

Transcript for November 9th Capital Storytelling Live Event at Verge Center for the Arts

Kevin (emcee/host):

Okay, we're going to go ahead and get started.

Welcome everyone to Capital Storytelling, thank you so much for coming!

My name is Kevin McLean, I'll be your host for the evening.

This is the second live event for Capital Storytelling. How many of you have been to an event with us here before? Wow that's fantastic!

So for those of you who are new, Capital Storytelling is dedicated to getting real people to share true stories on stage. It's run by the wonderful Lisa Cantrell. Let's give her a round of applause!

In addition to these live events, Capital Storytelling offers workshops. They are a lot of fun, and many of our storytellers tonight have attended. If you're interested in participating, we'll have the next round of workshops coming up in February and March. You can sign up on the email list so you can get info OR you can also go to our website: capitalstorytelling.com

We have a really exciting line-up of seven storytellers for you tonight! I'll introduce each of them as they come up, and we'll have a short intermission in the middle. They're sharing stories that are funny, exciting, poignant, and all very personal. Almost all of our storytellers tonight are first-timers, and I'm so excited for all of you to hear them! Now, it's not easy to get up here and share something personal in front of strangers, so let's give them all a round of applause.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED, JUST A FEW ANNOUNCEMENTS

First, we really want to thank Sacramento State's University Enterprise Incorporated, which provides the funding for Capital Storytelling.

We also want to thank Verge Center for the Arts—they are always such a pleasure to work with putting on these events. So thank you for letting us use this great space.

And finally, please please please turn off your phones! Like, actually turn them off so they're totally silent, not vibrate mode. It can really distract the storytellers and it can distract others who want to listen to the stories, too. So take a moment to check your phones.

Alright, so let's get started! First up we have Sue Hobbs. Sue is a professor at Sacramento State; she enjoys creating stained glass art, poi spinning, and gardening in her free time. She is Native American, and her Potawatomi (POT-uh-what-uh-me) name is Shishib'kwe (she-she-buh-KWAY), which means "duck woman."

Sue's story is called "The Jam." Let's welcome her to the stage.

SUE:

I live out in the country, kind of. So the place where I live is an acre and a half and you can go out from the back door and there's a swimming pool and then we have our backyard and a fence and beyond the back fence we have fruit trees so we have plums and apricots and peaches and things like that, our fruit trees.

We got this property a little over twenty years ago and it was a fixer upper. It was a big mess. The people who lived there before didn't take care of it. So for example every square inch of soil there were weeds taller than me and there was dilapidated structures in the backyard like there was this falling apart chicken coop back there and everywhere inside and out was a mess. We spent a lot of money and time fixing up this place, so the story I'm going to tell you happened about ten years ago. It was the fourth of July and it was really, really hot. It was like 100 degrees maybe even more than that. That day I had gone out to the back where the trees are and picked some fruit and usually I wasn't able to get the fruit because the birds would get it or the squirrels would get the fruit but I had managed to get out there and I came back armed with buckets of apricots and plums and I'm determined I'm going to do something with these fruit, but I'm a terrible cook. The things I cook don't turn out very well. I'm super messy. I make a

mess every time I cook, but I do know how to make jam and so I thought you know that's what I'll do with these fruit I'll make jam, but making jam is a really hot process. You have to boil the fruit and then you have to take the boiled fruit and put it in glass jars. Then you have to boil the glass jars so they seal and it's really really hot and remind you it was 100 plus degrees outside and I knew if I did this in the house it would heat up the house and would take a long time to cool it off and I just kind of thought what should I do?

My husband came up with this great idea. He said why don't you do it outside. We can bring the camp stove out and you can do it on the camp stove. I'm like I don't know where will we put the camp stove? He says well put it on the barbecue. This is one of the things we hadn't fixed yet. It was made of brick. Bricks all mortared together. It was about 5 feet wide maybe waste high, two and a half, three feet deep and the bricks are falling off of it and it was mossy and on one side there was a hole where you have a grate and you can put, you can cook stuff, where you can barbecue stuff like meat, vegetables or whatever. There was a door in the front that you could open and you clean out the ashes from there and then to the right in the bbq was this I guess what you call a surface prep area where you can put your plates of food or whatever and so my husband he gets a camp stove and he brings it over and it plunks it down on top of the bbq and that's when I realize the bbq is not level because the camp stove is doing this: wobbly you know. And he also has this giant propane tank and he puts it on the ground and I'm just. I'm not sure. I'm like I don't know. I don't know if I want to cook on that thing. It doesn't look safe.

“Oh it'll be ok, don't worry about it. It'll be fiiiine. It will be fine. It's not THAT unsteady. It'll be ok”

So I'm like “well I don't know. I guess if you think it'll be ok, I'll go ahead and do it.”

Now I never cooked on a camp stove before so I didn't know how to light it and so he lit it for me and in my mind I may be imagining it different than it was but he turned the propane and the gas came out hooo, you know and then he lit it and there's a big fire and then the fire died down and the nice little flame that I could use to cook my jam. So I'm like ok I'll cook my jam. I decided to wear my bathing suit to cook the jam because it was hot outside and I'm not a very good cook, a very smart cook and I thought Ok I'll take a

break and go swimming halfway through and so anyway I'm out there and I'm making my jam and true to form I made an enormous mess. I had jam on the bbq. I had jam on me. I had jam on the sidewalk. It was on the plants. It was on the grass. It was everywhere. And so I'm thinking what am I going to do. I need to clean this up. It's going to be really hard to clean up. I don't know how I'm going to do it. So I'm thinking about this. My husband decides he's going to go skinny dipping in the pool, so he strips naked and he jumps in the pool. He's splashing around in the pool while I'm trying to figure out how I'm going to clean up the mess.

And then I realized hot sticky sweet things melt with hot water right, it's perfect. And I had this ready made pot of boiling water right here. So I hadn't turn off the camp stove yet and I got hot pad holders and I grabbed the pot of boiling water and I lifted up and that's when the camp stove tilted toward me and the flames pointing more at me and I got scared and I couldn't put it back because it was uneven and I kind of lost my balance I dropped the pot of water all down me, boiling water. That's when I started freaking out. I started shrieking my head off. I was really, really upset. In my mind my legs had just melted off and really really upset and it hurt a lot so my husband he jumps out of the pool, he's still naked and he grabs a hold of me. And I'm like what are you doing? And I'm fighting with him. And he's got a hold of me and he wrestles me over to the swimming pool. And I'm fighting him because I don't know what he's doing. I'm like this weirdo why are you got a hold of me and he puts me in the pool.

"Whyyy did you do that?"

And he says "put you in the water. It's cold it'll probably help"

I said "Oh, ok but I'm still freaking out. I'm shrieking really loud, screaming really upset"

And so we call the doctor. And I actually you know went to see the doctor a couple of days later because I'm stubborn like that I didn't go right away. And turns out the doctor gave me some cream for my leg and one of my leg was really, really burned. I had second degree burns on my leg and I had to put the cream on it and wrap it all up in all these different bandages and stuff and I couldn't go in the sun, so I had to wear jeans or pants or long dresses, I couldn't get in the hot tub. I really like getting in the hot tub. I couldn't do that. But actually I did get in the hot tub. What I do is I go out

into the hot tub and my husband would help me in and I would stick my leg out on the outside of the hot tub so I'd sit in there with my leg in there and it seems like it took months and months for it to heal. I don't know might not have taken that long but it felt that long that I had to keep changing the bandages, but I ended up not having a scarred. Not a scar on all of my leg. It's amazing. But I do still have one jar of that jam left and do you know why? Because it cost me an arm and leg, well a leg at least.

KEVIN:

Give another round of applause for Sue Hobbs!

Okay, our next storyteller is Reuben Greenwald.

Reuben is originally from Oakland, but he's lived here in Sacramento for the last 7 years. He works Sacramento State running programs that engage, connect, and support student success. Reuben got bit by the artistic bug in 2nd grade after winning a still life water color contest. Now, in addition to his work, he does freelance graphic design and enjoys catching local performances and art shows.

Reuben's story tonight is called "The Final Cut"

REUBEN:

I used to have this recurring dream in high school that I would be running late to school. As I slowly made my way with my heavy backpack filled with books weighing me down, I would walk down the long hallway on the second floor of our building only to see everyone staring at me as I walked. As I made my way into the classroom I passed by a reflective window and noticed that I totally forgot to put on any clothes that day. Yep, I was totally naked.

Once I realized this, I would grab my bag and rush back down the hallway, walking at an ever so brisk pace with total a rush of total anxiety filling my body - as I had to re-pass everyone again but this time I knew that they knew that I was naked. My hands were clammy and sweating and I was concerned how many people would notice that I didn't have anything on. I

mean we've all been there – that one naked dream – the one when we wake ourselves up and think this would never happen in real life.

August 1st, 2015 my birthday was approaching in 14 days. Birthdays had always been a joyous time for celebration, balloons and cupcakes, but somehow, I felt this year was going to be different. For the past few months I had been faced with an autoimmune condition that was slowly attacking my body from the inside out. All of all of the tiny follicles that produce my hair were being destroyed.

I stared at myself in the mirror, as I occasionally did from time-to-time, trying to push my hair in all the right places to cover up any spots.... But the condition, known as alopecia, was causing me to lose my hair in patches at such a steady rate that I was barely able to hide it anymore.

I made an appointment at a hip little barber shop in Emeryville with my friend Maddox the barber. I walked in to the barber salon, wishing this wasn't the choice that I would have to make. It was like a going away party for my thick, dark, brown hair that I so long enjoyed styling because I knew that once he shaved it off, it would most likely never come back.

I had really mixed feelings about the whole thing –as unlike other friends who lost their hair due to chemo they got to fight cancer, my reason wasn't going to be life threatening – but I knew it was certainly going to be life altering.

I sat down in the chair after being greeted. I pulled off my dark thick rimmed glasses which for the past few weeks had been so good at covering the fact that I had lost most of my eyebrows and eyelashes.

It was then whole world became blurry– sort reminiscent of how I was feeling inside- and I couldn't see the mirror in front of me. My other senses became heightened - the fresh smell of pomade and other hair styling products filled the air, the sound of the electric razor starting up like a race car engine right before the Indy 500. Vrom vrom vrom. I felt the razor getting close to my head as he started on the right side and made his first made its first swoosh - I could see the blur of my black hair falling to the ground.

Maddox was convinced that he could save it– the parts that hadn't already become bald spots could be styled into different hairdos and mohawks. So from time to time I would put my glasses on for a bit to see these cool unique hair styles that I never thought I would have but finally wanted to have. However, I knew I never could as it would all fall out eventually and alopecia would take 100% of the hair on my entire body.

So, I sat there and had him shave it all off with every swoosh feeling more and more naked. I could feel the breeze hitting my scalp – nothing that I had ever felt before.

He kept me company, he made it fun, we laughed but inside I was scared. I was scared because for over 30 years, ever since I was born, my thick dark hair accompanied me along the way. It was with me on my first day of kindergarten with my pink micky mouse lunchbox, it was with me when I walked across the stage and graduated high school, when I went off to college to study in red rock landscapes of the southwest. It with me when I walked down the aisle on a cool October morning to get married and eventually on a warm June night when my marriage crumbled and I got divorced, it was with me when I climbed to the top of an active volcano on my birthday just a year prior to me sitting in this barber shop chair - but I knew from now on it would only be with me in photos and memories.

As the final piece of hair fell to the ground, I grabbed my glasses from the barber's table in front of me and slowly put them on to see myself in the mirror for the first time – without my hair. This is different – I thought

As I made my way back home to Sacramento, I prepared to go to work the next day. I felt totally vulnerable in a way I had never felt before because I didn't recognize myself. Not only did I have to battle the feeling of being totally exposed and vulnerable – I had to find the me inside of the person that I didn't recognize.

I packed my bag as normal, grabbed my lunch from the fridge, and put on a black linen newsboy cap that so I wouldn't feel completely naked and exposed. I grabbed some tweezers and plucked out that last remaining black eyebrows and eyelashes which hadn't already come out and took a deep breath as I got in my car and drove to work.

I remember walking in to the university for the first time, my hands were sweating and clammy. It was that feeling I had in my dream – the feeling of being completely naked and exposed yet with all my clothes on. That first day was scary - people would come up to me asking if I was ok or what was going on – but with every person that asked – the answer became more and more natural - what I realized that day was that the acceptance I so longed to get for from others was really the self-acceptance I needed from myself.

As time went on, I became more and more comfortable in myself and began to embrace the hairlessness of my body. The smoothness of my face, my legs, my head. The quickness to which I can jump out of the shower and head to work without a blow dry or styling product. The money I save from no longer needing to purchase hair products, shampoos, shaving gels or haircuts.

But I do sometimes wish that I could grow out a mustache just to wax it into a handlebar, have my dark hair back to put in a unique pompadour for going out.

This is a new me, it's a stronger me, a more resilient me, a more hopeful me, and a more HAIR FREE ME. While my hair had joined me on many journeys in my previous years, the hair-free me has and will create beautiful stories and memories of my own.

KEVIN:

Give it up for Reuben!

Next up we have Jordan Salvador. Jordan is our youngest storyteller tonight. He's a second year student at Sac State studying business. He's a creative soul. His dream is to direct and produce movies. One of his favorite movies is the Iron Giant. He started a hot sauce business with a few other friends that they called Sangre del Dragon (which means Dragon Blood in Spanish). One of the flavors they made was mango berry habanero—they are on hiatus but hoping to sell more in the future.

Jordan's story tonight is not about hot sauce or movies, but I felt like you needed to know all of those things. Give a round of applause for Jordan and his story "Laminated and Stapled"

JORDAN:

So picture this: You're standing in line at a school cafeteria, waiting to get your lunch. You're in fifth grade, and you're in alphabetical order. You're hungry, you're lactose intolerant, and you're at the end of the line, because apparently your last name starts with an S. And it's about to be your turn. You just watch as your classmate in front of you is given a bean and cheese burrito, oozing melting cheese on the sides, and you just start thinking in your head, I can't eat this. I'm lactose intolerant, and this is not good for me.

It's your turn. The lunch lady is about to put the burrito on your plate, and you just tell her, "No puedo comer eso porque me hace daño. No tiene algo mas que me puede dar?" meaning "I can't eat this, miss. Do you have anything else I can eat? Because this really could hurt me." And she looks at you for two seconds and puts it down, and then she says, "Here's your milk." She doesn't understand you because she doesn't know any Spanish, and you don't know any English. For me, that was an experience I lived.

You see my parents came from Mexico. They moved into some apartment complex in Sacramento, CA. In our household, ever since I was born, it was all Spanish, entirely. There was no English at all. There was no English coming into my ears; there was no English I could see; there was no English coming out of anybody's mouth, so no English came out of my mouth. And it was like that all the time. My parents even lived in a whole Spanish-speaking community, so there was no English at all, like whatsoever, at all.

I even went to a Spanish-speaking elementary school. At one point, I even asked my dad if I could touch English. He looked at me like I was crazy. He just sent me to bed. That question kept me up all night, because I heard English from somebody that day and I was like, what's English? I had just heard about it. I had never seen it. I had no English at all.

That all changed when we had to move, and I had to go to a different school. It was an English-speaking school, like there was no Spanish at all. It was just a regular school. I remember the first day. I had an adult by my side. I was told he was going to be my interpreter. He was there to interpret everything my teacher, Ms. Chung, had to say.

Ms. Chung—she was a really good teacher, she loved English, and she loved literature and writing and everything—she taught us everything, from math, from science to everything else. But she mostly focused on writing English, and just reading and everything, but mostly on writing.

So she told us about this contest that she held every month. She had different topics and everything, all different months. For that particular month, it was to write about something that happened to you. I didn't think about it that much, because I didn't really know a lot of English yet.

So as she finished it, I just thought about it a lot in my head. I was like, you know what, I don't have a lot of friends. Because who wants to talk to a guy who has an adult by his side all the time? How fun could that guy be? Or, I don't want to talk to that guy. He doesn't even speak your own language, because you can't understand him.

And I thought about that. You know what, maybe if I actually prove myself. If I actually win this competition, I could learn English. I could make some friends. The chaperone is out. It's a win-win for me.

I remember the first thing I did. I was walking out of class that day, was going into the library, and I picked up a book to read. That book, I still remember, it was a Captain Underpants book. And I took it home. The first thing my dad said to me when he saw me reading the book was, why was I picking books with guys with underwear on them? And stuff like that.

I was like, I was just trying to read it and to learn English. And he was like, well, just don't forget about Spanish. So yeah, I've been learning Spanish ever since I was born, you know, don't worry about it, dad. We still speak Spanish up to this day in our household. So, yeah, I'm not forgetting Spanish any time soon.

I began reading the book. I began writing everything I saw in it. And then later on, I progressed. I checked out Dr. Seuss books, I learned how to rhyme. And then after that, I read Moby Dick. It just went on like that.

This particular day, I walked into class, and she told us about the contest because it was a new month that day. She told us that we had to write about what happened to us. Whatever had happened to us before, we could write about it. And that was for the contest.

The winner would have his paper at the top at the back of the class. There was a whole bunch of “worth-mentioning” papers below the top middle one, and they were just all just scattered around. They were just stapled to the wall. But the one on the top was the winner. That paper was actually laminated. It looked glorified up there in the middle. So I was like, this is my chance. I’ve been reading English, I got a little bit better. This is my opportunity. And I had a lot of things that had happened to me. So I was like, yeah, this is it.

So first thing I did when I was home was I took out a paper. I was like, I’m going to win this. I don’t want a chaperone anymore, and I want some friends. I just want to do it to get some respect and stuff like that. So I’m just going to do it.

And this is what I wrote about: I wrote about the time I got hit by a car. This was when we were living in apartments still. It was just one day, we were playing tag, and all the kids from the apartments were just playing tag, having a good time. And that day, there was just this one cocky kid who I wanted to get because he was just a real cocky guy. I guess people just hate the cocky guys. And so, it was my turn. They tagged me.

I passed by a few couple of other people. I didn’t even tag them. I was like three inches from them. I think they were even trying to get caught, because I couldn’t catch anybody if I tried. But I was just focused on the guy I wanted to get. I was just behind him all the time, and I wasn’t aware of my surroundings. I was just, calling him. And my fingertips were about to touch his back.

I didn’t even know where I was, but the next thing I remember is, I opened my eyes and there were just red lights all around and it was blurry, so I closed them back up again. I don’t even know how long I was out, but then I opened them again and I was in a white room. I was in a bed. I was lying, and I couldn’t feel my body. I was like, what’s going on? I had casts on my

left leg and a cast on my right arm. I looked to my left and my parents were just sitting there, looking worried. I know I would be too.

But that day, I got carried out on a wheelchair, put into my car, and they took me home and I said hi to my sisters again. And we talked about it. I was like, what happened? And she was like, you got hit by a car, you flew in the air and did two backflips. And I was like, what? That sounds awesome! Why didn't you record it or something. She got kind of mad, but I was like, you know, you could have put that on some show or something. I could have been like, yeah, look, that was me. I did backflips. I'm that cool.

But that day, I couldn't move anything. I slept in the living room, in a big bed. I was just watching TV all day, there in bed, all the time. And I spent like half a year in that bed, in the living room. I wanted to get out of the bed, because it was just really frustrating.

During that half of a year, my dad came home and he had a folder with him. He said that the school gave it to him, for me. And I was like, oh! I opened it, and there were a bunch a letters from my classmates at that time. I opened it, and I just saw a bunch of letters and they were from all the students. They were just black and white printouts with the cut edges and same letters: Hope you feel better, Get better soon. They were all colored with crayon and whatnot.

There was this one in particular that I remember that I really liked, and it was like a turquoise-colored crayon in the front. When you opened it, there was this tank-looking rectangular thing, which I assume was a car; because if I had been hit by a tank, I wouldn't be here. There was this figure in front of the vehicle, and there was a pool of blood too. It appeared to have no limbs. The limbs were on the corner of the pages, all around, scattered. I was like, well you know, thankfully that didn't happen. My dad saw it and he was like, "Eh." Then I was like, at least he was creative, he put some thought into it. And I liked it.

And that's what I wrote about. I wrote it on a lined piece of paper. There were flying letters all around. That's what I wrote about. I turned it in. I even forgot about it for quite some time. School was regular and everything.

Then, this one particular day, I came into the classroom and I sat at my desk, and we did this one warm-up. After the warm-up, Ms. Chung called

for our attention, and she said that I had won the little competition. At that moment, I was like, are you serious, I won that competition? I was like, well yeah, obviously, I put my mind to it. I was going to win it because I wanted to win it.

She just said that she was very proud of me, because I actually put my mind to it. She told me to turn around to look at my paper. I just turned around, and in my head, I just had these thoughts. I was thinking, well, I'm probably here for a reason, thank god. I survived getting hit by a car. I'm here for a reason. Anything you want to do, you just have to do it. The only thing holding you back is not having any self-confidence and just not believing in yourself.

As I turned to look back, I looked back. And there were a whole bunch of papers scattered around, the "worth-mentioning" ones. At the top was my paper. It was laminated and stapled to the back wall, and it had a mid-sized gold star and it said my name on it. I was just so proud of myself. My paper was up there.

KEVIN:

Thank you, Jordan. Great job!

We have one more story before our intermission. Our next storyteller is a VERY special guest and we are so SO happy to have her because she's a little bit famous here in Sac! Betsaida LeBron is a veteran improviser with 12 years of experience in performing, directing, and teaching improv. Her passion is connecting people through improv. She is an alum of the renowned iO-Chicago Improv Training Program and Bay Area Theatre Sports in San Francisco. Some of her favorite subjects to teach include improvised storytelling and creating characters on the spot. She also regularly conducts team-building and communication workshops for organizations through improv. Betsaida currently performs with improv troupes MRI (Masters of Rap Improv) and Kooky Pants and co-facilitates POC Improv Space sponsored by the Sacramento Comedy Spot. In her day job she works as the Education and Outreach Coordinator for Broadway Sacramento.

Let's welcome Betsaida to the stage with her story, "Limp and Stupid"

BETSAIDA:

When I was in high school I distinctly remember watching the local nightly news with my mother and hearing about a fatal car crash caused by a drunk driver. The report stated that both driver and passenger of the other car died, but the drunk driver was in stable condition. To which my mother scoffed “well... that figures!”. I didn’t understand her reaction. I asked her what she meant. She elaborated that often drunk drivers cause accidents and walk away unharmed because all the alcohol in their system makes them, in her words “limp and stupid”. They can get thrown around and they often walk away just fine. For some reason that conversation struck a nerve for me. For whatever reason, my teenage brain understood that to avoid pain or injury in my life I needed to go limp and stupid. I’m sure that’s not what my mom wanted me to get from that conversation, but that’s exactly what I took from it.

In high school I auditioned for the show *You’re A Good Man Charlie Brown*. I had always enjoyed performing and acting in school, but I had never fully committed to it. I was cast as the understudy to Linus. Linus! The dweeby needy awkward little brother with a security blanket. Not even Linus, but the understudy. Oh my God! I took that so personally! I dropped out of the show. It hurt my feelings it was like they were saying I wasn’t good enough to get a role that I wanted. I immediately stopped doing theater. Which in retrospect, only highlights how dramatic I am.

Flash forward a few years to one summer in college, I was working as a camp counselor in the woods of Sonoma County. One evening a few of us camp staff decided to go into the closest town, Sebastopol, to see the recently released movie *Pirates of the Caribbean*. The roads were narrow, winding, and dark. I was seated in the middle row of the Astro minivan. We were not drinking, but we were unfamiliar with the roads, and probably going a bit too fast. There was some gravel that had fallen in the road and it was enough to affect the tires’ traction. We started fishtailing and we were headed off the road into an embankment. Once I realized we were about to be in an accident, I remember thinking “ok, Betsaida. This is it. Limp and Stupid. That’s how you get through this.” So, I did. I relaxed my body and just zoned out. I stayed calm as the car flipped in the air, the frame broke, every window shattered, and the van was totaled. When the dust cleared I was able to climb out the shattered window on my side and

help others get out of the van. I also called 9-1-1 to report the accident. Some of the others broke bones or had scrapes and bruises, but I walked away without a scratch. I recalled that discussion with my mother years earlier and thought, “whoa, I’m definitely onto something!”

Moving forward, “limp and stupid” became my “go-to” response for almost anything scary or uncomfortable in my life. When things got difficult or when conflict arose I didn’t put up a fight. I let others boss me around, I didn’t stand up or fight for most things. I wore it as a badge of honor that I could go with whatever and be the “easy going” one. When a good friend gave me a chocolate cake for my birthday (by the way, I hate chocolate). I sat politely and zoned out while I ate most of my slice of cake. When the guy I was really into broke my heart, I went limp and slept. When I got passed up for a promotion at work, I went numb and stopped caring about the work I was doing. Going limp and stupid kept me cool and breezy, without having to really feel the harshness of life.

Towards the end of my time in college I discovered improv. Improvisational theater. It was theater without a script or plan and the entire goal was to go with the flow and not think twice. Wait?! What?! For someone who had been going limp and stupid for years it seemed like a natural fit. And it was. Improv was fun. And I was good at it, I could make people laugh without really trying. It felt wonderful! I fell madly in love with improv. I took every class and workshop that I could. I performed everywhere that would let me. It was thrilling.

It was in the beginning of my love affair with improv that I met a kindred spirit who loved improv as much as I did. I loved how much he loved improv. He could talk improv theory for hours and early in our relationship I was an eager sponge taking it all in. He had a big dream to start an improv theater and create a community and I supported this wholeheartedly with the “yes, and” philosophy that infuses improv. We started dating and immediately began building an improv community and theater together. We hosted weekly drop in classes. Put on weekly shows and people started coming, and learning, and making connections with each other. It felt incredible to share my passion for improv with my partner and our new community.

The more I did improv the more I realized there was more to it than I originally thought. Although the basic tenants of improv teach to agree and

to not think twice. It also meant listening and responding honestly in the moment. To be an effective improviser you had to be comfortable making a choice and committing to it, while accepting whatever else was happening in the scene.

There was a time in an advanced improv class at iO Chicago that an instructor called out a specific scene that happened in class. This was a formative moment in my improv development. Two students were pretending to be sisters cleaning out their grandmother's closet after her funeral. One sister was clearly upset about the death of her grandmother and said she couldn't believe grandma was gone. The other sister reached into the closet and with a devilish smile pulled out something from the closet and held it out and said "It's grandma's underwear. Put it on." The first sister, agreed and happily mimed putting on the underwear. The instructor immediately stopped the scene and asked "What are you doing?! That doesn't make sense. Why would your character eagerly put on granny's panties!?" The student was just trying to agree, because that's what we're told to do in improv. The instructor explained that we are not supposed to blindly agree, because that's boring! The correct choice was to continue to be upset about grandma's death, and to hesitantly agree to put on granny's panties. They replayed the scene and those suggestions transformed it into a brilliant and entertaining scene!

From that moment on, I challenged myself to add depth to my improv scenes, I worked on being honest, grounded, and committed and making choices, not just blindly supporting the choices of others. I also began finding my voice as an improv teacher, teaching others how to play more confidently and began to gain respect from my theater community in my own right. This deeper approach to improv was changing me and it was changing the theater. Over the course of five years of running the theater with my partner the dynamic between us gradually shifted from a collaborative and creative partnership to a divisive and adversarial one. We eventually broke up but kept trying to run the theater together. I had reached a point where I felt more confident in my improv, and in life, and was ready to take on a bigger role in leading the theater. However, within the theater and in our relationship increasingly felt relegated to a support role and felt like my strengths weren't being considered or appreciated. Honestly, I felt stagnant and trapped.

It became obvious that I needed a change and that change was leaving the theater. But letting go of the theater and the community I helped build would be one of the most difficult conflicts I've faced. I tried ignoring the issue, and not making it about me. I couldn't. I tried going with the flow and being the old me, a hyped up yes person. But, that felt inauthentic and uncomfortable. At this point I had spent years teaching performers that it was important to be honest and commit to their choices and work with the truth of the scene. Now, I was being challenged by the universe to do the same. The truth was I was unhappy, and the truth of the situation was my partner and I were no longer able to work together in the ways I wanted. Although I wanted more, I was comfortable in my theater. It was my place. I had a space where I could perform and teach whenever I wanted. It was my safety net. It was a terrifying idea to walk away from that. What if outside of this, my theater, I wasn't good enough? I was scared to put myself out there. What if I was rejected? I couldn't take it. Improv is something I love and I was scared I would lose everything I worked to build and that I wouldn't find it again. I felt like I did in that Astro Van veering off the road. It felt like I was heading off the road I wanted to be on and towards a dangerous uncertainty

Except this time, instead of going limp and stupid, and repeating my pattern, I chose to take the wheel and make my own choices rather than just saying yes to others' decisions. It was one of the scariest decisions I've made to this day. But it was also one of the best decisions I made. I left the theater and over the course of two years, rebuilt something different but on my own terms. I created a personal website focused on my passion for teaching and performing improv, I began putting more energy into an improv duo I'd established with my comedy partner years earlier. I started performing more, reaching out to other theaters, reestablished a weekly drop-in improv workshop, and traveled to improv festivals. Since that time I've had the pleasure of performing and teaching across this country and have also found a new community of improv kindred spirits on my travels. But most importantly this change in my life represented a culmination of my having learned to stop making the choice to be "limp and stupid." If you're facing a difficult conflict, I hope you learn from my story and decide to take the wheel of your life and drive with intention and passion.

Thank you.

KEVIN:

One more time for Betsaida!

Alright, so we'll have a 10-MINUTE INTERMISSION. Take a break, stretch your legs. Restrooms are just over this way. We'll see you back in 10 minutes.

Also! We have tote bags! \$20! Up here at the front!

{INTERMISSION}

KEVIN:

OK, WELCOME BACK everyone. Grab a seat and let's get things started again. Before we get to our final three stories for the night, I've just got a couple more announcements.

If you want to keep up on Capital Storytelling events and workshops, we have an email list. PLEASE SIGN UP. We do not spam you. You will get 3-4 emails a year letting you know when you can sign up for classes or come out to another event.

In addition to the live storytelling workshops, Capital Storytelling is also hoping to have podcasting workshops in the coming year. So sign up for the email list to keep informed about it!

Follow us on Facebook! We also post info there! Just look for Capital Storytelling on FB...

Okay, our next speaker is Johanna (YO-hon-uh) Heyer (HI-ur).

Johanna is a PhD candidate in Civil and Environmental Engineering at UC Davis. She's interested in the intersection of air quality science, public health, and environmental justice. In her spare time, she enjoys biking, cooking vegan delicacies you won't know are vegan, and playing softball. She also shares her love of music with the Sacramento area on her radio show The Mood Organ at KDVS. When she needs a break from it all, she escapes to her deluxe, canvas-walled, and collapsible vacation home. Johanna loves a good story, and can often be found curled up with her favorite feline friend watching an old film or immersed in a novel.

Johanna's story is called "Skating the Salty Ice," let's welcome her to the stage.

JOHANNA:

I don't remember ever believing in Santa Claus and one of my mom's favorite stories to tell about me when I was a little kid was one day when she was walking me around in my stroller around the streets of Oakland and I was probably 2 or 3 years old and I rolled my head back and I was like "hey mom" and she was like "what Johanna?" and I said "mom is Santa Claus real?" and she looked back at me and she said "Are you sure you want to talk about that"?

And I paused for a long time and squinted up my face and I was like "no" and so we kept walking and we never ever talked about whether Santa Claus was real or not ever again, but I knew at that moment. I never really believed in Santa Claus, but I loved believing in the story that my mom and my family had created about Santa Claus, this like fun mix between fantasy and reality and this was easy to do on my dad's side of the family because it was kind of a traditional Christmas, you know we just all have to agree that yes sometime during the night some guy came into the house through a chimney or something and left us a bunch of presents and that makes perfect sense, you know we can all agree on this. On my mom's side of the family which is Swedish it was a little harder to pull off because in the Swedish tradition Santa Claus is actually part of the Christmas dinner, part of the ceremony and this creates a problem because Santa Claus is actually a fictional character. Sorry if I spoiled that for anybody. So somebody actually has to dress up as Santa Claus and my mom and my grandmother were the two people that would always do this. They would always so no, no, no I want you to do it this year. You did it so well two years ago or whatever but both of them really actually wanted to do it. And so every year one of them would dress up with the whole red outfit and a beard and a hat and come out and dance with everybody and distribute the presents and it was a lot of fun. Some of my more gullible cousins never really noticed that either my mom or my grandmother was always in the bathroom mysteriously occupied for the entire time Santa Claus was visiting us.

Christmas wasn't the only part of my childhood where my mom came up with these great fantastical tales and really gave it 100%. There was also princess toothy the tooth fairy. So while other kids would get really excited about a dollar under their pillow, I would get these magical scarlet runner beans and little rolled up scrolls written in cursive with these sweet little notes to me about how delicious my teeth were, and this was so motivating to me that to my mother's horror I one year on my birthday I extracted my own tooth because it was a little bit loose and I thought that it would be really cool to see what kind of bonus I would get for losing a tooth on my birthday. Coloring book turns out not totally worth it.

These stories weren't just for special events my mom would also tell really great bedtime stories. She often wouldn't even read me books, she would just tell me stories from her life and knowing now what I know about how she likes to add details and drama to things I'm not really sure if she actually while living in an Austrian castle at age 16 ripped open a German shepherd's mouth as he was attacking a five-year-old girl and threw him against a wall to rescue the child that she was babysitting or whether she really used to play tag and leap between buildings in elementary school, leap across the roves or whether she was really attacked by an entire mount of fire ants while bicycling across Turkey. Her regular stories also sometimes get a little confused between fiction and reality. We once got in an argument about whether my cat really had what she described as feline leprosy and she insisted this was a real condition until I googled it and proved there was no such thing as feline leprosy.

She also sometimes does this thing where she adopts other people's stories. Once she was telling me this story of this horrible nightmare she had in college where her hippie, vegan friend made this disgusting birthday cake for her out of mud and grass and I was listening to it I noticed it sounded familiar and I went and checked with my dad. Turns out it was actually his dream which she just loved the story so much that in her mind she became the protagonist of the story and so she would be always telling these great stories with embellishments and drama and when I was little I would sit there and be like that's not actually how it happened mom. We didn't go there, no we did this first. And she would get so annoyed at me and she had this rule that when she was telling a story I just had to sit there and listen. I wasn't allowed to correct anything. She explained to me that it's part of telling a good story is to tell it in an interesting way which sometimes you twist the truth a little bit. I learned later that a lot of this

came from my grandmother who also had a lot of great stories. She used to tell me the story of how my grandfather the night before he died visited her in a dream as a sort of like ghost like horse and she had all these little Swedish figurines called Tomten around her house and she had this whole story that if you piss off the Tomten they'll ruin your life. It's this old Swedish farmer's tale. And so you have to do nice things for the Tomten so every morning if I spent the night at her house I would have to go every morning and greet all of the Tomten and stroke their beards and kiss them on the nose and say good morning to them to create good will.

And so given all of this that I know about my maternal line's propensity for embellishing stories I should have known better than to rely on them for a school assignment. So in my freshman year of high school I had this teacher named Mrs. Sokolower who she was very uptight, very out of touch with the teenage world and I remember one time there was a bomb threat and while we're all locked in a room she decided it would be a good time to read us a small children's story. She also had the misfortune of being assigned to teach us sex-ed which was not a great one for her to do and so she was just like a laughing stock of the class and I was one of those people that kind of took advantage of those moments when she said funny things.

So I wasn't her favorite student. In my first semester of freshman year, we got an assignment to interview an immigrant. I was like ok I got this. I'll talk to my grandmother. She has lots of great stories of being an immigrant. So I called her up for this assignment and I asked her just tell me stories of what it was like growing up in Sweden and what it was like coming, moving to Silicon Valley before it was Silicon Valley? And so she told me all these great stories of when she first arrived including her first Halloween in the United States. Nobody had warned her that this was this weird thing that Americans had concocted. So she was sitting with her family kind of late at night and here's all these people pounding on her door. She goes, she tells everybody to hide under the bed, she goes very cautiously, opens the door and sees all these small people in weird outfits holding out these bags towards her and so she didn't really know what was going on. As she stared at them she noticed there's candy in the bags. She said "Oh this is a sweet tradition they've come here to give me candy as a welcoming gift." And so she took the candy out of the children's bags.

There was another great story of my uncle on his first day of kindergarten, not speaking any English, he came home and my grandmother was very nervous that he wasn't going to make friends you know having the language barrier. He came home at the end of the day with like 7 kids behind him and he just had this huge smile on his face and he came inside and he's like mom, this is great, all these kids are so fun. They are speaking in gibberish. So he was walking with them just thinking they were speaking some made up language and going along with it.

And then she also told me a bunch of really nice stories of growing up in her childhood in Lassabacka Sweden. It's this small Swedish town on the west coast next to a slightly less small city called Varberg, it's about an hour south of Gothenburg. Living there her dad worked in a wire factor. Her mom stayed at home. But most of her family lived out in the country and they were farmers. Every summer she would go out and visit all of her cousins and she took great pride in being the best girl cousin riding horses, racing and being kind of a tomboy. And she also had these beautiful stories of hunting for berries and mushrooms and finding cool animals and then one of the things that I thought was the most beautiful is that she used to go ice skating in winter on the ocean and she told me all about how it was a sparkly lake with nobody else around and she was racing with her cousins. It just sounded like this very beautiful winter country scene that I was very out of touch with living in California where you don't get frozen ice skating except in the downtown areas.

And so I wrote all of this up, I just transcribed it word for word, I turned it in and I was like "ok great. Done with my assignment." About a week after we turned it in I saw Mrs. Sokolower looking at me at the end of class and she was like Johanna I need you to stay after for a minute. And knowing that I had done a really good job on this assignment -- I spoke to an immigrant, I got some really great stories, I was like "Oh maybe she wants to congratulate me or like ask if I want to put this in the school paper" but I quickly realize that this was not the case. I had done something wrong. I couldn't figure out what it was. She looked at me as everyone else was piling out of class and she was like "You know Johanna, if you didn't have any immigrants in your life you could have talked to me. I told everybody I have people that you can call. You didn't need to just make all of this up."

I felt this like wave of indignation coming up and I was like “No I interviewed my grandmother. There are all. I didn’t change anything she said, I just wrote down exactly what she told me. She told me great stories.

She said well if you look at this third paragraph here, it said she went ice skating on the ocean. And me thinking with my high school chemistry, I felt my face getting all red because I realized just at the high school level, a bunch of salty ocean water is not going to freeze even if he gets really cold.

And so I sort of like paused and stammered and explained I’m so sorry but I don’t know how to explain it to you but my grandmother really tell me this and she’s always making things up and telling me all these ridiculous stories and I don’t know but this what she told me. I finally convinced Mrs. Sokolower that I hadn’t cheated on the assignment and she kind of let it slide and then for years afterward, I added this to my arsenal of stories about my wild grandmother that she had gotten me in trouble. I had to do this simple interview assignment and she had told me all these ridiculous stories and got me in trouble for plagiarizing, but it turns out two years ago my great uncle from Sweden was in town and he is going to visit my grandmother and help out around her house and we were talking about all the funny things she does and how she’s so demanding and she has all these funny ideas about everything, and I brought this story up and he was nodding along until I got to the end and he says “Well you know it is actually possible. It doesn’t happen anymore but at that time it did actually get cold enough and because of this special turbulence that happens in the Atlantic ocean around there it is cold enough that the ocean can freeze. Now she probably didn’t go all the way to the ocean for the ice skating, but there is an estuary that was very near where all of her cousins lived and so it’s entirely possible that she did go ice skating there.

I have never told my grandmother any of this but now I feel kind of guilty that I spent 10 years saying that she was a liar so now I’ve learned to embrace my family’s embellished style of storytelling, but remember that I always have to check the facts.

KEVIN:

Let’s give another round of applause for Johanna!

Before we bring our next speaker up, I just have a couple more people to thank. I just want to recognize Laryn Hoggard and Ravin Pan. Laryn has been helping with our workshops—in the summer and Fall—and she taught one of our storytelling workshops this Fall... some of the storytellers from tonight actually are from HER class...you might have seen Laryn and Ravin helping at the door tonight. Ravin is also helping to take photographs of all of our speakers. Thank you Laryn and Ravin!

Alright, our next speaker is Gloria Grandy.

Gloria has been a freelance artist, designer, and crafter for more than 30 years. Her roots are in theater costume design and interior design. She learned how to sew from her mother when she was 9 and never stopped. She loves working with textiles and fabrics, acrylics and watercolors, photography, ink, pencil and charcoal. And, as you'll find out tonight, she is a passionate doll maker.

Gloria's story is called "I wouldn't have missed it for the world." Let's welcome her to the stage.

GLORIA:

I am a fibro-artist. I've been working with textiles and fabrics for about 20 years. I create quilts and wall hangings and costumes and wearable art and cloth dolls and my dolls have been all over the United States and Canada either in exhibits or after being sold so my dolls get to travel a lot more than I do.

About seven years ago I got a call from a curator for an exhibit in Charleston, South Carolina called "Mermaids and Merwomen in Black Folklore." The curator's name was Cookie Roberts or Cookie Washington. I told you nerves do that to her.

Her name was Cookie Washington and she is a well-known African-American fibro artist and she's known for, one of her accomplishments was that she created a beautiful quilt for the Obama family when they, when President Obama was elected that hung in the white house for both of his terms in office. Anyway she was calling me to find out whether I was going to enter something into the exhibit. She'd seen some of my work online and

she was intrigued and wanted to know whether I was going to create a doll for this exhibit and I said well I don't know anything about mermaids, I didn't know anything at all about black mermaids and didn't even know that they existed and so I said not too sure so she said well I'm going to send you some information. I'm going to send you something to inspire you, to get your creative juices flowing.

So a couple of hours later I got an email and she sent me the most beautiful images by other artists – beautiful brown skinned mermaids with long, black, curly hair and some wonderful folktales and stories that were part of South Carolina's culture and legend and I kind of thought well you know. I went through the stories and I looked at these beautiful images and I thought well I'm going to sleep on it. I do my best planning and thinking in my sleep, so when I woke up the next morning, I had some wonderful images and pictures in my head of possibilities for art dolls that I could create, so I went to my work room and started pulling out fabric and glitter and sequins and buttons and shells and beads, anything that looked mermaidly and I put it all in the middle of my table and the first thing I did was I drafted a pattern for a doll, all the dolls that I had made to that point had legs. None of my dolls ever had tails, so I had to create a doll with a fishtail.

So I created the pattern with a fishtail, cut the pattern out, assembled all of the pieces, sewed them together, stuffed them, put the doll together and I would up with two very interesting looking mermaid dolls. So then it was time to decorate, then it was time to turn them into something beautiful. So I pulled out my metallic paints and painted those fishy tails in golds and silvers and you know shades of blue and made them look scaly and they looked really beautiful and then painted faces on the dolls and decorated them with shells and beads and then I added yarn for their curly hair and some fibers for seaweed. It took me about two weeks to get them done and I thought ok so I took some good photos and then submitted my photos to the selection committee after all that work it's not a guarantee you still have to be selected so that was my next step. So I got ready to wait for a couple of days because it would take a few days before I would get an answer back to see if my dolls would be accepted.

So then after about four hours I got an email that said "welcome to the mermaids and merwomen in black folklore exhibit". Your dolls have been accepted. And so I was so excited and all of a sudden kind of realized that

this was probably was one of the most important shows that I had ever done and it was a big deal to me. I hadn't realized that in the process greeting the dolls until that moment. So next step was to get the dolls in the box, you know get them mailed off. So I package them all up, got ready to go to the post office and then fear struck again because if the post office loses my dolls, that's it, they're irreplaceable at that point and if the post office doesn't get them to Charleston then I'm out of luck, but anyway so sent them off.

Couple of days later, I got a call again from Cookie Washington, Cookie Washington and she told me that my dolls had arrived safely so I was able to breathe easily and then she asked me, she says well do you want to sell your dolls at the end of the exhibit and I hadn't really thought about it and I said well sure. She says well what value or what price do you want to put on the dolls and I, selling dolls here in Sacramento is a challenge you know I mean people want to barter with me all the time so I very boldly said I want \$100 dollars for each doll and then I got total silence on the other end of the phone and I'm thinking oh my God I've asked for too much and I was ready to say well I'm willing to take \$75 and she told me you are crazy, she says these dolls will easily sell for \$350 each. And I thought sure if you can get that much for it, go for it, so then she started telling me about the exhibit and about the ceremony and all of the celebration, the reception and everything for the opening of this exhibit in Charleston and she says you know all of the artists are invited to come, she says you really should think about going and the way she described it you know they're going to have a procession on the beach for the water goddess. They were going to have this wonderful reception in the gallery and she started talking about food, she started talking about shrimp and grits and fried green tomatoes and hush puppies and she had me sold and that point. Ok I want to go.

So I made my plans and I said this is a once in a lifetime event and I have to be there. I bought my plane tickets and made my reservations for the hotel and I'm all set. So I went to work the next day and I had been assistant managing for an antiques/ collectible store for about five years and the owner of the store came in and said you know business has been really bad and I'm going to be closing the door at the end of the week. I was devastated. I thought oh my God, I can't go to Charleston and I was more upset about not being able to go to Charleston then I was about being unemployed, so it was kind of like what am I going to do.

I went home and thought ok I'm going to have to cancel my flight, cancel my reservations for the hotel and just not going to go, so went to bed, decided to go to sleep, sleep on it again – do my best thinking when I'm asleep – woke up the next morning and it was kind of like I can't miss this. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. This will never happen again. This particular exhibit is something that's very important, very special, one of the biggest ones I'd ever done and I thought I have to go so then I started thinking, started planning my budget, putting my pennies together, counting my savings. I went as far as going to the coin op and dumping my coin jar into it to make sure that I had got every penny, every dime. I decided well if I really stay on a close budget, don't buy groceries, I didn't have to buy gas because I wasn't going to work so I thought Ok I'm going to go do this and eggs and potatoes are a great food when you're on a budget. You're not hungry if you eat eggs and potatoes. You can eat those for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

So anyway, I had about three weeks to go before I had to leave and sure enough by the end of the time I had all my money together and I thought I'm going to do this. I can go. I'm going to go. And the shuttle came, picked me up to the airport, I flew from Sacramento to Atlanta and from Atlanta to Charleston and when I got to Charleston, I met two other ladies from California who were artists with this show and we shared a cab to the hotel, when was great because it meant I didn't have to pay for the cab all the way, so got to the hotel, went upstairs, got ready for the opening that night and when I came down on the elevator and the lobby was full of artists. The hotel had been reserved for the artists. And there were 110 artists from all over the U.S., from Haiti, from Brazil, from Jamaica and from West Africa and all of us had created Mermaid art for this exhibit and it was very moving to feel like all of us had a single concept and we all created our own interpretation of this single concept, so you kind of felt like 110 strangers, but you all had the same mind at this particular moment.

Anyway we got on the shuttle, two shuttles to get us to the gallery, the shuttle pulled up to the gallery. As we were pulling in you could see the ocean in the background and it was kind of shiny and sparkling and you could kind of hear the water moving and you could smell the ocean and some restaurant was cooking something fabulous. There was this wonderful sensory kind of a feeling already very emotional. I was already so excited because I was there. I kept telling myself I'm here. And pulled up to the gallery, we all got out of the shuttle, there was this beautiful two-

story building with this wide, long, staircase that led up to the front doors and we were all kind of on the lower landing kind of on the sidewalk waiting to go in for the exhibit and when I looked up, this little woman introduced herself as Cookie Washington and she welcomed all of the artists and the visitors to the gallery and she talked about how proud she was of this particular exhibit because it was just a dream of hers and we had made it real for her. After she spoke, the mayor of Charleston said a few words and welcomed us all because he knew that we were from all over the country and out of the country and then they opened the doors to the gallery. I climbed up the stairs, I was like a little kid, my knees were just shaking, I didn't know what to expect. I knew there was going to be something wonderful in there and climbed the stairs with the other artists. As I went through the main doors and I was in the lobby and you could see some fiber arts exhibits in the lobby and then as you looked through the gallery doors you could just see this explosion of color on the walls and these were all fiber art quilts and fiber art wall hangings that all of these artists had created on this same theme of mermaids. As I went through the door, right at the opening I could see my two little dolls – mermaids- on the front table greeting everybody as everyone came in. And in the background, the back of the gallery was all glass windows that went out on the ocean. You could just see this gorgeous view and my little dolls were kind of in the front with the ocean in the background. There was just this kaleidoscope of colors on all of the walls with everybody's art just kind of, just in amazing form and fashion, large and small and it was just amazing. I was almost weak kneed because it was almost overwhelming it was like the biggest event that I had gone to regarding my art and for the next three days they treated us like we were celebrities on the red carpet.

It was just so cool. We ate. We were wined and dined. We toured and paraded and it was just a wonderful event and then got back on the plane. I was so happy I'd gone. It was so well worth it. When I got back to Sacramento I even had a little money left in my pocket so I wasn't broke.

A few weeks later, I get a call from Cookie Washington again and my two dolls had sold for \$700. So...

KEVIN:

Okay, we have one more speaker tonight. And before we get started I do want to let you know that this last story deals with sexual assault. There is

nothing graphic, but if this is not a topic you can listen to, please feel free to step out for this one.

Now one more time, I just want to congratulate all of our speakers for their bravery coming up on stage and sharing their stories tonight. Let's give them all a round of applause.

Our final storyteller for the night is Kate Bosworth.

Kate is a graduate student in the Counselor Education program at Sac State and is working toward a certification in movement-based expressive arts therapy at The Tamalpa Institute. After working for 13 years in the public policy sector, Kate is now pursuing her goal of helping others heal from trauma. She holds a bachelor's degree in Philosophy and Sociology with a minor in Spanish from the University of San Diego. She is an avid dancer, backpacker, reader and artist.

KATE:

A couple of months ago I was leaving class and I saw a flyer on the bulletin board in the hallway and it said "Storytelling workshop" I was like yes, storytelling workshop, I'm there.

So a few weeks later I was at the first session of the workshop and we listened to some recorded stories and we learned how to tell a good story and then we were invited to tell a story of our own. Now it's like something had drawn me to this workshop, like there was something in me that wanted to be told. But now here in the workshop, I couldn't think of anything. My mind was blank. So we got prompts to help us think of a story, things like when were you most afraid or embarrassed or surprised and is there a regret that you have or what's the biggest decision you've made. Still I couldn't think of anything, so I spent the next week mulling it over. I was thinking maybe I could tell a story about this past summer when I went backpacking with a group of friends and we actually ended up getting trapped in the mountains because this mud slide blocked the only road out. I could tell that one or I could tell a story about how I fell in love with the person I've spent a third of my life with. That's a good one. I could tell a story about that time in southern Mexico in this really remote area on a dirt road on an edge of a cliff with a bus driver who was shit faced drunk.

I almost didn't go to the second session of the workshop. I just felt like these stories I was thinking of didn't quite seem to fit for some reason.

So I went and met with the instructor and I reviewed how to tell a good story. I tried to think about how I could make the mud slide incident work. I did go to the second session of the workshop and I heard other people tell their stories. And I was like man they have great material. What's my story?

And then that night riding my bike home, there was this tiny little sliver of moon in the sky and I was riding my bike home through the dark streets and I realized the story I want to tell, the story that wants to be told and I realized why I had been so challenged cause see the thing is the story I want to tell, the story that wants to be told is not the kind of story that is told in polite company. It's a story that people don't want to hear, I told myself. It's a story that's dark. It's painful. It hurts. Stories like that are best kept untold, right? They're best left in the dark. The other thing is the story I want to tell, the story that wants to be told, it's a story that's already been told. It's being told again and again, a chorus of voices, the same refrain. Why tell a story that's already been told? I thought. But I realized riding my bike home on that dark night in early fall under that tiny sliver of a moon, I realized the story I want to tell, the story that wants to be told is a story of being raped. No it's not an appropriate story to share. It's a story of black darkness closing in around me, definitely not the right type of story to inflict upon these poor unsuspecting people of the workshop. It's a story of seeing my paralyzed body in front of me being caged in, but I'm exaggerating, right? I felt paralyzed, but I wasn't really paralyzed, right?

It's a story of waking up hungover and full of shame, see? I was drunk. It was my fault. It's a story of being bruised and bleeding and blaming myself, but that makes it sound worse than it was. I mean the blood was only because it was the first time I'd had sex. It's a story that wasn't violent. I said no, no, but my body was passive, lifeless, force was not required. It's a story where the violence came later, hating myself and hurting myself, cutting and scratching and burning myself. Starving myself, wanting to kill myself and my secret, a story of addiction and confusion and depression, definitely not the kind of story to share.

But this is my story, the story that wants to be told. And it's also a story of somehow surviving and it's a story of anger, burning, searing, anger and a

story of grief and loss and mourning. It's a story of asking for help, a story of evolution and transformation and healing. It's a story of learning to love myself after all these years and I realized riding my bike home on that clear, crisp night in early fall under that tiny sliver of a moon that I do have lots of stories to tell and maybe someday I'll share my stories about the mudslide and about falling love and about how scared I was on that bus in southern Mexico, but right now those stories don't fit me, right now, this is the story that fits, this is the story that wants to be told and this is a story that I hope somehow by telling will stop happening over and over again inside my head.

KEVIN:

Thank you so much, Kate, for sharing your story.

And that's our last story for the night everyone.
Let's give another round of applause for all of our speakers
And for the mastermind behind it all Lisa Cantrell

Thank you so much for coming this evening, we hope to see you again soon!