



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: Putting Together an As-Told-To Feature

And we're gonna go ahead and get started. This week we're talking about something very, very different. This is the As-Told-To feature. And this is something that doesn't come up as much in the travel genre specifically as it does in women's magazines or other sort of deep... I would say, not that we think of women's magazines as deep journalism, but other outlets where they're doing some really compelling stories. And this can happen because As-Told-To features or As-Told-To stories at all have some very particular characteristics that keep the majority of stories from working well as an As-Sold-To feature.

So today, what we're going to talk about specifically is to begin with why we've saved these pieces for last. As I mentioned, they're quite different than a lot of other types of stories that you'll see. And one of the reasons that we've saved these for last is that the various different storytelling and articles structure in journalism techniques that we've developed over the last few months of this article nuts and bolts series are going to come together, and we're going to look at how. And then I'm gonna walk you through several different aspects of how these As-Told-To stories are very different than other types of articles you would write, and not necessarily in the ways that you would think.

You might find, after we look at some of them, that you don't even feel like they're articles in the traditional sense, that they seem to be more like oral storytelling stories or something like that. And we'll discuss why that is and how that approaches how you write them. And then because everything that I say kind of seems a bit abstract when I just tell you about it, then we're going to get into, I've pulled up three different examples from three different outlets of As-Told-To stories that are short enough that we can look at them now together, and also I've pulled up a few different examples from one outlet where they publish one of these every issue so that we can kind of look at how they change from one issue to another. And then we're gonna talk about how you pitch these pieces.

So like I said, this week we're going to talk about these As-Told-To pieces. And there's a really specific reason that I saved them not only to the end of the month where we're talking about pieces that really revolve around one person and one subject, but also until the end of this entire series. And that's because in so many ways, these pieces are not...they're not journalism in a certain sense. We started this series way, way back when...we started this series talking about news briefs. We looked at the inverted pyramid that makes up a news brief. We talked about how reporters focus on who, what, where, when, why, and how you can write those things at the top of the page to get through your story without forgetting anything, and making sure that you pack everything into the small spaces. News briefs are typically 100, maybe 200 words. That's where we started.

And now we've gone through all sorts of different types of features that you can write, features that you can write as a round up or as a narrative, as a profile of a business, as a



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profile of a person, how you can take the same type of story and write it very, very short or write it very, very long. And now at the end of this long journey, like I said, we've been doing these alternating months of article nuts and bolts webinars with other webinars going back all the way to the beginning of the year.

Now, at the end of this long journey, we've arrived at something which might not feel like this would be the epitome of your writing skills, but that if you can pull this off, you can kind of write anything. So why is that? Why is it that these As-Told-To pieces are really the culmination of everything we've talked about? Like I said, I'll explain kind of what they look like, but it'll make a lot more sense when you see them.

But a very defining feature of an As-Told-To story is that it's written in the first person, but it's not written by the person who experienced the thing being described. So in many ways, you can almost think of this As-Told-To person story like you're writing fiction in the first person. You're writing something that is not from your own experience, as if it were, and you have to avoid bringing yourself your thoughts, your background, and your experience into that story. And both elicit from the person and rely entirely on what they said to create all of these other types of things we've been talking about, creating a sense of beats throughout a piece, creating a sense where the motivation and the emotion of the subject changes. You need to also create a sense of transformation throughout the piece.

And none of these things are easy in the first place when you're writing about something that happened to you or that you've researched extensively. But it's a whole other world when you are not only writing about a different person's experience, as we saw when we looked at the profile pieces, which are also a very artful connection of different threads, but you're not only doing that with someone else's experience but you're also writing it in the first person, as if it with you was you without letting yourself enter the story. And that's why in many ways, like I said, this feels more akin to the challenge of writing a piece of fiction in the first person than it will feel to writing other pieces of journalism.

So something that I read when I was looking up kind of some different techniques that different writing professors and other people use to talk about As-Told-To pieces was this that I thought was a very good framing mechanism. And we'll get into why you need a framing mechanism to make sure you're on point with your first-person pieces on the next slide, but I wanted to lead into it with this, that As-Told-To piece should focus on the belief that only using the subject's words and phrases will make the article accurate and truthful.

Now what that translates into is this sense of truth is something you can say a lot of fiction aspires to have, a sense of truth by talking from fiction to find a sense of deeper truth and all



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we could go la, la and all sorts of literary things like that. But this idea of something that is accurate and truthful means that we are representing another person's experience. And this is one of the central dividing lines with why something is done as an As-Told-To piece rather than done as a profile or as a feature that might be a reported feature or your first-person experience of interacting with this person.

And that's because you need the impact, the emotional weight of that person to really convey what they have gone through in this instance. And this is why one of the reasons that you see a lot of As-Told-To pieces in women's magazines or things of that ilk like "Reader's Digest" or something like that is because they're often done as these very...you can almost say exposey, but very tell-all type pieces about something rather horrible that happened to a person, which was horrible but very important and very resonant for other people where you need to use the person's words for that weight to come across.

Because if you did it as a third person piece as it was reported, or you wrote it as a profile, it would be about this thing that had happened, but you would miss that impact, that impact that this event or this circumstance or some...we'll look at one where they're talking about an item, someone else is talking about their job, we'll miss the impact that that person has had on or the thing has had on that person when we just intersperse quotes with background that's written in the third person. So the big differentiator here is that it's not just the quotes that are in the first person. We're not just using quotes for color, which is something that we've talked about in some of the earlier webinars in this series, especially in the last month where we're talking about stories that relate to an individual person, rather than using quotes as an offset of different things that are more distanced more in the third person, particularly for background or it could also be description of the person or of their environment. What we're doing is we're allowing that individual's voice and that individual's perception of the world and the events that happened to them to drive the story completely.

So what that means is that whatever a writing an As-Told-To about, it needs to be so singularly focused on something of very great importance to the person that you're writing the As-Told-To about, that their experience and that weight can also create weight for others. So we did...it might have even been last year. A while back, we did a webinar on personal essays. And I talked about how even though you're talking about something that is personal to you, something that happened to you, a few different things that happened to you and you're weaving back and forth between the present in your personal history and things are going on in the world and all these stuff, it should arrive at something universal, it shouldn't touch on universal things throughout.

When we talk about writing features or also we talked about writing profiles more recently, we talk about going on a journey of transformation that arrives at a realization that has



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universal impact. So when we look at these As-Told-To pieces, we're limiting the field so much. It needs to be something where if it's not written by that person, it just won't seem as important, and it needs to be, in terms of content, it needs to be about something where that person can speak to it in a way that has universal implications.

So you can, in a way, think of this, like, if you were to be writing an article about an experience that you had, what would be the instances where you would have to write it in first person, where you couldn't write that same story about that same thing that happened and write it in third person? So there was someone that had joined us for the boot camp recently, and she describes herself as an emerging SIS. She's really new to writing in this way and writing for travel specifically, but she's been doing a lot of work with me for coaching. And she's been coming to a lot of conferences and really working on her craft and her style. And she's just overflowing with all these ideas that are intensely in the personal essay format.

Not everybody is and that's totally fine, but the types of ideas that work as personal essays that you as a writer might have, are also the ones that work as As-Told-To pieces when you hear someone else mention them. So these are moments like there was a really wonderful story many years back in one of the writing anthologies. I believe it was the "The Best Women's Travel Writing" or something like that. It was about a woman who is young and blonde and thin and lovely, and goes, I believe it's an Egypt, she goes to the souk, she goes to the market.

But she goes out in a burka, and she goes around the market in a burka. And she has been spending time in this place without a burka before this. So she already kind of has a sense of how she's usually viewed, how she usually goes around the world, what her interactions are usually like. And the story is essentially showing how she now understands the beauty of the burka, that as a woman it actually frees you. This is what she was saying in her piece. "It frees you from the leers, from the comments, from all of those things. It allows you to move about in the world without having to endure, worry about encounter, or be waylaid by any of those things." At the end of the piece, she takes the burka off and she goes back into the souk. And she, you know, reiterates what it's like to now be sort of chained by her freedom, if you want to say that.

So this is a piece that you couldn't have that same impact writing that same piece in the third person. If you had been at a dinner party and heard this person tell you that story, you couldn't write that for her. You couldn't write a third person story about her piece. Either she would have to write it up herself or you can develop a knack for writing these As-Told-To pieces. So I put one caveat here on the slide, which is that if you feel like you don't have a good understanding of when it's more appropriate or only appropriate to write something in a



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first-person style rather than a third person style, I highly recommend going to, you know, the digital newsstand or your local newsstand and just picking up a couple of travel magazines and flipping through the feature sections, and comparing the features that are written in first person to the features that are written in third person. Because you'll get a sense very quickly for how third person creates that distance in the piece and what that means. So if you don't already have a sense of when you're interested in writing these As-Told-To stories, that's a trick that I recommend for helping yourself understand that.

Now the other thing that happens when we're writing as this other person is that we can't be ourselves. And that has multiple layers. We can be ourselves obviously in terms of our opinions. So as you're writing in this I, I, I of the other person, you're never commenting upon what the person has said. But besides that, you're also not writing as a journalist. That includes other background or other facts. All of the background and the facts need to come from that person's experience and things that that person have said or things that they said, "Oh, yeah, well, so and so told me." You can include the little bits of what legally would be called hearsay, but little little bits of motivation that they brought in from something they read somewhere or something they heard somewhere, but because they told you that, okay?

Now, what this means is you need to really focus only on what the person knows about the topic at hand. And that's why, like I said earlier, is that it's really important that these are things where the person, first of all, has a very, very deep connection with the subject that they're talking about, so there's enough to write about. But second of all, that that connection has some sort of universality, that other people can learn something, be moved by, identify with that experience.

And we talked, I believe it was two webinars ago when we talked about interviews, we talked about how when you are editing an interview, you're sometimes, it depends on the magazine, you're sometimes going to put the things in the chronological order in which they appeared in the interview, which won't necessarily be chronological for how they matter or how you would put together a story that has a chronology and what came first and what came later. But that you're often moving around the component parts of that interview to make the interview itself have an arc, to make the interview have a sense of movement so that someone reads all the way to the end. And in profile, this is especially the case. You're really creating a lot of different scenes there and putting those together.

But here in As-Told-To piece, it's an entirely different story how you are moving those things around for the chronology. Because here, unlike an interview where you're really trying to keep kind of chunks of texts together or sentences or something like that, here you're essentially ripping apart the words of the whole interview and putting it back together in a way that makes sense as a story.



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So one way that you can think of this, if you've ever done this, is...I'm not sure if any of you have experienced doing translation from another language, whether on purpose or just accidentally. I know there's some people who, I'm not sure if any of them are on the call today, just looking at the list, but I know there's some people who follow us who very regularly will do reporting in another country. For instance, when I first started I was doing a lot of writing for Italy magazines, so obviously I was doing a lot of my interviews in Italian but then I was writing for a British audience, so then I was even translating for myself from, you know, my American into their British English but all also from my interviews that were being done in Italian, then into what I was writing. There's somebody, for instance, who's working on a guidebook right now in South America, and so she's very regularly interviewing people in Spanish but then the guidebook that she's writing is going to be in English.

So some of you may have found yourself because you speak two languages or because you're just somewhere where the predominant language is in English and you're trying to figure things out, that you're already naturally translating what people around you are saying into what you put into your piece or into how that colors your piece or different things like that. And I feel like with an As-Told-To piece, much more so than with an interview or a profile where you're really looking for those kind of money quotes, those quotes that really shine, you're often looking at how to kind of translate what they're saying into something that still sounds like them, but in a new language, which is storytelling language, okay? And there are places and we'll look at this in a bit, there are places where you really specifically want to look for one type of quote, or you want to specifically pull out one thing that they've said and you kind of want to hold on to that and keep it all in one piece. But that's not what's going to happen the majority of the time.

So like I said, I think even more so than with some of the other things that we've looked at, here you really want to be seeing the articles live and in person. So before we talk about structure, before we talk about what these kind of look like in terms of their shape, I want you to see/hear a couple of these. So I'm gonna blow this up so hopefully the text will be a little bit bigger than for you. And I know it's always a little smaller the way that it comes through, but this hopefully you guys can see. So you see this is the title is "A High Maintenance Co-creator on Her Favorite Possessions." And they call the story of a thing. And she is the co-creator of the HBO show, "High Maintenance," now in its second season, and here she's seen her New York apartment with her favorite possessions, chairs passed down from her great aunt. So they say right here up at the top As-Told-To with the date. This often happens with As-Told-To pieces as well. Okay?

So there's just a little bit of an intro here. In this series for tea, Emily Spivack, the author of Warren stories interviews creative types about their most prized possession. Inside the "High



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Maintenance” co-creator Katja Blichfeld’s apartment, there are two chairs that once belonged her enigmatic aunt. Here she in details how they serve as a reminder of her Tonto Laura and of the way she wants to live her life. So now we’ve transferred over to the first person and it’s the first person of Katja but being written by Emily. Okay? “My Dad’s aunt, Laura, who we call Tonto Laura was one of the two relatives that I had stateside. Everyone else lived in Denmark. Tonto Laura followed her husband to the United States from Denmark in the 1920s. She worked as a nanny and did some housekeeping while her husband was a bartender. Things with him weren’t as picturesque as she hoped they would be. He had a drinking problem. He was a ladies man, but she was religious, a ‘Good girl’ from a rural Presbyterian family, and she never would have left.

She probably thought it was her duty to stay with him. She led a solitary and quiet life even when her husband was alive. She got up in the morning, made herself coffee and breakfast, washed her dishes, ran her non-electric vacuum cleaner, put on her hat and gloves and took the bus to buy groceries and twice a week went to church. I think about how Laura was never able to self-actualize because of the way she thought things were supposed to be, both because of her religion and because of the times. I don’t know if she ever picked her head up from her mundane drudgery to ask, ‘Is this all there is?’ I don’t know what her inner life was like. I don’t know if she had dreams or aspirations outside of domestic life.”

And this is a photograph of her aunt that she’s put out on one of the chairs for them to see during the interview. “Towards the end of her life, I noticed she would read these cheap romance novels that she probably got from church bazaars. Or she made comments about attractive men, like I wouldn’t kick him out of bed for eating crackers. But she was never a sexual being to me. She always felt old and her manner very repressed. My aunt remains a mystery to me. It was her repressed side but underneath it, she was a romantic. I mean, she traveled across the world from Denmark to the U.S. to follow her heart. I would have traveled across the country for love, so I can relate. There’s something kind of poetic about that connection.

“These chairs were in Tonto Laura’s apartment in San Francisco until she died in the early 2000s and she was in her late 90’s, I have photos of my parents sitting in those chairs when my mother was pregnant with me. Since my aunt never had children, my parents cleaned out her apartment after she passed away. They brought these chairs to me in Chicago. Since then, they’ve been with me in six or seven apartments in New York, moved to Los Angeles and back to New York. I think about Tonto Laura more now that she’s gone than when I did when she was alive. And these chairs remind me not to get caught up in a cycle of living by some sort of prescribed notion, not to get caught in a trap of expectation, because she didn’t have a chance to experiment. I feel like I’m honoring my aunt’s memory by doing things she never felt like she could do.” Okay?



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So this one here, I'm just going to make it smaller so we can see multiple paragraphs all at once. This one here, I would say it's probably about less than 500 words, maybe this one is even 350 words but it could be up to 500 words. So let's look a little bit about what we see in terms of the structure here. And then I'll pull up the other two that I have for you. And like I said, one of them, I've got a bunch of different iterations of that in the magazine that it appears in. And let me know, like I said, in the chat box when I'm reading and we're breaking down an article. I'm usually on the other screen so I can see the article. So if you have a question drop in the chat box, and I will get back over to it as soon as I get back to the box.

So here, what do we have with the structure? Okay, they've got these photos to kind of break it up. And we can kind of imagine how this might look on the page because obviously "New York Times" is print. And they've got what would maybe be like, you know, two half-page columns next to each other with this text. And they start, and you'll see this, they tend to start by just diving right into it. They go right into my dad's aunt Laura, who we called Tonto Laura, was one of the two relatives that I had stateside. Everyone else lived in Denmark.

So she tells you what the story is going to be about and she drops the background and then we go right into the background. Laura followed her husband. We talked about what she did. We've got a wrinkle, what was hard for her? So this is very, very typical storytelling. Okay? We set out what the topic is and what the kind of status quo is and then we throw in a wrinkle and then we look at how that wrinkle evolves over time. Okay? Is that even though she had this problem, she didn't do anything about it. So what evolved over time here for the "Author," for the person who told this piece to the person who wrote it, what evolved here was that she wonders how Laura spent her time.

Was it really the way that it seems or did this complication that we saw up above, did that actually change what was going on in her internal life? She's not sure but she talks about little hints that she saw that there may have been something more than what she knew going on. So we have a little bit of an arc here about how her thoughts about her aunt Laura were evolving. And then we get into sort of the next, you could call it beat, but it's kind of almost the climax here is that these thoughts on Laura evolved and what she felt about her aunt and what her aunt reminded her of.

She talks about how she feels a connection to it, but also she kind of...not resents but she definitely questions the decisions that he made. And then she talks about how the chairs came into her life and now they are in many ways a constant reminder to her. But they're not a sad reminder. They're not a reminder of the things that she, you know, I don't necessarily wanna say didn't admire, but they're not a reminder of the things that she questioned about her aunt,



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so much is what she has learned from her aunt about how to live her life. So a very short and sweet little piece here but they cover a lot.

They cover a lot of the background of the aunt, they cover a lot of little things, these kind of, you know, we could call them quotes, but they're really just memory quotes, right? And they've got some little details, like these books that she would get, or you know, the routine in detail. She got up, made herself breakfast, coffee. She creates a lot of little scenes in here even though she's not using a lot of words, she's not using a lot of dialogue. There's not necessarily a huge sense of action scene in that way where like two people are sitting and talking, but you definitely can have those in an As-Told-To piece as well.

So that's just a little bit of the arc here. They really get right into it, they go into the background. They kind of hint at the question here, which is, you know, "Would you stay?" Right? And then we move through this other question, "Is this all there is?" And then, "Would I do the same thing? Into, "How do I incorporate that into my life now?" So you can see how like a personal essay, as we talked about in the personal essay one, it really moves through these ideas of questions that you pose yourself that guide your thinking. Now, did this person who told the piece to the person who wrote the piece tell it exactly like this? No, there was a lot of editing to get it into this format. And that's where the difficulty and the beauty of the As-Told-To piece comes in.

So this next one that I want to show you, this is really interesting. This is a section in "Sierra Magazine", which is \$1 a word market. It's very environment focused. It's a national magazine of the Sierra Club. In "Sierra Magazine" every month, they have this section called The Faces of Clean Energy, okay? So it's a recurring section each month that is an As-Told-To piece. And if I'm not mistaken, this one is on sort of on record as being around 500 words, okay?

So let's have a look at this one. This is the faces of clean energy and this one in particular, the title is, "The Crazy Lifestyle of the Woman Who Repairs Wind Turbine Blades," when she's not as what we're talking about, who we're talking about, and then we dive right into the background. So listen here for the complication, listen for the wrinkle. So as I'm going through the piece and talking, if you spot the wrinkle, if you spot that complication that hints at what's to come and what the piece is really gonna be about, let us know that in the chat box when you see it.

So she begins, "I'm a climber, a singer-songwriter, and a conservationist. I grew up in Rexford, a tiny town in Montana about two hours northwest of Glacier National Park. My dad worked for the U.S. Forest Service for 35 years and is also a climber. He instilled in me



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an appreciation for the environment and the outdoors early on. I performed my music in 31 countries and have seen the effects of traffic, deforestation, and overpopulation. I started feeling like I was creating a big footprint flying across the world and not doing very much for the earth. So I started brainstorming with a bunch of friends about how we can use our climbing skills to help the environment rather than hurt it. In parentheses, there are a lot of jobs that utilize climbing in the oil industry.

One of them told me that I should join a rope partner as a rope access technician to service wind turbines. I've worked there for five years. The company is based in Santa Cruz, California, but we repair wind turbine blades all around the globe. The job requires advanced rock climbing and rope rigging skills. Technicians work in high-speed turbines on turbine towers that are between 262 and 328 feet tall. First, we climb a ladder in the inside of the tower and in Gar ropes. Then we repel off the nose cone and secure ourselves to the blunt side of the wind turbine blade. Our repair supplies are then hauled up in buckets. It's a really physical job. Out of Rope Partner's of 75 technicians, I'm one of only 2 women in the field. That's because not as many women have the skill sets needed. You also need expertise in fiberglass repair. And I just happen to have fiberglass skills because I was a firefighter for seven years working at the Hot Shot bays helping to repair water tenders.

"It's a crazy lifestyle, you're constantly traveling since each job is four to six weeks in a different location. You have to do some very technical stuff and keep your cool. When you're up on the tower, you have a main rope and a backup. In my opinion, this is safer than driving to work every day. For some jobs, you can be up there six to eight hours, so you have to train your body to work in high winds. Even on a low wind day, you'll get bucked around since you're up really high. And you have to be careful because one side of the wind turbine blade is so sharp, it could cut your rope. Blades are tricky. They have many layers and each turbines' blades are different. So you'll often be on the phone with engineers while up in the air. I had a close call once during a brush fire in Idaho, I was at a job and the fire was pretty far away. The firefighters were dropping water on it, so I felt really safe.

"Then, after a couple hours, the wind suddenly started to gust to 26 miles per hour, which is our limit for working on the ropes. The fire flanked us on both sides and the wind started to come up rapidly. We finished packing up and climbed down as soon as we could. Before we got down, we saw a barn burn down completely. Luckily no one was hurt and everyone got out on time. We work mostly between spring and fall so I can spend the winter relaxing with family and friends. I'm into rafting and I also go climbing. It's easy and so much more fun because I'm not weighed down with a harness that I use at work that has the tools and gear. I do traditional crack climbing because that's less invasive. I use gear called cams to insert into cracks in the rock and then take them out. So I leave no trace.



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I've climbed in 17 countries including Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. Argentina is one of my favorite places, Patagonia and El Chalten in particular. I also love climbing in Spain and at India Creek in Utah. The job has definitely changed me. It's created a deep appreciation for family time and free time. The work is so physical and so intense that whenever I'm not working, all of the other things in life like people bickering, don't bother me. I have peace and patience for all of the other moments in my life. I appreciate the simple things, like drinking tea in the morning." We've got a question over here and someone else said that they lost volume, so hopefully other people are hearing. And somebody has a question about the practicalities of conducting these interview pieces. As in, do you take written notes or record and transcribe, what do editors tend to expect? I just wanna wrap up talking about this particular piece.

So I don't know if anybody noticed here, but this one was really different than that other one. So the other one was in "New York Times", and this one is in CRS. So you can definitely see a difference in the quality of writing because, like I said, As-Told-To pieces are quite difficult to write. So this one is a lot more, let's call it straight, okay? So it's really kind of presented in a very chronological way. They move through kind of topic by topic that they're talking about, you know, her background, what she did before, how she had the idea to get into rock climbing...oh, sorry, kind of rock climbing as wind repairs, and then the particularities of how this works. So she gives the specific kind of stats and all that, she describes what it looks like, she talks about how it can get dangerous, and what her lifestyle is like. So what we have to remember here is that this article and this section as a whole is intended to talk about the faces of clean energy.

So what that means is that, they're really aiming to present what different people's lives are like, and how different people from different backgrounds could come in to this field, how you might be doing something totally different and decide to come into this field. So what they've done here in this piece, like I said, even though it's presented very straight, very chronologically, very logically, in terms of how everything is put together, is they've really shown how somebody can be doing something completely different and move into this field. The skill sets required for this specific field, they painted a very clear picture of what the job entails while also kind of describing it in a way where if this might be your cup of tea, you can start to kind of hear how it would be a little exciting. And right as they're talking about how it gets exciting, they also make sure to very specifically outline what are the worst risks that you can have. They also talked about how your rope can be cut. But at the same time, she says that she feels like this for her is safer than commuting every day to work in a car.

So what's the twist here really? I think that the twist here and what she circles back to at the end, she talks about how what her work schedule is like and she brings back up that she travels, right? That she travels all these countries and she talks about how it's changed her so



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she appreciates things in her life more. Whereas up here at the top, she was talking about how when she was younger, she really appreciated the environment and the outdoors and these things. And then she kinda got into this lifestyle where she was going around as a musician performing and being in lots of different cities and felt like she personally had a big footprint and how I think the really kind of the...that this is like the complication is that she got into this thing that was at odds with her values. And then at the end of the piece, we see how it's brought her back to that.

So that, like I said, the complication tends to come out quite early on in these pieces, especially when they're only 500 words. So when they're 500 words, you're probably gonna see that happening in more like the second paragraph, whereas when they are longer, when they're really feature length, like you're looking at something more like 1000 words, 1500 words, 2000 words, 2500 words. I've seen these pieces come in like 3000 words in some of the women's magazines. In those cases that complication is probably gonna come up more like in the third or fourth paragraph. So Sally had an interesting question here about the practicalities of conducting these interview pieces. So I wasn't sure if she meant for interview pieces that we had discussed in the other webinar or for this, but it seems kind of like generally for any kind of piece that involves interviews, which would be all of the different four pieces that we're talking about this month in this webinar series.

So I think that we've touched on this a little bit on one of the earlier webinars that was more specifically around interviews. But I'll just kind of talk about some different approaches here to interviewing. So someone told me the other day that they've started taking their laptop along for in-person interviews. And I'm like, "Don't do that, don't ever do that." So I actually really like to do interviews by phone when appropriate. When we looked at profiles, you can't really do a profile and do it by phone because you need to be describing the person quite a bit. So you really need to spend time with someone to do a profile. It's very important to incorporate those elements into what you're writing. But with any sort of other interview piece, especially like the celebrity favorites one we talked about this last week, even this one you could really do by phone.

I really like to do it by phone and I like to take notes as I'm talking with them simultaneously because I think not just for myself but I've seen for other people that there's a lot of reticence and friction against going back and re-listening to your whole interview. First of all, because people don't like listening to themselves and second of all, because then you're just having to type up something that already happened. So I personally am a big fan and have really worked on honing these skills over the years of taking your notes while you do interviews. Most of the people that I know who do recordings like really just rue having to go back through it later. If you have set up the finances coming in through your travel writing well



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enough, you can farm those out to a transcriptionist. But I promise you, you won't be all that much more comfortable with hearing yourself even if you're just reading what you have said.

You can kinda skip over it but it's really not more comfortable as you would think, than not having to just hear your own voice. I say that as somebody who has their calls transcribed every single week. So what editors expect is something of that is going to vary from publication to publication, and that's something that is also gonna vary from interview source to interview source. So somebody who is a celebrity or has other some other position where what they say really needs to be audited by a lot of people, those will need to be recorded even if you're also taking notes for fact-checking purposes. With something like this As-Told-To piece however, you're not using the sentences necessarily exactly...well, for sure you're not using them in the order that they came out of the person's mouth but you're not necessarily even gonna use them in the same structure.

I've had a lot of times where I took quotes and I would mash different sentences together to cut out a lot of the kind of, you know, flabbiness in-between some different things that a person had said in order to get a sentence that fit into the length of the article that I needed to write, but still incorporated the thing that the person said. So there's a lot of types of whether it's these interview pieces, or quotes that are gonna go on a profile, or particularly in these As-Told-To sections, where you...what you're really looking to do is to take what the person said and chop it up quite a bit. So for this As-Told-To piece, if you're not typing what the person said pretty much verbatim, then you definitely wanna have a recording because in these As-Told-To pieces, you're really writing the whole thing as a first-person thing.

And so it can be really useful to also have the tone of voice on record if you're not really, really fast with taking those notes as you go through because you're having to recreate this, like I said, as if the person wrote it. And with this one, like I said, this is definitely one that's a bit more dry than this one was over here. And I'm gonna show you one more that also is a bit more...we could call it emotive. And this one is talking also more about this person's background, okay? So in this one, that tone of voice element isn't gonna be quite as important but what is gonna be important is these numbers. She's got so, so very many numbers in here and a lot of very specific details, like which country she's been sourced, who was working with you on this piece to have to just tell you the same thing like three, four times because you didn't get it down properly in one way, shape, or form the first place.

So in general for interviews, do something where you know you won't have to do that and for As-Told-To pieces I think that recording it is probably the best way to go because you'll likely be with them in person and you don't wanna be sitting there taking notes on your laptop while you're with them in person. So let's look at one last piece here. This one as you saw above, is called, "A Music Man by Chance." "My father was Italian and was called up



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for World War Two on his wedding day. He was captured in Africa by the British in early 1914 and taken to the village of Long Stratton, Norfolk. As a prisoner of war, he was sent to work on local farms and one invited him back after the war. He returned in 1948 with my mother and year-old brother. By 1957, he'd saved enough to buy a farmhouse and five acres.

“We raised poultry, chicken and ducks. I went to the local primary school in Norfolk. There were 48 kids in the class, I would typically come in 47th or 48th. I really wasn't motivated in primary school. When we were 11, all of us took the 11 plus exam for entry into Grammar School, which would place us on a college preparatory track. I was one of only two students to pass. I'm sure the headmaster was shocked. I'm fairly adventurous. At 13, I was into cycle speedway, which is track racing on a bicycle. I spent every waking hour doing it, holidays, weekends, and evenings. I was doing pretty well in school, but I dropped to the lowest half of the class. My mother, the sweetest lady on the planet took my bike away, and my grades rose. I had more of a sporting childhood and played cricket and soccer.

“My sports master, the gym teacher, sent home a report card just after the cycle Speedway and said, he said, ‘He works hard, is energetic and talented but must spend less time criticizing others and more time focusing on his own game.’ Maybe he didn't see me as the captain of the team or maybe he did because later, he made me captain of everything. My earliest memories of music were listening to Radio Luxembourg on a bush transistor radio under the covers when I was six or seven. We had another radio in the house, a rectangular wooden wireless with big plastic knobs, but you couldn't take that to bed. I shared a room with my brother and we listened to Guy Mitchell and Brenda Lee.

When I was 13, my brother and I hitchhiked to the coastal town of Great Yarmouth, about 35 miles away, to hear the Beatles. Most people didn't have cars, public transportation was costly and infrequent. Hitchhiking was a safe way to travel if you didn't have money and had plenty of time, especially if you weren't alone. From the first part of the first song, which I think was “I Wanna Hold Your Hand”, everybody, boys and girls in the crowd of about 2000 or 3000 started screaming. The band played to screaming from beginning to end. It was hysteria. I didn't expect to be in the music business. I spent 27 years in the food industry. My first job after majoring in physics at King's College, London was as a market research assistant in a chocolate company. I was involved in introducing Kit-Kat to the United States. In 1993, when I was full-time CEO in the food business, I was made an outside director of EMI. I had become chairman in just six years.



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“Growing up, when we lived on a farm, we had our own vegetables and our own meat. We ate Italian. My mother experimented all the time. She never made the same dish twice. I learned how to cook at the university. I lived in an apartment with three or four others and we took turns. Some were so bad at it that I guess I did most of it. I’ve done grocery shopping all my adult life, it’s a professional interest. I go alone and take forever. I shop with a basic list and take home two times as much as I intend to buy. I like to explore what’s available and watch other people shopping. I don’t clip coupons and I’m very aware of promotions, I can’t resist a bargain. As a physics major, I have an affinity for technology. And I developed power of analysis, though I’m not a physicist at heart. I think I’m an amateur. An amateur student of people and what motivates them.” So you’ll see this is a very different As-Told-To piece.

This also has kind of like a little bio of him at the end. And with this one, you can see it’s really very biological, okay? In terms of...or biographical rather. It really kind of goes through his background, his kind of history as a family, also his history as a student. So you can almost look at this as a very straight biography in the way that profiles are straightly intended to create a picture of an individual. This is really intended to create a picture of this individual who’s the CEO of a major corporation. But with his words, and why is that important? Because think about this, if this was written as a profile of him and we were mentioning these things about these stories from school and all that stuff, it would be so distant and so dry to have a profile of a CEO saying when he was young, he was fairly adventurous, and at 13 went to the cycle Speedway, which is a track race on a bicycle.

You know, it just has so much more power of evocation in your mind of picturing him to have it done here as a first-person piece, okay? So I just wanna get back for a minute to the slides and have us look at how we pitch these pieces. And this kind of lines up what Sally was asking before, about how do we go about interviewing these. But I also just wanna go back and before we get into pitching them, look at the structure if you will, because that’s really what we’re looking for in these article nuts and bolts pieces, but more kind of what these pieces look like on the page. So if you remember, we looked at three very different pieces. We looked at the one that was on the Tonto Laura’s chairs, we looked at the one that was from the rope access technician, and then we looked at the one by the CEO about his upbringing and how he never expected to be in the music business and how he came from this background in food specifically in rural England, okay?

So in each of these, as I mentioned, there’s a lot of very straight chronology going on. First, they kind of introduce who they are. In the case of the last one he didn’t quite exactly start it right at the beginning. He said, “My father was Italian and called up in World War Two.” So he goes right back to the beginning here. But we really see some very direct chronology in all these pieces. And that’s very common. But it’s important to remember that when you’re interviewing these sources, it’s not gonna come out like that in the way they speak to you. It’s



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not gonna come out in this very clean, “Here’s the beginning.” They’re gonna be telling you different things they remember from all over the place, and then you will be pulling them and putting them into this chronology.

One of the reasons that we use these very strict chronology here, is that it can be difficult, to go back to what Sally said about how do we conduct these interviews practically, it can be difficult to in an interview elicit all the information from them, go home and put it together in terms of how it works out chronologically, and then think of some crazy interesting crafty ways to go in and out of the scenes as we do with the profile piece of Woody Harrelson that we looked at, for instance. After having speaking spoken to them, you can go back and get more, but in a piece of this length you wouldn’t. If you were doing one of these 2500 or 3000 words As-Told-To pieces, you’re gonna go back and forth with the source many, many times, okay? To get that done. But at this length, you don’t have to. At this length, you’re gonna interview them very deeply. And then you’re gonna see what you have and you’re gonna put it together.

So another thing, like I said, that we experienced here is that all of these people are talking about things that they have a lot of knowledge about, and a connection to and that have something larger. The way for instance that one relative who maybe didn’t play such a large part in your life can really influence how you live your life. The way that, you know, your parents’ decisions can influence how the turns that your life takes and might be why you ended up where you are today. The way that looking back to find your roots can still allow you to exercise all of your passions and build the life that you want. These are three kind of universal way of looking at those three pieces that we just looked at just now. So then how do we pitch these? Okay?

So more than any other piece we’ve discussed, you have to be absolutely 100% bought in from the source before you go and pitch this piece. Because their name is on it oftentimes right alongside your own, if not before your own where the piece is listed, okay? So you have to not only have permission with them to do the piece, but make sure that they understand that it will look like it’s written by them. And not everyone’s gonna be cool with that. But what that translates to, which also is really interesting, is that after you write the piece, you need to give it back to them so that they can be sure that it sounds like them. So this is where we get into this odd space between ghostwriting and writing As-Told-To pieces.

So when you’re ghostwriting, somebody tells you things, you look at other things they’ve written, you kind of talk to them a couple times to get their voice. And then you sit down and you write something that sounds like something that they would have written. And they may give more or less time reviewing it to see if it actually sounds like them. So I’ve done a lot of ghostwriting in my previous career when I was at MIT. I know a number of you who do,



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whether it's ghostwriting blog posts for your content marketing clients. There was somebody at the event this weekend who had a cool type of content marketing she used to do which was that she would write first person kind of point of view, influencer style, state of the industry posts, destined for LinkedIn for the CEO of a major tourism CVB.

So there's so many different places that this ghostwriting thing can take you. But what's different with these As-Told-To pieces, like I said, is that you can write an article for a magazine as a ghostwriter under somebody else's name, but that's not gonna fly as an As-Told-To piece. It really has to be something where there's this emotional weight. So for it to run in the times or in "Sierra" or in something like that, as an As-Told-To piece, it really needs to have that sense that it has to be written by that person but the story has to be told well, so someone else needs to get involved. So what that means is that when you pitch these, you need to be cognizant of what the arc, what the story arc that you wanna include is. So that's a little weird because you would have had to interview the person first, right? But somehow you got the idea that they would make a perfect As-Told-To piece.

So you must have already heard from them something about their story. So we often go around for instance, last week when we were having a summer camp for coaching students, we went out to a lot of venues. We went to a place where the owner of this winery who bought it not too many years back, just has this amazing story, both that he used to be the proprietor of a very famous restaurant that's kind of like a see and be seen place outside of New York, but also that the way that he decided to buy this winery was just all of these kind of divine intervention type things. And, you know, he had a loss in his family and the way that this property and the timing of how it just appeared to him. And I couldn't imagine somebody doing that as a reported piece, you would have to write it as him. So often, you'll be out and you'll hear business owners talking about how they started their business, or how this thing happened in their lives or something. And that just has as told you As-Told-To story written all over it.

And that means you're like, "Okay, great. I know that this person has this great story. He told me when I interviewed him the other day, this story. Now I'm gonna ask his permission and then I'm gonna go write it." And then when you go to write it again, you say, "You know, I know you talked to me about this the other day, I wanna make sure that I get it all down. You know, I'll come out to where you are with my microphone and we'll sit together for a couple hours and we'll talk some more. And then I'll go write it up and then you'll be able to look at it. How does that sound to you?" Okay? So that's how you would kind of pitch that to the source. Then to the editor, you'll write a very slim down, like a one paragraph version of this bio and the arc of the person that you want to pitch.



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But it's very important that you don't write an attempt to dazzle the editor with your style, that you don't write the piece as a first person...or sorry, another piece. That you don't write the pitch as a first-person thing like it's being written by the person you wanna write in their voice. Okay? You need to write it very clearly that you're a journalist, and you're pitching to write an As-Told-To piece centered on this person. And here's the person and here's their story. And then, would the editor be interested in that piece? And the more important thing is to make sure that the outlet that you're looking at has even published As-Told-To pieces in the past because these aren't the most prevalent things. And you'll see them like I showed you to that were from the times actually, "Sierra" has that section.

A lot of the big dollar word type markets have them, in fact, but you just wanna make sure before sending it to them that it is something that they do.

And thank you guys so much. I hope you have a great next week holiday, if you're in a place where next week is a holiday. And I will see or talk to some of you guys after the holiday. Bye-bye.