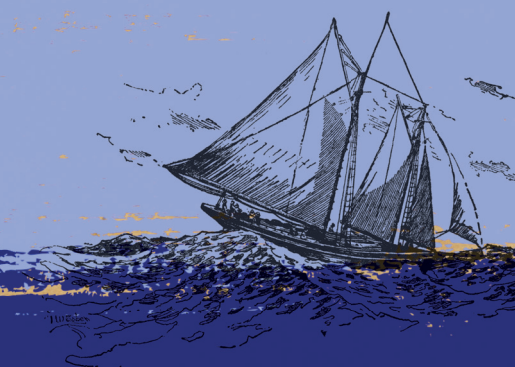


THE STORY STORY

DAVE BRICKER



*A Voyage Through the Islands of
Connection and Engagement for
Writers, Speakers, Professionals,
and Visionaries*

Dave Bricker offers a new and powerful approach to storytelling. Whether you're working on a marketing campaign, a business strategy, or a novel, you'll find useful tools and perspectives in *The Story Story* that will help your messages connect.

—Houston Gibson King, Ph.D.
International best-selling author of *The Happiness Book*

Also by Dave Bricker

The Dance

Waves

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A V O Y A G E

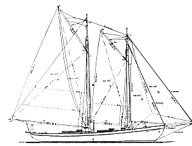
THROUGH THE ISLANDS OF CONNECTION
AND ENGAGEMENT FOR WRITERS, SPEAKERS,
PROFESSIONALS, AND VISIONARIES

BY

DAVID E. BRICKER

PERSPECTIVES ON STORYTELLING

EXPLAINED THROUGH STORYTELLING



ESSENTIAL ABSURDITIES PRESS

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Though the island settings in this book are based on actual places, the narrative is a work of fiction. Characters, names, businesses, places, and events are wholly fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or to actual events is purely coincidental.

The schooner illustration on the front cover of “The Ship We’re Here,” was rendered by I.W. Tabor for the original 1896 edition of *Captains Courageous* by Rudyard Kipling.

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Book design and production by Dave Bricker
Edited by Steven Bauer

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ISBN: 978-0-9862960-2-4

For Eva

Introduction

*The rationale behind *The Story Story* is simple: Too many books explain *why* stories are powerful tools for engagement, and *how* to use storytelling techniques to forge stronger connections with colleagues, clients, friends, and family members. But these books are *about* stories. As insightful as some of them may be, few of them are stories unto themselves—an oversight this book aims to remedy.*

The Story Story reads like a novel. The narrative—a Socratic dialogue of sorts—describes a group of diverse characters who encounter an unlikely teacher in a remote and beautiful wilderness. Together, they look into the sea, out into space, and deep within themselves to discover what stories are, why they're important, and how they work.

The Story Story is a non-fiction book wrapped in a novel, a literary anomaly that will surely have the librarians out marching in the streets with torches and pitchforks! You'll encounter practical storytelling advice and techniques, explore the thinking and

feeling behind stories, learn how stories flow through your psyche like blood through your veins, and find inspiration to rewrite the stories of your life and business. Hopefully, you'll enjoy a few smiles along the way.

If you're a writer or speaker, you'll find ideas in this book you can use. If your language is business or marketing or science, you may be surprised to find that your stories follow the same rules as those of your literary colleagues. The same is true if you're a visual, musical, or technological storyteller—or even a cook or a dancer. Though our individual stories are as unique as fingerprints, those magic swirls are found at the ends of fingers that share a common purpose—to touch and be touched.

The Happiness Congress

*T*he Happiness Congress was off to a less than ideal start. The setting was inspiring enough. The tiny island of Moraine Cay¹ in the northernmost reaches of the Bahamas offered a pristine white beach any postcard would covet. If those sands had ever been walked on, the wind and tide had long since erased any footprints. The clear, shallow waters of the Little Bahama Bank glowed as a stripe of vivid turquoise and aquamarine patches between the shore and the reef, a band of coral that extended from the seaward edge of the island like an encircling arm around a shallow, seagrass-bottomed anchorage where a lone sailboat bobbed gently. Beyond it, waves from the deep Atlantic driven by a brisk northeasterly wind exploded against the outer, barrier reef, sending spray high into the air. The pines of Little Abaco Island nine miles away—the “mainland”—and the radio tower at Foxtown rose at the far side of the glittering blue Sea of Abaco.

Small twin-engine planes from the South Florida coast had carried this year’s Happiness Congress participants—seven lucky

1. A cay is a small, tropical island—pronounced “key” like in the Florida Keys.

strangers—over freighters and cruise ships in the Gulf Stream; across a surreal tapestry of submarine colors and shapes dotted with green, sand-rimmed islands; over a patchwork of shoals and shallows on the backside of Abaco; and down onto a tiny airstrip in the pines on Great Abaco Island.

Three overpriced minivan taxis—*three!*—piloted by dark men chattering in marginally understandable Caribbean patois had carried the seven-member group a quarter-mile down the S.C. Bootle highway to the ferry dock where Charlie Albury waited with his outboard-powered launch.

Mr. Albury, with his Bahamian lilt, had been kind and encouraging as he'd answered questions about their tropical surroundings. He'd apologized for the spray as they set out against the wind across the Sea of Abaco, and he'd helped carry their bags down the dock to the beach on Moraine Cay when they'd reached their destination.

Charlie had sounded confident when he'd assured his passengers that Mr. King, their mentor and teacher for the ten-day retreat, would be delivered to the island within an hour or so. He'd suggested they walk around the quarter-mile-long island, enjoy the beach, perhaps take a swim, and explore their surroundings until King arrived. Everything about the trip up to that point had screamed “joyful island adventure!”

But that was four hours ago. The sun was setting behind the tops of the Abaco pines across the bay, and an incongruously chill February wind had stolen the romance from the setting.

Moraine Cay was not without shelter. A yellow and white wooden villa with a screened wrap-around porch stood not far off the beach. It was all quite charming except for the locked doors and the oversized “NO TRESPASSING” signs, subtitled “Seriously! This Means You!”

As the light faded, the Happiness Congress discussed whether “trespassing” included the invasion of the screened porch on the side of the house opposite the wind, especially if stranded visitors needed shelter from the elements. Micky Tomm argued that the goal of the owners of the house and the sign was to prevent intrusion and damage—which would only be a minor problem if they broke a screen and spent the night on the porch. They could always leave some money behind to cover repairs. Audrey argued that it was the owners’ prerogative to define the terms and boundaries—not the visitors’ to interpret them; the sign offered no caveats or exceptions.

Several of the castaways were able to raise a signal on their cell-phones, but nobody quite knew who to call or what to say the problem was. They had food—snack food, but at least it was food—enough to get through the night, nobody was sick or injured, and

they had all been delivered to exactly where they'd asked to be. The phone at the Happiness Congress office back in Orlando rang continuously through to voicemail. The prospects of anyone sending a boat out on a windy night to navigate through the coral heads and rescue them seemed remote. And where would they go once they got back to the mainland? Hopes for a comfortable evening rested on the elusive Mr. King turning up soon with the keys to the house and a compelling excuse.

They decided to hunt for driftwood. If enough could be found to make a suitable fire, they might stay warm on the beach. Barring that, Plan B would be to camp on the porch.

They found weathered planks and branches along with a few coconuts and a piece of blue sea glass. The scavenging operation was beginning to look as if it might produce sufficient fuel for a good-sized fire when Vincent, a young man who had arrived with a backpack and a guitar, asked if anyone had matches or a lighter. That scuttled plans for fire-building and dropped morale another notch.

As the temperature dropped, Micky Tomm grew frustrated. "You guys can freeze if you want, but I'm going to break through one of those porch screens and get some shelter from this wind. I'm cold enough already, and without a fire..."

He paused and pointed out at the anchorage. A lone, lanky, sandy-haired figure clambered over the side of the schooner² into a dinghy and began to row toward the dock.

A few minutes later, a shirtless middle-aged man with bronzed skin clad in a pair of zebra print exercise pants—his smile missing one front tooth—stared up from his small boat at the Happiness Congress’s welcoming committee on the rickety pier. “Howdy,” he said. “I’m Strider. I have a hot grouper stew on the stove if anyone is interested—and I’m guessing you all will probably appreciate some warm bunks once the temperature drops tonight.”

“You’re not Mr. King, are you?” asked Micky Tomm.

Strider laughed. “Nope. Just Strider.”

The castaways searched one another’s eyes.

Strider read their hesitation. “This isn’t the United States,” he assured them. “Nobody’s going to hold you up or push you under. And it’s ... what? Seven against one? You can spend the night on the beach if you want, but you’ll sleep better aboard *The Metaphor*.”

“You guys can do what you want,” Audrey told the others as she handed her bag down to the mysterious boatman and began to descend the ladder between his stabilizing arms, “but a hot stew and a warm bunk sound a lot better to me than freezing on a beach all night and feeling like a dumbass in the morning.”

Strider advised her to keep her weight low and centered until she was seated safely in the stern. “Anyone else? I can carry two at a time, plus bags.”

A half-hour and several trips later, the Happiness Congress and way too much luggage had been ferried out to the anchorage,

2. Schooner: A sailboat with two or more masts, the tallest of which is in back.

over the rope railing, and onto the wooden deck of *The Metaphor*. Down below, the travelers arranged themselves on settees on either side of the main cabin. The promised fish stew and a few bottles of wine quickly restored their spirits.

“Before we get to introductions,” Strider said, “will someone enlighten me as to how you ended up stranded on an island in the middle of the Bahamian wilderness? It’s not often that...”

Micky Tomm volunteered an explanation. “We come from all walks of life—I’m a pharmaceutical company executive; we have a musician and a teacher, a scientist, a writer, and a few others in our group. We’re all here for the Happiness Congress; we’ve taken time off to spend ten days talking about and studying the nature of happiness.”

Strider raised an eyebrow. “So you guys paid some serious money—I assume—to get marooned on an island in the Bahamas so you could study...”

“Getting stranded wasn’t part of the plan,” Walter, a tall man propped up in the forward corner of the settee assured him. He absentmindedly fingered his empty plastic wineglass. “We were expecting ten days’ accommodations and a well-respected teacher as part of the deal. I’m embarrassed to admit we all paid \$5000 in tuition plus travel expenses for this little adventure to nowhere.”

Strider twisted his chin and closed his eyes. After a long moment, he spoke. “Well ... you’re certainly not nowhere. In fact, if there

ever was a *somewhere*, you're smack dab in the middle of it. But there's no way you can know that yet.

"I have a suggestion—an offer to make—and if my instincts are right, you're all going to take me up on it. Why don't you spend the next ten days sailing on *The Metaphor* with me? I can't think of a better way to study happiness, and if anyone wants to jump ship, we'll be here in the Abacos—only a quick ferry hop and a short, overpriced taxi ride from the airport.

Micky Tomm looked Strider in the eye. "That's a kind offer," he said, "but I'm not sure why you're making it. What's in this for you?"

"Curiosity ... intuition ... a feeling. I was minding my own business out here in what you call 'the middle of nowhere,' and I suddenly found myself with an islandload of interesting folks aboard. The romantic, silly, or stupid part of me wants to find out why you landed on my deck. Maybe the answer to that question is 'happenstance,' but I can't resist the potential for this to turn into a story. The play has begun. I want to see how it ends."

"What about money?" asked Walter.

"Buy the groceries and be good company," said Strider. "I'm not here to prey on your misfortune. I'm going to go topside and check the anchor lines. You folks discuss it. I'll drop anyone who wants to bail out at the Green Turtle Cay ferry dock tomorrow."

Strider rose, offered a gentle bow to his guests, and ascended the companionway ladder.

Deliberations among the Happiness Congress were short. Strider seemed pleasant enough if a bit quirky. And if he was going to murder or rob them, he would have done so already. At sixty-two feet, the sailboat offered ample room and comfortable quarters. Ten days in the Bahamas aboard a classic wooden schooner certainly beat retreating to the airport and slogging home defeated.

Strider returned to the cabin. “Anyone leaving tomorrow?” he asked, grinning.

“We’re all in,” said Audrey. “But why were you so sure we’d accept your invitation? We don’t know anything about you. And I’m not convinced you don’t think we’re a bunch of bozos for dropping five grand on a ten-day workshop to study happiness.”

“I’m not convinced I don’t, either,” Strider confided. “I can’t think of a bigger oxymoron than ‘Happiness Congress,’ but there’s one thing I know for sure: You are all invested in your stories ... and stories are what happiness and the rest of the Essential Absurdities are all about.”

We Are All Salesmen

Strider retrieved a stack of blankets from a locker and suggested everyone retire to the deck of the schooner. He handed out the blankets as his guests climbed through the companionway. “Now that you’ve settled into your cabins, grab a cushion and a blanket and stake your claim on a piece of deck or cabin top.

“You’ll have to excuse me,” Strider continued, “but it may take me a few tries to remember all your names. A round of introductions will at least help me get started.”

Audrey sat to Strider’s left and spoke first. “We’re all just getting to know one another, too. We landed on the island and got caught up in playing *Robinson Crusoe*. I think we pulled together pretty well, but we never got past superficial greetings.”

Strider looked Audrey in the eyes. “Why don’t you start off, then? Tell us your name, what you’re passionate about, and what message you’d like to share with the world. Then we’ll go clockwise around the deck and come back to me.” Strider grinned comically. “We’ll save the best for last.”

“Okay, so I’m Audrey. I’m a counselor and a non-denominational minister. I have a Master’s degree in social work and a Ph.D. in psychology. I offer couples therapy, conflict resolution, grief counseling...”

“May I interrupt you?” interrupted Strider.

Audrey cocked her head. “Uh ... I suppose. Was my introduction not up to your standards, Captain?”

The happiness delegates chuckled over Audrey’s lighthearted challenge to Strider’s authority.

“I’m sorry to drop anchor while your sails are up, love, but you’re a lousy salesman. Tell you what; hold that thought. Let’s move on and we’ll come back to you. I suspect our friend sitting next to you will make my point. You are...?”

Walter bowed his head to his colleagues, made eye contact with each of them, and took a deep breath. “I can’t promise to know myself any better than Audrey knows herself, but I’m Walter. I’m a bestselling author, a two-time cancer survivor, and a motivational speaker. I offer workshops, coaching, and seminars on...”

“No, you don’t.” Strider pointed a finger and directed a stern gaze at his guest.

The thought occurred to several of the happiness delegates that a trip to the airport in the morning might not be a bad option after all, but then Strider’s features softened and he began to laugh. “I’m sorry,” he wheezed. “I’m having a bit of fun at your expense.

You probably think I'm woggly in the flooglebumpkin." Strider circled a finger around his ear. "But if you'll allow me, I'd like to test myself, here. You see, I live on a classic wooden boat in the Bahamas. I like to think of myself as happy—happiness being the magic sprinkles on the ice cream of life that you all came halfway around the world to learn more about. With your kind permission, in the absence of the venerable Mr. King, I'd like to take a stab at presiding over your Happiness Congress.

"But before you vote me off the island, I'll share a little secret about teaching. I know I just kicked your introductions into the scuppers, but we'll get right back to that. Do we have any teachers aboard?" Audrey nodded. Walter extended an index finger and Doug waved a tentative hand from across the circle. "Every good teacher learns as much from the students as the students learn from the teacher. I do *not* want to be a stuffy professor who feeds data to ignorant pupils. I want to be the *agent provocateur* who keeps the conversation off-balance and focused on the Essential Absurdities. You're free to put me in my place ...

"And sooner or later—probably sooner—I'll say or do something stupid. I'm extremely thick-skinned and you shouldn't waste an opportunity to have a laugh on me—laughter, of course, having plenty to do with happiness.

"So who here wants to push forward with the Happiness Congress under the misguided, irreverent, and nautically themed

guidance of Captain Strider ... and who wants to walk the plank? All who like pirate noises say, 'aye' and all who like horse noises say 'nay.'"

The deck of a wooden schooner anchored in the lee of a sheltering reef in crystal waters adjacent to a tropical island is no place to be disagreeable, especially after a hot bowl of fresh fish stew and a few glasses of wine—and especially after a stressful afternoon spent marooned in paradise. Applause and a chorus of approving *ayes*—and a piratical *aarrgh* or two—celebrated Captain Strider's ascension to the throne of the Happiness Congress.

After an exaggerated bow, Strider raised his palm to his circle of guests strewn about the deck. "With the ceremonies behind us, let me circle back to Audrey and Walter—and indirectly to all of you. It may be that some of you voted me in due to the lack of other candidates and not due to any great faith in my leadership. Let's rewind.

"I'm Strider. I'm forty-six years old. My blood type is O-positive. My shoe size is 11. I was born in Saint Anthony's hospital in Oklahoma City. My eyes are gray." Strider clasped his hands under his chin in mock swoon. "I like candle-lit dinners and walks on the beach ... but nobody cares about *any* of those forgettable factoids.

"Audrey, you offered me a story about what you *do*. That story may work in a world of concrete and glass office buildings and competitive corporate politics and societal pageantry, but it makes

no sense here. Your *real* story is far more valuable and beautiful; let's figure it out so you can carry it back to the land of clocks and calendars with you.

"Walter, you did the same thing; you told me what you *do* — seminars and coaching and the rest of your services.

"Audrey, with your permission, I'm going to pick on you because I stepped on you the hardest. . . ."

Audrey smiled. "Thanks, Captain. Shall I go fetch the cat-o-nine-tails for you?"

"There'll be no flogging here," Strider assured her, "just playful banter. If you're not laughing, you're not learning — another important piece of teaching wisdom that's too often overlooked.

"So, Audrey, let me rephrase my original question. *How would you describe yourself — as a person?*"

Audrey closed her eyes and gathered her thoughts. "I'm 45 years old. I'm single and amicably divorced, and 15 frustrating pounds overweight. I love the outdoors; I hike in the mountains and ride my bike. I like to read fiction and I love to travel. I own a house in Colorado where it's currently a lot colder than it is here. I have two dogs — both rescues and both mutts — and I keep a vegetable garden when it's not ski season. My daughter is in her first year of college . . . I can go on if you want more."

"No, that's perfect," said Strider. "But notice how *different* your two stories were. When you thought I wanted an introduction, you talked about your academic and professional qualifications;

I didn't get to know *you* at all. When you described your *self*, you talked about the place you chose to live and the things you love to do. You gave me ways to *connect* with you—human connection being one of the most powerful and important of the Essential Absurdities.

“So I ask all of you, how can anyone be *happy* if you have two or more completely different stories about who you are—and you don't know which one to use when?”

“Strider,” Walter said, “you accused Audrey of being a poor salesman. What did you mean by that?”

“I wondered when that bubble would break the surface.” Strider crossed his arms behind his head and lay back against a sail bag propped against the mainmast. “We are all salesmen—or *saleswomen* if gender equality in language is important to you. Some of us sell products; some of us sell services—and that's part of our business, which is part of how we survive in the urban world. That's probably why the ‘what we do’ story is the first thing to pop out of our mouths; survival is a big priority.

“But we are all driven to *connect* with other people. That's hard-wired into who we are. We want to be loved and trusted. We want to be listened to. We want to be understood. We want to share our ideas and dreams and philosophies and stories. We are all selling our *selves*, but we can't do that when we wear the ‘cloak of

respectability' story we're *told* will impress others. That story tells us to cover up who we really are with degrees and qualifications and achievements. Those things can be meaningful, too, but why present them in any context other than what we are passionate about? I don't care if you have a law degree, but I care if you're passionate about justice and fairness. I don't care if Audrey's a Ph.D. psychologist, but I do care if she's passionate about exploring how people behave and communicate. I don't care if Walter is a motivational speaker, but I do care if he's passionate about connecting with people and making them feel better about their lives and work."

Doug joined in from his perch on the aft cabin top. "So I could tell you I'm a high school art teacher, but that would just describe my function within society? If I tell you instead that I love painting and drawing and sculpting and I love teaching young people how to express themselves in creative..."

"Exactly!" Strider sat up straight. "Sell the benefits, not the features."

Strider allowed his audience a moment of silent contemplation and then continued. "Take a sailing trip aboard this boat as an example. The *features* of my ship include the number of bunks, the configuration of the sails, the fact that she's a traditional boat built in the 1930s, the horsepower rating of her engine, her eccentric captain, et cetera, et cetera. Those details may or may not

be of interest to various people, depending on whether they like boats or are shopping for an excursion.

“So what are some of the benefits?”

“She can carry a lot of people?” responded a voice from under the shadow of the main boom.

“No, that’s a feature, but we can turn it around and make it a benefit. What is the *value* to the prospective passenger—the customer—of *The Metaphor* being able to sleep eight guests?”

“You can bring your whole family on a cruise?” suggested Doug.

“You can have a meeting or a corporate retreat?” offered Walter.

Audrey smiled. “I think I’m getting this; there’s room aboard for more people to connect and share.”

“Exactly,” shouted Strider. “Hoist the ship’s colors to the mast-head for Audrey! Those are all good answers. People don’t care about what you *do*; they care about *who you are*; they care about what you have to *offer* them. They care about connecting with their families, colleagues, and communities. Sure, they want a board-certified dentist when their tooth hurts, but they also want a dentist who empathizes—one who understands that needles and drills are scary things. They want to *connect* with someone who can deliver a painless, fearless experience that delivers the functional results they need.

“How can we sell ourselves, and how valuable it will be for others to connect with us if the story we tell about ourselves has *nothing to do with our real worth*?”

“What about the name of this ship—*The Metaphor*? I could have called her *Aquatic Wooden Passenger Carrier*. That would have explained her function...”

“But it wouldn’t have explained anything about what she *offers*,” added Audrey.

Strider smiled. “Now you’re sailing in blue water. Good! What this ship is about will be revealed in time, but does anyone remember the two questions I asked when I kicked off our short-lived round of introductions?”

A 30-ish woman with her hair in braids spoke up. “I’m Kaitlin and I love to write—more details when it’s my turn—but I think one of the questions you wanted us to answer was what we were passionate about.”

Strider offered an upturned thumb of approval. “Good. And the other question?”

Doug jumped in. “What message do we want to share with the world?”

“Does everyone understand why I asked those *particular* questions?”

“Because you wanted us to share what we love and what we have to offer?” suggested Walter.

“An extra ration of grog and hard tack for you, Walter. We are all salesmen. What we are selling is that message we want to share with the world. What motivates us to share that message is our passion.

“What conveys our value to others is the *story* we choose to wrap our passion and our message in. Everything you know and think you know is wrapped in story. The story of our degrees and achievements is so much peacock tail-fanning. Those *features* are small details in the larger story of our *benefits* — of what we have to offer. Too many of us get sold on the ridiculous notion that a weak and poorly crafted story is the best way to describe who we are and what we’re all about. How does a résumé describe a person in any way that helps an employer decide whether or not they’re worth sharing forty hours a week of life with? Yes, qualifications are important, but hiring someone without bothering to learn what they find meaningful sounds like a recipe for unhappiness if I’ve ever heard one.”

Strider uncorked another bottle of wine and filled a few empty glasses before refilling his own. “It’s getting late and I’m an early riser. I’m getting a bit giblywobbled. Let’s coil this cable and move on to other topics. Did we get past grounds for mutiny?”

Kaitlin switched on her smartphone. “I’m a writer. I hope nobody thinks I’m too much of a geek for taking notes, but here’s what I got:

“We’re all salesmen, but too many of us sell the features and not the benefits — what we do instead of what we offer. People want to connect with us because they *relate* to us, and they can’t do that

unless we tell them who we are and establish why we're valuable to them. The closing of the deal is all about that connection, and I'm guessing that means in a practical, business sense, that the transaction shouldn't be the goal; it's a by-product of the relationship."

"You *are* a writer," encouraged Strider. "And a good one, too. Do continue."

"You also said that we wrap *everything* in a story—even the things we don't know—which doesn't make sense to me yet, but I imagine we'll get there. A story can be a narrative or a single word we use to label something, but ... and let me think about this for a moment ... a story is more than just a functional description; a powerful story conveys meaning and value. If it's about you, it conveys *your* meaning and value."

Strider raised his wineglass. "The student becomes the master. Will you write my book for me, dear?"

Kaitlin's blush was visible even in the starlight. "So the story we write about who we are has important consequences. If we're not telling people what our passion is and what our purpose is, our connections will be superficial. We might close a few transactions but we'll never get to what you call..."

"The Essential Absurdities," said Strider. "There's nothing quite so deep, wonderful, magical, and mysterious as the Essential Absurdities—especially when, as their name implies, they're *essential*."

“But we still have introductions to get through and warm bunks are waiting. Let’s get to know each other and save that topic for later.”

Who Are You?

*B*ack to introductions,” suggested Strider. “Name, location, passion, and purpose. Take a few moments to think about it if you need to; it’s not a test.”

“I’m Audrey from Boulder, Colorado. I love exploring the relationships between thinking and feeling, and the relationship between spirituality and rational thought. My message revolves around encouraging people to think, feel, and act broadly, deeply, purposefully, and meaningfully.”

“Now that’s an introduction!” said Strider, “Walter, you’ve got a tough act to follow.”

“I’m Walter from Boston—and as I said, a cancer survivor. I love the mind-body connection. I love the idea that a positive attitude can have physiological, healing effects on the body and that a healthy body is part of a healthy outlook. The message I share in my keynote speeches is tied to that. I encourage people to think of mental health and physical health as flipsides of the same coin.”

“I’m Vincent from Austin, Texas and I love playing music—mostly guitar—in a variety of styles: jazz, blues, rock, classical, folk. I love the idea that I can connect musically with people who don’t share my spoken language and with people who don’t know anything about music except that it makes them move their feet. My mission is to encourage people to listen deeply and experience the joy of playing an instrument.”

“My name is Micky Tommaczinsky—which is unpronounceable and unspellable so people call me Micky Tomm. I’m vice-president of a large pharmaceutical company in Chicago. My passions are both selfish and caring. On one hand, I love making decisions that combine billions of dollars with the skills and talents of thousands of people to keep an enormous business enterprise profitable and healthy. I get a thrill out of having my hands on the wheel of an aircraft carrier-sized company. It’s like being the benevolent dictator of a small country. But I also like that the products we make cure diseases. The end result of our efforts is comfort and hope for a lot of people. I sleep well at night knowing that’s where our profit comes from.

“As for my message for the world, I’m not sure what that should be. I could give you all some corporate clouddtalk about leadership, but I don’t think everyone can or should experience running a 150,000-employee public corporation. Maybe you all will help me figure that out on this trip.”

Strider nodded. “That’s okay, Micky. I’d rather hear an incomplete story that’s honest. When we answer life’s ‘fill-in-the-blank’ questions with fluffy filling, we prevent ourselves from discovering who we really are; we become the fluff we use to define our destinies, and spend our lives playing video games and watching reruns of *I Love Lucy*.”

A sprinkle of laughter followed Strider’s remarks. “I’ve been ‘off the grid’ for a while,” he apologized. “I live on a wooden boat in a blue wilderness. I don’t have a television ... and let me know if any of you come across that fancy phone I’m supposed to be able to get on the Internet with while you’re climbing around the boat. I’m not engaged with the media and electronic distractions that run through your lives—and that puts me out of touch with a lot of things and *in* touch with a lot of others. If you hear me get cynical about business and technology and city life, understand that I’m just like you. I’m invested in my story—and part of what I love about my story is that it’s not like *everybody else’s* story. Like all good storybook characters, I’m human, flawed, and fraught with contradiction.”

“So what about you, Captain Strider?” asked Micky Tomm. “What’s *your* story?” He looked around the circle at the guests who hadn’t yet introduced themselves. “I don’t mean to go out of order. It’s just that he got started and I wanted to...”

“Hear the rest of the story? Yes. That’s one of the peculiar things about stories; we naturally hate incomplete ones. Have you ever sat through a bad movie or read a lousy book because you had to find out how it ended?” Strider smiled at his audience who responded with nods of agreement. “Well, here’s another one....

“I grew up in a small town in Oklahoma where I lived a fairly typical white middle-class suburban existence. My father sold real estate. My mother was a poet and a very bad housewife. But as a poet she found beauty and comedy and tragedy in all of life’s mundane and meaningless people, places, and tasks. She inspired my two brothers and me to love books and language and to dig deeper into the world around us.

“I went to college and majored in English, though I found the program a bit too regimented and structured for my taste; it focused too much on writing eloquent prose and not enough on writing meaningful messages. I got As and Bs, drank a bit, chased some pretty girls, married one, and got a job as a high school college counselor.

“That was supposed to be it. I had the college degree and the job and the pretty wife and the Chevrolet. If you’d asked Betty, she would have told you the 2.7 children were waiting on the other side of the white picket fence I was about to hammer into the perimeter of the yard of the tidy white house we were about to get financing for.

“My job as a guidance counselor got me in touch with all sorts of things that people study and how those things led to various jobs people ultimately do to buy milk and Cheerios and lawn mowers and barbecue grills, but something about it didn’t feel right. I didn’t realize it consciously at the time, but I was helping young people write stories about what they were going to *do* instead of what they wanted to *stand for*. As a guidance counselor, I didn’t feel I was offering very good guidance—and when I did start offering what I considered ‘good guidance,’ the school administration didn’t think too highly of it.” Strider raised an administrative eyebrow.

“And then my Aunt Freddie died. Betty and I got on a jet and went out to Kennebunk, Maine one cool New England March weekend for the funeral, and there she was—a wooden John Alden schooner up on blocks in a boatyard with a ‘For Sale’ sign on her. She’d had a lot of work done on her—and she certainly needed some more—but spring was coming and she was ready to drop in the water.

“I didn’t think about it much at first because it seemed like an unobtainable and frivolous fantasy, but I had always loved adventures at sea—pirates and wooden ships and swords and cannons. All those old Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad books and those Sterling Hayden movies I’d loved in my childhood kept bubbling up in my mind.

“Then they read the will. Turns out my tough old Aunt Freddie had been hoarding cash since the Great Depression and a chunk of that went to me. She kicked over the house of excuse cards I’d been living in and I found myself at a very important crossroads in my life.

“That evening after the funeral, Betty starting talking about good neighborhoods to buy a house in and what names we’d give our first child if it turned out to be a boy or a girl. I just broke down at the table—I’m sure the other restaurant patrons got treated to quite a sideshow that night.

“I don’t remember a word I said to her. I’m pretty sure I begged her to come with me, but at the end of the evening, she got our savings account and the car and the furniture and all the rest of our stuff, plus half of Aunt Freddie’s inheritance money and a broken heart. I left with enough money to buy the schooner and pay for repairs, updates, and supplies.

“I could spend the rest of the night telling you stories about boats and boatyards and how a 62-foot schooner on the ocean is a different beast altogether than a 12-foot Sunfish on a lake at Camp Winnetonka, but the divorce and my decision to become a boat bum happened seven years ago. The important thing is not what all those stories are about, but that I have them. My life is richer because I stopped myself from writing the typical, boring life story that had been prescribed as a cure for my ‘imaginative

curiosity disorder' and chose to write an exciting one ... and here we sit talking about stories.

"So to complete the introduction: I'm Strider. I live on a sailboat currently located in the Bahamas. I'm passionate about stories and sailing and how the latter provides a perfect metaphor for the former. And my message for the world is that a life well-lived is full of meaningful stories that bring us closer to the Mystery."

Doug clapped and that sent a ripple of light applause around the circle of guests. "That's a great story!"

"Marvelous!" agreed Micky Tomm.

"You're not the first people to tell me that," said Strider. "The story doesn't necessarily make *me* great, but after we get past the Essential Absurdities, I'll share some thoughts on what *does* make a story great.

"But we're still not finished with introductions and I'm not the only one yawning."

Strider gestured at the next guest.

"I sort of introduced myself earlier, but I'm Doug from Miami—which means I probably had a shorter trip to get here than the rest of you. I'm an art teacher because—well, because I love art. I'm also a graphic designer, which means I find ways to put art to work for people. My message to the world is that creativity is important and valuable, even when you can't measure its worth on a spreadsheet." Doug nodded to his left.

“I’m Kaitlin from Seattle. I love the idea that you can take something abstract like an idea or an experience and convert it into squiggly marks on a page. If you do it artfully, others can decode those marks and understand your experience or idea. I guess my message to the world—in light of the discussions we’ve already had—is that literacy is an important vehicle for connection. The better people become at reading and writing, and the more they do, the better able we are to share what we see and learn.

“And if no one objects, I’ll be our self-appointed note-taker and secretary.”

“That’s cool,” said Vincent. “I think a lot of what you just said about letters on a page can also be said about *notes* on a page.”

“*Click*—another connection,” observed Strider. “But if Kaitlin will make a note to pick up that thread later, we’ll finish up the intros.”

“Aye, Captain,” replied Kaitlin. “One more to go.”

“I’m Lenore from New Mexico,” offered the last guest. “I’m an astrophysicist and a mathematician at Los Alamos labs. I get to be the exception to all those jokes; what I do literally *is* rocket science. My passion is expanding what we know about the Universe and what’s in it and the rules it abides by. My mission—which I haven’t thought much about before tonight—would be to encourage people to explore the world with an open mind. Too many people

grab onto a ‘fluffy’ story—to use your word, Strider—that makes it easy and safe and comfortable to explain the unknown. I doubt science will ever explain everything, but the more we learn, the more we’re *able* to learn. My message is ‘learn, explore, and grow.’”

“The butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker have spoken,” announced Strider in a deep, deliberate, story-telling voice.

“Now take a moment and look around the circle of Happiness Delegates trying not to fall asleep on the deck. I’ll bet everyone here remembers everyone else’s name. Try it.”

After a pause, everyone laughed with surprise. “Yeah, I remember everyone,” said Micky Tomm. “Me, too,” said Audrey. “I’m pretty sure I’ve got all the names,” added Vincent. The rest of the group nodded and smiled.

Strider continued. “As I said when we first started introducing ourselves, nobody cares what your degrees are or what school you went to or what your blood type is, what hospital you were born in, or what you do. People care about your *story*—about what you’re passionate about—about what you have to share with *them*. When you shared your passion and your mission instead of your qualifications, everyone here *connected* with you and what you care about. That’s why they remember your name.

“And collectively, we’re writing a story about *eight* characters off on a sailing adventure. Those characters had better be memorable

or our readers are going to wander off. Even *Gilligan's Island* only had seven castaways—though I bet anyone here who's over 45 can name them all."

"This is great stuff!" said Audrey. "I love it, but how do you put your story on a business card?"

"Make a note of that, Kaitlin," suggested Strider. "Doug the designer is here, and I suspect he'll have some suggestions to make about branding.

"Tomorrow morning, we'll get into some diving and sailing, and then tomorrow after we're anchored up at Green Turtle Cay, we'll get into the Essential Absurdities."

Watercolors

Light streamed through *The Metaphor's* ports and deck prisms. Bleary-eyed passengers followed the smell of pancakes and coffee to the main cabin. Lenore and Walter arrived first. Kaitlin only wandered in after her colleagues' laughter roused her from her bunk.

"How'd everyone sleep?" inquired Strider as he flipped another pancake.

Vincent raised his coffee cup. "I was out *cold!*"

"Me, too," said Audrey. "I haven't slept that well in years."

Walter smiled contentedly and offered a simple, "Mmmmm."

"Anyone need a refill on coffee?" asked Strider. "I can make another pot."

Micky Tomm and Kaitlin raised empty mugs.

Strider held up his spatula. "Today's storytelling topic is 'water.' You're going to spend the next ten days living and traveling in it and on it. In fact, you're about 80% water yourselves — physically

and mentally. You've already experienced the benefits of sleeping on it while it rocks you gently and gurgles past the hull.

"Since you're my captive audience, I'm going to force a short geography lesson on you to start your day." Strider handed out a nautical chart and a cruising guide for his guests to pass around and then continued.

"Think of the Bahamas as a small continent adjacent to North America. Most of that land is submerged; the water's about ten feet deep. The name 'Bahama' comes from the Spanish *baja mar* which means 'shallow sea.'

The Abacos—the northernmost Bahamas—consist of a 112-mile-long 'mainland island' that's really the two islands of Great Abaco and Little Abaco separated by a small tidal creek. To the north and east of that lies the Sea of Abaco, a shallow bay with a sand and seagrass bottom. Beyond that lie the 'out-islands.' Some of these are tiny green jewels like the one I rescued you from yesterday. We'll visit others that have had settlements on them for over two hundred years. Shallow water extends about a mile beyond the islands—mostly sand patches, seagrass, and scattered coral heads, and then you get to the drop-off. The third largest barrier reef in the world rises to the surface there from about twenty-five feet of water to where it plunges to thousands of feet. That's where you saw all that spray blasting up off the horizon if you were looking out to sea yesterday. After that you'll

find miles and miles and more miles of deep, cobalt blue North Atlantic Ocean.

“That barrier reef is a beautiful place to snorkel and explore, but with eight people aboard and only one of my two small rowing dinghies currently in the water, the story of us all getting out to that reef and back is one I’m—shall we say—unwilling to invest in. But Moraine Cay—the *one* island we happen to be anchored off of—provides a unique opportunity for us to explore what’s happening *in* the water. Just to windward of us is a coral strip that extends from the tip of the island out about a quarter-mile. It’s within easy swimming distance and the tide is nearly slack—which means we’re all going in the water.

“Put on your bathing suits and we’ll meet on deck in ten minutes. In the *aft* locker—the one in the back end of the boat which you newly nautically initiated types will henceforth refer to as the ‘lazarette’—you’ll find a big bag of masks and fins and snorkels. Find some gear that fits and jump in. It’s winter and it’s going to be *cold* until you get used to it, so the faster you get in, the faster you’ll get acclimated and start having fun.”

“Aren’t we supposed to wait an hour after eating before we get in the water?” asked Kaitlin.

“Ah ... and here we see the dark side of stories,” replied Strider. “Long ago—probably back in the ’30s or ’40s—some mommy reasoned that if little Johnny was full of Oscar Meyer wieners

and Fritos and chocolate cupcakes, his body must be diverting its resources to converting all that food into energy and poop—and therefore he'd have fewer resources to devote to the muscles in his arms and legs—the muscles he'd need for swimming. This theory sounded plausible and oh so deliciously erudite so she shared it with the other women in her mahjong group and they agreed it made perfect sense. The next thing you know, they were all sharing this fabrication at the hair salon, and in the checkout line at the Safeway—the end-result being that millions of children who were amped up on sugary foods that were far more damaging than a dunk in the pool on a full stomach had to writhe and whine and convulse and cry while their mommies forced them to wait out their sugar blasts on *terra firma*.

“A plausible story—or even worse, an *implausible* story—can spread like measles if enough people are willing to believe it without question—and this is where evils like wars and racism and the notion that you actually get better deals on Black Friday come from.”

The happiness delegates responded with a round of hearty applause.

Strider bowed. “I went off on a rant, didn't I?”

Kaitlin giggled. “I guess I'll go put my swimsuit on.”

Twenty minutes later, the group had suited up, finished screaming hyperbole about the cold water, adjusted masks and snorkels,

and made their way to the reef. Strider swam with the dinghy in tow and anchored it just behind the coral. Removing his snorkel mouthpiece, he said, “Float on the surface or dive down and explore. Keep track of how you feel and what you see.”

When confronted by the captivating array of sea life, the swimmers soon forgot about the cold. Living things of every conceivable shape and color entertained the happiness delegates for the next hour. Vincent swam down under a coral arch. Doug and Lenore marveled when Strider pointed out a paisley peacock flounder camouflaging itself on a coral head. As his guests grew more confident, they spread out. Walter spotted an octopus slinking through the coral. Micky Tomm rose to the surface over a grass patch with a large, weed-covered conch shell in each hand. Strider retrieved a spear from the dinghy and used it to procure a half-dozen lobster and a small collection of fish.

After the crew had ascended the boarding ladder and rinsed themselves and their gear with fresh water, Strider suggested a plan. “Green Turtle Cay is about 33 miles southeast of here. That’s about a six-hour sail. We’ll anchor up there tonight and go ashore in the morning. The old colonial settlement of New Plymouth is there along with two beautiful, protected anchorages. We’ll pick up some basic food and supplies—which we need to do because I wasn’t planning on having seven guests aboard—and then if the weather cooperates, we’ll bang on over to Marsh Harbour the

next day where they have a big grocery store and anything you forgot to pack.”

In short order, Strider hauled up the big mainsail and the anchor. The jib³ at the front of the boat followed and *The Metaphor* was under weigh.⁴ Once the three sails were set to his satisfaction, Strider engaged the self-steering vane. The vessel cheerily piloted herself on a steady course across the brilliant tapestry of blues and greens, heeling gently with the dinghy charging along in her wake. Strider took a final glance at the compass, took a few visual bearings on the surrounding islands, and assembled the happy happiness delegates on deck.

“Let’s tell some stories about water,” suggested Strider. “How did it feel to be out on the reef this morning?”

“Exhilarating,” said Audrey.

“That was gorgeous,” crowed Kaitlin.

“That was one of the most beautiful places I’ve ever seen,” offered Micky Tomm.

“Inspiring,” said Lenore.

Strider adjusted the rim of his battered straw cowboy hat. “So it’s safe to say that you all had a *powerful* experience this morning?”

3. *Jib*: The sail at the front of a boat — usually raised on a “forestay” that runs from the mainmast to the bow or bowsprit.

4. A ship was originally thought of as being under “weigh” once the anchor had cleared the sea floor. The phrase derives from “weighing anchor” and not from the common misunderstanding that the ship is making her “way” through the water.

“Absolutely,” nodded Audrey and Doug in unison.

“Now what if I were to suggest a different type of swim?” continued Strider. “What if I offered to take you offshore to swim in the blue water where it’s a mile deep?”

“That sounds dark and freaky to me,” said Vincent.

“Yeah, I think I’d sit that one out,” agreed Doug.

Strider continued. “So clear shallow water is exhilarating, but deep, dark, mysterious water is...”

Kaitlin broke in. “There could be sharks or killer whales or giant squid or God-knows-what down there. I’m not swimming in *that!*”

“No worries,” assured Strider. “If we see any deep water on this trip, we’ll stay aboard the ship. But since we have our psychologist, Audrey, with us, let’s see if she and Carl Jung can offer insights into your reactions to water of different depths.

“Audrey, can you enlighten us about archetypal symbols and about the significance of water in dreams and stories?”

Audrey gathered her thoughts and took a deep breath. “Certain symbols are common to all people — or at least common to people of particular cultures. For example, sand probably has a different symbolic meaning to Bedouins who live in the desert than it does to you and me. A car would probably not appear in a Bedouin’s dreams, but in urban industrialized society, a car in a dream can be assumed to be symbolic of ‘your way of getting around in the

world.’ Shortly after I finished my studies and moved to Colorado, I had a dream that I was driving my old car around in my new town, and that I was having trouble finding my way. This was my subconscious expressing anxiety over the contrast between my old, academic life and my new, natural, small town, mountain lifestyle.

“So an archetypal symbol is one that’s shared by most members of a society. If you look at fairy tales, you’ll find symbols like treasure maps, golden keys, dragons, princes and princesses—the list is endless—and these symbols are part of the psycho-spiritual fabric of our culture.

“In isolated tribal cultures, symbols from the environment like mountains and owls and foxes and rivers seep into the collective unconscious and assume the roles of deities or spirits that deliver messages through dreams. In industrial culture, we end up with cars that represent our perspectives, audio and video discs that represent memories and choices, et cetera. But because our society changes so rapidly and because our experiences with the surrounding environment, culture, and technology are so varied, our symbolic language is a bit jumbled up. People like me help sort out the psychic mess.”

Strider checked the compass and walked to the windward side of the deck so he could scan the horizon ahead of the ship before

returning to his sailbag throne. “Excellent. So what is water in the language of symbols?”

“Water is symbolic of the unconscious. If you dream about water, you’re usually dreaming about feeling or thinking. Have any of you ever had a dream where you can breathe underwater?”

Most of the happiness delegates nodded.

“That’s usually you getting in touch with your *sub*conscious. Something ‘below the surface’ is being revealed.”

“Good,” said Strider. “So if you were to dream about clear, clean water with beautiful living things and vivid colors in it where you could easily see the bottom, what would that mean?”

Audrey smiled. “That dream would be about clarity. If you could see into your subconscious mind and find that it was beautiful, and if you could see the metaphorical bottom and know there was nothing dangerous or threatening there, I imagine you’d wake up feeling pretty confident and complete.”

“And what if you dreamed you were far out to sea swimming in deep water? Kaitlin was less than thrilled about that idea.”

“That’s the nature of the subconscious, isn’t it? We aren’t in complete control of ourselves. Because of those fifteen pounds I mentioned, I know I shouldn’t eat chocolate cake but when it’s in front of me, I find it hard to resist. People lose their temper and say things in anger. Sometimes we speak or act without any

conscious awareness of the conflicts or problems that motivate our behavior. All those sharks and sea monsters down there in that black void can come up and bite you at any moment....”

“... even if the odds of it happening in the actual, physical ocean are remote,” interrupted Strider. “More people are killed by vending machines every year than by sharks. The story of the infinitely deep, dark, dangerous ocean is a reflection of the *internal* world more than it is a picture of the *external* world. Deep ocean water is just as clear as that gin we swam in on the reef this morning. We even use adjectives like ‘deep’ and ‘shallow’ to describe ideas and experiences. Where do you think words like that come from, and what does this tell us about stories?”

Micky Tomm spoke up. “I guess we experience things on two levels, even when we don’t know it. There’s the literal level and there’s the symbolic level. We can enter a situation and use our senses to evaluate what it *is*, but without being aware of it, we may react more to what it *means*. Also, the physical world gives us things like cars and keys and sea bottoms that our subconscious ‘borrows’ so it can map meanings onto them. These two worlds are reflected onto one another.”

“You know what’s cool?” offered Vincent. “I like the idea that this could be a two-way street. The conscious mind can be influenced by the subconscious mind, but if I surround myself with clear water and white sand beaches and green islands and blue

sky, doesn't that have a positive effect on parts of my psyche that I can't access with my rational mind? If the subconscious creates symbols and archetypes out of things it borrows from the physical world, why not give it beautiful things to borrow?"

Strider clapped slowly in approval. "...Which is why you feel so much better when you're on a beach or mountain top or blasting across the Sea of Abaco in a wooden boat with the wind pushing you past a string of beautiful islands. I doubt anybody ever had a peak experience while they were stuck in traffic or waiting in a checkout line to pay for their groceries.

"And we use this dual consciousness for effective storytelling." Strider opened his arms. "It's related to 'selling the benefits, not the features,' which we spoke about last night. So many advertisements and sales pitches—and introductions—talk about what the product or service or person *is* or *does*. That's all literal stuff. When we speak about what the product or service or person *means*, and how that meaning is relevant to what our listener naturally finds meaningful, we engage them at a much deeper level.

"Meaning is one of the Essential Absurdities. We'll get deeper into that, but though meaning can't be measured, it's like love, God, and pornography; you know it when you see it—or feel it. In fact, though it can't be defined or calculated or examined in a test tube, some philosophers argue that the one, single, overarching theme in all of human literature and endeavor is the search for

meaning. Whether Kaitlin is writing a poem or Lenore is calculating the orbit of a comet or Walter is encouraging an audience to live a healthier lifestyle or I'm sailing around proselytizing to a band of abandoned happiness seekers, we are all engaged in finding and creating meaning."

Strider paused before continuing. "And this will lead shortly to something truly meaningful to all of us: With the caveat that we'll soon resupply at Green Turtle Cay and gather the resources to assemble better fare, I'll put together some peanut butter sandwiches.

"Kaitlin, you're our official ship's secretary. Give me just a minute to go below and grab some lunch-making supplies. Then you can regale us with one of your eloquent summaries."

"Aye aye, captain." Kaitlin's swinging braids followed her forward to where she stood and leaned against the foremast. "This is pretty heady stuff considering we haven't been here twenty-four hours yet, but let me see if I can put it together."

She smiled professorially. "Point number one: there is no need to wait before swimming if you've just eaten."

"Point two: there's no need to number these points so I'll stop.

"Point ... or next ... or whatever: We live in a world of *literal* people, places, things, and actions, but we also live in a world of *abstract* symbols and meanings that lie beyond our senses. We perceive these worlds in conscious and subconscious ways that

overlap and communicate. The subconscious borrows literal objects from consciousness and maps meanings onto them. The conscious mind dumps an avalanche of sensory data into the subconscious—most of which, I imagine, it filters out and discards as meaningless. So if we want to connect with others, the stories we tell have to be *relevant* and *meaningful*. Otherwise our messages go in through consciousness, down into subconsciousness, and out with the psychic garbage. For a message to stand out against the cacophony of words and images, it must be relevant to your listener's personal search for meaning. Your story will be perceived on a conscious, literal level, and also on an abstract, subconscious level. If it doesn't pass the meaningfulness test, it won't hold anyone's attention for long.

"To use Audrey's example, most western people—the 'normal' ones who don't live on sailboats in the wilderness—are surrounded by cars." Kaitlin smirked playfully at Strider. "You drive around in them, shop, go to work, as part of your interaction with a literal world full of concrete objects and actions. When you dream, those same objects and actions are used as symbols that represent non-literal feelings. Your car—or maybe your old car in your new neighborhood becomes a vehicle—pardon the pun—through which you can create a literal reflection of the abstract. If you're experiencing stress because you're adjusting to a new environment, the only way you can wrap your literal mind around that

is to write a story about it. The subconscious mind does that for you.

“Meaningfulness and relevance come into play when we tell stories in the conscious world. If you tell a car story to a remote tribesman in the Andes, it won’t resonate with his subconscious ‘vocabulary.’ If you tell a car dealer or a mechanic or a racecar driver a car story, their daily exposure to cars is different from yours; your story might not resonate with them the way you hope. If your words are not relevant and meaningful to your listener on a subconscious level, they’ll be tuned out or quickly forgotten.

“Vincent suggested that it’s valuable to surround ourselves with an environment that contains positive and beautiful symbolism. If everything we send ‘down below’ is psychic junk food, we could end up suffering from psychic malnutrition!”

Audrey chimed in. “I’m going to steal that if you’ll let me.”

“I’d be honored,” Kaitlin said with a smile.

“*Connection* happens when we communicate an idea that is *meaningful* to everyone engaged in the interaction. Walter, you probably feel this from your audience when you give a speech. Doug, you probably get this when your class is interested in your lecture or engrossed in a creative project under your direction.

“In fact, as I think about it, the whole notion of *engagement* must run deeper than many people think. The fancy car or the low-cut dress or the slick business card are just *invitations* to engage.

They may get brief attention in the literal world, but unless the subconscious mind stops dismissing them as sensory junk, they won't be effective messages.

"If we understand the *meaningful* symbols that are shared by a society—archetypes—we find tools for connecting and engaging. This is probably why so many books and articles are called *Seven Keys to Success* or *Three Steps to Raising Happy Kids* or *The Road to a Happy Marriage*. Keys, steps, and roads imply opening locked doors, ascension, and moving forward. Their symbolic content transcends their literal meanings—nobody is going to turn a physical key or climb a physical stairway or hike down an asphalt road to accomplish those goals.

"And finally, we are all engaged in a lifelong search for meaning. Effective storytellers—whether they're artists, teachers, scientists, or businesspeople—understand this, at least intuitively. By understanding the art of connection and engagement, they create meaning in their own lives and in the lives of those they engage with. Financial success and survival in the physical, literal world are only *by-products* of engagement in the unseen world that lies beyond sense and intellect. Stories are the bridge that makes that possible."

Strider handed out sandwiches. He glanced once more at the compass, scanned the water around the ship, and laughed to himself. "Anyone want a glass of water?"

