

Courage My Friends Podcast Series V – Episode 3
Mouth Open Story Jump Out: Storytelling for Change

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ANNOUNCER: You're listening to *Needs No Introduction*.
Needs No Introduction is a rabble podcast network show that serves up a series of speeches, interviews and lectures from the finest minds of our time

[music transition]

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: COVID. Capitalism. Climate. Three storms have converged and we're all caught in the vortex.

STREET VOICE 1: The cost of living in the city is just soaring so high, it's virtually unlivable.

STREET VOICE 2: There seems to be a widening gap of the have and the have nots.

STREET VOICE 3: The climate is getting worse. Floods and fires. It's like we're living in a state of emergency.

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COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: What brought us to this point? Can we go back to normal? Do we even want to?

Welcome back to this special podcast series by rabble.ca and the Tommy Douglas Institute (at George Brown College) and with the support of the Douglas-Coldwell-Layton Foundation. In the words of the great Tommy Douglas...

VOICE 4: Courage my friends; 'tis not too late to build a better world.

COURAGE MY FRIENDS ANNOUNCER: This is the *Courage My Friends* podcast.

RESH: Amid our separations, and even divisions, how can stories bring us together? In our fast-paced world, how do they give us pause? And how are we uplifted and empowered when we can tell our own stories, in our own voices, and on our own terms? Mouth open, story jump out.

It's Halloween again, and for the Courage My Friends podcast, this means it's a time for stories. Returning with our annual Mouth Open Story Jump Out episode, we are very pleased to welcome storyteller Kesha Christie of Talkin Tales, storyteller Njoki Maburu, recipient of the Transformational Storytelling Fellowship, and Storytelling Facilitator Rani Sanderson of StoryCentre Canada.

Together we share in stories and conversation about the power of storytelling for community work, transformation, and social change.

And very aptly, given the time of year, the episode opens with storyteller Kesha Christie and the Caribbean folktale of The Soucouyant.

KESHA: There are a lot of things that happen in an October, but there are things that go bump in the night that we don't fully understand. Let me tell you the story about Dorothy.

Dorothy was an old woman, wise woman, and she did a lot of things for herself. She lived by herself on the edge of a village in her own little cabin. She would often walk in, pick up her groceries, and go back.

People watched her. There wasn't much known about her. Dorothy was her name, but no one called her that. They always called her May.

"Morning May!" "Evening May!" And she would greet them the same way.

But there was something funny about May. Not everybody noticed.

But Shelly-Ann, she watched keenly and she wondered why it is that there are some days when May would walk up tall, and other days when she would walk with her shoulders hunched, almost like she was a different person. Shelly-Ann took it upon herself to find out what was happening. But just like Shelly-Ann noticed May, May noted Shelly-Ann.

Shelly-Ann had a big family, but her uncle, Uncle Denny, he recently died. No one knew why. But the family was quick to have a ceremony and bury him. A few nights later, when the cold came in and there was no moon in the sky, Shelly-Ann noticed that things felt different. She didn't see May that day, but she wanted to know what was going on. So she went out to spy on May's cabin.

She noticed something very interesting. May walked upright into the cemetery all the way to her uncle's grave. Shelly-Ann came in closer. May dug up the uncle, she took out his liver, and she started to make a brew.

With that black, thick brew, she rubbed it on her skin. And then that's when it happened!

May began to peel off her skin and place it in a mortar. And then with her skin off, she jumped into the air, lighting up the sky like a fireball, shrieking as she went. She was gone. Shelly-Ann stood stunned, wondering where is it that May could have gone?

What is May!?

The very next morning, when Shelly-Ann woke up, she heard a couple of the neighbors talking.

They were talking about the incident. They seen a fireball in the sky, which meant Soucouyant was on the rise.

Later that day, Shelly-Ann found out that a little boy named Juni had a very strange bruise on his neck. He had two holes and he was weak, could barely move.

But you see, no one saw May that day.

The very next night, the same thing happened.

But Shelly-Ann, knowing that May was a Soucouyant, sprinkled salt on the skin. And after that, no one ever saw May again.

RESH: Oh, Kesha, thank you so much for that wonderful opening. Beautifully done, and very topical, given that Halloween is right around the corner. So, Kesha and Njoki and Rani, thanks for joining us for this year's Mouth Open Story Jump Out episode that we did start last year for Halloween.

Kesha, let's start with you. As a storyteller, the founder of Talkin' Tales and host of the Walk Good podcast, what drives your passion for storytelling?

KESHA: Oh my goodness. That is a loaded question. I grew up with stories.

A Jamaican household, there was a story for everything. Why you should and shouldn't do something. Things that go bump in the night.

And I was a quiet child. So I was always in big people business and no one ever knew. But I learned a lot of things. Like I found out that my aunties, the names that I knew them as were not their real names. I found out that different traditions we passed down through our stories.

So I always carried stories with me and I could tell you about a sale and make you feel like you were there with me. But it wasn't until I got older that I started to realize that this treasure, this gift could disappear.

If the storytellers that we have now stop telling, our stories would disappear. Their energy, their life. So we have to continue to share our stories.

And ever since I decided on a whim that I was going to be a storyteller. I have to tell you. I can't shut up, one. And two, I see the value.

They say that sometimes words are like liquid gold. Stories are too. Because if there's one way you want to connect people, tell a story and you've got everyone's attention.

RESH: Absolutely. Thank you.

And Njoki, you just completed the Transformation Storytelling Fellowship with Community Foundations Canada - and congratulations on that, by the way. Give us an overview of the Fellowship and tell us about your work as a storyteller.

NJOKI: Yeah, thank you so much, Resh. And for that beautiful story, Kesha. Scary also.

Well the Storytelling Fellowship in full, it's called the Transformation Storytelling Fellowship, and it is part of the Community Foundations of Canada Transformation Department.

Specifically this fellowship is working with a goal of bringing in a lens of intergenerational storytelling into exploring how philanthropy can be more equitable and inclusive going forward.

What are the people who have already worked in philanthropy or who are just curious about philanthropy, thinking about ways that this ecosystem can be shaped differently? Can include more voices? Can be more equitable going forward. And in this context, the Community Foundations of Canada, in short CFC, welcomes a host of people to apply and specifically really to hear from the youth.

I found that as young people, sometimes philanthropy doesn't seem like the most accessible space. And we are sometimes not able to see ourselves represented when thinking of, oh, this large foundations, for example. You know, there's a narrative of that's for those people that have money, have already retired.

But no. I am so committed to making our voices as young people from multiple parts of this world, shapers and creators of a different type of philanthropy, a different system of philanthropy. And so connecting this to storytelling. My fellowship involved using writing as a way of communicating with different folks from across the country, which is presently Canada, and also whoever else chose to read our pieces from other parts of the world on how philanthropy and emerging technologies actually can intersect. And how those two sectors have the potential of shaping more transparent and more accessible forms of capital or access to money.

So I used writing, my colleague also used writing, but also used a series of audio recordings. And the fellowship is really open to whatever forms of storytelling people bring in. Perhaps there will be someone who will want to do a documentary. Perhaps someone will want to do visual art. But the purpose is how can we tell stories that showcase different ways that communities across this country, Turtle Island, are thinking of new models of philanthropy that are really pursuing, as CFC likes to say, a future where everyone belongs.

RESH: Thank you. And you know, it's interesting, the different modalities of storytelling, and we'll certainly get more into that. And Rani, you are the founder of Story Centre Canada. What is Story Centre's mission?

RANI: I run StoryCenter Canada. It was actually founded in the U. S. about 30 years ago, and we launched the Canadian branch in 2015 so that we could work specifically in the Canadian context. And I work across the country. I also work across the U. S. and around the world helping people tell stories. So I am not personally a storyteller as the other two are.

And thank you for that story, Kesha. It was amazing.

We focus on digital storytelling, which is short personal narratives that are multimedia videos. So I provide the tools and support. And people who are the experts tell their own personal stories. So the work that we do is more rooted in personal, first person stories, personal lived experience.

We believe that people are the experts in their own lives and should take full control over how they tell their stories; both in the words and the visual representation that they choose to tell their story. And we work across the country with a wide variety of non-profit organizations and individuals who just want to share their own stories.

They own their stories. We believe that everybody owns their own stories. So they can then choose how they would like to use those stories and stories get used for lots of different reasons. For personal reflection and growth. For advocacy work. For education on an issue or a topic. You know, personal stories are really great way to humanize an issue.

Statistics are important, but people have a tendency to forget them or not realize how important they are until you add a human face or story to that issue. So it's a great tool for helping people share their stories. And we also know that stories can be commodified a lot of times. So that's part of the reason why we feel people own their stories.

As opposed to a documentary filmmaker or journalist coming in to take a story and decide how to represent it, storytellers that we work with get to make all those decisions on their own. So that's the work that we do.

RESH: And you began in film and video, right? Is that the reason that you switched over to storytelling?

RANI: I sort of happened into it a little bit by accident. I mean, intentionally by accident, if that's the way to put it. I did have a film and video background and then decided to do a later in life Masters of Environmental Studies where I was going to focus on community engaged arts and education. And I thought I would probably make a documentary and my supervisor at the time introduced me to digital storytelling and it was like a light bulb went off.

I didn't know this thing existed or had a name, but it was exactly what I had always been looking for. Was a way to help other people tell their stories, as opposed to me coming in and telling their stories. And it was just a beautiful way for me to combine

my technical and creative skills with my passion for community development and community work. So it was a perfect fit.

RESH: Lovely. And community development, community building, social justice work is shared by all three of you and stories and storytelling obviously are very much a tool for that. Kesha, what do stories and storytelling mean for working with particularly marginalized communities?

KESHA: Stories are power. They help you to uncover your hidden self.

When we share stories openly and honestly, we hear the heart of the other person. We're able to understand each other. It's the way that we pass down our beliefs and traditions. And it's also a way for us to question the society around us. It gives us a different view.

It's said that storytelling entertains, provokes, and educates. So it gives you an opportunity to learn something new and also offer another way of thinking of things. So you're able to see yourself differently. You're able to see your circumstances in a different light. Or find a new solution because you're looking at it with a different lens.

RESH: Njoki, you co-wrote the article, along with Inda Intiar, "Lessons From a Transformational Storytelling Fellowship". What do you mean by transformative storytelling?

NJOKI: This is very well aligned because later today we'll, Inda and I will be speaking about this very topic to another group on what is transformative storytelling.

RESH: Oh, lovely. And they can also listen to the podcast later on.

NJOKI: Yes, that's actually a really good idea.

And I also want to acknowledge that we were able to collaborate with Andrew Paul from the Edmonton Community Foundation, who has helped us tremendously in shaping these ideas.

When we were chatting about transformative storytelling. One of the key things that we have observed is necessary in defining what this means is a centering on consent.

Rani just spoke about that. You know how the people who hold the stories, those are the places, those are the places that we draw our attention and uplift their voices. And for what we have observed as transformative storytelling, is the consent is necessary in telling the story. But also in extracting the story, taking it back.

In traditional media, once it's published, it's out there, too bad for you if you said something you didn't mean to say. Or if the story that you've now published is now causing some form of threat or danger to you.

But from what we've learned, even from Andrew, is through transformative storytelling, there is the opportunity to say: Well, this story served its purpose at this time, but the person or the people, the communities that offered it to us, no longer want it in the public eye at this time. What is it that we can do to perhaps repair to take it down. Or if it cannot be taken down, what are the ways that we can work in collaboration to ensure that these people still have their dignity and safety cared for. And it seems far off as how is that even connected to the storytelling?

But it is so central to it because if storytelling continues to be extractive and commodified, then it becomes a product. And transformative storytelling is not about producing, a series that is a hit show. It's not just about a product that is sellable. Transformative storytelling is really about honoring the dignity, the consent, the self determination and the sovereignty of whoever is giving a story. But also being accountable as the person that is either receiving that story to witnessing. And what I mean here - thankfully, I've learned from amazing knowledge-keepers - is how can I hold this moment where I am being told a story without having to feel that I have to insert my advice in it or my twist in it. Can I just receive it and deliver it in the way that is doing them a service?

So transformative storytelling has those elements. And the purpose of it is that it ripples beyond you, beyond the direct community that it touches.

It may not have the "impact" in the next 30 days. It may not have the 500 views in 24 hours. But the purpose of it is that it plants a seed that can live long enough to do the work that it's meant to do. And perhaps that story at this time was to begin to question, why is money transferred from this country to this country in this way, in terms of philanthropy?

And maybe that question wouldn't be answered in next year's conference. But because someone had that seed planted in them through this type of storytelling; three years later there might be new ways of thinking about how philanthropy operates. So that's what we perceive as storytelling.

It's a long term commitment to consent, to collaboration, curiosity, and a lot of honoring self-determination.

RESH: So, Njoki, could you please tell us a story.

NJOKI: Yes. I really was thinking around this. And I remembered parts of my upbringing where I heard stories from my mother and sometimes as Kesha was sharing, you know, for a long time, I was the only child and sometimes I was pretty quiet and you just sit somewhere and you hear all these things and you're like, Oh, wonderful to know that.

But there's one story that has stayed with me for so long. It wasn't in the context of family that I heard it, but it was later in my teenage years when I was wondering, what, what do I do later in life?

And one day I was sitting down to read about one of my favorite people and teachers, who is Professor Wangari Maathai. She was a Kenyan environmentalist. A wonderful teacher. She was also in politics. What most people know her now for is having received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 and becoming the first African woman to receive this award.

Later in the years when I was just reading about her because I had grown up around a family that really, really loved trees and planting them and caring for them. I saw her speaking on video, and she started sharing this story, which I'd like to share. And I'd like to begin by acknowledging, from what I know now, that the story is also rooted in the Quechua people of Peru, has traveled north to the Haida people in Haida Gwaii, and now seems to also be trapped in different parts of the world.

There was a big forest fire. A really, really big forest fire. It was raging and the animals were running everywhere. The zebras, the cheetahs, the rhinos, the elephants, all the birds. And the hummingbird was a tiny little bird.

She started flying back and forth between a nearby stream of water and the forest fire. With her little beak, she went in, dipped her beak into the stream, and flew back and dropped it over the fire.

And as she was doing this, the animals looked out at her and said: Hummingbird, what are you doing? It makes no sense. You know that you're really, really tiny, your wings are really, really tiny, and your beak is too. Nothing you're doing is going to help here.

The hummingbird ignored their comments and kept flying until one moment when they were too much for her and even the elephant with his big trunk was not doing much.

She just stopped, looked at them and said: Well, at least I'm doing the best I can.

And she kept flying, and flying.

And this story, as the professor taught me, really just speaks to the importance of doing your little part. It may seem that the fire will never go out, but what good is there to just sit and watch, and maybe put others down who are simply doing the best that they can.

RESH: Lovely. Thank you so much. What is the context in which you would tell this story and what are you hoping that your audience would get from it?

NJOKI: Yeah, I feel that this story can really go into so many ways, in so many contexts.

It's been a couple years since I was in high school, but the first thought that came to me is how this story can even apply to moments where someone, a student, is experiencing bullying of some sort.

And there is a group that, you know, say, well, what are we going to do about it? The bullies always win. But maybe there is that one kid who says, No, we can all just decide to say something, do something, or even advocate to end the conditions that allow for such bullying.

That's just an example, but I feel that there is many ways that even in the workplaces, in public transport, we may observe a form of injustice, a form of unfairness. And I know there are moments where my voice feels really, really insignificant and small. But nonetheless, what if my question is the seed that begins to shake these establishments? What if my disturbance or the disruption that I bring to this context is what is needed today?

And what if I, choosing to speak up, especially for those who have more protections based on different identities and factors of privilege, what if my choice to speak up is really what rallies a shift in the policies and practices of my workplace?

So I hope that a story like this really reminds us that we are the agents of change and also acknowledge that each of us has different positions that we're starting on. We have different social locations and our contribution is important.

One of my teachers, Baratunde Thurston, he talks about how part of just contributing to a different type of building our current world and society begins with showing up. Just showing up. And that is. asking, where do you need me today?

I hope that that is a question that we can not only project onto those who are leading movements, but we can reflect on. Where am I needed today? And I think that applies in so many fields and places and forms of storytelling.

RESH: They're marvelously elastic, as you say, right? They can mean so many different things to so many different people in so many different contexts.

And Rani, obviously stories and storytelling are so vital and central to the work that you do. Is there an example of an impact, an especially inspiring impact of a story on somebody that you have worked with?

RANI: It's hard to pick one. I think a lot of the stories have a huge impact on both the storyteller and, I think as everybody here has been saying, the people who hear the stories.

The motto for Story Center is: Tell Stories, Listen Deeply. And a huge piece of that is also listening to the stories of other people. Bearing witness is so important in so many situations.

Our story workshops are small groups. So everybody is making their own story. It is very much a collaborative effort that people are there to support. We're never critiquing stories. You cannot critique somebody's personal life story, but people are there to support each other.

And it is amazing. I think we're talking about transformative power of storytelling, but how transformative it is to share your story, to hear your story and to be heard.

And I think a lot of people who come into our workshops and the groups that we work with maybe haven't always had or been given a space to share their personal stories or thought that they were important.

So, so many people come out of them feeling that they were heard and that their stories do matter. So I feel like, It's hard to pick one because I think so many of the stories have really affected people both personally as the storyteller and as the listener. I don't know if that completely answers your question.

RESH: I think it does. And as was said, stories are power, but they're also empowering that, if I'm hearing it right, it gives validity to people's voices and their experience, particularly if you've been marginalized, delegitimized for so much of your time

RANI: Yeah, even your story has been co-opted or commodified in a way that we're talking about, you know. So giving people that sort of platform to tell the story the way they envision their story being shared, both visually and through words, can be extremely powerful to a listener as much as the storyteller.

We can't pretend to know what a person is feeling or experiencing, but hearing them tell their story can be a start to understanding where people come from. Walking a mile in somebody's shoes, so to speak.

When we teach our workshops, we talk about owning your own emotions. Because while an experience may be something that is not universal; if you can tell your story authentically and with emotions, that's what people really connect with because those are universal. Everybody around the world knows what it feels like to feel joy and sadness and fear and excitement and be celebratory or be worried about something. All of that is universal. And if that comes through in the stories, then people really do connect to that authenticity of telling a personal story from a place of caring.

RESH: Right. And in many ways today we are living in sort of a deeply divided world and a deeply divided society as well. We have connections, but we also have divisions.

Kesha, how do stories serve to build social connection?

KESHA: Stories are .. I want to say tool for lack of a better word, but it's more like a piece of a puzzle that makes everything make sense. By that I mean, when we're in a room together and there's discord, "fear" would be the best word I'm looking for. Telling the story about ourselves, sharing a folktale with a moral lesson. It breaks down the walls that exist and it makes things make sense in a different way.

I tell people regularly that you may hear the same story, but it comes out different every time. Because the stories take on an energy of their own. And the message that's needed in that space for an individual or group of people; the story seems to unfold in a way that allows them to recognize their need. They're able to pick out whether it is a feeling, whether it is a phrase, whether it's the journey on a whole. There's just a piece of the story that allows things to fit different, allows an understanding, a commonality. And having that connection and being able to understand each other allows us to build, it allows us to connect and intersect on levels that otherwise we might be too afraid to explore.

RESH: Right. So with that, Kesha, please tell us another story.

KESHA: Absolutely. This is a story that I learned earlier this year in February, and I thought it's perfect on all levels. So let's get into this one.

This is the story of Aniko.

Long ago, Aniko lived in her village with her family, and they did everything together.

They hunted, cooked, played. They were such a happy family. Until one day, a very terrible thing happened.

A sickness raged through the village, taking everyone in sight, except for Aniko. She was the only survivor. She knew that she couldn't stay in her village by herself, but was afraid to go out into the world.

Making the decision to leave, she slowly walked away.

She walked until she came to the forest. This forest had trees as tall as mountains, and they seemed to be wide and very dark.

She had heard stories about this forest. Stories of people who went in and were never seen again. But there were also other stories of a village on the other side, much like her own, and her hope was that they would take her in.

So with a small prayer, Aniko walked into the forest. She walked and walked and walked until she was tired. When she had almost lost all hope, she found a path and followed it to the outside of the forest.

When she got there, she saw a beautiful place. She thought to herself, this is such a beautiful country.

She continued to walk towards the village. And by this time the villagers started to notice someone coming. So they started to look up and they, they noticed something different about her. And as she got closer to the village, she noticed something very curious about the villagers.

When they finally got close enough, they looked at each other.

And finally, one of the villagers said: Little girl, what are you doing out here on your own?

Well, Aniko told them about what happened to her and her family. And there was something about Aniko that made them want to take her in.

Aniko was amazing. Even though there was something very curious about her, the people welcomed her.

And Aniko fit right into the day to day. She would celebrate in their joys and share in their sorrows. And she brought a gift to the village, something that they had never experienced before.

Early each morning, they would hear Aniko singing. She would sing a song that would wake them up and get them excited about their day.

It became a habit that they wouldn't even get out of bed until they heard Aniko's precious song. You see for the very first time, the villagers were hearing songs and music. Where for Aniko, it was something that she did every day.

But in this village, like every other village in the world, there was one evil, jealous, small-hearted man that didn't like Aniko for one reason.

She had a short neck like yours and mine. The villagers had long necks, beautiful long necks.

Well, this man looked at Aniko and told her that she should leave the village. She was putting all of the villagers in danger. And she felt sad. Without thinking, Aniko, didn't want to bring harm to the village, she ran into the forest.

But the forest had changed. The brush was thicker, the trees seemed taller, it seemed darker. She walked until she couldn't walk anymore and fell over.

By this time, the villagers had started to wake up. Wanting to hear Aniko's sweet song, they heard nothing. And they waited. They waited until it seemed too ridiculous to stay in bed.

They started asking each other, Have you seen Aniko? Have you seen Aniko?

They went to visit the evil, jealous, small-hearted man, and asked him, Have you seen Aniko? He proudly said that he got rid of the short-necked one.

Well, that's not what the villagers wanted. And so now they had to figure out how are they going to bring Aniko back? If they go into the village themselves, then they, too, might get lost.

Well, that's when Aniko's friend had an idea.

Let us sing for Aniko, like Aniko has sung for us.

Well, the villagers had only heard singing when Aniko came to the village. They had never tried singing before. So they held hands, and with their broken voices, they kept singing her name.

Ah, Ah, Ah, Aniko Nisawane, Aniko Nisawane.

They called and called. The song meant, Aniko, we miss you. We want you to come home.

And their voices rang from the village, into the forest, and into Aniko's ears. She found her way back to the village and they were all grateful to see her.

The Chief of the village called everyone together. He had an announcement.

He said to Aniko: it is not how you look that matters; it's what's in your heart. And you have given so much to all of us. Let us give back to you.

And from that day forward, all of the villagers, including that evil, jealous, small-hearted man. He wasn't evil and he wasn't jealous anymore. Because he too learned that it's not how you look, it's what you carry inside that matters most.

RESH: Beautiful. Thank you so much, Kesha. Now, when you're telling this story, which audience are you telling it for?

KESHA: I adapt the story to the audience. So if it's high school students, I use references that they use now. I might change the environment to places or something that they can connect to.

When I'm sharing to seniors, I usually share the story as it is. And if there are younger kids, I talk more about the long necks and how they looked. I talk about the environment so that they can truly get a visual of the story.

What I find with all the stories that I tell is that they're adaptable to whichever audience I'm performing with or sharing stories with.

RESH: And this is very much part of the oral storytelling tradition. And it's really interesting because we're the media generation, and social media especially has shortened attention spans, increased the speed of everything, replaced traditional social interaction with social media interaction, which is not the same thing.

So as somebody who specializes in oral traditions of particularly Africa and the Caribbean, what is the place of oral storytelling in our fast-paced and tech-driven world?

KESHA: That's the magic of stories. Even though we're used to that hustle and bustle and that instant gratification, when you tell a story it's like you're taking each individual on a journey and they stop. It has a way of pausing the outside world and giving you a new space. Clearing your mind to take you on this journey. I've heard many people come to me and share that: Oh my goodness. I've loved your story. I remember this took me back to when...

And it's so key that when you're sharing the story, I just let them go.

It's like you said, Open Mouth, Story Jump Out is a real experience. I let the story go and literally watch the audience connect. You've got generations, grandparents connecting with grandchildren. Young people seeing their elders differently or recognizing their elders in a different light.

They're sharing what's on their phone with the older generation and they're communicating. The stories kind of create, not a bubble, but it just creates a pause in that fast pace of everything and allows you to connect with someone, something outside of that fast pace.

And when you slow down a little bit, you gain more understanding, more flexibility, opens your mind and your heart.

RESH: And Njoki, you too have written about this in your article you talk about, and I quote, "the deliberate slowness of storytelling".

NJOKI: Absolutely.

First of all, Kesha, that story transported me. I found myself with my eyes closed. I wasn't even here anymore. And truly, I felt what you were speaking about there. It's your heart that matters. So thank you for offering us that. And reminding us of the power of storytelling in really interrupting our perception of time.

In terms of deliberate slowness and storytelling, it again connects to what I was speaking about earlier. And what Kesha and Rani have been saying on how do we listen and witnessing?

I've observed that the power of storytelling really is amplified by the quality of listening that went into it. And the quality of listening is really founded on the opportunity for whoever is having the responsibility to listen To give themselves permission to slow down and to pause to ask generative questions and generous questions.

When a story is made with haste for the purpose of, Oh, I just got to meet a deadline - which is absolutely understandable given the economic constraints that almost everyone is living in - When a story is made with haste, I tend to believe that its impact or its quality, can be reflected in how it's received. And that maybe there was something that was left out. There was an incompleteness to something that was said. Or the audience that it reaches perhaps doesn't get the depth of what is possible through that one story.

So deliberate storytelling really interrupts that attention span that we are currently almost all navigating of reduced focus and a reduced presence.

By insisting on deliberate slowness, we change the quality of the stories we tell. Because there is an element of, I see you, I'm here with you, you who's offering me the story. I'm with you. I'm not extracting from you. I'm not just taking from you; I am with you. And in a sense that changes how that story is received. As just Kesha was saying. The quality of the story or the form of that story, will take the shape of those that are in its presence.

And deliberate slowness reminds me that the quality of the stories I tell. The depth of them. The questions that are generated from them. The people that the story reaches. All of those things and more are really connected to my capacity to listen better, listen deeper, and to give room for more than what I think I know.

I like to say, in terms of dreaming, you can write your dreams down, have them, but leave room for miracles.

And same thing for storytelling. You can have the form, the outline; leave room for everything else that the story wants to tell.

RESH: Wonderful. And I too have been listening to both of your stories and it does remind me of back home, sitting with your grandparents and your parents and your aunties and your uncles, and there's no television, there's no anything. It's sort of a reigniting of those relationships that so often we overlook or seem to have lost. And again, Njoki, you talk about the importance of relationships and you use the quote from Adrienne Maree Brown of stories "moving at the speed of trust". What a beautiful way of putting that. So thank you for that, Njoki.

Again, we are within this fast-paced, very mediatized environment. And that also, as has been spoken of here, offers a great deal to storytellers as well.

Rani, you specialize in digital storytelling. So tell us, what is digital storytelling and how would you use it?

RANI: Yeah. They are shorter stories, although the process is longer to tell them.

Our workshops are typically six weeks online, two hours once a week or three full days in person. So people have a lot of time to sort of sit and process their stories. But the end result is a short story, two to four minutes. They're highly shareable in this age of fast media and everything like that. Sadly, I think. I do love everything that Njoki was just talking about: the deliberate slowness, taking the time to sort of reflect. And that's what the process of making the stories is in our workshops. We ask people to sit and reflect and really sit with their stories and give them space. And they often start much longer.

We start with an oral story in a story-circle kind of setting where everybody shares their stories, and then they write and they're typically under 400 words, which is less than a typed page. They're taught all the different process tools, the digital audio recording and editing and then video editing and people put pictures and photos and video clips and art work and all kinds of things.

They can tell their story through images as much as their words. We talk a lot about the fact that it is also a visual medium, not just an oral story. So how can your imagery maybe even tell a different part of your story that your words aren't going to tell? So how do all these pieces work together to tell a bigger picture story.

RESH: It just seems that stories, again, they're so malleable, they're so flexible that you can really use the, social media technology. I mean, I'd imagine that this became really handy given the pandemic. How has the pandemic impacted what you do?

RANI: Yeah, well, we obviously moved a lot of our workshops online. And it was an amazing way to connect people from all across the world from all different backgrounds to come together over these little zoom courses and really not feel so alone. And I think stories have that power anyways to make people feel not so alone. But during the pandemic, especially the first year when people felt pretty trapped in their homes and in their own four walls if they were even in lucky enough to have that kind of space. This opened up their worlds and made them feel not quite so alone.

We worked with children to seniors. We worked with kids as young as six and seven and we worked with people who were over a hundred years old to tell stories. And I think it was just really powerful, no matter where in the world people were to not feel alone in their experiences and just in their spaces. We had a few people who would just come almost regularly. We offered a lot of free one-off sessions where people could just come and share things.

You know, stories, as I think both Kesha and Njoki were saying, they're very powerful. They really have a power to create and build empathy and be

remembered, right? And have yourself remembered in a lot of ways. They continue beyond you in a lot of ways.

It's kind of the first thing we do with little children. We tell them stories. We have storybooks and picture books. I used to work with children quite a lot with picture books, doing projects on different kinds of storytelling and kids love it.

And then somehow they grow up and hopefully we can help them continue to hold onto that magic, the magical power of stories. Especially the types of stories that both Kesha and Njoki have been sharing today. They're just really magical.

And stories breed stories also. Somebody tells a story and then somebody else tells a story and then somebody else tells a story.

Oh, that reminds me of this. That reminds me of this thing. And suddenly you have a whole room of people talking where maybe nobody, especially younger people were a bit reticent to speak about some issues, some topic, just something. And during the pandemic, a lot of that was just about being isolated and lonely.

We worked a lot with young people in the North. Where even some of the technology wasn't helping too much. We had a lot of connection issues and all of that. That's the beauty of technology. Sometimes it works, sometimes it makes things more complicated. But it did allow people this two hours once a week to really connect.

RESH: It's interesting because, you know when I was reading through all of your work in your organizations and what I kept seeing was the metaphor of weaving, it's story weaving that you can bring together multiple threads from multiple people and create something new, right, which I think is just a lovely image.

What are the elements of a good story Kesha?

KESHA: Oh, wow. The elements of a good story. Stories are energy. And so when I come into a space sometimes and I am very intent on telling the story I practiced, something moves through the room and the story itself changes. Either it becomes a completely different story, in that the characters experience where they are; changes or the conversations that they're having in the story become different.

I love to tell folktales because they always have a moral or a lesson, something that's going to stick after I'm gone.

I always like to have a little bit of humor, even in the serious stories because it allows that break, that refresh for a heavy topic. It's really any story that I can display, relay or unfold in a way that will resonate long after I'm gone or really the stories that have sticking factors.

I often tell people that there are some stories I can't tell. I love them. I know them, but they didn't stick to me the way that others do. And I can only tell the stories that stick.

And I find that when I tell those stories that they feel like they're bursting out my chest. They have heroic values in that they challenge how we look at ourselves. They give us the opportunity to see our environment differently. And it connects us on multiple levels. So even though we're different cultures and backgrounds, we're able to connect with a situation.

Everyone knows when their mom is upset, or everyone knows what it is to pass down a gift from one person to another. And so if my stories can connect on any one of those levels, then I feel like I've checked everything that's needed to share an amazing story that will stay long after I'm gone.

RESH: Lovely. And Njoki, the same question to you. What would be some key elements of a good story or good storytelling?

NJOKI: I first have to connect with what Kesha just said with long after I'm gone, those few words really say a lot. I think that is such a crucial piece in a good story is being that voice that allows for the story to do what it needs to do, unrestricted to one's time and one's place.

I'm someone who also has some background and deep interest in public policy. And, why is she talking about public policy now? But, honestly, the laws, the policies of where we are and what we believe is law and what we believe is right and wrong, begin with us, begin with a narrative. They begin with story. And this really is important to me to name because sometimes maybe someone is listening and thinking, Oh, storytelling well, okay, great that you have a group of people coming to join you for a Zoom circle for two hours or a group of kids.

Yes, those are wonderful spaces. And, as we tell these stories, people choose to believe certain things. And sometimes some stories are told more than others, believed more than others, which leads to the establishment of certain laws and policies. The elements then of a good story in connection with this is how is this story giving room for it to be changed?

Is it spacious enough to receive correction? Is it spacious enough to receive questioning?

I'm not talking about tales, but I'm talking about some of the narratives that we speak of. You know, of this group of people or this land. Are we willing to tell stories that can be questioned, that can be held accountable to those that tell them?

That to me is such a core factor of good storytelling, is the willingness to engage with another narrative.

I believe you mentioned Rani had a lot of language around weaving. Can this story function when it is woven with another? Or does it require that another story is completely erased for it to exist?

And I don't think a good story only survives when all others are erased. I think a good story is really centered around the embrace of complexity and nuance and contradiction and questioning. And also inclusivity of a multiplicity of voices.

When we tell a story as someone who is given the title of adult nor Elder, how can we make room in that story to listen to the five year old? To listen to the birds around us? To listen to... Oh, I learned this from an amazing teacher called Tiokasin Ghosthorse, who once said, How are we listening to the earth? And I was like, wait, what? And I'm still held by that question.

So for me, a good story listens beyond what it can directly see or touch. The good story listens beyond the constructs of what we are as human.

RESH: You know, you make that connection between stories and policy. When politicians are at town halls and when we're trying to really understand policies, very often they are put into story form because policies, stories, they have that common seat of values. Yes, stories do have a connection to policy, and especially when you are involving them in social change and in community transformation and community building.

Rani, rather than speaking of the elements of a good story, you instead speak of the ethics of a good story. What would be some of the central ethics of good storytelling?

RANI: I think with the personal stories, the way that we work, the big ethical piece is first of all allowing people to tell the story in the way that they want to tell the story. There are different ways to tell stories. Not everything has to fall into the beginning, middle, end kind of storytelling or a Western sensibility of storytelling. Across cultures there's so many different ways.

So allowing people to tell the story, their own story in their own words, in their own voice, the way that they want, I think, is a huge piece of the ethics. And that authenticity. But also realizing that one person's story is one person's story, and that they are not speaking for everybody. They're just speaking for themselves. And that's what their story is. They're not finger-pointing and telling people what to think. They're just going to tell it how it is. And people will come along on that journey with them if they tell their stories in a way that's authentic and truthful to who they are and their own lived experience. They're not speaking about everybody's lived experience, just theirs.

And I think this is how they work really well for policy or for research purposes, is that you get a bunch of people telling stories and you get a lot of different perspectives because culture is not a monolith. The community is not one person, it is many people who come with many backgrounds, many experiences into their stories, and they will all tell their stories slightly differently. And none of them are wrong. So it's making space for all of that.

I think ethically, storytellers own their own stories, as I said. So your story is not my story to tell or share unless you give me permission to share it. People can change

their minds as they go. And because stories change, people change, so their stories are going to change too. And they have to be given that space and grace also to tell stories that are right for them in that moment.

We often ask: Why this story? Why now? So there's many, many stories that we're all made up of walking around with millions of stories.

Again, your story may change from day to day. You may tell story today one way, differently tomorrow, differently five years from now, and none of them are wrong. They're all just who you are in that moment. The way we listen to song lyrics sometimes and hear one thing, one day and different thing, a different day, because something else is ringing true with us in that moment.

We just let people tell their stories. I think ethically to me that's the biggest piece is being authentic into who you are to your story and realizing that in other people and their stories too.

RESH: Is this what you mean by when you say that we have to engage in cultures of humility when it comes to storytelling?

RANI: Yeah, I think also as a facilitator in that space, I have to sort of recognize that in my own self, I am not the expert in somebody else's story. I might be the expert in the tools that I'm teaching people how to use to tell their stories, but I have to defer to people and completely recognize that I might be seen as in a position of power as the "teacher" in the space. Or that I come from more privilege in various ways than some of the groups that I'm working with and sort of step back and listen to other people. And again, it's very much about the listening piece.

One of the things I love about my job is that A. I get to hear stories all day long, but I learn from every single person in every single workshop that I work on. I learn something different and new and I take that with me into the next group. So hopefully I become a better facilitator every time I work with a different group. And what might be right for one group may not be right for somebody else.

So where we start at is asking people who they are and what they want and how we can best support them. And I think that's sort of part of that humility piece.

RESH: Thank you. So a final question, and I'm going to put it to each of you. And the question is, what stories do you still want to tell? Or what stories do you think still need to be told?

And Njoki, I'm going to start with you. So what stories do you still want to tell?

NJOKI: So many. The first thought that came to my mind and on my heart is really the story of land liberation movements. My goodness, I can't even describe how much my heart is connected to this.

You know, sometimes there is misnaming and lack of respect and recognition for the work that has been done and is continually done by Indigenous communities across this world who are stewarding the lands that they are on.

And specifically I'm thinking of my connection to the Land Reparation Movement in Kenya, which most people will call the Mau Mau people, who really fought in the forests for so many years against British settlement and colonialism. And how there is multiple perceptions, narratives that are projected upon who the Mau Mau were and how they looked. And, you know, living in the forest with long dreadlocks. And yes, some of them did have dreadlocks.

But I'm also connected and thinking of the women that delivered food to them. And how I've heard this from my own family of, oh, yeah, the women delivering food to the forest and keeping them alive to continue taking care and protecting the liberties of the people. So for me, that's a story that I will want to tell for many years.

I see myself, Inshallah, one day just moving around this world where I am invited and speaking to, and storytelling alongside farming communities, Indigenous farming communities, and land stewards who are engaging in the liberations or conflict mediations and conversations with multiple bodies so that they can overturn land grabbing and really work towards a community of self-sufficiency and land and food sovereignty. That is such a core part of the stories I want to tell. I know I talked about policy at the start of this and emerging technologies. These to me are tools that can facilitate land liberation. That's a story my heart is called to tell it and will tell. Hopefully.

RESH: Hopefully. Thank you so much. And Rani, the same question to you. What stories do you think still need to be told?

RANI: Oh, there's so many stories that still need to be told. I don't even know where you would start with this. I think right now we need stories of love. There's so much hate right now.

I don't mean love stories in that way. I mean, stories that are just rooted in love, even if they're being critical of what's going on in the world or wherever people are. I think there's just so much space for people to come together and learn from each other. And if they share these kinds of stories, maybe they can start to bridge some of these divides. There's so many stories that need to be told.

RESH: That is a through line, yeah, through many stories that need to be told, that need to bridge.

And finally to you, Kesha, what stories do you burn to tell?

KESHA: Well, like everyone else, there are so many stories that I want to tell, that need to be told. A lot of the stories that I tell now have been passed down from generation to generation. But when I look at my footprint and what I hope to carry

forward into the world, I want to tell stories about journey, stories about understanding selves Appreciating our differences and celebrating them. And how you know, each one of us have something to bring to the table. Each one of us has a talent, a spirit, a something that we carry with us and they can change our perspective. And as long as we continue to tell those stories, it brings out the connection. It brings out the love. It brings out that peacefulness, that place of understanding where we can change policy, move forward and be our best selves And so for me, I give thanks for the opportunity to be able to share those stories.

RESH: Lovely. Njoki, Rani, and Kesha, thank you so much for the conversation and the stories. It has been a pleasure.

RANI: Thank you.

KESHA: Thank you for coming and sharing. It's been amazing.

NJOKI: Thank you.

RESH: That was storyteller Kesha Christie of Talkin Tales and host of the Walk Good podcast. Rani Sanderson, Storytelling Workshop Facilitator and Head of Story Centre Canada. And Njoki Muburu, Storyteller and recent recipient of the Community Foundations of Canada Transformational Storytelling Fellowship.

And this is the Courage My Friends podcast. I'm your host. Resh Budhu. Thanks for listening.

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