

## Random Thoughts on Storytelling

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A few random thoughts in this post on the nature of storytellers.

I was driving with my wife a few weeks ago through one of the high mountain passes in Vermont. It's still winter in the peaks, which means that the trees are naked and sad and the ground is covered with dirty gray snow and the detritus of winter. It's monochrome: The sky, trees, and snow are all gray and forbidding. There is no color; it's not appealing and frankly rather boring.

At one point we stopped to walk around a nature area near the top of the pass, and as I slowed down and started looking a bit more closely at the ground, I began to notice a few things. In spite of the cold, deep green lichens were thriving on tree trunks, boulders and deadfalls. Wild violets were already peeking above the snow. Three scarlet cardinals fluttered above the ground in a knot of feathers like bright red blood spatter. In sharp counterpoint, an eastern blue jay screams like an un-lubricated hinge.

These moments of color transformed the landscape, making it far less forbidding and creating intense points of interest. Stories are similar in their structure: In many cases the story itself can be unattractive, but when it is punctuated by colorful elements it can be transformed.

### Musical Storytellers

I recently noticed something interesting about the music that makes up my iTunes playlists. Almost without exception, the musicians I am attracted to are all storytellers. Harry Chapin sings songs weaknesses in regular people that become their strengths. Crosby, Stills and Nash sang stories about the turbulent 60s. Yes and Emerson, Lake and Palmer offer up the alternative rock equivalent of classical music that tell epic tales of love and loss. Jim Croce, Don McLean, Simon and Garfunkel, Carly Simon, James Taylor, Meat Loaf and Toto all sing their lives and tell stories of life. Most of their songs are too long to play on the radio, and those that *are* played don't really tell stories.

When I listen to the songs of these performers, they transport me. I feel myself moving along with the flow of the story, a part of it, thinking nearly subliminally about what could be, not what is. In that way these lyricists and performers are leaders in the truest sense of the word.

Thanks for reading.