

StoryCatcher

by Christina Baldwin

There is an art to finding, writing and telling great stories. For readers interested in strengthening their own story-telling skills, Christina Baldwin's book **STORYCATCHER** is engrossing.

Baldwin defines personal storytelling as the practice of the art of connection: listening to a well-told tale, we travel our own memories and gain new insights from someone else's way with words.

She uses the structures and rhythms of myths, fairy tales and legends to create a "deliberate story" out of life events and reflections on personal experience:

- **Set the scene**, using sensory images and descriptions to answer "who", "what", "where", "when", and "why"
- **Follow a story grammar**, using stock characters and a conflict or challenge to start the hero on a journey, and create an arc of suspense.
- **Use a narrative frame**, creating the beginning (set the stage), middle (set the plot in motion) and ending (an outcome, a resolution of the creative tension)

In Baldwin's world, "story" is the **narrative thread** of our experience, not what *literally* happens, but what we make out of what happens, what we choose to remember and what we tell each other. "Story catching" is a powerful form of **listening attentively** to others in ways that create and hold a space for each of us to tell a hero's story, or a survivor's tale, where we are the main protagonist. A most intriguing notion is the **spiral of experience**, a mnemonic device she uses to explain how reflecting on an event or incident in your life can help you find the "*the nugget of meaning, humor, heartbreak, insight*" inside it.

Baldwin introduces storytelling principles and elaborates the skills needed for performing stories with simple, well-thought-out rules for conducting "story circles" in a variety of settings. She encourages us to succeed in becoming heroes in our own lives by finding stories, telling them well, and listening attentively.

It's a good read.

Selected Quotations

Story is the crystalizing of thought, turning it into something digestible, sweet on the heart, even when the details are hard to bear. ... We dribble sweetness over the harsh realities of life's everyday grind ... rolling what happens on the tongue until we discover the nugget of meaning, humor, heartbreak, insight.

Story-*catching* is the art of story **releasing** – putting good stories out in the world and holding them high, then tossing them onto the wind like releasing a falcon.

It takes time and reflection and insight to absorb, integrate, and release the events that trigger the spiral of experience. ... We need to ride the story down (the spiral of experience) to the point of grace / wisdom, and let it go.

What can I learn from your story that helps me see my own? When we imagine ourselves in each other's stories ... it's a treasure hunt.

Human beings can survive and grow through anything as long as we can wrap a story around our experience that fosters resilience. ... This is mutual inspiration. We need to mirror one another's courage.