

MY INTEREST IN STORYTELLING stretches back into the last century to my early childhood when my maternal grandmother, Nana Betty, would tell me stories to coax me to eat. Spoon in hand poised in front of my face, she would tell me about the exploits of a giraffe, her lead protagonist (with an uncanny resemblance to me), who would eagerly stretch its neck up to the top of a tree for a tender morsel at certain moments in the plot, which she would emphasize by pausing; that moment in the story coincided with the moment she would put a spoonful of applesauce into my mouth, transforming me from a finicky eater to an avid listener and participant in the story as I began to catch on to the story's pattern and my role in it. When I was a little older, five or six, she would walk me and my sister, Michele, through the streets of her neighborhood in Manhattan Beach (New York), introducing us as members of "Meet the Press," which she would then point out as the longest-running show on TV (as it still is), and prompting us to tell a story about ourselves to her neighbors sitting on their front stoops, who were apparently eager to hear our latest autobiographical installments.

From the perspective of many decades later, it's clear that this child's play of story listening and story telling was serious business that generated far more than my grandmother could have imagined. After all, we make

sense of who we are through the stories we tell about ourselves—and then, in one way or another, live. Over the years, I have told and retold versions of the “Nana” story in multiple forums, both personal and professional. I have also continued my family’s storytelling tradition, first by telling my son, Benjamin, when he was a two-year-old, tales of the hardworking garbageman, who, like Benjamin, finished his day with a bubble bath and a bottle, to help my son manage his fear of the loud and unexpected whine of the garbageman’s truck, and then by inviting him to lead a family storytelling hour in which he had the authority to set rules about what book should be discussed, by whom, and for how long. Storytelling is an inheritance he has enjoyed from the great-grandmother for whom he was named but whom he never met.

In the many years I’ve taught organizational storytelling, I continue to recommend that, if nothing else, the professionals I’m working with should read and tell stories to their children or to the children in their lives, even create a “storytelling hour,” led by the children, who should be encouraged to tell their own tales, critique the adults’, and exchange thoughts about books they’re reading. Scholars of literacy recognize the importance of telling stories to children and listening to theirs. This is how storytellers are nurtured.

Early in my career I had a special interest in stories. Though I’ve spent most of my career teaching business students and consulting with professionals in the workplace, I hold a doctorate in comparative literature, have written a dissertation on autobiographical narrative, and have taught a graduate course in literature on a topic that weaves together students’ life stories and those of published writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Lillian Hellman, Maya Angelou, and Mary McCarthy. I am also a lifelong reader of fiction and history.

Much of my work in organizational storytelling has taken place in the strategic studies programs offered at UCLA Anderson School of Management, where I am the director of the management communication program and advise teams of MBA students (some of whom already hold senior management positions) on strategy projects that require storytelling. In my work with these MBAs, we have tackled projects for organizations that range from high-tech entrepreneurial firms, in our award-winning

Global Access Program, to large multinational corporations like Coca-Cola, Disney, Fox, Hewlett-Packard, Johnson & Johnson, Microsoft, Navistar, Nestlé, Northrop Grumman, Oracle, Sony, and Sun Microsystems. The art of storytelling helps leaders—and aspiring leaders—put together compelling and memorable cases for their recommendations, embedding significant details and data into their stories to substantiate the future they envision for an organization.

This book has been the most social writing adventure of my career. Writing a book can be a very solitary act, but this one is about dialogues, especially with corporate communication professionals, who are often the chief organizational experts in storytelling (though no one holds that title), but also with filmmakers, CEOs of small companies, academic experts in management and communication, MBA students at UCLA Anderson School of Management, and corporate communication students from the University of Lugano's "MScCom" Executive Master of Science in Communications Management program who study strategic management at UCLA Anderson each summer. The Acknowledgments section at the end of the book lists all those whom I've interviewed for the book.

My thanks to all the people involved in the making of the book. At UCLA Anderson, I am very grateful to Professor Alfred E. Osborne Jr., senior associate dean, and to Elaine Hagan, executive director of the Harold and Pauline Price Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, for research and travel support; to head librarian of the UCLA Anderson Rosenfeld Library, Rita Costello, and her assistant Jeannette Boca Montez for tracking down secondary source material and addressing my research questions; and to John Morris, faculty advisor in the Anderson Global Access Program, Jill Hisey of the Office of Alumni Relations, and Nelson Gayton, executive director of the Center for Management of the Enterprise in Media, Entertainment, and Sports, for putting me in touch with experts in organizational storytelling. I remember and value the many conversations I've had with Nelson exchanging personal stories and reflecting on their impact on our lives and our work.

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Dave Samson of Chevron, Marike Westra of Philips, and Perry Yeatman of Kraft.

Thanks as well to the Arthur W. Page Society for providing a network of corporate communication professionals, which was invaluable to my research. Colleagues who are members of the Management Communication Association, a small group of faculty who lead communication programs at major business schools, also provided me with a much needed forum for discussing parts of the book—at the very beginning stages in the mid-1990s at Dartmouth’s Tuck School of Business and more recently at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business.

I have been blessed with highly intelligent reviewers who were generous with their time and commented extensively on the manuscript. They include Daphne Jameson (Cornell University), Marty Nord (Vanderbilt University), Kathy Rentz (University of Cincinnati), Barbara Shwom (Northwestern University), and my former colleague and coauthor Jone Rymer. Their questions and comments pushed me to delve more deeply into the topic. Of course, any errors are my responsibility.

When I began putting together a proposal for the book, my colleague Eric Flamholtz introduced me to Margo Beth Fleming, acquisitions editor for organizational studies and economics at Stanford University Press, and told me he thought she’d be an ideal editor for a book that brings together the literary and the managerial. He was so right. Margo’s belief in the project and suggestions at every stage have made the book possible.

I am grateful as well to my husband, Don Brabston, for his support (emotional and technical) and patience during those many times when this book took over our home offices and our lives, and to our son, Benjamin Brabston, a young management consultant who continues to challenge and enrich my thinking. Two mathematically gifted men, they understand, in Benjamin’s words, “You can’t throw around a bunch of numbers and think you’ll be convincing.” Don suggested that I say at least a word about our two sable-brown Burmese cats, Google and Yahoo: though they do not tell stories, they are the subject of many and a reminder that work should be balanced by at least a little time stretched out in the sun.

Over the last dozen years or so, I have had the great pleasure and honor of working with Bob Foster and Elwin Svenson, the leadership team for

UCLA Anderson's Global Access Program (GAP), our highly ranked entrepreneurial and strategic studies program, and of participating in this inspired educational program since its inception. GAP is the major educational forum in which I have taught MBAs how to put together and deliver memorable cases for their strategic recommendations to outside client organizations—stories that require students to bring together critical thinking and communication capabilities and to embed significant data and analysis in their stories to substantiate the future they envision for their clients. In GAP, I have also been able to revise and sharpen my thinking about data-based organizational storytelling and apply all of this to the continued growth of our students and the companies we are assisting. None of this would have been possible without the standards of excellence and the spirit of openness to new ideas and practical application that Bob and Sven have created. As just one indication of their global impact on education and business, both of them have been awarded a knighthood by the Finnish government for their extraordinary service to business development and US-Finnish relations. This book is dedicated to them.

Manhattan Beach (California)

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