

Telling Stories to Sell What We Love

(and advance ourselves professionally in the process)

A talk given at #GWA2017 by C.L. Fornari

Stories make our subject “sticky.” Some say that the brain is actually hardwired to remember stories.

What makes a good story? First a Premise, Theme or Point. Next characters, just enough detail, conflict (maybe a villain!) and a resolution.

Popular story themes:

- ~ The little guy can win. (Example: front yard veggie gardens)
- ~ Secrets. (Example: how to do the impossible or extreme.)
- ~ Dreams can come true. (Example: before & after garden.)
- ~ What we do in life *matters*. (Example: monarchs on Asclepias...and yes, I show a “tropical milkweed” and no, they are not “poisoning monarchs.” For more see this: <http://monarchbutterflygarden.net/is-tropical-milkweed-killing-monarch-butterflies/>
- Seeds in Durham, NC <http://www.seedsnc.org/>
- ~ Things that are surprising or funny. (Example shown: veggie bouquets at a farmers’ market.)

Examples of how a story “sells.”

J. Peterman Catalog <http://www.jpeterman.com/>

Book: *Significant Objects – 100 Extraordinary Stories About Ordinary Things* by Joshua Glenn and Rob Walker

“Eddie the Terrible” <http://hssvacc.blogspot.com/2014/12/a-full-disclosure-blog-three-reasons.html>

Stories can be true, or just *feel* true. If the stories are fiction they need the ring of authenticity. Human emotions R-Us!

Speakers’ Stories

Signature stories are those you have crafted. They are often something that has happened to you or people you know. And as speakers we would no more tell another speaker’s stories than we would copy another writer’s text.

Stories in the public domain. These are stories from the news or other commonly reported tales. Examples are how Post-it notes came to be invented, or “Eddie the Terrible.”

Practice stories out loud. Tell them to your friends around the dinner table. Try them out at Toastmasters, in a GWA Power Circle, or at a free talk at a local library. Notice where people laugh and accentuate/build on those moments.

Practice stories standing up. Make sure your actions make sense with the story. Don’t move randomly on stage.

Writer’s Stories

There are the stories about the plants themselves. (*Of Naked Ladies and Forget-Me-Nots* by Allan Armitage, Best Plant Stories of 2016 blog post:

https://medium.com/@andy_murdock/the-best-plant-stories-of-2016-7893e376a565) and stories about people where plants play a role. (Think J. Peterman style)

On my blog you can see my experiment with starting off each plant post with a story. Most of them are fiction.

Words Are Important

This isn’t news to communicators, but why are we still using old terms that much of the public no longer uses? People do not consider themselves “gardeners” anymore. Why aren’t we using the words, or creating the photographs, that speak to who is in our audience and what they care about?

Before starting any project we need to ask: Who is my audience and what do they care about?

Finding Your Stories

Tales from around the dinner table.

Embarrassing, difficult, or weird situations you’ve found yourself in. “The funniest/oddest thing happened today...”

Write them all down.

Food for thought: Books by Bernedette Jiwa – sign up for her newsletter: <http://thestoryoftelling.com/>

**Keep in touch:
www.GardenLady.com**