

Nonprofit 911 – October 23, 2007
Storytelling for Fundraisers
With Katya Andresen & Macon Morehouse
Sponsored by Network for Good
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The audio transcript can be found at www.fundraising123.org

Jono: Good morning and afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the October 23rd Non-Profit 911 sponsored by Network for Good. This is Jono Smith and I'm the marketing manager here at Network for Good. If this is your first time joining us, welcome to Non-Profit 911. If you are a repeat visitor, we're happy that you found these valuable enough to return and we welcome you as well.

In case you're not familiar with Network for Good, we're a non-profit just like you are and our mission to help other non-profits raise money online. These training calls are a free service to the non-profit community to help you improve your online fundraising results. We also provide online fundraising services directly to non-profits such as online donation processing.

But this is not a sales call, so we'll leave mention of those services for a little bit later. I am going to mention at the end of the call how you can get more information about Network for Good and even sign up for a free trial of our services if you are interested.

Now on to today's call. We've had, actually, over 800 people register. The tones you heard were actually people beeping in. We had a technical difficult where those tones were beeping every time somebody joined the call. Literally, hundreds of folks are logging onto today to this October 23rd session on how to tell your story, tips for better storytelling, fundraising success, and media glory.

All the lines have now been muted and this call is being recorded. You'll be able to download an audio transcript at Fundraising123.org within 24 hours. At this point I'd like to introduce the speakers for today's call, Katya Andresen and Macon Morehouse. Both of today's speakers are actually journalists by trade.

Katya is currently our vice president of marketing here at Network for Good but prior to joining the non-profit world, she was a journalist in Asia and Africa. Macon Morehouse has been a journalist for over 21 years and is currently working on assignment for *People* magazine and *USA Weekend*.

She's also the author of several non-profit case studies and human-interest stories that profile Network for Good clients. Macon and Katya will be actually discussing some of those today. You can also read those in their entirety at Fundraising123.org. Katya and Macon will speak for about 45 minutes today and then we'll take your questions.

If you'd like to ask a question at any point, please send us an email at Fundraising123@NetworkforGood.org. Without further ado, I'm going to turn the phone over to Katya.

Katya:

Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today. Have no fear, we're going to be talking and telling a lot of stories today. We hope it's engaging and of use to you. Let me give you a quick rundown of how we're going to go about the call today.

I'm going to talk a little bit about why stories are even important, very briefly, tell you a couple stories of my own, and then I'm going to run through five elements of a good story that are highlighted in a new book about storytelling that I quite like and recommend called *The Elements of Persuasion*.

You don't need to frantically scribble too many notes. If you go to www.Fundraising123.org you will find notes up on that page, you will find links to all of Macon's wonderful materials, and you'll find links to all the books and articles I'm going to be talking about today. We've got that taken care of for you. As Jono mentioned, we will have a written transcript and an audio file of this call available to you in the next few days so you can come back and look for more information as needed.

After I talk about the basics of storytelling, I'm going to be interviewing Macon, turning the tables on her. She's a journalist used to interviewing other people. I'm going to interview her about her experience writing some stories for some non-profits that are line today that use Network for Good's services.

We're going to talk a little bit about how she went about finding the heroes in these organizations and pulling out their stories and telling them in a really compelling way. You can read all those stories at the www.Fundraising123.org link that I mentioned. We're going to briefly talk about attracting media to your story.

That's going to be woven in a lot of Macon's comments because she wrote up these stories for the non-profits I referred to with an eye toward helping them tell their story for fundraising purposes but also because she is a member of the media. She wrote it in a way that would be of interest to

journalists so we're going to be touching a little bit upon what is a good story in the eyes of the media.

As Jono mentioned, we're going to take your questions. You can start emailing them as we go along at anytime and we will answer your questions. If we see a lot coming in, we won't do too much of a monologue and leave plenty of time for questions at the end. Why a story? Why are we on the phone today and why are Macon and I such proponents of storytelling?

One thing I like to point out is stories are a really interesting way of communicating. I think as marketers and fundraisers we're accustomed to two kinds of communication. One is what I call "one-way communication." We're used to taking out ads or sending appeals or perhaps we put together a public service announcement on the radio or television to kind of blast out our message and hope someone's out there listening on the other end. I call that "old-school" marketing or one-way communication.

A second way of communication is often more effective. It takes the form of a conversation. We see a lot more of that going on today online. If you put out a blog about your programs and you have people commenting it and you're engaging in conversations with your donors and supporters, that's an example of two-way communication.

The really compelling thing about story is it's a third way of communicating. If I tell you a story, we're transported together outside the present to another time and place. You're living an experience with me as you imagine it in your mind. That's a very amazing thing to experience and it brings two people much closer in communication than one-way or two-way communication.

A story is really wonderful because it injects color, texture, images, emotion, and meaning into what we do. Let me give you an example of why that matters. If you heard me speak before, you may have heard this story. Forgive me. I tell it a lot because it's one of the stories that sum up who I am and what I believe about marketing.

One of the things that we hope you get out of today is a sense of what your story is. All of us have good stories to tell about ourselves and our organization. We should really latch on to those and use those to sum up a lot of what we do and what we think because it's what people remember. My story's about soon after 9/11.

I was working as a consultant to the public health field and I was hired to help them tell their story and to pull together success stories and try to

make the public health storyline and the need for investment in public health infrastructure very interesting so that policy, [wants], media, and different audiences would latch on to these stories and it would galvanize support for the public health field with the hope.

Then 9/11 happened soon after I was brought on to do this. Soon after that there was the Anthrax attack. A day after the Anthrax attacks was the annual meeting of this group of public health professionals. I flew out to Denver for the meeting. The first night, we all gathered in a big ballroom and a funder came forward and she was supposed to give the keynote address and talk about the priorities of her foundation.

Instead, she told us a story and she talked about how she was a nurse by training and had just taken a month leave—a sabbatical—from the foundation to go work at Ground Zero. She talked a lot about that experience and then she said, “I could get up tonight and give a speech but I don’t really want to.

These Anthrax attacks have happened and these are going to change the lives of you all in this ballroom. You’re the first lines of defense against bioterrorism. I expect this affects your work profoundly. Tell me your stories. Tell me how we as funders can help you.” Oprah style, she took her microphone off the podium and walked around and was ready to hand her microphone to people in the audience.

The first public health professional took the microphone and said, “The problem with these Anthrax attacks is they’re really a distraction. Do you know how many people die from smoking-related causes everyday?” The next person grabbed the microphone and said, “You know what we should really be talking about is childhood obesity. It’s reached epidemic proportions. Do you know how many thousands of children are obese now?”

Everyone’s applauding these statistics. Then a third person takes the microphone and says, “What we’re trying to say to you is you need to understand all the things we do in the public health field, the whole gamut of what we do and then you can see all the areas in which we need support.”

That was a very interesting interchange because here were a group of people who didn’t want to or could not tell a story in response to her request for a story. Instead, they wanted to share what Macon’s going to tell you a little bit more about, which she calls “the kitchen sink.” We all are such believers in our mission and everything we do as non-profits that we want to tell people everything.

That really gets in the way of telling a good story. The other reason I tell this story is it just gets at the heart of some of our hang-ups with stories, which I want to acknowledge right off the get go here. If you're a marketing or fundraising person, you probably naturally gravitate to stories but you may encounter resistance in your organization from program people or others who always want the "kitchen sink" to be there, who want to enumerate every detail of what you do because they believe in it so deeply and rightfully so.

They feel that the more information you put out there the more convincing or compelling you'll be. Unfortunately, that's not really the case. In fact, people tend to shut down the more information they get. If you don't believe me, there are a slew of research studies that have come out recently to this affect.

Even Nicholas Kristof of the *New York Times* took note and wrote about how Darfur statistics are less compelling than one puppy is what researchers find. He called his column "Save the Darfur Puppy." The idea is people pay attention to stories. That doesn't mean they have less gravitas than we do.

Stories are how we experience life and each other. Everyone on the phone is the sum of the stories you tell about yourself or that others tell about you. It's the same thing with companies, movements, cultures, nations, and even civilizations. Civilizations are the sum total, our history is a series of stories.

It is not a cop out to tell a story. It's the way that we can best communicate and bring people to that shared space I talked about, to get people transported to that third place that we share with them where they are living in their imagination what we are trying to convey. There are three great people writing on stories that are all linked on that page I mentioned earlier.

One is Andy Goodman. He wrote a wonderful short piece called "Storytelling As Best Practice," that you can order online. There's a link to it. I interviewed him for my own book and one of the things he says is, "What's hard about telling stories is we tend to be either too close to our stories or too far from them." What does he mean?

What he means is sometimes we get so far down the weeds in our work and so accustomed to seeing the impact of our programs or beneficiaries that we almost lose sight of what's remarkable. It starts to become humdrum and every day and we forget that the little stories unfolding around us every moment during our day are actually incredibly interesting to the outside world.

I experienced this as a foreign correspondent. I found that after I'd been in the country about a year I was not as good of a journalist because I would see extraordinary things all day long in Cambodia or the countries in Africa I was in and they would stop looking different or new and I would forget that there was interest to the outside world. I'd lose that fresh eye.

It's easy for us to lose our fresh eye and forget or be too close to our story. Simultaneously, as Andy says, we might be too far from our story and this is where we get into the "kitchen sink," where we've lost touch with our frontlines work and for the emotion of it and we are up at the policy level or the strategy levels in organization and we have trouble communicating without wanting to show all of the big picture and every mention of our work.

That is also an obstacle to storytelling. What I wanted to do right now is give you five elements of a good story just so you have a sense of "How do you find those stories if you're too close or too far and how do you recognize them? What are the elements?" I'm going to run through five of them which are up on that page I mentioned—Fundraising123.org.

I'm going to give you some examples as we go through and then I'm going to talk about how Macon applied some of these principles in her own prodigious experience as a journalist to shape some stories. These are from *The Elements of Persuasion*, which is a book there's a link to on that page.

Element number one to a story is something everyone on the phone has, I believe, which is terrific so you can check that one off. You need passion to tell a good story. The teller needs to be passionate about what they're talking about. We all, I would think, have passion to tell our story. We wouldn't be on the phone today and we certainly wouldn't be overworked and under paid in the non-profit profession if we weren't driven by that passion and that desire to make a difference.

We wouldn't try to hide that. The more passionate we are in telling our story and the more authentic we are in our emotions, the more compelling we are as the narrator. Another way of saying this is we need some oomph in the narration. I want to give you an example. There was a woman who we've come to know here at Network for Good who is a mother of two, 38 years old, and lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.

On January 18th of this year she went out for a run. She was training for a marathon. She's a very good runner. She's an accomplished triathlete. She's on one of her long, fast runs and in the middle of her run her feet

went completely numb. She couldn't feel a thing. She couldn't figure out what was happening.

She thought maybe she had been overtraining or chasing her children around too much or just generally tired. She went to the doctor only to learn within days that she had MS. She was quite devastated. She didn't know what to do with her feelings and her family and friends wanted to help her.

She wanted something positive to channel her emotion into. She said this was one of the darkest days of her life and she wanted to find something constructive to do. She heard about a program we have here at Network for Good called "Six Degrees" where you can fundraise for your favorite cause. It's something we do with Kevin Bacon.

She built a fundraising widget and sent it to all of her friends and family and said, "I want you to support my cause." She ended up raising \$800 the first day, \$18,000 within a matter of a few weeks, and won a matching grant because she raised so much money. Since then, she's been on CNN Heroes, the E! Network, and been offered a book deal. Why?

Because she had such a compelling story. She wasn't talking about the mission of her local MS society. She was talking about how she experienced it. When people do that, that unleashes incredible power. She had incredible passion as a teller.

The second thing is she was the hero of her own story and that's the second element. There needs to be a protagonist or hero in your story. You need someone who people find they respect or who is compelling, someone substantial but someone relatable at the same time, someone people identify with and feel some role in the stakes that that person is facing. That's another thing you want to be looking for.

The third piece is you need an antagonist or a conflict. Journalists take a lot of grief from a lot of people about the way they're always looking for conflict or they're always going negative. What journalists are looking for is an antagonist or a conflict. If there's nothing at stake, there's no story. What is the hero up against?

If there's nothing in their way or there's no conflict, it's not a story. What is the person trying to achieve? What's in the way? Where is the natural tension in the story? You can call and tell someone about your nice non-profit and have nothing controversial and that's fine, but a good journalist may try to seek controversy because they're trying to find the conflict.

They're trying to find what you're up against. By telling your story in a way where you show what you're up against, that raises the stakes and makes for an interesting story. I don't mean a person or a politician or something you're fighting necessarily. It could be poverty that someone's overcome. It could be dire consequences if actions aren't taken. You need some kind of tension there.

The fourth piece is awareness. There needs to be some meaning derived from the story. What does the hero learn? What's the aha moment of the story? That's a really important element. In this book *The Elements of Persuasion*, they tell a story about a team in Guatemala that was trying to negotiate some parties to bring an end to a civil war there.

A team got together army, rebels, politicians, priests, and villagers to talk and for days they heard each other out. They were describing acts of unbearable cruelty and things were going nowhere. Then I'm reading from the book, "Then one politician described going to the exhumation of a mass grave at the site of a particularly brutal massacre.

When the bodies were removed, this man noticed that there were tiny little bones at the bottom of the pit. He asked the forensic scientist doing the work if those were the bones of animals, perhaps monkeys that were somehow buried as well. 'No,' he was told. 'Many of the women killed that day were pregnant. Those are the bones of their unborn children.'

A quiet fell over the room. Deep and profound, it lasted not for seconds but for minutes and when the discussion began again everything had changed." That's just an example of awareness. Sometimes when you tell a story people have a moment where they recognize something they wouldn't have otherwise and you want that built into your stories.

The last piece is transformation. What changed? What impact came about because of your work? What's different as a result of the story you're telling? It can be a little thing. One of the most effective fundraising emails I got this year was from the Monterey Bay Aquarium. It was two paragraphs long.

A staff member [asked his dad who'd come to visit the aquarium,] "Are you having a good time," and he talks about how they'd come to the aquarium, they hadn't even realized you could go diving with some of the sea creatures, they had, and it was just this life-changing experience. His dad says, "It's the best thing we've ever done together, period."

I love that story as a parent because it's so emotional to me that you would have this wonderful moment with your child. That's the transformation in that story. It's just one parent having a transformative experience because

they visited an aquarium. Those are some of the things that we're going to be looking for.

I want to turn now to a master at work here, Macon Morehouse, who's with me because I expect some of you on the phone are saying, "That all sounds very nice, but we don't really have a hero," or "We don't really have a conflict," or "Our organization is very process oriented and that formula's just not going to work for us."

I want to show you how Macon has taken three very different non-profits that we're going to walk through, interviewed folks there, and helped them figure out what one of their great stories is and she's told those stories. That's what I want to focus in on now—how do you do this when you think you can't—because it is always possible if you're looking for the right thing.

The first example we're going to be talking about here is the GESU School and I'm going to ask Macon to tell us a little bit about the school and how she figured out how to tell a story about it. One of the reasons this is a particularly interesting story is the school faces things a lot of you face, which is they do a lot of things.

There are a lot of dimensions to this school. There are a lot of things that they do but you can't tell them all or you'll end up with the kitchen sink. Macon, can you tell us a little bit about what you did after you met the folks at the school and how you tried to identify a story there.

Macon:

Hi, everybody. I actually had a conference call with several of the people from the school and they walked me through how they're doing so many great things there. As a journalist, I'm always looking for the thing that peaks my interest because I think I'm like a lot of average Joe readers out there. If it interests me, it should interest them.

This is just one example. This story could have gone a lot of different ways. One of the things that piqued my interest is between third and fifth grade, the school separates the girls from the boys and educates them in their own classroom. They started this program 13 years ago now because they noticed that they were losing boys as young as third and fourth grade.

This is in an incredibly poor, tough neighborhood where the graduation rate for kids in that community normally is terrible. These kids were just being lured onto the street. They had research backing that up that it wasn't just happening in Philadelphia and elsewhere, so they took action.

One of the things that piqued my interest is anybody who's been reading the newspapers over the past couple of years know this is a current trend.

Everybody suddenly is very interested in it and the US Department of Education actually recently loosened its rules so that public schools can do this more easily.

I wanted to do a story that would help the readers feel what it was like to be in the classroom with these teachers. We did it with the third-grade teachers because this is the first years that these students do that. I spoke with two of the teachers in depth. They were describing what was on their walls, how their kids behaved, and really were bringing to life what it was like in the classroom.

I used that to put it against the larger trend of what's happening nationwide. That's an example of looking at what you're doing and trying to fit it in with a trend. It could be a trend that's local, regional, national, or whatever. It doesn't have to be the world's biggest story to work as a trend.

Then I also was able to use the story to talk a little bit more broadly about what the school does just to help peak interest because somebody may say, "Well, single-gender classes, that's very interesting," but they may just read a blip about a new language program that they started to help these kids speak proper English and they started even in Pre-K to help these kids succeed.

It's a brand-new program there. Just a mention of that, without going into detail because you don't want to go on too long or you're going to lose your reader, but that may be the one thing that stands out and gets somebody to say, "I'm interested in seeing what GESU has to say," and going to the website and finding out more.

Katya: This story about this school in inner-city Philadelphia is up on the site if you want to take a look. I'm actually going to ask Macon to read the first paragraph and to talk a little bit about how to get into your story. The idea of gender-specific education sounds great although one's eyes glazed over when you put it in the words I just did. I'm interested in having her read the first paragraph to share how she put that in human terms. Could you read the first paragraph, Macon, and then talk a little bit about a [weed] or a peg?

Macon: The first paragraph is: "When teacher Tyrone [Myers] asked a question, he always calls on a boy to answer it. Down the hall, Shirley Bright only calls on girls. No, these teachers aren't practicing blatant discrimination. At GESU School, an independent, K through 8, Catholic school in the heart of one of North Philadelphia's toughest neighborhoods, is a way to keep the boys engaged and the girls confident.

“From third through fifth grade, these children will learn in boys-only and girls-only classrooms,” and that’s the end of the first paragraph. One of the things you want to do when you write is make your readers feel like they’re there. I often resort to the five senses. You need to bring out smell, taste, touch, sight—whatever you can to make your reader feel like they’re there.

In this case, you got an immediate sense of what the classroom was like and there was a little bit of titillation. If you don’t know what the story’s about at first, you’re like, “Why is he only calling on the boys? That’s not fair.” So it draws you in. It also quickly puts the story in context. You know by the end of that paragraph that we’re talking about single-gender classes and I haven’t even used the word “gender” because that’s a processed word.

Katya: That’s a great example. I’m sure when she’s reading that first paragraph you can really visualize what the schoolroom looks like. I want to focus in on one thing Macon just said. She talked a little bit about the element of surprise. There’s a third resource I haven’t mentioned that’s up on the site called *Made to Stick*, which is another one of my favorite books.

It talks about the elements of a sticky idea or story. They do talk about the element of surprise which Macon used really beautifully in that story by drawing us in and saying, “Who is this teacher who always calls on a boy?” We’re instantly hooked in. I think that’s a great example of a good peg. I wanted to ask Macon a little more about that.

She has a great mantra called, “Nice is not enough,” which is great for our sector. I’m going to ask her a little bit about her role. She’s writing for *People* magazine. She gets a lot of people like you all trying to get her to cover your stories. When do you take the phone call or when do you return the message and when is there that hook like you found with the GESU School that makes you want to write a story?

Macon: I almost always try to take the phone call. It is true. I’ve told a lot of people, “Nice is not enough,” because the problem is all of you guys are doing great things, nice things. You wouldn’t be in that business if that was not your interest. There are a lot of people across the country, thank god, doing nice things.

In order to make your story fly, you really need to have—sometimes it’s even an intangible extra—but you need to have a good back story. That means, say, whoever started your foundation has an amazingly, incredible, compelling reason for having done it—a personal reason. It needs to be unique in some way and unique is hard because, obviously, that means one of a kind.

But it could be unique in the context of your community. It could be unique in the context of your region of the country. It doesn't have to be the only one in the US. In this case, the story that I focused on for GESU, the thing that was appealing is its part of a national trend. It's something that people are really interested in now from the very highest levels down.

Laura Bush, one of her programs or campaigns in the past year or so has been the education of boys, and while that's not necessarily single-gender education, that is something that single-gender education is addressing, you can tap into a trend. Anything that gives you a good gut reaction, and something that you can differentiate and explain why this is part of a trend of this is unique, it's helpful because just doing something nice rarely flies.

Katya: Great point, and a nice segue into a second story I want to talk to Macon about here. Just to sum up, you can read about GESU School online but I think the big lesson that I would like to highlight from her work is "nice is not enough, kitchen sink is too much." Find one element of your story that is really unique and compelling and start there, stick to that.

You can then show how it relates to the other elements of your program. For example, she said in the sidebar she mentions other things going on at the school, but remember that that unique hook, that one peg, is what ensnares the reader or the listener. That's the most important thing.

The second thing that Macon started to talk about, which is a nice segue to our second story that she put together for Golden West Humanitarian Foundation is she talked a little bit about having a good back story. Could you explain more about what you mean by back story, or why people sometimes should [figure it in] largely in the stories you're telling about your organization?

Macon: I worked for *People* magazine, so I'm trained to look for the personal story, but it's something that works no matter what publication you're pitching to because people relate to people, it's as simple as that. We're all trying to find some sort of connection, and particularly in this era when people really want to find a way to help and do good, they can relate to other people they see helping and doing good.

As a matter of fact, one of my tips is when you're trying to come up with a story, you may not have something that's trendy or currently newsworthy, but look at the people who are in your organization, your volunteers, the people you're helping, because any one of them may have an incredibly compelling story that would help describe what your organization is doing.

With Golden West, this was a little bit of a tough one because this is an organization that's based in California, but it does its work in countries that are far away. They basically are developing technology to help diffuse landmines and roadside bombs. Obviously we've heard a lot about IEDs and are increasingly hearing about that.

One of the challenging things about them is they're dealing with technology, so it's very, very technical and something that may be beyond the grasp of casual readers. The other thing that was challenging is a lot of their people are from other countries and I've discovered in a lot of the work that I've done that Americans really like to read about Americans.

I had a long conversation with the folks at Golden West who were great and we talked to some of their people and what they were doing. I ended up doing a story, a profile, framed around one of their people who was from California, he was in the US Military; he now spends the vast majority of his time in Cambodia, teaching people there how to take apart stockpile munitions.

This is very important because that way they can't be used for other things, but he also recycles materials from the munitions that are used to help diffuse other things like the buried landmines. One of the interesting things about him is that he started out his military career actually making munitions and now is focused on getting rid of them.

It's something that is applicable to everything we hear on the news now. He's working in Cambodia, but we hear about everything in Iraq, Afghanistan, all these countries that are daily in the headlines, so there's an appeal there and it helps make people more interested in the story when they might hear about the technology and normally glaze over.

Katya: That's great, and the person you put at the center of the story, his background as a bomb builder to a bomb diffuser is such a wonderful hook. It's a great example of a hero that's very substantial but also relatable and a little bit of a surprise built in, which I think is maybe a hallmark of your storytelling. That story is also up on the site.

When Macon is talking about Golden West and GESU, she's talked a lot from the perspective of the media on how these stories are compelling. I noticed we had a question that was emailed in from Nicole, where she says, "Is storytelling good for major donor solicitations as well?" I want to make an important point here.

As two people who have been in the media, everything we tell you about what makes a good story applies not just to journalists, but to donors and

to everyone. Everyone wants to hear a story and I can't think of a better way to reach a major donor when you're with them one on one, or for that matter, if you're a mass fund raiser and you're emailing 10,000 people, to start with a story.

It just draws people in. One of the things Andy Goodman, who is an expert on storytelling, said to me that I put in my book is that there's a Gary Larson cartoon about what dogs hear when we speak to them. I'm sure everyone is familiar with this one. It has a picture of a dog looking at a person and the dog hears, "Blah, blah, blah, Ginger, blah, Ginger, blah, blah, blah."

The dog is only hearing its name. Human beings are similar. We hear, "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," and then, "yesterday, I..." and everyone perks up because we hear a cue that a story is about to begin. We want to cue the story because that's really what's compelling to the listener, whoever they are on the other end, whether a donor, a member of the media, et cetera.

Again, it's what draws people in, and you're going to remember the stories from this call, I guarantee you, far better than you're going to remember the five points I gave you, for example, because it's just the way the mind works. One of the themes I want to highlight both from GESU and from golden West is the importance of people the importance of a human face on the story. (Or an animal face, in the case of some of you on the phone working with animals.)

Another thing I want to highlight is the fact that sometimes you don't have an easy hero or an exact angle that strikes you right off the bat, which brings us to our third story, which is CANFit. This is a tricky one and I'm getting a bunch of emails from the folks on the phone who are involved in advocacy or process or policy work saying, "Okay, where is the hero? Where is the back story? What do we do with this?"

You should check out the third example of CANFit. I'm going to ask Macon to talk a little bit about that, but here is an organization that's all about training the trainer, and kind of like middle men in the process of social change. What do you do if you're in the shoes of CANFit, who is CANFit, and how did you help them out of that conundrum from a storytelling perspective?

Macon: CANFit is an acronym for the California Adolescent Nutrition and Fitness program. It's a great program, great cause. Their focus is in fighting obesity in minority populations in children. One of the things they used to do is fund a lot of programs that were very hands on, very photogenic, like

surfing lessons for American-Indian kids. That kind of story is a no brainer.

They don't do that any more. They do a lot with policy, a lot with training, after-school programs, how to work with their children. So the challenge there was trying to find something that people could relate to. We had some great conversations. I got the background of some of the people who worked there and they all have nice, compelling reasons for being in it, but I couldn't find something immediately that zinged.

Then they mentioned that they were coming out with a snack guide for after-school programs. The multi-purpose guide was to develop recipes that would be culturally interesting to these different groups, so not your regular Hostess Ho-Ho kind of approach. They also had to be low cost to fit in with the California reimbursement program.

They add to meet certain calorie expectations. It's really a document that's going to be coming out next month that is geared toward helping these after-school programs develop snacks that are healthy that they can get reimbursed for. When I looked at it—I have a child, I read a lot of parenting magazines, they're always full of recipes—I thought, "Let's look beyond what the actual purpose of this document is and see if it can be applied more broadly."

In the vein of these parenting magazines, I was like, "Let's do something with multi-cultural snacks. How fun would that be? Take your kids' taste buds around the world." So that's what I wrote about and included some of the recipes because magazines are always running the recipes, and also just to add a little bit more and to pique interest, I added a little bit of background of two of the people who work for CANFit who, growing up, were exposed to less-than-healthy food.

Both had sort of "aha" moments as kids and turned that into what they're doing now. That was just a very brief, first-person "why we're doing this," a quick, almost like a snapshot, that somebody could read very quickly and may or may not keep somebody's interest, but it was just a little bit extra and makes it personal.

Katya: Great—thanks for that. I'm going to turn to some questions that are coming in now. Lisa wants to know: "I noticed Macon's stories are all two to three pages. Is it possible to write a compelling short story that's only a couple paragraphs? If so, what elements are most important to include?"

I'll ask Macon to answer that and then I'll give you an example of a story that's one-sentence long or one image that I used as a journalist just to show you the great economy with which stories can be told.

Macon: That's a great question and some of these stories out there are a little bit longer because I put in some side bars, but it actually is much better to write shorter, more concise and more to the point because the media that you're reaching out to don't have time to read through everything and you want to catch them right away. So actually going for the three, four or five-paragraph approach is the best.

But you still need the elements—the “why now,” a flavor of the background story—because you're basically trying to give them a taste of what you have to offer, and if they're interested and want to follow up, they're going to come to you and get more information, but you still have to answer the basic questions—the “why now,” what's interesting and unique about us, what is the image that's going to draw you in.

If you chose your words and images very carefully, you can do that, maybe not easily, but you can do that in five paragraphs.

Katya: Absolutely, and Macon puts this in her writing tips, by the way, which are very valuable and she shared them with us: Don't get too wound up thinking you need to find one story that sums up everything your organization does and there's just this crowning tale that is so perfect that it conveys all that you want it to.

You're better off finding some interesting anecdotes or snapshots of your program, like only the boy being called the classroom at the GESU school. That's an image that we're going to remember. It tells a whole story in just a few paragraphs. That could easily have been a three-paragraph story if it were in a fundraising appeal.

Macon was talking about what appeals to media; donors don't want to necessarily read a long story either. It depends on what they're reading. If they're reading a newsletter they got in the mail, they may want the longer story. If they're in email, they probably don't. When I was a journalist I was constantly looking for the telling the tale because I worked for Reuters and Associated Press, which gave me maybe 200 to 400 words to tell a story about a foreign country that people knew nothing about.

So that was kind of hard. I'll give you a couple of samples. One story I did, I was working on trying to convey in Ukraine what had happened to the pension system. With the fall of communism and the collapse of the Soviet Union, pensioners were really left high and dry and while capitalism has brought a lot of opportunity to a younger generation, people were depending on pensions from the government and saw those go away with their government.

The wealth was not shared. I could tell that...in a book! One of my first days in Ukraine, I was in front of a big, landmark church there in Central Square and there was an old babushka grandmother with the scarf over her head, stooped over, begging with a McDonald's cup. That really gives you the whole story right there. She's holding a symbolism of capitalism, she's begging, she's older, clearly hard up, she's lost her social safety net.

The arrival of McDonald's has done nothing for her. That sums up a lot with one image. Images are really powerful. Macon talked about the five senses. It's really important that people can see, smell or almost taste what is going on in your story. Another example is I knew the *New York Times* correspondent when I was working in Cambodia and he came through to do a landmine story.

He did a short feature on landmines, which is a big issue in Cambodia, but he went to see a workshop where they were making prosthetics for landmine victims—arms and legs—and they were really big, and he said, “Don't you do children's sizes?” and they said, “Well, children don't survive a landmine blast.”

It's like the story I read you from the book about the tiny bones in the mass grave. There are just certain telling the tales that tell the whole story in themselves. Would you read us a couple questions, Jono?

Jono: Suzanne from America Scores writes in: “America Scores has tons of back stories, heroes and conflicts, et cetera. We deal with childhood obesity, illiteracy, immigrant minority populations, gender-divided elementary school classes, et cetera. When I think about it, we have fabulous success stories for each of those.

“My problem is the kitchen sink. I have real trouble deciding how to limit what I say. How do you choose which story to tell whom? When I'm reaching out to the media with a pitch letter, for example, is it okay to send two different stories to two different editors at the same media outlet?”

Macon: That's a good one and you're very lucky to have a lot of great stories to tell. I think you do have to be choosy because one thing you don't want to do is give the people you're pitching to a sort of fatigue, where you're pitching early, often, and repeatedly, especially if initially they're not interested.

If you are pitching to two people in the same organization, one thing you do need to do is be very up front with them and say, “I'm doing this,” because they're going to run into each other in the hallway and say, “Wait a minute, they pitched me...” So you need to be transparent in that case.

You can go through what you have and pick what you think is the best story. One way to do that is talk to your friends and neighbors and see what resonates with them, because what resonates with them may very well resonate with a lot of readers. Journalists are always going to be asking, “Why should I do this story now?”

So look through your potential stories and pick what’s the most topical. What’s feeding into something that’s in the news right now or is part of a rising trend? You don’t want to pitch everything and you want to have some things in reserve to pitch further down the line. If you blow everything now, when it comes back six months or a year later, you’re not going to have anything to offer.

So you do need to have a critical eye and if that’s something you have difficulty doing, ask for advice. Talk to your neighbor or anybody you think might be interested in what you’re doing to get their feed on what most interests them.

Katya: Macon, you talked a lot about the importance of latching on to national terms, things that are already in the spotlight, and showing how your story is a good, unique angle, which is great advice for dealing with the media. Lisa asks a related question: “Other than our general media, is there a great resource for knowing overall terms that matter to the general public?”

“How do we know what people care about? For example, I know the Annie Casey Foundation puts out a KIDS COUNT data book each year. Macon’s comment made me wonder if there’s a short list of hot topics that exists. How do you know what’s hot?”

One thing that Macon’s talked about is looking at what’s in the media. What are journalists focused on? I’m going to post this when we post the transcript of the call, but there are some great websites on the Internet that have national polling data free, and you can read what the national polls are focused on.

What’s being polled on shows you what policy makers happen to be caring about in that moment, as well as what’s seizing national attention. It can also back up your story. You can say, “There’s a new poll out. We have some really interesting stories to illustrate what’s going on in people’s minds with regard to that poll.”

I blogged about it some time ago. I just don’t have the link in front of me, but I will find out for you, Lisa, maybe before the end of the call if I can. You can sort by issue and see what angle pollsters are taking and what they’re interested in. Another person asked simply: “How do I know what

to pitch and how to I find the journalist to pitch it to?” Macon, perhaps you can give some insight on local versus national media.

Macon: No matter where you live there’s going to be a local newspaper, a TV station, the community newspaper, community magazine, and you need to become an avid media consumer so you’re familiar with them. Say your non-profit has something to do with health. There’s going to be a health writer at the newspaper. If you’re in a particular county, there’s probably somebody who specializes in covering that county.

You just need to do a little bit of legwork so you know who to approach because once you’ve started a relationship with a journalist, you have somewhere you can go. If it’s somebody who’s generous with their time, you can even bounce some ideas off of them without, hopefully, wearing them out.

In terms of trying to figure out what to pitch, you really need to sit down and take a hard look at your organization, what it does, what the programs are, who the people are in it, and figure out what’s most appealing to you. Seriously, if you do have difficulty with that, talk to a best friend, talk to your mom, talk to other people.

Because if you’re too close to it, just as Katya was saying before, somebody with fresh eyes may be able to say, “Wow, that’s really interesting. I want to know more about that,” and their reaction may be a very good guide to what would be appealing more broadly to a reader.

Developing sources on the national level is a little bit more challenging, although as a *People* correspondent, I had many people calling me just blind saying, “I found your name in a media guide.” There are actually a number of media guides out there with the names of different media and contacts there. Katya can provide you with the names of some of those.

That’s a place to at least start. Again, you might want to look for the person who specializes in your field rather than just doing a blind call to the editor of the metro section or the news director of the TV station. The more you can pinpoint somebody who might be covering the kind of thing you’re doing, the better.

Katya: There’s a question from Michelle, who says: “If you’re telling stories in an e-newsletter to a targeted audience, i.e. health or education, does it makes sense to go in depth in the stories? For instance, should the stories contain more technical details so the targeted audience will be more health/education savvy, or should the articles be more brief?”

My answer to Michelle, and something I want to reinforce about what Macon just said is audience, audience, audience. I'm always saying this in any teleconference I've been on, but the way you are an effective storyteller, fund raiser, marketer, media pitcher, you name it, is to understand your audience and what they care about, and to speak to that.

If you're talking to health or education policy [makers], it may be very appropriate to have a certain level of technical detail. You don't want a communication devoid of story because while they're interested in those details, it's useful to have something memorable to kick it off and to put some context around the statistics you might be sharing or the technical information.

If that's appropriate for your audience, great. If you're going for the general public or for a broad swath of donors, then a lot of technical information would not be appropriate. It just depends on who you're speaking to. That really goes with the media too. My biggest complaint as a journalist was people just called me up and tried to treat me like a mouthpiece for their issue.

As if I was just going to say, "Wow, that's great, you're such a nice organization. What would you like me to write about?" But I was looking for a story and no one seemed to realize that I have to tell a story too and if you help me do my job as a journalist, I'm really going to be more interested in listening to you.

If you treat the media like an audience that needs to find good stories, and you help uncover those stories, you make their job easier, or you make the policy makers' jobs easier by passing on useful information, that can be great. Don't forget—sometimes you might have a "news you can use" angle. We've got a couple notes from advocacy organizations saying: "What do we do with our stories?"

I think the CANFit story is really interesting because the recipes are what came out of that particular one. If you're a policy organization, what sort of helpful tips or information can you give your audience, your experts in a topic, and then how can you set that within a story so it's something people will hang on to, refer to, and be able to use in their work?

Jono: I want to remind all of you that an audio transcript of today's call will be available within 24 hours at Fundraising123.org. You'll notice there on the website, there's a link to Resources where you can find all of the resources that Katya and Macon mentioned on today's call, in addition to transcripts of some of the calls we've done over the past few months.

If you haven't listened to our "Website 101" seminar, that's been one of our most popular seminars and can really help you improve the results of your website. Finally, I noticed that a number of the folks who registered for today's call are using PayPal for their online fundraising service.

I wanted to let you know that Network for Good provides a similar service, and actually the average gift through Network for Good is \$140. So if you're looking to improve your online fundraising results, please take a look at Network for Good's DonateNow service and you can see a link to the free trial of that on the www.Fundraising123.org website.

Our last question comes from Kimberly, and we will answer any questions we didn't get time to on the phone today via email within the next few days. Kimberly says: "In my experience, stories have made for successful issue-specific appeals. My question is about year-end appeals.

"A lot of organizations' year-end appeals are an overview of everything they've done in the past 12 months without a compelling story. In your experience, has sticking to one story made for a more effective year-end appeal than touting successes, or does a combination of successes and a story work well?"

Katya:

Thanks, Kimberly. That's a perfect question to end with today because we can wrap up all of the main points in it. You should not have a year-end appeal without a story; that's crazy. Should you only have a story and not wrap up your impact or what you've done over the years? No. You need to put the story in the context of impact.

Here are three questions you should answer in your year-end appeal for the donor:

1. Why me? Why should the donor care about this appeal, and that's where story comes in. The best way to answer "Why me?" is to give them a story they can relate to that's compelling, draws them in and makes them care.
2. Why now? This is a theme that Macon's brought up a lot with respect to journalists and media. Why should I act now? What's at stake? What have you done this year? What are you going to do next year that I want to support? Where's the urgency?
3. What for? Which is, for what impact? That's where the broader information about what your organization does, what it's achieved and what it will achieve with further support is really important. If I give you \$10, what social change will happen? That goes into that transformation

theme we talked about as the fifth element of a good story. Don't forget to show what good will come when someone supports you.

I want to wind up by reading you something that Andy Goodman said, which is inspirational. He says, "Figure out your core stories. Tell me the main points you want people to know about your organization, and a story that illustrates each one. Tell me your 'how we got started' story, your emblematic success stories, stories about when you fell short and what you learned, stories about where you're going.

"If you've got that down, your communications will be a lot simpler. People will remember you." I couldn't agree more, so on that note, please go back and think about all the different stories you have to tell. We hope this has been useful to you. Macon's got great tips up and I'll ask Jono to run through one more time what you can do after this call to get some help in this department.

Jono: Thank you, Katya and Macon. I also want to remind you to join us at the same time next Tuesday for our next Non-Profit 911, which is "Event 101 for Fund Raisers: Putting Your Mission into Action." We'll be joined by Jeff Shuck from Event 360, who has produced large and small non-profit events.

Once again, Fundraising123.org is the website to visit to find the resources and transcripts. Our email address is Fundraising123@NetworkforGood.org. You can register for the next Non-Profit 911 call on October 30th on the Fundraising123 website.

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