

## Postscript: Starting Over

Robin M. Boylorn

Self-representational digital stories are “personal stories, told with the storyteller’s own voice, in the first person” (Lundby, 2008, p. 5). Digital narratives are also collaborative and co-constructed, influenced by the stories we have lived and witnessed, and grounded in the canonical narratives we are exposed to in culture (Lambert, 2006). In the workshop, these stories included those we brought with us in the room, those we inherited from our families, those from popular culture and media that we seek to resist, and those we had lived that begged to be told. As demonstrated in this special issue, our stories reflect our personal experiences while reverberating others.

One of the purposes of the workshop was to identify and embrace the opportunities embedded in everyday technology to help us tell our stories, but I would be remiss if I did not also use this space as an opportunity to think about the challenges technology poses when relied upon as a singular method of creating, saving, and disseminating our stories. While digital storytelling is a remarkable option, it should not be adopted at the expense and exclusion of more traditional storytelling methods. Truth is, technology sometimes fails us. At times, that failure is ours, in others the fault lies with the technology itself, or even fate. I was reminded of this when preparing to write the conclusion to this manuscript. I

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interviewed each of the participants of the workshop at least once, accumulating nearly 20 hours of automatically transcribed cloud recordings on the Zoom platform available through my university. While I took memo notes during the interviews, jotting down follow up questions and noting themes, I planned to return to the recordings themselves to re-listen to and re-watch the interviews and use direct quotes from the women about their experience. Months later when I returned to “the cloud” to retrieve the recordings they were no longer there. Instead, I found that they were automatically erased because of a University setting format I had not been advised of in advance. Unbeknownst to me, this setting was to automatically delete any cloud recordings after 30 days. Had I known the recordings would not be available in perpetuity and would result in the irretrievable loss of data for this project, I would have done several things differently. One, I would have downloaded the recordings, saved them to my hard drive, and backed them up on a different server. Two, I would have paid more attention to the Zoom tutorial; and, Three, I would have been more diligent about backing up the stories I was recording in those interviews. Instead of re-saving the recordings outside of the Zoom platform, I was impressed that Zoom had an option that would audio transcribe the recorded conversations so I wouldn’t have to. With this in mind, I created a folder in my email account to save all of the confirmation emails I received indicating that the cloud recordings and audio transcripts were “now available” with no way of knowing at that time that they would not be available when I needed them.

There were other technological gaffes within the workshop.

1. The workshop editing took place in a computer classroom in my college. After the first day of learning the software and techniques, storytellers began to upload pictures, audio, and video clips to the computers they were using, and saved their “as is” work to complete on the final day. Unexpectedly, the next morning they arrived to find that the computers had been wiped clean. Evidently, the classroom computers, like my Zoom Cloud, had been preset to automatically erase saved content overnight. The women would spend hours on the final day of the workshop replicating their work. They had to start over because their stories had been lost, “accidentally” deleted because the technology was set up to clear saved work to free up space.
2. The thumb drives that were provided for the storytellers to save their work on were ironically incompatible with the computers (we were, however, able to save their “large” files on Google Drive), so they were not able to save a version of their digital stories in a format that could be easily altered. That meant that some of the women who would later revise their

stories from the workshop, including for this special issue, would have to start all over again (again), likely without the same emphasis, sound effects, or timing.

3. A final challenge was a limitation of access to some of the tools outside of the workshop. While Veralyn shared a list of digital technology and software that could be used at home to create digital stories (including Adobe, Premiere Pro, Audacity and Hindenberg), she trained the storytellers using iMovie, which was available on the Mac computers we used in the lab. Like me, most of the participants were not familiar with Macs, and had to be taught step by step instructions on how to navigate the computer, let alone the software. While two days on the computers inevitably alleviated the illiteracy with the technology, if they did not have access to some of it outside of the workshop, how would they expand, revise, or reproduce what they had learned before they could forget?

The landscape of digital media and technology is constantly changing, and with it accessibility and possibility. One of our goals for this workshop was to demystify digital media so that participants would feel comfortable trying new technology and consolidating their stories into small, digestible and easily shareable vignettes. By honoring the reality that we all have a story to tell, we hoped to help storytellers learn how to craft those stories legibly for a larger public. But ultimately the purpose of *The Storyteller Project: Digital Storytelling for Women of Color* was not simply to provide technical assistance with storytelling, but to provide a community context for black women to tell their stories proudly and unapologetically. While themes of oppression, mothering, memory, spirituality, mental health and ability, sexual freedom and sexuality, and social justice reform pushed the stories forward, it was the bravery of the women to tell their stories through testimonies that made them memorable. Their stories are a reminder of how many times and in how many ways black women have been forced to start over with nothing, from nothing, to generate everything. And the storied starting over is done elegantly, intentionally, and beautifully. On her personal blog in response to the event, storyteller Kristina Hamlett chronicled our few days together as an amalgamation of power, saying, “when a group of black women who don’t hold shame congregate and create with love...there is power in the room.” And there was.

I can’t wait to start over.  
And do it again.

## References

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