Step 2 & 3 – Developing Your Hero’s Journey
By Melissa Balmer – PedalLove.org

Step 1) Understand Why Storytelling Matters So Much

If you haven’t watched it already please watch I highly recommend you watch my short 3-minute video on YouTube: Why Storytelling that explains 5 of the key-reasons storytelling is such an important tool (yes, it’s in the course as well).

Here’s the link: https://youtu.be/56i0-YoQ2So

Step 2) Developing Your Hero’s Journey Story

Overview
Almost everyone has an “origin” story, the “why” you’re either working professionally (or advocating in some strong way) for active, mindful mobility, and a more sustainable world.

This is the story that you think makes you sounds good (even impressive), inspiring, and professional. It’s safe. It often shares how/why you want to make the world a better place.

The challenge? It’s usually not really getting to the heart of the matter because it’s not actually the real story, or it’s a very sanitized version of it. There’s usually a story behind that “polished” origin story. Your real why is usually hiding, even if in plain sight. It’s a story that’s personal, authentic, perhaps messy, often humbling and embarrassing, but rich with the power to inspire because the persona is universal.

The following questions will help you find that story, that why, and coax it forward into the light of day. These questions are the first step in recognizing the power of that story to connect with and authentically inspire anew your ow tribe and fresh audiences too.

Note: These questions are included as a downloadable worksheet in the online course as well.

Step 3) Developing Your Hero’s Journey Worksheet from Becoming a Storytelling Superhero – Melissa Balmer PedalLove.org
Melissa’s Story:
The origin story I shared most frequently when I began to speak at active living summits and conferences was that I was recruited into bike advocacy before I’d even gotten back on a bike for. In 2009 it took my then friend (and now partner) Charlie Gandy six months to get me try it again. I hadn’t been on a bike for over 25 years. The night I did I fell in love again with biking. That was my super feel good hero’s journey origin story.

But it wasn't the real story.

What I shared also, but glossed over, is the back story which is the heart of my story. I’d given up my car in March of 2007 because it had been impounded for parking tickets that I simply couldn’t afford to pay off. I lived in a historic neighborhood in Long Beach CA close to downtown. I often had to park several blocks away from my apartment (10+ if I came home after 9 pm), and because I mostly worked freelance from home, I would forget to move my car, or just be too tired to do so.

The tough irony? I’d wanted to donate my car at the end of the previous year for a good tax credit (which I really needed) but lost the nerve. I knew I lived in a city with good transit. There was a bus stop not only close to my house, but close to where I was working part time as a floral designer. Still, I feared what my friends and family would say. I was embarrassed about my poor health and even more about my finances.

But with my car impounded I finally decided to take the leap and let it go. I decided it would be an experiment. I was inspired by the summer I was 19, and the year I was 21, both living car-free in Italy. Everyone there rode transit.

The fantastic irony? It was my living car free that interested my new friend Georgia Case to talk to me about the City of Long Beach getting serious about becoming bike friendly and the two of us winning the request for proposal to handle the multi-media marketing campaign for the new Bike Long Beach project. Giving up my car led to a professional renaissance that continues to unfold for me in fascinating and inspiring ways, even though I still struggle with my health and have moved to the Pacific North West out of the Southern California’s growing heat.

Questions for You:

One) What’s your official “polished” work and/or volunteer advocacy origin story in a short 1 paragraph nutshell?
Two) When did biking, walking or taking public transit most memorably give you a sense of freedom, independence and fun?

Note: This can be as far back as an early childhood memory.

Three) Can you share a sense memory of that time? Can you write down the sights, sounds, smells and feelings? What did you see and do?
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Four) What happened to make you realize you needed to, or wanted to, use biking, walking and public transit as a part of your regular or even daily life?

Note: You may never have stopped using biking, walking and or public transit. If so, share more about that back story.

4-A) Was it an easy or a tough choice?

4-B) What challenges did you have to face?

4-C) How has it surprised and delighted you?

4-D) How has it helped you see the world in new ways?

4-E) Any other surprising or unexpected twists?
Mapping Your Story to the Hero’s Journey Arc

The Hero’s Journey is a story. That means it always has a beginning, middle and an end. Without this it’s not a story. Its shape is usually like a triangle.

The shape of the Hero’s Journey narrative arc is usually a triangle and that’s what we’ll use for this course.

The Hero’s Journey follows a narrative Arc. This is the structure of the plot, how things unfold. The stories that we humans find most interesting (for thousands of years) follow these guidelines from Aesop’s Fables to Shakespeare to Harry Potter.
The Narrative Story Arc Is…
The structure of the plot and how it unfolds in the timeline. The stories that we humans find the most interesting throughout the course of history follow this arc.

One) Exposition, setting the scene: Often this tells us of a “normal” that gets disturbed, but not always. Sometimes things begin bad, with a longing for something better.

Two) Rising action, or inciting incidence: This is your hook to catch your audience’s attention. Something happens to challenge the hero (you) and spurs them into action.

Three) Climax (also known as the turning point): This does three things A) It’s the height of the story’s action B) It answers the story’s biggest questions C) It marks the beginning of the story’s decent into resolution.

Four) Falling action: This is when you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but at least one more twist in the road brings a challenge.

Five) Resolution: Your resolution does not have to be a happily ever after ending but it needs to wrap up the story with a bow for now. Celebrate this victory before gearing up for the next fight. Ask others to join you!

Now Map Your “Why” Story to the Hero’s Journey Arc

1. My scene-setting:
2. My inciting incident:
3. My turning point:
4. My falling action:
5. My Resolution:
Next Write Out That Story:

Write out a rough draft 1-2 page story. **Be very honest about your struggle and overcoming.** Without kryptonite there’s no story to Superman.

**Your goal is to hone this story so that it can be a:**

- 1-3 paragraphs for an email or print newsletter
- 2-3 paragraphs for a blog
- 3-5 minute spoken word story for a presentation, conversation or interview

**Note:** These are estimates. You can go longer but shorter is sweeter. Leave people wanting more from you rather than less.

**You’ll create storytelling magic now by:**

1) Framing for impact, just like a camera’s lens. Really narrow in on the story so that it begins right before the action, or the inciting incident happens.

2) Tune into one sense memory and amplify it. This is from Bobette Buster’s “Do Story” book which I highly recommend. What do you remember seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, smelling?

3) Drop your jargon. Replacing any acronyms and insider baseball talk with easy to understand but interestingly descriptive language. Don’t leave anyone out because they can’t understand you. Remember television is written so that the average ten-year-old can understand it.

Things will really take off for your story if you have a call to action at the end. How can people easily join you? Is there a survey, a petition, a downloadable PDF, a blog, an email newsletter to read, an event, a class?

**How to use your stories:**

Layer them into your communications, presentations and interviews like a cake. Do your best to NOT share lots of data and statistic without humanizing it with a personally engaging Hero’s Journey story illuminating what you’re talking about. Make it relatable and human.

In Step 4 we’ll take this rough draft story and turn it into something really special with storytelling techniques from an array of masters. Step 4 is coming March 7, 2019!