

Transcript of Capital Storytelling Live Event, August 15, 2019, Crocker Art Museum.
Sponsor for the evening: Capital Public Radio

Erin Dorn: Good evening, and welcome to the Crocker Art Museum!

My name is Erin Dorn, and I am the Adult Education and Art Access Coordinator, and I am so pleased and delighted to see you all here tonight for a program of live storytelling presented by Capital Storytelling!

This is an amazing group led by Lisa Cantrell who first leads participants in workshops and then has participants present their stories in a live performance in front of an audience. And tonight you are that lucky audience.

I was inspired to bring Capital Storytelling to the Crocker by our current exhibition Big Ideas: Richard Jackson's Alleged Paintings and his belief in process over product, which is the theme for the evening. Who here has been to see the exhibition? It is open only through August 25, so I do encourage you to see it – and remember that entrance to all of our galleries is included with your ticket to tonight's performance (as is always the case with our program tickets).

If you go up to the third floor to see the Richard Jackson show, you'll notice he does a lot of different things, experiments a lot, and takes a lot of risks with his work – in interviews, he's explained that he doesn't believe in doing the same things over again to achieve the same effect over and over again; rather, he's always interested in trying something new, caring less about how things turn out and more about the process he took to get there.

To me, this idea of process over product feels very similar to what a live storytelling performance might be like – taking a risk, experimenting, trusting your audience to stay with you, no matter how things turn out. Tonight, let's give our trust and support to our brave storytelling performers! And here to introduce them, please welcome our host for the evening, Kevin McLean of Capital Storytelling!

KEVIN (emcee): 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 fourth live event for Capital Storytelling. How many of you have been to an event with us here before? 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!

Let's also thank CapRadio. They are our sponsor for this event. And I also want to thank the Crocker for providing this space to host the event tonight. And a special thanks to

Erin Dorn, who is the Adult Education and Art Access Director at the Crocker, for inviting us to the Crocker and working with us to organize everything.

Ok, so we have a really exciting line-up of eight storytellers for you tonight! I'll introduce each of them as they come up, and we'll have a short intermission in the middle. We have a mix of veteran storytellers and first-timers on our line-up tonight. No matter how many times you've done this, 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. The theme of the night—as Erin told us— is Process over Product (but you know... every story can fit this really—right?). Before get started 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.

Alright, so let's get started! First up we have **Steve Hill**. Steve is a community organizer and a human rights and economic justice activist. When we asked him to send a bio on himself, he sent one modeled after "two truths and a lie." Here it is:
Decide which are the truths and which is the lie.

1. Steve moved here last year from Vermont, where he spent winters in a cabin without plumbing and only a woodstove for heat.
2. Steve has spent family Christmas with the Kennedy's. He doesn't mean some unknown family that happens to have a famous last name.
3. Believe it or not, he's single.

You can decide which are truths and which one is the lie, it sounds like there will be some clues offered on the stage. But be warned, there may also be deception. The title to Steve's story is a three word phrase that is in the last sentence of his story. It will be obvious when he gets there (because you will be clapping and the story will be over)...but to tell you ahead of time would give it all away. Let's welcome Steve to the stage.

STEVE: My story is about a date from hell. Maybe you have an experience in this genre, or you've heard stories from your friends. I expect that my story has a fundamental difference from any you may have had, or heard, because in my story, I am the date from hell.

It kind of makes sense. People go on dates, they have a disastrous experience. You never hear about it from the other person's perspective, until tonight. And, you know, it's hard to stand in front of people and say, "I'm the date from hell." So, like, I'm not a jerk. I don't talk only about myself, even though I'm pretty interesting. Things happen in my life, just wild, out of the blue. And I'm not a flake. I make a plan. I live with intention. But I'm also open to outcomes that I may not have expected. And sometimes that's what happens.

So this particular date was with someone that I knew. We had the same group of friends and so we'd often see each other at parties or gatherings. And over time, an attraction started to grow. She broke the ice, and asked me on a date. I was living in a city at the time, and I'm kind of an outdoors person. Most weekends, I was heading out of town. I was doing section hikes of the Appalachian Trail. Or I'd just take off in my kayak and go camping for a couple of days. And she was all city. She grew up in New York. She'd only lived in big cities. She thought she might like the outdoors, but she didn't have any experience in it. So she asked me on the date, and asked me if I would plan it, and take her canoeing, which was perfect. It was something right in my wheelhouse. And I knew exactly where we were going to go.

About 70 miles outside of the city, there was this remote creek that I had found. It's not the kind of place with a parking lot and a put-in. You just have to know where to pull over on the country road, and drag your canoe through the brush into the creek. So the creek, it meanders through the woods. About halfway down, there's a place to have a picnic. And then close to the end, there's some mild whitewater. It's not dangerous, but if you've never been in a canoe before, it can be kind of exhilarating.

And then we'd leave bikes where we take the canoe out, and have a nice bike ride back to the car over rolling country roads. It's the best date I've planned. Except, the morning of this date, I woke up and I realized it was August, and it hadn't rained in a while. And there wasn't going to be enough water in the creek. So I needed to come up with another plan.

Much closer to the city, there was a freshwater marsh. And upstream from the marsh was a wildlife preserve. And I'd never been there before. And I thought, "Oh, this might be nice that we would go and discover something together." We got there and it wasn't at all interesting. We're just there in this open water with these occasional trails through tall grass. The sun was beating down. It was kind of miserable.

So we're paddling downstream, kind of hugging the shore to get any shade, when we came across this opening with water flowing into the river. We paddled into this opening, and there was this large backwater pond. And there was life back there. It was awesome. There were Great Blue Herons and Egrets and Red Winged Blackbirds. We paddled through it. At the other end of this large pond was a creek that fed into the pond. So we paddled into the creek, and it had this magical feeling. As we got in, it felt like no one had ever been there before.

We paddled in, and the creek narrowed, and the trees formed a canopy. It was like we were in a tunnel. It was fabulous. As we went in further, the creek, it had these high banks, so we couldn't see what was around us. It was just the creek, the high banks, the canopy, our canoe. And the picnic. The picnic that I packed, this was no peanut butter

and jelly picnic. This was an adult picnic. I packed things I thought like, "What's a sophisticated city person want to eat?" I don't know, but we probably had like, couscous salad with arugula in lemon juice, or something.

But we couldn't have this picnic in the narrow creek and with the high banks. So we paddled on. And I'm the only one paddling. She's got, this is working, like, "I'm in my own world. I'm intoxicated by this because it's magical, and I wonder where it's going to go." And she's leaning back. She's got her feet dangling in the water. This is an excellent first outdoor experience. And as we paddle up a ways, I hear in the distance the sound of falling water. And I think, "Oh my god, this is going to be awesome. There's a waterfall. There's water falling over rocks. This is going to be great."

So I start paddling with more vigor. And she senses that I'm paddling with more vigor, so she sits up, grabs a paddle. Now she's paddling too. And we get to this point, and we know the waterfall is around the next bend because we can hear it. It's so close. The level of anticipation in our canoe is, it's pegged. And we come around the corner, and there's the waterfall. Sure enough, there it is. We see it. But that's not the first thing that we noticed.

We came around the corner and suddenly there was a clearing, and behind the waterfall, in the clearing, was a large urban sewage treatment plant.

The waterfall was the spillway from the sewage treatment plant.

We didn't get out and explore. We didn't have a picnic. It was a long, and quiet, battle back to the car.

As we went back through the creek, I saw these occasional signs that said we were on the property of the sewer authority. Probably the grossest experience of my life happened on this date. And somewhere out there, there's a woman who has a story about some guy who took her in a canoe up Shit Creek to a sewage treatment plant.

KEVIN: Give another round of applause for Steve Hill!

Okay, our next storyteller is **Gladys Unimuke Wilburn**. Gladys is 70 yr young. She is a Folk Fiber Quilting Artist and Folk Storyteller. Founder of Folk Art Sisters of Sacramento, a folk art Quilting group. She published her first folk-story book in 2017 called Harlem Hill Chronicles. Gladys is also a two time cancer survivor, and her advice for living a complete and peaceful life is faith in God and a taco a day. The title of Gladys's story tonight is The Elephant, let's welcome her to the stage.

GLADYS: I enjoyed having breakfast with my grandmother every morning. I'd watch her shuttle into the kitchen with her Pepto Bismol pink chiffon bathrobe and her house shoes. And I'd just watch her as she stirred the oatmeal and got it ready for me.

"Grandma," I'd giggle. "Do you love me?"

There was a silence.

"Why are you asking me this early in the morning if I love you or not?"

Silence.

"Yes, I do." I'd start giggling again, because I absolutely knew the answer to the question before I asked her. Of course she loved me. If there was anything I was perfectly sure of in the world is her love.

"Hurry up Gladys Jean and finish your oatmeal or you're gonna be late to school."

Well, I enjoyed that oatmeal so much. It was full of brown sugar and big hunks of that sweet yellow butter. It was delicious. But I finished it off. And then I slid down from the table and immediately went into the living room where my grandmother had gingerly placed my Red Face Indian Writing Tablet. My Number 2 yellow writing pen. My car coat. And my brown tote bag. I'd put all the things inside the bag and I made my way out the door to go to school.

Well class was usual, you know, it started out normal, as a normal morning. Miss Rob, my third grade teacher, was kind of a controller and very definitely in control of that third grade class. She walked around the classroom with a large paddle that she had embraced in her arms. This was to let everybody know who was in control.

Well, I must admit that I was not the favorite student in that class. She was, "Gladys Jean stop talking." "Sit down, Gladys Jean. " "Is that paper yours?" "Be still. " The whole thing. I was a little hyperactive. Anyway, this particular morning she got up from behind her desk and she stood up and said, "Class! Attention! Attention! I have an announcement to make." And all the kids were excited. They wanted to see what Miss Rob had to say.

"This year the third grade classes have been invited to participate in the Como Elementary Arts Festival. Each third grade classroom will present a mural." Everybody was so excited. And out of all the students I think I was the most excited because, for one, I loved to draw, and number two, I immediately knew what I was going to present in the project.

Well, Miss Rob said the theme of our project will be, "My favorite animal." Oh, what? That was just right up my alley. "I'm gonna do an elephant."

So Miss Rob went on to explain that they would pass out the art supplies and give each person their crayons and pencils and things they needed to start. So she asked, "Is there anyone who wants to help me pass out the art supplies?" Well, all the kids jumped up and raised their hand, "Me. Me. Me."

I was not going to do to that. I saw this as an opportunity to be able to present my elephant and become new friends with Miss Rob if I did my best. So I was going to make sure that I did not do anything to anger her, especially not raise my hand, and be one of the participants in passing out supplies. Who knows what would go wrong.

So Miss Rob selected my Jean Smith to help her pass out the supplies. So row by row they went down and passed on supplies. Of course, Miss Rob gave me my paper, "Here's your paper." She slammed it down on the desk. Immediately I began to draw my elephant. All right. One circle, one circle. My little hands went all over it. I did a little erasing with the gum eraser that I had beside me.

Before Miss Rob could get to the end of the desk, "Miss Rob! Miss Rob!"

Miss Rob stood up for a few seconds pretending that she did not hear me.

"Miss Rob!"

She turned around. "Yes, Gladys Jean, what is it?"

"I'm finished."

She didn't say anything. She turned around and she came back to my desk.

"I'm finished, Miss Rob. See? See my elephant? I'm finished."

With her arms still folded, with the paddle still in her arms, she went, "Mmmm, okay, mmm, well, this is really nice. You know, Gladys, Gladys Jean, you have good potential."

"Uh, but," she said. "Mmm, the head's just a little too big for the body. And I think if you make a few adjustments to the, to the drawing, probably it'll go in the project."

Well, I was excited to hear that because I felt the same way. Even though I was a little suspicious because I thought the elephant was perfect just the way it was. But I wasn't going to battle with her because I wanted my elephant in the festival.

She said, "Well, just do a few little changes, and probably it will fit for festival."

So she walked away from the desk and immediately I began to erase and erase. Well, anyone that knows anything about gum erasers is they almost turn into sand. The more you use them, the more they fall apart. It's all on the paper. However, I erased and I made the change.

And about five minutes later, "Miss Rob! Miss Rob!"

"Yes, Gladys Jean," she answered.

"I'm finished. I made the changes."

And she returned to my desk, and she looked at the paper. And she said, "Well, you know, um, you need to make the legs just a little bit larger. The legs are too small."

I said, "Okay. All right."

She said, "So write the changes." She walked away, and immediately I began to change the legs. And I changed the tail. And I ended up changing the snout. So, with the last change, she came back and I thought, "I'm finished. I'm through. I've made all the changes." In the process of making all the changes, there were holes all in the paper 'cause I had erased and erased and drew again and erased. So Miss Rob came to the desk and she went, "What, what is this?" And I looked in her face with complete confusion.

"What is this?" she said. "This, this is terrible. What's wrong with you? Are you retarded? What's wrong with you can't understand what I said? Is, is that braid sticking up on your head too tight that you didn't understand what I said? This is terrible. It's a mess."

Well, I made 14 changes to this drawing. It was a mess.

"Look at the holes. It's not presentable. You might as well ball that up and throw it in the trash." She turned away and went from me. And immediately the bell rang for us to leave because it was the end of the day. Well, I was shocked. I was embarrassed. I had been shamed. I was disappointed, humiliated, the whole nine yards, and most of all, I wanted to cry. I felt [inaudible] in my throat building up, but I held my eyes tight, so I could hold back the tears. I needed to be home.

I needed to be with my grandmother. All the way home, I tried to hold back the tears. I tried to rehash all the things that had happened in the day. What did I do? Finally I arrived home, I immediately went into my bedroom and I lay down on my bed.

I took a deep breath. And I allowed myself to cry deeply. Tears began to flow on side of my face. I tried to hold back the snot from my nose. And I rubbed it. And I cried and cried. And I cried so hard that I didn't notice that my grandmother had arrived in the bedroom. She was standing by the bed.

"What's wrong girl? Why are you crying? Are you crying?" she asked.

I said, "No."

She said, "Oh, really?" She said, "Why is all that snot running around your nose? What's the problem?" she said.

I took a deep breath. I began to tell my grandmother about the events of the day. How I redrew the elephant so many times, and how it had all the holes in the paper. And how she promised that if I made all the changes that surely my drawing would be chosen to be on the mural. My grandmother sat down, put her big body at the end of the bed. She took her hand, and she began to rub the ends of my toes.

She said, "Okay. Where's the picture? Do you have the picture with you?"

"Mm-hmm."

She said, "Well get it and let me see it."

So I got up and I went over to where the satchel was, and I pulled out the paper. And I gave it to her. Well, she took the paper and she examined it. So she said, "Take it and put it back." So I did.

So she said, "Baby, remember when the kids were teasing you about your freckles? And about how fat you were? And how they'd tease you about your puffy hair? How you braid always sticks up?" She said, "Do you remember what I said?"

I said, "Yeah. You said freckles were a kiss from God," I was just stammering.

She said, "Honey, it's just opinions. It's just their viewpoint. Everybody has an opinion." She said, "It don't make it right." She said, "Did you like the elephant?"

"Yes."

She said, "Okay. Well then that's all that matters." She said, "Get up and go wash your face and let's go and fix dinner." And she was so comforting in the way that she spoke, the tone. And she wasn't really excited. She didn't give in to my, you know, histrionics. So we got up and we had dinner. I thought nothing else about it.

So the next day at school, class started out as usual. Miss Rob was sitting at the desk. She got up and she was walking around. And she started explaining some of the arithmetic problems, and suddenly a woman came in the door. And I raised up. It was grandma. She had on her Sunday best dress, with her Sunday best hat, her matching Sunday best purse.

And she walked in slowly. And Miss Rob went, "Oh, Miss Gladys. Are you here to see about Little Gladys today? You know, she's one of my best,"

And my grandmother interrupted her. She said, "Excuse me. Can I ask you a question?"

So Miss Rob said, "Oh yeah, sure, what do,"

She said, "Am I correct in believing that," and she turned to her arm. She unclipped her purse. It came open. She pulled out the picture that I had.

She said, "Am I correct in believing that this picture that Gladys drew, that you told her if she made the corrections that it would be in the festival?"

Miss Rob was just taken aback. She stammered, and, "Yes, oh, yes, oh, yes."

She said, "Yes or no?"

She said, "Yes, that's true."

She said, my grandmother said, as she folded up the drawing and placed it back in her purse. She said, "Oh, good. I just wanted to know." She said, "So when I return to come to the festival, the drawing will be there. Is that correct?"

She said, "Oh, yes, yes. Yes. Sure it will."

Well, my grandmother closed the purse. She turned and she walked away. She did not look at me. She just went out the door.

Well, I'm happy to say that the picture of the elephant was in the mural. Our class won a prize. And I also won a ribbon.

In retrospect, I think about this woman who was quiet, but firm. And how I learned things from her just, just from being around her, her softness. She could have been upset. She could have hollered and screamed and yelled, "Don't do this to my child." But she was dignified. And it really, I would say, kind of professional the way she handles

things. But the one thing I did learn and I know to be true is that she loved me. And that I loved her. And she was my champion.

KEVIN: Thank you, Gladys! Oh also, Gladys' book can be found on lulu.com – just type in her name and you'll find it. Next up we have **Adele Ohs**. Adele is Japanese-American and a native Sacramentan, who considers herself a living history. Growing up in old Japantown, Oak Park, and South Sacramento, she left Sacramento after high school to attend university, and after getting married she lived for nearly 40 years in Europe and various locations around California. She is a retired public school educator and has, at various times, been a dance teacher and leader of women's ministries. Adele and her husband, Skip, have four grown children and twin grandsons. As an *obasan* (old lady), she shares her story from a belief that we are all becoming—hopefully learning from our pasts and evolving into wholeness. Adele's story is called Memorial Day, Sacramento, circa 1951.

ADELE: You know, it's ironic that I, I sort of put this story together, and it's from my history. But I put it together, and then very shortly after that, "Go back to where you came from," came out. So I told this story for the first time three days after that came out.

But really what I wanted to do was talk about what it means to be a patriot. Because in 2019, being a patriot has kind of a negative connotation. But if we talk about becoming, a process of becoming, then I feel like I am a patriot. I am singularly and irrevocably American. And the story that I want to share with you is really kind of my dad's story.

My dad was born to Japanese immigrants in 1917 in Sacramento. His father came from Japan around the turn of the last century to work in the strawberry fields in Florin. And by the time my dad was born, somehow my grandfather had acquired enough money and he owned two properties. Technically, he did not own those properties because of Alien Land Laws, he would not have been allowed to be a citizen, or own any property in the United States, until the 1950s. But somehow, because of my dad being born here, he was able to get these properties and they were in what is known as Japantown. Or was known as Japantown.

Old Japantown was a very small area. It was bordered on the north by Capital Mall, then it was Capitol Avenue, and more or less on the south by P Street, where the CalPERS building is now. The western edge of it was Second Street, but that's now I5\ . And then the eastern edge was Fifth Street. And so my grandfather's building was on Fifth Street between O and P. When World War II came, my dad was evacuated to Tule Lake Internment Camp in Modoc County, along with most of the other Japanese people in Sacramento. And there he met my mother, who had been born in Portland, Oregon, and she was incarcerated there as well. And they met and married there. And were

able to leave because my mom got a job as a housemaid in Detroit, and they were able to leave the internment camp.

In 1944, my dad was drafted into the US Army. He had volunteered three times before and been rejected. But ironically, in 1944, they needed replacements. And so Daddy got drafted. And after basic training in Mississippi and Florida, he shipped out to Italy and France for the remainder of the war. And there he joined the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which was an all-Japanese combat unit. Except for the officers, the officers were all white. They were the most decorated unit in the United States Army in World War II. And in fact, in any war. The irony, of course, is that their parents were all incarcerated in concentration camps in the United States. After World War II, my dad came back to Sacramento. And one of the things he did was he joined the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the VFW. And after World War II, the VFW was a big deal because there were so many men who had served. He was in the first all-Japanese post of the VFW in the United States, and he became a commander. And then later he became a member of a higher leadership position on the County Council for Sacramento.

Now the VFW was my dad's community. All the guys from Sacramento had been in the 442nd in various places. And that became his community. One of my early memories is that on Saturday nights when there was a meeting of the VFW, my dad, who was a grease monkey, would get out of his greasy coveralls and wash up. He'd put on a pair of khakis, and a white shirt and tie, and a jacket. And then he would put on his VFW Service Cap with the little pin that said he was in the County Council, or something.

When I was three or four years old, it was Memorial Day, and my dad took me by the hand and walked me up to Capitol Avenue. And there he met with the County Council and the people of the County Council because they were going to march in the parade from the west steps of the Capitol down to the Tower Bridge. It was a big deal. There was an Army Color Guard to lead it. There were bands. There were all kinds of American Legion, and school kids. And I remember my dad lifting me up, and putting me in a convertible, handing me to two very white ladies. And they set me on the back of the convertible. And when the parade started, we went slowly down Capitol Avenue, which kind of looks like K Street looks like now.

There were people on either sides. People with flags. People waving, and they taught me to wave. Four years old, I didn't know anything. When we got to the Tower Bridge, the parade stopped. I was lifted down. And someone handed me a wreath of flowers. Red, white and blue flowers. I had never held that many flowers before. I didn't realize that those were something you could hold.

My dad lifted me up to the edge of Tower Bridge and said, "Throw the flowers in the water." I did not want to drop the flowers in the water. They were so lovely. When I looked over the edge, everybody was throwing flowers in the water. And they were

floating down the river under the bridge out to the delta. And my dad said to me again, "Throw the flowers in the water. They're for the soldiers that died." So I threw my flowers. That's probably the first time I can remember that I was an American. And that it meant something. And that I belonged to something that was outside of my little world.

There's another little anecdote that goes with this about my dad in the VFW that I'd kind of like to tell because it's a little footnote. Because he was in this state leadership group, he was invited to many different conventions. And at a governor's reception here in Sacramento, he was invited, and the special guest was a Supreme Court Justice, Earl Warren, who had been the District Attorney of California when World War II started. Later he was the governor. And Earl Warren was instrumental in lobbying Franklin Delano Roosevelt to sign the executive order that resulted in the mass evacuation of the Japanese from the west coast. So when my dad's turn came to shake Earl Warren's hand, my dad said something like, "I respectfully decline to shake your hand until you apologize to the Japanese people for the injustice that you did them." We were always kind of secretly proud of my dad for that.

I like the image that when my dad died at the age of 65, at his funeral, there was an Honor Guard. And there was a Presentation of Flag, a Pledge of Allegiance, but it wasn't an Army Honor Guard in their sharp spats. It was a bunch of old Japanese men wearing VFW Service Caps, who came and presented the Colors in honor of my dad.

My dad was really proud to be an American. I am really proud to be an American. And we don't have to go back where we came from.

KEVIN: Thank you Adele!

Ok, our last storyteller before intermission is **Melissa McGillicuddy**. Melissa is a comedian and was recently nominated for Best Comedian in the Sacramento News and Review. She is the Stand-up comedy Program Director at Comedy Spot where she produces shows and regularly performs-- she recently co-produced the first ever all-women comedy festival in Sacramento, Femme Fest. You can find out about her upcoming shows on her website... <https://meowlissamcg.com> (just google her name and you'll find it)

Melissa's story is called Colombia.

MELISSA: When Lisa asked me to be on this show, she said I needed to tell a true story. It didn't need to be funny, but it could be. Now, asking a comedian to come on stage and tell a story that isn't funny is kinda like asking a chef to come over to your house to cook something, and it doesn't have to taste good. So please laugh at my story is what I am saying.

Lisa also told me the theme was process over product, but I didn't have to tell a story that followed the theme. Which is good, because I don't really know what that means. To be honest, I just wanted to tell you all the story of my trip home from Colombia, South America. I'm tired of telling it to my therapist, so now it's your turn.

I went to South America with my aunt and uncle about 5 years ago and it was kind of a nightmare. I don't have enough time to tell you about the trip itself, so I am going to tell you about my trip back home. Plus, my therapist said there isn't really anything funny about the trip, so she suggested I stick with the flight home.

Just to give you all a bit of context. The trip went bad real fast because it turns out my aunt is the abusive dictator type. I didn't know. It was a real Not Without My Daughter type of situation. Which, for those of you under 40, Not Without My Daughter is the sort of true story about Sally Field escaping from Iran and her abusive husband. In my version, I play Sally Field, obviously, and my aunt is my husband and my uncle is Iran.

Ok, so I am flying back home from Bogota and it's been the worst vacation of my life. I was flying back by myself, and I was also being very cheap and I picked the longest flight back home with the most stops imaginable. We'll pick up the story about 20 hours into the trip home. I'm in Florida and I have just two more flights until I get home. Florida to Phoenix, Phoenix to Sacramento. What could possibly go wrong.

I'm boarding the plane in Florida and the woman in front of me goes to put her suitcase up in the overhead bin, as one does. Except this suitcase didn't want to go into the overhead bin. My guess is that was due to the fact that her suitcase was not made for overhead bins. It was the largest suitcase I have ever seen pretending to be a carryon bag. This lady must have known a guy. Then, all of a sudden, the suitcase falls out of the bin and landed on the lady who was sitting in the seat directly below the bin. Lemme tell you, from my angle, this giant, heavy ass suitcase fell directly on this lady's head and I thought for sure she was dead. But the lady brushed it off like it was no big deal. Immediately my thought is, this lady is undead, that's the only reason she's not in pain.

So, we all keep moving down the aisle to our seats like nothing happened. This is a very full flight, so I end up sitting in the very last row because there are no other seats. And as fate would have it, I ended up sitting next suitcase dropper. Normally, I'm not the type to make airplane small talk with the person I am sitting next to, but I was just so curious about how she's feeling about what happened. So, I lean in and say, wow, I hope that lady is ok. That was a pretty big suitcase. What are the dimensions on that sucker? Seems big for a carryon. She said, oh yeah, I'm sure she's fine. About 30 minutes later we hit some real bad turbulence. You know how there's turbulence and then there's **turbulence**, well this was the latter. Everyone was buckling up, saying their Hail Marys. A few minutes later the flight attendant comes on the intercom and asks if there's a

doctor on the plane. And my response is to look at suitcase lady and be like, yo, it's that lady. Her neck's all fucked up.

Quick side note, it's always interesting to me when someone asks is there a doctor in the house. Because anyone could say they are a doctor and there's really no way to prove it. Excuse me, miss, you say you are a doctor, well please just take this buzzfeed quiz real quick.

Ok, back to the story. We hit so much turbulence and we were running so far behind I started to worry that I was gonna miss.....the newest episode of the bachelor. And my final flight home. I JUST WANTED TO GET HOME. There were no other flights to Sacramento that night. Mine was the last one. I was not going to stay in Phoenix overnight. Me and suitcase dropper got to talking again and she also wanted to get off the plane as quickly as possible because she didn't wanna deal with having to pay for that other lady's spine to get replaced. So, we came up with the idea of rushing to the front of the plane right as it lands, before anyone else can get up. That could easily save us 5-10 minutes because we are in the very last row.

The plane lands, and I run up to the front of the plane before anyone else can even get up. Just like we planned. And the flight attendant comes up to me and says, sir, please have a seat. And I think to myself, sir....? That means only one of us ran to the front. I turn around and see suitcase dropper, still in her seat, waving at me. I should have known. I guess that old saying is true: never trust a lady who drops a suitcase on another lady's head and then acts like everything is ok. I tried to reason with the flight attendant. I said, can I please just get off the plane? I have a connecting flight that I have to make. And then this old lady in the front row stands up and says "we've all got connecting flights". And I say, "yeah but mine's not to heaven".

So I am doing the most painful walk of shame back to my seat. Yeah, they didn't let me off the plan. I'm trying to make eye contact with everyone on my way back and explain myself. I'm not a bad guy, I have a fight to catch. I've been traveling for 25 hours. My aunt, is a monster. I just need to get home.

Moral of the story is don't ever do what I did. What's even worse is I still made my connecting flight and got home that night, and I'm sure I delayed getting off the plane even more by trying to get off the plane early.

KEVIN: One more time for Melissa! 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. (I think they can buy drinks and food at the Crocker, too)

INTERMISSION

KEVIN: Ok welcome back everyone. Grab a seat and let's get things started again. Before we get to our next few stories, I've just got a couple more announcements.

In addition to these live events, Capital Storytelling offers workshops. They are a lot of fun, and several of our storytellers tonight were students in the workshop. If you're interested in participating, we're currently enrolling for our Fall workshop coming up in October. You can sign up online at capitalstorytelling.com Another way you can get to share a story on stage is by pitching us a story. You can find info on how to pitch to us on our website, capitalstorytelling.com.

We have podcasting workshops too. Next class will be in the Winter. Check on our website and Facebook page for announcements about exact dates. Our next event is Nov 8 at 7 PM at Verge Center for the Arts in Midtown. Mark your calendars! Sign up for email list at door. We don't spam. We let you know about classes and events. You can also find recordings of all of our previous events on our website.

Now our next storyteller is a very special guest. We are SO HONORED to have Brian Crall share a story. Brian is a comedian, father, founder, educator and a general mover and shaker whose eyes seem to sparkle all the time – seriously though—look at him—his eyes really look like they sparkle, even when he's mad. He is the founder and manager of the Sacramento Comedy Spot—where he performs and teaches others how to perform improv and sketch comedy.

Fun fact, Brian was actually MY improve teacher not too long ago. And I know what you're thinking: "hey Kevin, you're not improvising any of this, I can see your little pieces of paper right there." First of all, how dare you. Second I got meningitis halfway through the class so I didn't get a chance to soak up all of his wisdom. In any case, Brian is a fantastic comedian, performer, and teacher, and I'm so excited to have him here tonight.

He is currently on a mission to achieve 10 big life goals in the same time that it took humans to send a man to the moon (2979 days)... and he is filming all of it and posting videos on YouTube for us all to watch. The goals include writing 4 screenplays (and selling at least one)... and doing something worthy enough to warrant being interviewed by Terry Gross. The title of Brian's story is _____. Please welcome him to the stage.

BRIAN: I never wanted to be a comedian. When I was young, I was pretty sure I wanted to be President of the United States or a lawyer or a businessman or an astronaut, or Indian Jones. It was like never, ever on the list. Never in a million years did I ever think I was going to be a comedian. And if you told me I would be running a comedy spot or a comedy club or a foundation, I just wouldn't believe you.

So we have to start this story in 1993 when I started Sac State. I started Sac State as a business major with plans to be a businessman. I don't know what that means, seriously I had no endgame. I was just going to be a businessman and make a ton of money. It didn't take long before I realized that I was completely miserable as a business major at Sac State. I made 0 friends, I was still hanging out with my high school buddies, I hated most of my classes, I disliked most of the people I took classes with (not that they weren't good people), I didn't connect with hardly any of the professors that were in the business program. I loved my anthropology class, loved my econ class, didn't like most of the other business classes that I had. But I soldiered on with barely passing grades for 3 ½ years, because I was sure that I would figure it out what type of businessman I would be. But then, I met Professor Siri in statistics class.

Let's see. Like okay. I needed to be able to get through math, right? You needed to take statistics before you could get any kind of business degree at Sac State. But when I started at Sac State, I had to start at like the lowest math level. Like the lowest math level at Sac State. I was that bad at math. But I had like really great math professors at Sac State so I just took all the classes I needed to eventually take statistics. And I did really good in all of my math classes. I just needed more help. Like I'd have to go in and get tutored every once in a while. My statistics professor, Professor Siri, was not the kind of teacher that I needed. He seemed like was "done." He seemed like he was kind of an asshole. He made me feel like such an idiot. I ended up dropping out of statistics class mid-semester and was okay with taking an F for the semester just so that I didn't have to finish being in that class with him. I figured I would just take it with a new professor and then that F would disappear, I don't know that's like something to do with at school. Like it's a thing. And then everything would be fine. I would just go about my merry way, and take my next level of class and my business degree and everything would be right with the world.

So the next semester came around, and I was sure to pick the Section of statistics that a different instructor. I sat down in class the first day and the door opens and here comes Professor Siri walking in, and then he proceeds to tell the class that the professor for that Section is on sabbatical and that he would be teaching the class for the semester. And I got out of my seat, and I walked to the door and I dropped out of college. Like that was it. That was it with me being a business major. I just felt like something was telling me to quit. So, I was living with my mom and step-dad at the time, and I was working like 30 hours, almost full time. And the deal was, with my mom, that I could live at home as long as I wanted to as long as I was in school. And that day, after I walked out of class, I sat my mom down, and I lied to her like nobody has ever lied before. I was like "yeah, school is great. I love my classes. It's a full load, but I'll be okay. No, no, no. I'm sure that work will not affect my grades."

And then, so like, the next morning I had my "next class." So I did what I needed to do. I set my alarm for 6:00 AM. I got up, I took a shower, I ate breakfast, grabbed my

backpack, and went off to school. And then I had to like figure out what I was going to do with all this time between 7:00 AM and 3:00 PM when I had to work. And I decided I would just go to the park. I would drive to the park. And I would go there each morning and I would read books and take a nap and eat my lunch, that my mom would make for me sometimes, but I would just read books. I would pass the time until I could go to work early and then get to work about an hour early and then talk to the other front desk clerks that worked at this hotel I worked at. And then I would go and hang out with my buddy, Neil, who was the office manager and catch up with him before I had to start my shift.

Now, side note, Neil as it turns out is the only person that really knew that I had dropped out of school. We used to go to the movies at least once a week. Sometimes more, like 2 or 3 times a week. Because we were right next to a movie theater and we got free tickets to the movie theater. Anyway, so we would go to the movies all the time. We would watch the movie, and then for 2 hours after the movie we would stand in the parking lot and we would talk about the movie. I remember it being winter, and it being super cold outside. Like, we never got into a car. We would just stand outside, and we would talk about movies.

Even as a kid, I can remember telling my mom the entire plot to a movie in real time. Like, if a movie was an hour and a half, I would recap the entire story in the kitchen word-for-word for an hour and a half. That's how much I loved movies. Like I loved going to see movies, and Neil was my movie guy.

What was really funny, since Neil was the only one that knew that I had dropped out, I would come to work and he'd be like "so how was school today." And I was like "you..."

So, during my semester in the park, I read books on 3 subjects. I think I read 2 books per subject. I read a couple of books about the Titanic. I mean, looking back, I think it's because that's where I thought my life was heading. I read a couple of books. The biography and the autobiography of Charlie Chaplin. The movie Chaplin had just come out a couple years ago and I was totally into it. I loved Robert Downy Jr in that role. And, the last subject I read books on was the Apollo moon missions. And, I still have this book: Andrew Chaikin's *A Man on the Moon*. And, this book absolutely changed my life. And it continues to change my life. *A Man on the Moon* tells the real life story of the moon missions. And, like most people, I knew that we landed on the moon, but I didn't know like the story behind getting to the moon. Like the fact that we didn't really know if we could get to the moon. We didn't have the technology to get to the moon when JFK said "hey we're going to the moon." We were testing missions, and the book goes into details about the Gemini Missions, which were the missions before the Apollo missions. And how we needed to learn how to dock in space and how we were creating all of these computers to be able to get there. All the stories about Apollo 11 and Apollo 12 and 13 and the scientists that were training to get to the moon so that they could study

rocks. I mean I remember reading that book and just being shocked, like blown away that all that stuff had happened. I remember reading the part about the three Apollo 1 astronauts that died in a fire on the Launchpad and I just cried, I mean wept in my car, reading about that. I was like, I couldn't breathe when I was reading about Apollo 11 and how all these alarms were going off as Apollo 11 was getting ready to land on the moon. Like I cried when I read the words "tranquility base here, the eagle has landed." Like this book was amazing.

I walked into Neil's office at the hotel and I told him that I knew what I wanted to do with my life, I wanted to be an astronaut. And Neil looked at me like, *really, that's what you want to do?* And what he knew, and I soon figured out, that I really didn't want to be an astronaut. I just, I wanted to be whoever I had read about or whoever I had watched a movie about. Whatever media I consumed last, I wanted to be that character. So I wanted to be Indiana Jones. I wanted to be a Secret service agent, or just Kevin Costner in general. And then I wanted to be an astronaut. But what took me a little while to figure out what that I really wanted to be in entertainment. And at the time, I wanted to be an actor.

So, I re-enrolled in Sac State as a theater major that next semester. And it was the single best decision of my entire life. I finally came clean with my parents. I was like "hey, ma, I dropped out of school. I'm back in school. I'm a theater major" and I remember her looking at me and saying "an actor? Oh Brian, I just wanted to you to be successful." Don't worry, she's my biggest fan now. And I told my step dad and he's the straight-laced one. He ended up working for the state for years, it's like the very definition of stability. And he pulled me aside and in a really low voice he said, "you know what Brian? I always wanted to be the color commentator of football games on the television. So just go for it."

So theater department felt like a comfy pair of shoes. It was like the perfect fit for me. I loved every class, I had fantastic grades, I was the president of the drama society, I had sex, I met my future ex-wife, and I met people that are still my very best friends to this day. Everything just seemed right with the world. And what was funny is I wanted to be this serious actor, so I auditioned for all the lead parts and all the shows that were in the main stage theater that sat like 250 people. And I never got 1 of those parts. Instead, I would always be in like the student productions. And the productions, they were all the comedy plays that took place in the 30 seat theater all the way across campus from the main theater that didn't even have a sign and it looked like a maintenance building for the school. I would be in those productions. But I was in so many comedies that people started telling me, "you're really good. You have really good comedic timing." And it took me a long time to even beehive them. But I was pretty darn good at all of the experimental comedy things that were happening at the studio theater at Sac State.

So, it's my last semester as a theater student. I'm in a bar with my friend John and we're trying to figure out what's next. And I knew I wanted to do community theater, but I didn't want to do bad community theater. Because there's a lot of bad community theater. So we were like drunk brainstorming about what to do next and he said "you know what you should do? You should do a sketch comedy show like Saturday Night Live or MadTV. And after that you could do one show and after that you could do more traditional theater." He was like, "it would be fun!" He even had a name for the group, which was the free-hooch comedy troupe. So, I loved doing comedic stuff in plays in school, and I was pretty good at it. I had also taken classes in writing. And I was like "oh this could be a really fun one-off sketch comedy show. We'll do it for one date and then we'll move on to something else." And so I called John the next day and I said "hey man let's do this. Let's put on a sketch show." And he said "oh no, I didn't mean me. I mean I don't want to do it, I just thought it would be good for you." So he had like no interest in being part of this group.

So, I ended up forming the free-hooch comedy troupe Ron, Jason, and Rebecca, and my soon to be wife, Coleen. They were all people from the Sac State theater department when I was there. And Rebecca suggested that we bring on Dan, who was her cousin, who she said was a big guy and pretty funny. And we brought on Angie, who was Jason's friend, and I'm pretty sure that's why he invited her to be part of the group. And then Jeff joined the group, and he was the only person who showed up for auditions. And he had distributed about 100 flyers and Jeff was the only guy that showed up so he was in the group. It was pretty easy. Although, ironically, Jeff was arguably the funniest dude that was there. And so it was just really fortunate that we had him as part of the team.

So we did our first show at Perkos café and lounge on Richard's Boulevard in July 2001 to a sold-out house of 137 people. And I have to admit, it was a pretty fucking good show. And after that, I remember we were trying to figure out if we should keep going and we were like "yeah we should definitely keep going, let's do another show." And so we had this meeting. I remember sitting at a round table in Rebecca's living room and the vote was "should we do a weekly show, like Saturday Night Live, or should we do a monthly show?" And of course I was like, "we should definitely do a weekly show." And so we ended up voting and we decided to do weekly shows. All of us had full time jobs, and some of us had kids, and I had a kid on the way down the road, and we still did weekly shows. We would rehearse 3 times a week, sometimes till 2 or 3:00 in the morning, and we did one years' worth of brand new shows. And keep in mind, none of us knew anything about sketch comedy. But we learned, and we learned like super-fast. Because some of the stuff that we did was absolutely terrible. At the same time, some of the stuff we did was pretty brilliant. Some stuff that even today, I pitch to people, or tell them about in a sketch class, and they're like "yeah, that's a really good idea."

So anyway, after the first year we lost Angie, Jason, and Jeff. They all went to Los Angeles. But we kept going. And we did monthly shows after the first year. And those cast members would switch in and out and we kept the group going until about 2007. But in 2005, we opened The Comedy Spot on Broadway which was like a 900 sq. ft. location with no heat, no AC. But it was a location where we could do whatever we wanted. We could do whatever comedy shows we wanted to put together. Every other comedy club in town was just doing stand-up comedy and didn't want us around. And so we created our own space where we could experiment and do things like sketch, and improv, and also stand-up comedy. But we wanted to push the boundaries. I took classes at the Upright Citizens Brigade in Los Angeles and in 2007 we started having multiple shows every Friday and Saturday night. So we were open two nights a week and we would do 2-3 shows in a night. And then in 2007, we moved into the Mars building in midtown. And in 2017 we opened up an additional location just for our classes. What started as a collection of 8 misfits is now a community of over 200 performers, employees, and volunteers. And this year is actually our 10th anniversary at the Mars Building. I've performed in at least 2,000 comedy shows and somewhere in the middle of those 2,000 shows is where I started calling myself a comedian. So, I started this by saying I never wanted to be a comedian. There are still days where I don't want to be a comedian. But I'm really grateful that I've found something that I really love to do. I'm grateful to be surrounded by amazingly talented people. I'm grateful that I get to perform on a regular basis and be creative. All because a professor, like I don't even know their name, went on sabbatical. And because I was afraid to tell my mom I dropped out of school. And because of the Apollo moon missions. And because of JFK. I became a comedian. And to be honest with you, I want to be a comedian and a screenplay writer. So on December 18th 2018 I started a 2,979-day mission to achieve 10 life-changing goals. That's the same amount of time it took for NASA to put humans on the moon. And one of those goals is to write 4 screenplays and sell one. So over 8 years, I can return to the stage and tell the story of how Brian became a filmmaker. Thank you for your time.

KEVIN: Thank you again, Brian! Ok, next we have Trish Taylor. Trish was born into a southern matriarchal family, and she was raised by her gypsy mother and a clan of Irish American storytellers. From this loving clan, she learned that nurturing a lifetime of courage, humility, and laughter awards us the priceless gift of stories. And that when all else inevitably turns to ashes, we will gratefully inherit and hold tight to the well-worn stories of those we loved. Trish is honored to share one of these stories with you tonight. Trish's story tonight is called "Me and Ida," let's welcome her to the stage.

TRISH: The way I met Ida was I had been living in West Sonoma County on 40 acres. And I was tired of living at a dead end road, off a dead end road. I was just sick of it. I wanted to be able to order pizza. So I moved to Sacramento. I found a job. I moved here. And unfortunately, it was a startup, and within six months the job had fell through. So

here I am living in Midtown, beautiful Midtown, all the trees, and I was lonely and I didn't really know anyone and I'm like, "Why did I do this?"

One day, I'm walking down P Street and the trees are just beautiful. And I look in front of me and there's this little woman, very senior citizen, really thin, and she's walking down the sidewalk. And she's walking like this: she takes one step, and then together. Almost like a wedding: one step and then together. And she has two coat hangers, and they're the old fashioned coat hangers, the wire ones. On the two coat hangers, there's one thing I can't see, and then there's an old house dress that looks like it came from the 60s, you know, the floral ones, the cotton. She's so tiny and she has these two coat hangers. And she just shuffles. And every time she shuffles, she changes shoulders. And I'm like, "What is going on, with...?" I felt like, "This is terrible." It was the summer. She's literally like five foot tall, carrying these hangers. I didn't want to scare her, right? Because I'm like, "Hey," to some little old lady right? So I walk up to her, and I'm like, "Hi." And she's like, "Hi!" And I was like, taken a little aback. And I said, "Hey, I'm your neighbor. And I just wondered, do you want some help?" She said, "Sure!"

And I said, "Okay, well, I was gonna carry them for you." She goes, "Great!" She hands them to me. She's so friendly. So I'm walking beside her And I'm like, "Where are you taking these?" And she said, "Oh, My friend's paying me. I washed these for her. And I'm taking them to the senior home on J Street." I said, "Well," that was quite a ways away, and I'm thinking, "It's going to take us forever to get there walking like this, right?" So I said, "You know what, why don't you stay here? I'll go get my car and I'll drive you." Now I didn't know how she can take that, 'cause she didn't know me. She said, "Sure!" like that.

So I said, "Okay, I'll take the clothes with me. And I'll go get my car. So I went and got my car. Got her in the car. We went to the senior care. And we delivered these, eventless. The lady was her age, and it was like she was young. She looked older than this other woman, but it was like she was younger. It was weird. I'm like, "I don't know what's going on." So, I drove her home.

Now I'll just fast forward to tell you that I started visiting her. And very soon, well, you know, I had nothing else to do either, and she lived just around the corner from me.

I started visiting her like two times a week. And then it, then it got to almost every day because I wanted to check on her, and I wanted to help her with things. Pretty soon I realized she was an alcoholic. She drank a lot of wine, but she was a functioning alcoholic. She was pretty happy all the time. She lived in this little studio apartment in Midtown, and it had a Murphy bed that stayed down all the time. And the mattress on

it, I think was from World War II. It was the blue and white striped mattress. And I'll just say, that's another story.

But anyway, so I would just go hang out with her and we would chat. One day, she had this big closet like they'll have in the studios. And it was just, it was just like a hoarder's place. It was crammed with stuff. One day I said, I didn't want to be disrespectful, but I said, "Ida, would you mind if I helped you clean your closet out?" She goes, "Great! Yeah!" And so, I'm like, "Okay." So I started pulling stuff out of this closet. This took a few days of course, right? And I was pulling that like coupons from 1982. I'm like, "You don't need these coupons, do you?" And she goes, "No. I don't care." Like everything, just, "No. Don't worry."

There was a few things she wanted. And she had this, one, I love antiques, she had this beautiful suitcase. And I found out as I got to know her that she had been an immigrant from Yugoslavia, the former Yugoslavia, during World War II. She had escaped. She wasn't Jewish, but she had escaped German-occupied Yugoslavia. She had this incredible immigration story to United States. She had a lot of stories, and they were all just fanciful and crazy and everything.

As I'm cleaning this closet out, I come to this box near the back. It's just a brown box, about this big. Really, maybe it had a little writing but I couldn't tell what it was. So I brought it out. And I said, "Hey, Ida, I found this in the back. What is this?"

And she goes, "Oh, that's my ex-husband's ashes." And I'm like, "When did he die?" It had been like 20 years that he'd been dead. And I said, "I don't remember hearing about him." She says, "Well I don't talk about him." But then she went on to tell me that he had been really abusive to her. And it was really just so sad for me to hear, because I loved her so much by then, and it explained a lot about her choices, right? So I'm holding the ashes and I said, "Well, what should we do with them?" She said, "I don't, can you just take care of it? Can you just deal with it?" I said, "Well, I can just take them and deal with it."

And she said, "Yeah. Could ya? Great!"

So I'm like, "Okay." So I took these ashes, I put them in the trunk of my car. I didn't know what I was going to do with them. What do you do with the ashes? I mean, I knew there were laws, and I'm just like, you know, I'm not really good at that stuff on my own. I'm like, "I'll figure it out somehow."

I drove around ashes in my trunk for months. And I think, "I got to do something with those ashes." So I decided, being without a job, I decided to be a substitute teacher just to tide me over between jobs. One of the things I had to do was to go to the Federal Department of Justice in Sacramento to get my fingerprints. I went down there. Went

through the whole process. After I'd done with that, I went to the bathroom and I was using the bathroom. And I thought, "I think this is a good place for those ashes, the US Department of Justice. He deserves justice because he had mistreated her, and caused her life to go in this crazy way." I was so angry at him for treating her like that. I got pictures in my head of FBI movies and all the Justice court rooms and stuff. And I'm like, "This is it. This is where I'm taking them."

My aunt had taught me when I was very young that you can do anything you want as long as you act like you know what you're doing. Just walk around and act like you know what you're doing. So I said, "That's it." I walked back out to my car, went into the trunk, got the ashes. Just put the box in my arm, walked back into the building, went into the bathroom. And I looked around, and I thought, "What can I do with them?"

It was a government building so it had that kind of government trash can, you know, the hand towel thing, and then the trash can. And I'm like, "This is perfect. It'll fit in there."

I looked around to make sure no one's in there. And I put the box in there.

I did have some fear like, "I am in the Department of Justice building. This is not going to go over well if someone catches me." So I took a bunch of paper towels and flipped them on top, and then I left.

I felt so good. I just felt like I had rectified a wrong. Like, "There you go!"

And I just imagined them throwing the trash out, and where it would go, and then it would end up in a dumpster, just where he belongs.

Ida and I continued to have that relationship. I always felt good that I had been able to do that symbolic thing for her. She eventually died. The only thing I took, because I didn't want to take a bunch of stuff because she had a niece in town, but the one thing I took was the suitcase that she had brought from Yugoslavia so many years ago.

And I keep that in my bedroom on the floor. It's a very beautiful brown with green leather trim. And I don't put anything in it. And then sometimes, if I'm feeling down, I just open it up, and look in it, and I can just feel that somehow that makes me closer to Ida.

KEVIN: One more time for Trish!

Our next storyteller has been with us since the beginning. She was a student in the very first workshop and we're so excited to have her on the stage again. Suzi Byrd works at Sacramento State as administrative support staff. She has two degrees, one in biological sciences and one in studio art, neither of which she uses professionally. She lives in Sacramento with her two daughters. Please welcome Suzi to the stage.

SUZI: A little more than 10 years ago, my husband, Dave, died from complications of cancer. It was 5 months from his diagnosis to his death. He was 45 years old. It was during the summer, right before our two daughters, Catie and Fiona, started 7th grade and 1st grade respectively. As you can imagine, this was a very dark time for our family. No one can prepare you for the experience of grief. I remember, in those early days, feeling like I was running a never-ending marathon with no oxygen and no potty breaks. It's physically painful. It's an amputation with no anesthetic. It's a very personal experience and it's also a very public experience. It feels like you have the word "tragedy" tattooed across your forehead. Death is permanent so I thought that those feelings of early raw grief, those sharp and unbearably painful ugly feelings, would also be permanent. They're not. Eventually you find ways to breath. Eventually you learn to live with it. Eventually joy sneaks back into your life.

However, in those early months of our new life, our life without Dave, the girls and I struggled. We loved him and we missed him. I wasn't as worried about Fiona, my 1st grader. She was a resilient little ray of sunshine who never lacked for friends. She instinctively knew when and how to get the support she needed. Plus, she was little. Little kids don't understand that death is permanent. It's normal for kids that age to ask when the new daddy would show up (some of her friends did ask Fiona that question). Fiona coped with her loss by singing songs about death, drawing pictures of Daddy, and telling people why she hadn't learned to swim or tie her shoes: "My daddy was going to teach me, but he can't because he DIED." These are normal healthy things for a grieving 6 year old to say and do. She was fine. The one I was really worried about was Catie. Seventh grade is rough under the best of circumstances, but she was socially awkward AND mourning her dad, who was her favorite person in the whole world. Grief hit her really hard. I was also worried about myself. Managing my own grief, while raising two little girls by myself wasn't really something I'd planned for when I got married. I didn't know what I was doing. Getting cancer and leaving me with two grieving children hadn't been a part of Dave's plan either.

One day when I was at home alone (I think the girls were at school) I was overcome by a sudden grief storm. That's another thing that happens when you lose someone. You will be going about your day, minding your own business, missing your loved one, when suddenly for no apparent reason, you collapse in a heap and ugly cry until you vomit. These are grief storms. On this particular day, the grief storm hit as I was headed to the long narrow walk-in closet to complete some mundane household chore. It's carpeted with stacks of shoe boxes at the entrance and storage totes at the back, clothes hanging to one side and bare wall and coat hooks lining the other. As I entered the closet, the tears started.

The keening started. I tripped over some shoe boxes and wrestled with some hanging shirts and dresses. I couldn't find the string to pull to turn on the light. I was lost. I was

falling. I pitched forward. My face landed on something soft and, in surprise, I took in a sharp breath. (Sniff!) It was Dave! No, it was Dave's big winter coat, forgotten on a coat hook at the back of the closet, with its heavy faded red canvas and big pockets and soft wool lining that zips out. Suddenly I was transported to another place, a place of comfort, a place where Dave could embrace me and tell me everything was going to be OK. I pressed my face more firmly into his coat and took a deep breath. (Sniff!) His scent was still there. He'd sent me a hug from the hereafter into the here and now. I felt my shoulders relax.

I remembered him wearing this coat as we tramped around an Apple Hill tree farm with the girls searching for the perfect Christmas tree. I felt my heart rate become more even. I remembered our family trip to Disneyland and how he hated the Tea Cups ride (even though I liked it). I felt my eyebrows unknit themselves and my tears start to dry. I remembered our wedding day, the small ceremony in his parent's backyard. Everything was blooming (and wilting) in the 90 plus degree heat. That was a good day. I smiled. I stepped back from the coat. I found the string for the light and broke the spell by pulling and flooding the closet with light. I found that I could breathe again. The grief storm had passed and, for once, I didn't feel exhausted and empty afterward. I felt comforted. I felt calm. I felt stronger. I had discovered a new way to get through the day! All I needed to do was visit the coat for a few minutes.

Over the next couple of weeks, I did just that. When I needed strength and comfort, I'd go to the coat and breathe in Dave's scent. It helped. As I was better able to manage my days, I was better able to care for my little girls. Fiona was doing fine. Catie was not so fine. The grief storms were overwhelming her on a regular basis, at school as well as at home. During one of Catie's particularly bad grief storms, I attempted to comfort her. She was having none of it. She didn't want me to hug her or tell her that everything would be OK. (It wasn't OK. It would never be OK again. How can you even say that it will be OK?)

Desperate, I took her by the shoulders and guided her to the closet. I walked my crying and keening child inside. I ignored the string for the light and stood her in front of the coat. In the dark, I instructed her to lean forward and breathe in. Confused, she did what she was told. (Sniff!) She froze. Then she pressed her face further into the coat and took a really deep breath. (Sniff!) I felt her shoulders relaxed. A minute later her heart rate slowed. In the dark I sensed her eyebrows unknit themselves and her tears start to dry. She smiled.

She whispered, "It's Dad. He's here. I mean, his coat is here. It's like he's hugging me."

"Yes, Catie," I said, "His coat is here anytime you need it."

"OK. Thanks, Mom."

We stood for a few more minutes in the dark with the coat that carried the scent of the man that we both missed terribly. And we were comforted. We were at a precipice with healing in sight.

Without turning on the light, we turned away from the coat and blindly wrestled passed the hanging shirts and dresses, we stumbled over the shoe boxes. We exited the closet and together stepped back into the daylight. Together we could do this. Together we really would be OK.

KEVIN: And our last speaker of the night is Gina Woata. Gina was born in Haiti and came to the US when she was 13. She went on to earn a degree in accounting from the University of Denver, worked for a big accounting firm and then started her own firm. She was successful, but overworked and stressed. After a breast cancer diagnosis in 2014, Gina changed everything. She sold her practice, focused on her health, and spent time reflecting. She now helps business owners balancing their goals and ambitions with personal fulfillment. She loves yoga, eats ice cream every chance she gets, and she says her mother inspired her to aim for the stars and pursue her dreams.

Please welcome Gina to the stage for her story, "I Love a Pretty Ending."

GINA: What you should know about me is that I really love a pretty ending. I love when things get wrapped up into a pretty package, and it looks good. So to that end, on one of my artists dates, I decided to take myself to the Crocker Museum. While there I spotted a brochure advertising storytelling class. Immediately I was intrigued and I decided I was going to sign up and become a storyteller because I wondered what that would be like.

So my first class, our instructor, Lisa, started to teach us the steps in the process of becoming a storyteller. So she shared with us some stories in classroom that were recorded, and everybody was just like, oh, clapping, and were so happy to hear the stories. And we commented on the stories, and it all sounded so nice and pretty. And I was like, "Oh, I'm going to be a great storyteller. And I'm going to tell my story the same way." And so somehow, when the stories were being told, I created in my mind that all the stories had to be happy endings of people clapping, and excited about the story. And so that was my mindset.

So Lisa beautifully and eloquently articulated to us all the four parts of becoming a great storyteller. You have to have character, conflict, climax and resolution. Okay. So when she was going through that, she was like, "You know, your story needs to have character. And your characters have to be relatable, so that the audience understands what you're saying." And I'm thinking, "I got that. I can create a story that's going to be completely relatable. Everybody's going to relate my story and my characters. Great. Good to go."

All right. And then she goes into the next one, which is, you know, the conflict in the story, that there has to be a natural conflict. And I was like, "Oh, that's also going to be an easy one, 'cause I have conflict. I've had conflict in my life. So great. My stories are naturally going to have conflict. So got that. Next."

Then she goes on to explain that stories also need to have climax, the part where the audience is anticipating what's going to happen in the story. I'm like, "Oh, yeah, I can do that too. I'm gonna be a great storyteller. No problem. This is gonna be good."

And then she gets to the part where she talks about the resolution. This is the part in the story where there's a shift in the character, like there's a meaning, something happens at the end, it's like a closing to the story. Now, this is where I got stumped.

"Okay, okay, I need to come up with a really good, happy ending," because in my mind, that's what I need to have. So we go home, she talks to us, and she says, "You know, when you're picking your story, just write it down and go through your vignettes. And, you know, wrap it up and come to class and, you know, tell your story."

So I go home, like a good student who was sitting in the front row, taking notes. You know, I have all my notes. I'm going home, when I write my story. So I start out with, "Okay, here we go, I'm going to do my first story." First story that comes to my mind, I go back to my childhood. And I'm saying, I'm going to tell the story of when my mother came to America from Haiti. That's going to be the story I'm going to tell. I'm gonna tell the story of how mom left to come to America. She left my four brothers and I. And I, at the time, I was seven, and my youngest brother was two years old. But oh, wait, there's not really a happy ending in that story." Because it wasn't a happy ending. In fact, it was a very painful time for us, even for my dad.

I remember on Mother's Day, the neighbor who lived next door to us for as long as I could remember, she was a sweet older lady, she pulled me out of the street where we were all playing together with some other kids. And she called me in and she's like, "You know," and she got really close to me, which felt really uncomfortable. And she said, "You know, you shouldn't be wearing a white rose on your dress. You actually should be wearing a red rose because your mother's not dead. So you should know that."

And so, "I can't tell that story in here because that's not a happy ending story. Like, okay, okay, I'll think of something else. I know, I know, I could tell the story of what was a normal day." Again, me and my brothers were playing when we got the news that mother was sending for us to go to America. "Oh, that's going to be a really good story because our friends and everybody talks about America. It was the land of milk and honey. There was money on the floor." I mean, of course there was. This is why people

in America always send money back. You know, so money was on the floor. So when I got there, I told my friends I'd pick up money for them. And send it back. So this is going to be a great story. This is the story I'll tell in class.

Oh, wait, but when I started thinking about it, huh, coming to America was actually really hard. When we got here, I didn't speak English. I didn't even really know my mother that well because it had been five years since I had seen her. Oh man, it was actually really tough being in America and going to school here. And when we got to be at mom's house, she had already remarried and instead of it being the five of us there was actually one more child, and now it was the six of us.

And my mom had to work a lot because she was an immigrant and didn't speak English. She worked as a maid. And so she was working consistently two jobs to take care of us. So that's not really a good story. I can't tell that one. It doesn't have a happy ending. And I need a happy ending story.

Okay, okay. I know, I know. I'll tell the story, this will be a better story. When I was 18, I ran away with a much older man to Thailand. Oh, that's not a good story either. My parents weren't happy about that. Okay, I'll tell the story about going to college.

Okay, so I went to college. I got my degree in accountancy. Oh, this will be a good story. Oh, yeah. I got pregnant my last semester of school. And my family being super conservative from Haiti, being a single parent was not a good thing. It was actually really bad. So that's not a good story, again. Oh man. Okay, I could tell the story of how I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Oh, that'll be sad. People will cry, and be sad. Not a happy ending.

So throughout this process, I realized how much I really, really love a happy ending. And I couldn't see that a lot of my stories, a lot of the things that were happening is still part of my process of evolving, and becoming the person that I am today. And so there's not a pretty ending. It's just a continuum, a process. And so I am who I am now, because of all these things I went through in my life, and because of who my parents were, my brothers and the stories that I still carry deeply that make me the person I am.

KEVIN: Thank you, Gina. And let's thank all of our storytellers one more time! And again, thank you so much to our sponsor, CapRadio, and the Crocker Art Museum for hosting us. And one more round of applause for our leader, Lisa Cantrell.

(Lisa speaks for a moment here about upcoming events)

Thank you so much for coming, we hope to see you again soon.