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EXEMPLARY TALES: VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS

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THINKING WITH STORIES

Below you will find two stories. The first was published in 1997 in *Playful Approaches to Serious Problems: Narrative Therapy With Children and Their Families* (Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997) but in fact took place in the early 1960s. It tells of my father, who was known in the small Ontario town of Peterborough where I was raised as "Benny the Peanut Man." Benny derived from Benjamin, and "the Peanut Man"[1] derived from his occupation running a small lunch bar called The Nuttery, along with my mother, Helen, across from the cinemas on the main street that also sold the peanuts he roasted daily. I wrote the second story several years ago but never got around to publishing it. It was a response to a problem previously unknown to me in my practice, and that was the vogue of young women binge drinking, their consequent over-intoxication, and the justifiable responses of their families when this was discovered, most often in ways similar to that told in this particular tale. By the time these families sought professional assistance, in every instance the situation was dire. I quickly intuited that this territory we all found ourselves in was unmapped.

Or so I thought. The story you will read below has truly "stalked" me ever since I at long last figured out my father's intentions in my late 20s and my sobering

[1]"Benny the Peanut Man," in D. Epston (1998), *Catching Up With David Epston: A Collection of Narrative Practice-Based Papers Published Between 1991–1996* (pp. 1–9). Adelaide, Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications.

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realization that I had far from duped him. Quite the opposite—he had found a most intriguing way to teach me to know my limits. I was then given to consider how, in fact, I was the most temperate or at least the most prudent drinker of all my friends and was known as the one who could be relied on to keep everyone safe, much like the current designated driver. This was something I took pride in at the time and still do.

Story 1

"When I was fifteen, I informed my parents that I had engaged in underage drinking along with my somewhat older friends. My parents, as expected, took it pretty well but my father unexpectedly, did not leave it at that. Since he was a man who only drank on very rare occasions and kept little or no liquor on hand, I was surprised when he arrived home soon after my disclosure with a very large bag from the liquor store. On reflection, I suppose he chose an opportune time to start unpacking his bag. I observed him putting away bottles of rum, rye, scotch, vodka and gin. In all my life, I had never seen so many different kinds of hard liquor in one place.

I couldn't help inquiring what was up. My father told me he had been thinking about hard liquor ever since I had told him about my drinking and he had got to wondering if hard liquor was as 'hard' as it was when he was my age. I arrogantly replied, 'So what's that got to do with all these bottles you've got here?' He told me, 'The only way to find out for sure is to try each kind out.' I must admit to having been somewhat bemused. He invited me to join him in testing the hardness of hard liquor. 'How do you do that?' I innocently asked. 'Well, it's pretty easy, really. What you do is drink it. That's the only way to find out.'

Now I knew I was on to a really good thing—free drinking at my father's expense. I had to laugh at my father's naiveté, considering the risks my friends were taking in diluting their father's liquor supplies with water to ensure their own supply. I had always considered my father a fool so this was nothing new to me.

Every so often, my father would convene tests in which we would drink together, comparing the hardness of say rye whiskey when he was my age to its current proof. He would engage me in considering how 'hard' whiskey was for me as we talked and drank together. We both got the odd headache, but that just went to prove how hard whiskey could be. My friends marveled at how I was duping my father and I seemed to gain a lot of respect from them for what I took to be my guile.

It was many years later before I realized that Benny's idea of 'hardness' had a strong resemblance to the familiar concept of 'knowing your limits.' He had persisted with our experiments until he had gained sufficient evidence that I truly knew my limits. Because I had demonstrated my more carefully considered drinking habits to him, my father rested more easily at nights he knew I was out with my friends" (Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997, pp. 185–186).

Story 2

There was a ruckus in the waiting room that quickly abated when I introduced myself to Roger, a man in his late 40s, Jocelyn, a woman of the same age, and their 18-year-old only child, Naomi. Roger looked apoplectic with rage; Naomi couldn't possibly have appeared more disgruntled than she did; and Jocelyn was pale with what I came to learn was apprehension. I invited them into my office. Before I knew it, Roger and Naomi had changed the seating arrangements from a congenial circle to something akin to a boxing match, each contestant in their respective corner glaring at the other. I thought it wise to enquire what possibly could have brought such a situation about. It didn't take long for Jocelyn to have me appreciate their circumstances.

Naomi had recently turned 18, and Jocelyn told how "our little family went out for a special dinner to celebrate" and how one of the highlights was their sharing a bottle of wine with Naomi who now was the legal age to drink alcohol. Three weeks later, Naomi had permission to stay overnight at her friend Tracy's. "Tracy is like our second daughter because she has spent so much time with us, even on holidays." That night, they were roused at 1:30 a.m. by a policewoman at their door and a policeman supporting their scantily clad, stuporous daughter reeking of vomit. She was so intoxicated that she really could not stand up unaided. The policewoman sternly reported that they had found her unconscious at a bus shelter in the central business district.

Jocelyn, who was a nurse, bathed Naomi, put her to bed and sat up with her all night to ensure her airways were clear of vomit. These events had seemingly overturned everything they had thought was so about the other. Roger and Jocelyn were alarmed at Naomi and "what could have happened to her" and said, "We just can't trust her anymore after that." Naomi shrugged off her mistake but was incensed that her parents had grounded her for the foreseeable future. She quickly went on the attack by threatening all of the following: I am going to run away from home; I am going to leave school and get a job so I can support myself; and I am going to Social Welfare to see if I can get a Youth benefit to live on my own because of our irreconcilable differences. Roger and Jocelyn rose to this occasion and countered with threats of their own that had been informed by legal advice they had sought. This dispute had been going on now for 2 weeks and according to Jocelyn, "It's getting worse and I am afraid of what is going to become of our family." I had hardly said a word, and it was about 10 minutes into our meeting. But by now I had realized that I could not be an adjudicator, deciding on who was right and who was wrong without adding fuel to the fire of this rapid escalation. I held up my hand: "Roger, Naomi, and Jocelyn, can I have your attention for just a moment as I have something I want to say to you, Naomi, and to you, Roger and Jocelyn? You will need to listen very carefully to what I am about to say. Why? I can see how this dispute has arisen from your mistake, Naomi, and your concerns for your daughter's well-being, Roger and Jocelyn. I do not dispute either your

mistake, Naomi, or your concerns, Roger and Jocelyn. But tell me this—have you found over the last 2 weeks that no matter how either of try to find a way out of it, you seem to be getting into it? Naomi, I know you have tried your best to reassure your parents that the mistake you refer to will never happen again. Roger and Jocelyn, am I right in thinking that you are dead set on seeing that such a mistake never happens again? If I were to propose the means for you, Naomi, to prove to your parents that you know your limit, would you hear me out? Roger and Jocelyn, if Naomi were willing to risk learning her limits in your presence, would you give her a chance to do so? And would you be as rigorous as possible in seeing to it that she knows her limits and forbid her to go out with her friends until she does so?"

Everyone was confused but at least I had their attention for the time being. How could I sustain it was now my concern. "Roger and Jocelyn, can I have your consent to speak to Naomi first?" Perhaps still skeptical, at least they conceded this opportunity to me. I knew I had to make the most of it.

DAVID: Naomi, what do you drink when you go out drinking?
NAOMI: Beer and tequila chasers sometimes!
D: Is that what you and your girlfriends generally drink at a bar?
N: Yeah.
D: Do you think you made that mistake a few weeks ago because you didn't know your limits?
N: Suppose so!
D: Can you even guess what your limit might be?
N: Not really!
D: How much does a beer and a tequila chaser cost?
N: About nine dollars.
C: Naomi, do you prefer imported or local beer?
N: What do you mean?
D: Well, if your parents were to arrange a drinking party for you and your girlfriends, that is if you want to invite them along, what do you want your parents to have on hand—Steinlager, Stella Artois, or Heineken?
N: What?
D: What would you think if I guaranteed you free beer and tequila for you and your girlfriends for going to the trouble of testing your limits?
N: What?

I knew this was high stakes, but I had that story that had resided in my mind for about 35 years. I had figured it all out when I was 27 when my father and mother had divulged this and other matters to me as well considered and planned. I will never know if they knew how ingenious they were.

I didn't dare look over at Roger and Jocelyn yet. I pressed on with my conversation with Naomi. "Naomi, do you have any jeans or anything with pockets that you would agree to wear at such a party?" "Why?" Now, Naomi was very curious by

what seemed to be my non sequitur. "To put the bottle caps in your pockets." "Why would I want to do that?" "I'll tell you why. The day after, when your mum and dad show the home movie of you testing your limits, you can find out how many beers you had by counting your bottle caps. Because the only way I know to find your limits is to go beyond them a time or two and then you can scale it back to your limit. Who knows what your limit might turn out to be? Might be one beer or it might be ten? Only your mum and dad can tell, although you will also be able to decide for yourself by reviewing yourself on the movie of your drinking party." Naomi had a wry grin, which I took to be part bemusement and part incredulity. But I was unconvinced she was taking me seriously.

Turning to Roger and Jocelyn for the first time, I asked them: "Would you be willing to have a drinking party at your home either for just the three of you or you could, with Naomi's permission, invite Tracy and her other girlfriends along? And would you foot the bill for the beer? Would you also arrange to make a home movie of the party so all of you could review it sometime the next day to see if you can work out what her limit might turn out to be? And you know how a drunk often thinks they are so much funnier and more interesting or able to drive their car or motorbike, but when they to turn others who aren't drinking out of the same bottle, it is a very different story. Also, would you draw a straight line somewhere and ask Naomi to walk it for a kind of police test? I doubt if you could get a police breathalyzer, could you?"

Naomi now looked even more bemused, but Roger and Jocelyn seemed to grasp the gist of it as indicated by their very reasonable queries. I rushed to her aid. "Naomi, if you have any misgivings about this, just think of all the money you are going to save and if you make a mistake or two, you will have your mum and dad on hand to make sure you do so safely and they may know some remedies for hangovers." She still was uncertain, nodding her head from side to side, but at least agreed to go along with her parents in order to collectively determine her limits.

I now took up the matter of finding your limits with Jocelyn and Roger. "Would either of you say you know your limits?" They assured me they did. I turned to Naomi and asked if she thought her parents knew their limits. She told a story or two where Roger had exceeded his limits on some special occasions at family weddings and he conceded that this was so. "Roger, do you remember how when you were Naomi's age you learned your limits?" Roger became thoughtful, shaking his head from side to side. "You know, David, when I think back to my first drinking days, I am really ashamed of myself. Hey, I played senior rugby and in those days—probably it's still the same now—the after-match drinking was atrocious! You more or less drank until you dropped." "How long was it before you learned your limit?" "Too long, David! Too long!" "Did any of your drinking mates pay a high price for not knowing their limits?" Roger looked down at his feet, ashamed. "I have never told you about this, Joce, but before we started dating, my rugby mates and I were at a 'piss up.' And Jim, whom I didn't know that well, but, hey, he was on the team, got the idea in his head to drive to Waiwera [50 kms north]

to see his girlfriend. Well, he was too fast around a corner and went over a steep bank and died! We didn't drink much after his funeral. We had lost a mate, and you know that was the first funeral I ever went to. I always thought funerals were for old timers like your grandparents or your great-grandparents." "Roger, is that how you learned your limits?" "Well, I don't know, but I never could drink the same way after that. Every time I thought of my mate, I would turn down an offer of a beer. So I guess you're right. But what a way to learn your limit, David? The hard way!" Naomi and Jocelyn were respectfully silent, allowing Roger time to recover his equanimity.

"Naomi, do you think a drinking party under your own roof with your selected guests, in which you can learn your limits and prove to your mum and dad that you know your limits, is better than running away from home, leaving school or applying for a Youth Benefit from Social Welfare?" She agreed. "Jocelyn and Roger, for the price of a few cases of beer and a bottle or two of tequila, is it better to convince yourself that Naomi knows her limit under your roof so should she make a mistake or three that you are on hand to make sure she doesn't learn this lesson the hard way?" They agreed, and for the first time they all smiled at one another. After responding to a few more queries as to the details, they departed a lot less fractious than they had arrived.

They returned about a month later. Naomi had insisted that the first drinking party be a family-only affair. "I thought my girlfriends might think it sounded too weird! But when I told Tracy about it after the first time, which wasn't too bad really, she asked if she could come to the next party at our house." She started laughing, looking at her father: "Actually, it was sort of fun with Dad! Tracy really loves my mum and dad. So she was there for the second party. And David, I had her wear jeans too to collect her bottle caps!" She then burst out laughing, followed by Jocelyn and Roger. The parents related how Naomi had gone beyond her limit the first two times. But when I asked, they told me they had expected this and didn't make a fuss about it. Instead, they showed her the home movie in which she had to admit she was losing her balance and "raving like a lunatic." They all agreed that they were almost sure Naomi now knew her limit, but they all needed a few more drinking parties to be able to rest assured.

Jocelyn phoned a few months later informing me of Naomi's limit and told me she and Roger had agreed to allow her to go into the city with her friends; and although they did not sleep well until she returned home later that night, everyone was doing okay, considering.

Why Do Stories Go With You?

The question that has always perplexed me is how and why some stories stay with us and in a manner of speaking won't let us go. Like many of my professional generation, I was raised on Milton Erickson's stories that were collected by Sidney Rosen and published in *My Voice Will Go With You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H.*

Erickson (1991). In fact, these tales reside with me to this day although I last read them in the mid-1990s. And they were told and retold ad nauseum at workshops taught by Ericksonian acolytes and probably still are. I can only guess how many of those tales time and time again engaged with my practice and found their way into my early publications (Epston, 1989), although I doubt if anyone who knew those stories well would have recognized that. How do they work then? I would suggest they guide you in a manner that inspires your own imaginative capacities rather than the provision of manualized and regulated direction. Perhaps more than anything else, I suspect that when these stories took up residence in my mind and played upon it, they began to amalgamate with the variant circumstances I and my clients found ourselves in and yielded very novel outcomes. But I have no doubt each one could be traced back, if I endeavored to do so, to one of those tales of Erickson's that had haunted me with its charming ingenuity for so long. I thought with them and I am sure I still do. Perhaps I could no longer recall each story in detail, but I could remember the gist of it, or what I am going to refer to as its logic, no matter how counterintuitive many of his stories seemed at first reading. And that is something important about such exemplary tales: They do not reveal themselves entirely. Much is left as a puzzle that you cannot resist puzzling over. The best means I found to do so was trying its logic out in similar circumstances. Exemplary tales show you *how* to do things but you have to figure out why. For me, what characterizes such stories is a lingering mystery that stalks me like a friendly ghost. To be quite honest, I wonder if I were to indeed solve the story once and for all, it could no longer teach me. It would no longer be pedagogical. An exemplary tale must retain something akin to the magical lying somewhat beyond easy conclusions.

Writing Exemplary Tales

I recently sent a PDF of a draft exemplary tale to Jill Freedman, a friend and colleague of mine in Chicago. Her reply was absolutely encouraging. "David, reading your story was like being there sitting beside you and seeing the family the story was telling me about before my eyes." That is what the exemplary tale writer intends for their readers.

It should come as no surprise that narrative therapy might take a special interest in exemplary tales for pedagogical purposes. Surely, it would be odd if this were not the case. After all, as early as 1989, Michael White wondered in the subtitle of his seminal paper, "The Process of Questioning," whether narrative therapy might be considered "a therapy of literary merit," a term he borrowed from Jerome Bruner (White, 1989). I have used the term *exemplary tales* to describe this genre of exposition of practice since I edited "Story Corner" in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* over the period of Michael's editorship and a few years afterwards (1981–1990). And with Jim Duvall's approval, in 2010 I reinstated something similar in "The Corner" of this journal. Once again, this

format encouraged submissions and publications in this exemplary tale genre (Epston, 2010). In fact, this series of articles, first appearing in this issue (*Journal of Systemic Therapies*, volume 35, number 2) and subsequently in following issues (volume 35, numbers 3 and 4), grew out of the generosity of this journal to sponsor such reader-friendly and practice-friendly articles. For so long now, exemplary tales have been well established and characteristic of the narrative therapy literature (Epston, 1998, 2008; Epston & White, 1992; Freeman, Epston, & Lobovits, 1997; Maisel, Epston, & Borden, 2004; Marsten, Epston, & Markham, 2016; White & Epston, 1990). In fact, exemplary tales have always been my preferred way to show my practice, whereas Michael's exemplary tale writing combined both showing and then telling (in particular, White, 2007). We always thought of these as complementary genres.

Many years ago, I recall reading in the research literature what practitioners most often resort to when their practice is stuck. Formal academic research came last, followed by supervision and consultation with seniors, and then, perhaps counterintuitively, informal discussions with workmates and peers came first. It has always interested me that many of those discussions are carried on through the telling of exemplary tales. Such a consultation usually is begun by a peer, who, after a moment or two of reflection, muses: "That reminds me of a person (family or case) I met with recently (or some time ago) . . . let me tell you about it." In agencies with long-serving staff, what might be called an exemplary tale-book becomes the joint property of the agency itself and is continually being circulated by way of such storytelling. These are stories that constantly get referenced, not with any expectation of providing explicit instructions or a manual on how to proceed but something rather different. Such stories circulate to show colleagues how their thinking might be re-invigorated once they appraise the parallels between the circumstances the story is telling about and the circumstances that have caused the therapist to consider thinking again or thinking afresh; that the circumstances they are now facing are beyond their experience—much like the situation I found myself in with regard to binge drinking and its consequences for young women and their families.

Some therapists might come to realize that the terrain they find themselves in is as yet unmapped and that they might have to find their own way. But perhaps others have traveled over similar terrain, had to find their way, and drafted a map while doing so. The two stories above, to pursue the metaphor of mapping and the unmapped, may overlap to some extent. Either one might travel according to the map implicit in their colleagues' or agency's story, travel along it until the specific circumstances force them to abandon it and find their own way, or decide they are on their own and for this very reason are intrigued by how their colleagues found their way rather than pointing to a way already in existence.

It is well known that oral cultures used stories as maps in which to repose knowledge of all kinds. An oral culture's anthology of stories might be considered their archives or libraries. It is to such literature/storytelling traditions we might

turn for guidance if we intend to do something similar. I have chosen in particular an ethnography by the anthropologist Keith Basso called *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (1996). The Western Apache, in fact, refer to their stories as maps, and they sought Basso's help to write them down now that so many of them were engaging in the practices of literacy. Here is Nick Thompson, an Apache elder describing how such stories work:

> This is what we know about our stories. They go to work on your mind and make you think about your life. Maybe you've not been acting right. So someone goes hunting for you—maybe your grandmother, your grandfather . . . anyone can do it. So someone stalks you and tells a story about what happened long ago. You are going to know they are aiming a story at you. All of a sudden it hits you! It is like an arrow they say. But when it goes in deep, it starts working on your mind right away. No one says anything to you, only that story is all, but now you know people are watching you and talking about you. So you have to think about your life. Then you feel real weak, real weak, like you are sick. The story is working on you. You keep thinking about it. The story is changing you now, making you want to live right. So you want to live better. It's hard to keep on living right. But you won't forget that story. It doesn't matter if you get old—that story will keep on stalking you same as the person who shot you with it in the first place. (Basso, p. 59)

What has intrigued me and some of my colleagues is how some exemplary tales have stalked us in a very similar fashion, perhaps not so much to live right but to practice as professionals to the very best of our capacities. Such stories *show* us the way—the already mapped—or more aptly how to find our way when we reach the unmapped territories, rather than tell us as manuals or toolkits, to use two contemporary metaphors for training in our fields of practice.

This is why I write exemplary tales and have done so since submitting my first one—"The Case of the Nightwatchman" (Epston, 1989)—to Michael White, who in 1981 was editor of the *Australian Family Therapy Journal* and who willingly accepted it for publication. In fact, that is how we first made each other's acquaintance. I was only too well aware that what I was proposing would be frowned upon by the styles our professional ways of speaking and writing sanctioned and prescribed as scientific, neutral, or evidence-based. On principle, I objected to such restrictions, as did Michael, for the way that people were represented or under-represented.

Cheryl Mattingly (2010) summarizes this style of representation:

> The "medical chart" may be regarded as a narrative template for much professional writing. The distinction in literary theory between flat and round characters is helpful here. E.M Forster tells us that flat characters in their purest forms are constructed around a single idea or quality. Once identified as such, they never surprise us; they never waver. They are fixed. They do exactly what we expect them to do. They are in a manner of speaking "done for." Round characters, by contrast, possess multiple qualities, shadowy ambiguities and outright contradictions. But most importantly they are capable of change (Forster, 1927). (p. 108)

Exemplary tales portray people according to their moral character as they engage with their plights by means of what matters most to them. My intentions here are similar to those of Ruth Behar in her *Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (1997). Someday, I would like to trace the many variations on this in the exemplary tales I have published since 1981.

To write such exemplary tales, I had to find other styles, genres, and vocabularies by which such stories might be told. Max van Manen is a phenomenologist and qualitative researcher who has directed his theorizing to the practice of writing what he refers to as evocative, a style of writing and telling that allow for a text to "speak to us so that we may experience an emotional and ethical responsiveness, that we know ourselves addressed" (van Manen, 2014, pp. 240–241). He sums up such an enterprise in the following terms: "There exists a relation between the writing structure of a text and the evoking effects that it may have on the reader . . . The more vocative the text, the more strongly the meaning is embedded within it, hence, the more difficult to paraphrase or summarize the text and the felt understandings embedded within it" (p. 241). He calls for a "poetizing form of writing" (p. 241). Most accounts of what happens in therapy/counseling, when it comes to be represented in professional vocabularies and genres, sever what is presented from what happened between therapists and those who seek their help. These accounts are markedly one-sided. Such versions as we intend by exemplary tales require language that "authentically speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking of it as a language that reverberates the world," as Merleau-Ponty says "a language that sings the world" (Merleau-Ponty & Lefort, 1973, p. 242).

Van Manen presents us with a vocabulary of the means as to how we might proceed to do so. First, "lived thoroughness": Such language and the descriptions it provides "attempt to bring back experience vividly into presence" (p. 242). This is a special quality of description and narration such that we "see before us" so as to speak what is not as such seen but told. Second, "nearness": This method, he states, gives words their full value so that layers of meaning get strongly embedded in the text. "This 'speaking' of language gives us the sense that we are brought 'in touch' with something and thus 'see' something in a manner that is revealing of its experiential sense" (p. 249). To put it another way, it establishes what he refers to as "feeling understanding," producing a nearness and intimacy with the phenomenon. This style means that it is sensitive to the local and particular rather than explicating the universal. Third, "intensification": van Manen purports that a poetic language is necessary if word is to become image, and this takes place by means of "literary or poetical allusive power" (p. 262). Words must be intense, memorable, and quotable. "An image presents meaning immediately; we grasp meaning directly by an act of intuition" (p. 263). Fourth, "tone": Here, van Manen is referring to "the expressive quality of sound in giving voice to words" (p. 264).

As Wittgenstein (1968) reminds us: "When I read a poem or narrative with feeling, something goes on in me which does not go on when I merely skim the lines for information" (p. 111). We experience the tone of a text not unlike the way we

experience "the captivating effect of a compelling musical score or catchy tune" (van Manen, 2014, p. 267). Fifth, "appeal": Here, the aim is for the text to possess the empathic power to appeal, so that its meaning speaks to and makes a demand on the reader. Here we are looking for a language that is sensitive to the experiential, moral, emotional, and personal dimensions of professional practice and professional life. The attempt here is to try to reveal a knowledge in the action of the practitioner that are the sensual, atmospheric, and felt aspects of experience, knowledge that cannot be translated back into cognitive knowing. This writing intends in fact to "discover" what we know in how we act. And finally, "epiphany": Here, according to van Manen, the reader/listener is stirred up, challenged primarily in the realm of the ethical, and provoked so that the deeper meaning of the text can have a transformative effect on the self of the reader... so that they might think/feel very differently than they might have by other means if they should find themselves in situations that parallel those embedded in these stories which hopefully are not easily forgotten (see also Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

I invited this generation of exemplary tale writers—Travis Heath (Heath & Arroyo, 2015a, 2015b), Kay Ingamells (Ingamells & Epston, 2013; Ingamells & Ijsseldijk, 2013), and Sasha Pilkington (2014)—to join me. Each has recently published his or her first exemplary tale in this journal. I asked them to describe how they transitioned from the conventional ways of representing others and themselves in professional writing.

Sasha McAllum Pilkington

As a practitioner, the transition from traditional academic writing into writing exemplary tales has been accompanied by a relief and excitement that comes from being able to step into my natural habitat. There is an ease and familiarity for me in representing therapeutic conversations and the narratives of people's lives in a story. I feel in step and connected with what is important to me in practice. However, while I have felt comfort with the genre, the writing process was at times like climbing a mountain as I sought to uncover the route between one place and another. It was important to me to honor the experiences of the people who share their lives with me, and I became particular about every word I wrote. Some days a story seemed to write itself with me excited as to what was behind the next bend, while at other times I slogged determinedly to add even a small amount to the narrative.

The documentation I have written over many years by way of letters as well as recording therapeutic conversations created a significant stepping stone into exemplary tale writing. Doing so over the course of my career has provided daily opportunities for me to rehearse recording dialogue that is significant to a person, and to practice writing a co-evolved story. The exemplary tales I write are a development and extension of my therapeutic letter writing style in which I can illustrate

the transformative and moving moments I experience with the people who share their stories with me and how the practice of narrative therapy brought us there.

Exemplary tales allow me to connect and express what is meaningful to me by giving voice to silenced stories, and by creating a context for therapeutic questions in a way that humanizes the people I work with and the therapeutic practice we engage in. As I share the raw honesty and complexity of the work, I feel more connected to both the reader and the people who share their stories with me. The editorial guidance and mentorship David has provided have been significant in showing me what might work in a story and what would not. I have enjoyed searching through both session notes that were taken collaboratively and therapeutic letters as part of the story writing process.

As I became connected to the people I speak with and the meaningful conversations we shared together, my writing moved into step with the philosophy of narrative practice. Writing exemplary tales provides me with a vehicle to express aspects of narrative practice that I think are significant. The tales have allowed me to illustrate the nuances of practice in ways that contextualize and humanize both the experience of the people I speak with and my responses as a counselor. They have also given me a means of expressing what I am passionate about in a way that is meaningful to me.

Travis Heath

As I began a PhD curriculum in counseling psychology over a decade ago, I found that the predominant philosophies guiding both the program and the profession were very different from my emerging approach. Moreover, I learned the discourse of research and clinical case notes and the "correct" ways to engage in writing such reports. This left very little room for telling stories and left me feeling bored and discouraged with traditional "academic" writing. I found most research in the field to be lacking creativity and of very little practical use for me as a therapist in training. I was instead drawn to the storytelling of authors/clinicians like Irvin Yalom and Oliver Sacks. They were really telling stories! However, they were also prodigious scholars who had reputations that preceded them. This left me slim hope that writing this way could be something a commoner like myself could do in a way that might be taken seriously.

I am sad to say this feeling stayed with me until I was fortunate enough to connect with David Epston in April 2015. When he invited me to engage in a writing adventure with him, I was, of course, quite excited. However, I quickly discovered that my formal training was trying to take over and discourage me from fully allowing creativity to permeate the writing process. It took multiple "proddings" from David to "just start writing" and not worry about the "final direction" of things before I became reintroduced to a way of telling stories that had always come naturally to me.

I have practitioners and practitioners-to-be at the forefront of my consciousness when writing exemplary tales. My hope is not that they photocopy my work and adopt it as their own, but rather that they capture the spirit or essence of the work. A canonical approach has never been helpful for me when learning how to do anything, which is perhaps why narrative work was always so appealing to me. However, a phenomenal question that someone else asks can serve as an entry point for my own creativity. Treatment manuals essentially strap a person to the back of the author as the author climbs up the mountain with reader in tow. Exemplary tales provide perspective on the climb awaiting the reader and hopefully some inspiration as she blazes her own trail to the top.

Kay Ingamells

I have always seen the world as a magical place and I have always loved stories. Since becoming a narrative therapist, therapy conversations have become a place of their own for me with a magic of their own. To write about such conversations as I might write case notes would have been akin to describing a fantastical landscape by writing only about its topography.

Before writing exemplary tales, I only knew how to describe the people in case notes. The people I met while trudging through fat files when I did time in mental health and child protection services were never the people I came to know. Case note versions of people were almost always one dimensional, bleached of character, then packaged into predetermined categories dictated by the discourses of professions and services. In clinical meetings, these case note versions were further storied into being as the people themselves faded further from view. I know people as infinitely interesting. The more I engage with the detailed poetry of narrative enquiries, the more surprising and delightful I find people to be.

I vowed I would never speak of people in "case note-ese," because I knew that if I "spoke them" in this way, I would be contributing to storying their identities. I attempted to "speak them" otherwise. However, my written case notes, which I like to think of as respectful, did not justly represent the people I had met either, probably because I was focused on pathologizing descriptions I wanted to leave out rather than what I might put in. When I first began writing, I wrestled to pull myself away from the influence of 20 or so years of such note taking. I was shocked by the extent to which my thinking had been colonized by a way of seeing people that was distasteful to me even although I had so strived to avoid it: Rather than coming to life on the page, people died on the page.

In the beginning I could barely see what it was I was doing or find the stories. With David Epston's painstaking help, I found my "story vision" and writing voice. This metamorphosis has spread into my practice: The more I write stories, the more magical therapy conversations seem to become and the more people come to life in front of me. I am so grateful that I have come to be able to see and story people in this way.

VIRTUAL APPRENTICESHIPS

These back-to-back special series articles in this issue, as well as those appearing in the next two issues (volume 35, numbers 3 and 4), attempt to bring your attention first to the long tradition of exemplary tales within the narrative therapy literature and practice, and second to how recently it was formally introduced in the Couple and Family Therapy program at North Dakota State University by Tom Carlson and his colleagues. We hope we are able to heed Merleau-Ponty's warning: "It is not enough for a painter like Cezanne, an artist, or a philosopher, to create and express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others" (1964, p. 19). Can exemplary tales, purposely introduced to training programs especially for newcomers to narrative therapy, be a species of virtual apprenticeships whereby creativity and ingenuity can be fostered in the next generation of therapists?

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