



# Begin with the End in Mind

Telling Compelling Stories



## Our goals...

- ▶ Tell meaningful stories while traveling.

## Our challenges...


- ▶ We won't have much time to gather photos, quotes, facts or footage.

## The question...



- ▶ How do we make the most of that time?






# Be adventurous



Brady Dennis was a night cops reporter in the Tampa bureau of Poynter's St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times when he started writing "300 Words," a series of short stories about ordinary people, in 2004. He won the Ernie Pyle Award for human interest writing for his series.


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- “The easiest thing was my complete confidence in the people we would find. I believe that each person not only has a story to tell, but that each person has a story that matters. I’ve always felt humbled in the presence of everyday, “ordinary” people who are willing to share their lives with us.”
  - “I learned it doesn't take 3,000 words to put together a beginning, middle and end. A good story is a good story, no matter the length. And sometimes the shorter ones turn out [to be] more powerful than the windy ones.”

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- “The hardest thing, I suppose, was finding a theme in each piece that was universal — love, loss, death, change, new beginnings. Something everyone could relate to on a human level. I didn’t think it was enough to say, “Look, here’s an interesting person.” I wanted to capture that person in a moment when readers could say, “I understand. I’ve been there.””
  - “It's not enough just to paint a pretty picture. We must strive to tell them something about the world that matters, to be journalists and not simply storytellers. Hopefully, in a non-traditional way, "300 Words" does that.”

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- ““300 Words” made me a better reporter by forcing me to rely primarily on observation. Notice that most pieces contain almost no quotes.
  - “I didn’t interview people as much as I simply shut my mouth and watched and listened. We don’t do that enough.
  - “It also made me a more economical writer. With only 300 words to spare, each word had to matter. I’ve tried to apply that rule to the other stories I do, even the long ones.
  - “The idea is to cut away the fat and leave only the muscle. “Less is more:” It’s true for most stories we write.”




# What's the method?

- Focus on a story. A universal theme.
  - Find the thing about the person everyone can connect to.
  - Quotes define the person to the core.
  - Short is better. Readers don't want long. Neither do viewers.
  - Observe. Listen. Write. Edit. Write.
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# Samples

- ▶ Look for the personal connection
  - ▶ Look at the word choice
  - ▶ Look at the quote or soundbyte –
    - ▶ How does it define the person?
  - ▶ Look for the theme
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# After the Sky Fell




Tampa Bay Times photo: Chris Zuppa

The loneliness of the overnight shift at a Suncoast Parkway toll booth: Lloyd Blair, 71, sits back and waits for the next driver to come by his station.

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- The few drivers on this dark, lonely stretch of the Suncoast Parkway in Pasco County pull up to the toll booth, hand their dollars to Lloyd Blair and then speed away.
  - None of them knows why the old man sits here, night after night, working the graveyard shift.
  - Well, here's why: Because years ago, on a freezing winter night at a party in Queens, N.Y., he met a woman named Millie.
  - Because he fell in love with her brown hair and wide eyes and 100-watt smile.
  - Because they got married, moved to Staten Island, had a son and worked for decades in Manhattan; she as an accountant, he as a banker.

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- ▶ Because it had been their dream to retire to Florida, and so they saved all their lives to make it possible.
  - ▶ Because, just as they began to talk of leaving New York and heading south, she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and they spent their time and money traveling to New Jersey, San Diego and Mexico in search of a cure.
  - ▶ Because, in the end, they came to Florida anyway.
  - ▶ Because they finally bought a house in Spring Hill, although she was too weak that day to get out of the car.
  - ▶ Because she died nine days later on Jan. 5, 2002, a day "the whole sky fell," he says.

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- Because, after she was gone, he found himself alone and \$100,000 in debt.
  - And so he took a job collecting tolls.
  - The drivers who pass by see a smiling 71-year-old man with blue eyes and a gray mustache who tells each of them, "Have a great night!"
  - They don't know the rest of Lloyd Blair's story, or that he keeps Millie's picture in his shirt pocket, just under his name tag, just over his heart.



## Dissect:


- What questions did Dennis ask?
  - What did he learn by observation?
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# The Man in the Mirror





[Times photo: Chris Zuppa]



The big night: Rick Waddell, left, shares "a classic moment" with his son Josh King. Little brother, Allen Waddell, watches.

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- He's standing there in front of the mirror, dressed in more pink than he's ever worn in his life. He's 17, a senior at Lakewood High School in St. Petersburg.
  - Josh King can't stop staring into that mirror. The seconds pass. He poses. He pauses.
  - The boy stares out at the man. The man stares back at the boy.
  - And there they are.
  - The man in him paid for this tuxedo - pink shirt, pink socks, pink shoes - with the money he earned mowing lawns. The man paid for his haircut and the tickets to tonight's prom. The man is paying for dinner. The man in him helps look after his younger brothers. The man will graduate later this month and yearns to escape Florida. He's the one who will head to college in Virginia. He's the one who will study business, then find a job, find a wife,

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  - The man paid for his haircut and the tickets to tonight's prom.
  - The man is paying for dinner.
  - The man in him helps look after his younger brothers.
  - The man will graduate later this month and yearns to escape Florida.
  - He's the one who will head to college in Virginia. He's the one who will study business, then find a job, find a wife, find his way in the world.



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- And then there is the boy in Josh King.
  - He's the one who still has baseball trophies on his dresser and a Porsche poster on his wall.
  - He's the one who feels nervous tonight, the one who will feel a shiver creep down his neck when he picks up his date - a girl he thought was out of his league.
  - The boy in him will forget to open the car door for her.
  - He will play his music too loud and be too shy to say much during dinner.

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- The boy in him still doesn't know how to tie a tie. So his father shows him.
  - And as the father slips the tie from his neck and puts it on his son's, he smiles and says, "This is a classic moment."
  - They both look at the mirror, knowing how soon the boy will disappear.
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## Dissect:

- What questions did Dennis ask?
  - What did he learn by observation?
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# Believe that Everybody has a Story

- In the series, "Everybody has a Story," 1998-2004, CBS news correspondent Steve Hartman, chose random names from local phone books. Each person featured chose the next by throwing a dart at a map.
- Balloon:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DvfaCuVveVw&feature=youtu.be>
- Adoption:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ku0gCFI0V9Q>
- Soul Food:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Er4QmKxRYoU>



## Dissect:

- What questions did Hartman ask?
  - What did he learn by observation?
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# Your Turn:

- What story will you tell?
  - Will it make your reader laugh, cry, think, want?
  - Will the story be something you're proud of and will want to show off?
  
  - Next class, we will cover how to find these stories on our trip...
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