

Happy New Year!

Crafting Memorable Lodge Stories - Part III

(Please hand out or email the enclosed story and instructions to your members!)

We are thrilled that Author Lori Silverman has completed her three-part series on how to tell your success stories (enclosed). See the "Grapefruit Tree" story first, then read the instructions on how to craft such a memorable story about a transformative and successful lodge or Association experience that convey images, feelings, and a universal lesson for readers.



While this is somewhat like a writing class - especially for those with an affinity for writing, it is a customized, crafted lesson for any member on how to capture the best stories of your lodge to tell - to attract new members. You can also publish your own lodge story in news releases or fliers, share it with reporters as a feature, or place it on social media channels; such as your lodge website, Facebook page, or blog. You may need permission or need to create character names instead of the names of real people. Look for someone either in your lodge or perhaps a student or teacher in your community who could help create a story about your lodge. This could be initially prompted and developed by your lodge. What a great project for a YELL! group or a whole class at a local school! Wouldn't a teacher love a community-sponsored lesson where young kids or college students could try to write your lodge story from your story prompts and answers to questions you provide? What about putting a booklet together of all the wfla events or activities, to share with potential members?

First, you need to re-read all three steps Lori provided (Sept./Oct. 2012 and Jan. 2013), then share copies of the steps with whoever you ask to do this, and be sure you have a full lodge discussion about what story your lodge prefers to share with the public. Think of your best practices and choose one from those. Do you have the best festival in the region; how did it start and what challenges have you faced that made it better? Did you work with the American Legion to create the best fundraiser ever - what were those challenges and resolutions? Is one of your best events a Mother's-Father's Day and why? Did your lodge help save a struggling family in the community by holding an amazing benefit that alleviated their financial struggles, and what was the lodge's challenge? Better yet, do you know a life insurance or annuity beneficiary who was saved financially when a spouse or relative passed away? Remember, this is more than a news report like your Herald articles; this needs to get the reader involved with emotions and feelings, so your story becomes more memorable than simply stating facts.

So put your heads together at an upcoming meeting, and find a way to share a story special to your lodge members. Good luck and send me a copy if you have a completed story!

THE THIRD STEP IN TELLING STORIES: CRAFTING MEMORABLE STORIES

Written by Lori Silverman, Author of **Wake Me Up When the Data is Over: How Organizations Use Stories to Drive Results** and other books. She is also a professional speaker, consultant and owner of Partners for Progress®, a firm dedicated to helping organizations think and act differently. To learn more about her work, check out www.partnersforprogress.com, www.wakeupmycompany.com.

The holiday season is a time when many stories are shared. Some new, some old. In my family we repeat the same stories year after year, always with new embellishments. We have become so good at this that we can take over from each other in mid-sentence. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the same were true of your lodge's stories? That they are told over and over again via the media and citizens in the community-at-large because they are so memorable?

I'm often asked, "What is the secret to telling great stories? The types of stories that compel people to change their thinking, feel a particular way about an issue, or move them to take a specific action. The secret is simple: These stories are well-crafted from the start. So what are the ingredients to a well-crafted story? There are eight of them:

- * A plot (with some sort of conflict)
- * Characters
- * Dialogue, including inner reflection
- * Contrast (good/bad, etc)
- * Drama or intrigue
- * Sensory information
- * Layers of meaning
- * A "universal" lesson (related to the main character)

To help you identify each of these elements, the story, "The Grapefruit Tree Lives On" has been provided for you online at <http://www.partnersforprogress.com/Grapefruit.htm>. It is also enclosed. Various parts of it are referenced throughout this article.

Start With the Plot

Think about all the terrific movies you've seen or novels you have read. They all have a main plot: a conflict, problem issue, challenge or dilemma—that some character needs to overcome. These are not usually small issues; they typically are quite significant. Why is this? The ending of a story would be ho-hum if the plot were not all that interesting.

The same is true of the stories you have collected. They, too, need to have a significant plot line. Without it, you do not have a story. You merely have a nice description of an experience someone has had.

Before capturing a story via audiotape, ask yourself when you first hear it, "What is the main conflict?" Make sure it is compelling enough to capture people's interest. If it is not, it may need to be embellished, so that it is memorable to the listener or reader of the story.

In the grapefruit tree story, the main plot comes fairly late in the story. It's described in the paragraph that starts with, "Last summer brought the greatest challenge of them all. The tree became infected with sap sucking insects called scale." There is a subplot that comes earlier when Nancy attempts to eat the grapefruit, the one food she most hates.

The Characters

Especially in the fundraising arena, people are more inclined to give monies when individual characters are featured in a story than when a group is described. The more you can breathe life into individual characters such that listeners and readers can personally identify with them, and visualize them in their mind's eye, the better. It is always good for them to be named, even if the person who provides you with the story requests that you not use their real name.

In the grapefruit story, Nancy is the main character. Others who are mentioned are Nancy's fourth grade teacher, Mr. Goetz, her secretary and the secretary's husband, and Nancy's mom.

What About Dialogue?

Both inner and outer dialogue are crucial to ensuring a story does not turn into an example, an anecdote or a description of a series of events. Inner dialogue is what a character is thinking—or what he or she is saying to self. In the first paragraph of the grapefruit story, we hear Nancy say to herself, "Wow. What an easy question," when Mr. Goetz asks her class, "What is it that you hate?" His question is an example of outer dialogue; her thought is an example of inner dialogue.

I am often asked, what if the person who is telling me the story does not recall what was said? It is fine to create dialogue that speaks to the essence of what may have been said or thought, as long as the person who gave you the story acknowledges that these statements are a close approximation to what might have been thought or spoken.



And Then There is Contrast

To maintain the reader/listener's attention, bring contrast into a story - even if you are not provided with any when audiotaping it. Contrast has to do with distinctions: Examples include right versus wrong, good versus bad, appropriate versus inappropriate, or dark versus light.

One contrast in Nancy's story is what is mentioned in the previous example. Nancy thinks Mr. Goetz's question is easy, yet she has great difficulty swallowing the grapefruit she eats the next morning. Another contrast has to do with how the grapefruit tree survives all sorts of neglect, yet becomes ill after Nancy does everything possible to nurture it. A third is how something Nancy hated—grapefruit—turned into a tree that she loved.

Ensuring Drama or Intrigue

It is important to include events in the story that heighten excitement and interest and build toward the plot conflict. Throughout the early part of Nancy's story, this starts with her eating the grapefruit, continues through the explanation of how the tree is treated while she is in college, and how she felt about it during her first real job.

The use of analogies and metaphors can help in this arena. For example, Nancy talks about the tree as being a "surrogate child." She then goes on to talk about how her secretary's husband also grew his own tree and how they are like "proud parents" that exchange pictures. After cutting back the tree, she describes it as "looking like a discount store replica of a bonsai tree."

Sensory Information

Using words that create a sense of smell, taste, touch, hearing and visualization is key to memory retention. Sometimes these sensations will be given to you from the original teller of the story; often they will not be provided. This means you will need to transform the narrative you are given into language that is easy to recall.

When Nancy first relayed the grapefruit story to me, I mentioned to her that I actually like grapefruit—and that a lot of other people do too. I asked if she had eaten or drunk anything else along with the grapefruit. She replied, "How would I remember? That's a lot of years ago." I am the one who decided to add the phrase, "washing down each bite with a swig of milk," after Nancy took each bite of the grapefruit so that even grapefruit lovers would think, "ugh" after reading or hearing this.

Go through the story and search for all the words that create a picture in your mind's eye. There are several of them—from planting the seeds in the milk carton to the ready-made Christmas tree, to pruning the tree.

Layers of Meaning

Every story has many messages associated with it. It is your job to ensure that all of these messages and/or lessons are appropriate for the audiences that will hear or read the story. As you read through Nancy's story, ask yourself, "What does this story mean to me?" to ferret out all of these themes. Why is this important to do? First, you want to identify the one universal lesson that you want to focus on. More about this in a bit. Second, you do not want to offend anyone who may come in contact with the story.

In addition, these multiple layers of meaning create and hold interest. And they keep a reader/listener's attention. Both are important to someone being able to recall the story and being sparked to repeat it to others.

A "Universal" Lesson

In order for a story to spark some sort of change, it must have one key lesson that permeates it. In Nancy's story, it is "promote the positive." Universal lessons need to be positively stated and no more than seven to nine words in length. Making these lessons alliterative also helps them to be remembered. Once you have identified the universal lesson for a specific story, go back and recraft the story with it in mind. Everything you include in the story must reinforce it. This means that some details will be left out, even if they are interesting, because they detract from the main message.

One other memory trick is to take the main words in the universal lesson and use them individually earlier in the story. For example, in the second paragraph of Nancy's story, the word "positive" is used.

After stating the universal lesson at the end of the story, include after it a call to action. Think about what is it that you want the reader/listener to do? To think? To feel? Do you want them to donate monies? Do you want them to become more involved in community activities? Do you want them to feel positively about something or someone?

Crafting a Story

Taking the time to carefully craft a story can have significant pay-offs to your lodge. And it will make it easier to tell it. Use the pointers in this article as a checklist for ensuring you have thought through all the elements that are key to ensuring a story is remembered and acted upon.

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the grapefruit tree lives on, by Nancy Sprecher

In the fourth grade I had the most creative and hip teacher a ten year old could have. Mr. Goetz was very experiential and interactive with his students. Toward the end of one picture perfect spring day he asked our class, “What is it that you hate?”

I thought, “Wow. What an easy question.” Hands were flying in the air all over the place, eager to be picked. Mr. Goetz decided to call on us one-by-one. When it was my turn, I said “Grapefruit.” Now, I don’t like grapefruit. Almost forty years later, I still don’t much like grapefruit. I have no earthly idea why I chose it. But, instead of saying, “Going to bed too early. Doing homework. Having three-foot long snakes put down your shirt...or any other normal fourth grader response, I said, ‘Grapefruit.’”

Mr. Goetz then issued a challenge right before the bell rang. “Come back in the morning with something positive to do with that which you hate.” As I walked home all I could think of was, “Boy, what a bummer. What’s so good about a grapefruit?”

The next morning, I got up early and quietly made my way to the refrigerator. I pulled out the smallest grapefruit I could find and put it on the kitchen table. I poured myself a glass of milk and then went and found a knife and a spoon. Gathering up all my courage, I cut the darn thing in half and swallowed it one bitter spoonful at a time, washing down each bite with a swig of milk. At least I had a purpose to eat it. I needed the seeds. When I was finished, I gathered them up and went looking for an empty milk carton. You know the drill: fill the milk carton with dirt, plant the seeds, and water them. I took my project to school and waited to see what happened.

It only took a week for a couple tiny shoots to break through the dirt. They soon became small little seedlings. One spindly thing with a couple of leaves on it actually survived past this stage. When it got larger, I took it home and planted it in a small pot.

Eventually this plant became a tree which meant I had to transplant it into a five gallon pail. During the winter it made its home in the basement. My mom would throw water its direction every now and then when she went downstairs to do the laundry. After losing all its leaves, it would be brought back upstairs in the springtime and put outside. Year after year—through the rest of elementary school, through middle school and high school, and even through four years of college—this cycle of neglect repeated itself. I really hadn’t intended to keep this tree which had miraculously grown to be six feet tall. It was sort of an afterthought.

After I moved 150 miles away to take my first real job, I needed something to fill my sparsely furnished apartment. So I called for the tree to be delivered to me. It was then that I became obsessed with it. It wasn’t going to die on my watch.

Where else was I going to find a ready made Christmas tree on which to hang white lights and little gold balls that look like grapefruits?

Through six house moves, a multitude of insects, mineral deficiencies, and a rare fungus, I’ve done everything possible to nurture this surrogate child. I remember my secretary babysitting it when I changed cities in the middle of winter so it didn’t freeze to death in the back of a moving van. Her husband was so moved by the experience he decided to grow his own grapefruit tree. He and I are like proud parents. In fact, we regularly exchange pictures of our trees.

Last summer brought the greatest challenge of them all. The tree became infected with sap sucking insects called scale. By the time you can see them it’s usually too late. The scale attracted aphids, which also like to suck on the sap.

Before I knew it, the tree contracted black spot, which discolored all the leaves and caused a terrible mess. No matter what I tried, I couldn’t get rid of the insects. My mother took it upon herself to prepare me for the tree’s inevitable death. “Well you know Nancy, it’s almost forty years old; it’s never going to make it. It’s going to have to die sometime. You’re just going to have to accept this.”

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hacksaw in my left hand and my hedge trimmer in my right, I chopped off enough branches to fill four, 30-gallon garbage bags. What made it even more difficult was the odor. You see, if you break off a leaf or a branch, it stinks—it's kind of like getting a whiff of ammonia mixed with stale cold bitter coffee. I washed each remaining leaf with a special type of bug spray on a toothbrush. When all was said and done, my grapefruit tree looked like a discount store replica of a bonsai tree.

In a matter of weeks, what to my wondering eyes did appear? My grapefruit tree had persevered. Today it's in the best shape it's been in years. It stands 10 feet tall and is about five feet across and is very full and lush. It has green and shiny leaves that are each about four inches long. I now have to trim it several times a year since it's growing at breakneck speed.

Every day my grapefruit tree is a physical reminder of how to turn a negative situation into something that's good. It's a continual reinforcement of the need to "promote the positive" in all aspects of life. When you promote the positive you enhance your ability to persevere through whatever problems and difficulties may come your way. So I ask you: How do you approach your work? Do you promote the positive?

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