

# BayNet Newsletter

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## The Power of Personal Stories

“People are hungry for stories. It’s part of our very being,” said Studs Terkel, the consummate storyteller best known for his oral histories of everyday Americans. Storytelling is an age-old tradition of passing on individual, family, and cultural experiences. A story about an experience that touched your heart has the power to touch someone else’s heart as well. Stories connect us deeply to each other and foster empathy. Stories can challenge our assumptions and create new ways of perceiving, and ultimately serve as catalysts for new ways of acting.

For nearly three decades, I have been sharing my family’s Holocaust history in a variety of venues in order to inspire others to make a difference in everyday life. At a California Association of Independent Schools conference last year, I gave a workshop using my new book *Legacy of Rescue: A Daughter’s Tribute*. It’s about

my father and the Hungarian Army Officer who defied Nazi orders and saved him and over 100 other Hungarian Jews in a forced labor battalion. Teachers were riveted by the story of rescue and its aftermath; the research, documentation, and perseverance it took to have my father’s rescuer, Zoltán Kubinyi, honored as a Righteous Gentile. Remarks about history repeating itself and questions about the rise of anti-Semitism in Hungary today, as in other parts of the world, were punctuated by outrage and renewed commitment to teach tolerance and urge students to speak up in the face of injustice.

Teachers quickly began to share their own family histories of war, displacement, and the experiences of parents and grandparents coming to America. Many also mentioned that they often use family or personal stories in the classroom. A Spanish teacher said he shared his family’s history



Personal stories are powerful weapons

*Theodore Roosevelt giving speech from SMU Library*

when teaching about the Disappeared of Argentina. An ethics teacher said he shared his Holocaust history to engage students in discussions of moral and ethical dilemmas.

I recently asked colleagues about the kinds of experiences they shared in the classroom and why. *(Continued on pg 3)*

## Becoming a Successful Indie Author/Publisher

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing all your hard work come to fruition in the form of a book you’ve authored and published. It’s exhilarating to see your book warmly received by your librarian/information professional colleagues and even more satisfying to know that the book you’ve authored is helping so many librarians and information professionals enhance and

advance their careers. This is the story of how two librarians set out to help their colleagues improve their careers and inadvertently became authors and publishers along the way. Several years ago, we decided to pool our collective experiences navigating our meandering career paths to develop a series of classroom workshops and online webinars to share

with our colleagues what we’ve learned about mastering an alternative career path. Our “Expanding Your Career Potential” workshop series helps information professionals learn how to strengthen their current skill sets or acquire new skills.

It was our workshop attendees *(Continued on pg 2)*

## Special points of interest:

- Marta Fuchs shows how to use personal stories to connect with others and bring learning home.
- Learn the benefits of using Twitter in your library in 140 characters or less!
- The benefits of publishing your own book from two successful librarian authors.

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## Indie Author (cont.)

“It was our workshop attendees who initially suggested [writing] a book...”

(Continued from pg 1)  
who suggested and encouraged us to write a book based on the workshop curriculum so they could have ready access, any time, to the many skills and techniques that we teach in the course. We soon began outlining our book and added 22 new skills as well as other material that wouldn't fit into the 90 minute workshop format.

Initially, we pursued the traditional publishing route, but we ultimately decided to take the indie route to:

- retain creative control over the content
- bring the book to market as soon as possible
- keep the book price extremely affordable

We plunged headlong into writing and explored a number of options for self-publishing both a print and electronic version. We decided to use Amazon.com as our primary distribution vehicle because Amazon:

- provides authors with a template that makes it relatively easy to format the printed book and also to create an electronic (Kindle) version for sale
- handles the entire sale process from beginning to end, including the purchase transaction, printing, product delivery and all customer service issues
- is recognized as a reputable sales outlet that is easily available to customers all over the world
- allowed us to set our own pricing so we could keep the price as low as possible to maximize sales and distribution of the book

The result has been the book titled *The Librarian's Skillbook: 51 Essential Skills for Information Professionals*, which had a soft launch at the SLA Annual Conference in June 2013 and has gained popularity since then. There is both excitement and frustration with self-publishing

as there is no editor reminding one of deadlines and the authors need to handle every detail and make every decision, including pricing, promotion, distribution and many other services normally handled by a traditional publisher. That said, we were so glad we retained creative control. It is an amazing experience to finally see one's book in print and then to go to book signings and meet buyers excited to talk to the authors.

Would we do it again? Yes, indeed! Indie publishing is another skill to add to our skill set and we hope to share many more career expansion topics in the coming years.

By Deborah Hunt, Library Director at the Mechanics' Institute and David Grossman, Academic and Public Reference Librarian, various libraries in the San Francisco Bay area; co-authors of *The Librarian's Skillbook: 51 Essential Skills for Information Professionals* [www.librarianskillbook.com/](http://www.librarianskillbook.com/)

## The Benefits of Twitter in 20 Tweets

1. What can you do with Twitter? A lot!
2. Wakimoto tweeted in her information literacy credit course: deadline reminders, key lesson points, anything useful and no more than 140 characters.
3. Soules started doing the same thing after Diana told her about this new approach.
4. Benefit 1: key lesson points are isolated and repeated in their own highlighted message, which aids memory and helps students learn what is important.
5. Benefit 2: a deadline reminder helps first year students, the main group in these courses. They need more hand-holding than students with university experience.
6. Benefit 3: students can sign up for mobile messages, which enables us to “push” this information in a new way that fits their needs.
7. Soules then created twitter ac-

counts for her liaison work, one for each liaison area.

8. Use 1: quick reminders about key new library titles for each discipline.
9. Use 2: notification of upcoming database demonstrations.
10. Use 3: queries about titles for potential purchase—yes, no, hold off for now?
11. Use 4: offers of one-time classes for their courses.
12. Use 5: general library news that might be of interest or affect faculty.
13. Some faculty “follow”; some do not.
14. Some faculty find Twitter a helpful way to receive information; some do not; some are enthused; some tend to scoff.
15. More backup emails are required with faculty than with students.
16. For those faculty who follow Soules' Twitter accounts, they are not

included on all emails, only those that require more than 140 characters.

17. Faculty and students are overwhelmed with information, workload (particularly as term progresses), and messages.
18. Conclusion 1: anything we can do to highlight what's important to students and/or faculty and reduce the amount of text we send is a good thing.
19. Conclusions 2: we have found a way to embed Twitter into our pedagogical work, not just use it as ornamentation or for the sake the new and glitzy.
20. Conclusion 3: Try it; you might like it.

Aline Soules is a Reference and Instruction Librarian at CSU East Bay and Diana Wakimoto is the Online Literacy Librarian and Archivist at CSU East Bay.

## Personal Stories (cont.)

Reasons ranged from using personal stories to build trust and strengthen the teacher-student relationship, to helping students see teachers as “real people,” to encouraging student engagement and giving students permission to share themselves more authentically. Some teachers use stories of personal mishap to inject humor and normalize teen behavior. Many teachers believe personal stories help students see the relevance of what they’re teaching because students hear a real life situation that illustrates what they’re learning.

Catarina Meyers, who teaches biology and environmental science, remarked:

I generally find that students respond very noticeably to my telling of personal and family stories as a connection to the topic at hand. I also have distinct memories of my high school and college instructors telling personal stories. In fact, it strikes me that I remember little else in terms of specifics from my high school classes. This makes me wonder if that neural connection – empathy? emotional intelligence? – makes things stick?

Matt Zealand, high school Spanish teacher, spoke at length about what he shares with his students and why: As a non-native speaker of the language I teach, I have found it useful to tell my language-learning story in class. My students always find it humorous that I grew up in probably 'the last place in the United States without a single native Spanish speaker,' as I like to call my hometown of Cumberland in rural Western Maryland. I believe it is useful for their 'growth mindset' to hear I've gone through the same difficulties they are having with the language and that I made the same errors they are making on my way to speaking the language as well as I do now. I always remind them that they are much stronger at this point in their

Spanish-speaking career than I was at their age.

Nancy Coffee, an elementary school special education resource specialist, also shares with her students her personal educational struggles in order to validate theirs:

I think I've been connecting with children through my own learning process and personal reflection of experiences since I was a teenager. When I began working in classrooms, my connections with students became more academically based. Kids quickly picked up that I make mistakes (spelling, grammar, forgotten words in sentences, math errors, reading errors), am a little forgetful at times, and become easily side-tracked. I openly talk about how adults make mistakes, too, and that it's okay to help out in an appropriate and kind way.

While many teachers I spoke with said they use common sense to decide whether to share something personal or not with their students, others said they weren't so sure where to draw the line. The following guidelines from my work as a psychotherapist may help you decide whether or not to disclose personal information and what to keep in mind:

- Have a purpose, goal, objective in mind that you wish to accomplish.
- Be selective and discerning, consciously selecting stories that will illustrate the lesson, make real world connections.
- Be mindful of what is developmentally appropriate and what students are able to understand at their age and maturity level.
- Know your motivation and whose needs you are trying to meet--yours or the students.
- Keep professional boundaries and remember your students are not your peers.
- Be careful not to burden students with personal

information that might cause them to feel sorry for you, worry about you, make them want to take care of you.

- Stop if you start feeling emotionally overwhelmed and losing your focus.
- With many students in the room, be aware that your story could be interpreted and internalized in a variety of ways.
- When asked personal questions that you don't want to answer, ask the students “How is that important to you?” Often what they really want to know is “Will you be able to understand me and my struggles?” which then could lead to meaningful conversations.
- Be sure the focus remains on the lesson and the students, not on you.

Using personal stories strategically and mindfully can be a powerful way to engage and inspire students. My friend and colleague, Dr. Jon Herzenberg, reminded me that the online nonprofit Kiva organization demonstrates the power of stories to be transformational. Kiva's mission is to connect people through lending as little as \$25 in order to alleviate poverty around the world. “We're inspired to contribute based on the human story,” Jon explains. So we should remember that the stories we carefully share with our students may end up making a significant difference in their lives for years to come.

*Marta Fuchs, MLS, MFT is director of Library Services at Drew School (California). She is also a licensed marriage and family therapist in private practice in Albany, CA.*



Stories can connect people across time and space.

*Boy Reading Adventure Story by Cliff via Flickr*

“I openly  
talk about  
how adults  
make  
mistakes”



## Bay Area Library and Information Network

**JOIN BAYNET ONLINE:**  
**[WWW.BAYNETLIBS.ORG](http://WWW.BAYNETLIBS.ORG)**

Submit a story:  
[http://baynetlibs.org/news/  
submission-guidelines/](http://baynetlibs.org/news/submission-guidelines/)

As a multi-type library association, BayNet represents librarians and information professionals from all varieties of organizations. Our mission is to strengthen connections among all types of San Francisco Bay Area Libraries and Information Centers, and to promote communication, professional development, cooperation, and innovative resource sharing.

If you would like to know more about what we do, contact us via email at [baynetlibs@gmail.com](mailto:baynetlibs@gmail.com)

## Inventor's Workshops are Now Available for Booking!

One of the resources that we have launched this summer is the Inventor's Workshop. They give the public an opportunity to step into the shoes of an engineer as they investigate, experiment, and find solutions to real-world problems. Children and their parents will be able to design, build, and test solutions to engineering challenges.

### **Inventor's Workshop Details**

**Duration:** 1.5 hours

**Number of participants:**  
Between 50 and 75

**Space needed:** Capacity to fit a minimum of 60 and a maximum of 150 people.

**Cost:** \$350

**Outdoors or indoors:** All of the stations can be facilitated in or out of doors, though indoors is preferred

**Ages:** Building It Bigger and Construction Zone: K and up; Others: 3rd and up.

Here are some examples of the amazing workshops to bring to your library:

### **Build It Bigger!**

Explore the world of structural engineering. Design and build your very own freestanding structures using newspaper dowels, anything from a human sized tower to table top dome.

### **Construction Zone**

Enter the construction zone and build whatever you can imagine with keva blocks and connectors. Build arching bridges, elaborate coasters or other cool

creations.

### **Roller Coaster Engineers**

Custom-make a table-top marble roller coaster! Kids and families will design and test their coasters to keep their marble on track through all their loops and turns.

### **To Book**

To Book in Solano County – contact Reyna Hamilton at 510-292-5862 or email [inventorslab@berkeley.edu](mailto:inventorslab@berkeley.edu)

To Book in Contra Costa or Alameda contact the Registration Office:

Phone: 510-642-5134

Email: [lhsreg@berkeley.edu](mailto:lhsreg@berkeley.edu)



Help kids get a head start on their science!

*Brookhaven Summer Sunday by David Moscher via Flickr*