

FINDING AND TELLING YOUR HEALING STORIES

A WORKSHOP WITH JOEL BEN IZZY
AT RANCHO LA PUERTA

TELLING TIPS: WHAT MAKES A STORY WORK?

PERMISSION - Like so much else in life, much of storytelling is about the set-up. Find the time and create the space to let a story breathe. To help, ask permission before telling it.

COMMITMENT - Tell about something you care about, and when you choose your topic, stick to it.

45 SECONDS - Give yourself time to be inside the story before you tell it. 45 seconds of calm should be a start - a minute if you're feeling expansive. Whatever your story (or slice of description) let yourself be into that story with all of your senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Let yourself linger on the last one, touch, for it's not just what you touch with your hands, but the feeling you get inside the story. Of the first kind of senses there are five; of the second kind there are too many to name.

ZOOM IN - Part of what our stories do is to let us - and our listeners - focus. Start with the big picture - "I grew up in New England..." and work your way into further details - "in a town called Chatham, right on the elbow of Cape Cod." Then further - "And at the very edge of that town a gray and white house that was built in 1783, with a window in the attic."

DETAILS - When you tell it, offer those that make the story rich for you.

SHOW, DON'T TELL - One of the toughest lessons in writing and storytelling. When you tell instead of showing, it is like letting the air out of a balloon. Instead of saying "It was really beautiful!" let your words paint a picture of the first rays of light in appearing on your hike to La Covina que Canta, and that one spider web with the dew drops..." you get the idea.

TAKE YOUR TIME - To make a long story short is to kill it. Each story has a natural life span, and when you find yourself summarizing to squeeze in a bunch of information, you may be cutting it short. By the same token, when you take an inherently small story and stretch it out for an hour, you may be keeping it alive too long. Listen to the story - and your audience - for guidance.

FIND THE CONTRAST - When descriptions fail it is often because black and white have turned to gray. Simple contrasts - in weather, setting, colors, moods - can be powerful.

- **AND THE CONFLICT** - Much as we may wish to avoid these in life, we love them in stories and movies. There's always a problem, and as the problem grows, so grows the story.

SOMEBODY WANTS SOMETHING - This usually has something to do with the problem. If we can relate to what our main character wants, we're involved in the story.

A STORY IS A GIFT - Not a performance to be judged, but a treasure to be passed on.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE - Remember, you're building a bridge from them to the story. Make connections to what they have in common - perhaps the place, perhaps the weather, perhaps the time of day. And, remember, they're just people.

KNOW YOUR ENDING LINE - And when you get there, stop.

WHAT'S A STORY?

A problem recounted so as to make us curious, make us care, and make us feel.

It does this in our head, our heart and our gut. Usually it's driven by "want" and/or fear.

There are three basic ingredients: Person, Place & Problem

A HANDY STORY TEMPLATE:

Once upon a time...
...every day, every day
...and then, one day....
...because of that.... (repeat)
...until finally
...and ever since then...

(adapted from Kenn Adams, How to Improvise a Full-length Play)

SOME STORY STRINGS: Remember to take the time to let each one breathe...

Think back to a place you once liked to go.

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Think of a teacher you remember

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Looking back over your life, can you recall a time
when you found yourself astounded
by a single color?

☞ ☞

Close your eyes until your inner ear hears a piece of music that you once loved. As you listen to it, let it bring back all the memories that went with it.

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Try to recall a smell you loved when you were a child. Once you have it, try to conjure it up in your memory, letting your other senses fill in the scene.

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Describe a photograph that's meaningful to you - and tell why.

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Books by Joel ben Izzy: *The Beggar King and the Secret of Happiness* (Algonquin, 2003)
Dreidels on the Brain (Dial, 2016). For more info on Joel's books as well as his story telling, writing and consulting go to storypage.com or write Joel@storypage.com

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