound of the wind.

The actual knocking on a bench or table top to indicate someone is at the door wanting to come in.

Non-words which indicate sound

I will use words which are not in the dictionary but have the desired effect to bring a picture to the minds of my listeners, e.g. "Blamm! "Down she went into a head sea, shuddering through every rusty rivet."

In some ways these sounds are akin to what we used to hear in the now largely defunct, radio plays of yesteryear. This was pre-television entertainment. Those radio actors didn't have a lot of sophisticated electronics to make their sounds. They used things like fingers drumming on the top of a table, close by the microphone to indicate a horse's galloping hooves. In presenting to a live audience there is nothing to stop you doing exactly the same thing.

With voice variation, with sound effects, with the dialogue between your imaginary characters, you can bring make a story seem so real that it becomes a movie in minds of those who are watching, but mostly, *listening*, to you. You are the medium between the story that you have and the story they experience. You are doing your job to your optimum capacity when you, as a person, have disappeared – figuratively speaking – and are simply the conduit for their experience.

Specialist Language

Finally, in this chapter on Telling Techniques, it would be remiss of me not to mention a little about jargon or 'specialist language.'

In your own specialist field, in just about whatever the job, there has developed over time words and phrases that have particular pertinence to that job. It is a language apart. The police have their language. The fire-fighters another. The ambulance drivers another. So, too, do aviators, accountants, lawyers, sailors, engineers and so forth. There are thousands of these pseudo languages which are familiar too, yet only fully understood by those who operate within those particular fields.

Should we use this jargon? Should we use this specialist language? The answer is both, no, and yes. No, if it is something the majority of the audience is probably not reasonably

familiar with; words or phrases it are doubtful they will understand. Yes, if it is a fairly commonly known word or phrase and the audience is likely know of it – or it will not leave them wondering what is meant. You can use it, if it does not detract from the continuing 'movie' in their minds. And you should certainly use it if it adds atmosphere and authenticity to the story.

"Half a million of tons ice scraping along the side of the great ship. It opened up a series of holes and punctures through those, ice-cold, inch-thick plates all the way from the *forepeak aft to boiler room number six.*"

"Foxtrot November Charlie, Your clearance is via flight planned route. Enter control area on climb to flight level one-five-five. Call Sydney Control on 118.5 abeam Mudgee."

"Eighteen One, VKG. Armed holdup alarm at Commonwealth Bank, corner of Church and George Streets..."

"Eighteen one, copied – Three minute away."

This type language does not detract from the clarity of what is going on, rather it adds authenticity and atmosphere. Certainly use it whenever you can.

Summary

Keep in mind the energy that can be created by the audience themselves. Be aware of numbers, seating density, your proximity to the audience.

Characterization is very important in enhancing your stories.

The heart of characterization is what your characters say and do.

Move around the platform, but with deliberation. No aimless wondering.

Use sound effects, if you're comfortable doing so.

Be careful of specialist language, jargon and unfamiliar lingo. But happily use it if you're pretty certain it will be understood.

Chapter Eight

Researching Our Stories

"Storytelling is the most powerful way
to put ideas into the world today."

Robert McKee

Let the Stories Find You

My general advice to a storyteller is do not seek stories, let them find you. I'm of the belief that we attract into our lives that which we need, as far as our introduction to a particular story is concerned. By not seeking stories, I mean, don't jump on line and expect to find a story which is just right for you on Google Search. I'm not saying you won't. But you could well bring confusion to yourself at the vast amount of stories there out there 'in the cloud.' Let life happen as it will and you will select from among the thousands of stories which come your way, those that are closest to your own interests. The interest being not only of the head but of the heart.

As mentioned earlier, I started my oral storytelling with just one story. It doubled to two within a month or so. But it wasn't until I actually 'retired' from paid employment – but certainly not from the world – that I started to add more stories. That was in 1995. Within eight years I had all the stories I could use and made the decision to take on no more. This was not strictly adhered to, though. I added at least two more because of their particular appeal. However, over the past decade I've kept my story list fairly static. A few seem to have dropped away due to lack of use and diminishing interest. But in the main, the same list is extant in 2015 as it was in 2005.

Add stories as *you* feel inclined

You might have an entirely different viewpoint. You might feel that you can add stories indefinitely, increasing the number with no upper limit ever contemplated let alone reached. However, if you do so, you will either have a prodigious memory, a 'photographic' memory which never fails you, or you will use a story perhaps once, or only for a little while, and then forget it all together.

I expect there are people who can remember in fine detail hundreds of stories. I am not one of these. Even with thirty or so stories I do use, I am obliged to regularly go over them, ensuring that certain details such as names, dates, and places remain in the 'ready-to-use locker' of my mind. Later in this book I will tell you how I do this.

So, let those stories arrive in your life. Let life present them to you. You are the one to decide to take action on them. So how about some examples of that?

As earlier explained, my first story came about from a sub-plot in a novel I'd written. The second came from one of my experiences as an aeradio operator at an 'outback' airport. As an ex-sailor and an ex-air-operations man, I had a background for these types of stories. So when in 1980 I picked up a *Readers Digest* magazine and read of a story about the pilot of a crop duster aircraft, lost out over the vast reaches of the Pacific Ocean, being saved by the experience on a crusty old pilot flying a DC10 for Air New Zealand, the memory of it must have remained. Though it was some years before I followed up on that story.

Some of my own research into stories

What triggered the follow up was to see a movie on television where exactly the same story was now being told in film version. Only this time the Air New Zealand pilot had been replaced by an American counterpart. This raised my hackles somewhat, for I knew it was a beat up and had nothing to do with any American Airline.

Having lived in New Zealand from 1971 until 1973, and also because of my interest in Aviation generally, I decided to see if I could find out the real truth of this story. Was it as depicted in the *Readers Digest*? Or was it as shown in the movie? How could I find out from those personally involved?

From my Sydney home I wrote a letter to Air New Zealand, asking if they could provide me with contact details of the airline captain on whom the story was based. A month or so later came the reply. He no longer worked for Air New Zealand. He'd retired. But perhaps the International Federation of Airline Pilots, based in London could help. They provided a postal address. So I sent a letter off to London.

They did more than reply. They contacted the pilot, a Captain Gordon Vette, who now resided in New Zealand. On the same day the letter came back from London I also received a the 'package' from New Zealand. The good captain himself sent me that package.

Captain Vette was very pleased by my interest. So much so that he sent me an excerpt from a book he'd written on that very same incident. It had all the names, facts and figures in it. He also mentioned his support and input into the enquiry regarding the loss of one of Air New Zealand's DC10's which had crashed into Mount Erebus only the year following his story of the little lost crop duster. Indeed, his input into the Mount Erebus crash helped bring out the truth of the matter: namely, it could *not* be blamed on pilot error. But that is another story.

With my now very detailed and authentic information on the 'Lost Crop duster' saga, I put together one of my longer stories which I simply call, 'Lost.' The story runs for thirty-five minutes and has always been well received by many audiences both large and small.

As I've already stated, the best stories are the ones you've personally experienced. The second best are those 'straight from the horse's' mouth, so to speak; straight from the person who has experienced it. And this was certainly the case with, 'Lost.' Captain Vette was at the very heart of the story.

Mostly, though, we learn of stories which come to us through a number of intermediaries. Quite often these stories do not jell with the true facts of the matter. For example, if you've ever had anything to do with newspaper stories, you'll find that what comes out in print is often a *very creative* and inaccurate account of what really happened. Personally, I've yet to read of an account in which I've had personal knowledge being even close to the real event. That might sound cynical. But that's how I've interpreted what I read.

Your research – well researched books are okay

So let us say that you have a particular story that fascinates you. How can you find out more about it? If someone has experience it themselves and written a book on it, wonderful! If someone has personally interviewed the main character or characters of the story you're interested in, and then written a book, also good. It isn't likely they'll get too much wrong, and they will certainly obtain such vitals as time, place, names of people and the basic structure of what occurred.

In my story, *The Sixty Milers*, I researched a number of areas, but primarily the story came from a book called, *The Lost Fleet*. The name of the author now eludes me, but it dealt with diving of wrecks along the New South Wales Coast. The book included several stories of the ships which had sunk – many of which were colliers or 'Sixty Milers', as they were called. One ship in particular, which sank in August 1956, the *Birchgrove Park's*, story was particularly significant to me. For I had been in the Navy in that year, and was later to serve on a little naval vessel, HMAS *Kookaburra*, who's commanding officer was in charge of the search for the *Birchgrove Park's* survivors.

However, with my interest aroused, I researched further.. I obtained both texts and photographs from the Internet. I was able to obtain names of crew members, people involved in the rescue, the name of the company the ship belonged to, and many other useful details. After a while I knew quite a lot not only about the *Birchgrove Park* but about the Sydney colliers generally.

Some months after I'd put that story together I was invited to present to at an annual dinner of The Merchant Navy Association and their wives and family. I presented the *Sixty Milers* to an audience of well over a hundred. And as I spoke, hands went up.

"Yes, yes! Captain Laurence Lynch. I knew him well."

"The first mate, Tom Kenny, he was a good friend of mine."

"Charlie Camilleri! Goodness! Yes, we had him home for breakfast after he was rescued in 1951. You remember? When the *Kiama* went down six miles off The Entrance."

The audience were wrapt for I was presenting something dear to their hearts. Oh, and by the way, the full name of that story is, "*A Eulogy to the Sixty Milers*." And a eulogy it was – and *is* to the hundreds of seamen who lost their lives in delivering coal from the coal fields that the city of Sydney might grow and flourish.

There are, of course, stories of a nature which it would be difficult indeed to research. Yet people do. For example, the unofficial ceasefire in World War One on the Western Front. Records of it were hidden away for decades. Yet today, people are now being told in large numbers of that Christmas Eve in 1914. It is a truly great story: when the fighting stopped

and goodwill prevailed between the opposing armies. As I've already said, it was a story suppressed for years. Now it has been made into a movie!

Don't ignore what you overhear in the office

I'd heard about an even lesser known unofficial ceasefire. This also took place on a Christmas Eve. It was a Christmas in the 'Korean Conflict'. This story came from simply a few lines I'd overheard of an office conversation. One of my colleagues mentioned it to a friend. He explained how his elder brother had been a British soldier and had actually experienced the event. He'd been there at the front. The story is short. But it is very powerful. If you ever hear of such stories, add them to your repertoire. They are gold.

My story, *The Station Master's Bell* also comes from something I overheard in an office, when two former World War Two soldiers, who had served in Papua–New Guinea in 1942, told of the bell and its story with just a sentence or two. My expanded version of these few sentences made it into a fascinating, thirteen–minute–long story. You don't need a lot of detail for a good story. But you do need a good, creative imagination.

Another fascinating story that I don't tell enough was told to me by a very old friend of mine, William (Billy) Laing. Called the *Mystery of Kersey Village*, it deals with a phenomenon it is very difficult to believe in – Time Travel. The story is fascinating, and stems from the days way back in 1957 when Billy was a fifteen–year–old naval cadet. The direct telling by Billy made a real impression. As an old sailor, he knows how to spin a yarn. But I still looked the story up on the Internet. You'll find the story under the Smithsonian Institute's site. It is certainly worth a read.

What is the easiest way to put together a story?

What is probably the very easiest way to put together a story? From our own memory of a personal experience – if we have the will for it. And the courage. For often the most moving stories are ones we'd rather not tell. But if we do find the courage, and we do have the will, these are the most powerful stories we will ever present. So be brave!

Even here, though, you might have to add in some specific and factual details such as time and place, names of persons involved in that story. Our memories are fallible. So we might possibly need have recourse to some of our own records which can set us straight. Here is

where our referring to our personal diaries, our old letters and essays, photo albums, perhaps our library of books, will be very handy to have. To tell a story and make a basic mistake which can jar the listener out of the content of that story, could be quite disconcerting. So know the facts as well as the emotions of a story – even ones personal to yourself.

Summary of Research Your Stories

Don't seek out stories: let them find you.

Add stories judiciously so you're not overwhelmed with too many at any one time. Learn each thoroughly before you move onto the next.

Go to the source of the story – the actual experiencer – if you can

We have our own stories, those told to us by other *experiencers*, and those who have told other who then, through a series of intermediaries, get the story to you. The further away the story is from you actual experience, the more you'll need to confirm the facts.

Check the facts – even the facts of you own personal experiences.

Chapter Nine

Storytelling and Business

"The purpose of storytelling is not
to tell you how to think, but to
give you questions to think upon."

Brandon Sanderson

Storytelling teacher, Doug Stevenson, says that "Storytelling in business is a very serious business." I agree. We know also that being able to present *well* in business is also very serious business. Corporations spent a lot of money on hiring experts in public speaking and presentation skills to train their staff in how to communicate effectively. How many, though, hire experts in Storytelling to teach their executives and sales people how to tell stories?

It is assumed that if someone has been taught public speaking and how to use visual aids, field questions and the like, they'll automatically know the how, what, when, where, and the why of using stories in their presentations. But will they?

Stevenson also goes on to say, "Story is the most important tool you have in your tool-belt if you want to be memorable – if you want to be *persuasive*." In my own life, I have learned a great many aspects – serious and important aspects, of the jobs I've held, from being told stories by those who have also worked in the same fields. Some of this, in retrospect, has come from quite amusing stories, such as when, at fifteen years of age, I commenced my first job as a telegram messenger boy for the now defunct Post Master General's Department. That was way back in 1951. These were the days before the majority of homes had a telephone connection. The telegraph and telegram ruled.

"Wouldn't go into that garden, Tom. Leave the telegram in the post box, and yell as loud as you can. Get the feller inside to come and collect it."

"Eh? Why's that?"

"Well, I always remember last time I went in. The dogs will let you in. They won't even growl. But you try getting out! From what I've been told they tore the arse out the trousers of one of the lads who went in a few months back. Two huge bull mastiffs in that place..."

"Few months back Jack was coming down that same hill where you nearly had your accident. He had a full load of pennies in the basket on the handlebars. He'd collected from a dozen phone boxes. Lot of weight, mate, as you know. Anyway, he's coming down Tilba Street - you know, the really steep part - when his bike chain breaks.

Now, you know our bikes have rear-wheel brakes. With that bike chain gone you can't pull up. Not a hope. Well, he tries to brake but nothing works. Way he goes! He goes faster and faster and...There's a T-junction at the bottom of that road with lots of traffic and..." Well, to cut the story short, Harold spent six months in hospital... Thousands of coins all over the intersection. Kids are still picking up pennies around there."

With those sorts of stories I was encouraged not to take certain kinds of risks.

Sailor Boy Blue - A series of stories within a bigger one

The stories I heard, and learned from, during my six years in the navy are so numerous that it would take a book in itself to write about them. And as a matter of fact I *did* write a book about a lot of them. There were amusing stories such as how sailors lost the food off of their dinner plates as they made their way from the ship's galley, situated on the rear upper deck and they made their way along the open deck in gale force winds. They'd hold their full plates of food in one hand, and use the other to hold the ship's rail to stop being lost overboard. What was lost overboard was the food on their plates! On many an occasion, by the time they reached the mess deck their plates were bereft of everything barring a smear of gravy!

"A tip, my son - always take two dinner plates, so you can put one upside down on the other. Hold up tight together. That way the wind can't get to your bangers 'n mash."

Or how certain sailors, descending steps which ran athwartships, rather than the usual standard fore-and-aft fitting, would so often slop a bit of gravy or custard on the top step of this dangerously swaying ladder. From such an innocuous story opening, began a saga which lasted weeks as the victim of a fall from that ladder blamed the man who'd

inadvertently lost some of his custard. It created a story which was so interesting I put it in my novel, *Sailor Boy Blue*. Eventually the two protagonists were pressured by the rest of the sailors to fight out their argument with fisticuffs before the whole crew!

But the moral was: Don't let other people cajole coax, or intimidate you into doing something you don't want to do - especially if it's just for their own amusement.

A bevy of yarns from many sources

The stories which came out of my eleven years in Aviation Operations with the now defunct Australian Department of Civil Aviation also resulted in a novel. Once again, there were many stories within a larger story.

My time as a radio operator with the New South Wales Police Force, also resulted in my penning a lengthy critique of the Police Force at that time. My time as a truck driver, my time as a foundry labourer, and again, as a laboratory assistant in a rubber factory, also was filled with stories. In a single year as an Antarctic Expeditioner with Australia's Department of Science I not only heard dozens of interesting stories which saved both time and effort, I had happenings told to me by way of story which could well have saved my life.

"Don't trust the ice on those lakes, Tom. It might look safe but..." And then a story is told to me of an earlier expeditioner who *did* make that mistake and who is now buried upon that bleak, lonely, wind-swept island.

Then there was the story of a man who had also died on that same island a decade or earlier. He'd hated the expedition's doctor so much that he refused to see him, despite his ever-increasing agony. He died of a burst appendix and his grave stone is up on a nearby hill for all to see.

I spent fifteen months working as a clerk in the Underground Mains Department of the Auckland Electric Power Board. A clerk's job might sound boring. Mine probably would have been except that I was invited on many occasions to accompany the underground mains engineers as they went about their work in the field.

I recall one evening at dusk as John Grigg, a twenty-five year old qualified engineer, and I, now thirty-seven, 'livened up,' that is, switched the electricity through from two 500 KVA transformers, to this brand new sky scraper in down town Auckland. It was quite an event. My job was simply to be there ready to kick John away from those terminals if something went wrong.

But there was drama in this event: the donning of the thick, rubber gloves which stretched above the elbows. The thick, insulated mat to stand on. The deft and rapid pulling through the damping-oil of the transformer switch. The immediate hum and feeling of aliveness as 6.6000 volts is reduced to 240 volts and piped through to the new building's main switchboard. Then our stepping outside into the darkness of night to watch an electrician at that switchboard, lighting up one floor after another, starting from the bottom and working upwards. The feelings of knowing that here was a brand new office block which would house workers for perhaps the next fifty or sixty years!

There are stories in this sort of thing.

There were also the Safety Officer's stories, so, so important.

"Yeah, Tom. This fellow up on the steel awning above the shopfront. Just one moment's lack of concentration. No, he wasn't one of ours. Anyway, he stands up near the edge of the awning. To keep balance he places his hands on the street light wires..."

"I recall the earthquake back in 1930 when..."

The number of stories that we are told and we learn from is infinite. It is the natural way we pass on knowledge. Pictures are created in our minds. We respond to these with emotion as well as intellect. This is what teaches us best, short of a personal experience.

For example: telling a light-aircraft pilot about 'clear air turbulence' across a certain mountain ridge *might* stick in a pilot's mind. It's just one more thing for him to remember among all the detail of cross country flying. Describing to him your own experiences of the buffeting, yawing, pitching, rolling, falling and rising with no hope of controlling what is happening - the peril - the fear. These will have him remembering.

Stories in various industries

In the British television series, *Grand Designs*, where a usually difficult building project is covered in every episode, there is a story. It entails all the elements of a story. Someone wanting something, personalities, dialogue, the challenges and hurdles to be overcome. Then the final triumph. In the Australian television series, *The Block*, which is also about building and renovating homes, there are stories. Every episode has its stories within a larger story.

Sales trainers in real estate, car sales, boat sales, instruct and teach their trainees how to gain sales and avoid pitfalls with stories from their personal experience. I've heard stories from a road engineer, truck drivers, a train guard. I've heard them from a tool maker, lab assistants, meteorologists and handymen. The story can be, and is used everywhere. Telling the right stories well, to the right people, at the right time, cannot not help the man or woman in the business world. The emphasis here is on telling the story well. For it is in the telling that the feelings of the message are accepted, taken to heart and acted on.

Summary

In this chapter the summary can be captured in that one single sentence quoted at the outset: "Storytelling in business is a very serious business."

Chapter Ten

Humour in Storytelling

"Everyman's reach should extend
his grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

Robert Browning

So you're not a funny guy. Who of us is? Ask nine out of ten people if they think they're the sort of person who can make people laugh and they'll say, "You're, joking? I couldn't fight my way out of a wet paper bag with my jokes." And the chances are they're probably right. People automatically link humour with joke telling, stand-up comedy, comedians' one liners –seemingly thrown off the cuff on stage, film and television – that in actual fact have been practised over and over for effect.

As a public speaker and storyteller I certainly fell into this most common category of "I'm not a bit funny," group. As a longstanding Toastmaster, I found that for decades, I'd entered several types of speaking competitions – but had nearly always shied away from entering the Humorous Speaking Comps. I had to be cajoled into those few I did.

"Humour – that's not me."

"Just tell some stories," I was told. "Just relax, be natural". So I entered a humorous speech competition and hardly got a giggle. A few years later, another. Two giggles and a chortle, maybe. "Oh, for a guffaw!" I just wasn't funny, so I gave up.

But in my duo of stories I was telling to groups *outside* of Toastmasters at this time, I was getting a regular laugh or three in those two yarns. The laughter was pretty consistent. Moreover, the laughs always came in the same places of those stories. After a while I began to realize why. These two stories had become so familiar to me that I was completely relaxed in telling them. Over time, I'd let an occasional spontaneous and extemporaneous 'aside' slip into the yarn. Once added, it stayed.

For example, in the story of *The Sealers*, I mention that the ship in that tale is sailed to New Zealand. This is New Zealand in 1810. So when I mentioned that "the natives (Maoris)

weren't friendly," I happened to drop in the words: "But they would invite you to dinner," straight after the "natives weren't friendly," line. I then paused. That was when the laugh came. The audience knew that the Maoris were cannibals at that time. *They* filled in the details with their knowledge. It was *their* creation. It came from their understanding of events – and their funny bones that was tickled. So I left this in. I still leave it in. I still get a laugh at that point.

Let the audience fill in the detail

So a point in humour, if you can do it, is let the *audience's* collective memory provide the details which engender the humour. It then becomes their humour, not yours, and this ownership by them makes it more powerful.

One way to do this is to move towards something very obvious and then stop. The audience is already ahead of you. You witness this in lots of comedy scenes when something is shown to the audience which the hero or central character has not yet seen. 'The old banana skin on the floor trick.' It is almost as though the audience know something that the storyteller doesn't.

The Phrase That Pays

I've use this ploy myself, in my humorous speech, *Ware's Law*. There is, in speaking circles, something called, "The phrase that pays." That is, this is *something* that will not only stick in the memory of the audience, but is likely to have them motivated into action. In *Ware's Law*, I repeatedly and throughout the speech say: "And where is Ware's Law?...pause...*It's in the understatement*. By the time I've said this four or five times the audience knows what is coming the moment I utter the first part of that phrase: the question. In their minds they answer it. "It's in the understatement."

I saw this technique used by Toastmasters International's 2014 World Champion Public Speaker in August 2014. Danajaya Hettiarachci, from Sri Lanka, was speaking in front of an audience of thousands at the Conference Centre in downtown Kuala Lumpur. In his speech, which obviously had to have humour in it to get him so far, he repeatedly said. "I see something in you (pause) but I don't know what it is." By the time he was getting to the end of the speech, around 2,000 people were chanting out loud. "*But I don't know what it is.*"

By letting the audience contribute, and in a humorous way, the speech became a world-beater. Danajaya won! He won against a competition field which runs to around a third of a million people. That is how powerful a "Phrase that pays," can be. So use them!

Let the audience see you as coming off second best

In my story about the American military plane attempting to get into Dubbo Airport on a stormy evening, I tell him that the airport is closed. The pilot's reply makes the humour. I say he can't land. He says, "Well, that's stiff, buddy, 'cos we're coming in anyway." So by throwing in some dialogue with me as the victim of that little exchange, I create humour and get a laugh. Once again, I use this same bit of dialogue in that story every time I tell it.

But, personally, I was still of the opinion that I couldn't speak humorously. I couldn't get people to laugh. "Others have it, but not me." The idea had become quite fixed.

If they accept you, they are more likely to accept your message

Then I began gradually to realize this business of humour is very serious – yes, serious! For people learn best when they are entertained, and one of the strongest parts of entertainment is when the audience laughs. We learn best in moments of enjoyment. In some ways it is akin to carrot versus stick. If an audience is being pressured it won't take kindly to what is being said, if it is being entertained, it will more readily accept the message. If they laugh they accept you. If they accept you, there is far more chance of them accepting your message.

A major key to humour

"Sudden incongruity," I read somewhere, is the key to humour. Take them along a certain line of thinking and then twist it to something completely unexpected. But how to do this? Then gradually I realized that the 'story joke,' rather than the one liner, is the easiest to remember. It is also the most powerful type of joke – providing it is done right. I also realized that we all hear lots and lots of jokes, but remember very few. I must admit that I fell into this category and envied indeed the man or woman who can come up with a new joke or jokes every time you meet them. "What a memory!" I'd enviously think. "Wish I could remember all those funny stories."

But we do remember some of them. And if you're anything like me, you'll find the ones you do remember are the one's you've thought so funny *that you tell them to other people*. You could hardly keep them to yourself. You might not tell them as well as the fellow who told that little yarn to you – the first time you tell it. But keep going with it. Once it's familiar, and you remember the exact words of the punch line every time you tell it, it is yours.

One way to remember a joke. remember the punch line

And this is one way to remember a joke – the punch line. Or more accurately, the visual pictures of the story *and* the punch line.

I've been into public speaking for over forty years, but it was only about a dozen years back that I became confident enough to enter Humorous Speaking Competitions in Toastmasters regularly. I found that I could win Club Level comps and go on to the next level, Area Comps. But I never got beyond that for quite a few years. In retrospect, I think it was because I did not rehearse my material. I thought a straight out yarn which covered what I regarded as a humorous story – which would fit into the allotted seven-minute time span allowed – would be enough. It wasn't. I still hadn't realized that being humorous is a serious business. We need to practice our material, hone it. We need to listen to ourselves on an audio recorder, get the timing right. And actually put in some "sudden incongruity," and punch lines which follow the right length of pause. We need to give the audience time to figure something out. We need to give the audience time to laugh and finish their laughing. Timing is so important!

The humour needs to stem from how *you* see the world

So I began to take humour seriously. By this I mean that I would come up with a speech idea and then work on it for laughs *within* the story itself, as well as at the end of the story. I found that having huge tomes of jokes in print, through which one could peruse to find a suitable quip, wasn't worth the effort. This had to be our own humour. It had to be the way *we* saw the world. Once this was realized by me, I began to think more in terms of characterization and dialogue.

Use Characterization and Dialogue

For it is within characterization and dialogue between characters that so much humour happens. And as I write this a memory comes up of one of the funniest skits I ever witnessed. It comes from a very old American television comedy series called *Amos and Andy*, probably 1950's vintage. I saw only this one episode, but it was hilarious. Let me describe the scenario.

One of the characters – both were elderly Afro-Americans – we'll say, Amos, is trying to con Andy into buying a house. Only it isn't a house. It is a house painted on the front of a huge roadside bill-board! It is a drawing of a house being *advertised for sale*. The hoarding comes right down to ground level and the house, from a distance, looks quite real.

The comedy really gets under way as Amos and Andy talk about the various merits of this beautiful home – Andy not knowing it is simply a signboard. Andy wants a closer look. Amos comes up with all sorts of reasons why he can't. Andy insists. A high point comes when Andy actually opens the front door, steps inside –right through the signboard – then quickly steps out again. His words " Well, it's airy enough, but kinda compact."

Look to your own frailties, foibles and frustrations

But to come back to my own presenting humour with the hope that it will help you with yours. I looked back over my own life to some of the more stressful – at the time – but in retrospect, humorous events. And as I did, so stories began to emerge. For example, the pressure of driving a delivery truck around metropolitan Sydney was filled with small but quite humorous incidents. In many ways, every trip had its share of frustrations. So I came up with a series of specific and general incidents which I wove into a six-minute presentation called, "*Can Ya Drive a Truck?*"

"*Can Ya Drive a Truck?*" consisted of an irascible, short-tempered fictitious, driver's 'off sider' and me – as the driver. The story comprised our conversations, together with our heated exchanges with other motorists. It involved both incidents and accidents, some real, some imaginary – nearly all exaggerated to a point of being ridiculous.

"Steering wheel of that truck was so big I used to look through it, not over it."

"Sit up, Tom. Sit up!"

"I am sitting up, Macka."

I'm a little guy in real life. My fictitious off-sider driver is a giant of a man.

"Cabin was so big you could hold a Toastmasters Annual Conference in it."

Exaggeration always helps.

Then, after a minor accident with another vehicle.

"Can't ya see the sign on the back, mate? You can't see my mirrors, I can't see you. – Never get inside of a turning truck! Never!"

"Can Ya Drive a Truck?" got me above Toastmasters' Area Level of competitions to Divisional Level for the first time. A year later, a second humorous speech I called, *"Ware's Law,"* took me to that level again. This was a level where perhaps the members of thirty-five clubs had entered and fallen away. To reach this level by someone who once believe they couldn't be the least bit funny, it was a big boost to the morale. I was stoked!

Be very careful of your self-talk

Today I no longer say I can't deliver humour in a speech. But I certainly don't claim to be a humorist. Or even think I'm anywhere near as good as some of those fortunate people who seem to have that amusing turn-of-phrase and mannerism that gets people laughing almost by their presence alone. But one thing I do know. If we can stop feeding ourselves with all this negative thinking about "No, we can't," we eventually begin to realize that "Yes, we can."

People like to laugh at the egotistical antics of others. Perhaps this is our own egos which appreciate the woes brought on by other people's attempting to be superior, I don't know. But I suspect it is. I use this in a scene in *Can Ya Drive a Truck?* The scenario is that I've just been involved, through my own negligence, in a really spectacular motor-vehicle accident. No one is injured. The cops are called. I'm quite obviously in the wrong. I bumped into their cars. Naturally, I'm feeling very anxious.

Turn the tables on an obnoxious character

Two drivers, whose cars have been demolished by the impact of my truck, arrive on the scene very angry indeed. They cannot understand why these 'stupid policemen' are asking them questions, not me. One says to the other, under his breath, thinking the policeman

nearby cannot hear: "What's wrong with this copper? He must know we are in the right. We weren't even in our cars." The other also replied under his breath. " Yeah, I can't bear fools."

The policeman turns in a flash. "Can't bear fools, eh? Well, apparently your mother could. You're in the wrong! Both of you! You're parked too close to the corner. You're supposed to be ten feet back from the building alignment. I'm going to book you both for not adhering to the traffic code!"

Putting yourself down works in humour

If you can build up a story in which your hero is shown as an ordinary guy, subject to all the foibles and foolishness that we all are, rather than someone who is 'larger than life,' you'll have people sympathising with his plight. If you can use yourself as hero or lead character in this way, even better. How many Ronnie Corbett jokes were references to his own lack of stature? How many of the Australian comedian, Steady Eddie's, the man with multiple sclerosis, was based on his own unsteadiness and lack of co-ordination? How many overweight comedians poke fun at their own obesity? Be courageous. Look at yourself as objectively as you can. Then present to the audience how you feel about these things. Do this not in a way that shows you are feeling sorry for yourself, but how you are beginning to understand yourself.

Please do not get the impression that I know a lot about the use of humour in stories. I do not. I know only of those few areas where humour in stories has worked for me. However, I do make the point that if you want to tell stories, and you *want* to put humour into those stories - then take a risk. Go out on a limb, so to speak. Reach for more. For as it has been said by the famous British Poet, Robert Browning, "A man's reach should extend his grasp or what's a heaven for?" And this certainly applies for all of us who want to grow in any of our abilities.

Summary

Let the audience fill in the details of a story wherever you can.

A Phrase that pays is worth inclusion.

Don't be afraid to exaggerate to the point of ridiculousness

Use conflict and dialogue where you, as the teller, come off second best.

Let the audience see that you are subject to all the frailties, foibles and frustrations common to humankind.

Use characterization and Dialogue to enhance humour.

Chapter Eleven

Keeping Track of Things

"Stories are the communal currency of Humanity"

Tahir Shah, in Arabian Nights

Those Boring Records

When you first start telling stories to audiences you'll probably remember what tale you told. This won't last. Within a short time, assuming you increase the number of your stories and are invited along to various groups, remembering which audience you spoke to, and which story or stories you told, and how many times you've visited these people...it can become quite complicated. So you need a system. Boring, as it might seem, you need to keep records and files. If you don't, you could find yourself forgetting appointments. You could find yourself going to the wrong venue. Or the right venue on the wrong day. The list of complications which can occur is quite lengthy. And even with a good system of keeping track of things, you can still come unstuck. I know. I have!

Fortunately, of the 850 or so speaking engagements I've had over thirty years or so, I've only mucked up five - and almost mucked up another three or four. How? No excuses! On three occasions I simply forgot. Had a lot on my mind. The other couple of times were when my car let me down and there was no way I could arrive on time.

The 'nearly' mucked up ones were when, firstly, I went to the wrong venue. On another occasion, I turned up on the wrong evening. The third was also to the wrong venue - two places with very similar names in the same suburb of Sydney. However, because I'd made a habit of always leaving plenty of time to find a venue I'd never been to before, I was able to arrive on time without too much fuss.

So another word of advice here. Always leave plenty of time to travel to a speaking engagement. Allow for the unexpected traffic delays, or you not being able to readily find the venue, or a close-by parking spot.

What sort of files do we need?

Okay, that said, what sort of records and files do we need? My earliest attempts at a filing system weren't good. But after a few years, I realized that I needed to record a 'booking to speak' with more than just an entry on my wall calendar and a manila folder to hold all my records. So what evolved was a system whereby I had both electronic, paper and even cardboard records. I used them all. Different methods for different circumstances. So I ended up with a computer file which was ongoing, a system of five-by-three inch cards, a pocket diary, two wall calendars - one in the kitchen and one in my study - and, the most detailed record - an exercise book with a half-a-page for each speaking engagement.

Expand your filing system to fit your expanding needs

All of above were referred to and used - still are. But it is the half-page in an exercise book which contains most detail. Each half-page contains five columns: Date and time of engagement, name of the organization, number of times I'd been there, and the date of the last time I attended. The third column had the venue's name and address. The fourth, the name of the person who called me, their phone number and email address. But it is the fifth column which held the most detail.

This fifth column - the Remarks' Column - had the date the caller booked; the number of people expected to attend and other sundry information. For example: whether a microphone would be provided if needed. Whether they'd provide, lunch, some expenses money - anything you'd want to know before you actually got to the place. If I had attended this group before, I would place details such as the speech/story title or titles and dates I attended, so that I wouldn't use the *same* material again!

After an event, I would then fill in such details as: what speech or stories I'd told. How many people actually attended - compared with those earlier expected. Whether the atmosphere was good; whether it went well, or not so well. Any remarks about shortcomings such as 'the microphone failed,' or there was no proper MC introduction...all manner of things which would help should the same organization attempt to book me again at a later date. I could then refer back.

This referring back is particularly useful, because it might be a year later you get that invitation to present to that group again. It might be five years. It might be ten! I've been invited back to groups that I haven't spoken to for seventeen years! By that time

everything has probably changed: most of the members, different venue – but someone will remember you. Stories last!

Most of the remarks I wrote up in my 'Remarks Columns' were positive. Generally, people did enjoy what I'd done. If it went well, I'd simply put in, "Went well." If it was outstandingly good, I say so. But on the odd occasion, to warn myself from ever accepting another invitation from a certain group, I would write up, in brief, the reasons why I doubted I'd go again. For example: "Travelled a sixty-mile round trip; very heavy traffic. Only eighteen people turned up (When it was indicated there would be a least forty) No petrol money received, though promised. Poor venue. Very badly organized meeting with the 'general business session' cutting into my allotted time., etc."

As I said, this didn't happen very often, but it can happen.

Keeping each story fresh in your mind

A couple of days ago I sat down and wrote out the titles of some two dozen stories I tell. I wrote them in two columns: ones which contain a definite message or moral, and those that are told simply that the audience enjoy. It is likely that if you're reading this book with the objective of telling stories, perhaps in business to make a point, the first list would be more pertinent to your objectives. So let us say, by way of example, that you've compiled a dozen stories which make the sorts of points you wish to convey to you audience. A dozen stories. How do you keep the details of each of these fresh enough to retell the tale and not find you've lost half of the material in that story? Some of your favourites will never be lost to you. Others, less used, might lose some detail. How can you keep all of them ready for instant recall?

A Long Term Memory Strategy

The story itself is hardly likely to be forgotten. It is the *detail* within that story which can fall away. For example, the names of places and people in particular. A few statistical facts, which are important might also be lost. For example, in my story on the Titanic, I need to remember, dates, times, ship's dimension's and weight, number of decks, number of boilers, number of crew, number of engine room department personnel. Then comes the names of a least a dozen people pertinent to the story: Captain Edward J Smith, Thomas Andrews, Bruce Ismay, Lady Cosmo Duff-Gordon, the list goes on. Then there are the radio

operators, Jack Phillips, Harold Bride, the radio man on the *Californian*, Cyril Evans. How do I remember all the detail?

I do it with cards.

The reverse-the-card method

It was a system of memory shown to me way back in 1961 when I quickly had to learn the geographical location and three-letter abbreviations of hundred of towns, villages and aerodromes so that I could do my job properly as an aeradio operator. So how does it work?

Step one, write a word or short sentence on one side of a small card. For example, the words "Titanic's master." On the other side of the card: "Captain Edward J Smith." On a second card: "Nominal owner of White Star Line." On the reverse, "Bruce Ismay." "Ships that answered first distress call," other side of the card: "SS Frankfurt 150 miles, SS Carpathian 58 miles." I think you get the picture. You read one side of the card, and then write down on a piece of paper what you remember is written on the other side. This is a method for fast recall.

I have thirty-three of these cards for my thirty-six minute presentation on Titanic. But on the other stories the number of cards is far less. Some stories have as few as eight or nine. All you need is enough.

Some of my stories rate no cards at all. Most of them, in fact. But in these, there is not a lot of complex detail which needs to be constantly refreshed. In fact, only seven of the twenty-five speeches I wrote down in my two lists have these cards. So there is no need to be alarmed about how many stories you need to keep practising. However, I qualify this remark by saying that if I do intend to make a presentation which could be quite detailed, and I haven't delivered it for a while - and I don't have cards for it - then I do take the trouble to refamiliarize myself with it.

Okay, so how often do you need to go over those cards to keep the story fresh?

Keeping the detail of each story fresh

You'll need to go over those cards many times when you first learn the story. Then less and less as time progresses. Eventually, once every three or four months will suffice. So, if you've got half-a-dozen stacks of cards for half-a-dozen of your more detailed stories, you might be able to review them in just an hour or two, four times a year! Yes, that is all it will take to keep those stories fresh – three or four reviews a year. Have a system for this to ensure that you do it!

But when you *start off* with that story you'll probably have to review it every day for the first four days. Then you can miss a day. Then you can miss two days. Then you can miss four days. Then you can miss a week. Then ten days, Then two weeks...

I think you get the picture. The time between reviews is gradually increased. Two weeks., three weeks, five weeks, three months – four or five months and....you've arrived. The speech or story, if reviewed three or four times a year is now yours for life.

The above can be clearly shown in a graph. In such a graph, the vertical axis would represent the amount of detail, the top of it representing 100% knowledge to be learned. The horizontal axis would represent elapsed time. A line plotted on the graph would show that we lose around half of what we have learned in the first twenty-four hours. Yes, half! However, if we relearn the whole lot again, then we lose only about forty percent in the next twenty-four hours. As time goes on we lose less and less percentage of what we have learned. So, if we refresh ourselves up to the hundred percent mark at wider and wider intervals, we retain that one hundred percent during those wider and wider intervals.

Sounds complicated, but it isn't And it works!

Harking back to records

With your computer records you can keep tags on not only on what audiences you've addressed and the dates on which you addressed them, you can record how many groups you've addressed and how many people you've spoken to down the years. For the first few years, I didn't do this. But from April 1995 I did. And it is very satisfying indeed to see those statistic increase as the year roll by.

So keep good record, you'll be glad you did.

Summary.

Adequate records are essential to your ongoing success.

There are methods to keep the detail of your presentations fresh and ready to use. Use them.

Chapter Twelve

Storytelling and Public Speaking

"People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact it is the other way around."

Terry Pratchett

Parallels and differences

In the introduction to my earlier book on Storytelling, *The Raconteur*, I mention the parallels between Public Speaking and Storytelling. My actual words are: "Public Speaking and Storytelling are interweaving strands of the same splice. Almost inseparable, each gives the other strength." And this is so. Later on, in this same book, I mention that Public Speaking and Storytelling involve both art and craft. The art arises in the mind of the creator, the craft, in the structure, content, and delivery. Both are of equal importance.

So what I will do now is present to you a speech which exemplifies the use of both art and the craft, as far as is possible, by using only *printed* words. But first a little background on this particular speech.

In Toastmasters International it is commonplace for members to have to put together and present a five-to-seven (5-7 minutes) speech as they work their way through the Toastmasters Communication and Leadership Program. The 5-7 minute speech is also used in the various speaking competitions held, be it at club level, or even at the Grand Final held at the International Conference each year. So practising these short speeches is commonplace. Mastering their delivery, so they have both an excellent structure as well great content, is another thing. It takes dedication.

Seek evaluation

I decided to enter the International Speech Contest. I succeeded in winning at club level but wondered if *what* I'd written and presented was good enough to take me further. So I did something I'd never done before. I contacted a world champion speaker and asked if he'd be willing to take a look at my 'written' speech and offer suggestions for improvement. The man I contact was Jock Elliott. I'd met Jock a few times, and although we aren't close, I regard him as a friend. Jock had won the International Speech Contest in 2011. However,

he lives in Queensland, whilst I live in Sydney, New South Wales. Too far away to just drop around for a chat.

I sent my speech off via email. Jock replied with corrections. I replied to his reply saying, his style was different from mine. Certainly I could take onboard some of his suggestions. But I couldn't present them the way he did. Our styles were different. I sent a corrected version to him. He sent one back to me. Eventually there was compromise. I used some of his suggestions for improvement, but I stuck to the way I wished to present this speech. I now 'paste' it in below.

The Secret

Let me tell you a secret. You and I have the power to change the world. How? By sharing what we truly know. You and I have the ability to share the unique knowledge that each of us has. But do we have the will? Do we have the courage? *And that's the secret.*

Mister Toastmaster – Ladies and Gentlemen...

What do I mean by this? We all have different types of knowledge. Let me tell you a little story to illustrate this. My friend, John, once said to me, "Tom there's a terrific restaurant up town. Food's absolutely scrumptious. Must be the best in Sydney." So I went along. I went because I trusted John. This is knowledge based on *faith*.

But I didn't know what the food tasted like, so I stood outside and peered through the glass to the patrons within. I could see the meals being served. I could see the smiles on the faces of the customers as they tucked into their food. I could hear the laughter and camaraderie. This was good – wonderful. This is knowledge based on observation, on the *intellect*.

But still I did not actually know what that food tasted like, so I went inside, found a table and ordered a meal. When the meal arrived (I take a large spoon from my pocket) I took my first spoonful. Aaaarrgh! Just what did they put in that curry! It doesn't matter if the food was awful. Or it was good. Or it was mediocre. What matters is now I knew the truth of it. This is knowledge based on *experience*.

Many of us are reluctant to tell the secrets of our experience-based knowledge. We are frightened that we will be ridiculed, laughed at, found wanting. So we remain silent. And if

we remain silent forever then the secret dies with us. But when we share the secret we become teachers, and when we become teachers we give others our greatest gift.

Is there some secret that you're frightened to tell the world? Tell it! *Tell it!*

I was that way. I was twenty years in Toastmasters before I could summon the courage to present a speech, to share my secret, my gift, that I am a psychic. Yes, a psychic – not a psycho. I am a medium, a channeler. I see dead people. No, I'm kidding. I don't see dead people. And you are certainly not dead.

It took me until I was sixty-five before I had the courage to run a class I'd been putting off for years. That class, *Inner Quest, Our Search for Happiness –Body, Mind and Spirit* for seniors. I was told it would never be accepted. That it wasn't scientific. No one would come. As it was, it turned out so popular, so successful that 20 to 35 people came along every fortnight for eight successive years! One lady only missed one lesson in all that time!

If you have a profound, soul-moving experience that you yearn to tell but fear telling it – tell it! Teach it!

Teaching is inherent in Nature. You see the mother magpie teaching her chick to forage for food. You see the mother duck, her young all strung out behind her swimming across the lake. Whatever she does they do exactly the same. You see the big bear teaching the little bear to scoop salmon from the raging river – and to ignore the man from John West diving into the water nearby.

To teach is to give – so teach what you *really* know.

What are our rewards for doing this? Firstly, we learn far more about what we are teaching than those we are teaching. We grow. Secondly, our feelings of worthiness, self-esteem and accomplishment rise. There is nothing more rewarding than being able to teach from the heart our own truths.

Ladies and Gentlemen, each of us has our own gifts, talents which are unique to us, and no one else in the world has them to exactly the same degree. Each of us has our own qualities which are duplicated by no one else. And each of us has our own values. Share these

things! Teach these things! And teach from the heart. For to teach what you really know is a gift from the soul. *And that is my secret.* Now tell me yours...

Analysis of a speech containing story

So let us analyse the speech from as many aspects as we can.

First and foremost: What are the objectives of the speech? Secondly, are they realized? The second questions cannot be answered by speaker. But it can be sensed. It can be sensed by the attention of the audience, their concentration, their body language, and their laughter and applause at the appropriate places within and at the end of the speech.

It can also be sensed in that hard to describe, intangible something I mentioned earlier in this book, the combined speaker and audience's energy which creates an atmosphere which can't be described but is certainly sensed.

All right, so how does the speaker create –in this sort of speech – what he or she wishes to create?

You will notice that there are stories in this speech. Yes, even in this length of speech, it is made up mainly of story. You will notice that there are scenes which can be easily visualized by the listener: the restaurant, the magpies, the ducks, the bears. The actual message or objective of the speech: To message to *reveal the secret stories* of one's heart and what a gift they are, is contained in just a few rather terse sentences. The power of this speech comes from the stories, particularly the first-hand experience stories of the speaker.

So what else does it have in it?

Some Humour Content

There is humour. Not a lot. It isn't meant to be a humorous speech. But by putting a little in, one keeps the audience attention and even gets them, hopefully, to laugh. It is assumed most of the listeners have seen the movie, *The Sixth Sense* and can recall those classic lines, "I see dead people." It is also assumed most of the listeners would have seen the John West advertisements on television, where a man dives into the water near grizzly bears to steal a fish from one of them.

There is also humour when I – as the speaker – produce a large spoon for all to see, and take a spoon full of this imaginary dish of curry. A visual aid of this type can add humour because it is unexpected.

There is also a very unexpected twist to the end of this speech. It was suggested by Jock and can make all the difference in that it is an invitation, a motivation, for the listeners to make a decision and to act. It is a very powerful way to end such a speech.

The audience's most loved words

You might also notice those words we all like to hear from a speaker – *you, we, us, our*. There are eleven 'you's, fourteen 'we's, five 'us's and seven 'our's in that speech. Even with this many there are rather are more 'I's' than I'd like. However, the I word isn't overdone. The emphasis is on the audience's needs. For as it has been said so many times, "It is not about you: it is about the listener." Bear that in mind at all times and you won't go far wrong.

So there we have it.

You might even find more things within those printed lines which will help you with your own speeches and stories. My hope is you do. But to change the subject somewhat.

There are storyteller and storytellers.

Up until quite recently the role of Storyteller had become something of a joke in the Public Speaking World; at least in the speakers' world I'd been exposed to in Toastmasters, Rostrum, the National Speaker Association of Australia, and even in the evening college classes I'd attended.

Storyteller? You talk at pre-schools, like? Oh, fairs and carnivals? No? Where then?

The commonly held view back in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s was that storytelling was for kids. People wore clown suits, or dressed up like medieval gypsies, or Irish leprechauns. Even when I was a member of the Australian Storytellers Guild between 1998 and 2003, I was told it'd be a good idea to dress a little more like a storyteller. I never did. I wasn't that sort of teller.

When I go out to tell stories, I generally wear a business suit and tie. Or if not a suit and tie, a sports coat and slacks to match. Or if it is expected to be an informal gathering, an open-necked but neat casual shirt and trousers. Fortunately, this standard attire is now being accepted and worn by today's storytellers. Moreover, it looks like the trend is here to stay. Well, at least for those who wish to speak in the world of grown.

However, the word, 'Storyteller' still holds connotations that the teller is *just an entertainer*, that there is little value in what he or she has to say to the serious-minded adult who wants to learn something important.

This view has to be overcome. To a certain extent it is. But the change is happening far too slowly, in my opinion. Tell someone you're a raconteur and they'll marvel. "Oh, what's that? That's an entertainer isn't it? Sounds interesting - tell me more." Tell someone you're a storyteller and they immediately go back to the stereo-types mentioned above.

Of course, if you're in business and want to impress an audience with your credentials, you don't generally tell them you're a storyteller. Best leave it that way. However, if the feedback you get is "Wow! You sure know how to tell a powerful story!" revel in it. You're a success.

So keep working on those stories. They could make all the difference in your success.

Summary

The art and the craft of storytelling.

Seek evaluations from experts.

An example of a short speech.

Analysis of that short speech.

The words the audience loves to hear.

There are storytellers and story tellers.

Thirteen

"The heart is wiser than the intellect."

J. G. Holland

Learning by doing

The best way to learn something is to actually do it. You carry out the action for the first time that which you want to learn. From there on you usually improve. But there is a proviso. You must know what it is you want to do. So how do you know what you want to do? Probably you've seen someone else do it and you'd like to be able to do it as well. As a child you might have seen other children and adults swimming, but you cannot swim. The fact that the adults can do it is taken for granted. Adults can do a lot of things children can't. But when you see those other kids in the water, some no older than you, the desire to be able to swim can become very powerful indeed. So the motivation is there. But how to do it? And the question is asked, "Do I have the courage?"

It is from here that you resolve that you'd like to be able to swim; to go in and join them. They're having fun. And unless you have had a very bad experience, for example, nearly drowning in your first attempt at swimming, you will push on until you've mastered this skill.

The same goes for most things learned. We watch others do it. It appeals to us. We watch some more. We are motivated to learn. Then we actually take the physical steps required to master the skill.

Does exposure to oral storytellers create storytellers?

Sometimes we don't even know where the motivation to do something like storytelling even comes from. It seems to make no sense. But if we look back over our lives there will be certain people who have made an impression on us because they did these things –and they were good at doing them. Moreover, the chances are we respected and looked up to these people. Certainly I can recall the people who made an impression on me. As a boy at school in England in the 1940s, if the winter weather was really atrocious, Sport would be cancelled. Perhaps it was snowing. The children would all assemble in the school hall

where a senior teacher, a Mr. Wisdom – yes, his real name – would tell the assembly the most fascinating stories. We kids were carried away by the word pictures that man could put in both our heads and hearts. To this day, I still recall – and use – one of Mr. Wisdom's great Christmas Stories.

I want to be like this guy

With public speaking, the example which made me 'want to be like this guy,' came as I listened to a short speech given back in late 1960. It was delivered by an instructor at my place of work. Twelve of us, nearly all ex-navy and ranging in age between twenty-five and thirty, were to undertake a twelve-week course. We were to be trained to become air-ground radio officers for the Australian's Governments, Department of Civil Aviation.

I remember it as if it were yesterday. Ken Cross stood quietly at the front of our group in that classroom and said, "Gentlemen, as I look around this room at all of you, I know that there is no way that I can know as much as all of you put together..."

Well! Here we were, all young men who'd put up with the bullshit and ballyhoo of naval discipline for a six or twelve year stint, and here we were not only being treated as equals, but actually being told we knew something already!

So what happened here?

Over the years between being a boy of around eight or nine, I had come to love oral story. Few teachers had the skill of Mr. Wisdom, but many school teachers would *read* stories to their classes from time to time. It wasn't quite as riveting as Mr Wisdom' way of doing it, but the stories were very interesting.

I recall a Mr. Retallick, in Primary School. He would regularly read to us during the last period of a Friday afternoon before our weekend break. He read such yarns as *Treasure Island*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. And he read them in such a way we were transported. His reading developed in me a love of reading. Much of that reading was the content of books containing 'short stories.' These, of course, eventually giving way to longer adventure yarns and novels. Lots of reading resulted in a desire to write. But to quote Rudyard Kipling, "That is another story."

Fear of Public Speaking

Like so many of us, I kept well away from public speaking. Even the idea of it frightened me. This fear could rise almost to a point of panic if it looked like I would have to speak before a group and wouldn't be able to get out of it. My wife and my wedding day was tarnished for me by the horrible realization that, at the reception, I'd be expected to "say a few words." How I eventually mumbled my way through this, being encouraged quietly by a nearby sister-in-law, was a real embarrassment. But the lesson learned here wasn't the right one. I learned, 'Keep away from scenarios whereby you could be asked to speak up.'

I managed to do so for the next ten years.

Yet the strange thing was, although I feared public speaking, there was something within me that yearned to learn this. I could imagine myself, doing great things in my life, and I knew this would involve my speaking to audiences - big audiences...maybe huge audiences! Where these ideas came from I do not know. All I know is they persisted.

This was pretty well the case until around 1970 - ten years after being married. A brother-in-law invited me to a local Toastmaster meeting. He promised me I would not be asked to speak. He was wrong. I was asked. I was asked a question. I was told to stand up and answer that question before around twenty strangers. It went like this:

"Tom, tell us in one minute, what was the biggest mistake in your life?"

Sweat breaking out all over me, adrenaline being pumped by a heart going well over optimal speed, I stood up and replied.

"The biggest mistake I ever made in my life was to trust my brother-in-law, Mick, and come along to this meeting. He told me I would not be asked to speak..."

I was angry. I was worked up. I was - terrific! And yes, I spoke with passion for the full minute.

At the end of the meeting, of the ten or so people asked questions on the night, mine was voted the best answer. I'd won! I was stoked!

Nothing succeeds like success

Now, there is an old saying that "nothing succeeds like success" and this is true. I went along to another meeting. This one, though I was still very apprehensive, I did enjoy a little bit more. However, because of circumstance involving an overseas move to a shift-work job, I didn't pursue my public speaking ambitions for another year-and-a-half.

But what really made an impression on me was the confidence, competence, the quality of these men, many not much older than me. They were so good. They were so polished. I wanted to be like them. The seed had been planted in fertile soil.

So what I'm saying here? The same message I opened with. We learn best by doing, but we need to know *what* we would like to do by being exposed to others who can already do what we want to do – and do it well. We need exemplars. We need role models. We need people we can emulate.

There are myriads of public speaking teachers but what about storytelling teachers?

When we get into the Public Speaker World we find that there are many competent speakers around. Our exposure to their talents enables us to learn what we'd like to emulate and what to cast aside or ignore. By practising, we gradually find our style. But it isn't quite as simple to find Storytelling *Teachers*. At least, that is what I've found. In the storytelling organizations I joined and, after five years or so, left, the majority of storytellers didn't 'cut it' with me. Fairy tales, folk tales, stories for tiny-tots and adolescents, didn't appeal to me. There were a few exceptions. But of the scores of storytellers I heard, you could count on the fingers of one hand the *type* of storyteller I admired. And as for storytelling teachers? It appeared no one specialized in this!

What I realized though, is that my presentations in *both* worlds: storytellers circles and the public speaking organizations I belonged to, I inevitably told stories. Sure I could present an informative speech. But generally I told stories. How could I learn more about this? There must be some storyteller-teachers out there. Was the shortage of qualified and capable teachers in this subject that bad! If I was going through this sort of dilemma, then it seemed to me a lot of others would be to. Perhaps it was time for me to specialize.

My intentions for the reader

When I decided to write this book, my intention was to enable the reader to not only become a good storyteller, but to learn how to *use* story for their betterment. This was, and still is to some degree, a challenge. I've little to measure my own 'betterment' by, other than the number of invitations I get to speak. Being retired and not wishing particularly to return to paid employment, how could I help others who might want to use story in their business career? I'd left business ambitions behind me long ago.

Then, very recently, I came upon Doug Stevenson on YouTube. Here is a man who is obviously not only a good storyteller, but a man who can teach storytelling to others so that they can use that knowledge for their betterment. So I took a look at some of Doug's stuff on YouTube and, yes, he is a well-known storyteller teacher. Moreover, he's written a book on the subject.

My own experience in *teaching* others to tell stories is far less impressive than Doug's. However, I've presented workshops and seminars in a number of places: Sydney and environs, country New South Wales, Adelaide, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. And I have an invitation to present in Hong Kong at a Toastmasters Convention later this year. However, despite thirty years of telling stories to audiences, I still have a lot to learn about the teaching of this subject.

In some ways, the invitation to speak in Hong Kong is what prompted me to write this book. For as it has been said, writing clarifies and solidifies ones ideas. I wish to do this, for I look at people like Doug Stevenson and realize he is streets ahead of me in delivering storytelling workshops. I can learn from him! And I intend to.

Teaching Public Speaking

I've probably had more exposure to teaching public speaking than storytelling and there are a lot of helpful similarities. So, without going into a lot of detail, I will present for the reader a few tips which will help in both these areas. This is particularly so where it comes to delivery.

Developing Your Voice

Whether you like it or not you will be judged by your voice. Whether you think it is *fair* or not you will be judged by how you sound. Let us be very clear on that. People form almost instant opinions not only on what they hear a person say, but on the tenor, the timbre, the resonance of our voice. So it behoves us to develop our voice to the best of our ability; to make the best of it, given what Nature has provided us with.

Surveys have been done to find out what makes, not only for an attractive voice, but one that invokes in us a sense of immediate respect. The Earl Nightingales and Richard Burton's of this world were blessed indeed. What voices they had! Most of us are not so blessed. But we can generally improve to a marked degree the way we come across by consciously working on our voice. We can learn to project better, to articulate more clearly, and increase our range of sounds. We can even learn how to deepen and lower our pitch, something most of us would like to do.

Besides the obvious benefit of being more pleasant to listen to, and sounding more credible and authoritative, by taking the effort to improve our voices we also strengthen them. We're not so subject to getting sore throats and laryngitis from too much speaking. In an occupation where we might be expected to speak for a couple of hours with very little break, this can and does happen - if you haven't prepared for such long speaking engagements. Regular voice exercises provides this preparation.

I have in my possession the book, *How To Say It - with Your Voice*, by Jeffrey Jacobi. The book is quite detailed. However, I find that just by practising for twelve minutes (as advocated) ever few days, a series of exercises from that book, I've been able to maintain a trouble-free speaking voice. What happens is one increases the flexibility and strength of the various muscles used in speaking. Regular exercises - certainly not every day but at least a couple of times a week, will ensure the improvements are retained.

I'm told that this development of the voice is not unlike the development of a fine physique by body-building. You build up. Once the muscles are developed, fairly regular exercise is all that is needed to maintain what you've now got. So if you do decide to improve your voice, be sure to keep up a fairly regular practice to ensure that you don't lose what you have gained.

Developing the optimum pace for storytelling

In the early 1970s I lived in New Zealand. Whilst there I learned that one of that country's most esteemed public speakers was a former parliamentarian. He had died a few years earlier. I cannot recall his name, but he was reputedly a great public speaker – an orator. Naturally, I never got to hear him speak, but I did read a book which mentioned how he had developed himself to be 'the best.' His advice was so simple. Here it is.

"Read aloud for ten minutes every day." That was it! But there was a bit more. "Read aloud every day as if you were telling a story to an audience of children."

What was being said by this extraordinary speaker was that every word has to be pronounced correctly. The pauses have to be there. The vocal variety has to be there. The required volume, the rise and fall – everything needed to transfer the words so they can be converted to pictures in the mind of the listener. Also, those pesky, er's, ah's and 'um's will drop away. By reading aloud for just ten minutes a day, until that way of speaking has become habitual to you, you will become a master of delivery.

Simple? Yes.

Will you do it?

And just for the record, this man was a speaker *before* the days of the audio recorder, the audio cassette player, or the digital audio and visual devices we have today. How much better, then, can we become by practising what he advocates and then playing our recordings back to hear and correct ourselves. Certainly, today we have no excuse whatsoever for not developing our God-given voice to give us the best it can give us.

Summary

Learning by doing is best. We look to exemplars we can emulate. Most fear public speaking at first. Look for role models in your speciality. Develop your voice. Develop your delivery.

Chapter Fourteen

You as the storyteller

"To hell with facts! We need stories."

Ken Kesey

As a storyteller you are a subtle persuader. Yet in the very subtlety of your approach lies your power to influence. This is because the listener is not identifying with what is being said, by and large, as *your* opinion. You're not being 'spoken at.' He or she does not see you as parading your personal belief, a belief with which they might not be in agreement. It is the *story's hero's* opinion which is being presented – an imaginary third party. Get the listener to empathise with that third party and you've overcome initial rejection. They start to buy into it. For "stories are products," as Doug Stevenson says. They market and sell you: your beliefs, your passions, your values. This is why you have selected these particular stories to tell. They reveal what you are.

Your stories reveal your character

The stories you do tell, and the way you tell them, also markets your credibility. They show the audience what you have in common with them. Your credibility stems from your knowledge, the way you present that knowledge, and your trustworthiness. All of these have to be earned quickly. That ninety-second time limit in which this happens must be borne in mind as you open your presentation.

I have found that the easiest way to establish credibility is to start with a story. You don't need to go into a long-winded explanation as to why you are there, what you will cover, what you intend to do. Whoever has introduced you will probably have dealt some of that. A printed program might have also explained this. So, in many of my speaking engagements after being announced, I say simply:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I am a storyteller. Pause." And what does a storyteller do? Tells stories so...Once upon a time, a long time ago, in a land far away..."

Corny?

Perhaps. But it gets immediate attention. Sometimes there's even a laugh or two and a sigh of relief. So I'm up and running. And with that first story point is made. The audience realizes at the outset that this session is going to be different. A story is introduced. The scene is set. The character or characters introduced. The journey has begun. They can sit back and relax.

With a straight speech, with the main objective to inform the listener about a product or service – and hopefully to sell it to the audience – a lot of information is provided. Generally it is too much information. The good points of that product or service are emphasised, even over-emphasized ad nauseum, the drawbacks and shortcomings downplayed. There are heaps of power-point slides, perhaps containing terse, dot-point sentences, pie-charts and graphs. The presenter might throw in a joke or two, which quite likely have little or nothing to do with the main aim of the presentation. They're just fillers with the speaker hoping to establish rapport.

Don't bore them with nothing but facts

I can recall one presentation I attended where a CEO simply put up, one power-point slide after another for ninety-minutes. Up went the slides and he, reading them out loud, microphone in hand, bored his audience silly. As he was the boss, most of them were too frightened to leave. I left. Seventy power point slides were too much for me.

True!

Not one story was told.

On the other hand, in those days, one of my jobs was to go out to the public-at-large to tell them what services we provided. I used stories as well as a portable over-head projector to describe what we were about. I think I'd use around six to eight visuals. The rest of the presentation was stories, with a question and answer session at the end. No one ever walked out.

The world's most powerful persuasive tool

It is often said, "Everyone loves a story," and they do. So if you can be a storyteller *and* you can convince your listener into accept what you're advocating, you have the most powerful business tool for selling that there is, at your disposal. But it is a skill which needs to be

developed. Salesmen learn all the technique's such as 'Never ask a yes-no question,' but are rarely taught how to tell stories which can make a point. Public speakers are taught how to speak and are told that storytelling is important. But they're rarely shown how to do it. They are not shown how to 'step into story mode' and then step out again to address the audience smoothly. This moving into and out of story, into and out of story, is something which is done by the practised storyteller so easily that it isn't noticed. It is a developed skill.

Within a story itself, the teller moves from descriptive narration into characterization and dialogue smoothly, much as a writer of an adventure story or novel writer does, but it is all *within* the story. When he or she then says, "Put your hand up if you..." and the teller has *stepped out*. There is interaction *outside* the story as hands go up.

"Right," The audience is acknowledge with that simple word, then.

"Furl top gallants and main! Let go the main bower."

The storyteller, with a raising of the voice, augmented with appropriate gesture and movement, is now *back in* the story of, say, a old sailing ship about to drop anchor. The listener are also immediately pulled back in, and the movie in their minds' continues.

You could upset a listener.

It has happened with me. I was telling the story of the Titanic's sinking when a woman suddenly burst into tears. Not just a little trickle down the cheek, but a real sobbing session. A friend had to console her. I found out later that her son had died when HMAS *Melbourne* rammed HMAS *Voyager* back in 1964 and eighty-six sailors on the *Voyager* drowned. My immediate thought was, "Thank God I hadn't been telling my story, *The Hoodoo Ship*, which depicts in graphic detail the actual events of the *Melbourne's* collision with not only the American destroyer, the *Frank E Evans* but also the *Voyager's* sinking. How bad would that have been!

But you cannot really prepared for such reactions. You cannot know the entire audience's life stories. Also, this is only one incident, concerning one person, in thirty years of telling stories to over 60,000 people. It's a bit like airliner crashes. They do happen, but they are rare.

Make them laugh and cry

You've probably seen those Ancient Greek masks that depict live theatre; the smiling face, the sad face. The message here is that actors make an audience both laugh and cry. As a storyteller you come close to being an actor. In some aspects you are an actor. In the use of dialogue of your characters, for example. The more emotion you can arouse in your listeners, the more effective your stories are. Do not downplay or stay away from giving your very best in doing this. You can use jokes, stories, throwaway lines, the whole gamut of strategies used by really good speakers and entertainers.

I recall an American comedian, a man who'd once been a dentist, saying. "Who said we dentists don't know about human relationships - We do build bridges." Just two sentences, The point is made. But you can then move into and expand on that point. The point then becomes an explanation on how to build those bridges or inter-relationships.

Work on your belief in your role

Once you have seriously begun to work on your own psyche with the belief that you are a good storyteller, you will be well on your way to becoming one. Our subconscious mind is linked to that great concept Carl G Jung called, The Collective Unconscious. I believe that to be true. Give yourself permission to be open-minded as to just how good you can become in any field of endeavour and your abilities in that field will expand. They cannot not expand. One of the great psychological laws is that, in plain English, "We bring into our lives that which we think about most." Think, imagine, dwell positively on your ability as a storyteller who's getting better as time progresses and this is what will happen.

This means that you must not berate yourself if something does not go as well as you had hoped. You did something; you got a result. You did not fail. The result you got was not as good as you had hoped it would be. Next time it will be better. But I think you probably understand all this self-motivation stuff, so we'll get on.

Never stop building your language skills

The Oxford Dictionary contains over half a million words. Our personal understanding of the words we read in books might amount to one twentieth of these, for example, 50,000 words. They are in our 'understanding' or 'comprehending file' of word meanings. If we

write, we might use 15,000 different words – then we might not! But it is in our *spoken* vocabulary that the majority of us fall short. It is not uncommon for us to use only a couple of thousand words – even less. And the trend today is to use less and less. Hence we have one word with multiple meanings such as 'cool.'

I sometimes tease teenagers by asking them: "Is it cool to be hot, or hot to be cool?" I think you'll get the drift. The use of a good working, vocal vocabulary is essential if you are to become a good storyteller. Or a good presenter and teacher in just about any area. So work on that spoken vocabulary. Add words. Add colourful, descriptive words. If you can describe the subtle nuances required in efficient storytelling you will have those words at your disposal.

Chapter Fifteen

Find the point, then find the

"Memory is the primary and fundamental power, without which there could be no other intellectual operation."

Samuel Johnson

We are consistently told that our most powerful stories come from our own experiences. These are the most authentic. These, the most credible. These revelations provide the listener with something straight from our minds, our hearts. But questions arise: do we have *enough* first-hand stories? And are they *interesting* enough? How can a man or woman who has led a relatively routine and perhaps even hum-drum life, have experienced the sorts of happenings that can change the beliefs of a listener? "I never climbed Mount Everest," you might be thinking. "I never did become a sports hero." or "I never even *sailed* in a yacht, let alone made a solo trip around the world." "Why would anyone want to listen to my very ordinary, everyday stories? They're so commonplace."

Use stories common to all

It is because they are commonplace, everyday happenings with which many can identify, that provides their appeal. They are likely to be shared experiences. Not exactly the same, in all probability, parallels will be automatically drawn. Everyone has had such troubles as being late for work because their car broke down. Or the train failed to arrive. Or the bus had a minor accident and was delayed. Everyone has had experiences where they thought something was too difficult to achieve until they were obliged or forced into doing it. Everyone has had trouble with a boss who was too demanding, or has had problems with being mistaken for somebody else, at some time in their lives. These common happenings make for stories that we can use in our presentations.

This does not mean that you will not have some very important and unique story or stories that you cannot use because they're not commonplace. Not at all. But these more important - and perhaps more significant - happenings in your life can be used to make that crucial *key* point you wish to make. The more mundane tales can be used throughout as supportive and auxiliary material to move you towards the ending of that fuller story and its profound take-away message.

You know what your big stories are. Yes, you do have them. They're the ones that have shaped your character. They're the happenings, the experiences that have moulded your life philosophy up to this point in your life. Be aware of these. Treasure them. These are gold when it comes to presenting to an audience. But what of the lesser stories; the myriad experiences of the sort mentioned above?.

I would like to point out something a lot of people are unaware of - *no experience you've ever had is forgotten*. You have recorded within you every single happening since the day you were born! Moreover, each thought as it was laid down within you still retains not only its thought-detail, it contains its emotional reaction at that time.

You don't believe me?

Regressive hypnotherapy, carried out by an experienced practitioner, bears witness to this. In such hypnotherapy sessions a person can be regressed back in time - way, way back. If asked about a certain happening when he or she was just three years of age, they will be able to tell the therapist about it - often in minute detail. They will cry, or be filled with anger, even rage. They will relive it as if it were happening now.

So I ask you to take my word for it that nothing is forgotten. What is lacking is the ability to readily *recall* many of these instances. Recall and memory are not interchangeable in meaning!

There is a well known Shakespearian quote, "Old men forget." This is pretty well confirmed with most people as they approach their very senior years. We forget people's names. We forget where we left our reading glasses. We might be unable to recall street names, or when something took place might be juxtaposed so dates are mixed up. But incidents, happenings, the way things played out - the story - is not forgotten once it is prompted in some way to come to the surface. The story arises and we can tell it from beginning to end.

The well known storyteller teacher, Doug Stevenson, mentions in one of his YouTube educationals something which clarified a very important point. It's something most of us do but don't consider its ramifications as the stories arise in us. Doug says words to the effect that we should think of the point we wish to make, and *then* come up with a story to present and support that point. When I heard him say that I immediately put his

presentation on hold. I then listed on paper as quickly as I could as many points as I could quickly think of that could be backed up by a story. Within a few minutes I had written over twenty. Below are just a few of those.

'Safety Preparedness' - A hole cut in the back of a bush toilet so that the snakes, that quite often came inside to keep cool on the concrete floor, could escape out the back as the door as the front was opened. A true incident in my life.

'Car colour and safety' - How I nearly crashed into a dark-gray coloured car on a gray, rainy winters night because it could hardly be seen. Another true incident in my life.

'Don't speed just because everything seems safe' - How the throttle slide on my big, 650 cc motorbike got jammed and I couldn't slow down.

'Reliance on memory notes' - How I mixed up my prepared palm-cards before an audience and found myself floundering.

'You don't know to you try.' How I believed I lacked mechanical ability until I plucked up the courage to change my car's water-pump.

All of these were memories which quickly popped up. These are some typical and fairly commonplace happenings we can nearly all identify with. Since writing down those twenty or so incidents which can *illustrate a point* I have added a few more. These without hardly having to think. They just come up.

"But why do they come up for you, Tom?" You might ask. "I can't quickly think them up like that."

Ways you can boost your recall rate

My intention here is to point out ways that will make recall of such incidents arise for you more readily. So here goes:

You know your life story - but how often do you go over it? Have you ever thought of writing your autobiography? Have you ever written any short stories, essays, even letters to friends about things which have happened to you? No? What about journal entries? Diary entries?

Okay – so I'm old fashioned. People rarely do these things nowadays. So what about the things you've told others on Face book? What about emails to friends? Or even what you 'Twittered?' And there must be stories you've told friends over a drink. Think back...

You got 'busted' for drink drive? You went to the bar to buy beer and you found you'd left your wallet at home? The fire alarm went off in your block of flats and kept going for two hours. You let the door bang shut behind you and couldn't get back in? Thousands and thousands of incidents have happened to you. Don't put them down as being of no consequence. You can use 'em in your stories to make a point.

Get yourself a note book or recording device of some sort. Put in it as many instances as you can think of which you can back up by a story. Keep the notebook or whatever you choose to use close by. Keep adding to the list as story ideas occur. What you'll be doing here is training your greatest servant – your subconscious mind – to present you with what you need when you need it.

That major presentation

So it's definite – the presentation you've been planning is definitely going ahead. You know the take away message you want to leave with your listeners. You've known for weeks. So this is be the specific purpose of this presentation. "What can I do to ensure that they do leave with that message, along with their motivation to act?" you ask. "How can I get them to leave feeling absolutely inspired?"

You've already learned the basics. You know you need a speech structure. You know the speech needs to have an 'audience-capturing' opening. It has to have salient points. And it definitely has to have a conclusion which leaves them in no doubt as to what you'd like them to do. But now, with the knowledge I'm hoping you've acquired in this book, you will know how to use story to give real strength, real appeal, real heart, to your message. So we will take a very brief look at ways you can do this.

Let us assume that this a business presentation. It will go for around an hour The presenter wishes to use a number of visual aids to add variety and to reinforce his/her points. They might be choosing to use an overhead projector, a whiteboard, butchers paper on a easel. All of these are commonplace in such presentations. So let's take a look at how we might go about this.

We have worked out, in our preparation, that we will have three main points, all reinforcing our one major objective. We might even have sub-points on one, two, or even all three of those main points. The way I see it, if we do, we need a story which makes the appropriate point on all of these – even the not so important sub points. This becomes quite a challenge, for we need a series of stories, each of which adequately illustrates the point and yet stays close to, or parallels the main objective.

Sounds difficult. But if we've done our preparation – and allowed our subconscious mind adequate time to come up with and present to us the relevant story ideas – we can manage. We can more than manage. We can make it into one of the most powerful presentations this audience has ever heard!

Open with a story!

What story?

If you don't have one which encapsulates the overall objective of your presentation, you can use a *general* story which can be used for just about any subject. For example, the story of the *Professor and the Old Sailor*. I use it a lot as an opener. In this story, without going into a lot of detail, the learned professor is a fount of knowledge. He knows just about everything – except the one thing that brings him undone. He doesn't know how to swim. He knows about Geology, Oceanography, Meteorology. But he doesn't know, as the old sailor does, about *Swimmology*.

At the end of this story I simply say to an audience..."and what is this swimmology?" And from that question I can put in any answer I like. In other words, at the end of this opening story I can follow it with any subject matter. If you have a few such stories at your disposal you can use one of them if you don't have one *specific* to your goal.

Okay, so you've opened with a story introduction. Now you come to your first point. Your first point is what you deliver after that initial story. But don't put anything up on a whiteboard or flip chart or whatever yet. Let the audience get used to your storytelling methods of presenting. Tell them another story, then make your second point. If there are to be sub-points around that main point, tell a story which illustrates each of these, then summarize your main point – bringing together these sub points by a reference back to the main story in that particular point – then show your visual.

Keep the visual up, along with your silence, long enough for them to read and digest. Switch off, and get on with the next story.

As it has been said so often: tell a story, make a point. Tell a story, make a point. When you've made that point, which should be inherent and obvious to the audience at the end of each story – then, if you so desire, show the visual. Do not interrupt a story to show a visual. Don't break in on the 'movie' in your listener's mind.

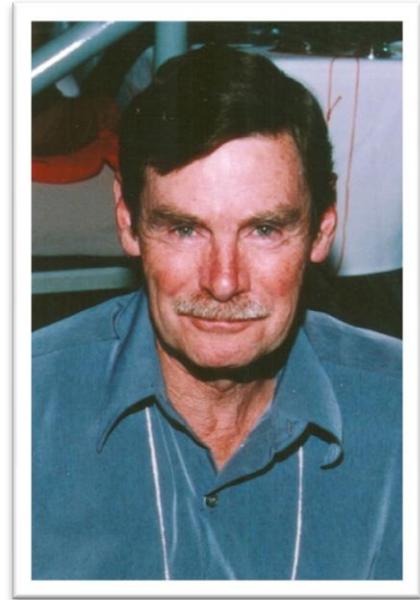
One possible way to break up a presentation is to stand and tell a story. Then, if you ask a question which you genuinely want the audience to answer, you could possibly sit down in a chair on stage – or do something which puts the emphasis on the questioner. You can hold a brief Q & A. before standing again and making it quite clear you're going to launch into another story.

Whether you do things the way I've suggest here is entirely up to you. You probably know your strengths and weaknesses as presenter. However, do not skimp on story. It is what the audience is moved by. It is what they remember. And if you do it right, it will be from the great story or stories you've told that they will be moved to action.

May you have all success. And may all your stories be memorable.

About the writer

Arthur Thomas Ware, Distinguished Toastmaster, joined his first Toastmasters Club in 1972. An entertaining speaker, storyteller and writer, now retired, he lives in Sydney, Australia. Tom is a frequent speaker at Probus, National Seniors, Rotary and many other charitable and social organizations. Known as "The Prince of Storytellers," one Probus club has invited him back now fewer than fourteen times over the past eighteen years. His audiences have included Master Mariners, the Australian Navigation Association, and the Merchant Navy Association. Also, the New South Wales Legatees, who oversee RSL matters in that state. He is a proven performer.



Tom was born in London, U.K. in 1936 and migrated to Australia with his family in 1951. He has been a sailor, an air-ground aviation radio operator, and a police radio operator. He's worked for an electrical supply authority. He has also been a foundry labourer, truck driver, laboratory assistant, clerk, and even an Antarctic expeditioner.

Tom was a state finalist with Rostrum of Australia in 1980 and grand finalist with the City of Sydney's 'Festival of Sydney' in 1982. Since that time he has given hundreds of speeches and presented scores of seminars both at his former places of work and to interested groups. Moreover, he has successfully taught others to do the same.

A prolific writer, this is his second book on Oral Storytelling.

Tom is married with three grownup children and four grandchildren.