



Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-January, 2020!

After enjoying above seasonal warmth during most of December, we Saskatchewanians have descended into a deep cold spell, which the forecasters tell us will last at least another four days (for a total of about 10 days of below "seasonal" weather). And since people fear deep and recurring frostbite and cars that won't start, don't we love to discuss the cold!!

I hope, nonetheless, that the first month of the new year (and new decade) has begun well for you. One of the sources of this month's articles comes from the ancient philosophy of Mexico: perhaps reading this issue will transport you mentally to that warmer climate!

To be more precise, I draw upon the Toltec philosophical book by Don Miguel Ruiz. If you're feeling uneasy from the pressure to fulfill new year's resolutions or from the pressure to achieve greatness in this new decade, then Ruiz's book could be for you!

In "Storytellers' Corner," I visit "snollygoster," a little-known American word that carries much potential for storytelling.

As you all know, January is typically a month of bitter wind and cold when we all long for hibernation. But as I write, I feel uplifted by morning sunshine that streams in my office window, regardless of the -30 C windchill! The peace in the street below and the promise of our lengthening days all offer hope that I wish to share through this issue.

May this new month, year and decade bring you renewed health, contentment and prosperity, my valued readers.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

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Article One: What can Mexican Toltec philosophy teach us about life?

A valued member of the Raj Manek Peer-to-Peer group to which I belong, recently recommended that we read *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom* (2012). Even the most skeptical reader would feel engaged by this book, particularly in the last half or two-thirds of the volume.

It was written by the contemporarily trained Mexican physician and surgeon, Don Miguel Ruiz, who describes his early adulthood as one "distracted by modern life." After experiencing a life-altering car accident, Ruiz found happiness only by returning to the healing and teachings of his ancient ancestral--Toltec--wisdom.

The book has been categorized as "personal growth" or even "self-help," although its tenets easily belong to philosophy, theology, mysticism, and more.

Ruiz writes that "Ninety-five percent of the beliefs" of everyday people (including readers) are "nothing but lies, and we suffer because we believe all these lies" (19). But his focus is instead on four *alternative* "agreements" that he discusses, at length.

"If you want to have a life of joy and fulfillment," he says, "you have to find the courage to break these old agreements that are fear-based and claim your personal power."

Here are Ruiz's alternative "agreements":

(1) Be impeccable with your word: This he says is the most important and most difficult truth to honour. One's "word," he says, comes directly from God (cf. John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word . . . the Word is God"). The word is the source of our power to create, work or do anything.

Ruiz defines the "word" as the capacity of speaking with integrity. He says to say "only what you mean." We also must avoid using the word to speak against ourselves or to gossip about others. When we speak "impeccably," we take responsibility for our actions, but do not judge or blame (or chastise) ourselves.

He says to use the power of our word in the direction of truth and love. This is the "greatest" agreement of the four.

(2) Ruiz's second agreement is "Do not take anything personally":
"Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream.

When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering."

Ruiz further explains that "Your point of view is . . . personal to you. It is no one's truth but yours." Similarly, we should not take on another person's truth that is not meant for us, as becomes the case when we "take things personally."

When we refuse to take on others' truths or obsessions personally, we acquire “a huge sense of freedom” (69).

Ruiz further adds that “you are never responsible for the actions of others; you are only responsible for you. When you totally understand this and refuse to take things personally, you can hardly be hurt by the careless actions or comments of others” (64).

(3) His third agreement is “Don’t make assumptions.” Ruiz says to “find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama . . .

With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.”

It is “always better to ask questions than to make an assumption, because assumptions set us up for suffering” (76).

This agreement demands that we use (or actively secure) self-esteem and confidence, which are needed to ask questions of others with knowledge and/or authority.

The biggest (and worst) assumption that we can make, Ruiz says, is to assume “that others see life the way we do.” (74), since that only leads to negative thoughts, feelings and abuse.

(4) Ruiz’s final agreement is to “always do your best”—regardless of which area of life or what circumstances you are in: “Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best and you will avoid self-judgement, self-abuse and regret.”

Ruiz cautions against those who overwork or obsess over their craft: “If you try too hard to do more than your best, you will spend more energy than is needed and in the end your best will not be enough. When you overdo, you deplete your body and go against yourself, and it will take you longer to accomplish your goal. But if you do less than your best, you subject yourself to frustrations, self-judgement, guilt and regrets (86).

He concludes by stressing “freedom” as the basis of a beautiful life, because “freedom . . . is to use our own mind and body, to live our own life,” instead of a belief system taken on or forced upon us” (110).

Ruiz insists that just as we can choose to live in happiness and love so too can we choose “suffering,” which many people unconsciously indulge in (as the current state of the world painfully reflects).

As we enter this new year and a new decade, we may find what Ruiz terms a “beautiful life” by releasing the very many false “agreements” (i.e. distractions and obsessions) that crowd our paths.

When we embrace the four Toltec agreements Ruiz outlines (and which could be said to be ecumenical, as they reflect truths from Christianity and Buddhism, amongst others) it becomes self-evident to the reader that a “beautiful” life is open to everyone from every gender, cultural, ethnic, class, linguistic, vocational, intellectual and other perspective.

And now it’s your turn: Do you find value in Ruiz’s “four arguments” and how he explains them?

Please write in; I'd be delighted to extend this conversation.



STORYTELLER'S CORNER:

Word nerd alert! The case of "snollygoster"

The word “snollygoster” received airtime recently on CBC radio’s “Sunday Morning,” with Michael Enright. Enright was emceeding another episode of their wordplay game, “Shut up; I’m thinking” (a radio version of “Balderdash”).

The concise version of the OED does not list “snollygoster,” and it is described in the Merriam-Webster as an “informal” term, used in the US.

Its correct definition is “a shrewd, unprincipled person” and the term is especially used to describe politicians.

Examples from contemporary life abound, but certainly as the latest developments in Iran and as the impeachment hearings in Washington show, Donald Trump continues to be a prominent “snollygoster,” probably receiving too much airtime for listeners' and viewers' health. The word is also onomatopoeic, sounding disreputable even as one says it, with its heavy consonant-based syllables.

SHOP NEWS:

Special thanks in this month's issue to Chelsea Wisser (Executive Director, Northern SK Independent Living Centre) for inviting me to reprise my resume preparation and revision seminar, to be held in their office on January 21st. Chelsea is dedicated and experienced in helping entrepreneurs and others with a variety of differing abilities find success in their careers. I look forward keenly to offering the workshop!

A special thank you and encouraging nod to my friend and mentor, Humboldt-based watercolourist and entrepreneur, Bob Pitzel. After receiving a dizzying number of rounds of chemotherapy for lymphoma, last fall, Bob has been rallying and recovering with characteristic patience and courage. And he continues to find the time to share a word of encouragement and advice with his proteges.

All the best to Bob and his spouse and caregiver, Maureen, as they continue his journey of recovery!

Renewed thanks to my friend and colleague Ashleigh Mattern for recommending Cal Newport's latest study, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (Penguin, 2019), which allows me to rethink my often reluctant use of social media. Congratulations to Ashleigh for her ongoing success as a journalist on CBC's Saskatoon Morning!

I enjoy assisting various folk with revising their HR-style resumes and have begun to contemplate the legacy story of the StartSMART program of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship. "Praxis," as it's often called in short form, marks its 30th anniversary this year, and has seen the graduation of some thousand plus, budding entrepreneurs!

And another thanks to Praxis Co-Founder and Chief Visionary Officer, Monica Kreuger, for mentoring my efforts on several projects and for the ongoing gift of allowing me to facilitate in the program on blogging and media releases.

As all who work with her know, she is a wonder: I'm ever grateful, Monica.

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.

On January 1, 2019, my company rebranded as "Storytelling Communications." I now I assist SMEs in closing more sales by communicating more effectively; I help economic immigrants to secure better jobs ethically; and I write the legacy stories of major companies.

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).