

January 2019 Vol 1 Issue 1



Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-January, 2019!

As winter's mostly mild temperatures descend into arctic cold, I'm happy to write from my warm office that I have rebranded! After seven years of writing and editing communications and marketing under the name of "Elizabeth Shih Communications," effective January 1st, 2019, I now lead "Storytelling Communications!"

Since last July, I have participated in daily seminars and weekly coaching as a protege of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship--conducting local marketing research, identifying a broader client base, and determining which writing and editing services will suit you best.

Thank you for your patience, as I have been offline, working, and allowing for some healthy silence on digital media (the topic of a recent blog posting: www.storytellingcommunications.ca/blog).

And Happy New Year 2019 to you! May it be a year of health, personal growth and prosperity for us all.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

Principal
Storytelling Communications

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Article One: On Storytelling as a Vehicle for Communications and Marketing

Welcome to my rebranded e-newsletter on communications and marketing for small- and medium-sized businesses (SMEs)! With the input of clients, mentors and colleagues, I have restructured my services and am happy to introduce to you "Storytelling Communications." A huge part of what I do is to tell stories about individuals and companies who use their success to give back to the community.

There are many forms that storytelling can take in our increasingly diverse culture. While reading and contemplating the importance of storytelling as a vehicle for entrepreneurial communication and commerce, I have encountered many ideas have spoken to me. Here are three of them:

(1) **An Indigenous American proverb** describes the value of storytelling in this way:

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn it;
Tell me a truth and I’ll believe it;
But tell me a *story* and it will live in my heart forever.”

Storytelling involves feeling and emotion—not only cognition. It’s commonly said (after pioneering advertiser, Claude Hopkins) that people are persuaded to buy on emotion, which they then justify with reason or logic. But the tension between emotion and reason, in which each competes with the other for supremacy, creates a socially (and potentially politically) charged space that communicators and marketers navigate.

(2) **Marketing guru Seth Godin** (who is not politically shy) reminds us that “Marketing is no longer about the stuff you make; but about the stories you tell.”

Nowadays, good marketing isn’t about a “hard sell,” but about building relationships with clients whose lives we can improve when we sell them services or products that improve their lives.

(3) And **the British psychoanalyst Adam Phillips** values “talking and listening therapy” (another form of cultural storytelling) as enabling people “to restore the loose ends and beginnings to the story,” when people’s “narratives have stopped or become too painful” or both.

These kinds and aspects of storytelling are part of how we keep ourselves and each other meaningfully alive. And in daily terms, they form the backbone of my Communications and Marketing workshops and projects.

Stories in Western culture can vary from sacred religious books and ancient epic poems to cheap celebrity gossip or potboiler romances. But all are what social change strategists Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning describe as showing “discrete and bounded accounts of events with a clear beginning, middle and end.” By contrast, the larger term “narrative” refers to a coherent “system of stories” that may be more open-ended and less linear in nature.

In their recent book, *Re: Imagining Change* (PM Press, 2017), Reinsborough and Canning argue that scientific study shows that humans are “unique in the animal kingdom” for having “neurological roots to storytelling” and for our “enjoyment of stories.” We are “hardwired for narrative,” so that just hearing a powerful story about an event or experience stimulates “the same neurological region as having the actual experience.”

Similarly, in experiments by psychologists that date to the 1940s, human subjects wrote stories in their own minds by which to remember and describe the movement of inanimate shapes (e.g. triangles, circles, squares): people would describe a film of such shapes “as the social interactions of three human-like characters, who possess personalities, emotions and intentions.” A big circle was a “ ‘bully’ who was ‘chasing’ the triangles,” and so on. Psychologists find that humans “as social creatures, project stories . . . onto almost everything we perceive.”

“We think, dream, imagine and believe through the filter of narrative,” so that narrative theorists (social scientists) say we should classify ourselves as “*Homo narrans*” (storytelling person) instead of “*Homo sapiens*” (knowing person). But in fact, Reinsborough and Canning argue that the terms “narrative” (related to story) and “knowledge” have been etymologically entwined for centuries, which shows us arguably the greatest reason that stories and storytelling are much more than just a fad for contemporary writers.

Social change theorists and activists have told us for generations that dominant stories of our culture tend “to justify the status quo of power relations and define ‘normal,’ ” and so to reinforce traditional power structures while overlooking the injustices that go with them. Reinsborough and Canning argue that narratives must be used as a lens to shape strategies for dissent and change, when powerful institutions are shaped by outdated, destructive stories rooted in violence and the exploitation of others.

The authors argue that when the “grip of such outdated stories weakens . . . a space for new stories opens.”

Some Academics (to name one group) dismiss the work of Communications and Marketing as part of an unthinking, “dominant” culture. And yet I work among colleagues who are passionate in their witness of “otherness.” You may think that there’s great distance separating the “MarCom” world from the Movement for Black Lives, Martin Luther King, Jr., members of our LGBTQ community or the life of Mahatma Gandhi (whose statue I frequently walk by, in our city’s own business district). But we all have the power through language and story to support change to social and political practices and possibilities.

In an era where there is little or no factual truth to some political narratives (e.g. in a Trump-led White House), all writers, including those in Communications and Marketing, have a responsibility to identify corruption, imagine change and work toward making it happen: we do this by changing the stories we tell and the ways that we tell them. We can write counter-discursively not only in political satire and comedy but also in our business documents.

I took encouragement three weeks ago from hearing that all of our city's locations of Chapters/Coles/Indigo had sold out of Michelle Obama’s autobiography, *Becoming*—a book that advocates for social and political change through a lens of narrative. *Mrs.* Obama argues against political detachment and the unthinking acceptance of privilege, whether it comes by birth or through education and hard work.

I have chosen to rebrand as “Storytelling Communications” because, when we write thoughtful stories as entrepreneurs, we contribute to the larger world we serve.

And now it’s your turn: how do you think the role of stories and narrative can affect our community? Please share your responses through the “Contact” page of my website, here. I’d be delighted to extend this conversation.

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STORYTELLER's CORNER



STORYTELLER'S CORNER: Words, Stories, Riddles and Jokes on Writing and Editing . . .

On the writer, Johann Wolfgang Goethe:

Goethe once wrote a very long letter to one of his friends. In the end he added a postscript explaining: "I am very sorry for sending you such a long letter but I did not find enough time to write a shorter one."

Do you have a story, riddle or joke on any aspect of writing or communications? Please share it with me; I'd be delighted to use it in an upcoming issue.

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SHOP NEWS:



This inaugural issue of TYSN is dedicated to the memory of **Craig Campbell**, long-time and distinguished naturalist in Southern Ontario, lover of wildlife and nature, mentor and dear friend. The lights dimmed when his spirit departed, late last month. We miss him greatly.

Special thanks in this new issue to business coach Deanna Litz and mentor Monica Kreuger, both of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship, in Saskatoon. The last challenging few months would not have been as positive without these two, dynamic, highly gifted women!

Since I made the leap last July to join Praxis' entrepreneurial training program (startSMART), I've been reading, writing and thinking about how to provide communications and marketing services that best serve you, the city of Saskatoon and beyond.

All of this planning and development have been supported greatly by Deanna, Monica and with assistance from the Praxis team.

Special thanks to Monica as well for sharing an excerpt of Reinsborough and Canning's book, *Imagining Change*, that became a central focus for my article in this issue. Aptly excerpted in "Bioneers," the argument encourages further exploration.

And special thanks, too, to family and friends with whom I shared a table or at least a hot chocolate over the holiday season. Reconnecting with you made the holiday season bright, even despite the astonishing number of flus and colds we've all been fighting!

Here's to better health in 2019!

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ABOUT US:

Between 2011 and December 2018, Elizabeth Shih Communications chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across the country.

Effective January 1, 2019, I have rebranded as "Storytelling Communications." I now write career and communications documents and lead workshops that help newcomers (and others) land their first, better or ideal jobs; that help SMEs to close more sales by communicating more effectively; and that help promote companies' legacies.

Interested in learning more? Please contact me through my CASL-compliant website (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I receive your message, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

Please visit my website for more information (www.storytellingcommunications.ca).