

One More Story

Jay Hosler

Juniata College Spring Awards Convocation, May 2, 2017

Jay Hosler is Professor of Biology at Juniata College.

When my wife Lisa and I came to Juniata College seventeen years ago, we agreed that we could live anywhere for a year, but that I would begin to apply for jobs immediately. We were too far from family and, frankly, I had hoped to teach someplace that people had actually heard of.

Within six months, we knew Juniata was where we wanted to stay. There are two reasons for that. The first is that I get to teach with a group of scholars whose intellects are only surpassed by their kindness.

The second reason we stayed is you—the students.

In celebration of the Spring Awards Convocation, I'm going to read you a story on your big day. I'm doing this because some of my happiest memories are of reading to my kids and having been read to by my parents. Stories are also a big part of my professional life. I've written, drawn, and told quite a few in my time here.

But, this isn't just any old story. Teaching you has inspired so many aspects of the comics I've made that I thought it was only fair that I write a story especially for you. In other words, this is my cheap, crappy graduation gift for all of you.

So, with your indulgence, I would like to tell you one more story.



Once upon a time there were some stories.

Like most stories, they were kinda funny looking. They were whirly-swirly tornados of words, images, numbers, and hormones. Video and audio pulsed a little too loudly in the center of their cyclonic masses, and in some cases musical notation drifted in and out of the maelstroms.

As stories go, they were pretty good. Rough drafts, really. But they were off to a promising start. Most of these stories hadn't been told to many people yet. They had circulated among family and friends and everyone saw great potential in them.

These stories were the sum of roughly seventeen years of writing. They came from small towns and big cities. Some were bombastic tales of derring-do told with great confidence but lacking depth.

Others were quiet stories that hinted at unplumbed richness but lacked the courage and conviction to tell their tales. There were worldly stories informed by sadness and struggle, and there were others that were achingly sweet in their naiveté. A handful of these stories were highly linear, relatively simple, and unable to imagine any other way to be told. And there were a couple that were constantly writing and rewriting their plots in response to each new idea that they encountered.

Despite the variety of approaches and themes, these stories all shared one thing in common. After seventeen years of writing, they had reached a point at which they needed some help to move the story forward. It wasn't that they were out of ideas. In fact, many of them were wildly creative. They just needed a fresh perspective, a different take, new tools to get themselves down on paper.

So, each independently started looking for a place to expand and edit their narrative. There were many choices, and by being pretty good stories they had many options. But as they searched, they all came to the same decision. They found this little library near the Juniata River that had a reputation for making good stories great.

The library sat on a hill and was run by crazy, old librarians wearing funny hats and dresses.

And so, four years ago, those young stories made their way to this special library, and almost as soon as they arrived, the crazy librarians started chucking things into these young, whirly-swirly stories. They threw metaphors and molecules, rocks and wet clay, animals and accounting spreadsheets. They tossed in tomes of ancient history, delicate little poems, and tiny strings of code.

The young stories each absorbed different things and spit out others. They integrated and synthesized and expanded their imaginations. These stories started to inspire each other in ways they never thought possible. And as they did so, they began to imagine new ideas. They could suddenly see that things could be different and, like a tornado of thought, they could transform reality. Reshape our expectations.

These stories could change the world.

So they spent their time in the library, writing and reading, writing and questioning, writing and editing, over and over and over. Refining each draft of themselves until one day they looked up and realized that they were coming to the end of a chapter. An ending was looming for all of the stories and it had come faster than they ever imagined possible.

The deadline had arrived and they weren't "done."

And that was okay, because as good as these stories were when they first came to the little library near the Juniata River, they were so much better now. They were not perfect, but a story does not have to be perfect to be loved, and the librarians loved these stories.

Even after all these years of reading, the librarians were routinely surprised by the new tales they found in their library. These stories were aspirational and inspirational. They could now reach beyond

themselves and speak to the world. They inspired the stories of others and made those stories better, especially the stories of their librarians. And by changing the librarians, they transformed the library.

But all good stories come to an end.

And as we all know, endings are very hard to write. They're hard to read. Of course, some of the stories couldn't wait to turn the page. But many didn't want the story to end just yet. It was comfortable in the library. Safe. These stories had settled into a groove.

And that is the worst thing that can happen to a story.

It was time for a new perspective. A scene change. A dramatic twist!



Okay, I'm going to stop for a minute. I've worked on this story for awhile, but I'm still not sure about the ending. Endings are hard. You want them to be perfect, but they rarely are. I've written an ending to this story, and I'm wondering if you're willing to give it a shot?

This is the audience participation part and the obvious set-up for the finale.

Do you want to know how the story ends? [Audience: YES!]

So do we.

So, stay in touch.

And don't forget to write.