



## Let Me Tell You a Story



“Let me tell you a story.” Those words have the power to stop me in my tracks and make me listen. I love stories. I love hearing them, telling them, reading them, collecting them, telling them again and again. I love the way stories get past our defenses and let us listen to big issues. I love how stories can be so simple and yet so insightful and important. I love how stories soften up our intellectual rigidity and get through to our emotions.

I loved it when my grandpa told me stories, in all their wonderful diversity and detail. I love to listen to the stories my son tells me of all the things he is doing and learning. I love to recount my own stories to my wife at the end of the day—rehearsing (and re-experiencing) the events that shape the way I think, work, and live.

Did I say I loved stories? I should have said WE love stories, because pretty much everyone I know loves stories just like I do.

Through stories, we are able to organize our experiences and ideas. We get to pick out the heroes and the villains, and we get a sense of what’s important, who’s really in charge, and of moments that are significant and have special meaning.

We like to see the way the elements come together in the particular circumstances or context of a story, and we try to figure out the importance of their interaction. A clever phrase in a story can set our imaginations off and running to fill in the blanks—to imagine or guess who someone is, what they are up to, where they come from, and why they are important.

We like to see our own lives as great stories that have characters and context, conflicts, winners and losers, and intricate details about when things happen and where we were at the key moments. We like to organize the passing moments of our lives into sequences of meaning, with one event leading to another in linked moments of value and importance. Stories help us imagine the possibilities, to think and plan ahead.

Stories let us see another person’s point of view; they let us see and imagine the significant events and moments in someone else’s life. Stories help us make sense of the world around us by helping us organize and recognize patterns and trends and life directions.

I love the story of that garden called Eden, where the first family lived, and lost, and were offered a second chance.



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I love the story of numbers: how all over the world mankind struggled with ways to count crops or design buildings and how the first computing machine—our hands and fingers—gave us the foundation of our arithmetic.

I love the story of letters: how pictures gave way to symbols that gave way to an organized way of communicating ideas through shapes we now call the alphabet.

I love the wonderful idea of One God as found in the story of Judaism and how monotheism is one of the brightest lights shining from any story ever told anywhere.

I love the story of science—in all of its disciplines—and the wonderfully different and interesting ways mankind is striving to unlock the secrets of the natural world.

I love the story of Galileo, struggling to tell the world that we were not the center of the universe after all. I love the story of Gutenberg and how a torrent of learning and information was unleashed with the creation of his printing press, which made our libraries of storybooks possible.

But mostly, and firstly, I love the story of Christmas. It is possibly the first story I ever really heard and learned. From my youngest days, I considered it my story somehow—precious to me in a unique and unforgettable way.

It's the story of a man and a woman and a journey. A story of a baby being born in really tough circumstances. It's got animals and shepherds and alien beings called angels singing out a message in a language no one can truly understand. It's got simple shepherds (with funny beards) and wealthy, exotic royalty (with funny beards). It's got people who are in trouble—no money, no place to stay, no one willing to give them a hand—and then, suddenly, like the angels appearing in the sky, the birth of a child who gives hope, and a baby named Jesus in a place called Bethlehem.

It's the first story I every really loved. And still do.

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*William "Bill" Robertson was president of Adventist HealthCare when he wrote this piece in 2003. Used with permission.*