

## Long Story Short part 1 of 2

**Eva Brownstein introduction:** Eva was raised between the mountains of northern India and British Columbia. Eva has always had a love for wild places and the people that inhabit them. With a bachelor's degree in anthropology and a graduate degree in communications, her filmmaking practice has evolved through curiosity, determination, and saying yes.

Her diverse interests have led her through a wide range of media landscapes from ski films to National Film Board documentaries to creating content for nongovernmental organizations in India, Rwanda, and Haiti. She finds inspiration in giving voice to under-represented peoples and issues and communicating stories of resilience.

Eva considers documentary filmmaking to be a privilege that comes with responsibility, and always strives towards authenticity and dignity in her work as a cinematographer and director. She currently lives in Vancouver.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/eva-brownstein-6abb722b/?originalSubdomain=ca>

<https://www.storyhive.com/creator/profile/id/295835>

**Jake Costello introduction:** Jake's bio says CBC Early Edition studio director, retired busboy, and participation award winning radio producer, but maybe you'd like to add to that a little bit.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/jake-costello-1.4928629>

**Jake:** Yes, I work at CBC radio with the Early Edition. I came there via Langara College through the journalism program. I am from White Rock, and live in the Vancouver area. I am excited to be here.

**Steven:** OK, thank you. We are excited to have you both.

[to the participants:] We sent you an email asking you to think about how you might use story elements in your work here, because not everybody is an instructor, or in your course. We are hoping-- and this is for the benefit of Jake and Eva to understand a little bit about why you are here, and what you have thought about before coming here-- to hear a few brief statements from maybe two or three of you regarding your interest in the topics, and what you hope to gain. So do we have any volunteers?

**Tanya:** I teach public speaking, and one of the things that students have to do is tell stories. I tell stories to help them to tell stories. I want to know if there is a right or different way of helping them to tell stories that, actually, make sense, and that work with the speeches that they have to give. That is why I am here.

**Lolahawk:** [Indigenous greeting and introduction] I have introduced myself to say what a wonderful afternoon. We are gathered together, as friends. I am looking to see how indigenous storytelling that I have put into the coursework can be used. I am a retired indigenous professor doing creative work filmmaking. I am looking to see how more I can broaden that conversation, reflection, and depth of putting story into our indigenous stories enter course content in a variety of ways.

<https://profiles.eco/riverlanguagehighway>

**Steven:** Thanks, Lolahawk. As you were speaking, I realized that I neglected to do the welcome. I am asking your permission to use what you just said as the welcome.

**Lolahawk:** Absolutely.

**Rhonda:** I worked with the veterinary technology program, and now I am in health sciences as their learning strategist. I am not teaching directly; what I am looking at is bringing in a narrative to the nursing department to show a story to their patients as opposed to just checklists and medical treatment plans. I would like to learn how to frame the story for that patient.

**Eva:** I would be curious to hear more people's perspectives, backgrounds, and interests in story in this room. It will just help us to tailor our content to you, and it is a privilege for me to be in a room of experts. I lead many youth filmmaking workshops with youth, and it is exciting to be in a room with experts in your own field to talk together about how we can use story, and what story even means today.

**Elliot:** I teach in the philosophy department. Philosophy, and often the sciences as well, are presented in a manner that is-- the important ordering of things is logical rather than narrative. I think people intuitively understand narratives better than they understand logical orderings like axioms. I am interested in thinking about how I can use storytelling to deal with my subject matter, which is somewhat abstract. How I can make it more concrete in some ways?

**Gail:** I teach in the history department, and I use narrative in a story continuously in all my lecturing in class to help with discussion because history is in part, not just our ideas it is all stories. It is also about making meaning out of the raw data, if you like, of material, and of conveying historical understanding, change, continuity, through particular forms of structured narrative.

At the Humanities and Social Sciences Congress, there was a daylong workshop on indigenous storytelling as pedagogy, and different ways of using story in different research methodologies as well as classroom. When I came back, I fired off six pages of notes to Steven and said, "I'm so excited...."

**Scott:** I work at the college in Academic Technology Services in technology integration. I look at it a slightly different point of view. Of course, I am interested in storytelling and how that works, but I am also interested in how the technology that we have in the classrooms that we have, that we may want to have in classrooms, may assist in the storytelling.

**Jennifer:** I teach English upgrading. I use fictional and personal narrative works. There is storytelling obviously, but I would like to-- and have students write personal narratives as some of their assignments. I would like to go beyond the obvious, and maybe find some ways to incorporate the power of storytelling into teaching grammar or vocabulary building or other aspects of language.

**Holly:** I work in the peer tutoring and writing center at learning center here. Part of my work is in training peer tutors to work with other students. The other part is encouraging students to come seek help. I am interested in how a personal story can be-- coincide with a shared story or a collective story and vice versa in terms of understanding student needs and understanding what their narrative is as they approach their academic goals. How that can help us in both aspects of the work that we do?

**Tim:** I am interested in it as how you two would coax stories out of people. In the same way, how faculty might be able to coax stories out of students so that they-- so they have the skills, and they know that what they have to say is important. Someone needs to give them the language and the confidence, I guess, to do that. That must be a part of your daily lives is getting those stories out of people who may be hesitant to be forthcoming.

**Sue:** I am a former high school math teacher. Often, people do not put together math teaching or mathematics with story telling. I used to use stories a lot to forge a bond that, in retrospect, made the math class less risky somehow.

The other thing that I did with it was I used it to create the stories about my husband to help them remember various aspects of what they had to remember in math. Because it was a lot easier to get their attention and settle with a story than by yelling and trying to get attention that way.

**Rob:** Just overlapping with what has been shared so far. I teach interpersonal communication and I am very interested in the stories that we tell ourselves about our lives. The foundation of my course is self-awareness. How those stories can shift over time based on how we commit to self-awareness, and how all that plays out in our interactions. I am looking for creative ways to, get students involved in those types of things.

**Priscilla:** I am staff working with the Aboriginal stream. Similarly to what Lola and Gail has said, I am here to work on the aboriginal because we are an indigenous program. We are unique within the college itself because we do have indigenous instructors and indigenous content. Storytelling is a big part of that. We bring in elders to share their stories. We bring in people

who work in the field to share their stories. Many of our students do share their own because a lot of the reason why they get into the program is because of personal experience.

We encourage that with their course content, and just with who we are as a program. I'm here to just support our program, and being able to grow and to learn from the people in the room, and also support the college in their indigenization strategy by seeing how there is this bridge between storytelling and indigenous pedagogy, and what we can do to further make the whole college have that in the curriculum.

**Jovian:** I am fascinated with the news. I have been a news junkie and a politics junkie since I was a little kid. It is always a little bit weird to me that young people are not obsessed with the news the way I was when I was 10 years old. I'm interested in trying to find out strategies to get people interested in following the news, political news especially, more closely. Current events, issues like climate change, et cetera. Specifically, using something like podcasts in classrooms, either video podcasts or audio podcasts. I have tried it out a little bit, and it has been moderately successful. I'm just wondering what sort of strategies you guys have for that sort of thing.

**Steven:** So maybe we will get you to respond a little bit. I had a question that you may or may not accept, and you could make up your own question. My question was how has storytelling influenced your vocation? If you prefer to modify that a little bit, and provide a response to what you were just told about why people came here today.

**Eva:** Well, once again, thank you for having me here. We have a diverse spread of experience in the room. It is going to be interesting when we break off into groups. I think we have enough experts to balance our own ideas. Story is very intuitive, as we have heard. I do not feel like I sit here as an expert, but just someone with a burning curiosity in story since I was a small child. I think it is that curiosity that has led me down this route, and that from your point, how to bring a story out of a person is simply interest.

This might seem very basic. I feel like much of what I have prepared may seem quite basic, but I think it is because the fundamental elements of story are so intrinsic to how we understand the world and understand who we are. My only expertise in my opinion is a burning curiosity in humans and their stories and the stories we tell, and a belief that everybody has a story. If they are given dignity, respect, time, and patience, that story can be developed.

There are specific techniques that can make that story more palatable, shall we say, to a radio audience or to a short documentary form or a long documentary form. So hopefully, we will delve into that a little bit more over the following few hours.

Essentially storytelling is my vocation. It is my vocation because I have always had a fascination and a curiosity. I was thinking this morning about story and why it is that I am drawn to story. Similar to what you mentioned, many of the facts about our lives when we really look into them are actually stories. When you see life like that it becomes much more engaging, and much

more plastic. Because we can re-imagine the stories of our past or of our possible futures, and inspire other people as a cinematographer and a director.

I like to think that it is a privilege to tell people's story, and just allowing them the space to reflect more deeply on who they are and what their positions and what their stand points-- yeah, world worldviews are. Brings out new aspects of their own story. It's just about being a mirror and a reflection for that.

**Jake:** I am also very privileged and excited to be here, too. Listening to some of the comments from the crowd, I hope that it is not us here at the front because I want to hear Sue's stories about math. I wish that I heard them when I was in grade nine. I like what Eva says about curiosity. And at CBC, it's a line that we hear often is that you can you can teach someone how to write and how to research, but it's that insatiable curiosity is the thing that will drive the stories that we find, and will drive someone to observe something that's no one's noticed before or no one stopped to ask about that we can dig into more.

A few months ago, Carol Off who hosts *As It Happens*, was in town speaking at UBC. She said when she was applying for that job years ago; she thought she was never going to get it. She was speaking off-air to some-- I guess the other candidate, and there was someone else in front of her who was offered the job and she would not say whom it was. They turned it down because they said; "I don't want to sit at a desk for the rest of my career just asking what happened to someone on the phone". She said, "that is the best question that there is. What happened is my favorite question."

It is true with some of the people who we get to hear from on the radio. The best interviews we do are just someone with a story and what happened. I am excited for the discussion that we get to facilitate today, and to hear your ideas, too, about how to pull stories out of people who have them in there. Part of our job, too, one of the challenges is we get someone on who doesn't want to talk to us and they have to. They hold some office that needs to answer some questions. They have some stories. And they do not want to share them.

Much of what we do is figuring out how to pull those out.

**Steven:** I think I have also heard you say that people bring a lot of information in or a lot of content wrapped around a particular event or something that has happened. Part of your job is parsing out or getting to the essence of what the story is in there.

**Jake:** Yes. I wanted to say I really like the title of this event. I think it's *Long Story Short*, and I think that's so great because from what I've experienced so far is-- and I'm probably not doing it right now, but the way to grab someone is to take the big scrambled several pages of notes, and then the work is distilling that into exactly what the essence of the thing is so that if you've got-- if your audience are a bunch of people who would just as rather be somewhere else, or if your audience can turn the dial or is looking at their phone or whatever.

If you are bombarding them with more noise than needs to be there, you are fighting an uphill battle. If you can get it down to the-- if the work that you can put in is distilling everything down to just the golden nougat, then that is where a lot of the good work comes from. It has been misattributed so many times; I do not know who actually said it. The line is, "I'm sorry that I wrote you such a long letter. I did not have the time to write you a short letter."

**Eva:** [after showing video clips] these were three portraits of three projects that I worked on last year. The second to last one was a project I did with a group of female Syrian chefs who opened a catering business here in Vancouver. I did that 10-minute piece through Telus. I think I might show a bit of that later because that is a good example of finding a thread that connects the experience of disparate characters, and developing that into quite a short narrative.

Trying to decide what to include and what to leave out, given that there is so much to the story of Syrians coming to Canada and the immigration system and the struggles to bring their families over, et cetera. It is really a challenge for me to boil down what facet of this story had not been told, and how I could tell that and how it would connect to the characters that I wanted to profile. We will talk about that later.

The other piece was about girls' education, both of them were about girls' education in India and Rwanda and how that is important. This is a clip-- it shows a different kind of storytelling from a film that is premiering at VIFF next week. It is a non-narrative documentary about number five Richmond road in Richmond, where you have all those very different spaces of worship right next to each other on the road.

This is environmental portraits of different temples and gurdwara and a mosque and a synagogue, and drawing similarities and differences through non-spoken portrait. There is no interviews in this, which is a real-- I feel like it is a medium that is really emerging. We are all sick of the talking head interview, but it is also hard to break out of that forum. This director, Cedric worked with these different communities for about three years to develop trust and rapport.

You will just get a sense of the cinematic language through here.

**Q:** we were talking about these women and immigration and all these things that actually are part of the story. In order to capture tension for your audience, how do you focus in on one thing instead of everything all at once? That is a big one for me is focusing in on one thing. How do you do that?

**Eva:** Well, it's a real challenge, and a lot of it comes out in the edit. The more clear that you can have a vision as you go in, of course, that will make your life easier in the edit. For this specific film, which was called Tayybeh about the female Syrian chefs. They had a lot of coverage from different Canadian media sources. They had been on the CBC and Globe and Mail, and most of Canada's mainstream media as a happy story of a group of Syrian refugees who came here,

started a business, and were creating a new life for themselves. It was a great counter to other reports that we often get of Syria.

I felt that there was a piece of the story missing in that usually the story ended with its a happy ending, they received their immigration papers to Canada, they set up a business, done. Whereas, for the women, a happy ending would be returning to a Syria at peace. It wasn't their choice to leave. That often gets skimmed over, and it's a complex story point because I didn't want to downplay their gratitude that they did manage to get to Canada, and that they felt safe and what not.

Their memories of Syria were very beautiful, and that is not a picture that we get often. I wanted to focus on their memories of Syria and a celebration of Syrian culture and how they are trying to rebuild that here through food.

My other character was an Egyptian woman who worked for 10 years in the Middle East in gender development for the UN. And her story connected to the story of the Syrian ladies in that she was also trying to build a home here, while everyday struggling with the nostalgia for leaving her life in Egypt. It was like "how do they navigate living betwixt and between these two worlds?" In cooking these dishes from home, they get to share a beautiful aspect of their Syrian culture. At the same time, every time they cook that meal, they are reminded of the family member who shared that recipe with them who they are separated from.

It is a very bittersweet process. It is not a clear story point, but this is the themes that I tried to tease out. There is no-- yes?

**Q. re:** the original thought or the original spark that started the story? Do you let it wander and then you pull it back? You know what I mean? Something else came of it, right? There are other stories as you said. I mean, not how do you pull it back, but how do you avoid going off on the arms and legs of everything?

**Eva:** I think for me, it was important for me to make a piece that the ladies wanted to see, and that would have a positive impact in their lives. They wanted to honor Syria. They wanted to share a story of the beauty of Syria, and their hopes for returning to Syria. That continued to anchor my process. That is an important question to ask yourself at the beginning of any documentary is "what is in it for the subjects?"

It is a huge ask. I spent days and days at their houses, and every interview was a very teary affair, which is intense when you are working with these sort of traumatic stories. I do not have a background in trauma or counseling, so there was always a fine line being I do not want to re-traumatize these women, but I want to share the story honestly. How could I do it in a way that is, actually, going to be beneficial for them? That is going to promote their business? There is a very tangible benefit here in that they are starting a business. If they can get their word out more about their business, then that is a positive promotion for them.

Number two was shifting attitudes around Islamophobia. So how can I paint their story in the most human way possible? In the edit, I think I did seven or eight different revisions, but I just kept referring to that point. OK, how do I not focus, necessarily, on the trauma, yet not ignore it because it adds weight to their experience? You see somebody just on the sky train going to work cooking. It is not that of a dramatic story. When you understand the background and what they went through and what they are going through every day, then everything has an added depth to it.

I think there was there was a question in here was how to incorporate facts into your story. So for example, I would put a fact in about-- I put facts in when they would add weight to the subjective stories. A fact about how many internally displaced people are in Syria, and how many people have been forced to leave while they're going about their daily lives in Vancouver to just add context.

**Thor:** There are a number of different ways you can tell a story. You have articulated a purpose. How do you determine that you have been successful? Or is there an objective measure of the success of a particular approach to storytelling? Or is it all just subjective? You feel good about the way you told the story, and you assume, therefore, your audience also felt better? Or is there some other objective-- What informs your education in storytelling? How do you know you are going down the right roads?

**Eva:** It is hard to know. Success, for me, for this film, was screening it and having many Syrian people come out. The ladies came up on stage, and they were-- you were there for that, weren't you Steven? [Yes]

They were really choked up, and it was an emotional moment. Then, these voices started popping out of the audience in Arabic saying we are with you sisters. Your story is our story. It was this amazing moment of dialogue between the audience and between the ladies on stage of Syrians in Vancouver hadn't met each other before. That was-- so I was like, OK, this is a success right there.

**Q:** My question is just to add a bit of contextual fact. How many hours of footage did you shoot and how long was the editing process?

**Eva:** The film was 10 minutes, and I probably shot five hours, six hours. That is the work. To get five hours into 10 minutes. I learned a lot about editing in that. I feel like I did not have enough time. Because there are so many stories that you can-- and you get so immersed in the story that you need to like-- You need two or three times as much time as you think to step away, clear your head, get feedback, incorporate that feedback, step away again, see if it works. It is just a crazy process.

**Q:** I am wondering if while you are editing you are also thinking about emotional connection? Because I think that is important in storytelling, and I am assuming that that is why the women reacted like that because it reached their emotions. So is emotional connection a big thing, and

are you doing things to go for emotional connection, or is that just a happy by-product? Are you intentional about trying to get an emotional connection?

**Eva:** I think that is the meat of it. That's the whole purpose is the emotional connection, and crafting your story beats to-- there's enough lead or enough reflective time after something deep is shared so the audience can integrate it. Of course, music and sound design is huge for that. It is very emotionally manipulative.

I watched Lion King yesterday, and it was just so over the top, the emotional manipulation of the sound scape. I tried to have a neutral, spacious sound design. There was time and space for the audience to draw their own conclusion, and not hammer them with too much emotional direction. That said, it is all about engaging the emotion. A successful film will-- you will feel moved. That is very crafted. It is crafted in that, when you feel something in the edit, you are like, oh, this is good. This is good. You keep that.

**Q:** How do you pick the music that you use?

**Eva:** In this case, I hired a Syrian oud player to make up a custom theme. Luckily, he was quite good. He was like, OK, we are doing a happy dinner scene. We are eating food together. Now, we are reflecting. I just walked him through how I wanted people to feel, and then he just jammed on his oud.

**Q:** Was he watching as he was playing, or this was before?

**Eva:** He knew them. He had a similar background. He did not have-- ideally, yeah, you would have a rough cut, and then you would bring it into your sound designer. I also had temp music. It is important to have music that matches the mood that you're going for to edit. Then, I mirrored those themes.

**Jenn:** I teach in the career development program here. I would be interested in including your video, if possible, so it is a very practical question. How would I go about accessing your video, and would I have permission to use it? It goes really well with-- when I am teaching about career development theories, the narrative approach. We're trying to add more content around working with newcomers to Canada and that sort of thing. So I think it would be a really nice match, and its 10 minutes so it's nice and short.

**Eva:** It screens free on Telus on Demand. It's on YouTube. <https://youtu.be/X-U8qICHovg>

**Q:** I think what I am hearing is going to the community, involving the community, with consent of the community is a collaborative process and involves giving back to the community. Maybe one of the ways that you measure the success is not the award, but is the community response: happy, content, feel their concerns have been dealt with respectfully in the process of story making. Is that part of the collaboration? Does the community feel like that the story has been told in a way that they are OK with?

**Eva:** I mean, I can only speak to the opinions of three or four of my subjects. I cannot speak to the broader Syrian community in Vancouver. You negotiate a process as you go along. I sent drafts of the cuts to the Egyptian woman who helped the Syrian ladies start this organization, the catering business. I would send it to them, too. It is tricky because they did not speak English.

I did my best-- I hired all other Syrian speakers to help translate the film, and ran it through. This was an important thing was-- I hired one translator who I thought was quite adept, and got the interviews translated. Hours and hours of interviews. Then, shortly before I was going to deliver, I had it run by another woman who had an even more fine ability of translation. It completely changed the meaning of many things. So I had to rush and go back and recut things.

I definitely passed drafts by the key people before I published anything, and made sure I had their sign off on it. As a director, it is an interesting thing to retain a little bit of creative control while also honoring the stories of the people you're trying to tell, and telling them in an authentic way given that you could only tell a fraction of what could be told in 10 minutes.

We are trying to make a longer piece right now.

**Q:** I am just wondering, and this is more about yourself and on the process, how doing these documentaries has influenced your view on the world, right? I am just thinking of myself as an indigenous person, and also a writer and director. I write from an indigenous perspective. I recognize that my perspective is from the oppressed and colonized perspective. And so you not being Syrian, you not being from Rwanda, how does that influence what your outcome is, and how your perspective has changed in recognizing where, maybe, your privileges and where you're at in the power, and being able to tell that story when it's their story?

**Eva:** Absolutely. This is a question I grapple with almost every day. Is this my story to tell? If I have the privilege and the access to tell this story, how could I do it in a good way? I aim to do these things in a good way by always having a community partner and a co-director. The Egyptian woman, was my creative co-director on this project because I can't assume to know, and it's hugely, hugely educational. I get my entire mind blown, and understanding of the world undone, I feel like, at the beginning, or through the process of every project.

There is no cut and dry answer to this. It is interesting as a white woman of a colonial settler Jewish background. Does that mean that I should tell those stories, or how am I able to move into-- I seem to be attracted to stories of cultures that are not my own. So is that right? If I am telling these stories, how can I do that in the best way possible? This is something I grapple with. I try to use the principles of A, do they want their story told. B, how can we work together to do it in a way that reflects the genuine experience, and see what will they be left with.

So for example, I was just working on a project in Nunavut. Building capacity was as important-- the process is as important as the product. So leaving that community with film gear and with the working knowledge of how to use that film gear felt essential to going in and telling a story

that was Inuit as a non-Inuit person. Having done it again-- that said, it would be better if there were an Inuit storyteller to tell it.

In this particular context, we were trying to build capacity in the community, so in the next time, there could be. It is a complicated time. I would like to continue the discussion. I am not sure if I answered your question.

**Response:** Yeah. It was a loaded question. I wanted to hear your perspective.

**Eva:** Every community has many different opinions on the matter. And that's part of the process is just that constant education, and never treating yourself as an expert, and always recognizing the privilege that you come in with and the generosity of people in sharing their stories, and how it can be a real mutual process.

**Comment:** with all the different departments here in the college who want to add storytelling, and who want to add indigenous pedagogy, I feel like that is the key message I would like people to take away is that they constantly need to put their college in check, and put their intentions in check.

Recognize that, although we may go in with good intentions and want to be able to prop people up to tell their story, we also need to be sure that we are being aware that it could re-traumatize people. That it could have people feel unsafe instead of in a safer environment. So depending on how it's done, that's a part of the [? key ?] that needs to be in that space to be able to have people tell their stories.

**Eva:** Yeah, you just have to feel it out every day, and always be ready to turn the camera off, or not bring the camera.