



StoryMasters: Stories with Pivotal Moments

How did it happen? Today, I was humming *ba-de-ya* from Earth, Wind & Fire's "September." I thought the year 2021 started...like yesterday, but it's already mid September! When did summer end? Will the year end tomorrow? Don't go so fast! We need to tell some stories from our meeting on September 12.

Daniel Dyba – *Here's Looking to What's Next*

"Kaizen" is a Japanese word, meaning change for the better. Changes are difficult. Each change may look insignificant, but even dust, if piled, can become a mountain. That's how **Daniel Dyba** transitioned from a network engineer to a software engineer. During his 5-year transition, he taught himself a new skillset through trial and error. If you have patience to make incremental changes and work through failures, you can achieve bigger goals, too. The key is to break projects or goals down into pieces and start small.

Arihant (Andrew) M. – *You Too Can Save Our Planet*

The climate change isn't somebody else's problem anymore; it's ours! Wildfires, draught, hurricanes, and torrential rain are everywhere. Extreme hot or cold weather is becoming our normal. While billionaires focus on colonizing Mars just in case the earth becomes uninhabitable, **Andrew M.** proposes how we could save our planet. When his compelling graphics showed us a lifespan of 30 years for disposable coffee cups and 200 years for plastic straws, we all reflected on our daily routines.

Catherine Magruder – *What Do Disney and Werewolves Have in Common?*

As a kid, **Catherine Magruder** wanted nothing to do with fairytales. She was a tomboy, rollerskating and climbing trees. But Snow White changed her in 1958; the animation was so captivating that she fell in love with Disney instantly. For 17 years, she was a proud Disney annual pass holder. Now, she saves Disney money and goes to the happiest place on the planet twice a year. So what do Disney and werewolves have in common? Catherine! – who also loves werewolves, as she showed us with her goto costume for Halloween.

Jacki Williams-Jones – *Baggage*

Do you remember the 70's? Airlines didn't have limits on baggage (*oh, good ol' days!*), so 18-year-old **Jacki Williams-Jones** was traveling to Reno with two heavy suitcases and "a few" bags. It didn't hit her until she got off the plane – how could she carry them all on her own? (Suitcases didn't roll back then.) Luckily, a family she made friends with on the plane helped her with her luggage. After that, she vowed never to travel with more baggage than she can deal with by herself. That vow resonates with all of us!

Harold Gee – *How Routines Can Improve Your Life*

A routine is a series of habits. It takes 21-30 days to establish a habit, and 6-9 months for that habit to become a routine. **Harold Gee's** routines include getting up at 5 AM, gargling, meditating, walking, keeping a journal, and napping. Why are routines important? Because they give you a sense of comfort. We, as humans, craze mindless and thought-free actions. Harold's suggested routine is to get an eight-hour sleep, have a healthy breakfast, go for a walk, practice gratitude, and keep a daily journal. What are your routines?

Lin Van Gelder – *The Incident*

The year 1959 was especially tough for **Lin Van Gelder's** mother. Besides carrying a child (Lin's baby sister), Lin's mother was nursing her father with emphysema and her mother with Parkinson's disease. When Lin went into labor, her mother slipped into coma and passed away. She grieved intensely. When she cried, the baby cried. The weather was no help, either; winter in Buffalo is notoriously miserable. But one day in spring, Lin's mother pulled a prank on the milkman out of the blue, which made her burst into laughter for the first time for a long time. It didn't stop her grief, but it transmuted her pain into laughter.

Meeting functionaries included Toastmaster **Tina Tomiyama**, General Evaluator **Margaret Mitchell**, Timer **Camille Miller**, Wordmaster/Grammarian **Mallery McMurtrey**, Videographer **Jacki Williams-Jones**, and Evaluators **Cynthia Moore**, **Antoinette Byron**, returning member **Kathy Garr**, **Anna Ziss-Patton**, **Jill Vanderweit**, and **Margaret Mitchell**.

Next meeting is October 10. (GUESTS, [RSVP FROM HERE](#))

UPCOMING STORYTELLING EVENTS

Many interesting storytelling concerts and workshops are coming up. Check them out on [our event page!](#)

SEP 26

StoryMasters Storytelling Café

<https://thestorymasters.org/storytelling-cafe/>

3:00 PM PDT / 6:00 PM EDT
 Category: Storytelling swap
 Location: Zoom
 Cost: Free

StoryMasters Storytelling Café is a safe place where you can share your work of art. Bring one whether it's still work in progress or a finished product. Anybody is welcome!

You're welcome just to listen, too.



SEP 30

By Heart: Lessons Teachers Learned in School

<https://thestorymasters.org/event/by-heart-lessons-teachers-learned-in-school/>

7:00 PM PDT / 10:00 PM EDT
 Category: Storytelling Concert
 Location: Zoom
 Cost: \$20

What does education look like through a teacher's eyes? Come find out, as four teacher-storytellers share what they have learned at school. It's not at all what you expect!



OCT 02

Implementing Successful Zoom Events: How to Be the Ideal Host, Emcee, and Event Tech

<https://thestorymasters.org/event/implementing-successful-zoom-events/>

5:30 PM PDT / 8:00 PM EDT
 Category: Workshop
 Location: Zoom
 Cost: \$0 - \$10

Learn how to smooth out any rough edges with teamwork and artistry. SAC's expert guest panelists (including Miyo Yamauchi) will offer professional tips and demonstrate how to become a sought-after Host, Emcee or Event Tech.



Check out more events at: <https://thestorymasters.org/events/>

Disclaimer: Events are posted as a service to our members, friends and the storytelling community. Posting is not an endorsement.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Freedom of Imagination

One summer afternoon, a group of women was having lunch. Everybody was smiling and chatting, enjoying the conversation and each other's company...except for one person. Let's call her Eileen here. Eileen's Alzheimer's started a few years ago. Since then, her friends started getting together to have lunch once a month, but now that her dementia has progressed, she seldom engages with the conversations. Something happened that afternoon. When one friend showed a picture of a white tiger, Eileen perked up and her eyes came to life. Suddenly, she started talking about her father, and her friends started taking notes of her story...



This is one of the methods to create stories with people with dementia. How does it work? Here is how:

1. Show pictures. The pictures shouldn't be related to their actual lives. When the picture is of their own house or family and the subjects don't recognize them, they may feel frustrated. Use random pictures instead.
2. Ask questions. The questions should be open-ended questions, not closed questions.
 Closed questions: Are they related? Is he a doctor? How many dogs do you see in the picture?
 Open questions: What do you see? What are they doing? What are they talking about? Where are they going?



You can create a story with a group of people with or without dementia. In Eileen's case, her memory was triggered when she mistook the white tiger for a lion, which reminded of her father whose middle name was Lion. But in many cases, people just make up stories, which is totally okay because there is no wrong answer. The key to make it fun is "yes, and." If you know improvisation, you know that "yes, and" rule of thumb: listening to others, accepting their ideas, and expanding them without limitation.

After all, creating stories is freedom of imagination.

Reference: [Time Slips](#)

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT IN RECENT EVENTS

Margaret Mitchell in the Storytelling Association of California (SAC) Genre Storytelling

It's been eight months since StoryMasters started participating in SAC Story Swap Genre Storytelling series. Catherine Magruder for Tall Tales, Kathy Falco for Romantic Stories, Pieter Severyn for Historical Stories, Camille Miller for Legends: Urban & Traditional, Miyo Yamauchi for Humorous Stories — each storyteller showcased StoryMasters admirably. The August show was no exception. Margaret Mitchell shared a beautiful personal story and touched the audience emotionally.

How a Pro Rolls

by Tina Tomiyama

Oh, StoryMasters, what an honor, a pleasure and an education it is to watch **Margaret Mitchell** prepare for a storytelling gig! Margaret wrote a superb new story, honed it, sent it to Barbara Clark for her opinion, honed it some more, and timed it. When it was crafted to her standards, Margaret memorized it (or “learned” it, as Barbara says) and, despite dealing with a painful sinus infection, scheduled multiple rehearsals with friends.

All this prep work paid off when Margaret appeared on SAC’s “Genre Stories” on August 18, telling her lovely and heart-wrenching story “*The Neighborhood*.”

The evening started with some well-known storytellers. **Mindy Donner** from San Diego Storytellers amused us with memories of her first waitressing job in “*Where’s Marie?*” **Linda Kennedy** from Foothill Storytellers worked with a women’s peace group to “tie a ribbon around the Pentagon” (and yes, they did it!). **John Petrik** of Sacramento Storytellers took us to the Czech Republic for a lesson in giving and receiving kindness.

And then it was Margaret’s turn. She took us to the Rosewood neighborhood in north Compton, in the fifties, as 12-year-old Margaret listened, observed and learned about

“...a young wife whose husband beat her for speaking her truth. A sweet, innocent family imprisoned through no fault of their own. A beautifully kind young man who yearned to grow into the fullness of himself.”

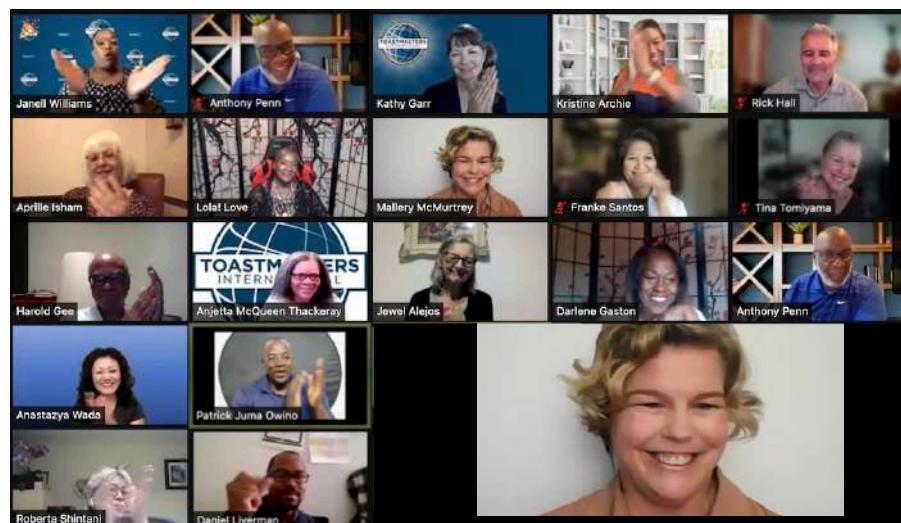
Margaret’s tribute to Benjy had viewers reaching for their hankies (and I’m reaching for mine again as I write this review). What a tour de force!

Margaret was followed by **Rocky Ross** from The Reboot: Storytelling Reimagined with a wrenching story about doing the right thing. **Julie Orth** from Mother Lode Storytelling shared episodes of kindness at the Burning Man Festival, and **Neshama** from Contra Costa Storytellers made an impromptu appearance talking about the beds in her life.

If you missed the show—or want to watch Margaret again—the show is available on SAC’s YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v+0cGqZJciaC8>

Thank you, Margaret, for your story—and for the education into how a pro rolls.

Mallery McMurtrey on the Intro & Bio Panel Discussion



On September 3, **Mallery McMurtrey** conducted the Intro & Bio Panel Discussion with first-class panelists; Rick Hall (StoryMasters’ friend), Kristine Archie, Lola Love!, and Franke Santos.

They talked about differences between introductions and bios, which one to use when, how long they should be, good examples, etc.

It was a wonderful chance to learn valuable information from entrepreneurs and professionals!

Thank you for the education, Mallery!

Miyo Yamauchi on a Roll

Miyo was B-U-S-Y! She told four different stories in-person and virtually in August; “POP-UP” Storyphile on August 14, Story Salon on August 25, Bridgeport PechaKucha on August 29, and a project which was taped on August 31 to be aired in 2022. Now, let’s hear how the PechaKucha show went.

What’s a PechaKucha?

by Tina Tomiyama

If you want storytelling that’s a feast for your eyes as well as your ears, check out PechaKucha!

PechaKucha (“chit-chat” in Japanese) is pronounced something like “p’chak’cha,” and it’s graphic storytelling. Storytellers create a slideshow which runs on auto while they’re telling their 6-minute-and-40-second-long story, but—here’s the scary part—the slideshow has exactly 20 frames which auto-advance every 20 seconds. PechaKucha storytellers must carefully time their words to match the frames.

Recently, 14 people told PechaKucha in a hybrid show originating in Bridgeport, CT, and the time went by like lightning! Some people used their own fine photography or charming illustrations for their 20 slides; others focused on wordcraft and paid less attention to their visuals. It didn’t matter—there was something wonderful from every speaker.

The hands-down, knock-‘em-dead, consummate PechaKucha champ is our own **Miyo Yamauchi**. Oh, StoryMasters, do please watch her video: <https://www.pechakucha.com/presentations/how-to-poison-your-roommate>. Note the enchanting images, the laugh-out-loud writing, and the impeccably timed delivery as each new slide hits *bang!* on a keyword or punchline.

“Oh, I was nervous,” Miyo told me afterwards. “Missing a few seconds would’ve ruined the jokes, so yes, I practiced a lot.” That’s our Miyo!

“Where did your visuals come from?” I asked her. “Most are from photo stock sites like [pixabay.com](https://www.pixabay.com), [unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com), and [shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com),” she said. “And I crafted some images (like the superhero, conga line, and boric acid) by combining other images.”

StoryMasters, if you’re interested in trying this fascinating storytelling form, let me know! Maybe we might put together a little work group to support each other while we learn how to craft PechaKucha.

What fun this visual storytelling form could bring to the [Storytelling Café!](#)



The live audience was able to see Miyo telling, together with the images.

Pieter Severynen on a mission to fight against climate change



Everything but the Plants

Arborist, botanist, climatology researcher and storyteller Pieter Severynen spoke at the Culver City Garden Club on Tuesday evening, Sept 7. He laced his carefully chosen scientific facts with historical anecdotes and dashes of humor, and held his audience rapt for over an hour.

This was the Garden Club’s first “live” meeting in 18 months. Even though the audience sat outside, masked and distanced, while Pieter spoke from the doorway, it was exciting to see and hear him live.

For those of us who may despair of being able to do anything significant to reverse climate change, Pieter recommends Paul Hawken’s book “*Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*”: <http://tiny.cc/gx1juz>

STORYTELLING STUB

Pick Words that Enrich Your Story

"Avoid using adjectives and adverbs in poems," my friend said. Because economy of words is essential for poetry, she explained, we need to use descriptive verbs instead. For example, instead of saying "she walked quietly," say "she tiptoed." To describe "run quickly," you can use verbs like sprint, gallop, scurry, scamper, dash, race, and hasten.

Her suggestion made me wonder about stories. Do we want to drop adjectives and adverbs in narratives, too? Let's try something.

She said, "Have a nice day." — We don't know her state of mind. Now, let's add an adverb and descriptive verb.

"Have a nice day," she said disgustedly.

"Have a nice day," she spat out.

Suddenly, her mood became visible. An ordinary scene is not so ordinary anymore. Now we know she's not happy.

The adverb and verb may give you different imagery and different tone. What they have in common is that they add new information and make your story more visual and richer. But pick words purposefully. Not all adverbs and adjectives enrich your story. If you say "he sings very beautifully," how much value does "very" add to the imagery? Not much. What if we use incredibly, unbelievably, remarkably, or extraordinarily instead of "really" and "very?" The level of beauty is elevated, isn't it?

And don't mix them like "spat out disgustedly." That's redundant.

References:

- [How to Use Adjectives in Storytelling](#)
- [Don't Use Adverbs and Adjectives to Prettify Your Prose](#)
- [How to Use Descriptive Verbs to Better Your Writing](#)
- [List of Adverbs to Strengthen Your Writing](#)
- [Online tool -- find adjectives for words](#)



EDITOR'S NOTE

Don't Over-Analyze Your Audience

When you tell a story, how do you analyze your audience? Do you read their posture? Or maybe their facial expressions? Sharing a story virtually makes it difficult to read people, doesn't it? Sometime, you hear the sound of dishes clanking or irrelevant conversations when somebody forgets to unmute themselves. Other than that, you neither see nor hear the audience. The little green light is your only audience. You have little idea how your story is received while you're telling it. I surely felt weird when I started telling stories virtually, but be that as it may, I got used to it eventually.

A few months ago, I finally got back on an in-person stage. The venue was a charming courtyard. I was psyched about sharing the same space with my audience again. Something was different, though. What was it? It took me a while to realize it was the plexiglass speaker's booth they'd put on the stage as a safety measure. As an audience member, I was fine with it because the plexiglass was transparent and, with speakers, the sound was fine. But when I stood behind the plexiglass, my perspective was different. The divider prevented me from feeling the audience. I felt like being a caged animal. I couldn't tell whether they liked my story or not until the show was over. I still enjoyed the experience, but the joy wasn't the same as what I had expected.

So last month, I grabbed an opportunity for an in-person show. Yep, it was a "revenge" show to fully feel my audience. The venue was a small art gallery, which should have been perfect to see audience reaction. But again, something was different. Because everybody was sitting spread out at the back of the room, I couldn't hear their laughter well. On top of that, I couldn't read their facial expression because of their masks. It made me flinch and freeze for seconds. Then, I remembered...

Years ago, while I was telling a story, I noticed somebody with a grumpy attitude. Because he was right there... sitting in the middle of the first row, I couldn't ignore him. While everybody was cracking up, he kept his face straight and his arms crossed. Obviously, he wasn't enjoying my story. But what could I do? We can't entertain everybody, can we? Then, after the show, "Yo! You!" he approached me. He was going to throw a wet blanket, I thought. Instead, with a straight face, he said, "You were funny. I'll be back."

We cannot know everybody's state of mind by reading their facial expressions or body gestures. In fact, once in the past I made a presenter get startled and freeze up. I don't know what kind of face I was making at the time. I was just enjoying the topic and fascinated by her presentation.

Don't overanalyze your audience. Their reactions may not reflect their feelings or your story.

— Miyo Yamauchi

