

## **TOPIC:** Real Life Story Time / The Power of Stories

### **Executive Report:**

Family of Faith Christian University has lost its student and faculty camaraderie. I remember when we had campus-wide meals held at faculty houses, game nights of volleyball or basketball, board game nights, snowball fights during finals week between faculty and students, study nights at the library or a local restaurant, coffee break study sessions, a class being moved to a local event space for a change of scenery, and many other memories. What do all these have in common? People are coming together to get to know each other and spend time investing in each other's lives. My desire is to bring that back. We have heard this desire from the students as well in their course surveys as of late. Students want more course interaction and not just teaching with videos. Students are asking for interaction with each other as well as the faculty.

When going from a fully on-campus university to a completely online university, we left a piece of who we are behind. We are a “family”.

As the FFCU Librarian, I feel the urge to bring us back to our roots. The library is a place to bring people together. So why not the librarian to be the one who brings them together as the “engagement developer” or “the learning experience curator” (Stephens, 2016, p 121).

Being a completely online library has its limitations in bringing people together, but technology has made that possible. It might not be the same as in-person hangouts or communal snowball fights, but it can still be fun and enjoyable.

## **Introduction:**

The idea is to start a communal event day once a month. This will be a day when the students and faculty have the opportunity to come together outside of class time and do something together that is not course-related, but to build relationships and knowledge.

This idea is a spin-off (not an exact duplicate) of the innovation of the Human Library. We, as a university community, have a gold mine of potential for life stories to be shared. We all have lived through things and have had experiences that others can learn from or could gain understanding of by our sharing.

So often, in the academic world, we have the privilege of listening to teachings from academic professors. But how often is the teaching mixed with personal stories? How often is there the opportunity to ask questions? Is there a time and place where we can suggest topics that interest us?

That is the idea behind the Real Life Story Time. The barriers between faculty and students get pulled down, and they get to talk on a level playing field. Preconceived ideas of stereotypes are dismantled and evaluated by the books and readers. Faculty and students get to share and ask questions of each other. They get to know each other in a way they wouldn't get to otherwise. When lives are shared, a new understanding is built between people.

## Origin/Context:

The Human Library idea started in “Copenhagen, Denmark, by Ronni Abergel and his brother Dany and colleagues Asma Mouna and Christoffer Erichsen as a project for the Roskilde Festival. It was premiered in Kenya, Panama, Botswana, as well as other countries in 2018” (<https://humanlibrary.org/about/the-early-years/>). “The first human libraries in the United States were held in 2008 by the Bainbridge Public Library (BPL) in Bainbridge Island, Washington, and the Santa Monica (Calif.) Public Library (SMPL)” (as cited by Wentz (2013)).



The Human Library Books are people with stories to share who are usually misunderstood or seen by others in a negative light. Every library has its own spin or flavor of Human Library Books, but the idea is the same: invite people to be “living books” to share an event or lifestyle in their life (or former life) that is of interest to others. The people who come to listen and ask questions are the readers.

There are many reasons to share a story: to entertain, to inform, to educate, or to simply share. It is where people get involved in others' lives by sharing, but also by inquiring. The Human Library Book and the reader both have the opportunity to share and inquire. It is not a one-way street.

Everyone would be invited to come and participate; faculty, staff, and students alike. The level of engagement that they choose to give is up to the individual. Nothing is forced or mandatory. This would be a free space for sharing and learning among those who show up.

The twist on the Human Library I am presenting is different than the proposed Human Library, though. So we really would have to rename it so we do not get in trouble for using the Human Library name, which is a registered trademark (<https://hud.libguides.com/c.php?g=712368&p=5146252>). I propose the name Living Evidence Library.

### **Application:**

FFCU students are asking for more interaction in courses (this area is up to the professors) and outside of course time (this is where the librarian can facilitate learning opportunities for all involved). The professors and the students alike can be Living Evidence Books and readers. Everyone can get to know each other through telling their stories, and in turn asking questions of each other. This can be helpful for everyone, no matter their place in the university. Everyone can come to a better understanding of each other. Friendships can be created, nurtured, and deepened through time spent together sharing and inquiring. Everyone's lives can be sown into, and growth of knowledge can be earned.

In this day and age, deep relationships seem to be of the past. Most of us are hidden behind our electronics, where we do not have to show who we are or truly interact. Texting and messaging others are counterfeits to a true relationship. We can say anything without others' knowledge of the truth. We cannot read facial expressions or body language

through a text or a message. We can hide. The idea is to build **real** relationships and be **real** with others.

As we get to know each other, we are more prone to be there for each other when times are rough. Family shares their joys and sorrows. A true family cares for one another. Experiences make us who we are, and when we share a part of ourselves, we include others in our experiences.

What could be a hindrance to this idea being implemented? We are not a huge university. We have faculty and students scattered all over the world. The time differences may be one issue with putting this into place. It could be difficult to find a time that works for the majority of the people who want to participate. We may need to do it at a few different times to see how it fits best. The other real flag is the topics to be shared. The desire is to allow people to share who they really are or who they were, or an experience they went through that could be of help for others to know or understand.

### **Evidence:**

For libraries that have implemented Human Libraries, the challenges came in different forms. The biggest issue I saw was having a support team in place for those sharing. They need to know the place is a safe place to share, if their story could bring up stereotypes, prejudices, or injustices. Some of the case studies I read came from the University of Huddersfield (<https://hud.libguides.com/c.php?g=712368&p=5146260>). Overall, the outcomes were positive on the Human Book and the reader side of the events. The only real lack found was the need for preparation.

I do not believe there is a Non-Denominational Academic University Library doing what I am proposing. I found an event that was held on the Sacred Heart University Campus (<https://www.sacredheart.edu/news-room/news-listing/books-talk-at-shus-first-human-library-event/>), but it did not go as I am proposing for our events. There was one other “Christian University” that hosted a Human Library in January 2017. It was held at Texas Christian University (TCU), but I cannot find any information on the event. The TCU campus planned to have another Human Library event on January 30, 2019, but from what I could find out, it had little to no interest ([https://calendar.tcu.edu/event/tcus\\_human\\_library](https://calendar.tcu.edu/event/tcus_human_library)).

In research, I did find stories of people who are being Life Evidence books in another way though, that aligns with what my proposed event entails. Rachel Howard wrote about some of the contributors to the “‘Here’s My Heart’ Documentary of ex-LGBTQ who came to Christ and how their lives and sense of self changed” (2017). MJ Nixon, who authored *The Journey Back Home*, is putting this documentary together not just with others' stories but also her own. She now works with the Refuge Ranch Atlanta deliverance ministry. Nixon’s goal is to “show the power of Christ and to show how to minister respectfully to the LGBT community” (Howard, 2017).



(Pictures from Here's My Heart Documentary Facebook pictures page)

I also researched other ways of life turned to Christ in reports. One that stuck out to me was an interview with a Satanist turned Christian. Michael Foust reported on the interview between Sean McDowell and Tepe. Tepe was raised in a Christian home, but started dabbling in the occult in college. She came to Christ after her mother died. The interview is found here: <https://youtu.be/duz0QmN5WII?feature=shared> (it is long).



(Picture from Foust's article in *Crosswalk* - Former Satanist Shares Her Remarkable Journey to Finding Christ.)

These are all real people with a story to share that we can learn from.

Like I stated earlier, this Real Life Story Time with Life Evidence Library Books is a spin-off of the Human Library concept. Unlike the original Human Library, where the stories are from people who are presently Gay, Lesbian, Nonbinary, Satanists, Drug Abusers, Witches, Transgender, and many other ways of life, our Real Life Story Times are from the viewpoint of those who once walked these walks but now are redeemed by the Blood of Jesus. They can talk from the perspective of one who walked that lifestyle or had such and such happen to them, but they found Hope in Jesus. They can bring clarity to what that lifestyle is like and how they got there, but then how everything changed with meeting the Love of Jesus. They can also share who and what made the difference to draw them to Christ.

We, as a “Christian Society”, shun or are even scared of some people. We have prejudices that are not right. We need to see people through Christ’s eyes. Someone needs to share Christ with them and show them that there is a way out and that they are loved. Hearing from those who have walked there would help open our eyes to the real people behind the lifestyles and how to show them the love of Christ.

With our community of people, some of the storylines that could be aired:

- Previously or Life After \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in any of the above stereotypes such as Adventure Back from Drugs or Life after Going Straight)

Others could be:



- Life after Death
- Third-World Nation Living
- Accident Survival
- Surviving Domestic Abuse
- Missionary Life of Today
- Living at the Bible College of Wales
- Being raised on the wrong side of the street
- Foster Care of Today
- Homelessness Living and Survival
- ADHD and Higher Education
- Disabilities but Still Pushing Through
- and many more.....

### **Strategy for Implementation:**

- The first step needed for implementation is to get permission to run with the idea. I would write guidelines, rules, and regulations for the events and make up a flyer with a pitch of my idea to present to the FFCU Administration.
- After getting permission to run full speed with the idea, I would pitch it to the faculty and students.
  - I would send out a flyer all about the event
  - I would send out a survey to find out who is interested in the event, with possible times for the event

- I would create a sign-up format for Life Evidence Library Book enrollees.
- After getting applicants and running those by administration for verification of their approval. I would meet with the applicants and talk over their topics.
  - We would go over the guidelines, rules, and regulations to make sure we are all on the same page.
- I would then find the means of the submitted available times of participants and plan our first Real Life Story Time event with Living Evidence Library books.
- Another Real Life Story Time Event Flyer would be sent out to all faculty and students, just in case more want to participate than those who signed up, with the event activity information and times.
- A calendar of the events would be put together and sent out so the readers can plan ahead to attend the Real Life Story Time with Living Evidence Library Books they are interested in.
- Those who want to participate in that month's scheduled Real Life Story Time show up for the event.
- I would also get a counseling mediator to be present at all events, just in case we have any issues.
- All Real Life Story Time Events would take place via the FFCU Library Zoom Room.
- One Living Evidence Book would be scheduled per event, per month. The event would run for 1 hour: 30 minutes for the story and 30 minutes for questions.

**Conclusion:**

“People are hyperlinks too” (Stephens, 2025, Module 5, slide 5). This comment rings true to me even more now. People are our living resources.

We all have a story to tell. Not all stories are accepted by their covers. Some covers look boring, some look scary, others look out of our wheelhouse or beliefs. What lies within the pages can surprise us. Many stories have twists and turns we did not expect. Will we take the plunge to become familiar with the stories and listen to their content instead of judging them by their covers?

Will we return to our roots of “family,” where we choose to cultivate relationships and learn how to reach each other in this messed-up world? We need each other. We need real-life interaction with real-life people to share our real-life experiences with.

Libraries are a place to gather. Just because we are all spread throughout the world does not mean we cannot still meet and greet each other, cultivate relationships, and learn from each other. We can all do research and studies online, but real-life experiences are more meaningful.

## Resources

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