

The Conjunction of the Prosaic and the Improbable

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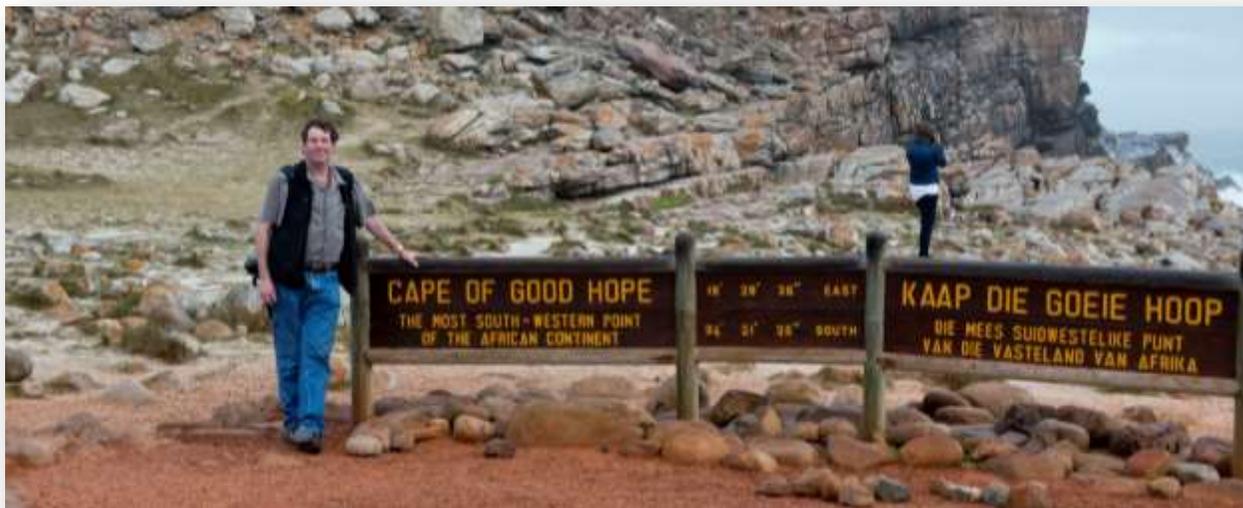


Prosaic: Having the style of prose; lacking poetic beauty. Commonplace or unromantic.

Improbable: Not likely to be true or to happen. Unexpected.

I just finished reading "[The Art and Craft of Storytelling](#)" by Nancy Lamb. In her book the author writes about "the conjunction of the prosaic and the improbable" as a storytelling tool. As she notes, telling the story of a person who spots an owl on the beach, "The owl on the beach is a perfect example of the conjunction of the prosaic and the improbable. These two elements do not belong together – which is precisely what makes them memorable."

Dewitt Jones is one of those inspirational people who draws people in like moths to a flame. Dewitt is a photographer who has done work National Geographic and is now a motivational speaker and lecturer. In his video, "[Celebrate What's Right With the World](#)," he exhorts his viewers to "find the extraordinary in the ordinary." That's one of the secrets of good storytelling: To look for remarkable and beautiful things in the prosaic and ordinary so that they can be presented to an audience as a possibility of what could be.



I saw this firsthand a month ago while I was working on an assignment in South Africa. I was at the southernmost tip of the African continent, on the Cape of Good Hope. One Saturday afternoon I went for a walk on the beach, a beautiful stretch of sand strewn with lichen-covered

boulders and flowering sea scrub. Cresting the rise of a tall dune I came upon a scene I never expected to see. There before me was the Indian Ocean, or perhaps I should say the stretch of water where the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean meet. And in the foreground was a group of ostriches, a male with five or six females.



Spotting me the male gave chase, apparently perceiving me as a threat to his harem. Thanks to the scrubby beach plants and the numerous boulders I was able to escape with nothing more than a few injuries to my pride. But think about this: ostriches on a beach? If that isn't a good example of the conjunction of the prosaic and the improbable, I don't know what is.

So what does this have to do with storytelling as a business tool? Sometimes the best way to shine light on an important point is through deflection. By telling a story that is peripheral to the subject at hand you can often redirect attention back to the actual subject by capturing the listener's attention with something else and then bridging the gap between the two. Sometimes people need a distraction – a break – from a serious topic to give them time to assimilate the message. A side story can go a long way toward giving that breathing room.

Thanks for reading.