

**Kelli Dunham/Queer Memoir's  
Little Tiny Guide to  
CREATING A STORYTELLING SERIES**

1. **First you need a venue. If you're part of a church or a community center, you've got that covered. Other suitable places include a bookstore, university space, coffeeshop, library, laundrymat after hours etc. Although many awesome storytelling events happen in bars, I don't recommend it for events hoping to incorporate non-performers as storytellers.**
2. **Then you'll need to decide:**
  - a. **How often you want to have the event (maybe try as a one-off?)**
  - b. **If storytellers can use notes (recommended for non performers)**
  - c. **How you will recruit and train storytellers**
3. **Consider offering workshops to potential storytellers; these can be peer feedback groups or you can work through a storytelling book like Judy Carter's The Story of You or Long Story Short by Margot Leibart.**
4. **You can pick a specific theme for the event or it can be simply "storytelling"**
5. **For the first event, limit the show to no more than 90 minutes. No more than 6 storytellers is ideal, but if you a longer show, more storytellers rather than longer stories is the way to go. Even if you're underbooked, I do not recommend ever telling a storyteller "take as much time as you want." Limits are good, in life and in story, it helps the story for the storyteller to have to really consider what parts are needed to have a complete beginning, middle and end.**
6. **After the first event, regroup with your organizing crew and ask what needs to change/improve.**

**SAMPLE SHEET FOR STORYTELLERS  
(ADAPT AS NEEDED)**

## **WELCOME STORYTELLERS!**

"But I'm not a storyteller"

Yes, Yes you are.

Humans are storytellers. It's in our DNA and has been since the beginning. It's the way we communicated where danger was, where to find food, and the whereabouts of the

saber toothed tiger. I guess the first and the last things are similar but what can I say. I have a lot of fear of saber toothed tigers.

But think about it....

Hasn't hearing stories about people who look like you, or felt like you or had an experience like you had...hasn't that made a huge difference in your life?

Someone wants to hear your story.

Someone needs to hear your story.

Some tips:

If you don't have a specific story in mind for the theme, brainstorm or do a mind map about all the different experiences you have had around that theme. Write them all down, even if they aren't experiences you could or would talk about in public.

Write them down even if you think they aren't all that interesting.

Most themes lend themselves to using some kind of prompts to help your memory. For example, if the theme is death, respond to:

When is my most recent experience with death?

My earliest experience? My most intense experience? My most confusing experience?

What are my predominant feelings around death right now? How about when I was a child?

Why did they change?

How have the people closest to me faced/ talked about/ responded to death?

What traditions does my family have around death and how have these traditions formed and changed?

Leave the brainstorming alone for a bit and then come back to it to select your story.

You might not feel totally committed to it at first, and that's fine, that's part of the process. Sometimes in the writing it out, and telling it and retelling it you discover what the story is...or what the ending is.

In order for something to be a story instead of just an anecdote it needs:

A protagonist (that's you)

A beginning

A middle  
And an end

And according to This American Life producer Brian Reed it also needs

REFLECTION (that's you explaining how you changed in the story or how what happened in the story changed your way of seeing things)

STAKES (that's the part where you tell the audience why what was happening was important).

If you get stuck either choosing your story or trying to outline the important parts use the STORY SPINE to get a draft together:

Once Upon a Time \_\_\_\_\_ and every day, \_\_\_\_\_  
Until one day, \_\_\_\_\_  
Because of that \_\_\_\_\_  
And then \_\_\_\_\_  
And then \_\_\_\_\_  
Until finally/then suddenly \_\_\_\_\_  
And the funny thing was \_\_\_\_\_  
Ever since then \_\_\_\_\_

Try it. Improv people have been using that structure for years. It really works.

Most experienced storytellers recommend actually writing out the whole story to begin with, even if you're going to have to cut it down or even if you're telling at a show that doesn't allow you to use notes (Organ Recital/Queer Memoir doesn't require our storytellers to memorize their stories but many shows do)

Once you write it all out, you may need to cut for time; the general rule is that an average person speaks at the rate of about 120 words a minute, so if your story is supposed to be between seven and eight minutes you will probably only be able to squeeze in 840- 960 words. That's less than five pages typed and double-spaced!

If you get confused about what to cut, remember you only NEED to include information that

1. Sets the scene
2. Moves the action along

3. Illustrates who you are as a person within the story, ie so your actions make sense
4. Explains why the events in the story were important/ life changing to you and/or why your life is different now as a result.

There are some great resources out there about first person storytelling. Some that are recommended include:

[THE MOTH's tips for storytelling](#) (lots of excellent videos of everyday folks telling stories)

Judy Carter's work on The Story Of You (especially the workbook of the same name for story prompts); check out her schedule of free online workshops [here](#)

[Pixar's 22 Storytelling Basics](#); every point doesn't perfectly apply first person storytelling still pretty darn helpful.

Finally some things we ask for if you're telling a story as part of ORGAN RECITAL or QUEER MEMOIR:

-Please use first names only for non public figures

-Please please don't imitate the speech, accent etc of any group that you're not identified with. I know you would never do this. But sometimes people do, and it's not what we're about and also I guarantee it will make even a super supportive audience get annoyed with you!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Kelli or Genne.

We can't wait to have you.

And remember

someone wants to hear your story.

someone out there NEEDS to hear your story.