

Volume 1 of *Great StoryTelling Network!*
StoryAfrica and StoryAsia

Introduction

If this is you have been sent this ebook as a gift from some of our subscribers, we bid you Welcome to 'How To Tell A Great Story'.

In 'How To Tell A Great Story', we (Eric and I, Aneeta) manage a bi-weekly newsletter called the *Great StoryTelling Network!*

The aim of *Great StoryTelling Network!* is to give a voice to storytellers. Our storytellers are not restricted to authors but include motivational speakers, business writers, copywriters, corporate storytellers and many others. Our aim is to provide a free platform for everyone to participate and create a melting pot of people who then share their ideas, resources and thoughts.

Two of the columns we feature are StoryAfrica and StoryAsia.

- 'Story Africa' - in this column, Eric Okeke shares stories from all over Africa.
- 'Story Asia' - in this column, Aneeta, shares stories from Asia.

In this ebook, we have collated the stories from both these columns.

You are at liberty to send this ebook to anyone you like. The only restriction is that you cannot modify any of the contents.

Thank you and Happy Reading!

Sincerely yours,

Aneeta Sundararaj
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INAUGURAL ISSUE
Volume 1, Issue 1
23 February 2005

Story Africa

Valentine Africa.

So how was your Valentines? That is the theme of this edition. Any stories? Then tell us your Valentine Stories. Share your Valentine experiences. I will tell you mine.

For me there was no Valentine. As Copy Editor of Nigeria's premier business daily newspaper, I work 11am-11pm, sometimes till 12 midnight, every day, Monday-Friday, and Sundays.

As Copy Chief, I am the chief gatekeeper of the newspaper, my job is to ensure that each edition of the newspaper comes out error free, stories are well edited, presentation is simple and content is readable and digestible.

For a 48 page daily tabloid, it is tough job. But I enjoy it all. That is the most important thing. If you do not have passion for what you are doing, you will burn out quickly.

February 14, I hardly knew it was Valentines Day. I got a few messages in my e-mail. I managed to send a few when I stumbled on a free emotional messages website.

But I was enmeshed in my work, and battling to edit the stories flowing from the desk of my News Editor, and to help Aneeta launch the first edition of **Great StoryTelling Network!**

Suddenly my mobile telephone rang. It was a text message from my wife. I managed to scroll on the message, read it hurriedly and in my haste I mistakenly erased it.

I do not even remember the message now as I instantly forgot it. Obviously my wife expected a feedback from me, but none came. Two days later, she enquired, and I confessed my mistake. I guess she was not pleased.

And so What Is Your Valentines for 2005?

For me, my Valentines for this year is the birth of the **Great StoryTelling Network!** and the revised and enlarged newsletter. It is a partnership between Aneeta and myself and it is our Valentines Gift to storytellers worldwide.

Al through last week, we were exchanging ideas via e-mail between Kuala Lumpur and Lagos on how we can fuse our AfroAsian vision for storytellers of all genre, from authors, through speakers to writers and communication professionals. It is a wide spectrum to reflect our vision. This the product of our partnership.

It is so because it represents our love for writing, our passion for storytelling. Together we 'mid-wifed' and gave birth to this storytelling network during the Valentine's Week, a season of love. Little wonder it is our theme for the week...

Take some story headlines from Daily SUN, a tabloid published in Lagos, Nigeria.

- Lead Story: War of Love. This is the adventure of an Israeli man and a Nigerian woman that resulted in the birth of a baby girl. Man denies girl.
- Another story of the first local dating website taking off in Nigeria to mark Valentine's Day. This will surely revolutionize the game and business of dating and romance in the West Coast of Africa.
- Nigerians told their love stories. Some believe in Valentines, others don't.

There were a number of Valentine messages from leading consumer brands and corporate Nigeria. Some samples:

- Amstel Malta: Let love renew you. This is Valentine.
- Golden Penny (bakery) Products: Eat your heart out with love.
- MTN (mobile telephony): Are you in love?
- Starcomms (telephone company). From Starcomms with love to our customers
- Money Gram (money transfer). You will love the way your money arrives just like that for Valentines Day.

Happy Valentine's Day everyone!

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Volume 1, Issue 2
9 March 2005

Story Africa

If there is anything good about Africa, it is plenty of opportunities for good stories. Some Americans and Europeans say so when they visit Africa. See what Paul Evans, publisher of the internet newsletter, The Instant Speaking Success Letter wrote in the latest edition: *Let me tell you a story about Africa.*

For those who do not live in Africa, using that line as an opening phrase would create immediate attention. Why? First because most people have not been to Africa. Having just returned from visiting South Africa, Malawi and Zimbabwe, here's what I discovered.

"All my friends and family want all the details of the trip from start to finish. They want to experience the continent's adventures through me. They want to hear about the encounters with wild life they have only read about or seen on a screen. I came back with 20 solid stories to use in speeches."

What is in Paul's story?

1. Africa is the place to visit for stories. It has potentials for many interesting stories about so many aspects of life from wildlife to the way Africans live and work.
2. There are plenty of adventure in Africa awaiting visitors/tourists. So many tourist attractions in Africa.
3. There is hunger in the Western world for live stories about real happenings in Africa. What they are fed with in the global media may not be true. This need is what the **Great StoryTelling Network!** has set out to meet with StoryAfrica. You want to satisfy this need, then read this newsletter regularly and recommend it to your friends.
4. For storytellers, speakers and writers who want solid stories they can use to make maximum impact on their audience, Africa is the place to visit. If you cannot come, then make the **Great StoryTelling Network!** your regular companion, keep abreast of developments in Africa and pick fresh ideas from StoryAfrica.

StoryNigeria:

We want husbands, say women. As the world celebrates the *International Women's Day*, take this story from Nigeria. Do your religion and/ or culture allow women to openly agitate for husbands? That is what happened sometime ago in Zamfara State, Nigeria where women took to the streets to press for, guess what? Husbands.

Their demand was clear: We want husbands. Our men no longer want to marry us. We are tired of waiting. Our men should come and marry us.

The protesting women were made up of single girls, widows and divorcees. They are Muslims, and their faith allows a man to marry up to four wives provided he loves all

of them equally.

March 8 is the *International Women's Day*. The poser then is: Is it moral for women to openly agitate for husbands? Post a comment. Title it: We want husbands. Send your reply to: eric@howtotellagreatstory.com

Africa-USA

Sam Roberts, a writer reports that more blacks from Africa now go to the United States of America than during the slave trade. New York State draws the biggest number. And Nigeria and Ghana are among the Top 20 sources of immigrants to New York City. But many have moved to metropolitan Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston and Houston. Pockets of refugees have found havens in Minnesota, Maine and Oregon.

Human Trafficking:

It is global problem but more prevalent in Africa. Some foreign nationals come to Africa pretending to do business, but they have ulterior motives. That was what a Chinese woman did. She exploited the Ghana Free Zones area and engaged in human trafficking. She was arrested by immigration officials who rescued seven Chinese nationals.

Numbers

15 %: Portion of Parliamentarians worldwide who are women.

40 countries are still unwilling to change laws that institutionalize discrimination against women.

10 African countries sent women entrepreneurs on a study tour to Malaysia in year 2001 to open joint ventures with Malaysian textile industries. It was organized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

46 women were treated in Katsina State Nigeria for Obstetrics Fistula

International Women's Day : Quotable quotes from women

On gender equality and discrimination against women:

"We are not content. There is much that needs to be done."

Kyung-wha Kang. Head 45 member UN Commission on the Status of Women

"Progress has been achieved in some areas notably in girls education and women's rights. But there are many negative indicators that need urgent attention."

Carolyn Haman, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

"What are these indicators: Violence against women?"

Lack of economic opportunities; Unequal representation in decision making.

"Considering the emphasis on military expenditure by governments, women are losing ground."

Jane Zeiton , Director, US based Women s Development and Environment Organization (WEDO) .

Religion: My Faith and My Job

So what is your Lenten story? For Christians worldwide, this is the season of Lent. Lent is a period of 40- day fasting and prayers, abstinence, charity and almsgiving.

It symbolizes the 40-day fasting of our Lord Jesus Christ in the desert.

The end of Lent precedes the celebration of Easter- which re-enacts the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus.

Roman Catholics worldwide, of which I am one, traditionally begin every Lenten season on Ash Wednesday, a yearly ritual when a Catholic priest smears ash on the foreheads of Catholic faithful with the sign of the cross and the affirmation: Thou came from dust, and unto dust thou shall return .

The meaning is, you came from the dust of the earth, and there you shall return at death. For Catholics, Ash Wednesday is one day they do not eat meat in reverence for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Unfortunately for me, I ate meat February 9, this year's Ash Wednesday. And I regret it.

How did it happen? I was careless. Three days earlier, my wife kept reminding me to abstain from meat promising to prepare the family meals that day with fish. Due to call of duty as a newspaper Copy Editor, I could not even go to church on Ash Wednesday to take Ash, but I resolved to abstain from meat that day.

I maintained that stance till 6pm, when at the peak of duty editing stories for next day's edition, one of my colleagues in the newsroom walked straight to my desk (he had never done that before), opened a wrap of local meat delicacy called Suya in Nigeria (roast beef garnished with pepper and other spices) and beckoned on me saying: Uncle Erico (as they call me in the newsroom) please eat.

I did, enjoying the roast meat oblivious of my religious observance. It was the 9pm network television news that night that jerked me to the reality of my mistake. Oh God, I moaned as I threw up my hands in despair, eyes momentarily shut from the computer monitor in front of me.

I bowed my head in silent prayer asking for God s forgiveness. I was careless and I promise it will not be so on Ash Wednesday 2006.

Lenten quotes.

Some people are under the illusion that they can enter heaven on a roller coaster without effort, without pain, without the cross. But the Christian life is not a rocking chair. We must struggle to enter by the narrow door. We must make a definite commitment to the person of Jesus Christ and the gospel.

Rev Fr. George Ehusani, Secretary, Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.

"Lent is a time when we are invited to leave our comfortable environment and enter a place of emptiness and need."

Dr Joe Difato, Publisher, The Word Among Us, a Catholic devotional.

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Volume 1, Issue 3
23 March 2005

Story Africa

Easter

For Christians worldwide, Easter is here which ends the period of Lent. It is the time to remember and even celebrate the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ a little more than 2000 years ago.

For us in Africa, Easter is very much in the air. Churches are organizing retreats, crusades, prayer sessions and all. Public holidays are coming and workers would travel to their villages to see loved ones.

What do Americans, Asians, Australians, and Europeans want to hear or read about Africa? It is Wildlife, Tourist attractions, African culture and Literature. StoryAfrica will strive to offer our readers great stories on these in subsequent editions of this newsletter. And in each edition we shall spotlight a great African Institution.

This edition, we feature the allAfrica.com Their story in their words: Who we are.

AllAfrica Global Media is a multi-media content service provider, system technology developer and the largest electronic distributor of African news information worldwide.

Registered in Mauritius, with offices in Johannesburg, Dakar, Lagos and Washington, D.C. AllAfrica is one of a family to tens of thousands of end users.

The website allAfrica.com is among the Internet's largest content sites, posting over 800 stories daily in English and French and offering a diversity of multi-lingual streaming programming as well as over 900,000 articles in our searchable archive (which includes the archive of Africa News Service dating from 1997)

Strategic alliances with media and information technology companies such as Comtex News Network,, Radio France Internationale, and the BBC extend AllAfrica's global reach.

Content agreements with over 100 African news organizations generate steady revenues for the content partners and give them, in turn, access to the prize-winning reporting of the AllAfrica team. Currently AllAfrica is seeking partners for our planned development of new infrastructure and peered data hubs in key African locations.

TouristAfrica:

After seven years in limbo, the Argungu International Fishing Festival holds this March. It is an annual tourist attraction that holds every year in Kebbi State, Nigeria.

Argungu festival is an internationally acclaimed fishing contest that marks the beginning of harvest. And it pitches about 30,000 fishermen in a contest of barehanded fishing, wild duck hunting, swimming, wrestling, arts and craft exhibition, traditional music and entertainment.

For Argungu 2005, giant television screens will be mounted to ensure vantage view.

Hospitality: The Grand Hotel in Kebbi has been upgraded, and the Presidential lodge completed. Infrastructure: Construction of the Sokoto-Birnin Kebbi-Argungu road has been completed to make attendance easy for tourists.

Argungu 2005 is a 4-day event. How does it work? About 30,000 fishermen drawn from Nigeria and neighbouring West African country, Niger Republic are assembled at a river bank. For the flag off, two shots fired from a dane gun (native gun) prompts them to jump into the river with frenzy clutching gourds and nets. There they struggle to catch the biggest fish with bare hands. Fishes caught are weighed on a scale. The fisherman who makes the biggest catch goes home with cash gift, automobile, and other gifts. Other fishermen also get gifts. It is not a winner take all.

Argungu Fact File

Name: Argungu International Fishing and Cultural Festival

Started: 1934

Period: March 16-19, 2005

Venue: Kebbi State, Nigeria

Location: In a river, over one mile stretch

Event Form: Contests

Contestants: 30,000 fishermen

Activities: Fishing, diving, wrestling, traditional music, and entertainment

Prizes: Cash rewards to fishermen with biggest catch

Corporate Sponsors: 15 corporate organizations including ADC Airlines, MTN, Globacom, V-mobile, and Nigerian Bottling Company

Technical Assistance: By Dr Amos Adamu, former chairman, Organising Committee of the 8th All Africa Games (COJA) in Abuja 2003. His comments about the fishing festival:

"My experience when I organized the COJA games gave me an insight about tourism and sports. People must have time for leisure. Travel to Kebbi and enjoy the tourist attractions that abound there"

State support: Mohammed Aliero, Governor, Kebbi State of Nigeria. He speaks on the 2005 Argungu:

"You are aware that my administration decided to revive the historic festival which was rated among the greatest cultural events in sub-Saharan Africa before it was abruptly suspended for about seven years. The decision to revive this festival was in response to the challenge of boosting the nation's tourism for generating internal revenue and foreign exchange for the state and the nation.....Information, courtesy, ThisDay newspaper.

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6 April 2005

Story Africa

April Fool or April Real

What is all this talk about April Fool's Day? A myth, legend, belief, celebration or what?

Well in Africa, April 1 of every year is celebrated somewhat at a personal level among friends, relations, family members, professional colleagues and business associates with jokes and stunts, but never at corporate or national level.

And the April Fool bug has bitten so hard that hardly are any serious decisions taken on April 1 because of the belief that it may turn out to be abused or at best not taken seriously.

This April 1, the observance of the Fool's day was overtaken by events at the national level in Nigeria as the Nigerian president Chief Olusegun Obasanjo intensified his war against alleged corrupt public officials.

This April Fool season alone, the Nigeria president has sacked two ministers over alleged misdeeds and poor handling of public funds and properties.. Besides, the Senate president was forced to resign over an alleged bribery scandal and new a Senate president has taken over.

See how THIS DAY newspaper of Lagos, Nigeria reported the rumblings in the public sector in its lead story of Tuesday April 5:

"Yesterday signified the beginning of a difficult week in President Olusegun Obasanjo's fight against corruption as three incumbent and former top officials of the government became casualties.

In the first incident, former Inspector General of Police (name withheld) appeared in handcuffs before a Federal High Court Abuja, on a 70-count charge of money laundering and stealing of about N13 billion".....

This is certainly not a period of April Fool for Nigerians, it is April Real. It is like public officials are making fools of Nigerians by lining their private purses with public money.

Public outrage against corruption in high places was so intense in the first week of April that Nigerians think that this is certainly not a period of foolishness or for cracking jokes, but one of economic hard knocks and sober reflection of what has befallen their democracy. Besides, the death of Pope John Paul II has doused whatever enthusiasm there was left from the bashing and anger of official corruption.

Any April Fool hangover in your community? For Nigerians there is more pain. Petrol prices have gone up (April 4) by more that 10 per cent creating more burden for

motorists, transporters and passengers.

Transport fares have soared and manufacturers have served notice that prices of consumer goods will also go up because of increasing prices of diesel. Is this April Fool of April Real?

Thus for many Nigerians, it has been a tough season that left no room for April Fool jokes. It has been April Real.

For me and my family there was a tinge of celebration for us. April 1 is my father-in-law's birthday. A striking co-incidence. I was away at my hometown but my wife and children did go to celebrate with their grandpa. They sang, "Happy birthday to you", for him, much to his delight, and they got a good cheque of N20,000 for pleasing grandpa who is now 73. I asked for my own share, but they bluntly refused, pleading April Fool. But my wife was on my side and informed me that the money is real. She has not showed me the cheque though, but she says "wait until I cash the money in the bank". Why not do so now, I insisted, she says no, it is a post-dated cheque. I need that money badly. But I am more confused than ever whether it is April Fool of April Real by my wife and children.

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StoryAsia

Force of Nature

What would you do if you were to face death unexpectedly? This is a question that many people all over the world are asking today. Two events in the past two weeks have brought these matters to the forefront of our many thoughts. The first is a local event and the others is one that happened elsewhere.

Let's start with the local event. Over the past few days, on the MSN homepage, there has been an article about Paula Abdul's alleged tantrum here in Malaysia. It was an interesting article no doubt. However, the article seemed to gloss over why this very famous singer was in Malaysia at all. The words used were 'Abdul's recent trek to Kuala Lumpur for a tsunami benefit'. Just one sentence and a small mention - a 'tsunami benefit'. In fact, what Ms Abdul attended was the 'Force of Nature' concert which was held to raise money for those who suffered in the recent tsunami disaster. We raised over RM10 million in one night.

It has been reported that other than Paula Abdul, there were other international stars like Black Eyed Peas, Backstreet Boys, Boyz II Men, Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean, Eric Benet and more local stars like Sheila Majid, Anuar Zain, Dayang Nurfaizah, Innuendo, VE, Ruffedge, Ruth Sahanaya who performed that night.

I was not able to attend this concert but it did not lessen the pride I felt in the knowledge that my country could host such an event and raise awareness of the disaster that struck us all on Boxing Day.

Even when the tsunami struck, it amused me that 1 person emailed me to ask if my hut was still standing! We in Asia do not all live in huts. We do not all have no running water and electricity. Most of us live in homes that are made of brick and concrete and there are steel beams supporting the structures.

As for the tsunami, I felt that earthquake on Boxing Day. I was in my parents' home and the whole house shook. We were OK but I did not know until later how much damage it caused. The entire experience was a reality check and made me realise a few things about life and how precious it is.

We have been given yet another reminder of this force of nature because on Monday last, another earthquake hit the island of Nias off the coast of Sumatra. This force of nature came as many of the people who live in this region are rebuilding their lives. They get subsidies from the government and help from charities and non-governmental organisations all over the world. And yet, there was this new earthquake, as if Nature wanted to say, "Remember me?"

The second event was the sad story of Terri Schiavo. Rarely have the forces of religion, medicine and politics collided so spectacularly for the law courts to literally have a field day. As a person who trained in medico-legal work, this was a fascinating time of learning, observing and debating - there were issues of the right to live, the right to die, a living will, medical malpractice, the inability of an incapacitated person to give consent to treatment or refuse treatment, the wishes of the family, the wishes of the husband, the role that religion plays and even anorexia nervosa. Literally everything I studied, all in one case.

This event really happened so far away from Asia and if it was not for the internet, I doubt we in Asia would even know what was happening. The sadness of all the parties concerned can only be imagined. However, if Terri Schiavo has had just one legacy, it would be a lesson that we should all realise that we are not immortal and that people who have never discussed, much less written down, what they would want if they were suddenly thrust into her tragic situation, are all thinking about it now. I know that I am.

300,000 people have either died or are missing from our recent disasters. These statistics can be quite depressing. Nevertheless, it was what one foreigner in Phuket said, days after the tsunami happened, that most touched my heart; he said, "Everyone's leaving but I am staying and I am going to spend my money here, where these people need it."

Yes, life does go on. Many all around Asia do need help. Rebuilding is already well underway. It is not unsafe to visit Asia. A holiday here is probably safer, warmer (no doubt!) and certainly cheaper than anywhere in Europe!

So, if you do decide to come, please let me know. I might even given you a cup of tea in my 'hut'!

All the best,
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Volume 1, Issue 5
20 April 2005

Story Africa

Whither A Black Pope

Did you watch the funeral ceremonies of the late Pope John Paul II? I did. It was a spectacular funeral that commanded global attention.

Families worldwide including millions of non Christians sat glued to their television sets to watch world leaders, presidents, heads of governments and leaders of other faiths from Islam, Hinduism to Buddhism gather at the Vatican to bid farewell to the late Pope.

The critical question now is who becomes the next Pope? Can the Vatican give the world a black Pope? If so, will the new Pope be Nigeria s Cardinal Francis Arinze? This is the expectation that has gripped every Nigerian family and this feeling cuts across every religious faith practiced in this West African country.

And this expectation is growing into enthusiasm that a son of the soil may well be chosen to lead the world s over one billion Catholics. Will this be possible as Africa has only 11 Cardinals out of total of 117 that will elect a new Pope? In homes, offices, in the streets, and commercial buses all over Nigeria, the topic of discussion now is about the possibility of Arinze becoming the new Pope.

The Nigerian Cardinal is enjoying rave reviews in the African media. In newspapers, magazines, television, cable TV, and African internet sites, the story of Cardinal Francis Arinze is being told as Africa s gift to the world.

See how BUSINESS DAY Africa, the weekly newspaper for decision makers ran its latest front cover headline: *Is the world ready for a black Pope?*

And the rider: *Cardinal Francis Arinze of Nigeria is among those mentioned most often as a possible successor to John Paul II, but is the world ready for a black Pope?*

See excerpts from the story:

Many Africans think it is time for an African Pope, reports AP from Lagos.

They say having a black Pontiff would anchor the Roman Catholic Church among the world s poor - signalling that the Vatican aims to lead the fight against inequality and disease

..Believers across the continent have expressed muted hopes that Arinze might be chosen but most doubted the world was ready for such a step .. The growing Catholic churches in Africa now have 135.6 million members which are nearly 17 % of worldwide membership ..

..While John Paul II didn't increase the number of African Cardinals, he greatly boosted their profile by calling several to the Vatican. Arinze was entrusted with mediating inter-faith relations one of John Paul s favourite projects

...The Nigerian's appeal is enhanced by his proven ability as a bridge builder to other faiths especially Islam. Cardinal Francis Arinze of Nigeria is among those mentioned most often around the Vatican as potential successor to John Paul II, although he is considered a long shot by most accounts, even among Africans.

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StoryAsia

Langkawi



One of the beaches in Langkawi

My hometown is Alor Star, which is the capital of the state of Kedah.

Besides the many natural attractions of this area, the state of Kedah also has one other attraction and that is tropical and idyllic island of Langkawi.

I remember a time when there was only 1 hotel on the island and food was cheap, delicious and plentiful. Today, there are over 200 hotels and almost all are rated '5 Star' ... which translated means 'too expensive'!

I suppose that the price of development and prosperity is the fact that where it was all previously free, today, people would have to pay RM2.00 just to have a glimpse of the tomb of the maiden whose story is now a legend in this tropical paradise - the legend is that of Mahsuri and it is this story that I will share with you today.

Mahsuri's story took place over 200 years ago.

It began in the tiny land-locked village of Kedam. In this village, a childless Muslim-Siamese couple known as Pak Ada and Mak Ada lived a simple but happy life. They were, however, childless and this fact brought them much misery.

Legend has it that one day, Mak Ada was working in the rice fields when she heard the cries of a baby. To her astonishment, she found that the cries came from the paddy stalks she was tending and was baffled by this. That night, she had a dream where an angel came to her and told her to harvest the paddy stalks, eat the rice and she would have her baby. She dutifully followed and was blessed with the birth of a baby girl. The couple named their child Mahsuri.

Mahsuri blossomed into a ravishing beauty and when the time came, she was married to the brother of the king. The couple led a happy life and Mahsuri soon became popular amongst the people. She was known for her kindness and generosity. All this popularity irked the King's wife who began to plot the downfall of Mahsuri.

In time, Mahsuri's husband was sent on a campaign and she was left alone. Lonely, Mahsuri began to search for entertainment and came across a gentleman who was part of a dance troop from Siam. The entertainer that he was, this gentleman managed to enthrall Mahsuri with his stories.

Soon, rumours began to circulate that Mahsuri was having an affair with this gentleman. When the King got wind of this rumour, he ordered that she be arrested. Convicted of committing adultery, the King ordered that Mahsuri be executed.

Soldiers arrested Mahsuri's and proceeded to carry out the execution. It is said that it was only with the use of one particular dagger, did the executioner succeed in his grim task. Even then, those who witnessed the execution were surprised to see that a white kind of liquid sprouting out of Mahsuri's body instead of blood. Many say that this strange phenomenon was proof of her innocence.

Enraged because she was falsely accused, before she died, Mahsuri, cursed the island of Langkawi for seven generations to come. Soon after her death, there was much destruction on the island as a result of famine, drought and eventual attack by Siam.

This curse seems to have come true because it is only now, after seven generations, that this island has begun to enjoy a renewed prosperity.

On a lighter note, when Eric read this story, he had this to say: "... Ada is popular/common female name in Igboland in the South East of Nigeria. The name is usually given to the first daughter of any family. Once a girl tells you her name is Ada, you automatically know she is the first girl."

I hope you enjoyed that story!

All the best,
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Volume 1, Issue 6
4 May 2005

Story Africa

Labour Day, May Day

How do you celebrate Labour Day in your country? You don't? We do, in Nigeria where the day is better known as May Day.

I do not know the reason for this preference, but it is usually a big day when workers hold rallies in virtually all the 36 states of the country to articulate their demands for better welfare packages and work ethics, and to trumpet what concerns them most at the time.

What does a typical May Day in Nigeria look like? The day is always declared a public holiday. This gives workers free time to troop to public places, squares, stadia, and fields to hold rallies, give public speeches, chant solidarity songs, wave their union flags lustily, and read goodwill messages.

At such gatherings, different workers unions engage in march pasts in platoons, and depending on the intensity of demands at the moment or perceived government oppression. Such gatherings on May Days may even boil over into mini demonstrations.

In Nigeria, workers, public and private operate under one big umbrella, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC)

Born in 1978 via a state decree, the NLC has over the years wielded more power, garnered clout and credibility in the Nigerian nation and has come to be seen as the bastion of hope of the hapless Nigerian worker who is daily traumatized by the worsening economic condition of an oil producing country.

The labour movement in Nigeria operates like a monopoly, the NLC, under which there are about 35 affiliate unions.

And whoever is the President of NLC is a major force to be reckoned with, someone who commands respect in both the public and private sectors of the economy and even the ruling government of the day.

Of recent The NLC has been a thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian government largely because of the former's stiff opposition of frequent increases of petrol prices.

Government is determined to deregulate the marketing of refined petroleum products. It is doing so in the spirit of its privatization programme that will strip many corporate operations of state control; and it is also doing that in deference to the increasing prices of crude oil in the international market.

This has not gone down well with the NLC which stiffly opposes every fuel price

increase and many times have called workers out on strike for many days.

Each time the NLC calls, workers respond and down tools, totally paralyzing the economy. This has not pleased the Nigerian government which is seeking to pass a bill in the legislature that will break the seeming monopoly of NLC and its stranglehold on workers.

Oil, petrol, kerosene and diesel prices and shortages have become very sensitive issues in Nigeria which constantly pitches the NLC on collision course with the federal government. Labour's grouse is this:

Nigeria is a major oil exporter and a big player among the Organisation of Oil Producing Exporting Countries (OPEC). And why must the hapless citizens of Nigeria be made to suffer the vagaries of the dynamics of the international oil market?

Besides constant face off with government, the NLC also beams its searchlight on the private sector especially companies that operate bad labour practices, such as where workers are not unionized, where there are poor welfare packages, or workers become casualties. The NLC hates these and on many occasions has picketed banks and manufacturing companies, effecting lockouts and work stoppages.

In fact Nigerians now perceive the NLC as another government, a body that really cares for the interest of the masses. Many citizens even see the NLC President, Adams Oshiomhole as the peoples' president. The federal government does not like this and Labour's stiff opposition of its policies. That may explain why it wants to break NLC's stranglehold on workers via legislation.

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StoryAsia

Wayang Kulit

Last year, my friend and I went to watch a movie. Nothing strange I suppose, but the catch to this adventure was that the movie was aired outdoors! When we arrived at the venue, we bought tickets, spread out our mats and enjoyed the experience of watching the not-so-good movie, under the stars. It was the experience of going to an open air cinema that we enjoyed most. The event was touted as a success in the media and I certainly enjoyed myself. However, there was a niggling feeling inside me that all this excitement was not quite right. I could not figure out why.

A few days later, I figured out why!

I realised that with all the development in this country, we seemed to have forgotten that before TV., malls, cinemas with Dolby systems, DVDs, vcds, home theatre systems, popcorn, some terribly violent movies, movies that showed just a little too much romance, air-conditioning set so cold that one had to use a jumper to keep warm in tropical Malaysia, Asians had been going to the open air cinema for centuries. We had been attending the 'Wayang' for years.

As a child, I remember going to watch the 'Wayang Cina' - Chinese theatre. I understood not a word of it but the singing and just watching 'little people' (the puppets) fascinated me. Then there was the 'Wayang Kulit' which we were exposed to in school. It is this ancient form of theatre, 'Wayang Kulit', that I will tell you about today.

One of the most spellbinding media for storytelling, 'Wayang Kulit' is a form of traditional theatre that brings together the playfulness of a puppet show and the elusive quality and charming simplicity of a shadow play.

'Wayang Kulit' is most popular in the east coast of the peninsula. Of all the varieties of this theatre form, the common underlying principle is that light is employed to cast shadows on a screen and bring to life characters which are depicted by intricately carved puppets. These puppets are carved and hand-painted from cow or buffalo hide.

Each puppet, a stylised exaggeration of the human shape, is given a distinctive appearance and not unlike its string puppet cousins, has jointed "arms". There may be as many as 100 puppet characters, all with different traits and mannerisms, in a performance.

Only one man is responsible for breathing life into this array of characters: the master puppeteer and storyteller known as the 'Tok Dalang'.

The 'Tok Dalang' is a highly respected artist. He is considered to have exceptional powers over the elements and is a performer who excels in many things, from controlling the movements of the puppets to providing each one with a distinguishable voice to singing songs. As the stories told are ancient ones, he is a person whose oratory skills are excellent: he repeats lengthy texts word for word all the while entertaining his audience with jokes. The stories are of scholarly nature and help to imbibe in the audience age-old traditions and values. He knows all of the characters in his story intimately. As such, he is able to use his amazing vocal dexterity to give each character its proper tone and pitch, at times creating the illusion of conversation.

Performances last hours and are open air ones. A temporary bamboo platform is constructed in an open space. It has a raised stage on which the 'Tok Dalang' and his musicians sit. A fine cotton screen (called 'kelir') separates the 'Tok Dalang' from his audience. The light from the oil lamp throws magical flickering shadows on the cotton screen. The audience sees the silhouette of the puppets the 'Tok Dalang' uses projected on the cotton screen.

The stories of the 'Wayang Kulit' are traditionally based on the Hindu epics of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat*. For those who know me well, know that I am crazy, to the point of obsession, about these two epics, especially the *Mahabharat*.

The story is about the Great War between the Pandavas and the Kauravas - cousins who each claimed to be the rightful rulers of a kingdom. This bloody feud between the two branches of the ruling family of the northern Indian kingdom of Kurujangala culminated in an epic eighteen-day battle and the annihilation of nearly all those involved in the Great War.

The eldest among the Pandavas, Yudhisthira, was the embodiment of goodness and commanded the loyalty of his four brothers. The eldest among the Kauravas was Duryodhana. He was crafty and malicious. His brothers shared in these evil qualities.

Briefly, the evil Kauravas were envious of their cousins and started scheming to dethrone them. Their first attempt to kill the Pandavas was by burning them inside a palace. The Pandavas managed to escape, but then the evil brothers once again attempted to gain control. They challenged Yudhisthira to a game of dice which led Yudhisthira to lose everything, including his wife, Draupadi. He, along with his brothers and Draupadi, were exiled from the kingdom. The period of exile was 13 years. After the 13th year, Duryodhana decided that he would fight them for the Kingdom. Hence the Great War.

The most dramatic figure of the entire *Mahabharat*, however, was Krishna who was the supreme personality of Godhead himself. Krishna was the cousin of both parties. In addition, he was a friend and advisor to the Pandavas, became the brother-in-law of Arjuna, and served as Arjuna's mentor and charioteer in the Great War.

Throughout their lives and during the course of the Great War at the battlefield of Kurukshetra there were examples of the ethical gaps amongst men which were never resolved. In the aftermath of the war, Yudhishtira alone was terribly troubled and his sense of the war's wrongfulness persisted to the end of the text. This was in spite of the fact that everyone else, from his wife to Krishna, told him the war was right; even the dying patriarch, Bhishma, lectured him at length on all aspects of the laws of good governance.

The 'Wayang Kulit' is staged during religious festivals and important occasions, such as weddings, births and circumcision. A most enjoyable experience, the 'Wayang Kulit' also serves to impart moral values, pass down folklore, historical tales and pure entertainment.

Sadly, as the traditional form of 'Wayang Kulit' is steeped in Hindu Mythology, there were those who felt that the staging of this form of theatre had un-Islamic elements and was, therefore, prohibited. Thankfully, the 'Tok Dalang's and other practitioners of the art adapted to this situation and created other stories. This, in some small way, does ensure the survival of this ancient form of theatre!

I hope you enjoyed that story!

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Story Africa

Who Are You?

StoryAfrica will sound different in this edition. Why? Because I have a burden in my heart which demands a convincing answer. That burden is: Do women really know who they are, what they have? And how can this knowledge help them make real impact on their professions, on the society as mothers or would-be mothers?

Who are you? Critical question. Sounds simple, but not so simple to answer. You think so, make an attempt. I guarantee you; you will not give a good account of yourself. The best you may deliver is to give your identity, what you put in your Curriculum Vitae. Who you are, is much more than your biodata.

For mothers, I ask again, "Who Are You?" An attempt to really answer this question will lead you to discover yourself. And when a woman does that, she is confident. A confident woman builds her character. A woman of good character is an asset anywhere, any day.

Such a woman strives to develop her 'content' much more than her 'container'; to discharge her role properly in the family, and make positive impact on the society.

That done, I have a message for Mother's in this edition. In performing your roles as mothers, what should you give?

- To your husbands - submission, forgiveness and fidelity. Go beyond telling your husband, I love you. Support him; stand by him, in good times and bad times. Nothing ruins a marriage, or poisons a husband's mind as infidelity.
- To your Mother in-law - respect, patience, tolerance and understanding. You just have to. If the quarrel zeroes in, on no-case submission, mama will play the age card. 'You don't have respect for me. My first daughter is older than you, and she can never speak to me like that'. Please tolerate mama.
- To your in-laws - accommodation and a large heart. If you antagonise them, they will steer clear of your marriage. The day trouble knocks. You can guess their reaction.
- To your religion/faith - transparency; abide by the oaths of your marital rites and be a virtuous woman, faithful in all your dealings.
- To the sponsors of your marriage - Respect and confidentiality.
- To your family (parents, brothers, sisters) help and confidentiality. If there is any person you must confide in, besides your husband, it is your mother. If your mother is late, then get a mother figure. Your mother offers a convenient fall back platform or shock absorber for the bumps of marriage.
- To your friends and colleagues - respect and goodwill. When you marry, do not despise your mates who are still single. That is a mistake some mothers do. Keep the lines of communication open with your peers. If the pressure of

- raising children and maintaining the home is overbearing, explain. Do not be incommunicado.
- To your children - love, care, education, training, discipline, character building.
 - To your community/society - be a good wife, mother and citizen. In all, be like water that element that nourishes and gives life.

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StoryAsia

Purnima in the month of Wesak

In the last edition of this newsletter, I told you the story of 'Wayang Kulit' and also mentioned my interest in the Mahabharat. One of the main characters in that epic is Krishna, who is an *avtar* (incarnation) of Vishnu. Today, I shall tell you the story of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism and also another *avtar* of Vishnu.

I tell you this story now because in Malaysia, on the 22nd of May this year, we will celebrate Wesak Day. This full moon day ('Purnima') in the month of Wesak were the days on which Gautama Buddha was born, gained enlightenment and died respectively.

So let's begin: almost 25 centuries ago, in a small northern Indian kingdom, a King and his Queen lived happily. Soon, The Queen was expecting their first child. During her pregnancy, it is said that the Queen had a strange dream: she dreamt that a baby elephant had blessed her and this was taken to be a very auspicious sign.

As was the custom of the day, when the time came near for Queen to deliver her child, she traveled to her father's home. However, during the journey, the Queen delivered her child.

The child was named Siddhartha.

Unfortunately, the Queen died only 7 days after the birth of Siddhartha. Though sad at the death of his Queen, the King was overjoyed with the birth of his son and held a celebration to commemorate this. One of the people who came to see the newborn was Asita. When he saw the child, Asita cried and the King was concerned. When he enquired as to the reason for the tears, Asita said that he was sad – he would not live to see this baby grow up for the young Siddhartha would be either one of two things: He would become either a great king or a great sage and savior of humanity.

The King, eager that his son should become a king like himself, was determined to shield the child from anything that might result in him taking up the religious life.

Siddhartha was brought up in an environment of supreme comfort – he was prevented from seeing the elderly, the sickly, the dead, or anyone who had dedicated themselves to spiritual practices. Only beauty and health surrounded Siddhartha.

When he grew up, he married a beautiful princess of a neighboring kingdom. Her name was Yashodhara.

As Siddhartha continued living in the luxury of his palaces, he grew increasingly restless and curious about the world beyond the palace walls. He finally demanded that he be permitted to see his people and his lands. The king carefully arranged that Siddhartha should still not see the kind of suffering that he feared would lead him to a religious life, and decreed that only young and healthy people should greet the prince.

As he was lead through the capital, he chanced to see a couple of old men who had accidentally wandered near the parade route. Amazed and confused, he chased after them to find out what they were. Then he came across some people who were severely ill. And finally, he came across a funeral ceremony by the side of a river, and for the first time in his life saw death. He asked his friend and squire Chandaka the meaning of all these things, and Chandaka informed him of the simple truths that Siddhartha should have known all along: That all of us get old, sick, and eventually die.

Siddhartha also saw an ascetic, a monk who had renounced all the pleasures of the flesh.

At the age of 29, Siddhartha came to realise that he could not be happy living as he had been. More than just discovering suffering, he wanted to know how man could overcome suffering and so his quest for enlightenment began.

Siddhartha left his family, renounced the life he had known until then and began his journey.

At the age of 35 and on the night of the full moon in the month of Wesak, with the rising of the morning star, Siddhartha finally understood the answer to the question of suffering and attained enlightenment - he became the Buddha - he who is awake.

Siddhartha, now the Buddha, then began to spread his teachings. In time, his fame as the Buddha spread and his followers came from far and wide and included members of his own family. It is said that Buddha's father, the King, saddened by the departures of his son into the monastic life asked Buddha to make it a rule that a man must have the permission of his parents to become a monk. Buddha obliged him.

Buddha lived for another 45 years. When he was 80, on the night of the full moon in the month of Wesak, he died. It has been said that his last words were...

*Impermanent are all created things;
Strive on with awareness.*

I hope you enjoyed that story!

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Story Africa

Who is a leader?

A leader is a father, a father is a leader. Leadership is a burning issue or activity in every sphere of human activity. It can determine the success or failure of any business, enterprise, organisation, community or nation.

Who leads the family, the father of course? He is in charge and takes responsibility of the direction and welfare of all members. The African tradition and culture is largely weaved around the leadership role of a father. Take this story of Igbo mythology about the father's role. It is about Mr Tortoise.

The tortoise occupies a unique role in the folklore of the Igbo race of Nigeria. This reptile, gifted with longevity is branded as a cunning animal, full of wit and wisdom. And whenever the tortoise speaks, other animals listen.

There is this story about a father shirking his responsibility which teaches us a lot about business sense and leadership. The mother of tortoise took ill, and every effort to make her get well did not yield results. At a stage, it dawned on tortoise that this illness may well cause his mother's death.

The death of a mother in Igbo land means commitment of resources to the burial and elaborate process of funeral ceremonies. You have to satisfy the often conflicting interests of many stakeholders, especially your family members, in-laws, the church, societies, traditional groups, and the woman's family of birth.

Tortoise, the wise man pondered over these as his mother's health worsened. His mother's demise was in sight, no doubt about it, but he did not want to commit his hard earned resources amassed over the years just to bury his mother. It's a waste of resources, so Tortoise thought. As a prudent and wise person, he thought of a way out. Embark on a journey to a distant land hoping that mama would die and family members present would bear the responsibility of burying her and picking the bill. But there must be a good reason to travel, he thought. He thought a convincing story to tell as an excuse for his journey.

Mr Tortoise one day gathered all relations to a family meeting. He cleared his throat, and reeled out his well rehearsed story. "My people," he began, "my mother as you all know, has been ill for a long time, and her ailment has defied every known traditional healing therapy we know in this land. I do not want her to die. That is why I want to seek help from a well known Dibia [native word for traditional medicine man]. Tomorrow is Eke market day, and I want to travel to a distant land to see Odumodu, a well known Dibia who provides solutions for any known ailment."

"If anything happens in my absence, please you all should hold fort for me and take responsibility. Do not send for me unless something very unusual happens," were his

concluding remarks for a rather confusing story. Then he departed. This is wisdom in action, so he thought.

Igbo's observe a 4-day week, made up of four market days- Eke, Oye, Afor, and Nkwo in that order. And depending on your day of birth, your family name may well be Okeke, meaning born on Eke day, or Okoye, Okafor, Okonkwo for males. The equivalents for females are, Mgbekwe, Mgboye, Mgbafor, and Mgbankwo.

Shortly after the departure of Tortoise, his mother died. Elders summoned a family meeting to discuss burial arrangements. But there was a problem: Where will the money come from?

But Tortoise left instructions that unless the unusual happens, no one should ask him to return. But no family member was prepared to pick the bill. "What shall we do?" family members wondered. They called in the village consultant, an old man, well known for his wisdom who trudged along the community's pathways with his walking stick, almost bent double by a combination of age and arthritis. He pondered over their dilemma and came up with a solution.

The old man scratched his head and asked: "Tortoise said you can only send for him if the unusual happens?" "Ye-e-e-es," family members of tortoise chorused in response, nodding their heads with visible anxiety on their faces. They were expecting a solution.

There was silence. The old man, head bowed, stroked his unkempt white beards, shuffled his dry feet bound in goat skinned sandals, tapped his walking stick three times on the floor as if lost in thought, and suddenly looked up with the agility of a Tiger who has suddenly sighted a prey.

"I have a solution" he said reassuringly in his coarse voice, nodding his head. His eager listeners nodded in unison even before they heard the solution. Encouraged by the non verbal response, the old said: "Tell Tortoise that a man is pregnant in his family. He will return."

Early next morning, an emissary was dispatched to Tortoise with the unusual news. He returned immediately to meet a gathering of enraged family elders who told him they wanted him to come back and take charge of burying his mother.

And so who is a family leader? A leader is a father, and a Father is a leader. That is if he is always there to fulfill his fatherly obligations.

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StoryAsia

The Monks

In the last edition, I told you the story of Prince Siddharta who attained enlightenment and became Gautama Buddha. As a leader, one of the things that Buddha taught was the 'middle way' and in the last two weeks, I was able to experience something quite hilarious, which was anything but the 'middle way'.

It is no secret that in the city of Shah Alam, there are now such stringent rules about keeping dogs. Not pets, just dogs. Diseased cats, however many in number, are preferable to one healthy dog who attacks when children who are completely lacking in discipline and parental control continuously 'tease' this dog by throwing stones at it. Anyway, I digress. The reason for this 'dog' story is because of my very curious experience last week. A delivery man came to my door to deliver a letter. When I asked for his pen to sign the delivery order, he would not give it to me. He told me to use my own and would not touch the part of the document that I had signed or even touched. All this was because I have a dog! I looked back at him in shock. In return, he actually thought I was a foreigner and did not understand what he was saying in Malay; so he began to speak in broken English. I was made to sign the delivery order, print out my full name AND provide my passport number ... using my own pen! And all this, whilst I was talking to someone else on the phone. It was hilarious!

He reminded me so much of the reaction of the younger monk in a story about two monks crossing a river - a person who thinks so much about an emotion that it hinders practical behaviour.

Two monks were wandering through the forest when they came upon a beautiful courtesan standing on the banks of a flooded stream. Because they had sworn a vow of chastity, the younger monk ignored the woman and crossed the stream quickly.

Realising that the beautiful woman could not safely cross the stream by herself, the older monk gathered her up in his arms and carried her across the stream. Once they had reached the other side, he gently returned her to the ground. She smiled her thanks, and the two monks continued on their way.

The young monk quietly seethed as he replayed the incident again and again in his own mind.

How could he? the young monk thought angrily to himself. Does our vow of chastity mean nothing to him? The more the young monk thought about what he had seen, the angrier he became, and the argument in his head grew louder: Why, had I done such a thing I would've been thrown out of our order. This is disgusting. I may not have been a monk as long as he has, but I know right from wrong.

He looked over at the older monk to see if he at least was showing remorse for what he had done, but the man seemed as serene and peaceful as ever.

Finally, the young monk could stand it no longer.

"How could you do that?" he demanded. "How could you even look at that woman, let alone pick her up and carry her? Do you not remember your vow of chastity?"

The older monk looked surprised, then smiled with great kindness in his eyes.

"I am no longer carrying her, brother. Are you?"

I hope you enjoyed that story!

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StoryAsia

St. Francis Xavier

Today, I would like to tell you about the story of St. Francis Xavier. He was a Catholic saint who is said to have set up one of the first schools in Peninsula Malaysia. This school was in the town (now city) of Malacca and the story is set in the 16th Century. Malacca is situated about two hours drive to the south of Kuala Lumpur.

It is said that when Fr. Francis Xavier was travelling in the waters of the Straits of Malacca, on one particular day there was a big storm and his boat nearly capsized. He held the crucifix in his hand and said a prayer, and then he dipped the crucifix in the rough sea which immediately became calm. The storm subsided. Unfortunately, his crucifix fell to the bottom of the sea. The next day while praying for its return he was surprised to see a crab crawling up the beach to him holding his crucifix in its claws. With great joy he picked up the crucifix and blessed the crab, and the crab disappeared towards the calm sea. To this day, on the shell of this species of crab, there is a distinct sign of the cross.

Francis Xavier was born in 1506 at the Castle of Xavier to an aristocratic family near Sanguesa. Sanguesa was situated in the State of Navarre in the Aragon River Valley of the Pyrenees Mountains in North Eastern Spain. In 1512, the Spanish throne under Ferdinand and Izabella annexed the kingdom of Navarre.

Nevertheless, Francis Xavier was brought up in an aristocratic environment and had all the advantages that luxury could bring. It became Francis Xavier's choice to commit his life to spreading his faith in the gospel of Jesus as the saviour of mankind for the Catholic Church.

Francis met Ignatius Loyola in Paris in 1529 during his early education after Loyola himself had changed his lifelong ambition to spiritual matters from having been brought up in an aristocratic family where the young men were trained to be good soldiers.

Together, Francis Xavier and Ignatius Loyola became the founding members of Jesuit Order, Brothers in Christ.

Formal approval of this new order was given by Pope Paul III on September 27, 1540. In the year following the foundation of the Jesuits and after consultation with Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier was personally selected by Loyola to be the head of missions to Asia for the Jesuits. He left Lisbon on his 35th birthday April 7, 1541 arriving in Goa India thirteen months later in May 1542.

When he first arrived in Malacca in 1545, he felt the immediate need to start a school. The Portuguese had already been in Malacca for more than 30 years and it was natural that they should do something for the education of their children.

He returned to Goa and by 1548, sent to Malacca, Fr. Francisco Peres and Brother Roque de Oliveira. Upon their arrival in Malacca, they immediately started to register students. It is said that the school began with 120 pupils. By the end of the year, Fr. Francisco Peres, writing to Ignatius de Loyola said that the school had 180 students.

The school functioned in two houses, which stood where the former Governor's house stands today. By 1578, a new building was erected. It was hard work, for it was finished in 8 months. St. Francis Xavier started at least four colleges, one in Goa, one in Cochin, one in Malacca and another in Ternate. He gave great importance to these colleges. The college of Santa Fe, in Goa, was a place of great learning. The colleges were opened to Portuguese and natives. The policy was to give education to the children of important people, as they in turn, would have great influence.

The main objective, besides providing education for children of influential people, was to form young men from all parts of Asia and South East Asia, who would become priests or auxilliary brothers, if they had no vocation or then, "linguas" (or interpreters) to help the missionaries in their apostolic work.

Not only was St. Francis Xavier's selected as the head of missions to Asia for the Jesuit Order but he also represented the Crown of Portugal as a political emissary. Both positions required his communications and reports be sent to Rome and Portugal on a regular basis for administrative reasons. Francis Xavier's close personal and spiritual relationship with Loyola was of the nature that Xavier considered Loyola to be his spiritual father and therefore he corresponded with him personally on a regular basis during his mission years in Asia. It is said that the normally stoic Loyola wept copious tears of sadness and remorse when he learned of Xavier's death in China in 1552.

I hope you enjoyed that story!

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StoryAfrica

Genesis Of A Father's Role

How do you establish or demonstrate the leadership role of a father in your culture and tradition? I will tell the story of one way of doing it in Africa, especially among the Igbo nation of Nigeria.

A man's leadership is clearly demonstrated during the traditional wedding ceremony when the bride publicly declares her loyalty and submission to her husband. How is it done?

Traditional marriage in Igboland is called "Igba Nkwu Nwanyi", which literally means, Wine Carrying Ceremony. Wine carrying is a must in the marriage rites of Igbo's. Without it, no marriage is recognised.

The Igba Nkwu ceremony that seals the marriage goes like this: It is a very traditional ritual even in today's modern world. At the agreed date, family members and elders of the groom's family arrive with him to the family compound of the bride at hometown. The bride would have invited all her friends and professional associates who arrive in full force decked gorgeously in a uniform traditional attire, from head to toe. A loud music would be blaring a mix of traditional, continental and western music.

After initial greetings and exchange of pleasantries, the next item item on the agenda is the traditional breaking of kolanuts. And it begins with the usual refrain of He who brings kola, brings life, Amen, others will chorus. The kolanut occupies a pride of place in Igbo culture. It is a sign of welcome by the father or man of any whenever any visitor arrives. It is usually served in a small saucer with a knife for breaking it.

Then the agreed list of items of the traditional marriage usually stipulated by the bride's family, which are brought by the grooms family are displayed and inspected. They usually include, goats, palm wine, cartons of beer and stout drinks, crates of soft drinks, dried raw tobacco leaves, yam tubers of specified number, packets of cigarettes, hot drinks, clothing materials, and other items which varies among different communities. The items must be complete, if not the marriage process is stopped. Same if the yam tubers or goats are undersized. If they are, the grooms family is compelled to make it up with cash.

Then comes the high point of the ceremony. An elder of the bride's family pours out fresh palm wine into a calabash cup or gourd and beckons on the on the bride to come forth. Gorgeously dressed and resplendent in her traditional; attire, beads and other decorations, she walks gingerly to the old man amidst giggles and laughter of her her friends and members of the groom's family.

When she steps in front of the elder, he raises the cup full of palm wine for all at the gathering to see. Then he speaks in a loud voice to the hearing of all present. "This wine is for your husband to drink. You will use it to identify your husband here in this gathering and to show submission in the presence of all".

"So take this cup from me and give it to the man who wants to marry you to drink from it too. When you reach him, kneel down before him (sign of submission), sip some of the wine, then give him to drink. When he does that, it is a sign that the two of you really want to marry, and that we can go ahead with the traditional marriage rites".

As the elder makes the statement, there is a hush in the gathering and silence envelopes them. All music and discussions stop as all eyes are fixed on the woman of the moment, the bride. It is her day, which she has been looking forward to, to fulfill the cultural demands of her marriage.

She takes the cup from the elder and proceeds to search for her husband. This is the most dramatic and funny stage of the marital rites. She deliberately avoids where her husband is sitting and wanders off in the opposite direction for the search beaming whit smiles, craning her neck as if in search of a lost treasure.

AS the search continues, other males present, married or not, beckon on the young bride to give them the palm wine. She disagrees with shaking of her head. The crowd roars in laughter. Finally she discovers her husband, walks up to him, kneels down, sips from the cup of wine, and hands over the cup to him. The man accepts the cup and drinks the remaining quantity. A spontaneous thunderous ovation follows. That seals the marriage, and the merriment continues.

For the family of the bride, they have given their daughter away in marriage. They will bless her and her husband wishing them marital bliss, success, children, and long life.

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StoryAsia

***Kanyadaan* - the giving of the gift of a bride**

Last weekend, I attended the wedding of a sister of one of my former classmates. It was a Malayalee wedding and much like most Asian weddings, it was a grand affair with close to 1,000 guests.

During the dinner that followed the wedding, speeches were made and one interesting point was brought up - apparently, in the Malayalee wedding, there is no *Kanyadaan*!

Kanyadaan, apparently, is the notion through which a daughter, at her marriage, is given away by her father as a "gift" to her husband and his family. This is no strange concept for even in a Christian marriage (at least the ones I see on t.v.) the celebrant usually asks something like, "Who gives this woman in matrimony?"

Now, I have never been married and am certainly no expert in Indian weddings but I suspected that this was a little inaccurate. Nevertheless, I was fascinated. So I thought I would ask around, find out a little more about the wedding and what the role of the father is in a Kerala wedding. And true to Asian custom, the four different aunts I asked gave four different versions of the same thing and each aunt insisted that her version is the correct one!! So the story I will tell is what I learnt about the process of a Kerala wedding.

The Malayalee people hail from the southern Indian state of Kerala and it is no exaggeration to say that the Kerala wedding ceremony is the shortest in the world - it lasts no more than five minutes from start to end!

However, there are many pre and post wedding ceremonies and it would seem that the father of the bride is quite involved in it all. First, there is the *Nischayam*, which is the engagement ceremony. The prospective bride and the groom are not present on this occasion. The day before the wedding, a traditional dinner is served at the bride's residence. The actual wedding, *Madhuparkam*, is very short. The groom arrives at the bride's ancestral home, where the marriage ceremony takes place in a north-western room. The bride's father washes the groom's feet and welcomes him. The groom then gives him the off white sari that has to be worn by the bride for the nuptials. The nuptial ceremony, *Velli*, is performed around the agni (fire). The bride and the groom circle the sacred fire thrice, after which the bride's father ties the 'Taali' which is strung on a yellow thread around the neck of the bride. Thereafter, the bride's father gives her hand to the groom in a ceremony called *Kanyadaan*. Then there is an interesting part, *Sparsham*, where the groom lifts the bride's foot and places it on the Ammi (grinding stone) signifying breaking of ties from her old family. The groom then moves the bride's foot forward seven times with his hand symbolising her entry into his family. After the elaborate meal that is prepared, the couple then leaves for the groom's house.

This is one story I have told to you where the probability that it's inaccurate is very high. So please, if you know what the correct story is, I would really love to hear from you.

Nevertheless, I hope you enjoyed that story!

All the best,
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StoryAfrica

How patriotic are you?

Two folk tales from Africa, one about the animal kingdom, will help you determine your level of patriotism.

Story One: From A Motherless Girl To A Queen

There was a man married to two women. The first wife had just a daughter. The second had sons and a daughter. Because of that, she was the man's favourite. And so the man was not treating the first wife well and was neglecting her. Out of frustration, she fell sick and died. Thereafter, the second wife started to maltreat the first wife's daughter named Manu-Manu.

While Manu-Manu's mother was alive, she was taught her a lot of things when they go to the farm such as names of crops, vegetables, and botanical nomenclature. As she did that, there was always one bird nearby listening.

One day, the King of the village decided to choose a wife for his son, the prince. The condition he gave was that the woman the prince would marry should be able to say the names of different types crops in the land.

So he sent his town crier to go to the village and announce his new offering that any young bride with that knowledge should come to his palace. Manu-Manu's step mother heard it and got a wiseman man in the village to teach her daughters the names of all crops in the land. But her girls were not intelligent enough to learn fast.

Manu-Manu on her part wished she was able to say the names of the crops but she could not remember them. She stood by the bank of a river crying and the bird saw her. The bird flew to her and started singing the names of the crops. Manu-Manu remembered. When she told her father and step mother that she was going to the King's palace, they laughed at her. To prevent her from going, her step mother gave her a lot of domestic chores to do to keep her busy.

While she was doing the work, she was crying and singing the names of the crops just as the bird sang.. Luckily, one of the King's guards was passing by and heard her. He went to the palace and told the King who ordered that Manu-Manu should be brought to his palace immediately.

When the young girl got set to go, her step mother dressed her shabbily thinking it would make the king not to allow her into the palace. While she was going, she was crying and singing. When the king heard that, he commanded that she must be brought in.

Manu-Manu went it and sang all the names of the crops. The King was captivated by her voice and declared that she must be the prince's wife. And so Manu-Manu was instantly turned from an oppressed motherless girl to a Queen.

Story Two: Why The Tortoise Has A Cracked Shell

One day, the gods of a certain land invited all the animals for a party in heaven. Many animals could not go except the birds who had wings to fly to heaven. Tortoise wanted to go for the party and he decided to make friends with the birds.

On the day of the party, he borrowed wings from the birds and flew with them to heaven. On the way he told the birds his name is "All of you". They all agreed. When they arrived in heaven, a waiter came and served them food. Tortoise asked the waiter, "who owns all this food?" The waiter replied, "all of you".

The tortoise quickly got up and said my name is All of you, so I own this food. The birds watched the tortoise eat all the food alone.

When the party was over and it was time to fly home, the birds snatched their wings from tortoise so he was stranded. Tortoise begged the pigeon to tell his (Tortoise) wife to bring out all the soft materials in their home so that he could soft-land safely.

But the pigeon in an angry mood went gave the wife a wrong message. He told told her that there is going to be war. So she brought out all the sharp and dangerous objects such as knives, matches, and other domestic weapons.

The tortoise looked down from heaven and saw all they put for him to land on. He did not see clearly and he thought they were soft materials. He jumped down from heaven and landed on the sharp objects which shattered his shell.

That is why till date, the tortoise has a cracked shell.

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StoryAsia

***Ringgit* - the currency of Malaysia**

In Malaysia, our currency is known as *Ringgit* and *sen*. It is said that the word *ringgit* has been in use in this area for at least 200 years.

Apparently, *Ringgit* was already in the Marsden's Dictionary of the Malayan language published in 1812 which referred to it as a unit of currency. Abbot Favre's *Malais-Francais Dictionnaire* also contains this word, meaning a silver coin.

Ringgit originally meant a jagged or serrated edge.

According to the history of coinage, hammered coins had irregular edges and after being put into circulation, they were subjected to much abuse by unscrupulous tradesmen and moneylenders. They resorted to two generally known methods of reducing the metal content of these coins

- clipping - shaving or clipping the edge, making the coin progressively smaller.
- sweating - sweating involved putting several coins in a fine leather bag and shaking them. The friction between the coins meant that fine particles of the gold or silver dust accumulated in the bag.

From as far back at the 17th century European nations trading in the East had brought the silver dollar coin from the Spanish American mints as the coin of commerce in Asia. These round silver pieces had edges with a floral design. Later, coins of the Republic of Mexico were also introduced by the colonial government. These heavy silver coins after some circulation in our territories came to be nicknamed *ringgit* irrespective of whether they were from the Spanish American or Mexican mints. Thus the word *ringgit* came to acquire a second meaning which was applied to all silver coins of either serrated or floral edges of the same size, weight and quality of silver.

When production became more mechanical, coins were struck with a raised or beaded rim. Some had a floral edge or an incused edge, others had a jagged or serrated edge.

It began in 1837, when the Indian rupee was made the sole official currency in the Straits Settlements. In 1867, the silver dollars were again legal tender. In 1903, the Straits dollar, pegged at two shillings fourpence (2s. 4d.), was introduced by the Board of Commissioners of Currency. Private banks were prevented from issuing notes and private banks were prevented from issuing notes. Since then continuity of the currency has been broken twice, once by the Japanese occupation 1942-1945, and again by the devaluation of the Pound Sterling in 1967, when notes of the Board of Commissioners of Currency of Malaya and British Borneo lost 15% of their value. The new Bank Negara Malaysia and Singapore and Brunei Commissioners of Currency dollars were not devalued.

The word *ringgit* appeared for the first time on the 5.000 dollars banknote of the Oriental Banking Corporation of Singapore as early as 1849. On Malay coins, the Jawi script for *Satu Ringgit* (One Ringgit) was first used on the reverse of the British Trade Dollar in 1895.

Bank Negara Malaysia's first issue of banknotes was released in June 1967. However, the names *ringgit* and *sen* were officially adopted as the sole official names for the currency only in August of 1975. Furthermore, the use of the dollar sign "\$" (or "M\$") was replaced by "RM" (Ringgit Malaysia) only in the 1990s.

The conversion rate for *Ringgit Malaysia* today is as follows: US\$1.00 is equivalent to RM3.80. The coins are called *sen*. There are 100 sen in RM1.00. *Ringgit Malaysia* is offered in the following denominations: RM1, RM5, RM10, RM50 and RM100.

I hope you enjoyed that story.

All the best,
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StoryAfrica

African folk tales:

Why the lizard nods its head:

Tortoise and Lizard were very good friends. But Tortoise was greedy and selfish. One day, the King of their kingdom sent a message round their village that anyone who finds out the name of his pretty daughter would marry her and get half of his property.

Everyday, all men, young and old, went to the King's palace to tell the king the name of his daughter. The maid called her Lovely, men called her Beautiful Princess, while others called her, Queen of the land.

Tortoise thought day and night of what to do. But one day, he found a solution. He will go to the river where the princess takes her bath and stays for recreation to execute his plot. Tortoise went to the river taking along with him the beards of a He-goat and an axe.

He gummed the beards on the axe and set it up on by the river reeds so that when the princess comes to take her bath, she will see the bizarre figure.. When the princess came, she saw the axe with beards. In amazement, she called one of her maids who shouted the princess's name in excitement- Belu, have you seen an axe growing beards before, asked the princess?

Meanwhile, Tortoise was atop a tree nearby listening to the conversation. After the princess had gone, he ran to the King's house to tell him the name of the princess. Lizard, the gateman of the king was at the gate to the palace.

When he saw Tortoise coming, Lizard asked him why he was in such a hurry. Tortoise replied that he knows the name of the princess. Lizard then said the King was not at home and demanded to know the name so that he can pass it on to the King when he returns.

Tortoise foolishly revealed the name of the princess. When the King returned to his palace, Lizard told him the name of the princess. The King then gave lizard half of the royal property and the princess as his wife.

Tortoise was very angry with Lizard for his betrayal. So he decided on what to do. He invited Lizard to his house and served him a meal of hot soup with cowpea seeds. Lizard drank the soup with relish, but there was a problem. The cowpea seeds could not pass through his throat and lodged there choking him. Since then, anywhere the Lizard goes, he nods his head trying to get rid of the cowpea seeds.

That is why the lizard nods its head.

Hope you enjoyed this story. More in the next edition.

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StoryAsia

The story of how rubber became the foremost industry of Malaya

Natural rubber came from a single species of tree, *Hevea brasiliensis*. In the Amazon the rubber tree was known as the weeping tree. The Indians would slash its bark and let the white tears of the tree drip onto leaves. Then, it would be moulded by hand into vessels and sheets, impermeable to rain. Christopher Columbus came across Indians playing games with strange balls that bounced and flew while Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin found the material ideal for erasing pencil notations.

The King of Portugal had already established an industry that made rubber shoes, capes, and bags. The industry was fledgling, however, because the products were flawed. In cold weather the rubber became so brittle that it cracked like porcelain. In summer heat a rubber cape was reduced to a sticky shroud.

Then in 1839, quite by accident Charles Goodyear invented vulcanisation, a process that made rubber impervious to the elements. This became the single most essential product of the Industrial Age. John Dunlop invented inflatable rubber tires so that his son could win a tricycle race in Belfast. The Michelin brothers stunned critics by successfully introducing removable tires in the Paris-Bordeaux car rally. Soon, the first of 15 million Model T's rolled off Henry Ford's assembly line. Each item needed rubber and the only source was in the Amazon

The seedy riverside Manaus, situated in Brazil, at the heart of the trade, grew into a thriving city where opulence reached bizarre heights and of course. To cater for the world's market, impoverished peasants were imported by the thousands from Brazil's northeast and absorbed into an atrocious system of debt peonage. To maintain its control over the industry, the Brazilians frowned upon anyone taking the rubber seeds out of the country. Nevertheless, sometime in 1876, British agent, Sir Henry Wickham, slipped out of Brazil with around 70,000 seeds. In Britain, the seeds were successfully grown into little saplings. The saplings were then shipped to the colonies. Eleven were addressed to Henry Nicholas Ridley, who was at the time in Singapore. A plan was put into motion to have the first plantations growing rubber trees in Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and Thailand.

By 1909, Malaya had planted over 40 million trees, spaced just 20 feet apart in neat rows. A single worker could tap 400 trees a day. Production doubled every 12

months. Within a decade millions of rubber trees, all derived genetically from a handful of seeds, carpeted Asia's hillsides.

With the plantations in Malaya producing in excess of what had previously been produced in Brazil, the Amazon rubber boom imploded.

I hope you enjoyed that story.

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StoryAfrica

August Meeting , New Yam Festival:

August is a busy and eventful month for the Igbos in Nigeria. Besides the Christmas season, this is another period for almost mass return for Igbos from the cities back to their hometowns in the South East part of Nigeria..

For the men, August is the time to go home too, to observe the yearly ritual of New Yam festival. And for majority of Christian women, it is time for their August meeting. Women from many church parishes in the cities send delegates home for the annual gathering.

Preparations for August meetings are in most cases big, but the whole exercise is becoming too materialistic and expensive. sometimes exerting pressure on the pockets of their husbands. There are demands for new sets of clothes, in colours to match, the head scarf, bangles, shoes, and all.

It is not that these items are mandatory. It is just that vanity takes over . Trust Igbo women. They see the August Meeting as the period to display the latest stock in their wardrobes, jewellery and other accessories that you begin to wonder whether Christianity is all about materialism. Not so. Jesus Christ was a bundle of humility and He lived a frugal life.

August meeting is not observed by all Christian denominations. It is held mainly by the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. The Pentecostals hardly observe it.

The build up for this meeting begins months before shortly after the cropping season, early March when the rains set in. The heat is so much that some women who cannot on their own buy all the paraphernalia begin to disturb their husbands for money.

Pity the husbands who cannot meet these demands. Sometimes it leads to marriage break ups. No woman going for August meeting wants to appear in the old set of clothes.

Despite this aberration, the meeting is worth it. Issues discussed cover a broad range about living and working for women and the pressures of urbanisation such as balancing work and raising children, small scale business and self employment, marital infidelity, modesty, relating with in-laws, taking care of husbands, church activities and selfless service, and support for the work of God and all.

The women go back to the cities late August recharged to impact on the church more.

Next edition, we shall discuss the New Yam Festival for men usually held in most Igbo towns in late August.

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StoryAsia

Story 1 - Why would someone blow up a train?

Neill Neill, Ph.D.

We have been deluged with analysis of how the London bombings were carried out, by whom, at whose bidding and in the name of what cause. But little analysis has gone deeper into the why of such acts of terror -- too close to home?

These acts of killing and suicide were carried out by individual people with minds and hearts and feelings and families just like us. They may have been more like us than we might want to think.

People have been killing people forever. And when they do it, they do it believing it is the right thing to do. When an American soldier kills a "hostile" in Iraq, he believes he is doing the right thing. At the same time, the Iraqi fighter who kills American soldiers with a car bomb believes he is doing the right thing.

I have no doubt that the London bombers believed they were doing the right thing. All acts of genocide are based on rightness.

When we look at the psychology of the terrorist who bombs trains, however, it is not fundamentally different from that of the person who blows up an abortion clinic or the man who kills his wife because she is getting out of his "rightful" control. In each case there is a strongly-held belief of rightness.

Rightness is a scourge which has bred deadly children: fanaticism, religious extremism, and terrorism. All carry the potential for human carnage.

It is not a big step to move from absolute rightness to fanaticism and terrorism. That is simply putting rightness into action. A terrorist believes he or she has the right to use fear, intimidation, and violence, even killing sometimes, to force others to their point of view.

The history of Christianity is clouded with many terrorists and the smell of their victims' corpses. But the same cloud is big enough to darken many other religious movements.

The radical fringe of the environmental movement has supported terrorists. So have apartheid, the anti-abortion lobby and innumerable political movements worldwide.

My intention is not to make any judgment about the causes that have been championed by people using terrorist tactics. As a race we seem to keep rising from the ashes of the atrocities. Optimistically, we keep on evolving. But for the

individual, rightness is a terrible burden. That is why I call it a scourge.

There has been a lot written about why people seem to take on the weight of rightness: autocratic parents, tyrannical secular leaders, dogmatic and pompously-righteous religious leaders, autocratic educational systems, authoritarian teachers, sundry fear mongers and poverty.

To put it another way, the world is full of powerful models of rightness. The easiest route for the rest of us is often to try to be just like them. Oh how they love to be followed!

I include poverty as a source of rightness/terrorism, because fear seems so often to accompany poverty. And a person who is afraid, especially if the person is young, is much more vulnerable to the demagogues who preach rightness, whether inside or outside the family.

What are you afraid of?

Almost every day someone afflicted with rightness comes to me for help. No matter what form it takes -- judging, needing to dominate/control others with their rightness, perfectionism -- at its root rightness is a defense against fear. If I can help them deal with the sources of their fear, the compulsion to rightness lessens and often disappears, freeing them to think and to choose.

As members of the human race each of us must learn for ourselves and teach our children to distinguish between passion and rightness. Passion grows out of love; rightness arises from fear.

If you become aware you are attempting to control your children or anyone else through threats, bullying, verbal violence, arbitrary sanctions or physical force, it is time to take a step back and ask yourself, "What am I afraid of?"

This single step can be the first in breaking a human pattern that so many times has bred terrorism and death. If each of us were to do this, in time there would be no one left to bomb trains.

Copyright 2005 Neill Neill. All rights reserved. Dr. Neill writes regular newspaper columns on psycho-spiritual topics. He writes to facilitate growth in human consciousness and increase the store of hope and happiness. For a complimentary subscription to Dr. Neill Neill's Practical Psychology, go to <http://www.neillneill.com>.

Story 2 - What happens to your credit card when you die.

I had to share this story I received from a friend with you. It came at a time when I was having trouble with my credit card company. It put things into perspective and made me laugh. Whether this particular conversation is true or not, I have no idea. Nevertheless, the chances that it is are pretty high.

It begins like this: My Aunt died last January. The Bank billed her for February and March for their monthly service charge on her credit card, and then added late fees and interest on the monthly charge...the balance had been \$0.00...now it was somewhere around \$60.00 I placed the following phone call to Bank

Me: "I am calling to tell you that she died in January."
Bank: "The account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply."
Me: "Maybe, you should turn it over to collections"
Bank "Since it is 2 months past due, it already has been."
Me: "So, what will they do when they find out she is dead?"
Bank: "Either report her account to the frauds division, or report her to the credit bureau maybe both!"
Me: "Do you think God will be mad at her?"
Bank: "...excuse me .?"
Me: "Did you just get what I was telling you.... the part about her being dead?"
Bank: "Sir, you'll have to speak to my supervisor!"
(Supervisor gets on the phone)
Me: "I'm calling to tell you, she died in January."
Bank: "The account was never closed and the late fees and charges still apply."
Me: "You mean you want to collect from her estate?"
Bank: ".....(stammer)" "Are you her lawyer?"
Me: "No, I'm her great nephew."
(Lawyer info given...)
Bank: "Could you fax us a certificate of death?"
Me: "Sure."
(Fax number is given)
(After they get the fax.)
Bank: "Our system just isn't set up for death"
Me: "Oh..."
Bank: "I don't know what more I can do to help..."
Me: "Well... if you figure it out, great! If not, you could just keep billing her...I suppose...don't really think she will care...."
Bank: "Well...the late fees and charges do still apply."
Me: "Would you like her new billing address?"
Bank: "That might help."
Me: "Nilai Memorial Park Cemetery
(North South Highway and plot number given.)
Bank: "Sir, that's a cemetery!"
Me: "What do you do with dead people on your planet?"

Story 3 - Tigers

A short story here.

In the past three weeks, there has been much talk in the local newspapers about one particular tiger cub, Nicky. A gentlemen saved this three-month-old Malayan Tiger from the cooking pot (yes, believe it or not, there are people out there who were

going to eat her!). He paid quite an exorbitant price for this rescue mission and she was handed over to the Malacca Zoo. But I digress.

I was interested in the story of tigers *per se* and found out that we in Malaysia now have our very own classification of tigers. From *The Star* newspaper, I found out these facts:

There were originally eight classifications of tigers. However, a test of the DNA of more than 130 tigers and tiger pelts last year raised sufficient evidence to re-classify the tigers in Malaysia as a separate sub-species.

The Malayan Tiger, now the ninth sub-species is known as *Panthera tigris malayensis*

... .

I hope you enjoyed these three stories!

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StoryAsia

Tony Fernandes - Chief Executive, Air Asia, Malaysia

Perhaps, because of my own experiences, I am always interested in reading stories about people who have left comfortable jobs and branched out on their own. So I did a little research and came up with the story of Tony Fernandex, the Chief Executive of Air Asia, Malaysia.

The following story can also be viewed at:

http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_28/b3891409.htm

When Tony Fernandes wanted to start Malaysia's first discount airline a few years ago, he couldn't get a license. Then he heard bankrupt Air Asia, with two Boeing jets and \$11 million in debt, could be bought from the government. All he had to do was sell then-Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad on the idea. The two met in October, 2001, with Fernandes, a British-trained accountant, telling Mahathir a discount carrier could revolutionize Southeast Asian air travel and boost tourism at a time when airlines worldwide were struggling from the impact of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Mahathir was persuaded -- Fernandes only had to pay a token 26 cents for the carrier -- but airline analysts were skeptical. "When we started, they said it wouldn't work," recalls Fernandes. "They said we would die."

Well, Fernandes not only survived, he has thrived. One-way fares as low as \$2.50 have persuaded thousands of Malaysians to fly who in the past would have taken a bus, train, or boat. Since its relaunch in December, 2001, Air Asia has bought four Boeing 737-300s and leased 13 more. It now flies to 28 destinations around the region, including Jakarta, Bangkok, and Macau. Fernandes keeps costs low with short-haul flights, a high rate of aircraft utilization, and a fast turnaround rate. He also makes money with a lucrative cargo service, sales of drinks on board, and marketing tie-ups with other companies. Air Asia's planes are flying 80% full on average, and analysts say it will earn \$16 million in profits on \$120 million in revenues for the fiscal year ending June 30.

Fernandes' biggest achievement has been to turn Air Asia into an international carrier. Before he arrived on the scene, countries in the region never had any kind of open-skies agreement. In mid-2003, Fernandes' lobbying pushed Mahathir to raise the idea with the leaders of neighboring Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore. As a result, those nations have granted landing rights to Air Asia and other discount carriers. "Fernandes has had remarkable influence in shaping government and airline thinking in Southeast Asia and beyond," says Peter Harbison, managing director of the Center for Asia Pacific Aviation, a Sydney consultancy. "The Asia Pacific airline industry will never be the same again."

Now, Southeast Asia is buzzing with successful, low-price carriers such as Thai Air Asia, which took off in January, and Singapore-based Valair, which began flying in May. Asia's big established carriers are responding with cut-rate rivals of their own. Singapore Airlines, for example, is preparing to launch Tiger Airways in late November, while Australia's Qantas Airways is starting up JetStar in mid-November. Even though this means more competition, Fernandes is proud of what he set in motion. "It was the popularity of low-cost carriers like Air Asia," he says, "that forced them to move toward more open skies."

Fernandes learned to think like an entrepreneur from a master. After graduating from the London School of Economics in 1987, he worked as an accountant for Richard Branson's Virgin Records from 1987 to 1989. The amateur guitarist went on to become vice-president for Southeast Asia for Warner Music Group from 1992-2001. But Fernandes says he won't imitate his mentor Branson by branching out into many businesses. "Unlike Sir Richard, I am totally focused on just one thing -- Air Asia," he says. Not that he doesn't have big plans. He wants to fly 6 million passengers annually by 2005, up from 1.8 million last year, and buy 80 new planes to serve them. An initial public offering is looming as soon as September. Whatever he does next, Fernandes is likely to teach his competitors a thing or two about how to push the business envelope.

All the best,
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About the Authors of this E-book



and



Aneeta Sundararaj and

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Before venturing into the internet business world, Aneeta was a practising lawyer. She specialised in medico-legal work. However, after becoming thoroughly disillusioned by legal practice, she decided to do something that would make her truly happy and she became the author of the novel *The Banana Leaf Men*. She is passionate about writing and Hindu Mythology; not wanting to waste all that she had learnt, she combined her knowledge and [How To Tell A Great Story](#).

The two products that are most in demand on this site are the ebook: **How To Tell A Great Story** priced at only \$9.90 and *Great StoryTelling Network!* which is a free bi-weekly newsletter she manages with Eric Okeke from Nigeria.



And Here is What You'll Get In 'How To Tell A Great Story'

- Many simple "Storytelling Nuts and Bolts" exercises that are guaranteed to bolster your storytelling skills (and confidence) 300% within a single week of practice.
- **The secret "R.P.I. Principle"© that is as easy to understand as baking a cake!**
- The way you can use the "R.P.I. Principle"© to instantly connect with people you've never met.
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- Why "telling it as it is" doesn't work...and what you can use instead to gain far greater results.
- **The six most important questions you need to ask yourself to make each and every story you tell believable.**
- Why your storytelling skills will become completely natural... (forget about trying to dress properly to impress your audience, or trying to figure out their

"body language" or engaging them in the story that could take months to learn).

- **What kind of story are you really telling (you'll be truly amazed when you discover this powerfully simple secret)!**
- How marketing gurus use the "R.P.I. Principle"© to sell you their stuff ... every single time.
- **How the "I" in the "R.P.I. Principle"© has enabled hundreds of people and small business owners to develop a magnetic, charismatic "aura."**
- How to use the "R.P.I. Principle"© in public presentations and blow audiences out of their seats!
- **How people ALL OVER THE WORLD for CENTURIES use the "R.P.I. Principle"© to consistently mesmerize thousands of them when they just begin with the first moment that they look at their audience.**
- Simple, fast ways for anyone to work the "R.P.I. Principle"©.
- **Powerful strategies for developing your storytelling technique using our "R.P.I. Principle" and then seeing how you have power over others after only one week of consistent practice)!**
- The "R.P.I. Principle"© that EVERYONE is using but never publicly teach!

To find out more about this ebook, go to <http://www.howtotellagreatstory.com>.

Great StoryTelling Network!

This bi-weekly newsletter, *Great StoryTelling Network!* that aims to give a voice to storytellers of the world which creates opportunities in business for everyone. Our aim is to give a platform for people to voice their ideas, share their thoughts and resources, thereby creating a melting pot of people who then bring about opportunities in business for everyone.

Some of the columns that we publish are as follows:

StoryAfrica
StoryAsia
Tips for Great Story Tellers
"What's Your Fascinating Story? "
Articles and Book Club
"Blow Your Own Trumpet!"
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