

Storytelling in Person

Preparation and Practice

Where and When

There are many ways and places to tell your byway stories. You and others can tell them live and in person; on radio or television; with interpretive signs along the byway; on websites, Facebook, blogs and other social media; in brochures, pamphlets and books; and who knows what else will be created in the future. Each technique has its own set of “dos and don’ts.” This Byway Fact Sheet is about live and in person storytelling. Other techniques are described in other Byway Fact Sheets.

Advance Work

Before you “go on the road” with your byway storytelling, there is some advance work that needs to be done. First of all, you need to choose a byway topic to talk about, e.g., your favorite place along the byway. Explain why it is your favorite, why you think it is a place others would like and where it is. Other topics could be an important historic element of your byway, famous and infamous people from the area, natural sites, flora and fauna they should look for along the way, history of the byway itself, etc. Do not try to tell every story you know



in one visit or every detail on the topic.

Research and Preparation

Research the topic you plan to tell about, even if you are already familiar with it. Be sure you confirm “facts,” and possibly find out more about the topic. Then, organize the information you have gathered into a succinct presentation that includes humor, if appropriate. Remember do not read to the visitors.

If possible, find out the characteristics of your audience in advance (e.g., age, sex, race, residence, culture, experience, interests). How large is the group? Are there any hearing, language issues or other things that might impact the storytelling or listening.

Even if you do not know any information in advance, prepare to ask a few questions when you



first meet them. Interests? Travel plans? How they came to your byway.

Presentation Format and Setting

Determine the type of presentation and location you plan to use to tell your story:

1. Elevator speech – short and complete, 10 seconds max, attention grabber. Be prepared for follow up questions: e.g. “What is a byway?”
2. Indoor Lecture - in classroom, theatre, hotel conference room, museum, etc., with/without microphone, projection equipment, stage;
3. Outdoor Tour - wayside overlook, park, along a trail, in front of an historic building, etc.;
4. Onboard all-day bus tour; etc. Be aware that background noise may pose problems especially if you are close to the roadway itself.



Other Considerations

Do you have items that relate to your story that you can let the audience touch or look at? Have them available for your visitors.

Sometimes byway visitors have a limited time to stop, some may not have long attention spans, and sometimes what you think is fascinating is not “their cup of tea.” Keep an eye out for signs of weariness among your audience. If you detect loss of interest, hit the highlights and move on.

Ask questions, to get their take, but do not let anyone take over. Be polite if someone wants to “hog the show” and get back on track quickly.

Practice your presentation ahead of time so that you are able to “go live” without reading it. Then practice, practice, practice!

Closing

Summarize and take questions. Answer those you can and admit that you don’t have the answer to those you do not know. Suggest places for them to seek more information. Lastly, show how much you appreciate them coming to visit you and invite them to come again!