

## Digital Storytelling with Stewart S. Warren

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*The art of digital storytelling creates a profound shift from being externally directed by the world media machine to an experience of empowerment that involves the sharing of stories using state-of-the-art technology. This process honors individuals, families and cultures by giving value to personal experience and is therefore a trustworthy tool for cultural preservation and global understanding.*

### Storytelling

empowerment through personal and group expression

**The ancient custom of storytelling**, sometimes employing art and ritual, has been our primary means of education for thousands of years. The telling of stories has provided us with a way to teach values, share customs, preserve culture and develop personal, familial and tribal identity. As well, storytelling has often utilized drama and entertainment as a means to gain access to subconscious realms and profound spiritual experience.

**Storytelling teaches us about how to behave** in social context and how to overcome obstacles; about exceptional courage and sacrifice; and about our culture and how we, as humans, are to interact with it.

**Personal storytelling empowers the storyteller** in a way that is natural and nonviolent; can give the storyteller a greater sense of personal and tribal identity and pride; can bridge gaps between class, culture and other forms of diversity and even denial; and can provide the audience with understanding and compassion

### Technology

the digital avenue, some new tools

**The advancement of computer technology** has been as predictable and natural as making fire. Human beings have continually developed more complex and empowering means of utility and expression. Some have said that computers are a very crude representation of how our minds work and how creation occurs. One thing is certain, they are not outside nature but belong to the earth as surely as a spider web or a stone ax. The challenge, of course, is in how we choose to use these emerging tools.

The computer, and particularly multimedia technology and the Internet, provide us with an increased opportunity for connection among individuals and cultures and an increased potential to realize our global relationships and responsibilities.

**Computers are now available for use** by a majority of individuals in the U.S. and are becoming more and more available in other countries; are programmed to be increasingly "user friendly"; are becoming a primary vehicle for communication; and are being included in school curriculums at earlier and earlier ages.

**Multimedia technology via the computer** which incorporates the use of music, voice, image, script, video and animation is becoming a desired pastime in which a certain type of learning occurs on a regular basis. Multimedia: video, television and computers, are engaged more and more often for both leisure exploration of the world around us and for homework assignments from a variety of educational entities.

## Digital Storytelling

an ancient and vital forum evolving with technology

**Digital Storytelling is a process** of using scraps of multimedia materials such as snapshots, music clips and other memorabilia from our lives, and combining them with our own words on a computer to create a unique story. Instead of listening to stories constructed and told by media professionals, everyday people are now telling their own stories using this dynamic format.

**Digital storytelling provides a means of expression** that is largely free of corporate filters; creates an environment where people can express as opposed to being passively entertained; provides opportunities for people who have not previously been heard; can honor and preserve diversity among individuals and cultures; and can convey the universal within the personal thus offering a profound vehicle for empowerment, understanding and compassion.

*Many of the ideas and some of the phraseology in this narrative originated with Dana Ashley, and Nina and Joe Lambert. Many thanks to these teacher/pioneers.*

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When I first met and began working with Joe and Nina Lambert from the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California I knew that I had found a dynamic yet peaceful tool for revolution delivered by competent warriors. For me, Digital Storytelling is about confronting and replacing the dominant consumer driven media machine that provides only a one-way relationship with a more honest venue by using the same corporate technologies to empower individuals and groups as they tell their own stories concerned with their own histories and neighborhoods. As activist, teacher and poet I experience Digital Storytelling as a good reason to return to the town plaza and find out what's really going on.

The main goal of my workshops is for people to learn by direct experience the power of telling personal stories using contemporary media as a vehicle for building self esteem, preserving culture and bridging gaps. Participants in the workshops are provided with state-of-the-art software applications and hands-on training in the use of these tools. Our primary focus, however, is on the creation of a "poem-sized" story which is written and recorded by the participants and provides the narrative for their digital movie. Material from their "digital scrap book" such as old photos, audio recordings including music and even small clips of video along with title pages and a variety of transitions and effects are then compiled on a time line just as in the making of larger movies. At the end of the workshop, and after much hard work and mutual support from other "storytellers", participants take turns viewing one another's creations and are then given a CD with their digital story which is usually 3 to 5 minutes in length.

Operating from this same basis of simplicity and honesty I also co-create multimedia presentations as vehicles for sharing about organizations and businesses which promote and serve humanistic values. With intentions of respect and collaboration the new digital technologies can become useful tools instead of false gods. The distinction between exploitation and sharing with people should be clear to anyone and yet it seems important to repeatedly take the time to anchor ourselves and our projects in values that are uplifting and mutually respectful. For this reason when I work with people I ask them to consider not only what story needs to be told, but for what reason, and to what end. Simple questions like these can often facilitate a shift from old paradigm advertising to more responsible expressions that take into consideration the quality of our survival in this new millennium. After all, storytelling, like other expressions is a responsibility in which we create our understanding of the world and offer it to others.