

# – CHAPTER 1 –

## The Hook

*An opening line should invite the reader to begin the story. It should say: Listen. Come in here. You want to know about this.*

—STEVEN KING

No one expects a leisurely stroll down a city street to turn into an encounter with a giant hairy gorilla—but that’s exactly what my grandfather had in mind when he placed “Joe” in the front window of our family’s toy store. Joe was a six-foot-tall stuffed toy gorilla, complete with a name tag stuck to his matted chest that read “Joe.” Not only was the gorilla massive, he was mechanical, with a body that turned and waved to everyone passing by. The idea for the gorilla came about when my grandfather, fed up with people walking right past his toy store day in and day out without venturing in, decided something needed to be done to catch their attention. So he bought a stuffed gorilla and put him to work.

Needless to say, “Joe” got people’s attention. They would turn and look every time. They would stop in their tracks, they would yelp, they would jump back, startled. They often laughed out loud or grabbed the person next to them. But most importantly, Joe brought people into the store. The passersby wanted to know more. What was going on inside that store? They needed to find out. It was a great hook. A hook that got people talking. A hook that invited people to walk into the toy store and buy a toy before they left.

My grandfather didn’t want to gain customers by accident or by force, but by invitation. He wanted to arouse curiosity. Other hooks he created included launching water rockets that landed in the middle of foot traffic and having his employees—himself too—dress up in giant toy animal costumes while working at the store. He even displayed my father in the front window of the toy store with a bottle of glue, paints, and new model kits so that people walking by would stop to watch the kid in the window happily building a model airplane or model car, and want to enter the store.

Research tells us that the attention span of the average person is eight seconds. You have eight seconds to convince people that you’ve got something worth hearing about before they zone out, tune out, or check out. Be it a pitch to investors, a company presentation, or an advertisement, if you can’t catch the attention of your audience within eight seconds, you’ve already lost. So, how do you grab an audience’s attention within eight seconds? With a great hook. Like a gorilla in a window.

Now, more than ever, our attention is at a premium. We are busy, easily distracted, short on time, our noses buried in our cell phones. Before you can get someone to go into your store, check out your website, or learn about your great product or idea, you have to convince them that you have a story worth listening to.



## You Only Get One Chance to Make a First Impression

I know what it's like when you're casting about for a great hook. I have pitched to Hollywood directors and Fortune 500 CEOs with very short attention spans. So what goes into creating a great hook? You need to catch people with something unusual, unexpected, action-driven, or that raises a clear conflict.

When creating eight-second hooks, it helps to start with a question like a "what if" scenario. For example, "What if superheroes were banned from saving people?" That was the hook for *The Incredibles*, which took the "ordinary" world of superheroes saving people and turned it into an unusual situation. Your audience is now hooked and asking, "Why and how did they get banned?"

Or, "What if a rat wanted to become a French chef?" This hook from *Ratatouille* is unexpected, because why in the world would a rat want to cook?

Or, "What if the asteroid that destroyed the dinosaurs had missed?" The image of the asteroid about to crash into our planet from the movie *The Good Dinosaur* makes for a great action-driven hook.

Or, "What if a child's favorite toy is replaced by a newer toy?" This hook from the movie *Toy Story* raises a clear conflict.

Hooks that set up an intriguing question work like magic. This is true not just for film, but also for inspiring your employees or motivating customers to buy your product or service.

For example, when Steve Jobs introduced the iPod in 2001 his hook was: "What if you could put a thousand songs in your pocket?" This was unheard of. At the time, the only way you could listen to music on the go was with an eight-to-twelve-song cassette tape stuffed in a Walkman. Steve shared something unusual in eight seconds that grabbed his audience's attention.

Or, how about Elon Musk's hook for Tesla: "What if a company created an electric car that was aesthetically appealing?"

Whether for *The Incredibles*, Apple, or Tesla, good "what if" hooks disrupt our ordinary world and catch our attention. This hook can be positive or negative. It depends on the story you want to tell. In the case of Tesla, the hook is positive, offering up a solution to an ordinary world where cool-looking cars

only run on fossil fuels. For *The Incredibles*, the hook is a negative, setting up how an ordinary world of superheroes would be turned upside down if superheroes were banned from saving people.

To get your hook across in eight seconds you must be as clear and concise as possible. Don't focus on how many words it will take you to convince people, but how few. Albert Einstein said it best: "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." Here are a couple of great opening lines to movies that have clear and concise hooks:

- *Goodfellas*: "As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster."
- *Toy Story*: "Alright, everyone, this is a stickup! Don't anybody move!"
- *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*: "The key to faking out the parents is the clammy hands. It's a good nonspecific symptom; I'm a big believer in it."

In Arianna Huffington's book *Thrive* she jolted her audience with the first sentence: "On the morning of April 6, 2007, I was lying on the floor of my home office in a pool of blood." What a hook!

Hooks can be visual, too. Like movie posters, single images in a magazine, or a gorilla in a window. For example, a woman who works at a health insurance company told me how she uses her dented laptop to sell insurance. How does she do that? Well, right before she starts her sales pitch with a customer she opens up her dented laptop. The customer can't help but ask what happened to her computer. This curiosity sets up the beginning of a story. The agent shares how one day someone pulled out in front of her, and she was forced to slam on the brakes. Two things happened. She suffered minor whiplash, and her laptop, which she had left on the dashboard, was thrown around the car and damaged. Due to her injury, she went to the hospital—and experienced firsthand how the very health company she worked for actually operated. She was overwhelmed by the great service she received—everyone treated her well, even though they had no idea she worked for the company. The experience made her truly proud of her company.

You may not have a dented laptop, but you probably have something lying around that begs a story. Can you think of visual hooks you could use at your next important pitch? Do you have something that is memorable or meaningful to you, which might serve as a great lead-in to a story that relates to your product or vision for your company?

Don't forget the other senses to hook an audience: smell, sound, touch, and taste. Free food, candy, perfume, hand lotion, or wine are all great ways to catch your audience's attention, which could then lead to conversations and customer action. Sometimes customers simply like the music playing outside a store and wander in. At our family toy store, we play familiar music from kid's movies, hand out freshly made popcorn that smells and tastes great, have toys set up for people to play with (like wooden trains and windup toys), and display lots of toy-related posters and art on our walls along with the history of Jeffrey's Toys. The key words are *simple* and *effective*.

## Loglines and the Elevator Pitch

A hook is not a story. It's just a taste of what your story could be. In order to transform your hook into a story, you will need to create a *logline*, which contains the four elements that have been used in storytelling for thousands of years:

1. A hero
2. A goal
3. One or more obstacles (sometimes this involves a villain)
4. A transformation

A logline can be told in three minutes, in thirty seconds, or even in a single sentence. In the entertainment industry, people sometimes call the logline an *elevator pitch*. If you found yourself in the elevator with a big-time movie director and only had a few minutes to pitch your amazing idea, what would you say? In business, the logline would be the mission statement.

For example, the logline for *Monsters Inc.* was “When Sully, the best ‘scarer’ in the Monster World, accidentally befriends a human child and discovers that children are not toxic, he risks getting fired from his job, being thrown in jail, and losing his best friend in order to expose the truth that scaring human kids is wrong.” Yes, it’s a mouthful, but this single sentence imparts the entire movie in a clear and concise way.

1. Who is the hero? Sully, a monster that scares kids.
2. What is his goal? To save a child while exposing the truth that scaring kids is wrong.
3. What are the obstacles? Being fired, losing his best friend, and getting banished.
4. What is the transformation? Sully will move from naïveté to awareness.

Facebook’s logline/mission statement: “give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together, to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what’s going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.”

1. Who is the hero? All people.
2. What is Facebook’s goal? To help people build community and bring the world closer together.
3. What are the obstacles? The world is a big place and it’s difficult to stay connected.
4. What is the transformation? People will be able to connect with friends and family, discover what’s going on in the world, and share and express what matters to them.

Whether the hero is a single person or a company, they need to go on a journey to reach their goal. The goal might be to defeat a dragon, reach new customers, or build a better product. The hero must also face obstacles in order to create tension and uncertainty in the audience, keeping people engaged until the very end. These obstacles can be roadblocks, reversals, or twists, like a killer clown, a scheming competitor, or a spaceship that fails to jump to light speed.

By the end of the story, the hero or heroes have changed, and if done well, have engendered a change in the audience as well.

Give it a try. Write down the name of a person or group you’re currently working with or want to work with. What is their goal? What obstacles are keeping them from their goal? How could your products, services, or solutions help them reach their goal and experience a positive change?

Below are four examples of different loglines:

- What if there was a way to organize a company’s data to help them better reach and influence their current and potential customers?
- What if low-income families were offered free financial services and programs to help them achieve home ownership and economic stability?
- What if there was a toy store that could transport you back to a simpler time when having fun and playing was the most important thing in life?
- What if a product could turn everyday garbage into clean-burning fuel for any DeLorean?

Yes, that last logline is for the “Mr. Fusion” product from the end of *Back to the Future*, but you get

the idea.

Now that you know what goes into a great logline and hook, our next step in [chapter 2](#) is how to keep your audience's attention through transformational stories of characters changing.

- You have about eight seconds to hook the attention of any audience.
- A great hook is something unusual, unexpected, action-driven, or raises a clear conflict.
- You must know your idea well enough to explain it in as few words as possible.
- Pitching your hook as a question, like a “what if,” is a great way to engage with your audience.
- Use a hero, goal, set of obstacles, and a transformation when creating a logline.
- Use visual hooks to grab an audience's attention.

# – CHAPTER 5 –

## Story Structure

*If the story is good, the picture may be good, but if the story is weak, good color, top actors, music, and animation cannot save it.*

—WALT DISNEY

**F**rom Homer to Shakespeare to Spielberg, great storytellers have all paid attention to story structure, and you should too. Stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end are universal, crossing all borders and nationalities, ages and genders, regardless of status or class. Why? It's simply because everything in our world operates on a beginning, middle, and end cycle.

For example, the sun rises, gives light to the day, and then gives way to night. We are born, live, and die. We see flowers sprout, bloom, and one day fade. These cycles of a beginning, middle, and end are all around us and inspire the stories we tell. It's instinctive, and an essential part of who we are. Every aspect of the human experience confirms it.

Whether you are creating a ninety-minute film, with an act 1, 2, and 3, or a thirty-minute sales pitch, you need to have a clear beginning, middle, and end, or you'll run the risk of boring, confusing, or frustrating your audience.

The three-part story structure is also referred to as the *setup, build, and payoff*.

When Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone in 2007, his pitch followed the beginning (setup), middle (build), and end (payoff) cycle like this:

*Setup:* Steve, the hero in the story, shared how he created something to solve the ordinary-world problem of poorly made smartphones. He even claimed that all smartphones on the market were dumb.

*Build:* Steve showed how his smartphone was smarter than all of our home computers, along with sharing the obstacles and struggles that went into creating the iPhone and how he and his team solved these problems, like replacing a clunky stylus pen with a multitouch screen and difficult-to-install applications with "apps."

*Payoff:* By the end of the pitch, Steve had demonstrated how his new iPhone was going to change the ordinary world of smartphones. The audience was excited and inspired.

In the beginning/setup of a story, you create "the ordinary world," which includes you or your hero in their natural environment. At this point the audience needs to learn about the hero's passion. You must also introduce a problem that disrupts the ordinary world enough to force the hero to come up with a solution.

The middle/build of the story involves finding that solution. This includes the ups and downs, the obstacles and struggles that your hero experiences on the way to finding the solution.

The end/payoff of the story is sharing how you or your hero succeeded, in a way that excites and inspires your audience.

## **The Six Story Stages**

Once you get acclimated with the cycle of setup, build, and payoff, you can dive in deeper. In filmmaking, we break setup, build, and payoff down into six "story stages":

- Exposition
- Inciting Incident
- Progressive Complications
- Crisis
- Climax
- Resolution



## Exposition

The exposition is the setup of your story. This is where you share the ordinary world by showing the Who, What, Why, and Where.

- Who is the main character?
- What do they want?
- Why do they want it?
- Where does the story take place?

Without this information, your audience has no point of reference and will be lost from the very beginning.

What does your main character want? What passion or desire drives them? It could be becoming a fighter pilot, a professional hockey player, or a snake charmer. Indiana Jones's great passion is rescuing archaeological items, whereas WALL-E is a hopelessly romantic robot who just wants to find true love and companionship. The passion can be anything; but you must set it up at the beginning.

For balance, just as your character has a desire, they should also have flaws. A flaw is a limitation, imperfection, phobia, or deficiency that's present in a character who may otherwise be highly functional. Low self-esteem can be a flaw, as well as a severe case of vanity, or even a fear of heights. We all have character flaws, and they make us fascinating and unique, so you should never hesitate to include them in the characters you create.

Once the essential groundwork has been laid out in your exposition, it's time to pull the rug out from underneath the main character—and the audience—and set the story into motion. To do this, you need to introduce a life-changing event.

## Inciting Incident

This is the part of your story where you take that one thing that your protagonist is most passionate about and turn it completely upside down, either by taking away what they most desire or giving it to them. In *The Incredibles*, the hero's passion is taken away from him when he's no longer allowed to be a superhero. Conversely, the main character in the movie *Big* is a little boy who wants to grow up overnight, and one day his wish is granted.

Either way, the inciting incident takes the main character's passion and uses it to drive the story. If done right, the audience will feel sympathetic toward the main character and will want to see how the protagonist will change or adapt to their new, unexpected situation. This is when the story gets *really* interesting; progressively so.

## Progressive Complications

The progressive complications are exactly what they sound like; complications that get progressively more complex as we follow the main character through the story. Through the progressive complications, we see the trials that the protagonist must endure as they either try to put their life back together after their passion has been taken away from them, or try to adapt to their wish having been granted. The protagonist goes through most of his or her changes during these progressive complications. It is important to remember that these changes, this learning experience, must happen in stages, and the severity of each complication must increase if you are to keep the audience engaged. As such, the first complication will be the easiest to overcome, and the last will be the hardest.

From a purely entertainment perspective, you want to ramp up your complications from level one to ten to keep the audience's interest. If you start at a level five intensity and then drop down to a two,

people will get bored. Like us, the main character will take the path of least resistance when it comes to facing changes or adapting to situations. Eventually the main character will reach level ten and will be faced with the ultimate *crisis* decision to make.

## Crisis

The crisis decision is that fork in the road where the main character must choose to act on the lessons learned throughout the story, or turn their back on them. Will the character stay the same broken person they were at the beginning of the story, or will they choose to change? At this point the audience is in a trance, sitting on the edge of their seats, hoping and praying that the character will make the right choice. On some level, we believe that if the main character can make the right choice, then we can overcome the struggles in our own lives and change for the better.

In many stories, the crisis moment is motivated by a *mantra*. A mantra can be a saying, an image, a memory, or something that the heroes read, remember, or reflect on in the course of their journey. No matter how it is represented, the mantra compels the main character to reflect on what they've learned. Almost every movie has a mantra, whether stated or not, at this crisis stage of the story. In *Star Wars* the mantra is "Use the Force," and in *Ratatouille* it is, "Anyone can cook."

If the main character in your story does decide to change, then this type of story generally has a positive ending. Movies like *Finding Nemo* end on a positive note with the main characters changing. But if the protagonist refuses to change at the crisis moment, then this type of story becomes a cautionary tale with a tragic ending.

The end of the crisis moment marks the point where we move to the height of the story's intensity.

## Climax

The climax of a story is when we get to see our newly changed character face and defeat their *antagonist*, or the *villain*. This is the payoff. The previous stages in the story have all led up to this point, so it should be, hands down, the most exciting and action-packed moment of the story. The important thing worth noting here is that when the protagonist overcomes their crisis moment, it's almost as if their greatest weakness has become their greatest strength. Unlike at the beginning of the story, the hero is now fully equipped to defeat the antagonist. In story terms, this is HUGE!

If the antagonist is defeated at the climax of the story, it's essential that the protagonist is the one responsible for serving up the final blow. You don't want to take this away from the hero or the audience, who by now have become totally invested in the main character. If you sidestep their moment of victory, the story will feel hollow and the audience deflated. You also need to make sure that your main character is only able to defeat the antagonist *after* their crisis decision. I've seen stories make the mistake of putting the climax before the crisis (or ignoring the crisis altogether), and it leaves the audience feeling very unsatisfied.

With the antagonist defeated or removed, our final stage kicks in.

## Resolution

The resolution is like the tail end of an exciting roller-coaster ride. The coaster has come full circle, finally gliding into the station to drop us off where the ride began. The resolution of your story does the same. Our hearts are beating fast. We feel exhilarated. We can hardly believe what we have just experienced.

The resolution should tie up any loose ends so that the audience isn't left with lots of questions. This includes neatly wrapping up all the various story threads of the supporting characters. In a romantic comedy, we might see the groom's best friend finally find true love. In an action film, the villain might

be hauled off to jail and the cop reunited with his father. In *Star Wars*, Han Solo receives a medal from Princess Leia.

The point is that the resolution resolves any remaining issues. It makes the terrible reality that “the story must end” a bearable one, even warming our hearts as it drops us off at the station. A good resolution leaves the audience feeling happy and satisfied with the end of the story, even if it’s a sad one.

The great thing about this kind of story structure is that it’s so versatile. I’ve personally used the six stages to develop movies, TV specials, shorts films, and a multitude of other projects. These six stages of story structure really work.

## The Story Spine

Yes, the six stages of story structure can be intimidating, especially at first. This is why I encourage people to get their feet wet by starting with the “story spine.” The story spine is a quick and easy way to create great stories out of thin air. This tool was first introduced to me about fifteen years ago while I was performing with the Pixar improv group, the Improvables.

Here’s how it works . . .

You’re given eight incomplete sentences, and all you have to do is fill in the blanks with the characters and situations, and PRESTO! You have a well-structured story! Just make sure you don’t kill off the main character at the beginning or midway through . . . that would really throw things out of whack.

The incomplete story spine looks like this:

*Once upon a time . . .*

*And every day . . .*

*Until one day . . .*

*And because of that . . .*

*And because of that . . .*

*And because of that . . .*

*Until finally . . .*

*And since that day . . .*

Here’s how the story spine and the six stages of story structure correlate:

*Once upon a time . . . . .* Exposition

*And every day . . . . .* Exposition

*Until one day . . . . .* Inciting Incident

*Because of that . . . . .* Progressive Complications

*Because of that . . . . .* Progressive Complications

*Because of that . . . . .* Progressive Complications

*Until finally . . . . .* Crisis and Climax

*And since that day . . . . .* Resolution

You might find that using the story spine feels familiar. That’s not surprising really, as this was one of the first ways we used to tell stories when we were kids, starting with “Once upon a time . . .”

To see this tool in practice, let’s apply it to *Finding Nemo*:

*Once upon a time* a fish called Marlin lost his wife and all but one of his children to a barracuda attack. Marlin vowed that he would never again let anything bad happen to his only remaining son,

Nemo, who had survived the attack but was left with a damaged fin.

*And every day* Marlin would protect Nemo from the dangers of the ocean. But Marlin was overprotective and held Nemo back from having fun and even from going to school because of his damaged fin.

*Until one day* Nemo swam to the surface and was captured by scuba divers.

*And because of that* Marlin went in search of the scuba diver's boat. He met a forgetful fish named Dory who knew the scuba diver's address.

*And because of that* they swam to Sydney to find Nemo. On their journey, they faced sharks, jellyfish, and other dangers of the ocean.

*And because of that* Dory was injured and Marlin had to rescue her.

*Until finally* they found Nemo, but it was too late, he was dead. Marlin was crushed, and he and Dory went their separate ways. But Nemo wasn't actually dead, he had faked his death to escape! Nemo went in search of his dad and met Dory. When Nemo and Dory found Marlin, the three fish were caught in a net with hundreds of others. But Nemo knew how to escape. Marlin had to trust his son and when he did, all the fish were set free.

*And since that day* Marlin let his son live life to its fullest, even though the ocean is a dangerous place.

You can use this story spine exercise to share

- the story of a person. (This can be your story or the story of a founder of a company.)
- the story of a company.
- the story of how a person's future could be changed for the better if they engage with you and your company.
- the story of how a person or group of people was affected in a positive way through your company, a product, or a service you provided.

Here is an example of how you can use the story spine to tell your story or the story of a founder of a company:

## Walt Disney

*Once upon a time* in 1901, a boy named Walter Elias Disney was born, the fourth child of a poor family living in Chicago, Illinois, that believed in hard work and tough discipline.

*And every day* after Walt delivered newspapers, completed his schoolwork, and finished his chores, he enjoyed drawing cartoons.

*Until one day* a school friend introduced him to the world of vaudeville and motion pictures, and it changed his life.

*And because of that* while still in high school, Walt enrolled in Saturday drawing classes at the Kansas City Art Institute and correspondence courses in cartooning.

*And because of that* he pursued a career as a cartoonist, which led to him directing a number of animated cartoon shorts, which were unfortunately stolen from him because of his naïveté about the world of business and copyrights.

*And because of that* he joined forces with his business-savvy brother, Roy, and together they were able to protect and keep creative control of all of the characters and stories created at the Walt Disney Company.

*Until finally* he created Mickey Mouse, which became wildly successful, the first sound cartoon "Steamboat Willie," and the first animated feature film ever, *Snow White*, in 1937.

*And since that day* the Walt Disney Company has become one of the most recognized and loved

brands throughout the world, creating animated and live-action films and theme parks that entertain and delight audiences of all ages.

You can also use the story spine to tell a company's story:

## Wente Vineyards

*Once upon a time* in 1883, a poor German immigrant, C. H. Wente, made the voyage to America with the dream of creating a better life.

*And every day* after studying winemaking under Charles Krug in Napa Valley, he immediately knew he had discovered a passion and focus amongst the vineyards.

*Until one day* C. H. learned about land for sale in the Livermore Valley. Recognizing that the warm days, cool nights, and gravelly soils of the valley were ideal for growing wine grapes, he and his new bride, Barbara Trautwein, purchased 47 acres there and started their own winery.

*And because of that* C. H. and Barbara worked hard and turned their original 47 acres of land into 200 acres of thriving vineyards. To his seven children C. H. was a father who emphasized hard work, but as he would say, "Work made life sweet." Then out of the blue, Prohibition hit.

*And because of that* the winery struggled. Prohibition was eventually repealed, but the family had to rebuild the business. C. H.'s sons, Ernest and Herman Wente, took over and began prominently featuring the family's name on the label—Wente Bros. Ernest was the farmer, who focused on improving quality by importing rootstock and implementing better vineyard management techniques and winemaking practices. His work with the Wente Chardonnay would earn the family the title of California's First Family of Chardonnay™. His brother Herman was the businessman with a vision of reviving America's love of wine, which most people had forgotten during Prohibition.

*And because of that* the winery prospered, and the brothers welcomed Karl L. Wente, the third generation of Wente winegrowers, into the business. Karl quickly took charge of the winery, working alongside his father and uncle. But uncertain of the future effects of urbanization in the Livermore Valley, and knowing he needed to sustain the family's winegrowing legacy, he looked for other regions that could grow high-quality wine grapes. In 1963, he discovered Arroyo Seco in Monterey, a rugged region with long, cool growing seasons, loamy soils, and close proximity to quality water. The area clearly had great potential, but no matter how promising it was, establishing a new wine region is always an arduous process. Nevertheless, he made the decision to purchase 300 acres of apricot orchards from Alfred Riva and eventually replanted the property in vines. The site is now home to Wente's Riva Ranch Single Vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

*Until finally* the fourth generation of Wentes, Eric, Philip, and Carolyn, grew up learning everything they needed to know about the vineyards. This is a large part of what defines the Wente family legacy—generation after generation, they taught each other and benefited from the experiences of their predecessors. They built a place in the wine world by learning and cultivating what came before them.

*And since that day* the fifth-generation Wente winemaker, Karl D. Wente, pays homage to his family legacy by crafting a great portfolio of wines that are 100 percent estate grown and certified sustainable. "To me, I'm proud that my family has been committed to the soil and climate of Livermore Valley for five generations and Arroyo Seco since the 1960s, and that we have always had a philosophy of delivering thoughtfully balanced, food-friendly wine, with a sense of place."

Here is an example of using the story spine to communicate how a person's future could be changed for the better if they engage with you and your company:

## Fictional Autonomous Car Company

*Once upon a time* the horseless carriage—aka the automobile—was invented, promising faster and more efficient travel regionally and nationally for work, family, sightseeing, and more.

*And every day* more cars were built, more cars were sold, more roads were paved, more people depended on cars, and more companies used vehicles to transport all kinds of things—even more cars! New technologies increased the speed and reliability of the automobiles, and the world became a more connected place.

*Until one day* the world had too many cars, resulting in traffic jams, toxic emissions, and accidents. In 2013, 1.25 million people died in car accidents worldwide. There were 32,675 accidents in the United States alone, and 94 percent of the crashes were caused by human error. Something needed to be done.

*And because of that* scientists, and engineers, and great minds from all fields went to work to find solutions.

*And because of that* computer technologies and software began to emerge, supporting and supplementing self-managed driving functions that could eliminate human-error tragedies like drunk driving, distracted driving, and fatigue behind the wheel.

*And because of that* other obstacles and challenges have been addressed like government regulations, auto insurance, and building trust with the general public that self-driving vehicles can be safe.

*Until finally* [company name] successfully built and tested [product], bringing self-driving technology to a new high and promising improved safety and mobility.

*And since that day* we at [company name] will continue to push the boundaries of self-driving vehicles to provide safer, faster, and easier ways for people and products to travel from point A to point B.

Here is the last story spine example. It shows how to use the prompts to tell a story around a person or group of people inspired in a positive way through a company, a product, or service:

## Jeffrey's Toys

*Once upon a time* my great-grandfather and great-grandmother were minding the family variety store.

*And every day* they would provide a variety of items to different customers.

*Until one day* a woman came in who was panic-stricken. The woman's husband was about to go on a very important job interview, but his suit coat was missing a button. She needed a particular button to match the others, and fast!

*And because of that* my great-grandparents went through the buttons on all the racks trying to help the woman find a match. But they couldn't find a match.

*And because of that* my great-grandparents searched through the back storage room to find more buttons. But still couldn't find a match.

*And because of that* they dumped out all of the jars of buttons on the counter to see if she could identify the kind of button she needed. But they still couldn't find a match!

*Until finally* the woman suddenly said, "There! That's the button I need! It looks exactly like that!" She was pointing to the button on my great-grandfather's jacket. Without missing a beat he grabbed a pair of scissors, cut the button off, and handed it to her free of charge.

*And since that day* the customer and her family continued to shop at my great-grandparents' variety store and told all their friends.

It's sometimes hard to come up with the perfect story to illustrate the point you want to make, whether in an ad, a sales pitch, or a board meeting presentation, especially when you are under a deadline. One technique is to have a bunch of stories "on file" that you can draw from when you need one. When you have time and are relaxed, write down some important moments from your life using the

story spine. Then group your stories into different categories according to themes, like coming of age, self-sacrifice, and overcoming the odds. When you want to enhance a pitch or a presentation, just make sure you choose a story that shares the same theme as your content. For example, if your content theme is overcoming the odds in business, then choose the story about the time you learned how to dance, or mastered a new language, or asked that special somebody on a date. Or if you want to encourage a group of colleagues on the importance of teamwork, share the time you built a clubhouse with your childhood buddies, or won a game because you worked together as a team, or did a better job parenting with the help of your spouse. Your personal stories are a great way to inspire and impact your listener while still delivering the important facts and figures.

- Everything in our human experience operates on a beginning, middle, and end cycle.
- Whether you are creating a ninety-minute film or a thirty-second sales pitch, you need to have a set up, build, and payoff.
- In the beginning of a story the “the ordinary world” shows your hero in their natural environment. Your character should have a clear desire, and they should also have flaws.
- An inciting incident, or hook, takes the one thing your protagonist is most passionate about and turns it completely upside down.
- The middle of the story involves searching for the solution to the main problem, through ups and downs.
- The end of the story shows your hero succeeding, in a way that gets your audience excited and inspired.
- The story spine is a quick and easy way to create great stories out of thin air.

