

[Music]

[00:00:15]

Joel: Welcome to Real Stories MKE brought to you as part of Ex Fabula's work to connect Milwaukee through real stories. I'm Joel Dresang.

[00:00:22]

Kim: And I'm Kim Shine. Ex Fabula believes that everybody has a personal story that is worth sharing, so we host workshops, and folks can build their storytelling skills and their confidence. We also have StorySlams where true stories are shared on stage. And today, we are bringing you three of them.

[00:00:40]

Joel: That's right, Kim. And our theme is teamwork. For a society that emphasizes individualism, we also value teamwork. Teamwork asks us to set aside our individual interests for the good of the group. It acknowledges that for a lot of things we can achieve more together. By supporting one another and playing to each other's strengths. Now, Kim, I'm not a very good basketball player.

[00:01:03]

Kim: Are you really? I thought you would be amazing.

[00:01:06]

Joel: Oh, thank you. That's kind of you. But I'm a pretty good teammate. I like doing the rebounding, and passing, and playing defense, and setting screens. I like cheering my teammates on because I'm good at that, and I know it helps the team play better. So, what I lack in talent I try to make up for in congeniality and enthusiasm. And if not for teamwork, I wouldn't be on the floor.

[00:01:30]

Kim: See, that's great. When it comes to basketball, no. I remember when I was in middle school, high school and I did gym class. I was assigned basketball. Was not a good teammate there, but I don't think that that really is the true spectrum of what I can do. I think that I'm an individual who can definitely be on a team. Like if we're doing something competitive, we're going to win.

[00:01:52]

Joel: Yes. Sure.

[00:01:53]

Kim: I'm going to make sure everybody...we're going to win. You know? But if it's something that's like a group project, or a dance routine, or something that's more scholarly, I might need to take a moment to just kind of process what my role is on the team.

[00:02:08]

Joel: Right, sure.

[00:02:09]

Kim: And then I can come back in, yes. Let's jump back in.

[00:02:10]

Joel: Well, that's part of teamwork is just knowing your place on the team, right?

[00:02:12]

Kim: Exactly. Exactly.

[00:02:14]

Joel: Yeah, good. Well, the first story that we're looking at for teamwork today is from Matt Muddler [Phonetic 00:02:21]. Matt told this story at an Ex Fabula Experience with the theme of 'Kitchen Confidential'. Here's Matt.

[Music]

[00:02:37]

Matt: All right, so I'm going to... Hi, my name is Matt, by the way. In case you didn't hear that, head chef at Wonderland in Riverwest.

[Applause]

[00:02:46]

Matt: Oh, yay. Y'all heard of us. Great. Thank you. I'm going to tell you about the story of possibly professionally the worst day of my professional life. But through that probably being...learning probably one of the most important things and one of the things that keeps me in the service industry to this day. And probably something that has been a central theme in a lot of these stories. So, my first kitchen I ever managed at Comet Café back in like I want to say 2014, 2015. And I think it was my second Summerfest. Back then, oh, yes... We got one right there. Huge time for us. Every Summerfest would obliterate us. And this one year we happened to have the 4th of July fall on a Monday. Back then, Summerfest, if it fell on a Monday, they'd have a day off. So, all those people in Milwaukee who came for Summerfest had to find something to do. They would come to Comet. So, after that whole long weekend of just getting obliterated, our shelves were completely bare. We only had one purveyor that would deliver to us.

That was Reinhard [Phonetic 00:03:59]. So, we had all the food, everything that was going to restock our shelves, showing up with one truck. Our service started at ten. We are biting our nails because at 9:45 there's a line down the block. And we're sitting there, and I'm trying to keep everyone together. I'm like, "Guys, it's fine. It's coming. It's coming. It's coming." Well, now it's ten to, and we have no eggs for brunch. So, what do I do? Get in my car and drive to Pick 'N Save. I tell the back of the house, "Do not tell the front of the house we are out of eggs. You tell the front of the house we are out of eggs, and they will panic." So, I get to the Pick 'N Save. I find a clerk, and I go, "Excuse me, I would like a case of eggs." That man had no idea what a case of eggs was. I had to go, "So you know the things that all the eggs come in? I would like the whole thing."

So, he goes in the back and finds a big case of eggs. I am now calling my Reinhard rep going, "Hey, man, when are we getting our deliver?" We open at ten, mind you. He goes, "Oh, I have you slated for 1:30 PM." I go, "Hey, man, I don't know what amount of strings you got to pull, but that's not going to work for us." And I think he heard the absolute terror in my voice. And he went, "I'll get something figured out." So, as I'm sitting in the line, beep, beep, beep, beep. Every single dozen eggs. My anxiety is mounting. My anxiety is mounting. My anxiety is mounting. I finally get through, and the guy calls me and said, "Hey, we'll be there at 11, 11:30." Great. Get there. Bring the case of eggs. By then, the front of the house knows we're out of eggs, and they're panicking. And I'm telling them, "No, no, no, it's fine. We have the eggs. Everyone cool down." I'm prepping, truck shows up. People get let in. We see the ticket board just fill. We're having lines of tickets on top of the full board, and my sous chef looks at me with a deer in the headlights... He's been in the industry longer than I have, and he is 6'5", 300 pounds. And that man looks terrified. I go, "You want me to jump in?" He's like, "Well, if you want to."

[Laughter]

[00:05:59]

Matt: So, I hop in, and we are trudging through the day. I am on one side, a 20-something-year-old who just came up from the dish pit, and he is trudging along with me. I have another guy who just got... We got him from his first job out of prison. And he's sludging along with me. And we're going, and we're going, and we're going. We're trying to keep it together. And then halfway through the shift, my dishwasher walks out. And no one is yelling at him. He is literally just kind of almost limping. I said, "Hey, man, slow down. It's all good." By the second time I tell him, "Hey, slow is fast. Fast is slow." He just puts his stuff on and just leaves.

[Laughter]

[00:06:34]

Matt: And then the guy who just came up from the dish pit is like, "It's not even that bad." It was that bad. Then to top it all off, I go out for my first cigarette break of the day. It is 2:30. I am dripping with sweat. And food all around me. And I look, and I'm like, "Where's my car?" Apparently they still tow cars on 4th of July. And I turned to one of the servers, and he goes, "Oh, yeah, they towed that around like 10:30, but there was nothing we could do. And we didn't want you to have a worse day." But after that. After that whole day, after that awful day, I'm cleaning up. We sit out in the back courtyard. We shotgun a beer. And then we reflect on the day. And then we just sit there and make jokes. Like that's the thing I kept talking about. And then what a lot of people kept talking about is the comradery. That's what keeps you with the person next to you, because they went through it with you. And trying to put out a good product and have a good shift, and that's it. And that's why I'm still in the industry. That's why I think a lot of you were and still are and continue. And just trying to do good by the person next to you and putting out a good product for the customer. Thank you.

[Applause]

[00:07:43]

Kim: I really liked his story honestly, because I was just thinking... I visualized every moment. When they ran out of eggs, and he's like, "Don't tell the front of house." And then his car gets towed. And they're like, "Well, we didn't want to tell you." [Laughs]

[00:07:56]

Joel: For the benefit of the team, right?

[00:07:58]

Kim: Exactly.

[Laughter]

[00:07:59]

Kim: So, I could visualize all of those moments and then that relief that would just come at the end.

[00:08:05]

Joel: Have you ever worked in food service or in a kitchen?

[00:08:07]

Kim: I haven't.

[00:08:08]

Joel: Oh my gosh, yes.

[00:08:08]

Kim: You have?

[00:08:09]

Joel: One of the first jobs I had was a short order cook.

[00:08:12]

Kim: Oh my gosh.

[00:08:12]

Joel: Oh my gosh, yeah. It's just...

[00:08:14]

Kim: How stressful was that?

[00:08:14]

Joel: Stressful. But you're doing it together. Yeah.

[00:08:16]

Kim: It brings you... Yeah, it does bring you...

[00:08:18]

Joel: Yeah. It's really nice. Yeah. So, Kim, you know, Matt shared that story at an Ex Fabula Experience. As opposed to a public StorySlam, an Experience event is a smaller gathering of Ex Fabula members. It combines storytelling with interactive elements to get everybody participating in the event. So, then one of the benefits of being an Ex Fabula member is so that you can get invited to cool things like the Experience.

[00:08:44]

Kim: I like that. Our next teamwork story comes from Marika Kovacs-Houlihan [Phonetic 00:08:47], and she shared this one at our Deaf Story Projects StorySlam in 2022. This one is really cool because she told the story in American Sign Language. So, you'll hear the voice of the ASL interpreter, who's from Professional Interpreting Enterprise, as they interpret the story into spoken English. If you'd like to see this story told in ASL, you can check it out on Ex Fabula's YouTube channel. Here's Marika's story.

[Applause]

[00:09:18]

Marika: Good evening, everyone. It is so good to be on this stage talking to all of you tonight. My name is Marika, and the story that I would like to share with you is one of many that I've told in the past. You might be able to tell by my age, but I'm going to go ahead and date myself by saying in 1989 I decided to try out for the Deaflympics basketball team. I was ready to compete, and the place that they were holding the competition was in New Zealand. And I have to say, it was the time of my life. Having this experience with all of these world-class deaf athletes playing with one another was something that I will truly never forget. The interactions, the opportunity to meet people from all over the world was amazing. During the closing ceremonies, I had kind of a bittersweet moment, celebrating all the things that we had done but then all of a sudden watching these new friends go back to their home countries.

The people that were left were from the US, and we were about ready to take a shuttle to the airport to make our way to America. Everybody got on the shuttle, said goodbye to all of our newfound friends, and we decided to go to Auckland, New Zealand, which is a little bit far down in New Zealand. And we had to take a smaller plane to Christchurch. And then that was going to take us to our home country. The plane was packed full, but we didn't mind. We were having a good time, sharing our experiences at the Deaflympics. We got to Christchurch, and I have to say we didn't want the fun to end. But we were still feeling kind of melancholy about the fact that it was over, and we realized that we were facing a ten-hour layover at this particular airport. So, we all sat and talked about what we should do. So, we decided to rent a van right there just to see, "Hey, for ten hours, what can we do to Christchurch while we're here?"

So, we got in a van, and we decided where we would want to go. We got everybody signed up. It was great. There was a driver, and then of course I was in the front seat with the driver. And of course at that time, we didn't have GPSs, by the way. Again, dating myself. Right? We had a regular, old fashioned paper map. And so my friends are in the back rows, and they're talking about where they want to go. They're trying to figure out what would be the best place to visit. And so I've got this person with the

map. I'm navigating. We have the driver. And we paint the town red. We stop at this one place first, and we go to this restaurant. Then we go ahead and take a little tour of the mountains in that area. We got to the top of this area that was a mountain, and it was so serene.

The sun was just setting, and all of my friends had decided that we were just going to forget the plan. We were going to stay. Who cares if we're not going to get back to America for the next day? Everybody agreed that we were just going to screw the plane and stay in New Zealand. Then of course one person got in the van. They were unsure. Then another person got up. And we kind of knew how this was going to end. We decided one after the other as we got on the bus it was time to go home. Now, it was getting dark, and we decided to try to get to the airport as efficiently as we could. And of course, remember, we're trying to navigate with these paper maps and everywhere to go. Then we saw this sign. This sign looked like a triangle and a picture that had what looked like an "I love you" sign on it. But that was okay. We were going to go ahead. And there was a picture of an airplane on it, meaning that we were on the right track to the airport. But unfortunately, we got lost.

And then all of a sudden, we're going in this direction, and we don't know where the airport is. We're driving all around frantically, thinking we're going to miss our flight. All of a sudden we start getting really nervous. Where are we going to end up? So, we saw a local policeman, and we asked them where the airport was because we needed to leave soon. So, when we took a look at the sign, and it said "airport," take a look at which way plan is pointing. If the plane is oriented to the left, then you go to the left. If it's oriented to the right then you go to the right. So, now we got New Zealand signs figured out. We finally get all the way down to the airport. We know exactly when we need to be there. It is really close. We get our bags. We get it all checked in. And then we decide we're going to have two people drop off the baggage, another two people get the van checked in. Then we realize that there was this huge speed bump, and it shattered the glass in the van. And now here we are... We haven't even checked in the van yet. We hit the speedbump. We wrecked the van.

We're trying to get to our flight on time. And there's no TSA, by the way. So, we can really just kind of walk in. Remember, again, how old I am is being revealed in this story. So, anyway. So, here we go. Trying to get through this airport. We're trying to drop off the baggage, and we can't just drop off the van without any windows on it, right? How are we going to do that? Who's going to notice, right? Well, yeah, they would. So, we went ahead and got into the airport, and the coach for the Deaflympics was furious with us. He was telling us to hightail it as fast we possibly could to our gate. We got on the plane, but there were more of us that were waiting. And then the door closed, the plane took off. And then we took a moment and laughed so hard that our guts were busting. And here we are getting yelled at, of course, at the same time by our coach. The flight was about ready to leave, and then all of a sudden they realized that somebody was missing.

When they taxied the airplane and they realized that not just a couple of us but ten of us were missing, they actually went back into the gate, waited for us, so that we could all get on the plane. Now, they wouldn't do that for anybody anymore, but they did it for us. And we got into LA, right? We're in California. And it's time to get on our respective flights to go back home, but there were about five of us that were left over. And we're thinking, "What should we do in the six-hour...?" Like, "I got an idea. Let's go ahead and rent a car." And the rest is history. Thank you.

[Applause]

[00:16:57]

Joel: Kim, I'm glad you brought that up, that this is on the YouTube channel.

[00:17:00]

Kim: Yeah.

[00:17:00]

Joel: Because I was at that event. It was so full that my seat was right behind a pillar.

[00:17:05]

Kim: Oh my God.

[00:17:08]

Joel: So, I couldn't see. I couldn't see any of the storytellers. So, now I can see it on YouTube, and it's also got closed caption. So, you can follow along with Marika as she tells her story. But I love the story.

[00:17:17]

Kim: Yeah. Well, I want to kind of tell a joke. You know how they say when you buy tickets and the least expensive ticket is the one that's right behind the pillar?

[Laughter]

[00:17:25]

Joel: That's me. That's what I got.

[00:17:28]

Kim: Why'd you like her story though?

[00:17:30]

Joel: It was just so adventurous and just the teamwork aspect of it – of kind of the team deciding that they were going to go off and...

[00:17:37]

Kim: And get lost? [Laughs]

[00:17:39]

Joel: ...go on this trip. Yeah, you know. What the heck? [Laughs]

[00:17:40]

Kim: Well, one of the best parts of Ex Fabula is the variety in how narratives are told. So, our first Deaf Project Story Slam was held back in 2019. And we'll keep having these as long as there are stories to tell and to also sign.

[00:17:56]

Joel: Yes, love it.

[00:17:58]

Kim: Should we do some UltraShorts?

[00:18:00]

Joel: Let's do some UltraShorts.

[Laughter]

[00:18:02]

Kim: All right, this one here is from anonymous. "Being part of my school's green school yard team has taught me the importance of green space and green infrastructure."

[00:18:15]

Joel: This ultrashort is from Sue. "I was 18 and had just arrived in Madison when I read an article in the Daily Cardinal about some waitresses who had organized a union at the restaurant where they worked. I went there to meet them and tried to organize the IHOP I worked at. I got fired two weeks later, and it set me on a lifetime course of labor activism."

[00:18:37]

Kim: All right. Well, Javier says, "I was representing my mostly white AmeriCorps program at the Serve Wisconsin Conference when a kickball game started up. A group of beautifully diverse leaders in black track jackets rolled up and needed one more for their team. I quickly raised my hand and joined them and immediately felt like I was at home. I knew then I would be part of Public Allies one day."

[00:18:59]

Joel: That's great. This one is about the Amazing Milwaukee Race. And it's from... The person's name is #35. They must have still been wearing their bib, I guess.

[00:19:10]

Kim: [Laughs]

[00:19:12]

Joel: So, #35 says, "My sister and I worked as a team to figure out the transit bus system. We took the gold and green line buses to and from the Maynard Planetarium. Even though we are cold, we are having fun. We are very proud."

[00:19:27]

Kim: Yeah, don't let the weather mess you up. [Laughs]

[00:19:30]

Joel: Yeah.

[00:19:30]

Kim: And here's one from Bergart [Phonetic 00:19:31]. "My son, Charlie, ran a 5K with me. I paced him in the beginning so he wouldn't burn out. And halfway through, he asked if he could run ahead and ended up beating me. He was only seven. I felt very proud."

[00:19:46]

Joel: Aw.

[00:19:46]

Kim: Aw.

[00:19:47]

Joel: [Laughs] Our final teamwork story comes from Dan Lococo [Phonetic 00:19:51]. He shared this story at our Parenting StorySlam in March 2023. Here's Dan.

[Applause]

[00:19:56]

Dan: The door opens, followed by little footsteps. I say, "Good morning, Amelia. How did you sleep?" She says, "Why is it so dark in here?" I turn on a light switch. I decide this isn't the day we're going to have a conversation as to why some people see and others don't. Seems like giving and getting hugs is a much better idea. So, as I'm hugging my four-year-old granddaughter, I'm reminded that when her mama, Rachel, was about her age, I sometimes referred to her as my seeing eye kid. I don't know when my kids learned that I don't see, but Rachel and I, we were partners in crime at a very early age. And one of the first projects we worked on together was fixing a door in the duplex we owned that we were getting ready to rent.

And when we first got the place about five years earlier, the door is ready to come off the hinges. But we were going to use the room as a nursery, so we didn't really care. We storied in the basement. But now it was time to rehang the door. So, for the sake of efficiency, my wife and I decided to split the kids and the chores for the day. Helen and Jesse headed off after packing the car, and Rachel and I were left to do the job. Our project was we were going to fix the doorframe on Saturday and hang the door on Sunday. What we needed to do... Today, our job was to drill out the doorframe, install some wooden pegs that were going to be the basis for the door hinges to deal with tomorrow. So, had all our tools, had everything together. We were drilling. We were measuring. We were cutting pegs. Everything was going fine until it came time to put those pegs in the doorframe.

And as planned, the door, the holes, and the pegs were the almost exact same size. But that meant they weren't going to go in the holes. We had to do something to either make the pegs a little bit smaller or the hole a little bit bigger. And we were just stuck. You know how when you are thinking of just what

you want, you picture it. We looked everywhere in that house. We looked in the drawers. We looked in the old toolbox. We looked in closets. I could picture a piece of sandpaper or file, and yet nothing. So, we looked at our options. And I thought, "Well..." Couldn't call Helen because the phone had already been transferred to the new place. And cell phones were another ten years away. There's a hardware store down Brady Street, but I didn't bring my cane, handy. And having a four-year-old guide me down a busy street just...not a good plan.

And just sitting around waiting until Helen and Jesse got back, that seemed wrong in so many ways. So, we were just stuck. Did not know what to do. And finally since I had nothing else to do, I thought, "Okay, Rachel, here's the deal. We got these pegs. I need to scrape them to get them a little bit smaller on one end so I can get them started. What should we do?" And Rachel looked at the pegs, and she looked at me. And she said, "Well, we could scrape them on the floor in the basement. When I run and I fall, it scrapes the skin off my knee." And being a bright, sunny day, we headed out to the front stoop, and we scraped our pegs on the concrete. And it worked perfectly. In just a little, little time, we had our six pegs tapered. We had six pegs in the doorframe. We were all set to go. And that was the first of many projects we participated in together, but it definitely was not the last time that Rachel bailed me out of some weird situations. She's a very smart kid and still my partner in crime. Thank you.

[Applause]

[00:24:44]

Kim: Dan's story was really sweet.

[00:24:45]

Joel: I loved that... Yeah, the innovation that his kid brought to the whole project.

[00:24:50]

Kim: And this was another one where I could see them with the nails. They didn't have the sandpaper, so I could see them actually trying to...

[00:24:58]

Joel: With the pegs on the... Yeah, on the sidewalk. I can imagine myself walking by that sidewalk, wondering what the heck they're doing.

[00:25:04]

Kim: And it tells you how ingenious kids are, too.

[00:25:07]

Joel: Yeah.

[00:25:06]

Kim: Sometimes you got to listen to them.

[00:25:08]

Joel: Well, and the fact that he was tuned into that. So, that was pretty cool.

[00:25:10]

Kim: Right.

[00:25:11]

Joel: So, Dan sent us a note saying this, "It was great fun to get to share my story on the Ex Fabula stage. I especially appreciate how the Ex Fabula team made sure access was not a barrier to the storytelling experience." Thanks, Dan. I appreciate that, too. And just the fact that you take down barriers, that you gives more access means that you're going to get a greater variety of storytellers and better storytellers.

[00:25:37]

Kim: And when we do that, we always talk about how it brings us all together, just makes everything more relatable. Because you hear stories, and then you get out of your own box. You get out of your own way.

[00:25:46]

Joel: Yes. Yes.

[00:25:47]

Kim: And you realize, "Hey, you know, people live in different ways, but we all kind of experience a lot of the same things."

[00:25:54]

Joel: And a part of teamwork is just sort of keeping an eye on other people and adjusting to that.

[00:25:58]

Kim: Exactly.

[00:25:58]

Joel: And letting them live to their best abilities.

[00:26:02]

Kim: I agree.

[00:26:03]

Joel: Yeah, great. So, Kim, how about another UltraShort? And, again, these UltraShorts are short stories that people write on little slips of paper. And they're read by emcees at our StorySlams.

[00:26:13'

Kim: Okay, go ahead, emcee.

[00:26:15]

Joel: Okay. This one is from Robert. "My boss had several employees who were very close, but the boss was an outsider. The employees were high performers and were the best team in the company. The boss tried to make unwarranted changes without the team's input, and production seriously declined. The team was exhausted and all quit together. Never underestimate the power of the team."

[00:26:41]

Kim: Wow. I want to see where they all are now. You know? [Laughs]

[00:26:43]

Joel: Right. Where the boss is.

[Laughter]

[00:26:46]

Kim: That, too. Well this one is from Javi. Javi says, "In eighth grade, I was on the track and field team. I was one of the fastest short distance sprinters. Mid-season, I hurt my knee. So, I could still run but was now too slow to compete. I felt defeated and incomplete. Then I just cheered my team." That's good sportsmanship.

[00:27:08]

Joel: Yeah. Yeah, it is.

[00:27:08]

Kim: I like that.

[00:27:11]

Joel: Yeah. Yeah. This UltraShort is from Jen Girsky [Phonetic 00:27:13]. "We were playing in the national softball tournament in Rockford, winning run on second base, and we are in the field. An unreachable ball was hit to left field, and our hearts sank. We all thought we would lose the game. Our left fielder made an all-star catch, running back, and saved the run. We won. It was an emotional roller coaster, from sadness to euphoria.

[00:27:36]

Kim: All right.

[00:27:38]

Joel: Yeah. Well, Kim, it's that time of the show.

[00:27:40]

Kim: It's always that time of the show I feel, you know.

[00:27:42]

Joel: No, it isn't. It just gets to be that way at the end. So, that's all the time we have. So, don't worry, anybody, because we've been at this since 2009, and there are more audio and video stories available at exfabula.org.

[00:27:56]

Kim: Yeah, you guys can check our website, which has upcoming workshops and StorySlams. And we also really want yawl to come to an event and maybe even share a story yourself. You can connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Because we do some pretty cool stuff on Instagram now.

[00:28:11]

Joel: Yes. Yes.

[00:28:12]

Kim: Thanks to Lauren.

[00:28:14]

Joel: [Laughs] And thanks to the whole team who makes this program possible, including Ex Fabula staff, the storytellers, producer Lauren Instenes, and audio engineer, Sam Woods. And special thanks to the funders of our Deaf Storytelling Project, the Milwaukee Public Library Foundation, Bader Philanthropies [Phonetic 00:28:31], and Ex Fabula members. Also shoutout to our parenting slam event partner, Norris Inc., and its Beyond Fostering program.

[00:28:41]

Kim: For Real Stories MKE, I'm Kim Shine.

[00:28:43]

Joel: And I'm Joel Dresang. Thanks for listening, and remember everyone has a story. Think about telling yours.

[Music]