

## Real Stories MKE Season 1 Ep 3 | Transcript

Kim Shine 0:00

Welcome to Real Stories MKE, brought to you as part of Ex Fabula's work to connect Milwaukee through real stories. I'm Kim Shine.

Joel Dresang 0:08

And I'm Joel Dresang. Ex Fabula believes that everyone has personal stories worth sharing. We host storytelling workshops where community members can build their storytelling skills and confidence. And we also sponsor StorySlams, where true stories are shared on stage. Today, we're bringing you three of those powerful stories.

Kim Shine 0:28

Our theme, this episode is 'Culture'. And some people see their culture and their heritage reflected everywhere around them. But that's not always true for everyone. We hear plenty of stories from people who have had to work a little bit harder to discover, embrace and celebrate their culture. Hopefully, as we listen to those stories, we can all grow our own cultural awareness.

Joel Dresang 0:51

So I have a little story if I may share it. Yeah. So I studied at the University of the Philippines for a year. And I lived in a dormitory for international students. And one of the things that was great about that was that on different occasions, the national groups that were staying there would celebrate their culture, they'd do something special, the Korean students demonstrated Taekwondo, the Indonesian community introduced us to Wayang shadow puppetry. So when the time came for the American students to do something, we were bewildered because we couldn't figure out what our culture was. And we were all from different parts of the country. And they had different backgrounds, so and different experiences, and we weren't really sure how to represent or agree on what deserved being represented. So I think we ended up doing like, we served hotdogs, and somebody strum the guitar, and we sing folk songs or something-

Kim Shine 0:57

Pure America, right there.

Joel Dresang 1:16

Pretty lame. Yeah.

Kim Shine 1:58

But I get that though, because so my mom's side of the family. My dad's side of the family is mostly from Chicago. My mom's side is from New York. And so I don't know if this is as much like really true, true culture. But one time, I did my first solo trip to New York, because I just wanted to go back to the neighborhood where they grew up and see the apartment buildings, and I went there. And I talked to some of the residents and I was asking, I met this, this older,

nice lady. And I said, Hey, do you know this family name? And she she didn't, but she was really warm and really welcoming. And I think they actually lived up in Harlem, I believe, like 127th and something. But it was really nice just to be in that space. Because even if you know, you don't really get all the answers you want. You still feel connected to that culture to that heritage and to that, that place you know?

Joel Dresang 2:52  
That's great.

Kim Shine 2:53

Well, our first culture story comes from Nashley Medina. Now she shared this story in April of 2021 at a virtual StorySlam after participating in a series of storytelling workshops at Cristo Rey High School. Here's Nashley.

Nashley Medina 3:18

So yeah, my name is Nashley Medina. I'm a junior at Cristo Rey. And, yeah, my story is about looking or being too Mexican. And so this is this actually happened to me back in fifth or sixth grade. And so I went to a public school where people, people's culture wasn't really like celebrated, I would say, and there's one time it was announced that we were gonna do a heritage day for like, spirit week. And so I went home, and I told my mom, she was excited. She was like, Oh, you can wear your dress, right? And so yeah, so she, when the day came, so I wear a blue traditional Mexican dress, right? The ones used to dance. And then my mother braided my hair, really beautiful. There were two braids to the side. And then they were picked up like this with (unknown word). It was like, the Mexican colors for, the piece that was on my hair. And then I went to school. I was excited. I was happy. I was like, "Yeah, I'm wearing my Mexican dress." And then as I as I got to the classroom, everybody looked at me, I was the only one dressed like traditional, right? And then I was looking around and people were wearing, the simple shirts, that said Mexico or Puerto Rico. And so I was like, "Oh, wow, I'm the only one dressed like this." And so I was embarrassed and I wasn't gonna let that show. So I was trying to walk to my desk, and then this boy grabbed my arm. And then I looked at him and he said, "You look too Mexican." And then he said, "It makes you look like an (unknown). Those braces make you look like (unknown). And then I my whole face turn hot, I felt like it hot. And so I was like, "Miss, can I go to a bathroom?" And then I didn't wait for the response. And I just flew to the bathroom because I was embarrassed because he was loud. And then I heard laughs behind me. And then I went to the bathroom, look at myself in the mirror. And I was like, "Is it a good thing? Is it a bad thing?" You know, those comments that were said. And so it kind of like, not traumatized me, but it made me feel so self-conscious, that I did learn how to braid my own hair, and style, like more modern, because I wanted to fit in with other people. Blend in instead of stand out. And so I do feel terrible now, because it's like, "Why should I be embarrassed of my culture?" So this is something that has been stuck with me because like many people have made fun of my accent in English and Spanish because they're like, "Oh, you have a strong accent in English." And then they say, "Oh, you have that Mexican accent in Spanish." So yeah, thank you, everyone.

Alea McHatten 6:18

Yes, let's see that love for Nashley. Thank you for sharing this story that I know what it's like to experience stereotypes. (fades out as music fades in)

Kim Shine 6:40

That was great. I liked her story. I wanted to hear more. I thought it was kind of short. But I understood. But I did want to hear more.

Joel Dresang 6:49

There are time limits to these things. Usually at the story slams, you're limited to five minutes and we can't hear everything in five minutes. So there is editing that has to be done.

Kim Shine 6:59

If she - if she's listening to me, listening to you, listening to this, share again or share something else, please come back and share with us again. But that was Nashley Medina with her culture story. This is what's happened since she told that she's told us that, "My life has been a little similar to the situation I described. I always get my accent pointed out when I speak either English or Spanish. I was once meeting some people around my age internationally. And I came across people from Mexico. And they told me in Spanish, they said, we can tell that you are from the US because you don't speak Spanish like us. And she says I felt embarrassed because it was the first time someone from the same ethnicity as me pointed out how I speak Spanish. The second update she gave us she says that she's working on a project with her (unknown) class and shout out to miss Drager. We are supporting social justice. My group and I are supporting the LGBTQ plus community. And we as a class sold our products to the school and other people outside of school. She says it makes her really happy to see that they had a lot of support from a lot of people.

Joel Dresang 8:11

You know, that's really good. And it's too bad that she felt embarrassed by having her accent pointed out, because we all have accents. And the point is that she's communicating to somebody else and that they're understanding her and she's understanding them, and accents are just sort of a trivial sort of a thing.

Kim Shine 8:31

Yeah, they're just little sprinkles of spice on language, you know. But thanks to our project partner Cristo Rey High School thanks also to our youth programming funders, Herb Kohl Philanthropies, Greater Milwaukee Association of Realtors, the Dorothy Bush Foundation and Ex Fabula members.

Next up on Real Stories MKE is another story about culture from Taqwa Obaid. It was told in September 2021 at an event that had the theme of 'Around the Table: Stories of Food and Culture'. Taqwa brought food to the event to share. And here's her story.

Taqwa Obaid

All right. Well, I'm very glad to be here. My name is Taqwa Obaid. I grew up, actually I was born and grew up in Jordan. I'm actually from Palestine. My dad has 13 children. So nine sisters, four brothers. I have we grow up from a house that one mom, one dad. Mom always have to cook. And that's why we love food. So I wake up in the morning, I see her cooking. In the evening she's cooking at night. Again, she's cooking. So we had to eat three meals a day. And between she had to make us some snack as well. We moved to the US to Virginia. And my dad lived actually in Virginia for 13 years by himself, he tried to bring us to the United States. When we came to the United States, we lived in small house, where is eight acres, and my mom starts, like planting all kinds of food, when she cook at home. And again, I wake up at five o'clock in the morning, because she's cooking and making food. And our food sometimes takes a lot of time to make lunch, she's making again, food and dinner, we're making food. So it's just we have to eat, eat, eat, eat. And if you don't eat, you can't do anything at home. Then I got married, my husband was living in Saudi Arabia. When he came to the United States, I have two options, whether he has to work for somebody, or we have to come up with an idea where we make a small business together. So I said, we sat together and I said, you know, we have a lot of Middle Easterners and in the area, we have like, probably one or two, Middle Eastern restaurants, but no one makes the food my mom makes. So especially the bread, the bread, we have to actually to drive to Chicago to get it. So I called my mom and I said, "Mom, I wanted to start this business where we actually start making the bread." Everybody when you talk about Middle Eastern and a bread, you always come to your mind is pita bread. Actually, the bread, we actually use it a fluffy, large size, pita bread, and it called Taboon bread. And that's actually—it's not in Milwaukee. So I told her mom, this is where I want to start, I want to start selling that bread. So we started a small grocery store selling that bread. And I noticed everybody loved it. Like we started with making like 20 bread a day, that second week jumped to 100, 140. And we add to it **that the buys we make**, which is **small guys** filled with cheese or beef or hotdogs, potatoes, also we start making a larger quantity. Sometimes I had to do like 1000 or 1200 by myself, yes, in a day.

And then I told him "Let's, let's have you know, a small talk. I mean, though we are in a small grocery store. We're trying to build that business. Now we'll start taking catering for wedding showers, graduations, and the smells too small and we need more people to help." We decided to open our own restaurant. We tried, hard money situations. And it's just me and him alone. We didn't have that experience with English and knowing the communities and you know, everything about, you know, making a business starting a new business. But we said let's do it. We put in our mind into it, we will start working on it, we got the place. And when we tried to open—COVID came. So we try hard and hard and it takes like two years, actually a year and a half to get that restaurant together. And we all been during COVID. We opened July 31<sup>st</sup> of last year. And we were so scared. We don't know what to do. We have two kids, we're renting a house, bills and everything. But I told him, "You know, I believe in God. And I think we can do it." And I wanted to pass my mom's recipe. And maybe I skipped that. My mom came and worked with me and helped me and help my husband to learn how to make the bread and she gave me all of her recipes of the food. And she stayed with me for three months. And then after she went back to Virginia. A month later, I got a phone call she passed away. So yeah, so that's that's just like, you know, I was like, like, shocked for like a month. But I don't know, I guess God

landed to me, for her to come and teach me that. And, you know, when I start, you know making her food, making her recipe, I feel that she's with me all the time. So when we often was really scared of COVID: "What's going to happen then, how are we going to make it?" But thanks, God, I mean, since we all been, we have been busy. We got customers, we got support from the community. People love the food, they come in back to the restaurant, they're trying the food. The most things, they love it. When we make that, our own bread, and in front of them, and then we serve it to them like it's really hot and fresh. I mean, they just love it. So I think that's why my story is, it's like you know, food came from a big family, cooking food, passing my mom recipe. And I think I can, you know, I hope I can just keep her recipe alive as long as I can and pass it to my kids. Thank you.

Joel Dresang 15:49

That was Taqwa Obaid. She shared a story at "Around the Table: Stories of Food and Culture," an Ex Fabula event presented as part of Milwaukee Film's Cultures and Communities Festival, which was presented by Froedtert and the Medical College of Wisconsin. Thank you to those partners for having us. You know, Kim, I heard that story, and got so hungry for and curious about that bread, that taboon, that I actually went to her restaurant, bought some food and got extra taboon

Kim Shine 16:26

And, and how was it?

Joel Dresang 16:27

Oh, it's fabulous, really good. You know, I especially had some with some baba ghanoush. Yes. And it was—it was so good. But even by itself, it's just really tasty.

Kim Shine 16:36

Do you know, I was at this event. So I heard her story live and for whatever reason, I don't know. I think maybe I had eaten beforehand. Or maybe I just, you know, I was just not feeling like I wanted to eat but I didn't get any of her food!

Joel Dresang 16:52

Oh Kim! It's still available.

Kim Shine 16:54

I know! So yes, now I have to go.

Joel Dresang 16:57

Keep her in business so that you can have some. Taqwa's bakery restaurant is still serving up taboon bread, and many other delicious things. They're located just off 27th and Lakeland and the full menu is at [taqwas.com](http://taqwas.com).

Kim Shine 17:13

Should we get to some UltraShorts right now? Okay.

Joel Dresang 17:16

So UltraShorts are short stories that people at our events will contribute. It's based on the idea that everybody has a story to tell and sometimes people don't want to necessarily get up on stage and tell their story. So they can write it on a slip of paper, something really brief.

Kim Shine 17:33

30 seconds. Kind of ish.

Joel Dresang 17:34

Yeah. And legible, please. If you're going to be doing this, remember because somebody else is going to be reading it. So let's do some. We have some UltraShorts collected on the theme of 'Culture'.

Kim Shine 18:27

We do. Do you want to go? Should I go?

Joel Dresang 17:38

Sure. I'll go okay. So this is from Allegra, and it says "Game changer. 55 years ago, I sat in this very auditorium with my kindergarten class. As a student at Alverno Elementary School, a very progressive lab school, I came often to see different art performances. More importantly, I had French every day. As a result, I majored in French in college, did a year in Provence, and Peace Corps in West Africa. Alverno taught me to love language and culture. It spawned an international career. Alverno and French were my game changers."

Kim Shine 18:27

I love that. I took French in seventh grade, and we had a chance to go to Paris. I will never forget my dad did not let me go. Oh, look at the eyes around here.

Joel Dresang 18:37

Awh! Have you been?

Kim Shine 18:39

No, one of my friends went for her her wedding anniversary, or her wedding, and I really want to go.

Joel Dresang 18:43

And your dad didn't want you go again. Oh, this is coming up!

Kim Shine 18:48

Yeah, he said I can go. Our next UltraShort is from an anonymous writer. It says "The value of maintaining my identity while living in another culture is priceless. The temptation to blend in and do as the locals is tempting to be accepted. I would think if only I could cross over into their culture, then I would be accepted, make change and be happy. However, who I am inside isn't

changing. And it shouldn't. Because I'm accepted and happy when I don't crossover. When I am true to myself.”

Joel Dresang 19:25

And I appreciate that. And I think Anonymous is more interesting as their true person. Not blending in like everybody else.

Kim Shine 19:33

Nope. Good job. Our next story about culture is from Jason Drabek. It was told at the Green and Healthy Schools Conference which took place outside at the Fondy Farmers Market in August 2021. Here's Jason

Unknown Speaker 19:51

All right, miigwech. Thank you. Boo Boo balmy beneath Indigena cause Milwaukee and doing Jabba McKenzie and do dumb and it's not bando And oh good you got me no government No, because you got

It is a great day, I just wanted to greet you in Ojibwe. It's the language of my ancestors. And just introduce myself. My name is [ ], the Thunderbird, if you hear those thunders that come around, that kind of hangs out, that's where my name comes from. And my story started a little bit before 2019. Actually, started in 1977. That's long time ago, right? That just tells you I'm a little bit old. And I try to say I don't look old. But then my kids tell me, No, Dad, you're old, and so does my brother, and so does my sister. But in 1977, was born. Born confused, then continued to be a little bit confused. Born in the south side of Milwaukee, Native American male boy born just wondering, man, this, this is great. I love people, I love activity, I love action. I just don't feel at home, I don't feel it. I don't feel I belong. I don't feel like this is really me. And so I was lost. And I continued to be lost for a little bit of time until, I engaged in outside. I went camping, and just being outside, and not hearing everything. Slowing down, I felt a sense of peace, not a peace that I wanted to live in all the time. I love the city. I love my people, I love my family, I love being able to go places. But I have to go rejuvenate myself on occasion in those spaces. And so I continued that, continued that journey of living in two worlds. Living in a world where I know that I need to continue to push myself to be the best that I can be, but not really sure what that means. I know that I look a little bit different than the people that were in my neighborhood, didn't know what that meant. And that I knew that I wanted to be in spaces that converged. But that converged in ways that were respectful and healthy. And I wasn't I wasn't living in those spaces, I was living in spaces that said, you take as much as you can get as quick as you can, for as much as you can as long as you can. Because you got to take care of you, no one's gonna take care of you. That's your responsibility, you have to do that. And that's—that's how I grew up. And that's what I saw in schools. That's what I saw in my school that I attended. That's what I saw on the schools, whether they're public or private, elementary, or high school, and even in college, it was about the individual, not about the collective. And it didn't sit well. It rubbed me in a different way. And I didn't know what that meant. Until I ended up at the Indian Community School, was able to be there as a teaching assistant. And that changed my life. And it changed my life in profound ways, not because it exposed me to the

outdoors. But it unleashed what was inside of me always that I didn't know what it was. And that was a sense of belonging, and a sense of place. And those teachings that we receive, they talked a lot about that idea of of all of creation, of all of Earth, they can live without us. But we can't live without it. And so what do we do? How do we create spaces to take care of that responsibility? How do we enjoy those—the grounds? How do we take care of our relations, all of our relatives, the flowers, and the bugs and the birds and the mammals. That's our responsibility. And so those were, those were the initial thoughts that helped open up my mind to a new way of thinking and living. And really then engaging in that in education, whether it's in the outdoor garden. We have our local resident farmer, Mr. Jones over there in the back corner, hates it when I acknowledged him. So I like to do it purposely. So working with our students in the garden, our alumni, Alejandro, who continue to inspire us to be the best educators and people that we could possibly be. But we know that there's a lot of work to do, and how do we change perceptions? Because the same way that I grew up with that idea of take what you can, take advantage of it, it's yours, it's entitled to you, not give back? How do we change that perception because society wasn't changing. Our kids were growing up in that very much the same world. The only challenge is they had more instant access to all those thoughts with that little device, your cell phones that you have in your pockets, I have in mine, those things that keep reminding us about who's watching, what are they thinking? Do they approve? Do I fit? All those questions that continue to go through our students' minds? So how do we create space for them to live in a different way than they're raised? Live in a way that is in harmony and balance with all of creation, everyone and everything. So create opportunities, and it's not mine alone, but the one that was most impactful to me was one of our students engaged. We have learning connections to Mother Earth, how amazing that is to be connected to the earth that we're on. And students decided we want to clean up. We want to make a difference. And these are young people, the ones that we have to continue to provide opportunities for and inspire, because it's their future. And they said, Let's go clean up a park. And as these little kids go to the park and they clean up and they take the trash that's off to the side. They work together and they walk around, they see the water in the middle of the park and they start singing it to an Ojibwe. Singing "I love you water. I respect you. I love you." And so that idea is a sing around in the two girls hold their hands as they're walking around and they're picking up trash and they're singing the songs. I see in them what I didn't have growing up. I see in them a response sensibility and a hope that they can make a better life for their kids and for their ancestors. One of the greatest teachings that our elders gave us was that idea that we don't leave. We're, we're just guests here, right? This is our space to borrow. And what we do is we're borrowing this land in this space from our ancestors. So my question is, how do we empower those students? How do we engage those students so that they can see that that land that we borrowed from them, we left it in a better position than we received it? Thank you.

Miigwech

Kim Shine 25:34

And that was Jason sharing his culture story at the 2021 Green and Healthy Schools Conference. Thanks to the Green Schools Consortium of Milwaukee and Reflo H2O for partnering with Ex Fabula on this storytelling program. We also have an update from Jason. Of course, we do. He serves as the Head of School at the Indian Community School. He's also involved in supporting



language and culture for American Indian students and their families. He's passionate about education, Native American language and culture, environmental education, and spending time with families and friends. Born and raised in Milwaukee, he continues to seek experiences to grow, learn, and serve. I really liked his story.

Joel Dresang 26:20

Me too.

Kim Shine 26:22

Yeah, connecting to the world to mother nature just come on. And people often forget, or maybe they don't believe this way. But we come from the land, you know, we come from it. And then when we when we die, we go back to it. And we also have to just protect it for future generations. Because who knows what's going to happen when we're gone, Joel!

Joel Dresang 26:41

And, and those connections that people make with the land and how important that is with who they are and how they feel toward the world. Came up with some more UltraShorts!

Kim Shine 26:53

I think we should keep going. Okay, so this one is from Chris, a 2018 StorySlam selection. "In 2013, I went to Kabul, Afghanistan to meet with the Afghan peace volunteers. One of the young men I met was studying Business at the University of Kabul and managed a cement mixing company in Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. Now I remember him telling me that he'd hoped the war would end soon. But the war hasn't ended. Earlier this week. Almost five years later, I received a Facebook message from that man, Abdul Rahman. He and his wife are now in Kent, Washington. He loves Washington and is hopeful he'll get a job soon."

Joel Dresang 27:36

That's great.

Kim Shine 27:37

Yeah, that's great. Our next one is from Francisco. "When our son brought his girlfriend, Ashley, to spend the weekend with us at our house, she ate with us, too. We cooked pork feet, cow tongue, and for a girl who grew up in Michigan. She did so well *Latino from the rancho*" Well, that is all the time we have today for Real Stories MKE, but don't you worry. We have been at this for more than 10 years, and there are more audio and video stories available at [exfabula.org](http://exfabula.org).

Joel Dresang 28:07

Our website lists upcoming storytelling workshops and StorySlams, and we hope you'll join us at an event and maybe even share our story. You can also connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Kim Shine 28:19

And thank you to everyone who makes this program possible, including Ex Fabula staff, the storytellers, and audio engineer, Sam Woods.

Joel Dresang 28:28

Thank you, Sam. For Real Stories MKE, I'm Joel Dresang.

Kim Shine 28:32

And I'm Kim Shine. Thank you for listening.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>