



**Interview with  
Talia Stinson**

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**KENNEALLY:** When it comes to 2020, the storyline so far is as challenging to follow as a Tarantino movie – so many different threads, so many unexpected twists and turns. In winter, a pandemic of the COVID-19 coronavirus began that has since killed nearly 1 million people around the world. In the spring, a protest movement blossomed in response to the deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police, flourishing first across the US and then hopping to Europe. And throughout the summer, from continent to continent, nations have struggled to restart battered economies while seeking a balance between safety and survival.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center’s podcast series. I’m Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. In storybooks and scholarly journals alike, narrative is the framework for how we share information, experiences, and insights. Talia Adell Stinson, a freelance journalist and project manager based in Philadelphia, sees this ancient craft of storytelling in thoroughly 21<sup>st</sup>-century terms – as a form of data collection and data management. In addition to her work as a writer and consultant, Stinson is secretary of the board of the directors for Art-Reach, a Philadelphia nonprofit whose mission is to enrich lives by connecting underserved audiences with cultural experiences so that they may enjoy and benefit from the transformative power of the arts.

Talia Stinson joins me now from Philadelphia. Welcome to Beyond the Book, Talia.

**STINSON:** Thank you so much for having me, Chris. It’s a pleasure to be with you this morning.

**KENNEALLY:** Well, I appreciate you joining me and the opportunity to explore this notion of storytelling that you put forward. I believe in some of your writing, you’ve said that whether it’s individuals or brands, storytelling is central to our understanding of ourselves, our communities, and our organizations. Give me some sense of what you mean when you say that your story is your brand.

**STINSON:** All of us are living in this current moment in time and have been built up to it from prior moments. I think that whether it’s personal, professional, or a hybrid of both, your brand is everything about where you’ve been, who you are, and where



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you're going. My mother used to say as I was growing up, you ain't going nowhere unless you know where you've been. Play (inaudible) and play it often. That is part of your story, and it's part of everything that you do – how you interact with people, how you communicate in the boardroom, how you interact when you're at work or even on a field you play sports. So I really do think the story of who you are on all levels is essential to your brand in every sense of the word.

**KENNEALLY:** So if we want to find out where we are going, we have to know where we've been, and we've certainly been some rough places in 2020. It's quite the year – and not over just yet. Offer your own reflections on the struggle that we're all having to make sense of what is happening this year. It's a struggle to tell the story, really.

**STINSON:** Yes. Well, first, I'll say it's a struggle to sort of get through parts of the story at present. 2020 is a year none of us will ever forget. We will always remember where we were and how we endured a pandemic, the first that we've had in 100 years. I think this year, we've seen a lot of turmoil in terms of escalation and continuation of racial unrest about social justice issues amidst the global health crisis. Millions around the world have died. Literally, the country shut down, which is something I'm not sure anyone could ever really properly articulate.

I took this time for myself to grow in other ways. I did a lot of writing and a lot of reflecting. And I think all of us, whether you learned a new skill or started a new venture or paused in more ways than one, we've all come a long way from where we were even seven, eight months ago. So 2020 is a time that we will continue to relive in terms of the chapter that we are in presently and how we reflect on where we started.

**KENNEALLY:** It's seeking a balance, isn't it? There's a lot of negative stories out there. Certainly, some of these stories are just as terrifying as they can get. They're matters of life and death. Yet you're suggesting that one of the powers of storytelling is that we can find something positive. There is light in the dark.

**STINSON:** Absolutely. I think even in the toughest moments and trials and unrest – that can mean many things, and it has meant many things in the last several months – progress is still possible. I think that we will come out of where we are now. Not to say that it'll all be positive, but you can't get to the promised land unless you go through the valleys, honestly. I mean that proverbially and literally. So I've certainly had my share of all of those in my own story, in recent years in particular, and I'm still getting to the other side. I think we all are from our own personal, individual, micro-level challenges to even those beyond us.



So there is promise beyond where we are. I think the world has changed, and the new normal – which is a buzzword and is a phrase and a culture and this point – is something that was needed in a lot of ways. I've said it before in other things, but sometimes good things fall apart so better things can come together. So I have to believe that we are going somewhere beyond what was to better.

KENNEALLY: Well, you mentioned the promised land. How remarkable is it – I just saw an announcement on Facebook that Barack Obama's memoir of his time as president is going to be published later this year, at the end of November, and it's called *The Promised Land*. I really thought that was a remarkable choice of a title there, because it just means so much, right? It means the promised land and the biblical references. It means this notion of America as a kind of promise – a land of promise. There's so many ways to think about it. So you and Mr. Obama have something in common with that phrase there.

STINSON: (laughter) Yeah, I think you're right. It's flattering that you would say that, so thank you.

KENNEALLY: Well, as I say, it's all about promise here. You, though, have this notion of storytelling. It's a form of data collection and data management. On this program and elsewhere, we've been recognizing that the pandemic particularly, but just all the events that we go through, are really points of data that we need to collect and manage and process. It's funny. We think of ourselves not in very mechanical or technical terms, but this notion of data is so pervasive today that maybe it's a good lens to think about how we can tell stories, because in all of our lives, there is just an excess of data. So it's tough. You've got to sort through it. You've got to manage it. Right?

STINSON: Absolutely. I think one thing I'll say to start on this is that data is not just numeric, and it's not just qualitative, either, right? I think it's literally the ingredients of what makes up your anatomy, in every sense of the word, to your experiences, to your interactions. Walking down the street, you can collect data with all five of your senses and how you reflect on those.

I used to say when I was in high school, and when I first moved to Philadelphia over 20 years ago, I'm always writing. When I'm walking down the street, when I'm interacting with people, I'm always writing. I don't have to be having a pen in hand to construct a story, because I'm literally living it in the moment. How I choose to interpret and convey that is part of how I share it in an art form.

So I think that the data collection is those experiences, those feelings, everything else in between and within those words, to how you choose to emit that and analyze



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and interpret and share. I think that anyone, whether you're a data scientist to an athlete on a soccer field to going for a jog or whatever it is, you are collecting data through those experiences, and how you share them and you choose to share them is your art. It's also personal in every single interaction that you engage in through your day and through your week.

**KENNEALLY:** One of the things that's happened recently has been – I think the power of social media has made everything personal. Events that are happening on the other side of the planet just become immediately part of our lives. We see them on Twitter or read about them on Facebook or elsewhere. So making sense of the news, working with these stories, whether it's stories about scientific discoveries or vaccines, or whether it's stories about the demonstrations for civil rights and so forth, we need to understand just how they relate to us first. Then we can perhaps understand them better in the global sense.

**STINSON:** Yeah, I think with everything that's happening around the world, believe it or not, the pandemic and the social justice challenges and unrest and turmoil we've felt in 2020 has brought us closer together. We're more neighbors than not. I think the more people view it as divisive forms of communication, interpretation, to whose lives are valued more than others, you're missing the point. The point really is about how we connect and where we've all been within what's happening. Whether it's here or in Israel to the UK, we're all going through this together, even though we're not all physically together.

So we actually do, on a global scale, have a storyline that we're living and are part of. That's something no one can ever take away, regardless of where you stand on any one issue or not, on the ability to sort of be reflective of how this moment in time and how these moments sort of pair together, and it's powerful that every single person has within themselves. As you talk about this chapter of your life going forward, it's something no one can ever take away from you. You have the power to be able to share that your way, because it is part of your brand, too.

**KENNEALLY:** Finally, Talia Stinson, it seems to me that what you're speaking about here and this notion of storytelling as data management, data collection, though, is a way to turn that from the factual to the personal. There's an emotional element regardless of what we're writing about, talking about, that has to happen, because that makes the connection to the audience.

**STINSON:** The emotive tug is critical, I think. I think this is very personal. Regardless of sort of where you are, if you're in the legislature or what your career is, or even if you're a five-year-old in kindergarten right now, every single part of what's happening is personal. And there's nothing wrong with that. There's no shame in



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personalizing a pandemic or personalizing social justice issues or personalizing anything of the sort. Because the more you put yourself into it, the more you actually are able to share how you feel and be in touch with how you interpret what other people are saying.

You said before about how there's a lot in the media and on social media about marches and things that are happening, but how you choose to interpret and really regurgitate what you're reading and ingesting is critical. Anyone can write a news story or rattle off a few quotes they read in an article, but how you choose to actually personalize that and share your perspective is critical to how you're able to get beyond where we are as we go through continued valleys and peaks towards, again, the promised land.

KENNEALLY: Right. So it finally comes down to empathy, a word that we hear a lot these days.

STINSON: Empathy, yes, and emotional intelligence, too. It's a skill that I think we all learn on our own time. Some people have a sharper grasp of it than others. But that has something to do with it as well.

KENNEALLY: Talia Adell Stinson, freelance journalist and project manager based in Philadelphia, thank you so much for sharing these thoughts with me on Beyond the Book.

STINSON: Thank you very much for having me. It was a pleasure. You have a great day.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The complete Beyond the Book podcast archive is available at [beyondthebook.com](http://beyondthebook.com). I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on CCC's Beyond the Book.

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