



Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-October, 2019!

With Canadian Thanksgiving weekend now over, like many of you, I have been counting my many blessings in life, that enable me to write marketing materials for clients; to have friends nearby (as well as calling from far away), with whom I share love and support; and to have a safe place in which to live and work, when so much of our planet is dogged by strife and chaos.

Are there any new blessings (or maybe newly recognized ones?) that have been uppermost in your mind, this past weekend?

We city dwellers send our moral support to farmers who have laboured long hours to complete harvest, late this year, and often in unseasonably cold temperatures. Thank you to them and their families who support them--many working through all of the Thanksgiving weekend.

And although we have already felt the cold embrace of winter, I'm also enjoying many sunny mornings, punctuated by the gold and crimson leaves, on my daily walk. Autumn can be exhilarating!

In this month's issue, I highlight some very sensible ideas from writer and coach, Daphne Gray-Grant, as detailed in her new book: *Your Happy First Draft: A Practical and Painless Guide to Obliterating Writer's Block* (2019). Her thinking is so clearly presented that she makes me wonder how any of us ever contemplated the process of writing before her!

And in "Storytellers' Corner," I visit Mignon Fogarty's interesting distinction between the words "autumn" and "fall."

Although the shortening of daylight hours that comes with late-autumn challenges many of us, I hope you continue to seek the beauty in the natural world around us. This morning, I saw two small, but resilient, Manitoba Maple leaves clinging to an otherwise barren branch. Once again, we are reminded, the miracle of our changing seasons unfolds.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: On Happy (Crappy) First Drafts for Writers . . . From Daphne Gray-Grant

In her recently published book, *Your Happy First Draft: A Practical and Painless Guide to Obliterating Writer's Block* (2019), writer and coach Daphne Gray-Grant makes a strong case that the process of composing the first draft of any document should not create anxiety, fear, or other distress.

She suggests that too many people agonize over the act of writing, spending hours, if not days or weeks, hammering out that painful, first draft. Even then, we feel aghast when we read what this tortured time has yielded! We assume that all of that effort should at least leave us with publishable copy: And guess what? It doesn't.

So what's wrong with this scenario, Gray-Grant asks? Why is it that writers can't write?

For one, unlike other academic fields where instructors impart specific procedures for doing things, in English class in primary and secondary schools, we are seldom if ever taught practical strategies for how to write. We are misled to believe that "success depends on *talent*, not hard work" (7). A mystique forms around writers who find celebrity and success, so that more modest, workaday scribes think what we lack is talent, not strategy.

Did you know that many writers spend hours labouring over a first draft—between 50 and 90 percent of the time they have, actually *physically* writing.

By contrast, only five to 40 percent of their time is spent preparing to write; and then the remainder of the time goes (in short shrift) to revising and editing.

However, the composition time tends to get intruded upon by our reflexive editing, as-we-compose, so that even naming the steps in the process gets to be murky and unclear.

Gray-Grant suggests instead that 40 percent of writing a first draft should be spent preparing (i.e. 24 minutes out of a hypothetical hour); only 20 percent of time drafting (i.e. 12 minutes out of that hour); and finally, the remaining 40 percent of time editing and rewriting that draft (i.e. 24 minutes).

By redirecting and re-allocating our writing time, we can compose “crappy” first drafts (i.e. what I call “perfectly good enough” drafts), after having first planned at least some of what we will write. Then, with revising, rewriting and editing, that “crappy” draft can become readable and even excellent. Such a redistribution of time and effort can allow us to create a “happy” first draft—a good place to start.

Writers have to un-teach ourselves the truths we think surround the writing process (especially that it should be a smooth, free-flowing process, if we’re “talented” enough).

Why is it that writers don’t *prepare* carefully to write, Gray-Grant writes, when we wouldn’t consider cooking without first “lining up ingredients,” or take a holiday without “planning a route” to travel (9).

Taking more time to plan, such as by using mind-mapping strategies, is crucial. Many of us think visually and can direct our thinking better by sketching on paper.

And later, by allowing ourselves more time to revise and rewrite our “happy first drafts,” we start to see that the composition/writing phase is not such a “big deal.” We can sidestep the big “gap” that exists for many of us, “between our aspiration and our execution.” We also sidestep the thorny assumption that we can “change our work by doing it more slowly” (9).

By lowering our expectations for our first drafts, and by using such strategies as writing early in the day; thinking in chunks or steps—addressed one at a time, as we compose the draft; taking adequate breaks to allow our ideas to incubate; and never showing anyone else our first drafts; we can reduce the fear and agony we associate with writing.

Gray-Grant argues, after American happiness psychologist, Shawn Achor, that we accomplish things *because* we feel happy and *not* that our accomplishments *make* us happy. Therefore, having reasonable (not perfectionist) expectations for our first drafts enable us to approach composition more lightheartedly, circumvent the mental impasse of

“writer’s block,” make ourselves feel more placid, “don’t write when we don’t need to,” and so guide that “happy first draft out of [our] heads” (15).

Writing as an overall broader process can become a more fluid process that does not dominate our conscious minds and something to facilitate, quite regardless of the ability we think we do or don’t have.

And now it’s your turn: Do you agree with Gray-Grant’s strategy around “happy (crappy) first drafts?”

Do you catch yourself editing your writing, when in the composition phase?

How might her strategies allow you to write more smoothly and easily?

Please weigh in: I’d be delighted to hear from you.

STORYTELLER’S CORNER

STORYTELLER'S CORNER: Is it "Autumn" or "Fall?"

Since the last issue of “TellYour Story Newsletter” (on September 15th), fall has officially begun. Or should we say, "autumn?"

American GrammarGirl, Mignon Fogarty, writes that “fall” is more commonly used in the US and “autumn” in Britain.

The term “fall” gets its name from the longer phrase “fall of the leaf” that was first used in the 16th century. For unclear reasons, “fall” became more popular in the US than in Britain.

The term “autumn,” favoured by British speakers and writers, came into English (from the Old French) in the late 14th century. The first reference to it in the Oxford English Dictionary occurs in Chaucer: “Autumn comes again, heavy of apples.”

Fogarty also reminds us that lowercase letters are used for seasons, unless they are part of an official name (e.g. "the Winter Olympics").

Since "autumn" sounds so much more poetic than "fall," the former seems more inviting to me.

What about you?



SHOP NEWS:

I am particularly grateful this month to the Client Patient Access Service (CPAS) workers and other professionals who enable an aging family member of mine to live independently, for as long as possible. These professionals' concern and support are a lifeline to caregivers like me, whose lives would otherwise be subsumed by caring for aging family.

A shout out to friends and colleagues who have shared their stories with me of caregiving they've done for their elderly family. This can be such hard work, emotionally, and these stories deserve to be told! (Do I hear an ebook beckoning?)

And another friendly shout out to mentor Bob Pitzel, Humboldt-based watercolour artist, who endures repeated chemotherapy treatments with much patience and good spirits. I send Bob and his partner Maureen encouragement and affection, as they bravely tread the difficult path of recurring lymphoma.

I'm also particularly grateful this month to American Marketing specialist (and e-newsletter guru) Michael Katz. Michael discussed entrepreneurial strategy with me, recently, following an informative webinar that he gave. He continues at once to teach and charm, with his always humourous (but equally shrewd) insights.

(PS: Michael and his wife, Linda, recently passed their 30th wedding anniversary . . . Congratulations, Michael and Linda!)

Special thanks as well to old friends from Ontario (from both university and copywriting circles) who continue to write or call during holidays, even when work and family make heavy demands on our lives.

And special thanks to you, my readers, whose emails and text messages remind me that you are still engaged by this newsletter, some seven years since its genesis (the last five of which are indexed on my current website).

And thanks to readers who will excuse any typos in this issue, as iContact is having server issues, at present.

Thank you!

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 rebranded as "Storytelling Communications." I now write marketing and communications documents and lead workshops that help entrepreneurs and newcomers to Canada to strengthen their businesses or secure better jobs.

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).

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