



Our Favorite Story from the Master Class...

On July 16th and 17th, over 70 nonprofit leaders from across the US came together in Los Angeles for our Master Class on storytelling and presenting. The [Center for Nonprofit Management](#) co-produced the workshop, and the video recording of the classes is currently being edited into an online course for the [African Leadership University](#). Many stories were shared throughout the two-day gathering, and based on the reactions of the students, Shelby Pracht's story about her work at [Wild Iris](#), a family counseling and crisis center, was the consensus favorite. For the 16th anniversary issue of this newsletter, we thought you'd enjoy reading a good story as well as the notes we offered Shelby to help make her next draft even better. [Full Story](#) Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.



Shelby Pracht,
Wild Iris

...and Six Word Take-Aways from our Storytellers

When our workshop concluded, we asked participants to summarize their most important take-aways in exactly six words (and thanks to Larry Smith and [Smith Magazine](#) for the inspiration). Here are some of our favorites:

- Don't be afraid to be human. (Laverne Delgado-Small, Freedom and Fashion)
- Stories of vulnerable moments inspire change. (Robin Walker, Susan G. Komen Orange County)
- Well-told stories will rewire brains. (Rona Pryor, Social Venture Partners International)
- My story is yours. Yours, mine. (Liz Mester, WINGS for Kids)
- Our stories define, create our world. (Jason Smith, UC Berkeley)

Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center		
TELL STORIES BETTER	CAMPAIGN BETTER	PRESENT BETTER
Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative	Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter	Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes
Sept. 11, 18, 25, Oct. 2 9am - 10am PT	September 15 & 22 11am - 12pm PT	September 16 & 17 11am - 12pm PT

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"Alyson and Lynn," by Shelby Pracht

Alyson keeps glancing up at the clock every few minutes, as most of us are wont to do on a Friday afternoon. It's 4 o'clock and she's finishing up some paperwork at her desk before heading out for the weekend. Looking out her office window, Alyson sees a police car pull into the parking lot and a young girl hop out of the passenger seat.

Paragraph 1 introduces a relatable protagonist (Alyson, who's just trying to wrap up her week.) The police car's arrival creates interest, pulling us into the story.

A few moments later a timid head peeks into the front door of Wild Iris. Alyson meets the girl at the door and ushers her in. The girl, who could barely pass for eighteen, introduces herself as Lynn and immediately begins to cry, as it's obvious from her puffy eyes she's been doing all afternoon. Lynn hands Alyson a massive stack of papers in exchange for a tissue.

Par. 2 advances the story but still compels us to read on to understand exactly what's happening. Visual details (puffy eyes) help us see the action.

"Can you help me fill this out?" Lynn asks between sniffles. "The policeman told me you could. They just arrested my ex-boyfriend and told me I should fill this out for a restraining order. Today my ex followed me through town, slapped me, told me he would kill me, and then smashed my phone when I tried to call for help. All I want is for him to leave me alone."

The protagonist's goal becomes clear (i.e., help obtain a restraining order) and the stakes are high. Dialogue pulls us into the scene.

Alyson smiled, placed a hand on Lynn's shoulder, and said, "Of course I'll help you." As Lynn told Alyson more about the abuse she experienced that afternoon and for the past 6 months, all Alyson could think about was the danger Lynn would be in as soon as her ex-boyfriend was released from jail. Alyson was normally equipped to handle such a situation, but it was almost 4:15. Alyson knew if they didn't have the mountainous stack of paperwork filled out and delivered to the judge before 5pm, when the court closed, Lynn would be left unprotected for the duration of the weekend.

In par. 4, the writer introduces a ticking clock (literally). The 5 pm deadline lends urgency to the story.

Notice, however, that the story's tense has changed from present to past. Either can work, but pick one and stick with it.

Alyson and Lynn started the paperwork together, but all the while Alyson was considering options for getting Lynn out of town or into a shelter if they couldn't finish in time. Alyson knew that without a restraining order, the time when an abuser is released from jail is an incredibly dangerous time for a victim.

The stakes are raised as Alyson considers the alternatives if the goal isn't met. This builds tension and moves us deeper into the story.

"He's going to be so angry with me for getting him arrested," Lynn said, "I can't even image what he'll do." Alyson thought to herself, with her years of experience with domestic violence, "Oh, I can imagine exactly what he will do." Alyson and Lynn rushed to complete the paperwork and arrived at the front doors of the courthouse just as the bailiff was locking up. It was 5:02.

Dialogue tells us what Alyson and Lynn are feeling, and our emotions are engaged in the process.

"Please," Alyson asked, calling the bailiff by name. "I know it's late, but it's urgent."

"Calling the bailiff by name" is a telling detail showing how closely Alyson works with others in the community.

The bailiff could see the concern in Alyson's face and the fear in Lynn's,

and said "Just this once..." as he cracked the door open. Alyson similarly pleaded with the court clerk, who already had her coat and her keys. "I understand you're trying to close up, but could you please let the judge look over this request. It's so important that he sign it before the weekend."

Thirty minutes later, the clerk handed Alyson a signed copy of the restraining order. As Alyson explained to Lynn that her ex could no longer contact her or harass her in any way without violating a court order, she watched Lynn begin to cry again. This time, however, Lynn was crying tears of relief, not fear.

It was three years before Alyson saw Lynn again, but when she ran into her in the supermarket, Alyson recognized her immediately. Lynn introduced Alyson to her loving new husband, then gave her a hug and whispered, "I wouldn't be here today without you. Thank you." Though Alyson's job is difficult, helping Lynn and other women like her regain her sense of independence and safety make it all worth it.

Small but important details (coat and keys) help us visualize the scene.

This paragraph delivers a clear resolution to the story.

Since Alyson is the protagonist, it might be helpful to hear her voice at the end as well.

Special thanks to Shelby Pracht and her colleagues at Wild Iris for giving us permission to share this true story. Names and some details have been changed to protect privacy.

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free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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