

Direct Forum is a free email newsletter containing useful direct marketing tips, news updates and how-to information. It's convenient, informative and I am not trying to sell you anything!

1. Why storytelling is hard to do

2. The art and craft of storytelling

3. A step-by-step analysis of a great story

Why storytelling is hard to do

Raising funds by many methods—direct mail, crowdfunding, telemarketing, peer-to-peer, etc.—is not just asking people for funds but in many cases it involves telling a story. And many people find it hard to do that in a way that is captivating, be it a short written message or a more complicated format such as a video.

Storytelling means having to learn a new skill: Most fundraisers are passionate about the charity they work

for but translating that passion into words often requires that they learn a new skill.

Storytelling means listening and observing: To craft a good story you have to pay special attention to details like the twitch of a hand, a change in facial expression or a nuance in tone of voice. Above all you have to have the patience to listen and observe intently.

You guessed it. This issue is all about storytelling.

The art and craft of story telling



In fundraising many of the most successful appeals include stories that noticeably touch the audience.

Two novels that moved me deeply were Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*.

To me both of these novels were very powerful illustrations of an unjust system.

My work involves a lot of story telling—whether I am writing about people in the industry for my regular column Direct & Personal for *Direct Marketing Magazine* or featuring a disadvantaged person for a charity's direct mail appeal.

I've learned that the art of storytelling involves putting yourself into the other person's life, attempting to wear their shoes so you can accurately write about their journey.

Whether I am writing a bio for *Direct*

Marketing Magazine or for a charity, these are the steps I usually follow:

1. **Send the subject a list of questions.**

This allows them to frame their answers in their own words. It also gives them ample time to reflect on each question, rather than feeling put on the spot as they might had you started by interviewing them directly.

2. **Sift through their answers for nuggets.**

This helps you frame their story. You can mull over what seems most important to them and form thoughts as to how their journey led them to the life they lead today.

3. **Dig deeper for more answers and details of**

the interesting parts of their life. This is generally done face-to-face or on Skype. If those methods aren't available, use the telephone, emails or snail mail. Do whatever you have to, to get those crucial facts about any life-altering aspects of their journey.

CONTINUES ...

The craft of storytelling is organizing all the information.

- **Hook your reader** by finding a compelling way to start the story;
- **Enable your audience to feel** what the hero of your story feels, what they have lived through;
- **Create the setting** so your audience gets caught up in being there;
- **Describe all characters involved** so that your reader has a feel for the main character and all other influences in their life;
- **Set the plot** by giving information about what, where, when and how;
- **Fill in the backstory** by telling of actual events, challenges, facts;
- **Add important details** using underlying structure including the set-up, the build-up, the pay-off and finally the denouement.

Point of View and style are really personal and distinctive since they generally come from the perspective of the writer. More important is TLC. No that doesn't stand for Tender Loving Care but means something just as important.

In this case, TLC is Targeted, Lean and Creative.


Targeted is important because if it is not meaningful to the reader they will not read it.

Lean is because people these days have little time to read.

Creative means entertaining and informative.

Here are examples of storytelling in a direct mail piece for Special Olympics Ontario:


September XX, 2014



SPORT
THE TRUE GIFT OF FREEDOM

Dear Ms. Sample,

When Abbas Syed was invited by Special Olympics Ontario to assist the Golden Gate Chef in the Halal Food Fest presentation at the International Center, he was a big hit. More than 5000 people attended the event during two days.



Besides being a Special Olympics' athlete he is also a model and an actor. He knows how to entertain a crowd. *(More about him in the P.S.)*

BUT NOT ALL THINGS HAVE COME THIS EASILY TO ABBAS

Abbas was born with Down Syndrome to the immigrant family of Rashid and Sukaina Syed, who came here in 1989 from Dubai to start a new life. His arrival and the diagnosis that came with it were a bit overwhelming.

However, with the assistance and encouragement of all his family members and friends, they have coped and Abbas has learned to handle his challenges very well.

When he was about 6 years old, his parents began looking for physical activities for him to get involved in. They found that Brampton had a Special Olympics program. So they signed him up for swimming and gymnastics.

Today Abbas continues to swim all year long, plays baseball in summer and basketball in fall and winter, with Special Olympics Ontario. Abbas has won many medals and trophies at swim meets and was given a team award in baseball and basketball.

His crowning moment came when he was selected to accept the honor as CONTINUED...

YES, I want to support the acceptance and dignity of all athletes.

Enclosed, please find my \$_____ tax-deductible donation to help our "Special Olympics Athletes."

Email: _____
Phone: _____

<Ms. Joan Sample>
<Address 1>
<Address 2>
<Address 3>

I would like to remain anonymous. To volunteer, please call (416) 447-8326. Please return this form with your donation in the postage paid envelope. Official receipts will be issued for gifts over \$10.

Monthly Giving Payment Option

I authorize Special Olympics to withdraw _____ / per month

Method of payment #1

I have enclosed a one time cheque payable to Special Olympics Ontario

I have enclosed a blank cheque marked 'VOID' for my monthly giving option (I authorize Special Olympics to withdraw the above amount on the 1st of every month.)

Method of payment #2

Please charge my credit card: VISA MasterCard American Express

Card Number: _____ Expiry date: M | M | Y | Y

Name on Card: _____ Signature: _____

We appreciate the support of each and everyone of our donors. Thanks to you, we can continue to provide a better quality of life for people with intellectual disabilities. From time to time, Special Olympics Ontario exchanges its donor list with other reputable non-profit organizations in order to recruit more supporters. If you do not wish your name to be exchanged, please let us know: 65 Overlea Blvd., Suite 200, Toronto, Ontario M4H 1P1. Tel: (416) 447-8326; Ext 229. Toll Free: 1-888-333-5515 • Charitable tax No. 11906 8435 RR0001

CONTINUES ...

FUNDRAISING!

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Ann Morrison
The power of one

Foundation Fighting Blindness saying she had been made an honor of... "I've been a volunteer for a long time and this honor is a great honor for me."



Ann Morrison with a young boy

ANN MORRISON is a marketing executive at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. She has worked for the marketing department for over 10 years.

Foundation Fighting Blindness. The most important part of the award is that it is given to someone who has made a difference in the lives of others.

"I think it's a great honor to be recognized for the work I've done for the foundation."

"I've been a volunteer for a long time and this honor is a great honor for me."

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FUNDRAISING!

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How Ann got more involved with the charity... "I had organized a walk for the charity in 2008 and again in 2010. The first year it raised \$1,500. In 2010, the Foundation also said if I would be willing to come work as a fundraiser for the organization, they would pay me \$10,000."

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minerva fundraising solutions. Are YOU Ready for 2014 Event Season? Pledge & Honor Form Recognition, Data Entry & Scanning, Banking & Donation Processing, Tax Receiving - we can help!

Here are examples of my column Direct & Personal in Direct Marketing Magazine.

The article is in the May 2014 issue of the magazine, to read it go to: www.dmn.ca



A step-by-step analysis of a great story

One of the most useful lessons I learned was from my first boss, Christopher Williams, the Creative Director at Dorland Werbeagentur in Germany.

I had just graduated from Germany's Hochschule für Gestaltung (modeled after the Bauhaus School of Design) so I thought I was hot stuff and ready to shake up the advertising world.

He looked at my portfolio and shook his head. He then told me to go to the library and pick up the latest Advertising Awards Annual.

He said, "Select three Ads that you like. For the next two weeks I want you not to just study these Ads, but I want you to examine and analyze them thoroughly. Then I want you to copy them exactly and tell me why you like them. I expect you to include every small detail."

I sat there with my mouth open, stunned at what he had just said.

But for the next two weeks, I grudgingly pored over every

Ad in the annual and picked three of them. For the first time I scrutinized every detail. I analyzed why the Ad appealed to me. What was so powerful about the headline and how the main headline matched the visual?

I looked at how the visual was lit—was it back or side lighting? How was it cropped?

I looked at the typeface selected and positioning of the headline, at how the body copy was indented and what typefaces were used.

I studied the body copy that supported the headline; how thoughts were logically presented; how each paragraph was connected to the next one—how they were seamlessly woven together.

I discovered that I learned more by examining those three Ads than I had in the four years I had just spent at School.

So here is my analysis of a well-crafted fundraising story on the next few pages.

CONTINUES ...



You're going to have trouble believing this letter. I mean, what I'm about to tell you is so strange and incredible, you'll never forget it. But please understand that every single word of this story is true!!! I'm really praying you'll take a few minutes to read it.

Thank you.

Dear Friend,

She came to our front door Tuesday morning, dressed in dirty rags, holding a little aluminum paint can in her arms.

From the second she stepped inside our shelter, she mystified us. Whatever she did, wherever she went, the paint can never left her hands.

When Kathy sat in the crisis shelter, the can sat in her arms. She took the can with her to the cafeteria that first morning she ate, and to bed with her that first night she slept.

When she stepped into the shower, the can was only a few feet away. When the homeless girl dressed, the can rested alongside her feet.

"I'm sorry, this is mine," she told our counsellors, whenever we asked her about it. "this can belongs to me."

"Do you want to tell me what's in it, Kathy? I'd ask her? "Um, not today," she said, "not today."

When Kathy was sad, or angry or hurt – which happened a lot – she took her paint can to a quiet dorm room on the 3rd floor. Many times on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday, I'd pass by her room, and watch her rock gently back and forth, the can in her arms. Sometimes she'd talk to the paint can in low whispers.

I've been around troubled kids all my life, (over 41,000 homeless kids will come to our shelter this year!). I'm used to seeing them carry stuffed animals (some of the roughest, toughest kids at covenant house have a stuffed animal). Every kid has something – needs something – to hold.

Great start with a handwritten note— makes it personal and draws you in. It also lets you know right off the bat that it is a story about a real person.

The opening line about the person with an aluminum paint can is intriguing and you are hooked...

...by the middle of the letter you too want to know what is in that can.

CONTINUES ...

But the paint can? I could feel alarm bells ringing in my head.

Early this morning, I decided to “accidentally” run into her again. “Would you like to join me for breakfast?” I said. “That would be great,” she said.

For few minutes we sat in a corner of our cafeteria, talking quietly over the din of 150 ravenous homeless kids. Then I took a deep breath, and plunged into it...

“Kathy, that’s a really nice can, what’s in it?”

For a long time, Kathy didn’t answer. She rocked back and forth, her hair swaying across her shoulders. Then she looked over at me, tears in her eyes.

“It’s my mother,” she said.

“Oh,” I said. “What do you mean it’s your mother? I asked.

“It’s my mother’s ashes,” she said.

“I went and got them from the funeral home. See, I even asked them to put a label right here on the side. It has her name on it.”

Kathy held the can up before my eyes. A little label on the side chronicled all that remained of her mother: date of birth, date of death, name. That was it. Kathy pulled the can close, and hugged it.

“I never really knew my mother, Sister,” Kathy told me. “I mean, she throw me in the garbage two days after I was born.” (we checked Kathy’s story. Sure enough the year Kathy was born, the New York newspapers ran a story, saying that the police had found a little infant girl in the dumpster... And yes, it was two days after Kathy was born.)

“I ended up living in a lot of foster homes, mad at my mother,” Kathy said. “but then, I decided I was going to try and find her. I got lucky – someone knew where she was living. I went to her house.”

“She wasn’t there, sister,” she said. “My mother was in the hospital. She had Aids. She was dying.”

“I went to the hospital, and I got to meet her the day before she died. My mother told me she loved me, Sister,” Kathy said crying. “She told me she loved me.” (We doubled-checked Kathy’s story... Every word of it was true)

Short sentences and indented paragraphs: They are not there just for aesthetics. Both are there for the reader’s convenience. They help readers read faster. Indents also make it look like a letter that is more inviting

The conversation style makes you want to read on.

CONTINUES ...

I reached out and hugged Kathy, and she cried in my arms for a long, long time. It was tough getting my arms around her, because she just wouldn't put the paint can down. But she didn't seem to mind. I know I didn't...

I saw Kathy again, a couple of hours ago, eating dinner in our cafeteria. She made a point to come up and say hi. I made a point to give her an extra hug...

I've felt like crying tonight. I can't seem to stop feeling this way. I guess this story – the whole horrible, sad, unreal mess – has gotten to me tonight.

I guess that's why I just had to write you this letter.

Please – I know you and I have never met before. But I need to ask you something very important, and I'm praying you'll consider it, if you can.

Do you think you could help Kathy... and our other kids at Covenant House? Please?

There's one very important thing you need to know about Covenant House and our kids and it is this – a donation to covenant house is the absolute best way you can help the terrified and helpless homeless kids on our streets!

This year more than 41,000 homeless kids... Kids who are 12, 16, 17 years old ... Will come to our doors.

We'll give these kids food, and a safe bed to sleep in (the streets are incredibly dangerous!) And medicine, and counselling if the need it (most kids do).

But most of all, we'll give these kids love. For thousands of these kids, the love we give them tonight will be the first love they've ever known!

We are here for kids like Kathy 24 hours a day, in 9 cities across America, 365 days a year. No kid – no kid! – is ever turned away ever!

Thanks to the love and help of thousands of caring people – people just like you – Covenant House spends more than the entire federal government to help these kids. (That's what I meant when I said that giving to us is the best way to help these kids.)

But so much more needs to be done. And we can't do it alone.

Do you think maybe you could help? Please? Any donation you can send - \$15, \$25, \$50 – any amount, will be a godsend to our kids. Please do it today if you can.

Letters like this one, that take you on a personal journey and end on such a heart warming and touching note, makes one feel complete.

Only the final few paragraphs are a simple call to action.

Please.

I want to assure you of one very important thing. We're going to do all we can to help Kathy, to let her know she is loved. And I know, with your help, we are going to reach Kathy, and help her in a way no one has ever done before. You have my promise on that...

And when we do reach her, it will be because of you. It will be because people like you haven't stopped caring, and haven't stopped loving. Yes, it will be possible because of you. It will be possible because of you.

Thanks so much for reading this long letter. And please, pray for us if you can. Your prayers really help a lot.

/s/

In God's love
Sister Mary Rose
President

P.S. Our financial need is really urgent right now. Please help, if you can. (Thanks for caring...)

The word "you" is glue and on this page alone the word "you" or "your" is used 8 times. This letter does a great job of involving the reader from start to finish.

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