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## The Beginning

*“Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”*

ROBERT FROST



**I**n the last twelve years, I have told over seven thousand bedtime stories to my three children and rarely repeated any of them. Yes, I’ve done the math. I tell my kids an original story every night, before they go to sleep. And they ask for one every night. What’s more important is that you can do it too. You don’t have to be well-read,

and you don't need a great memory or speaking voice. You just need to be *you* and follow a few simple guidelines. This book will show you how it's done.

You'll learn a lot by reading the stories that follow each chapter. They all follow my basic formula for storytelling, as outlined in this book, and will be easy for you to duplicate with your own children. These are stories that my kids particularly enjoyed, and they will give you a good idea of how to tell a story. I always adjust the story to the audience, based on their age and maturity. The stories are presented here just as I've told them to my kids, with a few exceptions. I've titled them for the book, included occasional italicized or parenthetical remarks and made some minor changes for clarity and emphasis. I've also left out the questions and answers that often follow a story.

You have the ability to tell your kids great bedtime stories, which they will always remember. All it really takes is your life experience and the desire to connect with your children. You have a built-in advantage in that you have a captive audience, your kids.

Think about it. It's bedtime. Your kids and you are worn out, but they want to wring one more ounce of fun out of the day before they go to sleep. They want a bedtime story, and they are ready to really *listen* to *your* story. Unless you have an incredible memory and can draw up great stories at the end of a typically exhausting day and then tell them well, night after night, you won't make it with fairy tales. Thankfully, you have a vast and virtually endless supply of great stories from your life experience. There are several advantages to this fact:

- You don't have to prepare anything in advance
- Your kids are interested in who you are and were before they were born
- Your stories are naturally infused with your values
- You are sharing the oral history of their family
- You don't have to tell your stories in any particular order
- You'll never run out of material
- Telling bedtime stories can create a tradition of storytelling in your family which can last for generations.

In reality, these stories could be told anytime. Yet at night, when kids are sleepy and the lights are out, they are perhaps more willing to let Mom or Dad just talk. For the sake of simplicity, when I use the words “parent,” “mom” or “dad” in this book, I'm referring to anyone who is important in the life of a child. And everyone has a story to tell. If there is more than one adult in your family, you

can trade off telling stories, and don't feel pressured that you have to tell a story every night. You'll find the pace that's right for you.

But what if you're not the one who puts them to bed? No problem. You can tell your stories anytime and anywhere, at a family dinner or vacation, driving to school or even on the phone or through email. If you are a grandparent, your family may have suggested interviewing you to capture the family history. Why not beat them to the punch by *telling* your story now? The guidelines in this book will show you how, and they apply just as well to stories away from bedtime as those told before we say goodnight.

One more comment about timing: the intent of bedtime stories is to entertain and connect with our children. Occasionally, my kids will find a story frightening or upsetting. I was surprised

that what I thought was a funny story about getting my tonsils out had that effect on them. On the rare occasion this happens, I change to another story. I am trying to soothe them to sleep, not keep them awake with worries. There are of course other family stories that are better told to more mature children, when they are ready, away from bedtime.

I always tell bedtime stories with the lights out, because there are fewer distractions to the story and the kids keep heading in the direction of sleep. And my memories are easier to access in the dark. When I told my brother-in-law Bill that I was writing this book, he told me the following story:

“When I was a kid in Pittsburgh, my grandfather would sometimes put us to bed and tell us stories. The lights were always out, and he was usually smoking his pipe. He told us about his life and

adventures. In the dark, there were just the sound of his voice and the glow of the pipe, and, when he would take a puff, I could see his face.”

I love that story because it’s about Bill’s love for his grandfather and vice versa, and it’s a memory he will always treasure. Bedtime stories are a pathway to a great inheritance—your love for your children and the stories of their family. Don’t miss it.

*Note to the reader: In the stories that follow each chapter, I refer to Grandpa, Grammy and Aunt Mary Ellen. These are my parents and sister. I refer to others as Aunts or Uncles, and they in fact may be aunts, uncles, cousins or other close friends.*