

STORYTELLING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Part 1

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I think that most of us still enjoy a good story. Something exciting, intriguing, or amusing with a touch of mystery or adventure or maybe even some romantic moments. Stories, whether real or made-up, have been with us for a very long time and they were one of a few main activities that kept us entertained for centuries. Stories were an important part of our learning process. They helped us communicate and get some important points or messages across while we gathered in a large group around a bonfire. They also helped us grow up and mature as listening to stories, often told by our elders, gave us a unique access to the mysteries of yesterday. Long before the age of movies, television and Internet, the only way we could learn about the past history of our local land and our ancestors was through stories and tales. Personal experience, trials and ordeals, knowledge, wisdom, and our ability to learn from our own past successes and mistakes would normally come much later in our life, usually as we got into our late 20's and 30's. Stories also served as a way for older generations to "pass the torch", to share what they have witnessed and experienced in their lifetime, so that the generations that would come after them could benefit from these stories in some way.

The modern age and the advancement of technologies changed these old traditions and our communal or group activities, making them essentially obsolete or outdated at best. While many of us still read books and publications either in printed or electronic form, we may do so for entirely different reasons, often just reading for our own enjoyment or to learn something practical that way. Modern stories now circulate and become popular through blockbuster movies, popular TV shows or Internet sites, social media, YT videos, blogs, forums, and plenty of other online content. Television and its programming content, in its early days, could have been initially considered as a good, reliable, and mostly trustworthy source of news, entertainment, sporting events, education, history, religion and a few more themes that also evolved over the decades. Just like in movie theatres, TV programming was essentially stories, fables and narratives dressed in modern outfits and offered up in a new way. The main difference was that they were becoming more national or universal than strictly local. They were also being told or shared with the TV viewing audience by relative strangers. Strangers who were mostly programming or content-generating professionals and important decision-makers who were choosing what was relevant and essential for their increasingly larger viewing community to watch and to get exposed to.

Fast forward to the second decade of the 21st century and we now have a dizzying overabundance of online places, choices, favourite sites, links, recommendations from family and friends and so on. Lots and lots to read, to watch and to get excited about. More choices and options should in theory get us closer to what is important for us, for our local community and our nation. More choices translate into more diverse stories which may now come from well-known and reliable sources or from alternative or competing sources. How do we choose and who do we trust these days? The good old days of any given country's population being divided mostly between the right-wing supporters and the leftists, in terms of our political views, are now essentially a part of our fond memories from the tail end of the 20th century. Even if we all choose to agree that politicians from all sides and parties are essentially the same animals, voted in and carefully selected to serve and to protect the rights of the wealthy and the privileged, do we still choose to trust them sometime or maybe just with certain decisions, laws, or regulations? If all they tend to do is lie to us pretty much all the time, should we just ignore them and turn our attention instead to those who offer us better stories or those who frequently point out all of

the wrong doings by the politicians, by the ultra wealthy and by the society's high class? What if some or most of the alternative sources of the world news have their own hidden agendas? What if their messages are also designed to misinform and to further confuse the general public? In the world where we cannot or should not trust anyone, who do we turn to for advice or for guidance? Whose stories should we believe if all we get these days are mostly fake news coming to us from all sides? And more importantly, why we don't have any stories of our own? Why should we place our trust and our beliefs in the journalistic or investigative work of others and not follow our own gut instincts or hunches or our innate abilities to tell the truth from an outright lie?

Modern stories which we now read, watch, and share with countless others are no longer of our own making and are coming to us from sources which are located outside of us. While they used to reflect our own lifestyles, customs, and beliefs that stayed with us for generations, they have eventually turned into a "joke". A short story (though not always funny) we either read or heard or picked up somewhere which we will now share with other people, much in the same way we would share either a funny or a scary story with our friends, family, and neighbours just to get a reaction from them. Something to either laugh about or maybe argue about. We seem to be no longer capable of creating new and original stories, tales, and explanations for how the world functions and why it appears to be so messed up. These explanations are now a big part of our ready-made products and services. Much like instant cups of tea or coffee or junk food in a variety of forms being served up almost instantaneously by our food and meal vendors. Need to form or to have an opinion on anything? Just look it up online or use your favourite search engine, social media, or a discussion forum. Why ask a few of your close friends or relatives if you could easily collect tens or hundreds of opinions or suggestions from your online crowd. Internet can help us become well-informed and somewhat educated about a particular topic at best. At worst, it can keep us misinformed, confused, puzzled and angry with who we may perceive to be our enemies or opponents.

When Pluto entered the sign of Capricorn back in 2008 many of us realized that this could signify an extremely long and a very bumpy ride with some serious accidents and many fatalities along the way. A possible complete overhaul of our political and economic systems. A series of powerful earthquakes that would shake up and, in some cases, completely destroy the old foundations of our modern societies along with their structures, institutions, governments, and local authorities. Since Capricorn defines how we choose to live and work together in tribes, communities, and nations, we would have done well if we had gathered round the table about 10 years ago and began to draw up plans for our new power structures and power distribution in our nations and communities. Unfortunately, as we are finding out today, these early attempts could have done precious little or nowhere near enough, since we had no idea back then of the required depth and breadth of these changes and reforms. As it stands right now in the last days of 2021 we are about a third of the way through the decades of social changes. While reasons for optimism and for occasional breakthroughs do exist and may actually offer us some glimmers of hope through a few months of 2022, we should remain buckled up and keep our hardhats on just in case, for at least another decade or two.

Imagine being one of many passengers stuck on a runaway train that is barreling down the tracks at breakneck speeds. A growing awareness appears among some of the passengers that the tracks are going to end sooner rather than later or the train may eventually derail if it keeps running at these high speeds. When this happens, the train is going to crash, killing everyone onboard and wiping out a few nearby towns or cities before it comes to a dead stop. Jumping off the train isn't really a good option at these speeds as this pretty much guarantees instant death upon hitting the ground. We could try to slow

the train down to buy ourselves more time but that is just delaying the inevitable, at least with the current state of things.

The passengers are now split into three different camps. Some remain hopeful that a good solution can be found. While they recognize that they may not be able to save everyone who's onboard, their main concern and focus of attention remains on saving the lives of most, at the very least those who are willing to be saved or who are more interested in staying alive. They are willing to cooperate and to work together as they recognize that through pooling together their combined resources, thoughts, and ideas they may be able to come up with a solution or at the very least increase their chances of surviving. At the opposite end we find a group of passengers who may appear to share the same or similar concerns as the first group but choose to direct their attention to something completely different. They are convinced that this is all a plot or a game and trying to find a working solution is going to be a total waste of time. They suspect that someone has tampered with the train's engine or the brakes or they somehow bypassed all of the safety devices and are now controlling the train remotely, from a distance. Find this culprit or discover what they have done, beat the answer out of them or force them to admit to all of the wrongdoings and you have found the magic password and the way to disable the controlling system. The tracks aren't going to end at all as that is just a lie created to get us all into a panic mode. Someone (a group of powerful individuals with some type of a secret agenda and a hideous plot) has seized full control of this train and is doing all of this on purpose. Do not trust anyone, do not follow any orders or recommendations, do not attempt to cooperate or to listen to any reasonable explanations. A third group of passengers doesn't share the ideas, the concerns, and the suspicions of the other two groups. The only reason they got on this train in the first place was to enjoy the ride and to be able to watch the wonderful scenery outside as the train moves along the tracks. All they are interested in is getting back to enjoying the train ride. They paid for their tickets and they should be getting something in return. The train tracks may end soon or not and who really knows this for sure. All of that running around, screaming, yelling, and getting worried about the fate of everyone onboard is just too distracting and annoying and taking away from their ability to enjoy the ride.

Does any of this sound familiar at all? Your personal reality and close surroundings may only partially reflect this short story, but this is what we appear to be doing collectively right across the globe. We are so focused and preoccupied with what is going on in our own neck of woods that we seem to be forgetting that this train is now running across all continents and all countries so whatever is happening in various villages, towns, cities, regions and nations is really happening right across the board affecting the lives of billions of people. How we collectively choose to solve this giant puzzle will become a key factor in determining our own future and perhaps the fate of all humanity.

The big test for all humanity right now could be mostly about surviving the current pandemic, at least in the short run as this is what is staring us in the faces wherever we are and whatever we do. What underlies all of it is our ability, or lack of, to collaborate and to cooperate. To recognize that we are all in this together. Perhaps our innate survival skills and our herd mentality are telling us that we should look after ourselves first and to hell with the rest of the world. The sooner we get through this the sooner we'll be able to regain and reclaim our "freedoms". These selfish attitudes of "me first" may be extended somewhat to include our loved ones, our families, our close friends and maybe also our fellow compatriots or at least those who share the same beliefs, speak the same language, the same customs and culture. But that is still pretty selfish and reflects our unwillingness to take full responsibility for all our thoughts, our deeds, and our actions. Is it possible, as a well-known astrologer suggested, that humanity may have manifested this disease into our reality as a consequence of our collective addiction to our separation from each other? Other than the inevitable death at the end of our life cycle, there is usually very little that connects us all together and makes us all "equal" in a very sad sense. A worldwide

pandemic that has spread around the globe over the past 2 years has linked us all together as our lives are now being valued more or less equally based on our chances of survival. What will it take for us to realize that we are all equally affected by our desires to live and by our fear of death? All rich and poor, young and old, men and women, wherever we may find ourselves in the pecking order of our society. While we may occasionally choose to see past our differences and band together to fight for a common cause, this needs to become more of the rule to live by rather than the exception.

If you are interested in learning about the political and economic causes and reasons behind the current conditions of our lives and the evolution of the capitalist systems in the Western world you can read part 2 of this article.