



Contents

Introduction.....	2
Lisa Consiglio.....	3
Sting—The Arcs of Our Electricity	9
Ru Freeman—இலி ஆம் Sim نعم Oui Si டாஸ் Sí हॉ Tha 𑂣𑂗𑂢𑂰Ya 是的 Tá	13
Gabriel Byrne—The Stories We Tell, The Bridges We Build	17
Assaf Gavron—No to No.....	21
Felice Belle—Remember What You Love	25
Lila Azam Zanganeh—The Geiger Counter.....	29
Colum McCann—Constantly Unfinished.....	33
Phil Klay—Another Child, Another Yes	37
Vanessa Manko—The Teller and The Listener	41
N4 Timeline	45
Lee Keylock—Reflection and Letter to Colum McCann.....	47
Global Staff	49
Molly Crabapple—2022 Field Exchange Live Illustrations	55
Ruth Gilligan—The Story of Yes.....	57
Faisal Mohyuddin—Yes, Yes, Yes.....	61
Rob Spillman—Story of Yes	65
Ishmael Beah—Anchoring Empathy.....	69
Darrell Bourque—Beyond Right and Wrong	73
Colm Mac Con Iomaire—The Widening Circle	77
Ron Rash—Embedding the Truth.....	81
Board Members	85
Friends & Supporters	87
Rosanne Cash—This Has My Name On It	91
Marlon James—Confessions of a Lapsed Church Boy.....	95
Terry Tempest Williams—Why Stories?	99



What if we were allowed to meet each other exactly where we are, in all our flawed imperfection? What if there were no preconditions to our belonging together?

Ten years ago a group of creative thinkers asked themselves these questions and conceived of a way to make a dream a possibility. They created Narrative 4 (N4) with empty pockets, a handful of artists, and passion in spades.

The story of N4 is one of affirmation of our deepest selves, our immense possibility. The people of N4 say **yes** to the things that matter. **Yes** to struggle, **yes** to post-pandemic life, **yes** to rethinking that life, **yes** to relationships and **yes** to risk-taking. **Yes** to the power of overcoming the obstacles that get in the way of human progress. **Yes** most of all to empathy. We call what we do “the inconvenient **yes**.” The one that takes us out of our comfort zones and encourages us to re-imagine all of it.

N4: The Story of Yes honors that spirit with reflections from our artists and images from ten years of telling stories and pouring hope into young people and adults from Mexico City, Mexico to Limerick, Ireland, from New Orleans, Louisiana to Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Take a look.

We hope it will inspire you to consider the possibility that is contained in one small word: **yes.**



Lisa Consiglio

Yes because the beginning is not the same as the end Yes because all good things come from serious daring

Lisa Consiglio

June 6, 1994
Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial
Colleville-sur-Mer
Normandy, France

I said “yes” a year before. I was twenty-five. The Vice President of Corporate and Congressional Affairs told me she was pregnant and would not make the official trip to Normandy.

I was artful enough to recognize the opportunity of a lifetime and naïve enough to walk off the first of many cliffs. The Battle of Normandy Foundation, created to commemorate the 50th anniversary of D-Day, was a small nonprofit and there wasn’t an experienced pinch-hitter. My answer of “yes” was accepted with no resistance and great relief.

===

Here, on a blue, billowy June day—the fourth and final of our delegation—over 100 politicians and senior corporate executives once again climbed aboard three massive motorcoaches. The buses lumbered through narrow, cobbled streets lined with dense crowds of French citizens vigorously waving tiny American flags.

Joyful welcome aside, our moods became reverential and somber as we neared Omaha Beach and the American Cemetery.

Many of the delegates had fought in the war, lost family members to it, or played a strategic role in its unfolding and ultimate clumsy—yet victorious—end. Over the past fifty years, only a handful had returned to the bloody beaches they had left in 1944.

On June 6 of that year, they churned across the English Channel in coffins cloaked as boats to fight the Nazis and Axis alliance. The Allied Invasion, code-named Operation Overlord, heaved 73,000 American soldiers onto the bullet spitting, barbed wired shores of those five beaches: Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno, Sword. Nearly 10,000 of them lay buried here, on the grounds where we now stood.

The average age of a D-Day soldier was twenty-six. 26. My age. Then. There. That day, exactly fifty years later. *Average* age. Basic math deduces that 16-, 17-, 18-year-olds had landed on hellish sands during a day that would change history and define the future. Yes?

Oh God please no.

===

The pomp and circumstance began. President Clinton’s stirring speech included a call to action. “You did your job; now we must do ours. Let us begin by teaching our young people about the villainy that started this war and valor that ended it. Let us carry on the work you began here.”

The official ceremony was over. The dignitaries and celebrities departed. We had time to walk around, reflect and pay homage.

Only two members of my delegation had actually landed on Omaha Beach that fateful day. They had grown to be best friends over the past fifty years, even though they lived thousands of miles apart. I learned from their wives that the two men rarely spoke of D-Day. They had only recently decided to make the trip. Together. Today.

Unlike their wives, the veterans had been slightly guarded during the journey. Pensive, of course. Solemn, for sure. Traumatized, likely. And yet here they were. In uniform. Standing shoulder to shoulder, wide-eyed, wading through endless white marbled graves. One of them asked if I thought it would be OK to walk along the beach for a bit. I wasn’t sure of protocol that day but threw caution to the wind and said “of course.” They didn’t know the way and I offered to take them to the edge of the shore. We got there. Playful waves and blue water sirening something unfathomable underneath.

There was silence. I turned to leave and let them try to make sense of what lay before them. How could the beauty possibly mask the atrocities?

===



“Storytelling is an escape from the jail of self.”

- Tobias Wolff

Yes because stories stitch us together Yes because stories stop time Yes because we have a duty to listen



“You have the power to define yourself — remember that power; take that control.”

- Randall Kenan

“I believe that in order to heal, we must remember. Once we remember, we acknowledge. Once we acknowledge, we can take more significant action.”

- Dolen Perkins-Valdez



Yes because life is too short to be only you Yes because stories verify experience

To this day, I don't know who asked the question, “Will you walk with us?”

I wish I could have frozen the moment. That one second in a lifetime when engagement with the rest of the world was suspended. What did my face look like? Did my body stop moving? Did I breathe? Somehow, I said,

“Yes.”

We were in the shade of a bloodbath that occurred half a century ago. Before D-Day was laid bare through the lens of *Saving Private Ryan* and *Band of Brothers*. Just me. With them. Two men I had vowed to respect forever even before we'd met.

I was standing on a duplicitous beach, inside the memories of two soldiers who asked me to be a part of their stories. What was I going to do now? How could I possibly explain what was happening? How could I carry it? Honor it? Retell it? Pass the baton?

===

There is a statue on the grounds of the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial: *The Spirit of American Youth Rising from the Waves*.

I know this youthful spirit. I've seen it. Felt it. It's global. It's powerful. It's the future. And in this 10th anniversary, Narrative 4 year and beyond, it's full of hope, change, memory, and promise.

===

I'm often asked what the “4” in Narrative 4 means.

Voice, Story, Action, Life.

Yes, to all 4.

- Lisa Consiglio



Photo credit: Patrick Fouque

Gabriel Byrne

Yes because the ordinary is enough Yes because storytelling can dignify the heart

Gabriel Byrne

The Stories We Tell, The Bridges We Build

I often imagine the first stories that must have been told were around the fire in the caves of our ancestors.

The story would have been about the events of their day and the animals that they had to hunt in order to stay alive. And in the dark of those caves around the fire, those stories must have felt necessary as well as exciting, because telling the stories made sense of the fearful world that they lived in at that time. It was a community sharing of events.

The hallmark of a great story, or a story of any kind, is that it brings a community together. It joins the listener and the teller. And you don't have to be in a storytelling situation—around a fire, or gathered specifically for the purpose—for any story to matter. In any day or week or month of our lives, we go through hundreds of stories. Even if you say, "I went down to the shop this morning to buy a loaf, and on the way, I met this man who said to me, 'Oh, don't go down there, there's a detour, you'll have to take the long way'"—that, in itself, is a story.

And so, our lives are full of stories all the time—we are essentially our own story.

When we recount events and relate them to another person, a story becomes a mirror. You hold up the silvered glass, so that the listener sees himself or herself in the reflection. The listener recognizes the shared experience. He or she relates to the teller. And the purpose of relating stories to each other is that it reveals and illuminates the common humanity that we find no matter where in the world we go, or with whatever accent we speak, or whatever color our skin is. We are fundamentally the same. We have the same hopes and aspirations and fears and joys, and the

same excitements and the same love for family and the same fears about the future, and sometimes even the same regrets from the past.

The stories that we tell become a bridge between one culture and another, allowing that listener and the teller to intimately bond together in a shared human experience.

A shaman in traditional tribal life was a man who took on the woes and the joys and the fears and the longings of the tribe and acted them out. That was the first iteration of acting, I'm sure. It was also a precursor of theater, film, television, and novels. These fictionalized tales make sense of the world we inhabit. The stories of who we are, and the stories of our background, and our community, and our families find an echo, a mirror, if you like, in other cultures. Here, in the heart of a story, is where people—and worlds—are brought together.

There is no such thing, in my opinion, as an unimportant personal story. This is where part of the magic of Narrative 4 lies. Every story matters. And every story we tell—no matter how seemingly small or irrelevant—reveals something about ourselves and our perspective on the world. Our need to communicate with other human beings through the form of story is a very profound one, and it goes back to the first stories told in the caves. We are living in the echo of the past, and the past continues to give value to the future.

The way in which we sit and honestly communicate with another person, is, I would claim, almost a spiritual experience. It has been said that listening

is a form of prayer—you are giving your absolute attention to another person. And the teller of the story is giving the gift of his or her experience and his or her story to the other person. So, by revealing through story our deepest selves, we give a great gift to the other person who is listening.

To become aware of stories is to recognize that all of us are filled with meaning. It is our responsibility to let other people know our stories, because it's not just about somber telling of events, it's very much about the joy of living too. It's laughter, it's happiness, it's reflection, and it's our common way of making sense of this world.

So, **yes**, tell your story. Don't be afraid to tell it.

Tell it as truthfully as you possibly can and by doing that, you'll find a response in the person you're telling the story to, and you will find that the world is much broader and deeper than we ever thought it could be.

- Gabriel Byrne



“We mirror others, and the more we love someone, the more we mirror them.”

- Maurice Carlos Ruffin



“Storytelling is an act of translation. When you see it that way it means we already know each other's story and the translation is simply understanding how other people experience the same world.”

- Hasadri Freeman



“We become the stories we tell ourselves.”

- Hala Alyan



“The base of every good story is what if?”

- Crystal Wilkinson



“How can I understand you if I don't know your story...?”

- Christine Dwyer Hickey

Yes because we cannot afford to forget Yes because stories shatter preconceptions Yes because the reckless is gorgeous



Assaf Gavron

Yes because the world is our library Yes because stories, like a kiss, can't be experienced alone

Assaf Gavron

No to No

Let's face it—the word NO is king, in politics and just about everywhere else.

We are surrounded by NOs. Grounded by them. Crushed and battered by negativity. It sometimes feels like trying to fight back with **YES** is like being at the bottom of the pit, begging to come back up for air. I am especially aware of the three Nos that surround my life in Israel. Recently I opened my regular news site only to be confronted with the same old tired NOs over and over again: “NO negotiation, NO recognition and NO peace with the Palestinian people.”

For many years I accepted a world full of NOs. I made do with small, private positives: family life; love life; work life; leisure life. You can still get your fair share of NOs in them too, but you can always count on some positives. And like many people, I was content with my small world, and gave up on the big issues.

In 2012, my attitude was changed at a very powerful moment. A meaningful **YES** moment, which taught me I can, and must, expect more, and do more. It reminded me that we can't give up on the big questions, can't let the NO people dictate the answers; that we can change people, through empathy. In that first Narrative 4 (N4) story-swap with other writers in Aspen, and in the following years, with dozens and then hundreds and then thousands of teens and adults all over the world, I witnessed N4 helping us take small steps of **YES**, which stick together and join each other like

“You want to be a good citizen? Learn how to celebrate. Learn how to mourn. You learn that from your family and your friends. But also, you have to learn all the ways that different people praise, how varieties of people grieve. You have to become fluent in as many languages of joy and sadness as you can. And don’t just hear the song, feel it.”

- Patrick Rosal



Yes because stories long to be unravelled Yes because stars are more fabulous than ceilings

drops of water, adding up to create a lake of **YES** that keeps expanding. Making strong bonds and spreading empathy, using the so-simple-yet-so-strong power of storytelling, reassuring and re-proving each time its indispensable value to human life.

There’s this song from 2004, “America: F*** Yeah!” It’s a cringingly-ugly yet hilarious and poignant satire on American coarseness and aggression (McDonalds, slavery, fake body parts, Valium—F*** YEAH!). It’s a sarcastic, cynical message that uses the “YEAH” in reverse, to show us all the NOs trampling us. N4 knows exactly what the song means but doesn’t attempt to sing the same tune. Its message is not bitter, not cynical or sarcastic. It doesn’t submit to all of the plentiful NOs of the world or make fun of them. Its task is ambitious, huge. It is naïve without being ashamed by it. Persistently, N4 keeps pulling us away from easy skepticism and doubts and disbelief and pessimism and negativity, pushing us instead towards believing.

Negotiations? Recognition? Peace? Life?—hell, even America?—F*** YEAH!

- Assaf Gavron

“My responsibility is to connection.”

- TC Tolbert



“My N4 event was my first post-pandemic reading and WOW did it remind me of the necessity for writers to be active literary citizens. The curiosities and creative hunger of participating students fed me in ways I didn’t expect and for that, I will always be grateful.”

- Wayétu Moore

Photo credit: Robyn Twomey

Felice Belle

Felice Belle

Remember What You Love

When I was twenty-three, I fell in love with a poet who asked me what I want to do with my writing. My hubris said, “I want to be bell hooks.”

“Nah, you don’t want to be her,” he said. “You want to be you, fully realized.”

Yasss. I didn’t even know what that meant, but he made it sound better than being bell.

August 2020, the MFA program I teach in is meeting on Zoom, like everyone else in the world. My friend Ben is doing an author talk with Michael R. Jackson. The three of us were in a writer’s group, years ago, and Michael just won a Pulitzer for his musical *A Strange Loop*. I log on looking for light, inspiration, anything to pull me out of the pit of a raging pandemic, plus racial awakening, and civil unrest.

At the end of the talk, Ben asks Michael, “What’s one thing we should remember during these tumultuous times?” Michael says, “Don’t forget about your dreams. I know it seems like this will never end, but it will.”

When I was in nursery school, I wanted to be the librarian, because she was in charge of all of the books. And books were where stories lived. And stories were full of adventure and magic. It never occurred to me that someone had to write them or that “someone” could be me.

A Facebook friend posts: “Start over as many times as necessary.”

The universe is speaking to me.

Yes because there are no strangers Yes because without stories we stand in the shadows of sorrow

Pre-pandemic, I wanted to publish a book of poetry. But work, life, *Law & Order* marathons got in the way. There was never enough time. Then the world shut down and there is nothing but. I dust off an old manuscript. Use the newfound, never-ending free time to rewrite and refine.

When I worked at Brooklyn Public Library, the 2016 summer reading theme was “Get in the Game.” My best friend Jen and I adopted the slogan for our writing lives. Whenever one of us got rejected, the other would say, “Congratulations, you’re in the game!”

I apply for dozens of book awards and contests. Receive dozens of rejections. I am in the game.

I remember how much I love writing, that the actual act brings me joy. I decide, book or no book, I will always do the thing I love.

A year later—after joining the staff at Narrative 4—my colleague emails to say some friends of his have a small press, they’re looking for new voices, and do I have book of poems he could send?

Don’t forget your dreams.
I said **yes**.

- Felice Belle

“Words help us find each other and overcome the isolation that threatens to overwhelm and to break us. Words say we are here.”

- Mona Eltahawy



“But under the darkness, there was still hope,
I regained my strength, and I made an oath: ‘I will always serve
And help those in need,
I will always care
And help them succeed.’”

- Andres “Jay” Molina



“Part of what makes us human is how we strive, fail and get up again.”

- Madeline Miller



Yes because we must step into the fire Yes because we need the oxygen of others Yes because the extraordinary is what stories are about



Lila Azam Zanganeh

Yes because stories are both extravagant and necessary Yes because story produces stories

Lila Azam Zanganeh

The Geiger Counter

At the first summit I attended, Lee Keylock quoted Martin Luther King Jr.: “We must be love-struck with each other, not just color-blind toward each other.”

One of the most precious gifts of Narrative 4 (N4), and indeed of my life, has been meeting Warren Hardy. I met Warren at Yale University, at an N4 summit seven years ago. I had heard of him through Lisa Consiglio, in that marvelous, excited trill: *Warren has the most amazing story. I cannot wait for you to meet him!* In those first morning hours, early July, I'd been observing Warren in a classroom on the ground-floor of an Ivy-League brownstone. He was older than I'd imagined, which meant, around my age—not a teenager, like a good portion of the N4 family. He was from Connecticut, and working class, and Black. I understood he'd been incarcerated, and I—as a woman of Iranian heritage whose uncle had been shot—wanted nothing more, that morning, than to talk to him and ask about his life.

But I felt shy to walk up to him, and just say: *Hey, who are you, will you talk to me?*

Then it was my turn to go up and tell a story to the audience. I must have said a few sentences about why I was there, as a child of immigrants, and a writer, and why building inroads between all of us, right here and elsewhere, mattered in the age of hard borders. After I finished speaking, Warren came up to me and said: “Can I ask you something?” I said yes, yes of course. And Warren said: “I hear a lot of people speak, but when you speak, it comes from the heart, why?” I was moved by his question. At once I decided to tell him the truth, across the chasm of cultures. His culture was still largely unknown to me. And my own, Iranian, passing through France, was unknown to him. I talked with him about my mother, about her love, and learning about wonder, and integrity to a cause, and beauty.

We became fast and genuine friends, but the days were short and the university elevator almost closed its doors on us. Warren interceded and allowed the doors to open back. “Actions speak louder than words,” he said. He told me about his six years in prison, his three kids, how he got his degree and forgave his mother for the turmoil of his youth. He also told me about his time in a gang and took me around the rougher areas of New Haven. That morning, we ran into the Prosecutor General for Connecticut, who turned out to know Warren well. Warren had been helping him get boys off the streets before they wound up in jail. Helping him, at day’s end, save lives.

But the real miracle was that, as if by a sudden sleight of hand, or merely a set of destiny points set forth by N4, Warren and I understood each other. He bore no judgment on my upbringing, its relative privilege, or my color. He seemed to have put an accurate Geiger counter to my heart.

Two years later, at another N4 summit in Ireland, he caught me in a state of concealed despair. I was thinking about having a child, but the circumstances were tangled, and yet Warren told me I most certainly would have a child, not to worry, the world was willing it, it was right, and it would happen. A year after that, he sent me a random email, just after I’d made a prayer at another end of the world. Prayers are like candles. They give light to one another. That’s what was happening between us. Warren and I were giving each other light, even distantly.

I was stunned by this understanding between us across space-time. I felt seen and heard, as I know he did too.

The last time I saw Warren, just before the pandemic, was at an N4 summit in Louisiana. I was there with my partner, Simon, and the two of us were, in the words of Martin Luther King, “love-struck.” The three of us (and many others!) all went out together—dancing until the stars no longer shone. I understood that we were in this world together, not just me, and not just Simon, and not just Warren, and not just all our new friends dancing on the edge of our lives, but everyone whom we had, and would, come into contact with.

We were caught in the gravitational forces of our histories.

This past summer, Simon and I had a child, just as Warren had predicted, way back then, in Limerick. And Warren, for his part, has made good on his promise to continue saving lives—the lives of countless kids on the streets of Connecticut, and a handful farther away. And both of us say “yes”—not only to our friendship, but to this world, and the worlds that surround us.

- Lila Azam Zanganeh



“I always wanted to figure out: How much do I belong to this place? What are the terms of my belonging?”

- Emmanuel Iduma



“I’m amazed by how talking intimately and meaningfully to just one person can change the whole mood of the day. So, in terms of my literary legacy, if I write anything that speaks intimately to one person anywhere in the world, at any point in time, and if my writing helps the person to feel less downhearted and less alone—ultimately, less disenfranchised and more empowered—I am happy.”

- Chinelo Okparanta



“We live our lives not realizing which moments are special or which are ordinary—what will we remember, what memories will we try to grab onto, to hold close? All of these moments that make up a life.”

- Carter Sickels

Yes because we need to live our

lives out loud

Yes because the world also belongs to someone else

Yes because stories shatter preconceptions

Photo credit: Elizabeth Eagle



Colum McCann

Yes because stories glow even in the dark: Yes because logic and sermons seldom convince

Colum McCann

Constantly Unfinished

Confession: I almost didn't say **yes**. It's over ten years now and my mind is decorated with hazy splinters, but we were in a conference room in the Hotel Jerome on Main Street in Aspen, a group of about sixteen of us, or was it eighteen, or maybe twenty, writers and activists, sheveled and disheveled, a little creaky at the joints, a smidge doubtful, and possibly just a touch hungover.

We had been invited by Lisa Consiglio to a conference titled "Storytelling, Culture, and the Future of Democracy." She had proposed "a global arts initiative that harnessed the power of stories, and the wisdom of those who create them, to build capacity for compassion, especially for the underserved, the underprivileged and those within communities in conflict." I don't know why, but I had signed on as "Honorary Chairman." Secretly, though, I thought she was mad. Maybe not just mad, but stark raving. Yet brilliantly so. She had already completed a "story swap" between young people in New Orleans and Haiti, and while I didn't know quite what it meant, it sent a bolt of electricity along my spine.

The three days in Aspen involved fly-fishing, a trip to Toklat wilderness cabin, a dinner at Woody Creek and a sunrise at Maroon Bells among other pursuits. It also involved some serious reading. And I mean *serious* reading. Lisa and Todd Breyfogle had put together a series of seminar readings that as good as lopped the top of my head off. The list included Miguel de Cervantes, Plato,



“Imaginative empathy is one of the great gifts that humans have, and it means that we can live more than one life. We can picture what it would be like from another perspective.”

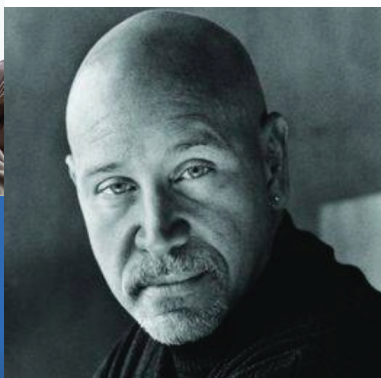
- Dan Chaon



Rousseau, Martin Luther King, Hannah Arendt, Virginia Woolf, and a little Chekhov thrown in, just for fun I suppose. The morning was dragging on. My mind was reeling. The previous night’s grapes had truly been fermented. If I’d had a hat, I would have pulled it down over my eyes. Instead, I wore a bandana—and I had the vague form of a pirate rising up inside me. We were talking about Socrates and somehow the conversation turned to the idea of sloth.

“Well, I’m feeling pretty slothful right now,” I said.

Lisa gave me a look. I know the look now, after ten years in the narrative trenches, and it was perpetrated with great grace. Essentially it said: “What the f*** did you just say?”



“If the meaning of life—the many meanings of life—could be distilled into a single day, the morning, I’m certain, would begin with a story exchange. Thank goodness Narrative 4 exists.”

- David Wroblewski

Yes because the moment is not yet, or ever, gone Yes because listening is the music of time



“I do love a tall tale. In my mind, a tall tale is like a cocktail of narrative and memory, in proportions that are just a little more intoxicating than the usual.”

- Josh Ritter

I tried to wrangle out of it by saying that I had work to do and that there were characters upstairs in my hotel room waiting for me (not least George Mitchell and Frederick Douglass) and that I was putting the finishing touches to a novel (*TransAtlantic*), and that the sloth was not real sloth, but confusion, and could we please figure out what we were doing there, in Aspen, talking about stories and storytelling and how exactly this was all going to work?

Then came a voice from across the room. One of my literary heroes, Tobias Wolff. “Colum,” he said, “you’re the Honorary Chair, correct?”

I stammered: the pirate in me was walking the plank. “So surely you know what we’re doing here?”

I maintained afterwards that I was just trying to disrupt the room, knock us all off our sense of comfortable balance, but I suppose I must admit that it was probably just, well, sloth on my part. Suffice it to say that I stayed and I listened, leaving Frederick Douglass and George Mitchell for another day, or maybe, essentially, they were a fulcrum of the day, an inspiration, a whisper in my ear about how stories matter.

The next evening our group was led to the Toklat Wilderness center and initiated in the Story Exchange. I was paired with Tobias’s wife, Catherine, and as the stories unfolded around us—from Greg, Reza, Luis, Ishmael, Darrell, Todd, Firoozeh, Assaf, Andy, Randall, Caro, Bill, Ron, Rob, David, Tobias, the two Terrys (Tempest Williams and Cooper)—and I felt something nuclear happen. A moment of creation. We were stepping into one another’s shoes in the most extraordinary way. We were crying and there were no tissues around, but somehow a roll of toilet paper was produced, and it circled the room, from person to person, as we dabbed our eyes and healed our tired hearts.



We told our stories. We said **yes**. It was one of the most extraordinary days of my life: and it gave birth to ten years, the remembrance of which now unsplinters my mind. I am grateful for that time, and I am buoyed by the future. **Yes**, because we are constantly unfinished.

Yes, indeed, for so many reasons...

- Colum McCann

“I truly believe that change is ushered in when people see each other, even momentarily. It’s the only way that I’ve learned that the needle might be pushed. I just know, innately, that things get done when people are forced to leave their sides. When their allegiances are destabilized even for a moment, that is when something starts to happen.”

- Shaun Leonardo



Phil Klay

Yes because the untold is a scar Yes because we must take a risk Yes because we need to laugh

Phil Klay

Another Child, Another Yes

I will always say **yes**.

The first child—complications, born early, couldn't latch, wouldn't sleep. It seemed this was what the military had really been training me for. The second child—wild, falling off of playground slides, bikes, knocking out a front tooth, multiple ER visits. The third—our pandemic baby, my wife getting COVID in the final month, wracked with pain, giving birth with the city shut down and the nurses too scared to enter her room.

I tell people having children is a good way to learn that humans are animals, and that life is out of our control.

My oldest son, age six, teasing me for my bad Spanish, says, "Baba can't pronounce our names right." All of our children were given names that work equally well for English and Spanish speakers.

"I named you," I say. "Whatever I say your name is, that's what it is."

My son mulls this over.

Pushing the point, I say, "I made you."

Confidently, my son declares, "God made me."

Well, then. I've got no retort. My wife, laughing, looks at me and says, "You're just a gringo sperm donor."

Children defeat you. Easily. When my first child was born, I called up my parents, exhausted, and told them I apologized for all the crap I must have put them through as a baby. When we had our second, I called up my parents and told them, "You guys are crazy. You had five of these things?"

With the first birth, when I held my son and sang to him for the first time, I could feel myself unraveling, the person I was and what I valued shifting beneath me in a way which, for a culture obsessed with authenticity and identity should have been disturbing but was, in fact, one of the most beautiful moments of my life.

Even then, I knew, my answer if my wife came to me with the question, Do you want another child? **Yes.** Always, **yes.**

- Phil Klay



"My ability to love gives me control over my spirit."

- Deacon Art Miller



"Be honest and brave and try to make the world a bit more beautiful, which is in no way the same as making it more pretty (though that is also nice). But these are really human responsibilities."

- Molly Crabapple



"We came from the hearts of stars. We are the universe, telling itself its own story."

- Donal Ryan



Yes because a textured life is one woven with another Yes because having just one story can be fatal

Photo credit: Beowulf Sheehan

Vanessa Manko

Vanessa Manko

The Teller and The Listener

Each Monday evening, I teach a writing course called “The Autobiographical Essay.”

Here, we read personal essays organized by theme—family, person, place, work, pastime, nature. Using some of the readings as models for their own writing, students share first drafts of personal essays.

As per the rules of the writing workshop, students read each other’s work and offer feedback to help make the work stronger, to improve writing skill, technique and structure. And while the course is about writing and learning to read as writers, I have come to understand that it has been about much, much more. Each student, in finding a form to tell their stories, and in being offered the time and space to construct their personal narratives, learns not just more about themselves, but also more about each other.

Semester after semester, in person or via Zoom, I’ve watched students hold space for each other and the myriad stories and life experiences they have had in their lives. As daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, friends and young people of the 21st century, they discover a voice and find their place and purpose in the world. Their stories set them on their paths to shaping their identities.

Some of the stories that have leapt off the workshop table and into the room include narratives of displacement as students adjust to New York City and the United States from Shanghai, Sudan, El

Yes because the miraculous asks us for a hand Yes because stories remember us Yes because the heart too needs to riot

Salvador, Niger. Other stories were of the loss of a parent, or a landscape due to California's wildfires, or a friend to addiction. There have been stories about the love of places, from a small country town in France to a high school athletic field's announcer's box. There were also stories of joy, love, and appreciation for 1980s movies and fashions, for a hometown of Honolulu, Hawaii, and for a grandfather's 70-year-long journaling practice.

I didn't know it at the time, but the work of teaching this class has further confirmed my belief in the power of stories and storytelling, but for a different reason than simply the love of writing and language, which is certainly a crucial part of it all. Instead, as each semester progressed, I began to witness changes in both the writers and the readers (or the tellers and the listeners). I watched as students grew more sure of themselves, more comfortable in their own skins, more compassionate, and I learned—especially during these past few pandemic years—that people long to, indeed are built to, tell their stories, to share their experiences. Not only do they discover more about the whys and wonders of life and all it can hold, but they also get to bear witness to someone else's joy, sorrow, struggle and delight. Through that act of reading—and of listening—they gain a deeper, more intimate understanding of the whole of life and its possibilities. The world was in those stories. And those stories were now entering the world.

So when I was offered the chance to join Narrative 4 (N4) with its central work focused on telling and listening through the Story Exchange, I said "yes" because I was seeing—week-by-week,

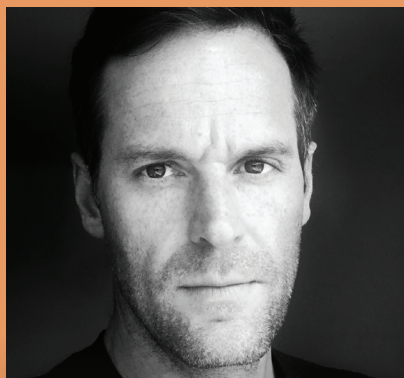
semester after semester—the transformative power of exchanging written stories in the classroom. I recognized how writing and telling is about more than simply execution, production and the craft of a well-turned phrase. It is also about connection and communication across differences of place, culture, language, gender, race, and socio-economic background. It can help—one story at a time—break down preconceived barriers to create a culture of compassion and understanding in a world full of conflict and cynicism.

Now, as one of N4's newest team members, I'm lucky enough to step into the flow of the organization at the ten-year anniversary, and I have only just begun learning. As I absorb and see and witness and hear and read stories about the work of N4 over the last decade, I've come to realize that—in a way similar to my Monday night writing class where students learn to write, to narrate, to tell, but also to listen, to read with insight and to hold space for each other's experience—N4 celebrates both the storyteller and the listener. In particular the listener is that quiet, near invisible role which can be so easily drowned out in our culture of oversharing, branding and influencing, where everyone is fighting to be seen and heard. One can write, dance, sing, draw, scream, perform their story, but it only ever finds its true completion, is only ever fully realized, when it reaches the eyes and ears of an *other*, where it can take hold of the heart and mind, and so move



"There is joy, or more properly awe, to be had in studying deeply language's power to shape and construct the world."

- Cord J. Whitaker



Yes because the end

"The most important thing, maybe, is to cultivate an open mind and to learn to listen deeply to others, the way they say things as well as what they say. Not only will this help you write dialogue and make you more aware of the qualities of voice, but it will help you cultivate empathy. And go outside your circle of friends and family. Travel if you can, even if only to another part of town. Be patient with yourself."

- Beth Alvarado



"The kind of courage it takes to tell your own true story about unfathomable pain and loss to an audience of thousands or potentially millions of strangers. That is an unbelievably brave thing to do."

- Elliott Woods

meets the beginning Yes because the beginning is not the same as the end

one to action, to a truer, wiser, more insightful and aware engagement with each other and the world. So I said "yes" to N4 and its work of the story exchange, because both the teller and the listener hold equal weight, and in this particular dance—the teller first taking the lead, and then the listener following in their own act of creation—each says "yes."

No matter the revelation, no matter the depth of sorrow, no matter the riot of joy, no matter the unfathomable complexity, each says, "Yes, I am here"; "Yes, tell me"; Yes, I will listen to your story."

And so, then, the dance continues.

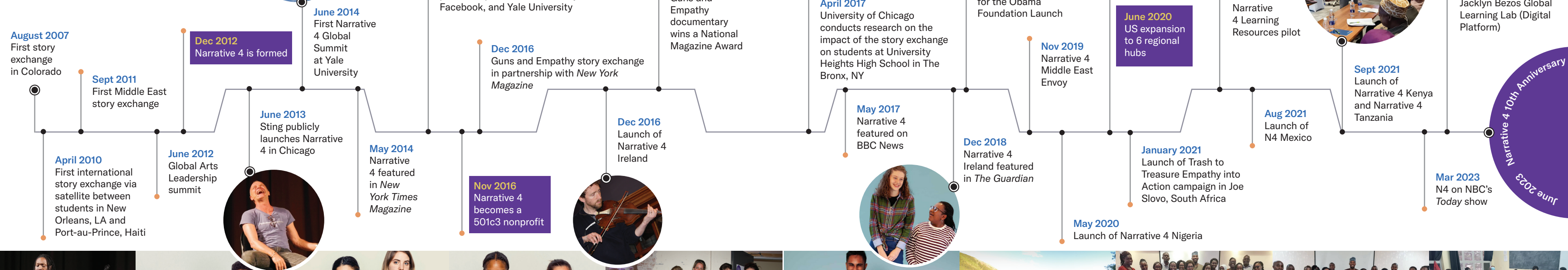
- Vanessa Manko

"Storytelling is the way into yourself -- and, mercifully, it is also the way out."

- Jennifer Murphy



Narrative 4 Timeline



The Tale of Two Schools

Yes because all good things come from serious daring Yes because stories stitch us together Yes because stories

stop time Yes because we have a duty to listen Yes because life is too short to be only you

Lee Keylock's Reflection and Letter to Colum McCann

Ten years ago I wrote a letter to a man I'd never met. My intention was clear—I wanted books to help transform the profound grief of a community into something more liveable. Far reaching, I know. Optimistic, **yes**. But never underestimate the power of instinct—of a single act.

How we respond in the face of tragedy is vital. I chose to write a letter because letter writing is an intimate act that can move a heart. Letters tell a story. Letters tell a history. And some letters open the doors for many.

I met Colum McCann and Lisa Consiglio in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Massacre (on December 14, 2012). Together, we created a way to ensure positive and tangible change. It is made possible when two people, sometimes very different people, get to know and understand one another's stories so deeply that each can tell the other's story as though it were their own.

Ten years since, Narrative 4 has created space for thousands of people to be seen, heard, and to

tell their stories. Individuals across oceans have connected and befriended en masse. Alongside you, the educators, students, and community advocates, we have built global communities of compassionate youth by bringing joy, sparking imagination and fostering meaningful connections. Our programs bond people so intimately that it is difficult to dismiss another human being as a stereotype, a caricature, an ideology, a thing. Rather, people want to hold one another in their hearts and lead with compassion.

It is simply not enough to yearn for a better world to happen. It takes boots on the ground to add more light to the sum of light. So let us always pledge to make space for all people to be seen, heard, and to tell their stories. And let us never minimize the power of a single story shared, or a simple, ambitious act; like a letter drafted by a teacher from the basement English office of Newtown High School in Sandy Hook, CT to an apartment in New York where a storyteller lived.

Lee Keylock
N4, Director of Global Programs



“I am writing to you with a heavy heart and the ‘human instinct for recovery and joy.’”

—Lee Keylock



NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL
12 BERKSHIRE ROAD
SANDY HOOK, CT 06482
(203) 426-7646
FAX (203) 426-657



Dear Mr. McCann,

I am writing to you with heavy heart and the “human instinct for recovery and joy.” I am an English teacher at Newtown High School, Sandy Hook CT, who like so many others is currently dealing with ways to inspire our students in the wake of such trauma. Bottom line, I need your help. We need your help. Perhaps more than help we need your vision.

As English teachers we teach numerous texts and numerous amounts of “tragedy” (is it any wonder we so often commit readicide amongst our youth). While these books have worked in the past, given our unique circumstances this month, they may not work at all. In the aftermath of Sandy Hook I, with a fellow teacher, have been desperately trying to find a text that can “walk the tightrope” between what is real and tragic, yet offer a great sense of hope in the wake of it all. Nothing in our curriculum really speaks to this. Your brilliant novel, *Let the Great World Spin*, could be our answer as it offers such beauty and solace during an unprecedented situation.

I guess what I’m asking for is donation of your book to aid our recovery; a book that I know would engage our youth due to its literary quality, beautifully drawn characters, compelling plot anchored in honest human dilemmas, and, of course, aside from its pure enjoyability, its offering of hope.

I feel a tad awkward asking for such a request (it feels sort-of-wrong to capitalize on our recent horror), but I have only the students’ interests at heart and maybe your book is partly the answer to make, as Ha Jin says, “things beautiful [again], even hailstones in the strawberry fields.”

Sincerely,

Lee Keylock

Keylock11@newtown.k12.ct.us

203-444-7750

Yes because stories verify experience Yes because an ounce of empathy is worth a ton of judgment Yes because the

possible occurs within the impossible Yes because no is boring Yes because we need to recapture belief

N4 Global Staff



“I have come to realize that social media isn’t that social. There is too much hate, violence and division in our world and it’s been amplified by online media. It’s high time we flexed a different muscle. Our young people deserve better. It’s been a difficult few years with the pandemic for them, but we now have an opportunity for a new way forward, one that values relationships, compassion and empathy for each other.”

- James Lawlor, Director, N4 Ireland



“As the oldest of four sisters, I invented our games and wrote and directed our plays. My sisters challenged me and made me reconsider my rules and plot lines, and the joy in that collaboration made me value being in community. We are designed to create and share solutions. The potential in our communities is enough to do what’s needed. We owe each other the opportunity to explore the full vocabulary of our human potential. We try to do this for one another, sometimes fail, and show our integrity in how we try again.”

- Margaret LaRaia, Learning Resources Director



“I was born, raised, and lived by the sea in Tampico, Mexico. I’ve always enjoyed sitting on the beach and feeling the sea breeze, watching the waves come and go, listening to the sound of the sea. Feel, observe and listen—three simple, but very powerful words when you do it from the heart. I am a person who likes to listen to that inner voice that says: ‘Go for your dream and make it come true. Change the life of others.’ That voice gives me the strength to connect with the stories of my students and with every human being with whom I interact, and to help them transform their lives, and make them better.”

- Maru Castañeda, Operations Manager, N4 Mexico



Yes because one story is never enough Yes because stories shoulder the world Yes because change is driven

by dialogue Yes because we cannot experience what is not there Yes because stories can work miracles

N4 Global Staff



“In second grade, I got in trouble during state testing for trying to read my copy of *Mr. Popper’s Penguins*. I was bored with the test. I was done with the test. I wanted to dive back into Mr. Popper’s story instead. I always carried a book with me, even into state testing. Books expanded my imagination beyond the walls of my school in Mississippi, beyond the

lines of my 3,000-person town, and into countries and cities, surrounded by people and characters I’d never otherwise know. The stories of the characters—fictional and real—that filled the pages of the books I carried, opened my mind to new perspectives, showed me new possibilities for my life, and led me to the classrooms I enter today as part of Narrative 4.”

- Ashley Pinciario, National Operations Director, USA



“Narrative 4 combines the power of art and education with the power of stories to show how authentic community engagement emerges from—and is always connected to—the N4 Story Exchange. Our successes have led us to document how the N4 Story Exchange is being used as a tool to spark change and maintain continuity in classrooms and communities.”

- Gautam Gangoli, N4 Chief Operating Officer

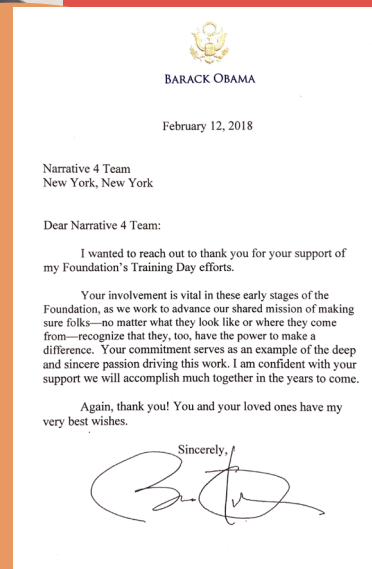


“The world today is touted as being more and more connected, as multiple social communities are created, curated and managed. What is mostly unspoken is that this world is both connected and

isolated. Communities are being rebuilt as silos, and inmates are kept within them via siege mentality and with an increasing distrust of people who do not believe in, or perform, group think. Young people are most affected by this, and are getting the short end of the stick, leading to a sharp increase in juvenile vices, mental health challenges and debilitating degrees of isolation.

The time to move beyond performing connectedness is now. Young people in particular need to be given better tools to engage, enter into dialogue, disagree, connect, and most importantly, empathize with each other. Our collective future is dependent on this.”

- Buchi Onyegbule, Head of Africa Operations



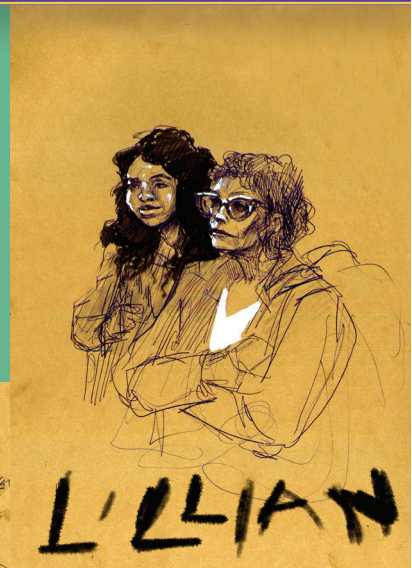
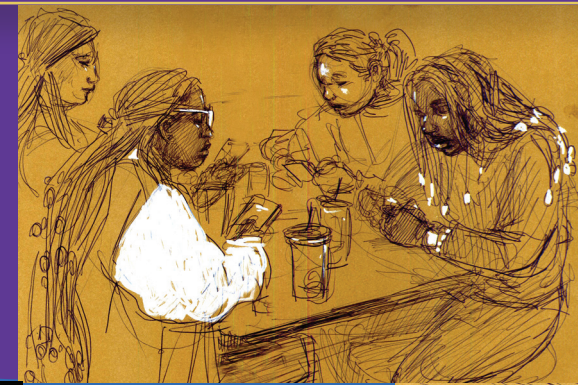
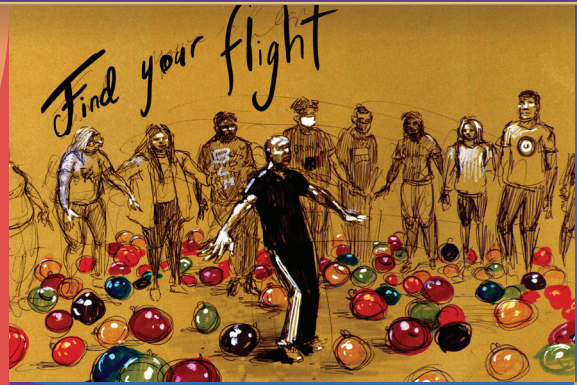


Please scan the QR code below to view the full Narrative 4 Staff list.

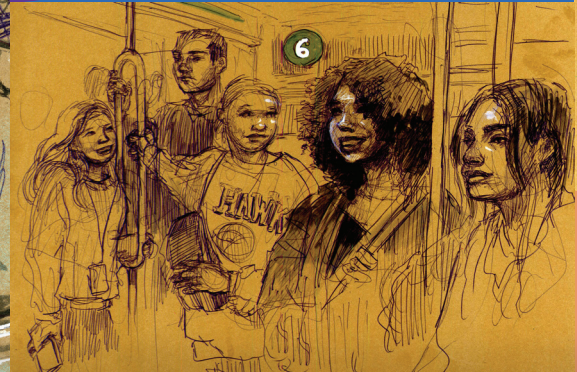
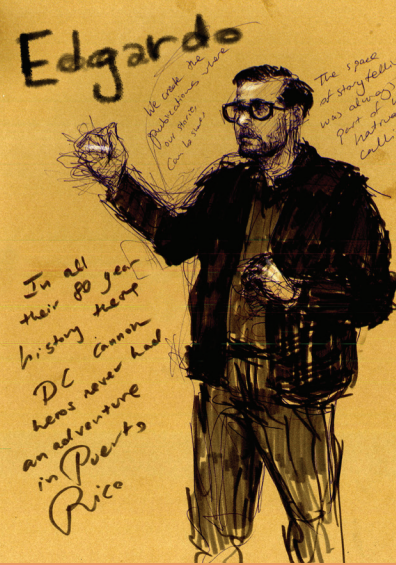


Yes because we cannot afford to forget Yes because stories shatter preconceptions Yes because the reckless is gorgeous

Yes because the world is our library Yes because stories, like a kiss, can't be experienced alone



N4 artist Molly Crabapple's live drawings of the 2022, N4 Field Exchange between students of University Heights High School in the Bronx and Floyd Central High School in Kentucky.



Yes because stories long to be unravelled Yes because stars are more fabulous than ceilings Yes because there are

no strangers Yes because without stories we stand in the shadows of sorrow Yes because we must step into the fire



Ruth Gilligan

Yes because we need the oxygen of others Yes because the extraordinary is what stories are about

Ruth Gilligan

The Power of Yes

As a reader, I go to books to see the world anew. To learn about others; to feel the texture and nuance of lives I haven't lived (which is to say, every life apart from this one I'm attempting here).

To be, both literally and metaphorically, moved.

As a novelist, then, I dream of writing books that do even some of these things—books that broaden horizons; that invite people to reconsider; to listen where, perhaps, they haven't done before.

However, I strongly believe that writers can't just take whatever they please—can't just wade in where they don't belong, purely for the purpose of harvesting new material. As with most things in life, it is imperative we think about power; about motivation and care.

It is the very least that we can do.

I joined Narrative 4 in the winter of 2014 and since then I have been thinking about these things in a new way. Because the story exchange is not about taking, it is about giving and receiving. Even more than the word "empathy," I think "exchange" is the real cornerstone of this organization and its amazing work.

Here is my story *in return* for yours.

Every time I explain the process to a group, I find myself cupping my hands below my heart as if holding something physical, something fragile. I then extend them outwards like an offering, a gift, before receiving something invisible in return and bringing my hands, carefully, back to my body.

That gesture, for me, embodies everything.

Because the mutuality is what makes the story exchange so powerful. It is a two-way street. A democracy. You can take a walk in my shoes *only if* I get to walk in yours too. There is also an emphasis on autonomy and choice—every time you take part in an exchange, you get to decide what it is you would like to share—what story you are willing and comfortable to entrust your partner with on that given day. It could be something inconsequential or it could be something deep; something funny or something serious (not that the two are mutually exclusive—the most hilarious stories are often those that offer the deepest glimpse into a person’s soul).

Either way, that decision—that power—belongs to you.

Right before an exchange, we facilitators go around the group asking people for their “hopes & fears”—that is, what they are most excited and most anxious about in that moment. Every time I do this exercise, one answer appears without fail.

I want to do my partner’s story justice.

As soon as these words of care are uttered, I do a silent celebration—**yes!**—because already they let me know that the process has been a success.

I believe that every school in the US—indeed, the world—should take part in a story exchange, but I also believe every novelist should too. To think about power; about motivation and care.

To think, above all, about doing justice.

- Ruth Gilligan

“One of the most important tasks for fiction is to expand the empathy of readers.”

- William Sutcliffe



“I just realized that what we’re facing here is an empathy gap. And this was just another way to generate conversation about something that nobody wanted to look at...What does it mean to be just to the others out there whose lives we do not think about? One of the answers I came up with was simply tell their stories.”

- Teju Cole



“The more knowledge of the world that we have, the more experience of the world that we have, the more the world gets smaller, the more difficult it is to ignore the things that we have in common with each other.”

- Reza Aslan



Yes because stories are both extravagant

and necessary Yes because story produces stories Yes because we need to live our lives out loud



Faisal Mohyuddin

Yes because the world also belongs to someone else Yes because stories shatter preconceptions

Faisal Mohyuddin

an acrostic ghazal for Narrative 4 as it celebrates its 10th anniversary

Yes, Yes, Yes-

terday, ten years before this jubilant now, this began as a dream, a desire, earnest,
Effervescent: to bridge voices, histories, build kinship, rapport—all with story.

Night skies hold so many secrets, countless stars the human eye can't always discern.
Yet, to imagine beyond the unseeable, is to believe—**yes**—in the vitality of story.

Every heart can be turned toward the light, become a wellspring of benevolence—
And every generous breath can be a bounty. To share this abundance—that is story.

Rivers rove, change course, die and are resurrected by rain. So too do minds meander.
So peace demands not agreement, no, but a radical empathy, forged story by story.

Open the door, listen to the misfortune and anguish of the world, to the ravaging
Forces of hate, fear, tyranny. Too many lives destroyed, each one possessing a story.

No surprise then that suffering persists, and violence and grief lure mistrust into the soul.
Aside from ourselves, our tribes, we worry, Why would another care for my story?

Real magic, children know, lies in wonder—in gazing ardently into the infinite
Realms of possibility, where one can reach into an empty box and pull from it a story.

And it's this fundamental capacity to give and receive, to exchange our singular
Troubles for a shared humanity, that can uplift us all—that's the true story of story.

If we must measure miracles, then let's do so by triumphantly praising the brave
Vision that, for ten years now, has gifted us a community, one founded upon story—

Each of us, a sentinel of hope and change—together, we're the lifeblood of Narrative
4—all of us, connected by compassion, singing **yes yes yes** to more of our story.

- Faisal Mohyuddin



“When bad things happen, humans respond in all kinds of ways. We bring a meal, we send a card. We donate money. Maybe we even volunteer our time. Sometimes we ignore the bad things, convinced that our own lives demand too much of us. But mostly, we want to help, and we feel a little better when we do.”

- Rita Omokha



“I am a daughter of Khmer refugees and genocide survivors. Writing is the practice of resilience.”

- Monica Sok



“There’s so much around us we cannot see, and there’s also so much we can. The gap between the two is where wonder lives.”

- John Freeman



“I ask questions about the boundaries of my own compassion and the boundaries of my own willingness to change my opinions and to see my complicity in how the world is unfair. And I present these questions to my readers, to my friends, and I hope that this encourages them, too, to ask questions.”

- Anna Badkhen

Yes because stories glow even in the dark Yes because logic and sermons seldom convince

Photo credit: Foster Mickley

Rob Spillman



*Yes because the moment is not yet, or ever, gone * Yes because listening is the music of time*

Rob Spillman

Courage in the Dark Times

No, no, no. This is what I thought ten years ago, as we were about to start the very first story exchange.

I can't be this vulnerable, I can't handle the responsibility of holding another's story. But then I, along with the rest of the Narrative 4's original members, jumped off the proverbial cliff, and as Colum McCann said, grew wings as we fell. Ten years and many, many story exchanges around the world later, I still get nervous sitting across from a partner, young or old, familiar or foreign. My eighty-six-year-old father, a concert pianist who continues to perform, gets nervous every time he takes the stage, and says that this productive anxiety is a good sign that he will bring maximum focus no matter how many times he has performed. Likewise, I still feel the great responsibility and honor of holding a person's story, and to have them hold yours.

This simple yet powerful exercise has profoundly changed the way I see the world. Deeply listening and truly hearing another's story is the quickest method from moving, as Rita Dove says, from "them" and "us" to "you" and "I," from preconceptions to flesh and blood individuality, and the actuality of lived experience. The bravery required has pushed me as a writer, editor, friend, father, and husband, has pushed me to be more present, more empathetic, and more courageous.

Courage is what we all need in these dark times. Faced with the news of gun violence, climate disaster, and imperiled democracy, it is easy to say no, I will not face the day, I will not engage, and instead will withdraw from the world. And then I remember a story I heard in a refugee camp in Palestine, or in New Orleans' Ninth Ward, or in a Bronx classroom. I will remember the courage it took to share that day and how my world expanded. Now, more than ever, we need each other's stories.

Now is the time to say **Yes!**

- Rob Spillman



“My films are about that search for the humanizing narrative that bridges the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to arrive at a ‘we.’”

- Brian Lindstrom

“What you need most right when you are in pain is connection. You need stories of resilience where bad things happen that can't always be controlled but people survive anyway. Not without suffering, but they can survive and help others.”

- Octavia Sexton

Yes because the untold is a scar Yes because we must

“Who has the courage to set right those misperceptions that bring us love?”

- Joseph O'Neill



“Stories are how we understand who we are, who we want to become. There is no stronger bond than between two people who share their stories with each other. It is a kind of magic — the ability not just to hear and absorb another person's story, but to make it your own, to own it. What greater expression of empathy can there be?”

- Reza Aslan



take a risk Yes because we need to laugh Yes because a textured life is one woven with another



Ishmael Beah

Yes because having just one story can be fatal Yes because the miraculous asks us for a hand

Ishmael Beah

Anchoring Empathy

I spent a significant amount of time with my grandparents as a child, especially before I started “English School” as my grandfather referred to it.

My grandparents were among the few wise elders of my village who were tasked with preparing the minds of the young people, building their character and the core of their humanity. More importantly, they were responsible for strengthening our imagination, the thing that shielded us against losing our empathy for one another in a world where it was constantly under attack. As my village became a town, this task became even more urgent.

How do you guard and preserve empathy in a world that becomes ever more complex as it grows from community to neighborhood, neighborhood to village, village to town, town to cities, cities to countries?

My grandmother had an answer: to use stories to reset the person and remind them of the deeply rooted value of stories... She would remind me all the time that “stories are medicine” and that each time we tell a story we pour some medicine into the world to repair it, and that our empathies are our natural bolts and knots that hold us together. For my grandmother, stories explained and illuminated everything in the world. As a boy, whenever I asked a question, she told me a story and would finish by saying,

“Did you listen well to the story?”

“Yes,” I always responded, and hoped for a follow up with the answers laid out.

“Well, the answer to your question is in the story. Just remember it and you’ll be fine.” She would return to humming songs which she habitually did as she worked. Almost unflinching, she would remind me once more to “always hear the story with your heart. Feeling the story is where the truth lies.”

I have experienced many circumstances that have shown me how the world uproots our existence and isolates us. Even in those times, I never forgot the words of my grandmother. As a writer, this has been the foundation of every story I tell, a medicine to pour back into the world and anchor us with empathy. Hence, when over ten years ago the idea of Narrative 4 was born in winter around a fire with artists, thinkers and people who care about what medicine is good for the world, I said a resounding YES and got on board immediately.

It was as though I was being invited again to the fire and storytelling gatherings that took place in my village long ago. I knew that this was what the world needed, an ear for the heart to listen to others through shared stories, a way to guard and reset the empathy within all of us that the ills of the world sometimes dull. I will never forget my first story exchange, or observing youngsters from the Bronx, New York share stories and make connections with other youngsters from rural Kentucky, of a young black Muslim woman exchanging stories with a young white woman from the south of the United States, and watching how the walls of misperception collapsed and newer ones of understanding and love emerged.

Though we are ten years old, I feel as though Narrative 4 is as old as time itself. Perhaps it is because connecting our humanity will always be a timeless endeavor.

- Ishmael Beah



Yes because stories remember us

“Our house was, and still is, an open diwan for neighbors, relatives, and friends, where fascinating stories are told and retold. In hindsight, it was a great opportunity to observe amazing characters and internalize narratives.”

- Ibtisam Azem



“Writing is essentially a matter of translating into words a tapestry colored and recolored by the ink of individual and collective lives, which is why, thankfully, endless stories can be written about even a single village, household or person.”

- Malinda Senevratne



Yes because the heart too needs to riot Yes because the end meets the beginning

“Each time we actually revisit memory, we re-narrate it in some ways.”

- Jenny Xie



Photo credit: Philip Gould

Darrell Bourque

Darrell Bourque

Beyond Right and Wrong

I live in a rose and ginger and citrus garden inside a bamboo grove in an unincorporated rural area of South St. Landry Parish in Louisiana.

I run my meditative run every morning. Although it is now a run trimmed from 10 miles, to 6, to 3, it nearly always ends with a return to the garden where I work for an hour, or two, or three.

In the garden and on the road is where I find the poems I write, where I know purpose and direction, where I encounter those beings I am most grateful for: the ancestors, wife, children, grandchildren, neighbors, friends, and stories and storytellers and the spirit guides in them.

Being a part of the founding of Narrative 4 is one of the most fortuitous moments in my life. Every storyteller called to work on the initial blueprint is heroic. Everyone who has come to Narrative 4 since understands the part story plays in the infrastructures that will save us. Musician, songwriter, painter, teacher, facilitator, administrator, we all believe essential stories are housed in everyone we meet. The poet Rumi said, *Somewhere beyond right and wrong, there is a garden. I will meet you there.* The garden beyond right and wrong is the field that Narrative 4 is ever traveling toward, the field I travel toward with them.

Together, we say **YES** to each other. **Yes** in any language, in any culture, in any time, in any geography. **Yes.**

Yes because the beginning is not the same as the end Yes because all good things come from serious daring

“I absolutely wholeheartedly believe in literature as a vehicle for social change. That’s what I love about reading books, it’s that ability to walk in someone else’s shoes for a little while.”

- David Joy



“I think in a real way, freedom begins with a book. I had spent all of this time literally just reading books, imagining that it wasn’t just a fanciful place that they were taking me, but I was learning something about being in the world that I didn’t fully know.”

- Reginald Dwayne Betts

“The life of our imagined folk is real life.”

- Téa Obreht



Yes because stories stitch us together Yes because stories stop time Yes because we have a duty to listen

I have learned that I make nothing alone. I am grateful for hours with Louise Erdrich and the various love medicines she turns into novels; for Joy Harjo who reminds me that no one is lost in the story wheel. Life is filled with conflict and pain and tragedy and foolishness and excess, yet both of these friends have offered stories and poems as antidotes. I have lived long enough to understand the tender power of literature. I am grateful to hear echoes in different sacred texts: *whoever saves a life is as though he had saved the life of all mankind* (the *Holy Quran*, Surah 5 verse 32) and *whoever saves one life saves the world entire* (the *Talmud*, Sanhedrin 37a).

I am grateful for all Jane Pittman remembers, for the courage of Big Laura in her story, for Jimmy, and Ned. I am grateful that Ernest J. Gaines has Jane remember that when they had eaten the fish they drew from the river, they brought the bones back to the river and on dropping them in the water asked that the bones go back and be fish again.

I am grateful for those boys in James Joyce’s “Araby” who run brightly through the streets of Dublin and then take their places in the world of experience as they must. I am grateful for the snowy tapestry of memory, identity, and loss, and affirmation and being that envelops Gabriel Conroy and Gretta and Michael Furey, and all of us too, in Joyce’s “The Dead.”

I am grateful that Uncle Vanya chooses to live. That Chekhov reminds us that we will always be “losing the estate,” or *standing*, or status. We will lose because those things were never ours to own in the first place.

I am grateful for Prospero, how he drowns magic for experience. Miranda’s “brave new world” is one that is fraught, but it is the world we live in, work in, love in, tell stories in. I am grateful for Rumi and Shams, and for 17-year-old Darnella Frazier who saw murder and filmed it. For Mahmoud Darwish and Fady Joudah, and for John Lewis and Anna Akhmatova and their leanings into *good trouble*.

I am grateful for it all. I am grateful for having had the chance to say **Yes**.

- Darrell Bourque



“To live in New Orleans requires an artistic bent, every encounter a poem, asking to be written, every outing a narrative, beseeching to be told. Thus, to be a Narrative 4 artist is to be a New Orleanian, in every sense of the word. Music, food, story, soul. Bingo.”

- Dean Thomas Ellis

Yes because life is too short to be only you Yes because stories verify experience



Colm Mac Con Iomaire

Yes because an ounce of empathy is worth a ton of judgment Yes because the possible occurs within the impossible

Colm Mac Con Iomaire

The Widening Circle

On the wall in the entrance hall is a quote: “As a kid I wanted to be a superhero, lawyer, actor, philosopher, comedian, philanthropist, entertainer, judge and doctor. So I became a teacher” (Nicholas Ferroni).

I am standing in a bustling school yard in Ramle, Israel on my first international trip with Narrative 4. This co-ed school is in what would be considered a disadvantaged area.

The students, a mix of Palestinian and Bedouin Christians, are all engaged in different games and activities involving ten or more people.

These are team building activities.

I have just stepped out of a large circle of fifty or more students who are holding what looks like an enormous skipping rope.

The rope is pulled taut at chest height.

The students are taking turns climbing up and standing on the rope, using their fellow students' heads to steady themselves.

Their challenge—to walk their way around the rope circle.

As each walker approaches, the rope tenses and sinks under the weight, leading those holding it to draw closer to each other, sharing the burden.

The circle is ever contracting and loosening as the walkers make their tentative way past. Some stumble after a few steps and are caught by their classmates when they lose their balance. The schoolyard is alive with the excited and encouraging cheers of their fellow students.

What an inspiring hive of positivity. What a way to connect.

What a way to bring stories together.

Yes indeed. We are all teachers, and our stories are the journey.

- Colm Mac Con Iomaire



“As educators, it is our duty and responsibility to create safe environments for all children to feel seen and heard and validated.”

- Jennifer De Leon



“There’s all these ways of seeing something that I think we either obscure or don’t think about. We need to do more than just empathy. We need to actually interrogate why we’re empathetic, or why not, or why we feel inclined to talk about something.”

- Rickey Laurentiis



Yes because no

is boring

Yes because we need to recapture belief

Yes because one story is never enough



Photo credit: Mark Haskett

Ron Rash

Ron Rash

Embedding the Truth

When I was five years old, I picked up my well-worn copy of *The Cat in the Hat* and asked my illiterate grandfather to read it to me.

I had listened to the story dozens of times, but my grandfather's version was transformative. The cat was getting himself and those two kids in a whole lot more trouble, and out of it far less easily. It was as if the words had magically lifted off the pages and resettled into wondrously new configurations.

I would wait over half a century before I heard another story as memorable. I was in a cabin near Aspen, Colorado, with a group of fellow writers. We were telling each other stories, something writers love to do off the page as well as on. Only these we rarely told anyone, stories about events that harbored in the deepest parts of ourselves. **Yes**, we *listened*, but a better word is that we *embedded* the stories, allowed them the internal power of personal memory as we told back what we'd been given by the initial storyteller. Something in all of us was enlarged that day, a renewed sense of narrative's empathetic powers and, at least for me, a reminder of how cynicism can be an all-too-easy excuse to avoid our need to try and make the world better.

Southern Appalachia is my home, a region that, if not ignored, is too often viewed in the most stereotypical ways. Through the practice of the story exchange, Narrative 4 has given teenagers in North Carolina and Kentucky a chance to connect with students from other regions. We can alter the world, one story at a time.

- Ron Rash

Yes because stories shoulder the world Yes because change is driven by dialogue



“I’m always thinking about the word. What is honesty? Who does tell the truth? Is your truth like my truth, or can we have two different truths?”

- Nikky Finney



“We’re all creatures of the earth...mine is a very earthy story.”

- Christine Dwyer Hickey

“...we are ultimately an amalgamation of others.”

- Roger Reeves



“There’s no reason why women—who have pretty well always been half the world—shouldn’t be shown in the stories that we’ve been telling ourselves for a couple of millennia.”

- Natalie Haynes

Yes because we cannot experience what is not there Yes because stories can work miracles

N4 Board Members



“We were perched high above Aspen. My body shook. And I had to get the words out.

We were exchanging stories. I was about to share my partner’s story. Of abuse. As if it were my own.

Until then, I could only imagine. Now, I felt. The words collapsed onto the mountain from my shaking lips. Emptied, I knew I could never see my partner—nor myself—the same.

We all carry so much. And we are all capable of so much more.

Yes, we had a duty: Unleash this ancient technology. For an otherwise disconnected and weary world.”

Greg Khalil



“No is not in the vocabularies of our founders, our artists, our teachers, our students, our collective bold visionaries. Their **Yes** has been contagious, setting off a pandemic of **Yes** while harnessing the power of potential. The vision has met the possible, often without a roadmap, as the organization has grown in extraordinary ways. Narrative 4 was birthed as a diverse and global organization—long before remote work became mainstream—and **Yes** has become the narrative, the engine, and the driver of who we are. As we celebrate the first decade of Narrative 4’s journey of empathy and action, let’s buckle our seatbelts for the decade ahead. It will be quite a ride. **Yes**, we can, **Yes**, we do, and **Yes**, we will.”

Heather Mitchell



“In a world increasingly threatened by factions, tribalism, and bitter partisanship, finding ways to understand and genuinely empathize with each other is essential to our basic humanity. When I first got engaged with Narrative 4 some 7.5 years ago, I was immediately struck by the positive potential to make a tremendous impact connecting people across a broad range of distances and divides. From a simple technique—the story exchange—Narrative 4 is able to quickly and effectively create a bridge of understanding that did not exist mere minutes before. While we so often hear, ‘It’s impossible to bring people together in these times,’ Narrative 4 proves that **Yes**, there is a way.’ The story of Narrative 4 is and has always been **Yes**. It is about what is possible and what we can achieve when we face each other and work to understand our differences – to see them through a lens of compassion rather than fear. Ours is a story of hope and humanity, a narrative of **Yes**.”

Gideon Stein



“The most effective way to understand people is to give them a chance to speak and feel heard and, **yes**, at the same time, to give ourselves a chance to listen & be changed. This is the twin beauty of what happens at Narrative 4.”

Sharhonda Bossier

Yes because life is not lived without reflection Yes because discoveries aren’t made without others Yes because

we inherit responsibility Yes because the ordinary is enough Yes because storytelling can dignify the heart

 *Friends & Supporters*



“It’s hard to believe it’s been ten years since Narrative 4 began its journey, working to help people share their stories, tell their hardest truths to another. Secrets are often damaging when we keep them in dark places, becoming shadows within us. By offering its trusted environment and innovative way to share stories, Narrative 4 allows us to bring secrets and shame into the light. The act of trust in telling another our truth is a liberating and life-changing experience, not just for

the individuals telling the story but for whole communities. I’m in awe of the work Narrative 4 has done all around the world these past ten years and may its next decade be just as bright and every bit as transformative as it was for me ten years ago, back on a mountain in Colorado, when I had the great privilege to share my own story with the remarkable founders of this deceptively simple program that changes the course of lives.”

- Caro Llewellyn



Yes because we cannot afford to forget Yes because stories shatter preconceptions Yes because the reckless



“In the words of the immortal Joan Didion, ‘we tell ourselves stories in order to live.’ This is the power and the magic and the impact of Narrative 4.”

- Danielle Ganek



“Narrative 4 changes us. In a world where everyone seems hellbent on their own wardrobes, it’s life-altering to suddenly put on someone else’s shoes, if even just for a moment, because that moment becomes indelible, profound and impossible to forget. In life, we’re really lucky to surround ourselves with people who are intelligent, passionate, curious and in love with the world. We’re extraordinarily fortunate to be able to nourish one another’s stories. In truth, it’s the stories of others that have helped save my life.”

—Liz Brack, Artist and Original Funder

“A little over a decade ago, in an alpine meadow in the midst of the Colorado Rockies, I sat with 30 people who had gathered to share stories about themselves. These were well-known literary figures, men and women with awards, best-selling books, films, and many other shared experiences.

I felt myself to be an ‘other’—that I was out of place. I was convinced that I had no story of common experience or ground to share with these people. Yet in the end, these all proved to be false assumptions. Instead of being an ‘other,’ floating on the margins of the group, I became a fellow soul that night, one joined through a sacred encounter with the common humanity we all shared.”

- Terry Cooper

is gorgeous Yes because the world is our library Yes because stories, like a kiss, can’t be experienced alone

N4 Friends & Supporters

“What started with a handful of writers and educators 10 years ago has expanded to a superb global initiative which can fundamentally change how we relate to the other, one story at a time.”

- Susie Lopez

“I’ve spent a lot of time focused on facts. But I’ve also learned the power of stories in shaping human perceptions about the world, and of oneself. That’s why it felt like serendipity to become part of Narrative 4’s project when it formed ten years ago: what other group is similarly devoted to rejecting the convenience of “othering”? Instead, the story exchange is the ultimate portal for real connection, providing a foolproof vehicle for remembering our shared humanity. Plus: the after-parties.”

- Julie Scelfo



“The first time I heard the idea of Narrative 4 from Lisa, I wanted to be a part of it. When asked by Colum and Lisa to be a sponsor of the first summit to include students, educators and artists from all over the world, I said **yes**. Quickly, I asked if I could be there too. In unison they said, ‘**yes.**’ Narrative 4 lives in the world of **yes.**”

- Karen Hollins



“Every now and then we have to remind ourselves that we are all important to one another. This is what storytelling does. Consequently, Narrative 4 binds us together in the most extraordinary way. Stories are the atoms that build the world, from Limerick to Lagos and everywhere in between.”

- Loretta Glucksman



Yes because stories long to be unravelled Yes because stars are more fabulous than ceilings Yes because there are

no strangers Yes because without stories we stand in the shadows of sorrow Yes because we must step into the fire



Marlon James

Yes because the world also belongs to someone else Yes because stories shatter preconceptions

Marlon James

Confessions of a Lapsed Church Boy

I haven't called myself a believer since 2007.

In the ten years leading up to that point, I tried to be a good Christian by praying away the gay, starving it, finally delivering myself from it with a five-hour exorcism conducted by two preachers who fought nine demons (allegedly) for control of my soul. I had a tormented relationship with god and an estranged one with church. And since wise believers and unbelievers both agreed that we come to our true selves by edit, I tried ditching the temptation, the sin, then the guilt, but all it brought was a cycle of stain, rinse, and repeat. After the exorcism I tried ditching church, and for the first time something stuck. Yet the most profound lessons I have ever learned came from church.

Conformity culture doesn't get more obsessive than church, but bible people understand the power and pull of a good story; the best part being that the lesson sticks even as the story fades. From a story came the mind-shaking idea that I was not a regular person because I was not here to do a regular thing. The preacher meant herself, but I took it to mean that yes, I could be David Bowie. A church story taught me that joy and happiness were very different things; the former a lightness of being one feels even when going through the heaviest of stuff, the latter a supposedly individual feeling thoroughly dependent on the moods and actions of others. Happiness could be taken away by the person or thing that gave it to you, but joy was a house you built for yourself.

“It is important that breaking out from the norm can occur even in one brief, fleeting moment, and these small moments still mean something. Change doesn’t always have to be a 180-degree shift.”

- Ivelisse Rodriguez



“It’s a good thing to see that people can heal after they’ve been broken, that they can change and become something different from what they were before.”

- Wiley Cash



Yes because stories glow even in the dark: Yes because logic and sermons seldom convince Yes because the moment

Church taught me something else. Right there in my 20s, when I knew too much but didn’t know a damn thing, I tied myself into a mental knot that unraveled this way: If I couldn’t find a way within myself, to be myself, then maybe the key was to simply stop being. This meant suicide, or at least rearranging my life on a self-exit strategy. But one Wednesday I stumbled into night church and the preacher hit me with the most mind-spinning and profound logic I have ever heard. That when I had come to think that I could not live anymore, what I reached was not the end of life, but the end of self. No, they were not the same thing. The logic, coming as it did from a Christian, was downright Confucian. That the whole idea of one true self was preposterous because it implies wisdom through reduction, not expansion. There was not one true self, but many, and one of them might die today, while another will be born tomorrow. That if you’ve reached the end of life, but are still living, then there must be some other life you need to move on to. Or some other you.

This version of myself that had reached the end had based his life up to that point on the wisdom of a sixteen-year-old, so I was only too happy to cut that dude loose. Which means, that reaching the end of yourself—reaching the end of your present story, is not just inevitable but sometimes even desirable. Otherwise, your new story will be struggling to push through the skin of a corpse. I haven’t said “yes” to a church invitation in years. But I say “yes” to that story every day.

- Marlon James



“Writing drew me into visibility, so I can’t separate my identity from my writing. Growing up, there were limited spaces where I could say who I am and where I’m from, for fear of being discriminated against or thrown out. These memories shaped my understanding of power and the world. My preoccupations and the questions in my writing are formed by my identity.”

- Nathalie Handal



is not yet, or ever, gone Yes because listening is the music of time

Photo credit: Debra Anderson

Terry Tempest Williams

Terry Tempest Williams

*Why Stories?**

I tell stories to make peace with the things I cannot control.

I tell stories to create fabric in a world that often appears black and white. I tell stories to discover. I tell stories to uncover. I tell stories to meet my ghosts. I tell stories to begin a dialogue. I tell stories to imagine things differently and in imagining things differently perhaps the world will change. I tell stories to honor beauty. I tell stories to correspond with my friends. I tell stories as a daily act of improvisation. I tell stories because it creates my composure. I tell stories against power and for democracy. I tell stories to move myself out of my nightmares and into my dreams. I tell stories in a solitude born out of community. I tell stories to the questions that shatter my sleep. I tell stories to the answers that keep me complacent. I tell stories to remember. I tell stories to forget. I tell stories to the music that opens my heart. I tell stories to quell the pain. I tell stories to migrating birds with the hubris of language. I tell stories as a form of translation. I tell stories with the patience of melancholy in winter. I tell stories because it allows me to confront that which I do not know. I tell stories as an act of faith. I tell stories as an act of slowness. I tell stories to record what I love in the face of loss. I tell stories because it makes me less fearful of death. I tell stories as an exercise in pure joy. I tell stories as one who walks on the surface of a frozen river beginning to melt. I tell stories out of my anger and into my passion. I tell stories from the stillness of night anticipating—always anticipating. I tell stories to listen. I tell stories out of silence. I tell stories to soothe the voices shouting inside me, outside me, all around. I tell stories because of the humor of our condition as human beings. I tell stories because I believe in words. I tell stories because I do not believe in words. I tell stories because it is a dance with paradox. I tell stories because you can play on the page like a child left alone in sand. I tell stories because it belongs to the force of the

Yes because the untold is a scar Yes because we must take a risk Yes because we need to laugh

moon: high tide, low tide. I tell stories because it is the way I take long walks. I tell stories as a bow to wilderness. I tell stories because I believe it can create a pathway through darkness. I tell stories because as a child I spoke a different language. I tell stories unknowingly with the exactness of a sharp-edged knife carving each word out of the truth of my experience. I tell stories as ritual. I tell stories because I am not employable. I tell stories out of my inconsistencies. I tell stories because then I do not have to pray. I tell stories with the colors of memory. I tell stories as a witness to what I have seen. I tell stories as a witness to what I imagine. I tell stories by grace and grit. I tell stories out of indigestion. I tell stories when I am starving. I tell stories when I am full. I tell stories to the dead. I tell stories through my body. I tell stories to put food on the table. I tell stories on the other side of procrastination. I tell stories for the children we never had. I tell stories for the love of ideas. I tell stories for the surprise of one beautiful sigh. I tell stories with the belief of alchemists. I tell stories knowing I will always fail. I tell stories knowing words always fall short. I tell stories knowing I can be killed by my own words, stabbed by syntax, crucified by both understanding and misunderstanding. I tell stories out of ignorance. I tell stories by accident. I tell stories past the embarrassment of exposure. I keep talking and suddenly, I am overcome by the sheer indulgence, (the madness) the meaninglessness, the ridiculousness of this act. I trust nothing especially myself and slide head first into the familiar abyss of doubt and humiliation and threaten to silence myself and retreat into the shadows and then I realize, it doesn't matter, stories are always a risk, tales that pierce us like splinters from cut glass—I tell stories because it is dangerous, a bloody risk, like love, to form the words, to say the words, to touch the source, to be touched, to reveal how vulnerable we are, how transient. I tell stories as though I am whispering in the ear of the one I love. Yes, exactly this, because a story like love is never finished.

- Terry Tempest Williams

*Recomposed from "Why I Write?," *Red – Passion and Patience in the Desert*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2001.



"Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity."

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



"He had spent his whole life listening to stories from the past and now he had his own, and it was slowly building chapter by chapter."

- Silas House



"As humans, we are more than rational beings; we are creatures with deep emotions, instincts, and curiosity. We seek to make meaning of the chaos of reality."

- Philip Metres



- Mary O'Malley

"As a child, I loved stories, the more surreal the better, and the Gaelic imagination was very surreal, full of heroes and baddies, often the same person. Full of ghosts and myths and strange creatures called changelings and the shifting island of Hy Brasil, which appeared every seven years and was listed in maps up until the eighteenth century. To tell a story, you must have a voice.

The more local a story, the more Universal its reach. The poet Patrick Kavanagh said that Homer 'made the Iliad from such a local row.'

First you can tell other people's stories, then your own. And this is the real reason stories are important. They give you permission to speak about your life."

Yes because a textured life is one woven with another Yes because having just one story can be fatal

Photo credit: Beowulf Sheehan



“Go for broke. Always try and do too much. Dispense with safety nets. Take a deep breath before you begin talking. Aim for the stars. Keep grinning. Be ruthless. Argue with the world. And never forget that writing is as close as we get to keeping a hold on the thousand and one things—childhood, certainties, cities, doubts, dreams, instants, phrases, parents, loves—that go on slipping, like sand, through our fingers.”

- Salman Rushdie

Yes because the miraculous asks us for a hand Yes because stories remember us

Yes because the heart too needs to riot Yes because the end meets the beginning

“Yes because...” by Colum McCann

The 2012 Aspen, Colorado Story Exchange that launched Narrative 4.



Contributor Bios

Lisa Consiglio

N4 CEO and Co-Founder

Lisa Consiglio is CEO and Co-Founder of N4, which she launched in 2013 but began envisioning in 2004. For over thirty years, she has dedicated her career to developing powerful organizations that transform the lives of their clients and constituencies. Deeply committed to a belief in the power of stories, her professional experience spans the arts, education, technology, cancer research, public policy and honoring WWII veterans. She lives in New York City.

Sting

Musician

Composer, singer-songwriter, actor, author, and activist Sting was born in Newcastle, England before moving to London in 1977 to form The Police with Stewart Copeland and Andy Summers. The band released five studio albums, earned six GRAMMY Awards® and two Brits, and was inducted into The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003. As one of the world’s most distinctive solo artists, Sting has received an additional 11 GRAMMY Awards®, two Brits, a Golden Globe, an Emmy, four Oscar nominations, a TONY nomination, Billboard Magazine’s Century Award, and MusiCares 2004 Person of the Year. Throughout his illustrious career, Sting has sold 100 million albums from his combined work with The Police and as a solo artist.

Ru Freeman

Writer

Ru Freeman is an award-winning Sri Lankan and American novelist, poet, editor, and critic, whose work appears internationally and in translation including in the *UK Guardian* and *The New York Times*. She is the author of *Sleeping Alone: Stories*, and the forthcoming collection of essays, *Bon Courage*, the novels *A Disobedient Girl* and *On Sal Mal Lane*, a *New York Times* Editor’s Choice Book, and the editor of the anthologies *Extraordinary Rendition: (American) Writers on Palestine* and *Indivisible: Global Leaders on Shared Security*. She teaches creative writing worldwide and is the Artistic Consultant for the Artists Network at Narrative 4.

Gabriel Byrne

Actor and Writer

Gabriel Byrne is an Irish actor, film director, film producer, screenwriter, audiobook narrator, and author. Byrne is best known for his work in *The Usual Suspects*, *Miller’s Crossing*, and *Into the West*. He’s also done extensive work as a television actor and as a director and producer. His *New York Times* bestselling memoir, *Walking with Ghosts: A Memoir*, was published in 2021 before being adapted into a one-man play on Broadway. He is based in New York.

Assaf Gavron

Writer

Assaf Gavron is an acclaimed Israeli writer who has published six novels: *Ice, Moving, Almost Dead, Hydromania, The Hilltop* and *Eighteen Lashes*; a collection of short stories, *Sex in the Cemetery*; and a non-fiction collection of Jerusalem falafel-joint reviews, *Eating Standing Up*. His fiction has been translated into 12 languages, adapted for the stage at Israel’s national theater, and optioned for movies. He is the recipient of awards in Israel, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. Gavron’s latest novel in English, *The Hilltop*, was published by Scribner in the US in 2014. Son of English immigrants, he grew up in a small village near Jerusalem, and currently lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. He has lived in the US, UK, Canada and Germany.

Felice Belle

Poet

Felice Belle consumes and creates stories to make sense of the world and her place in it. As a poet and playwright, she has performed at the Apollo Theater, Joe’s Pub at the Public Theater, TEDWomen and TEDCity2.0. Her writing has been published in several journals and anthologies including *Oral Tradition*, *Bum Rush the Page*, and *UnCommon Bonds: Women Reflect on Race and Friendship*. Playwriting credits include *Other Women*, *Game On!* and *It Is Reasonable to Expect*. She is a lecturer in the low-residency MFA

program at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, NY and Director of the Artists Network for the global nonprofit Narrative 4. Her poetry collection *Viscera* is forthcoming from Etruscan Press (Spring 2023).

Lila Azam Zanganeh

Writer

Lila Azam Zanganeh was born in Paris to Iranian parents. After studying literature and philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, she moved to the United States to teach literature and cinema at Harvard University. Lila has contributed criticism, interviews, and essays to a host of publications including *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Le Monde*, *La Repubblica*, and *The Paris Review*. Lila’s first book, *The Enchanter: Nabokov and Happiness*, was the recipient of the 2011 Roger Shattuck Prize, delivered by the Center for Fiction, and was published worldwide in thirteen languages. Her novel *Of Lovers and Other Madmen* is forthcoming.

Colum McCann

Writer and N4 President and Co-Founder

Colum McCann is President and Co-Founder of Narrative 4, which he began to help shape in 2004. He is the author of seven novels and three collections of stories. Born and raised in Dublin, Ireland, he has been the recipient of many international honors, including the National Book Award, the International Dublin IMPAC Prize, a Chevalier des Arts et Lettres from the French government, election

to the Irish Arts Academy, the 2010 Best Foreign Novel Award in China, and an Oscar nomination. In 2017 he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His work has been published in over 40 languages. His most recent novel, *Apeiogon*, was a *New York Times* bestseller, and winner of several international prizes.

Phil Klay

Writer

Phil Klay is an author and a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. His first book, *Redeployment*, received the 2014 National Book Award for Fiction. His novel *Missionaries* was named one of the *Wall Street Journal*’s ten best books of 2020, and one of Barack Obama’s favorite books of the year. He has written for *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, and more. He currently teaches fiction at Fairfield University.

Vanessa Manko

Writer

Vanessa Manko is the author of *The Invention of Exile*, which was a finalist for The Center for Fiction’s First Novel Award, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers pick, and a Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2014. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Paris Review*, and *Dance Magazine*. Formerly the Dance Editor of The Brooklyn Rail, Vanessa trained in ballet at the North Carolina

School of the Arts and danced with the Charleston Ballet Theatre. She has taught writing at Wesleyan University, Goucher College, and SUNY Purchase. She currently teaches creative writing at NYU’s Gallatin School of Individualized Study and is the Communications Manager at Narrative 4.

Ruth Gilligan

Writer

Ruth Gilligan is a writer and academic from Dublin now based in the UK. She has published five books to date and was the youngest person ever to top the Irish Bestsellers’ List. Her most recent novel, *The Butchers*, (published as *The Butchers’ Blessing* in the US) is a literary thriller set in the Irish borderlands during the 1996 BSE crisis. Ruth holds degrees from Cambridge, Yale, UEA, and Exeter, and works as a Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham. She contributes literary reviews to the *Irish Independent*, *Guardian*, *TLS* and *LA Review of Books*.

Faisal Mohyuddin

Writer

Faisal Mohyuddin is the author of *The Displaced Children of Displaced Children*, which was selected as a 2018 Recommendation of the Poetry Book Society and named a “highly commended” collection of the year by the Forward Arts Foundation; it went on to receive an Honorable Mention

in the Association of Asian American Studies 2020 Book Award for Poetry. Also the author of the chapbook *The Riddle of Longing*, he is an alumnus of the U.S. Department of State's Fulbright Teachers for Global Classrooms program, and he teaches English at Highland Park High School in Illinois and creative writing at the School of Professional Studies at Northwestern University. He serves as a Master Practitioner with Narrative 4.

Rob Spillman *Writer*

Rob Spillman is an editor at *Broadcast* from Pioneer Works. He co-founded and edited the seminal literary magazine *Tin House*, which published from 1999-2019. *Tin House* was the recipient of the inaugural CLMP Firecracker Award for Magazine of the Year in 2015. He is also the editor of *Gods and Soldiers: the Penguin Anthology of Contemporary African Writing*, which was published in 2009. He has guest taught at writing workshops and universities around the world and is currently a lecturer at Columbia University. His memoir, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, was published by Grove Press in 2016.

Ishmael Beah *Writer*

Ishmael Beah, born in Sierra Leone, West Africa, is the New York Times bestselling author of *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, and *Radiance of Tomorrow*.

His newest work, *Little Family*, a novel, is a profound and tender portrayal of the connections we forge to survive the fate we're dealt; *Little Family* marks the further blossoming of a unique global voice. Ishmael Beah was appointed UNICEF's first Advocate for Children Affected by War on November 20, 2007. In 2007, he also founded the Ishmael Beah Foundation, dedicated to helping children affected by war reintegrate into society and improve their lives. He is based in Los Angeles, California, with his wife and children.

Darrell Bourque *Writer*

Darrell Bourque, poet laureate of Louisiana 2007-2011, is the author of several volumes of poetry. Among the most recent are *Where I Waited* (on Amede Ardoin and other iconic figures in Louisiana Creole and Cajun music); *From the Other Side: Henriette Delille* (on the 19th century New Orleans social activist and religious leader); and *Migraré*, a book of ghazals on immigration, migrations, marginalizations and the Other. He is professor emeritus in English and Interdisciplinary Humanities from University of Louisiana-Lafayette and is the recipient of the Louisiana Book Festival Writer Award (2014) and the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities Humanist of the Year Award (2019).

Colm Mac Con Iomaire *Musician*

Colm Mac Con Iomaire is an Irish musician and composer. His father's people came from the Connemara Gaeltacht. On his mother's side there was classical instrumental music on the violin and piano. His first musical collaboration happened while he was still in school, a contemporary trad band Kíla. Playing in Kíla was accompanied by a long spell busking with band members in Dublin streets. A friendship with another busker Glen Hansard was followed by a leap into the professional mainstream and a new role, playing fiddle with the wildly popular Frames. From there, he was invited to write scores for films and has released his own solo albums. His new record is titled *The River Holds Its Breath/Tost Ar An Abhainn*.

Ron Rash *Writer*

Ron Rash is the author of the 2009 PEN/Faulkner finalist and *New York Times* bestseller *Serena* and *Above the Waterfall*, in addition to four prizewinning novels, including *The Cove*, *One Foot in Eden*, *Saints at the River*, and *The World Made Straight*; four collections of poems; and six collections of stories, among them *Burning Bright*, which won the 2010 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, and *Chemistry and Other Stories*, which was a finalist for the 2007 PEN/Faulkner Award. Twice the recipient of the O. Henry Prize, he teaches at Western Carolina University.

Rosanne Cash *Musician*

Rosanne Cash has released 15 albums that have earned 4 Grammys and 12 additional nominations. Cash is also an author of four books including the best-selling memoir *Composed*. Her essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *The Atlantic*, *The Oxford American*, and more. A new book, *Bird on a Blade*, combines images by artist Dan Rizzie with Cash's lyrics. Cash was awarded the SAG/AFTRA Lifetime Achievement Award for Sound Recordings in 2012 and the 2014 Smithsonian Ingenuity Award in the Performing Arts. She is one of only a handful of women to be elected to the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. In 2021, Cash was the first female composer to receive the MacDowell Medal, awarded since 1960 to an artist who has made an outstanding contribution to American culture.

Marlon James *Writer*

Marlon James was born in Jamaica in 1970. He is the author of the *New York Times*-bestseller *Black Leopard, Red Wolf*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award for fiction in 2019. His novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* won the 2015 Man Booker Prize. It was also a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature for fiction, the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for fiction, and the Minnesota Book Award. It

was also a *New York Times* Notable Book. James is also the author of *The Book of Night Women*, which won the 2010 Dayton Literary Peace Prize and the Minnesota Book Award, and was a finalist for the 2010 National Book Critics Circle Award in fiction and an NAACP Image Award. His first novel, *John Crow's Devil*, was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for first fiction and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize, and was a *New York Times* Editors' Choice. James divides his time between Minnesota and New York.

Terry Tempest Williams *Writer*

Terry Tempest Williams is a naturalist and fierce advocate for freedom of speech. She has consistently shown us how environmental issues are social issues that ultimately become matters of justice. Known for her impassioned and lyrical prose, Terry Tempest Williams is the author of the environmental literature classic, *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. In 2006, Williams received the Robert Marshall Award from The Wilderness Society, their highest honor given to an American citizen. She is the recipient of a Lannan Literary Fellowship and a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in creative nonfiction and is the Provostial Scholar at Dartmouth College.

Please scan the QR code below to view the full Narrative 4 Artists Network



Acknowledgements

This 10th anniversary celebratory book would not be possible without the collective work of our N4 staff—Colum McCann, Vanessa Manko and Ru Freeman, the N4 Artists Network, our Fall 2022 interns—Surabhi Raj and Lydia Poer (courtesy of Wilkes University), the team at Etruscan Press—Philip Brady, Bill Schneider, Robert Mooney, John Cornelius—and our wonderful graphic designer, Lisa Reynolds. Thank you all for saying “yes.”

© 2023 Narrative 4
All rights reserved. Published 2023.

Narrative 4
1178 Broadway, 3rd floor
New York, NY 10001
www.narrative.com



Published 2023 by Narrative 4
Printed in the United States of America
Cover and interior design by Lisa Reynolds



“This Has My Name On It” © 2023 by Rosanne Cash.

INSIDE BACK COVER/END PAPER



NARRATIVE 4

narrative4.com

1178 Broadway, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10001

[facebook.com/narrative4](https://www.facebook.com/narrative4) 

[@narrative4](https://twitter.com/narrative4) 

[@narrative4](https://www.instagram.com/narrative4) 