

# TURNING THAT INNER VOICE INTO AN OUTER ONE...

Since about June of 2017, I've been helping my brother-in-law to record his memoirs into a web site. Working with him has inspired me to look at my own memoir project with fresh eyes.

Although he doesn't focus on it to any significant degree, a big underlying aspect to his life story is the fact that since he was born, he's had Cerebral Palsy and very limited mobility. However, in spite of negative prognoses from doctors when he was born, and various societal barriers in front of him as he grew up in public school and took his post-secondary education, he has managed to beat the odds.

With the support of his family and friends, today, at the age of sixty, he continues to beat the odds and make his own life. He gets himself to wherever he needs to go to run his life relatively independently, and remains able to communicate, socialize, and express himself.

## His memoirs project...

In the last few years, he'd been slowly developing his memoir as a book with a local publisher. This process gave him an outlet for his many stories, as well as the satisfaction of knowing that one day, others could read his story and appreciate his life journey.

But his print publishing process was limited by his lack of funds, and had to be postponed when he became deathly ill in December of 2015. Throughout 2016, he healed, got stronger, and explored his options. He prepared for transition out of his father's house and Pearson Hospital, and into an assisted living situation. Rather than dampen his spirits, facing his own mortality and adapting to a new lifestyle only seemed to harden his resolve to tell his story.

For him, typing seemed arduous and editing a long document by himself using a mouse and keyboard in something like Microsoft Word struck me like a distant goal at the end of a lengthy and frustrating learning curve.

So throughout 2016, we discussed his project and the ways he could benefit personally from surfing the web. I found a low-cost internet service so he could enjoy wireless at home, and bought him an inexpensive tablet. As I indoctrinated him to the web, and sites like Facebook and YouTube in particular, he took to it like a duck to water, motivated by instant access and immediate gratification. Information, entertainment, news, sports, and even people now became available to him.

I encouraged him to go digital and online, instead of relying on (for him) costly paper-based publishing. I created a free blog for him, and as we worked together to write his story, it became apparent that text was really holding us back – the written word was not a good solution for someone with his unique challenges. Even Google voice typing was not really effective: we struggled to get his narrative translated into text, and finally had to give that up.

Nonetheless, he was an effective oral storyteller, and a passionate speaker where his life stories were concerned. So it occurred to me that we should abandon text altogether and just post his stories as audio recordings, accompanied by pictures and some brief summary text.

This was the right choice for him: he loves to talk, and loves to listen to his stories. With production now aimed more at his strengths rather than weaknesses, he's able to drive his project forward on his own terms: he hand-writes ideas for stories and records the audio himself whenever the mood strikes him. Then, we review it together, and he suggests which images might accompany it. I edit and post the completed audio files to his blog.

## What this means to me...

What I take away from this are a few lessons:

- Adaptability is crucial. Usability (and philosophies like UDL) promote technology that adapts to the needs of the user. Terms like accessibility, affordance, interface, and ergonomics relate to this, in my mind. Touch-screen mobile devices have levelled the usability playing field in a massive way.

Lesson: Adapting a process and medium to fit someone's strengths has changed the game entirely.

- Digital is liberating. Paper and printing are not dead by a long shot, but the major drivers of online traffic (in our case, Google) have created enough free online services to allow people on a fixed or low income to create their own content.

Lesson: Digital self-publishing is empowering.

For me, it feels like I should begin adding audio recordings to my own stories, here in my True Life project. It will open the stories up in a new way, allowing me to use music, sound effects and the emotion in my vocal performance to add a new dimensional depth to my stories.