



## Be Real #4: Telling Stories

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  1. Tell a bear-at-the-door story.
  2. Connect the specific to the general (or vice versa).
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### INTRODUCTION

*"I begin already to weigh my words and sentences more than I did, and am looking about for a sentiment, an illustration or a metaphor in every corner of the room. Could my Ideas flow as fast as the rain in the Store closet it would be charming.  
Letter, January 24, 1809, to her sister, Cassandra.*

When are you at your storytelling best? Is it when you're recounting recent events at coffee with friends? on the phone? at the dinner table with family? And what makes that your best? What are you doing at that point? Are you entertaining, informing, presenting your life the way you'd like it to be understood? Maybe all of the above?

This lesson is about using tried storytelling approaches on scrapbook pages. While you may not use the forms exactly as others have, knowing about them and seeing how your own stories fit with them, gets you thinking about what the incidents in your life mean beyond the obvious. It spurs you to think about causes and effects and the impact of and on your characters' personalities. The result of this thinking yields stories with complexity and layers of meaning.

**TELLING STORIES ON YOUR SCRAPBOOK PAGES****1. Tell a "bear at the door" story.**

The beginning of your story is your hook, the element that you use to draw your listener in. One of the easiest kinds of stories to "hook" a reader with is the "bear-at-the-door" story. This is a story in which there's an immediate and pressing problem -- like, say, if there really were a bear at your door.

**beginning**

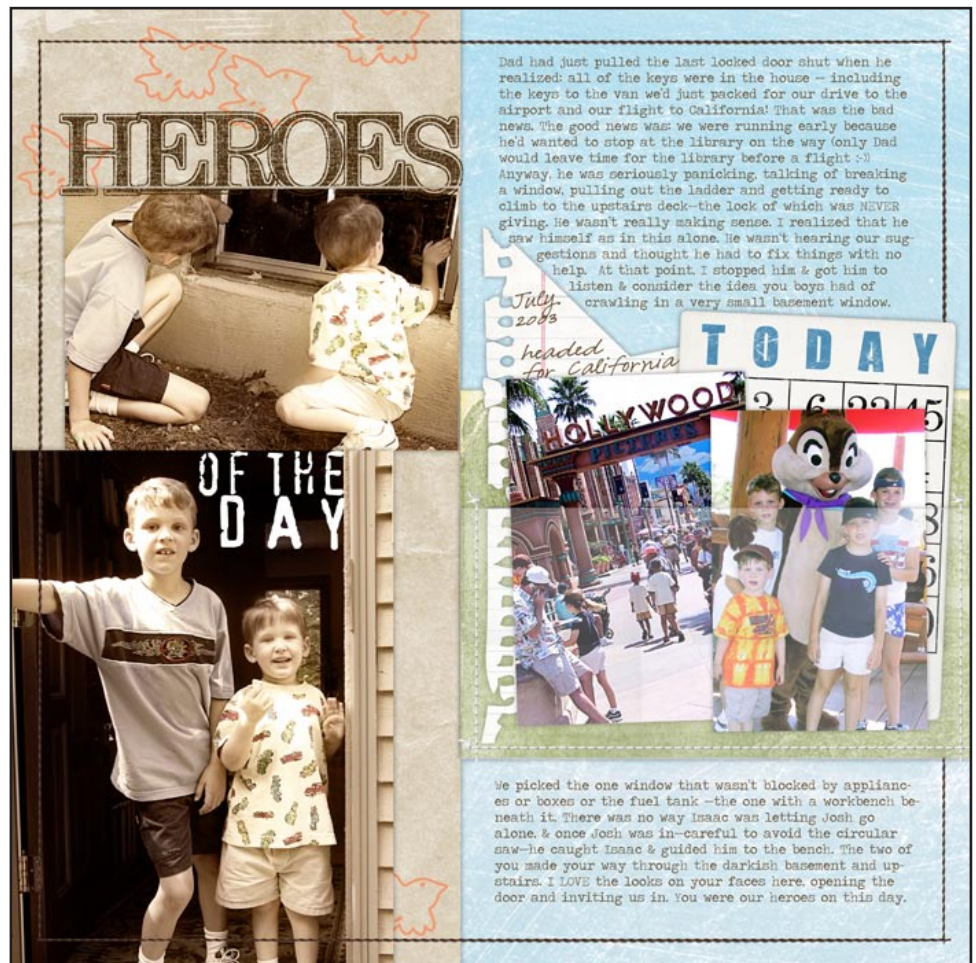
When you're scrapbooking this kind of story, make your viewer immediately aware:

a) of the problem; and  
b) of the urgency of the problem. Use one or more of:

lines, photos, design, color, images, and/or motif to make this initial impression.

**middle**

As you write the story, be aware of how the personalities of your main characters impact the events you're recounting. In "Heroes of the Day," I wrote of my husband's blindness to the help around him, my frustration with that, and my kids' pride in how they helped us out. Adding these aspects to the story takes it beyond an action-filled recount to a story that tells a longer-lasting lesson.



**end**

Be sure to tell and/or show how the problem was resolved, and, if it's relevant, any longer-lasting impact of the incident.

How I scrapbooked a "bear-at-the-door" story in "Heroes of the Day:"

- ◇ Journaling. The opening lines tell just what the problem is and why this is so pressing. The story proceeds with character complications and ends with a happy resolution.
- ◇ Photos. Desaturated photos of the boys solving our problem are emphasized. They contrasted with smaller, full-color photos of our later times in California.
- ◇ Design. The left side of the page has a darker look and features the photos of our dilemma. The right side, with blue skies and a pocket of memorabilia has a lighter feel that shows where we were headed with the problem occurred -- and that we did make it there happily.
- ◇ Title. The title indicates the outcome of the situation.

JOURNALING for "Heroes of the Day:" Dad had just pulled the last locked door shut when he realized: all of the keys were in the house -- including the keys to the van we'd just packed for our drive to the airport and our flight to California! That was the bad news. The good news was: we were running early because he'd wanted to stop at the library on the way (only Dad would leave time for the library before a flight ;-)) Anyway, he was seriously panicking, talking of breaking a window, pulling out the ladder and getting ready to climb to the upstairs deck--the lock of which was NEVER giving. He wasn't really making sense. And I realized, that he saw himself as in this alone. He wasn't hearing our suggestions and thought he had to fix things with no help. At that point, I stopped him & got him to listen & consider the the idea you boys had of crawling in a very small basement window. We didn't think we'd locked the door to the 1st floor. We picked the one window that wasn't blocked by appliances or boxes or the fuel tank --the one with a workbench beneath it. There was no way Isaac was letting Josh go alone, & once Josh was in--careful to avoid the circular saw--he caught Isaac & guided him to the bench. The two of you made your way through the darkish basement and upstairs. I LOVE the looks on your faces here, opening the door and inviting us in. You were our heroes on this day.

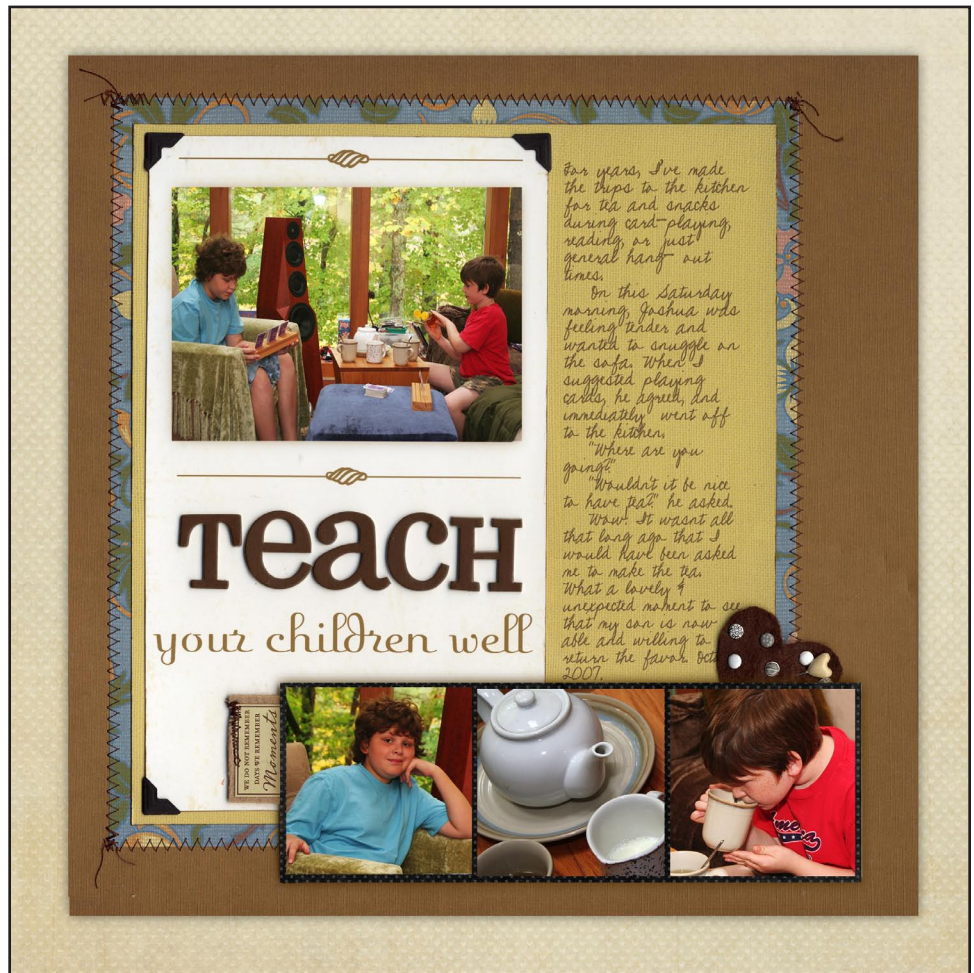
**2. Connect the specific to the general (or vice versa)**

Small exchanges and incidents in our daily lives are often indicative of important character traits, of repeating patterns, and even new trends.

Making those connections explicit on your page lets your viewers in closer and gives them a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the lives you're recording. What's more, writing through these things often reveals them to you as you write.

You can go two ways with this kind of page. You can

- a) begin with a specific incident and use it as support for a general statement (i.e., in "Teach Your Children Well," I record a specific morning of tea and cards and then extend the events of that morning to the more general idea of my children growing up to take care of the things I'd always done previously); or
- b) begin writing about a general understanding or feeling you have and then look through your photos to find specific instances in support of that idea.



How I illustrated a general idea based upon a specific incident in "Teach Your Children Well:"

- ◇ Photos. One particular morning of tea and cards is shown in the photos.
- ◇ Journaling. The journaling begins with an introduction to the general idea of me taking care of my children in small ways. It then transitions to a scene showing what was happening at the time these photos were taken. The scene is followed by an explicit telling of what I came to realize and appreciate about where my son is at now as a result of the scene.

Basically: the specific scene is sandwiched between an introduction of the general idea and a summing up of the general idea.

- ◇ Title. The title, with it's connection to a song and it's explicit meaning, is a cue that there is more going on here than tea and cards. If it were just about a love morning of tea and cards, it would have a more simple label-type title, something like: "Tea and Cards."

JOURNALING for "Teach Your Children Well:"  
For years, I've made the trips to the kitchen for tea and snacks during card-playing, reading, or just general hang-out times.

On this Saturday morning, Joshua was feeling tender and wanted to snuggle on the sofa. When I suggested playing cards, he agreed, and immediately went off to the kitchen. "Where are you going?"

"Wouldn't it be nice to have tea?" he asked.

Wow. It wasn't all that long ago that I would have been asked to make the tea. What a lovely and unexpected moment to see that my son is now able and willing to return the favor. Oct 2007.

**3) Scrapbook a journey--small or large, figurative or real.**

The "journey" is the oldest story form known. It's in the bible, children's storybooks, and Greek myths. It's a story in which your subject leaves home on a "journey" and returns transformed. The journey can be a true trip or a more figurative journey of the spirit. Examples of real life incidents that are "journey" stories include pursuing a weight-loss program, getting through a year with an intimidating boss, and doing something new that's out of your comfort zone. In journey stories, there are often unexpected meetings and events along the way that all contribute to the effect of the journey.



When writing a “journey” story, begin by conveying how the journey came about. Tell of the events along the way, and, by then end, be sure you’ve told about the impact of the journey on your subject.

How I used the idea of a “journey” story to scrapbook a first experience of my son’s in “Anime:”

- ◇ Journaling. This was a literal journey of 50 miles to a convention center. The more meaningful journey was of seeking out others with a shared interest and gathering up the nerve and resources to meet them. The journaling tells this story.
- ◇ Design/Photos. The design is journaling-heavy with one focal-point photo of my journeyer and smaller photos of the general event.

**JOURNALING for “Anime:”** Joshua, When I asked you what you really wanted to do this summer, you said you wanted to go to an Anime convention (Isaac wanted to go to a baseball game). You found one online that was to be in Boston, and while the date and location kept getting changed, you kept your eye on it and kept insisting that we were going. None of your friends had any interest in this, and poked kind fun at you for your passion about it. I didn’t really “get” what this was and tried to dissuade you, offering up other ideas, but you were insistent.

It wasn’t until we were almost there—on the last Saturday of August—that I found out you were nervous. I actually said that I was a little nervous.

“You’re nervous?” you said, and proceeded to tell me that didn’t help your own nervousness. You were dressed in the Gintoki costume we’d made for Halloween along with a treasured bokken you’d tracked down online. It was surreal parking in the structure for the convention center and seeing others walking by in outfits with wings, odd headdresses, weapons, hoods, and so much more. That’s the point where I think my 12-year-old self would have lost nerve and gone home. But you collected yourself and we made that walk across the structure, too. In the lobby we saw that the participants’ ages ranged from 11ish to early 20s. We saw that people were into this. There were parents dropping off teenagers and then some other moms like myself with younger kids—sticking out in our khakis and summer Ts.

You wanted me close for the early hours of the event and you did a lot of watching from the sidelines, but finally you were able to go off a bit and enter into the activities while I stayed on the edge with my laptop. Activities included a dancing lesson, skit improvs, a vendor area with lots of Japanese and anime-related stuff, board games, a large video game area, and a life-sized chess game with the pieces being people behaving like their characters and using their particular anime skills to remove other pieces.

For you, it was a rming to see and meet so many others with this interest. You found cool stuff at the shopping area. You enjoyed being recognized as GinToki and asked where you’d purchased your bokken. You were happy to come in 2nd in a video game competition and totally found irony in a college kid wearing one of those school-boy-uniform costumes winning while playing as Peach. It was definitely interesting and different and you had a really fine time—you’d found a group of people who shared your interests and enjoyed their

#### 4. Tell the story of when a stranger came to town.

If the journey story is the oldest story form in existence, the "visitation" story is the next oldest. This is the story of an unexpected visitor –or demand or event—showing up at your door and the subsequent detour from everyday life as you know it. The detour you take because of the "stranger in town" may be brief or long-lasting, but it is caused by the intruding event. Understand that this is a classic story shape and use that to inform pages about new people (or demands or events) in your life. Your visitor could be new neighbors, an influential teacher, even a new family member.

When writing journaling for a visitation story, begin with the introduction of your visitor. Proceed to make clear what disruption to life as you've known it the visitor makes. Continue the story to an ending that shows and/or tells of the changes that have come of the disruption this visitor has brought.

## CAMPAIGNING *with Victoria*



January, 2008

July 2007. The boys and I start going to Dover to the Clinton campaign office to make phone calls. We go on Tuesdays after music lessons.

Sept 2007. We meet Victoria at UNI's Durham Day - she spots my button and corrals me in to talk though I'm already a supporter. I go find Neil and we convince him to let Hillary speak to his classes about volunteering.

Nov 2007. House party for Hillary. Co-hosted with Sara.

Dec 2007. I canvas Durham with Victoria regularly. on Mast Road, Newmarket Road, Packers Falls Road, Worthen, Griffith, Surrey, Carriage, Little Hale, Wednesday Hill, Hampshire, Fitz Farm, Mill, Mill Pond, Faculty, Valentine Hill, Burnham, Church Hill, Chesley, Garden, Smith, Thompson, Oyster River, Madbury, Emerson, Edgewood . . . the street names just keep going through my mind.

Jan 4-9, 2008. Get out the vote efforts. Durham office opens. I canvas daily. Hang door hangers on Tuesday morning then canvas more and then man the polls til closing time.

Jan 10, 2008. Meet Victoria at the Durham office where -- she's totally pack and leaving town.

Jan 11, 2008. Help clean up at the

When this primary campaign began, I had no idea how much time I would spend with Victoria, nor how fond of & impressed with this 19-year-old I would become. I'd always planned to work at the office, on the phones--I didn't think I had the time or the nerve to go out knocking on people's doors. Victoria was persistent, though, totally believing in Hillary Clinton, and single-handedly rallying the volunteers in Durham-- on the campus and in the community. And so I joined her on the streets and then eventually I went out on my own (and with Elaine and Julia) to the backroads. Through hours of canvassing alongside Victoria, I learned a lot about her -- personally and politically. It was amazing how much in synch we were with our political beliefs. It wasn't just that we agreed on the same things--it was also that there were things that others said of the candidates or the election that just didn't or couldn't "get."

It was especially hard the morning after the unexpected (to me) victory to come hug her good-bye and watch her drive off to Dartmouth. Poof! Like that! Six months of hard and frequent work--done! But because of Victoria's pushing, I'd been a part of an historic election, I'd gotten the confidence to go out and talk to 100s of citizens about the candidates which was fascinating and so very affirming of how much people cared, and I made a wonderful new friend.

Dover office. Say goodbye to Jonathan and Iillana and clear road signs.





How I scrapped my time with the stranger who came to our town last year in "Campaigning with Victoria:"

- ◇ Photos. The photos feature Victoria and myself, but they also reveal who a supporting character in this story is--Hillary Clinton and her primary campaign in New Hampshire.
- ◇ Title. The title makes clear that the main subject of my page is Victoria and not Hillary Clinton, even though it is Clinton who brings us together.
- ◇ Journaling. The journaling begins with a statement from me about Victoria that indicates how important she became in my daily life. The middle elaborates on the time we spent together. The end tells of her exit from town (which coincides with the exit of the Clinton campaign) and my feelings about that as well as all that I gained from her presence and this experience.
- ◇ Design. Patterned papers and colors support the political theme that is key to this story.

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## 5) Encapsulate a story

This new era of texting in which we're currently living brings with it an appreciation for brevity. Supposedly Ernest Hemmingway was asked to do this and wrote the following: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Last year, the online magazine *Smith* asked its readers to write the story of their own lives in a single six-word sentence and ended up with a collection of memoirs that are sometimes sad, sometimes funny, and always concise. You can see several of these memoirs accompanied by photos and art at this National Public Radio webpage.

Challenge yourself to do this kind of encapsulation with a life or an incident. While I've never met Paula Gilarde's Auntie Rie, this page is a powerful statement that gives fabulous insight into who she must be. The pairing of a vibrant photo with these six words: "Destined for Convent. Left. Thank God." tells us so much about the arc of this woman's life since childhood.



scrapbook page by Paula Gilarde.

How Paula scrapbooked a six-word biography in "Rie:"

- ◇ Journaling. Just six words. And they convey so much. And the last two: "Thank God" are a brilliant and fun play on the words that come before.
- ◇ Photo. This photo of a smiling, almost mischievous-looking woman working in the kitchen hints at a large and happy personality. It convinces the viewer of the accuracy of the accompanying six-word biography.
- ◇ Design. Vibrant colors, distressed edges, tilted photo, and ruffled ribbon all evoke a cozy and joyful mood that support the relief revealed in the last two words of the biography: "Thank God."

**TRIGGERS: identifying journeys**

For yourself and any of the people that you scrapbook regularly, answer the following questions.

Where have you gone literally in the last year? \_\_\_\_\_

Why did you go? \_\_\_\_\_

Who did you meet? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened that was unplanned/unexpected? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you do or look at things differently upon your return? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*

What new thing have you tried in the last year? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did you/would you repeat this experience? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you incorporated anything new into your daily life as a result of this new thing that you tried? \_\_\_\_\_