

# WANTED: Master Storytellers

by Susan Nall Bales

This is a plea for better storytelling from the people in clinics and classrooms, programs and public agencies, who have their hands on America's future.

**T**HIS IS ABOUT STORYTELLING: HOW JOURNALISTS tell stories to citizens; how nonprofits tell stories to journalists to convey to citizens; how we tell stories to each other to try to make sense of what is happening to our families, neighbors, and people we don't know. And this is a plea for better storytelling from the people in clinics and classrooms, programs and public agencies, who have their hands on America's future.

This lesson acquires new urgency in light of recent events. Americans are trying to assign meaning to the catastrophic news of the past few weeks, and to fit them into their understanding of where our country is headed. Who will help them understand how to fit the pieces together into a coherent and practical plan for moving forward? Was Hurricane Katrina a "natural disaster" or a failure of foresight and federal planning? Is the gasoline shortage a cyclical event that we just have to ride out, or is it the inevitable outcome of irresponsible management of our energy policies? Is the suffering of so many African Americans in the Gulf a consequence of bad personal choices, or of structural impediments to opportunity which our

society has overlooked? Are the consequences of inaction on these fronts confined to a small group of people in Louisiana, or will the entire society suffer, pulling in farmers from Iowa whose livelihood depends on the transport of grain along interconnected waterways which now prove sadly unprotected from risk? For these, as for many other events in our common life, the answer rests on the ability of storytellers to connect the dots between past actions and present conditions in ways that make clear to the public what's at stake—and what can be done in the future—even as they clean up the debris.

In the opening pages of *Tropic of Capricorn*, Henry Miller famously intones, "I will give you Horatio Alger as he looks the day after the Apocalypse." Miller was castigating the inability of the myth of the Rugged Individual or the Self-Making Person to capture the reality of life for many Americans in the 1930s. A contemporary update might read, "I will give you the Ownership Society as it looks the day after the levees broke." That story, still in the making, would focus our attention on the things we must do together, because they cannot be done individually: from building roads and a reliable health-care infrastructure to improving schools and repairing the ladder of opportunity in our society.

It is tempting in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to tell a Crisis Story and to conjure Sympathy by parading the Victims. It's an old

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story, and one familiar to advocates, in which it is assumed that the cumulative weight of all the individual stories will at last convince the reader of the need for effective government, opportunities for all, and a wide array of social services. The other story, the story of the importance of safeguarding the public structures that protect us all, is a story only dimly captured in the brochures and annual reports of the nonprofit field. Yet it is this latter story that, our research argues, is best suited to opening American hearts and minds to the kind of long-term change we need in this country, if we are to achieve a true opportunity society.

Clearly, we need to start telling a different kind of story. Nonprofits who wish to open the eyes of Americans must pioneer a new kind of value-based storytelling whose big story is about overcoming boundaries between people to engage in common-ground problem-solving.

We need to ask ourselves, “What is the story behind the story—the *big* story that we tell ourselves over and over about our experiences as Americans? How are values embedded in the commentary and how do those values either help us solve problems together, as communities or as a country, or break us down into individual problem-solvers, a nation of individuals loosely tied together? How can we do a better job of wresting complex issues from the experts and explaining them in simple but accurate ways to ordinary people, so they get smarter about the way things work, and become better able to resist the inevitable spin of partisan distortions?”

Clues about how to tell this new story come from a number of places. First, this article is informed by the FrameWorks Institute’s own multi-disciplinary, multi-method research on how the public thinks about social problems. From issues of race and work to the role of gov-

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ernment and families, we have tested and retested what works to get Americans to engage in addressing problems—appealing to them as citizens, not consumers. This decade-long pursuit has yielded a number of recurring themes, many of which are infused into these storytelling recommendations.

Second, public journalism offers nonprofit communicators a powerful vision that we can use to inform, model, and support our work. But public journalism is not a passive tool. It requires smart advocates who raise the expectations for journalists. We can learn from them—both good and bad habits—but we must test their storytelling devices against a goal of making people smarter about how we can make America a better, fairer, more prosperous place for all.

Finally, this article uses a series of Ernie Pyle's columns from the 1930s to demonstrate a different kind of storytelling. We maintain that the way he argued—interpreting Americans to themselves and helping them see their country and its values up close and personal—is an art we must recapture if we are to rediscover our collective public voice. In the end, journalism is far too important to be left to the journalists. It's time to take back the territory of public storytelling.

One prominent journalist, Phillip Ault, described Pyle's ability to get away from the censors in World War II by remembering how he would go out and talk to people wherever he was. In this way, he broke several important stories about the political climate and public opinion as it affected various countries' support for the Allies. "The story," his competitor remembers, "was right under our noses." But Ernie got the scoop, while the others waited for the official communiqué. For nonprofits today—engaged in communities, and aware of the interaction between people and place, intervention and outcome—the story of what is happening in America is indeed right under our noses.

Ernie Pyle was a journalist, but this article is written for nonprofit advocates and service providers. What can advocates learn from a columnist long lost to history? We are increasingly dependent upon news for the way our issues are understood by the public. The press sets the public agenda, which sets the policy

agenda. And the news is increasingly dependent on us as the sources for stories about what's happening in communities, the impact of policies on people, and the opinions of community leaders. We are often inventing, writing, and pitching the rough drafts of the evening news. Learning new ways to frame our issues requires that we borrow from the best of journalism, understanding how to make the news that really does advance public understanding.

### Learning from Ernie Pyle<sup>1</sup>

*Enterprise, Alabama—This is a New Deal story, so if you don't like the New Deal you won't see any sense in it.*

*When the government took a hand here in 1935, six out of ten school children in the county had hookworm. Every other baby died at birth. One mother in every ten died in childbirth. The average mentality was third-grade. One out of ten adults couldn't read or write. Three-fourths of the farmers were tenant farmers. Most of them had never been out of debt in their lives. They averaged only one mule to three families.*

*And this is in Coffee County, which stands third among all the counties of Alabama in the value of agricultural products. These figures are not the scandalous revelations of some smart Brain Truster from the North. They are from a survey made by Southerners. Sure, you'll find wealth and grace and beautiful homes in the South, homes as pretty and people as fine as anywhere in the world. But you drive the back roads, and you won't see one farm home in a hundred that would equal the ordinary Midwest farmhouse.*

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*Coffee County has become a sort of experimental station in Alabama. Not by design, especially, but because the government people and the local agencies got enthusiastic, and it just grew up under them.*

*Federal, state, and county agencies all have a hand. To prevent overlapping, they are coordinated under a council, with the county school superintendent as chairman. They say it's the only thing of its kind in America.*

*These agencies cover most everything from typhoid shots to fruit-canning. They're like agencies in your home territory, only the need is greater and I suspect they are a bit more*



enthusiastic. The work is climaxed in the Farm Security Administration, which actually owns thousands of acres of land and plants these down-and-out farmers on its acres.

*I wish there were something to call these things besides "projects." The idea of a project makes the farmers contemptuous, makes Republicans snort with rage, brings sneers from the townspeople. A project is Brain Trust—experimenting, regimenting people.*

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*What they're doing here isn't a project, anyway. They aren't setting up a "settlement." Nobody is forced to do anything. The six hundred farmers on FSA are scattered over a county twenty-five miles square. What they're doing is simply a general and wide-stretching process—starting almost from zero—of trying to get people to live better.*

*Ernie Pyle, March 16, 1939*

### Putting the Public Back in the Communication

Jay Rosen, director of the Project on Public Life and the Press at New York University, argues that journalists need a "compelling public function" and suggests that it should be as "advocates for the kind of serious talk a mature polity requires . . . They should announce and publicly defend their legitimate agenda: to make politics 'go well,' in the sense of producing a useful dialogue, where we can know in common what we cannot know alone and where the true problems of the political community come under serious discussion."

In short, public journalism is a new way of covering the world that contributes to a "better, richer political dialogue." And getting there, Rosen asserts, will take a fundamental reinventing of the values and art of journalism. Journalists "will have to change their lens on the political world and learn to see politics anew, as a discussion they have a duty to improve. But

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first ... the press must acknowledge the existence of an old lens, a manner of viewing politics that has gradually broken down, making it more and more difficult for journalists to see their way clear of some destructive patterns. The horse race, insider baseball, the gotcha question, the feeding frenzy, the cult of toughness—these ought to be seen as unsustainable practices...”

Rosen’s challenge has been echoed by journalists around the country. “It is time for those of us in the world’s freest press to become activists, not on behalf of a particular party or politician, but on behalf of the process of self-government,” writes the *Washington Post*’s David Broder.

What would it mean to write in a new way? How can we drive these stories, first as storytellers ourselves—as advocates of and partners in a new level of discussion about our country’s future and the options that face us for getting there?

Rosen suggests that citizens examine closely the composition of news to see how we would restructure the way we tell ourselves what is going on in our country. He says that in addition to setting the public agenda and other well-documented aspects of their profession, journalists also participate in (1) the art of framing; (2) the capacity to publicly include; and (3) the shaping of a master narrative. We will investigate each of these goals in order to attempt to arrive at a new way of seeing our role as public storytellers.

### Getting More People into the Frame

There are many definitions of framing in public discussion these days. That’s only natural, given the fact that the concept of framing has been around for more than 50 years, with contributions from anthropology, political science, sociology, psychology, and linguistics. FrameWorks defines framing as “the way a story is told—its selective use of particular symbols, metaphors, and messengers which, in turn, trigger the shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world.”

Public journalism’s definition follows from this understanding. “Journalism schools don’t teach this, but still it’s true: Facts can’t tell you how they want to be framed,” writes Rosen. “Journalists decide how facts will be framed, and that means making decisions about which

values will structure the story ... Framing is not only an art ... but one of the important democratic arts. Done well, framing in journalism should proceed from and support certain values, and these are public values: the values of conversation, participation, deliberative dialogue, public problem-solving; the values of inclusion, individual responsibility, cooperative and complementary action; the values of caring for the community, taking chart of the future, overcoming the inertia of drift; finally the value of hope, understood as a renewable resource.”

Framing asks of each news story, “What was left in the story and what was left out?” There are also what Rosen calls “rituals of framing,” such as the two-sides rule or the human interest story. These ways of organizing the material, however, are not without consequences for the way we look at ideas (e.g. polarization, personalization).

In fact, framing has implications far beyond a story’s artistic composition. As media advocacy theorist Charlotte Ryan has observed, “Every frame defines the issue, explains who is responsible and suggests potential solutions.”

In his book *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*, Shanto Iyengar demonstrates how powerful framing is in signaling to the public who made the problem and who is responsible for fixing it. He divides television news into two basic frames: one that is essentially personal and another that stresses systemic interpretations. The episodic or personal frame, which grossly dominates news coverage, “depicts public issues in terms of concrete instances or specific events—a homeless person, an unemployed worker, a victim of racial discrimination, the bombing of an airliner,” and does not connect the situation to any broader social forces. By contrast, thematic or systemic frames “place public issues in some general or abstract context. Reports on reductions in government welfare expenditures ... changes in federal affirmative-action policy, or the backlog in the criminal justice process ... The thematic news frame typically takes the form of a ‘takeout’ or ‘backgrounder’ report directed at general outcomes or conditions and frequently features ‘talking heads.’”

The use of these frames will have dramatic consequences for Rosen’s vision of renewed democratic discourse. “Following exposure to



episodic framing,” concludes Iyengar, “Americans describe chronic problems such as poverty and crime not in terms of deep-seated social or economic conditions, but as mere idiosyncratic outcomes. Confronted with a parade of news stories describing particular instances of illustrations of national issues, viewers focus on individual and group characteristics rather than historical, social, political, or other such structural forces.”

In his book on media and public health, Larry Wallack admonishes advocates to frame for content, by which he means to “translate what are commonly seen as individual problems (for example, alcoholism) to social or public policy issues (for example, promotion and availability of alcohol).”

By contrast, the notion of a nation of discon-

nected individuals whose circumstances are seen as random events undercuts the need for government or even collective responses. Left to their own devices, few Americans can see a role for government or for any effective intervention, other than that of individuals. In this world view, the more emphasis on individuals, the better, and there is little chance that Americans will “connect it up” on their own. In a national survey at the time of the 1992 election, roughly two-thirds (65%) of Americans agreed with the statement “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on.”

Conservatives have long argued a view of public life that is nothing more than the aggregate of individual experience, need, and accomplishment. As Margaret Thatcher once famously

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pronounced, “There is no such thing as society... There are individual men and women, and there are families.” Following this way of thinking, the logical response to the plight of individuals is to hold them solely responsible for their situation. The problem of low immunization rates among preschoolers, for example, is due to bad parents, not to the inability of providers to eliminate missed opportunities.

How, then, is Ernie Pyle’s framing style useful to us?

It is useful because it reconnects us with the importance of translating from individuals to programs, and from programs back to individuals. Also, precisely because most Americans lack the ability to connect it up, to fill in the frame, to pull explanations from other walks of life into the news story, individuals are left alone in the frame with their “problems,” responsible both for their problems and for fixing them. They get little help from the news media, where episodic frames dominate news coverage (which intrinsically advantages the conservative view of public life, which is also episodic and personal). Society, and the host of environmental forces that shape individual outcomes, is left invisible to most Americans.

Ernie Pyle’s approach to storytelling is also useful to us because progressives have ceded ground on the issue of values. Values belong in the frame—an explicit part of why we believe what we believe. Values such as interdependence, opportunity for all, responsible stewardship, community stability and prosperity, prevention, ingenuity, and the common good—these must be lodged in our narratives, underscoring the forces and situations that explain why people rise or fall in our society and how they can and should be helped, outside of charity.

And, finally, Ernie Pyle’s approach is useful because the traditions of journalism continue to be built around the human interest story. But Pyle changed that story. He found ways to connect the dots, to reconnect people to a bigger reality, to imbue their stories with meaning beyond the traditional capacity of human interest journalism.

### Learning from Ernie Pyle

*AN AFFLICTION CALLED “SORRYNESS,”  
Elba, Alabama—They have a way of using the*

*word “sorry” down here that I’ve not heard in other parts of the country.*

*A listless, no-good, poor-paying fellow is known as sorry. You can be poor without being sorry. You’re sorry when you lack character.*

*One out of seven farm families in this county is now on government land. I asked how many really were in need of this kind of help. The answer was at least half. Probably half of that half are too sorry to get any good out of such help. But what I mean is that only half the farmers are doing well enough to live at all decently.*

*There is no real money now in Southern farming. If a fellow is straight, keeps his place clean, has a car and enough to eat, and sends his kids through grade school, that’s all any farm can produce here now....*

*And when you get down and mix in it, you can’t say it’s wholly caused by cruel landlords, by sharpster supply merchants, or by erosion. You can’t blame any individual, least of all the poor people themselves....No, it’s a combination of the landlord and the supply merchant and poor land and low prices and sickness and ignorance—in other words, it’s the whole system.*

*I haven’t much gone into detail about what the government has done here, because it’s much the same as in other places where they’re trying to recreate human beings. But they’re trying, through a thousand little pinpoints of practical education, to change the system. It’s a thankless job, for the system down here is as much a part of a man as his arm.*

*It will take generations to get the rural South raised above its system. Sorryness is a disease that America hasn’t paid much attention to before now. It will take a long time to purge it.*

*Maybe I get too worked up about things like this. Sometimes I think maybe a fellow should just shut his eyes and drive fast.*

*Last night, I went to see a movie called St. Louis Blues. Dorothy Lamour was in it, and it was set on the Mississippi and was very romantic and full of the lovely old things of the South. I came away thinking that maybe my recent pieces were all wrong, and that Hollywood is right. I should have made Coffee County romantic, and full of guitars, and happy, happy Negroes, and sweeping bows to the ladies.*

*Maybe I should, I don't know. But Hollywood has never seen all the pale dead people walking slowly around the red clay countryside.*

*March 20, 1939*

The Elba, Alabama, column puts people in the context of a system. It asks who is responsible for the problem, and who should fix it. It reads like a takeout or a backgrounder. It asks why, again and again. It resists the temptation to give us one non-sorry success story. And it ends by inferring that the story we are getting isn't the real story. That's a lot to accomplish in a short column.

Notice that, while many of Pyle's columns are profiles, others are inventories of what communities are doing to help people and why. Everyone—legislators, journalists—wants human interest stories. But human interest stories can backfire. The news is inherently reductionist. If the reader or viewer walks away without an understanding of the role of the community in addressing public problems, your hard work planting a story won't lead anywhere.

Nonprofit communicators need to carefully consider the composition of the frame before they tell the story. Ask yourself the critical elements of moving from the personal to the political. What is happening in the structure of our society that made this employer act in this way? How does the problem work—what forces drive it and how does it affect us all? What solutions are available? And what is our collective responsibility to fix it and to help out? What happens to “us” if we don't fix it?

When we tell the stories of the folks who “clean up, carry in and carry out,” as Robert Reich once put it, we must make sure we are telling tales of our broader responsibilities to each other. In this way, the “values” stories we are telling are about our unfinished business as a society, not merely the sad anecdotes of individuals who must be addressed through charitable responses.

### **Engaging People as Citizens, Not Consumers**

“By selecting whom you include in a discussion,” says Jay Rosen, “the press tells us whose world public life is, who knows about it, who acts within it, whose voices count, whose lives are relevant, whose concerns are central . . . Journalists make casting decisions. They decide

whom to cast in what roles in the drama of public life.

“To see people as citizens is to elevate them to a role they may not always do justice to, which is another way of saying that democracy is frequently disappointing. So, for that matter, is journalism. We are all frequently disappointing to each other, but we learn to live together by seeing each other as citizens, which means ‘somehow equal despite all differences.’ Seeing people as citizens is the art of finding that equal station to which all are entitled in a democracy, and reserving a place in the news for people when they occupy that station.”

Bill Moyers stated it best when he said it all comes down to whether you look out and see a nation of consumers or of citizens. Appealing to people as passive consumers often precludes our ability to portray and engage them in the business of public life. “I'm pro-choice on everything” reads a whimsical bumper sticker. Sounds good. But what is lost? Public schools, public parks, public housing, public broadcasting, public safety?

By contrast, the prevailing narrative of our culture is one of complete free will. The individual is a consumer and a lone protagonist. But she is not part of a broader collective, nor is she responsible for others except inasmuch as she chooses to be. She has no responsibility to inform herself of others who are different from her, as they are different by their own choosing. The notion of common ground is meaningless when the “common” has been privatized. In this world view, a citizen in Atlanta can view a newscast on the health status of babies in Anchorage with all the disinterested compassion of reading a *National Geographic* about whales in Australia: It's not about “us”; they are not “ours.”

And even if we were to be confronted with other people, other views, what would we do with that information? When the narrative is all about problems, and no solutions, people have little recourse to ideas of prevention and intervention. If what is asked of us are tears and charity, it is unlikely we will find our way to pragmatic action.

“News stories position us in a wide variety of ways—as spectators or as participants, as insiders or as outsiders, as voters, as consumers, as fans, as victims, as celebrants, as sentimentalists. Take the sort of story we commonly call a

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‘tear jerker.’ It puts us in the position of jerkee, the one from whom tears are pulled,” says Rosen.

Ernie Pyle often told the stories of people outside the realm of ordinary existence for many Americans. Not many of Ernie’s family members would ever meet a black sharecropper or a black scientist, an Okie or a Columbia professor. Ernie saw his job as explaining who these people were, as well as the forces that acted upon them.

Ernie Pyle’s America was not without skeptics. Pyle dealt with them by telling their stories, too. He would present a citizen’s opinions about the government; but he would also present “his side.” He argued with people and with reality. He talked back. But that talk was not the vituperative, mud-slinging of today’s talk shows—formats that have been shown to diminish participation in public life, not encourage it.

Even when Pyle covered people who believed in ideas he found shallow, he relayed them as part of the bigger story, and he felt obliged to cover them, and to critique them. But tone is everything, in news and public opinion. And Pyle’s tone is one that keeps the dialogue open.

### Learning from Ernie

*A JERSEYMAN’S VIEW OF THE NEW DEAL, Sparta, New Jersey—The man who fixes autos in a little town near here said if I could find five people in the town who would vote for President Roosevelt next year, he’d give me five dollars apiece for them.*

*“What’s the matter?” I asked him.*

*“Everything’s a big mess,” he said. “The Three-A\* has ruined the farmers around here. We pay big processing taxes, and the money all goes to the Midwest. Practically none of it comes back to the farmers around here.*

*“And the way they spend the money. See this road along here? From here down to that next telephone pole there used to be a row of nice big trees. Well, sir, they cut them all down, and then they dug a shallow ditch along the side of the road; then they put the dirt back in the ditch, then dug it out again and threw it on the other side. Then they put it back in the ditch again, and you can see for yourself they didn’t widen the road an inch, and I’ll be damned if it didn’t cost two thousand dollars. Such stuff as that!”*

*I suggested that President Roosevelt personally didn’t even know that road existed, so how could you blame him for doing that kind of work? Wasn’t it the fault of the local dispensers of work projects? And wasn’t even such wasteful work better than just paying the money out in straight relief, which would have had to be done otherwise?*

*The man didn’t know about that. It was just all a big mess. And anyhow, the guys doing that relief work were out-of-towners. His town didn’t have anybody at all on federal relief.*

*Only four people there were unable to scrape along somehow, he said, and the townspeople—not federal or municipal relief money—were taking care of them. The town isn’t very big; it doesn’t even appear on some maps. My guess would give it a population of five or six hundred.*

*“And the banks,” the man said. “There’s another thing. The bank examiners are a lot of kids who don’t know what it’s all about. Right here in this county the receivers and the examiners have accepted notes from the government that not a banker in New Jersey would have taken, and they threw out notes that within six months would have paid every cent. Such stuff as that!”*

*“Who are you going to vote for?” I asked.*

*He grinned for the first time. “Well, I don’t know,” he said. “There don’t seem to be anybody. Maybe I just won’t vote at all.”*

*August 10, 1935*

*\*Agricultural Adjustment Act. Passed in 1933, it sought to restore farmers’ badly sagging purchasing power by paying farmers to restrict their crop production and by imposing a processing tax on food processors. An amendment provided for lower-interest farm mortgages. POSTSCRIPT: President Roosevelt won reelection overwhelmingly in 1936.*

What Pyle did was keep the public dialogue going, explaining America to itself. We have lost both the language and the urgency for doing this. Again and again, he interjected himself as trusted intermediary in the discussion between different factions of Americans. He translated one to the other, under the broad banner of “us.” Ernie’s America was the original big tent.

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help people engage in the debate. Bring divergent opinions into the discussion. It's healthy for everyone to break down the stereotype that there are two sides to every issue. But talk back. Engage the reader/viewer in his or her capacity as citizen. Choose examples that average people can relate to. Interview your grocer, your hardware-store owner, your barber.

Throw these questions to the community: What happens when we ignore these problems? Will they go away? Will charity pick up the slack? What will this mean for our communities, our country? Refuse to let the problems be buried under bureaucracies. Remind the reader that we have ways to deal with big problems collectively. If a certain program isn't working, let's fix it, not destroy it altogether. American ingenuity can go a long way toward getting people engaged in constructive problem-solving.

### Telling a Big Story About Life in this Country

"By master narrative," Rosen writes, "I mean the story that produces all the other stories; or, to put it another way, the Big Story that lends coherence and shape to all the little stories journalists tell. In the Bible, the master narrative—the story that produces all the other stories—is the theme of creation and redemption, or the fall from grace and search for salvation. A master narrative is not a particular story journalists write; it is the story they are always writing when they tell the stories they typically tell. In election coverage, the master narrative is winning . . ."

For too long in this country, the master narrative has been dominated by the individual on the frontier—free to protect, defend, and provide for himself and his family. Anyone not in the picture is an outsider. The bonds of community are entirely voluntary and can be relinquished at any time. The body politic is to be viewed as a constraint on individual freedoms and to be used only as a last resort.

It doesn't have to be this way. This is not the only American narrative available to us. In 1896, that most famous American chronicler of the west, Frederick Jackson Turner, pointed another equally American direction for our collective storytelling: "These slashers of the forest, these self-sufficing pioneers, raising the corn and live stock for their own need, living scattered and apart," he wrote, "had at first small

interest in town life or a share in markets . . . The national problem is no longer how to cut and burn away the vast screen of the dense and daunting forest; it is how to save and wisely use the remaining timber." He ends by calling for the "revival of the old pioneer conception of the obligations and opportunities of neighborliness... In the spirit of the pioneer's 'house raising' lies the salvation of the Republic."

Turner points the direction for a new America. "Let us see to it," he writes, "that the ideals of the pioneer in his log cabin shall enlarge into the spiritual life of a democracy where civic power shall dominate and utilize individual achievement for the common good."

Nonprofit communicators must ask, again and again, whether the big story they are telling citizens helps them perform their duties better, helps them see important roles for both business and government in accomplishing our common purpose.

The vision of the good society, of what kind of "community" we want to create, is a powerful image, if we use it wisely, probing our own values as citizens responsible for creating and maintaining the greater good.

We can begin this task by taking our storytelling seriously. It may be one of our most powerful tools. If we can't find the public journalists willing to join us in this enterprise, we'll have to take on the job ourselves. We'll have to learn to tell the story that is right under our noses, in a way that invites America into the discussion. We must tell the stories of the people who pass through our classrooms, our clinics, our programs—in real people language. And just as important, we must tell the story of the places and forces that shape them, the places where they are lifted up or stuck. We must not make the mistake we have made in the past, talking about people as if they were programs with clothes on. We must step in and reintroduce Americans to themselves, to the shared fate that is the reality of life in this country.

We must begin to tell the stories in new ways, drawing from the material that presents itself to us and borrowing our soapboxes in the form of op-eds, guest editorials, letters to the editor, and talk shows. We don't have to write quite like Ernie Pyle. In fact, we don't have to *write* at all. Pyle is useful to us, as we struggle for models, because his style is approachable and demo-



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perform their duties  
better . . .

cratic. It lends itself to the kind of narrative we need to tell. It offers us a way in to the discussion. But each of us will have to learn to tell our story in language that is clear and true and compelling. And we will have to learn to tell these same stories in situations where those who can solve the problem are present.

Ernie is gone, but, as Charles Kuralt said, he's up there looking "over the shoulder of everybody who writes about America." Remember that the next time you sit down to write your annual report.

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### Endnote

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