

*FYI: Timestamps listed here are not correct, but know that all of the content from the interview is here.*

00:00

All right everyone, I am losing my mind because today's guest is my very dear friend Kate Tellers. And not only is she my dear friend, she has been called by the Wall Street Journal, a storytelling guru. And she and I laugh when we hear that said out loud, because like, it's a big word, right? But Kate has this wonderful glorious gift and I can't wait to share her both my friendship with her with you and also her great talent. So Kate, welcome to the show.

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Thank you so much for having me.

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100% and also you guys this is the Halloween episode so you can't see me right now. But I do have on a headband with a dancing ghost in the dancing pumpkin on top. If you do happen to go check out the interview on YouTube. If you've never watched the interview on YouTube, do know that our interviews on YouTube are completely unedited. So this episode I think is going to be a particularly shall I say rocky Rochus one maybe NSFW for some of you? So decide if you're not gonna have it on speakers at work today? I mean, who is it goes into a workplace today anyway. Okay, welcome to the show. Can you help our audience know a little bit about like, what is your job just to kind of give them some context.

01:04

I mean, what a job job so my title at the place on which I am staff. So I work at the storytelling not for profit the moss. I am the director of math works at the math. And I am a member of the creative team. So what does that mean? Basically, the math we help people tell true stories from their lives on stage stories are recorded for podcast for radio for books. And I help sort of that those stories for podcast radios, build those stories. And then I also run a programme where we I lead workshops and private events that teach the craft of storytelling.

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And in case anyone listening is not familiar with the moth. The moth is like one of the preeminent storytelling organisations in the world. And it has a very, I would say, I don't know how you would describe it. But I would say has a very specific sound to a moth story like there is a present in this animal story. There is a there isn't the same as every other kind of the world. How do you describe the actual like modus operandi of a moth story?

02:01

I think it's interesting that you say that there's a sound because the goal like that we always talk about and I use the phrase like the North Star for a story is truth. So you want the story to be told in the storytellers voice. So what you hear when you hear my story, whether at a live event, or podcast and radio is someone sharing without notes, the story that they've crafted with a director a lot of the time that is true to their own experience. So like a funny person is going to be funnier, a fast talker is going to talk more quickly, slower, quieter person, etc, and so forth. They're all going to sound different, but they should sound really honest and true to themselves. And there's no underlying production, there's no music, there's no editing, there's no you know, so it's it should feel like conversational would maybe be conversational and honest and vulnerable would be the universal threads, I'd say

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worse based on what you just said. And I think when I'm even noticing about my own opinion around mouth stories having a sound to them is because we are so used to hearing produced articles on the radio, or produced packages that have music underneath them or something. It's been way more I know you said that it is directed. But something has been more directed with multifaceted or different voices, it is so unique to hear a one story through one voice and one of the things that I think is so how to share with you that my team was listening to your story for what's the correct title of the cheese one, but also bring cheese, but also bring cheese, which is a gorgeous story. I'll let you share about what it's about what you tell the audience a little bit

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about what's about show. So this is a story that takes place ultimately deals with the death of my mother, but deals with my anticipation of the death of my mother and the way that you live when you know that someone that you love is going to be taken from you. And it's

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a beautiful story and told so eloquently and told so viscerally I would say, in my whole my whole team was very much like I had to stop and come back to it because I was having such an emotional reaction to it. And part of what I think is so powerful about the the way that moth helps two people uncover their stories is many of us can think about it being like oh, well it's kind of like you may laugh when you're hearing a story but it is not stand up. And I think the distinction there is so clear we're not driving towards a punch line. We're driving like you just said towards truth. Can you so you've been doing this for a while and one of your jobs that I understand is to go even into you know, we've talked about this many times how my acting coy over here, right? Like you go to organisations to help them. Like you worked with melinda gates and you help these people tell their stories and you help with organisations and when you're going to an organisation. What's the difference between an organisation like we decided we want to learn

how to tell stories like what does that motivation from org like, Why does that happen? Why do you think they come to someone like them off?

04:31

Oh, I mean, what companies come to the mouth and hire me in my position to make money because people know that what consumers want is they want to feel an authentic connection with a brand they want to feel understood they want to feel seen, and they want communication that is very clear. And all of that is what storytelling does best. So I feel and you know I'm in many ways like a very unlikely head of the programme that I am given as someone who comes from a creative background who is anti capital. In many ways, who you know has never wanted a job in a traditional corporate setting. But what I love about the work that I do is that I'm able to bring these values of like vulnerability and honesty and introspection into spaces where you wouldn't find them otherwise. So businesses are like, we need to tell better stories so that we can get our brand out there and perhaps, you know, increase our bottom line. And it's not always obviously, as tactical as that, of course, of course, I'm speaking very broadly. But then I can go in and say, Okay, I'm going to be in a room with 20 people who work together every day. And at the end of two hours, these people are going to see each other and understand both each other and themselves completely differently. You know, and that will help them communicate better, that will help them work better as a team that will help them create better communication, like it will help with all of those things. But I'm doing it through like, here's why I love storytelling, what's most important to me that I can see if you also tell stories with these values, the work that you also do, will be all the better for it. It's not like a here's a corporate story versus here's a good story. It's a Okay, let's just talk about, like, what makes stories great, and what makes the culture of storytelling within a company. Great, and then do that.

06:08

Yeah, I love what you just said, because you know, the people listen to this podcast are mostly creative people. And what we're always talking about is how when you share your story, like a lot of times, I think that one of my biggest ways that this podcast helps people is help them to learn how to show up or reach out or be seen. And what I think storytelling does is it gives the US the hook into seeing you and to understanding you. And that's why I think stories are such a great way to elevate that a lot of times I'll be talking to someone and they'll they'll write a letter or they'll be reaching out to someone and it becomes so corporate speak that I'm like no one cares about, I read your letter, and it's really well written and no one cares. And the care factor is I think what story gives and whether that as a full story or a piece of your story, like right now this is what I'm working on or whatever. Like we get more engaged as a as I think it's written into our DNA and our humaneness that we do that. So let's get let's backtrack. I want to make sure everyone hears like, I'm good. Don't worry, I'm going to drill Kate on a few questions around like good storytelling and how to get involved in all that towards the end. But first, I want to give

them a little bit of insight into how we met. And like you said, wouldn't be a if you were to look at Kate's background when she was growing up. You wouldn't say this is this is exactly the job she'd have. So because you are a performer, you are a performer. Can you share a little bit about that past for us?

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Yeah, I don't think you'd see me like flying across the world to do a presentation in London. You know, we're like, you know, dropping into Portland with Nike, here and there. Back in the day. So yeah, so I came to New York City as an actor, I did some regional theatre and I was really excited to try my luck in the Big Apple and I got hired and an acting studio for my day job. First working the front desk, answering phones, formatting resumes, opening up studios, and then later as a career consultant where I helped people, paired them with the acting classes and then ultimately taught acting classes. And that is where I met you.

07:53

Yes. And wait, just so we're clear. Caden, I both worked at this place. This is the first place I was ever a career coach. And we also like toured the country. Did you ever go to London with me or No, I don't think you did. Did

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you know we did not go to London together? we'd certainly went to Orlando.

08:09

Yes, yes. So Kate never tour the country and teach it the Northeast Northeastern theatre conference, a southeastern theatre conference, we will teach the business of acting and help a lot of actors straight out of college are on their way to college, learn how to work this wild and woolly business. And of course, we got into wild high jinks. I mean, I will just share one little window and take your time if I'm not completely you keep me honest here. We booked our flight a day early on accident to Orlando when we were supposed to go to a conference and when we found ourselves in Orlando I was like well obviously will we be going to Disney World and so we spent a day at Disney World kind of not exactly on the company's dime because right

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but we definitely were like well there's nothing to be done here because no one has checked it like it technically started that day but we didn't realise that like there was no networking to be done like people were checking in and we were like, well we'll do this and we did it so on the cheap I mean you remember we were like how do we get there? Should we walk?

09:02

Yeah, we got for totally. And also like a Kate is a fabulously talented performer she has incredible presence and I directed her in a cabaret show and so Kate and I are very very dear friends and so that's part of why I wanted to have on the show have you on the show today so the question I want to ask you is in all this so teaching all you so when you when I say this you told me this is true for you. You feel like you've taught people from all different walks of life how to tell stories better, is that true? Would you say? Certainly Yeah. And in that what's the one thing that becomes the thing you say to everyone is there one thing you say to every single person when you're working on a story with

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there's obviously the your story matters thing that is like, permeates through the ethos of everything and I run one of the training programmes at the moth, but we use storytelling in different contexts. And you teach storytelling differently depending on the population that you're reaching and the goals that they have for story. So your but your story matters is throughout all of that. I would say in terms of a craft thing. Something that I find so useful and kind of goes with that is that Like the more specific you are in your story, the more universal your story is. So you know, instead of saying I'm not even use my classic example but instead of saying, I was nervous you say something like, I didn't realise that my hands could sweat as much as they did or you know, I put my hand on the counter and it slid or, like I noticed when I said hello, my my hand was shaking, I'm making it all about the hands but you know that that thing where like, you're like, Oh, I get it like now I'm grounded in your world. Now I see what your world is like. Now I know how similar I am to you and how different you I am to you at the same time,

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when you just said that I got this image of the person being like, Yeah, but my story of going to the grocery store isn't interesting enough. Do you ever have that like confrontation of someone confronting something about them that I'm not interesting enough for the facts of my story are interesting enough, when what you just said is about an experience. It's not about the pharmacist was nice or not nice to me. It's not about like, I made it to the store with my to do list. It's about my hands were sweaty, like the internal experience is that also something that you see come up all the time,

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right, like emotions are universal. And I think the stakes of your story, like the stakes, in a personal story being like, what's important to you, or what make it compelling to a listener. So it doesn't matter. Like, you know, if I'm telling a story about being in a car accident, if I don't care, like if I came out unscathed, if I have tonnes of money, and you know, and I'm like, I'll just buy a new car, whatever. It's not an interesting story at all, you know, but I could tell a story about you

know, I remember telling a story once about my son when he was a baby, like freaking out at a bus stop just crying. And like, that's not like babies cry, like that's it. But for me, it became this big thing of I don't know how to parent My child, I'm not doing this, right. You know, he deserves a better parent. I don't understand him, why don't you know, and then it becomes like a really loaded story. And like, what I did to comfort him and how I figured it out in the happiness I felt when I could connect with him. And I was like, Oh, good. I do have maternal instinct. Like I do know what he needs. Even though it's literally a story about a kid crying, a baby crying, like that's like one of the most universal stories of all time. So I certainly combat that. And what happens to me a lot of the time is the person that says, I don't have a story to tell is the one that you asked like, you go three questions in and then you're like, then they like crack. And then it's like a Ha. And I think some of it is self protection in the beginning. And some of it is those are the people that are actually taking what you're saying, seriously, and not saying like, oh, I'll just be like, some flamboyant wreck on tour, who's going to Wow, you with a story of the time that I got someone to buy a drink for me, you know, which is like, okay,

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right. Yeah. And I think what's so important about your saying is that can imagine the internal experience of that person and feeling validated for that experience. What is the thing that you see on the other side of people telling stories? So a lot, I understand, I know a little bit about your work. So when you're going to a corporation, like, you have a little bit of a performative moment at the end, where people share their order. Some people share their stories, right? These are people who maybe have never walked on the stage before in their lifetimes, or is there a theme or their universality that you see once they've told that story that they walk away with?

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I mean, I think it's similar to whenever we do anything that we're terrified of and we get to the other side because I think you know, there's this like joke and I think it's a Seinfeld joke. I'll credit him here for that, though. I'm not sure where he says, you know, statistically speaking, people's biggest fear is public speaking. And second biggest fear is death. Meaning people would rather be in the coffin versus tell the eulogy. Like that's, I'm sorry, Jerry Seinfeld a completely joke. You can do it at the comedy cellar. But anyway, and so I think for a lot of people, it's that like exhilaration, but I think you know, in to me and I and I always feel this way. Like, it's not just about the like, final share, it's about the process. And people will say, like, I never realised that about myself, I never stopped in this way, I never realised these moments were connected. And then they'll be also heard, like, literally saying your story out loud, even if it's not to an audience, but especially when it's to an audience, the act of being of speaking and feeling heard, like that sort of, you know, one way diet you two way, but one verbal dialogue that goes on between audience and Teller is really magical. And I think we lack that, like, we don't give ourselves the

space to just say, like this experience that I had, was meaningful and has shaped me and is someone and the experiences that we think are the most important, are often not, and the experiences that we come back to all of the time often means something very different than what we initially thought that it was.

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I want to see you speak more about what you just said. Sometimes the stories we think are the most important or not, can you tell us about what that means? When you say that what Where were you taught? How are you taught that? How did you witness that?

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Well, the classic thing I mean, I think because people classically want to tell they want to be like engage. Everyone should be like the most interesting person in the room. They want to talk about their accomplishments. So like the classic thing is everyone's tell the story about running a marathon and I'm like, Great, that's freaking great. I can't run a marathon but that's not interesting saying like, I'm good at something and so then I did it more and now I'm good at something so you know, I always say like, I'm not interested in the story of the marathon. I'm interested in the moment you almost turned back like where's your vulnerability? Where's your attention? Where's your question? And so I think for a lot of people, they come into the workshop and they're gonna be like, I'm going to tell the story about the time I won something I want to marathon bla bla bla bla bla, but The more interesting story is like, well, what's the story that you always like in the movie of your life? What are the scenes that you come back to? And like, this is completely ridiculous. And I've actually never made this into a story. But it is a seed of something somewhere. I'm obsessed with, like puberty early, you know, like early teens tween time, and like the way it's really shaped who we are, I think those moments, and I was cut from my high school musical when I was a freshman. Wait, what was the musical we need to know? Brigadoon, of course. And I would lay in my bed tossing and turning with the music waiting for my diary in the back of my head. And I know I haven't actually made the story. But I have made this drive and actually told the story or crafted anything. But I know there's something there about like, I was a completely insecure kid, the only thing that I could do was theatre, I finally was doing theatre. And then being told, like you're like, it just completely ignited every insecurity of my body and like, brought me to my knees, you know, but that's like, ridiculous, you know, you say that to someone, like I'm going to tell a story about the time I was cut from a play when I was 14 years old. And people were like, you've literally done nothing in the decades. Of course, I have, but like, you know, that will come up for people or people will say, like, I had this interaction with my dad that, you know, I've always thought was this, like, I always thought my dad was being a jerk. And then I became a parent. And I realised, you know, my dad was doing the best that he could like, we received moments, almost banal moments in our life with heavier weight as our stories continue to, you know, pile on each other,

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I got the image of like, you know, when you dog your a book or something, like, I want to remember that they're like, Oh, yeah, that happened. And I didn't really clock what impact it had. Um, and so obviously, this work is very therapeutic for people. And I imagine it's therapeutic for you. And when, in when you're in any of these environments, are you? You're holding a lot of emotion? Oh, totally. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Beyond the like, I'm scared shitless that someone's going to ask me to tell the story on the stage. Your only emotion of this is this, we actually are going back and looking at a part of our lives or whatever. Can you speak a little bit about what that's taught you? Just to be there?

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Well, I mean, I think it's like, let me tell you something about myself first. I think it's reinforced for me a curiosity that I like, and that I think, you know, curiosity means that like my work is will be endless. Because there's always more people to find, there's always more stories to hear, there's always more connections to make, I can hear a story that I heard five years ago and hear it with different ears than I do now. And so that fills me with optimism. And I think that's not universal to myself. I mean, I think I have it, it is obviously a job requirement that I be a person who is curious about other people in the line of work that I do. And I think like, what is it taught me about, you know, it's easier, I think in the workshops, it's one thing it's like, particularly the workshops that I teach, where people are being brought in to, like, apply these skills professionally, I have to both emotionally take care of people, but make what I'm doing teachable. So I have to like tie it back to a principle. So like, you are crying right now. Because you're, you know, father didn't show up to softball practice, I have to hold space for that. And I also have to be like, if you open it in scene, it will be you know, more universal, or like your stakes were unclear. And that part of the strike tried to do those two things. But I think another thing that, I think are instincts that I don't know quite how to describe getting into this. But another thing that I do is I host live shows, and my job is a host, it's like not an emcee job. It's a host job. Like, it's, I find that to be a huge distinction. So for people that don't know, when we put on a show, we're putting on shows like we've done Sydney Opera House, which is, you know, 1000s of people, the schnitz and Portland 3000 people, you know, our smallest houses at this point are over 400 people. So we're asking people to go onstage, many people have never stood in front of a microphone never stood on the stage before, if no stage training and just tell a story about yourself. And then my job is to make sure that the audience is interested that the storyteller has the time in the stage, but like to keep that interest going. So to use an example, I just got back from Boston. So it was I don't know what, like 900 people, and we had people from like a guy whose job is to pick up bodies after they die, to soldier dealing with PTSD to a Mexican wrestler, to an intersex woman falling in love for the first time to a woman dealing with the fear of the very young death of her daughter, like these are all the different stories that are on the stage. So my job as the host is to get the audience excited and entertained in the



beginning. And then to sit there in the room and be like, how is the audience receiving this storyteller? The storyteller has a particularly the show obviously, there were a lot of like very big themes in it. This storyteller is doing this to the audience. What is my job is to reset, literally, so do I have to come on with a joke and respond to humour and keep everyone laughing? Do I have to like break some tension Do I have to give space to The story and give everyone in the room a chance to reset? Or do I have to, you know, whatever Do I have is someone told me that I have to give information on something else in here. And what that's allowed me to do is both obviously calibrate to that, you know, so when I post like I always have like there's three different ways I'll respond to the story depending on what happens in the room. But also really revel in like the commonality of experience that happens when we share stories that I'm not like, oh, that dude in row f seems annoyed, it's Oh, the entire audience obviously varies person to person. But I can sense like a general feeling in the room and like, what it really feels like to be in community. And that people in these spaces are coming in. And being in community together. And like sharing feelings, I mean, there's science behind this, our brains sync up or breath syncs up or heart sync up, it's exciting to allow myself to feel that and then to like, be a part of people's experience throughout, you know, the ups and downs of that, and the longer sense of a full show.

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Yeah, and I can imagine that, that what you just described is very moving. I mean, when you were telling me it was moving, but also like, different than telling a story, because you are really feeling with and then also like, I don't know, like, not the metronome, cuz it's not about the cadence of the room. That's not exactly exactly what is, but you are definitely like the temperature taker. And because I could just experience like, this is a super sad story. And the next person's is really funny, whatever, like not being very like, right, right? Yeah, I'm making, I'm reducing it a little bit by saying sad and funny. But you get what I mean, like, you have to allow the audience to reset so they can take in something new. And yet to maintain that, like, everyone's hearts are beating at the same time, you're like, spiritually holding hands right now. And we're going to go to the next story, kind of they can see that that would be and so what I'm hearing you say is that that connects to also who you are as a teacher?

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Absolutely. Is that people? I mean, I think that like, a lot of the time, people don't know what they're saying, you know what I mean? So someone will say something, you know, and it's like, you don't know how you're responding to, but someone will say something that they think is a joke. And I'm like, Oh, that's a piece of pain there. Or other people I can sense other people are hearing it. And it's not just paying, like, I'm making the sound far to pay those. But like, You know what? I mean, they'll say something that they don't realise it's funny, and everyone laughs and then we all have to be able to respond to it. And like, sort of identify, well, what's funny

about that? Or what's not funny about that? Or what's more importantly, what's the truth behind that? And how do we, you know, kind of acknowledge what happened in this room. Just because you have a funny line doesn't mean it is funny, for example, given the larger context of the story that you're sharing, and given that a lot of the time people share stories, and they don't know what the story is about in the first path. So listening for that.

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One of the things I just got from what you said is, you know, we may as a performer and I want to get back to the story of you getting to your job in a second now, but the story is a reformer is like, okay, your goal is to entertain your goal is to make them laugh, your goal is to make them sing the song as they leave the theatre. And that's actually not the goal of storytelling is to get the most truthful you can possibly because that is what is going to activate the audience for lack of a better word, right? So when you're working with people I can imagine like, the specifics you're trying to pull out of a moment are, can we make this this is truth does not qualify? You can't qualify truth. But can we make this feel more true to the people who are watching it? Is that what you're hearing?

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It's funny, because we're writing a book right now five of us in the creative team, and we get into, like, the nerdiest arguments and the conversation of truth. Like I mean, we just have it's been a while, one of the we were debating the other day for a storyteller, should it? Should we use the language to this? Should the story be honest or feel honest? And for a storyteller? What's the difference of that? Like, you know, we all have our own narrative narratives, we all tell each other we believe so I can say something like, you know, my cousin is really vindictive. If I feel like my cousin is vindictive, then that is a truth for me. I mean, I'd be ashamed to say it on stage, obviously. But like, if I believe that someone is wronging me in the arc of my story, I either have to further unpack that or know that that was true for me in that moment. So is that is that is the story honest? Or does it feel honest to the teller and I think sometimes I think there's a big difference. And sometimes I think there's no difference at all, which is what the whole debate was about. But I think Yeah, so what needs to be happening with a storyteller is they need to be sharing from a place where they truly believe everything they're saying, and we're not stupid as human beings, we know when someone's putting it over putting something over as we're trying to or not dealing, you know, like, just like, passing over a detail. That's like too hot for them to use jone term.

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What are that famous acting teachers?

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Is that too hot for you? Something is something bubbling up anyway. Yeah.

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Yeah. So question about what you just said, because I'm sure we could talk about the definition of truth forever. But first of all, I do want to make sure we don't run over the fact that you are working on the moss fourth book right now, what does that process like for you?

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So there's five of us writing a book, we've written it entirely in the pandemic, meaning that we get on zoom and now the book we're in like, we're going to copy editors. So we're like, you know, at the end, we started with everyone writing on, I mean, this is a how to book I should say, so different than our other books or other books ran theologies of stories that have been told on stage lightly edited for the page. This is a how to book the audience for anyone that wants to tell their story. So if you want to get on stage at the moment, that's great if you want to use storytelling to tell a better wedding toast, if you want to tell it to connect with friends, if you want to use it in business, like it's all there, and we have applications throughout the book, and it's gonna be great. It's super great. It's super great. I mean, now I'm at the point where I'm like, if I read it one more time but we're still like that's the thing is, these are the people that I'm writing this book with I've been working with for well over a decade, you know, when we've been the math has was a very different organisation when we all started there. So we've like crafted these ideas, these thoughts, so we'll really get into it and be like, that's not how it was. That is how it is, you know, in a loving way. It's an incredibly supportive and fun experience. But yeah, right now we're in like four to five hours of zoom every day, reviewing edits, putting in new writing, adding the book is full of examples from storytellers throughout the years. So really making sure that we're highlighting stories that exactly speak to the contents of the book that showcase the breadth of our community that showcase the impact of storytelling. We've such love for our community and for our tellers in particular it's very intimate thing to craft a story with a storyteller you know you're in these you know, love multi many long conversations about something that by nature being a good story is very important to them. So we all are like completely in love with our storytellers. So it's like killing your darlings anytime if if our editors like there's too many examples here or like we can

26:39

and I can imagine these conversations can get heated because there's all strong smart people deciding these guys like we need this one. I mean to this one, so you're It sounds like you're near like the end of this race, though, which feels good. Yeah. Oh, totally.

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And I think like we've really developed you know, I love Brian, you know, as a multi time collaborator with me, like I love collaboration and but I also believe you have to have opinions on personally. So I like people that come in with a strong point of view. And I come in with a strong point of view. When I have you know, the classic, I don't die on every hill. I don't think I stepped out of Be honest or feel honest. At one point. I was like, I think I'm cool. But like, but I freakin love those conversations. Like I love it. They're exhausting. But I love that we care so much that we know so much that we're pulling so much experience into things and you know, that we're writing some of the stuff we're writing about is like, truly powerful. I mean, to me, it's the most important stuff in the world. So when are we going to get to buy this book is it's too early to say that April 2020, to our 25th anniversary.

27:36

Okay, great. Great. It was great. Great. So wait, we need to go back to being a performer in New York City working together acting studio and then being at the office. How long have you been at the mall? Now?

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My first show I went to was beamed beginnings in 2007 and I joined staff the following years. 2008. So we're looking at 13 years.

27:54

Yeah, right. And so tell us a little bit about that journey to, you know, being an actress in New York City and like jumping into the moth and how that all happened.

28:03

So as you know, Brian, I was an actor in New York, I came to New York, like very interested in stage as most often people do, and I did Music Theatre and was interested in that and started doing all sorts of things like that. But then I pretty quickly got into comedy. I started taking as as you did, particularly in those days when you're sitting comedy, I took improv classes at UCB. I started it I started an improv group. I wrote sketch shows I did all that and then I got into solo stuff. So I was doing stand up. And then we did the cabaret. I got more interested in that which was a

28:35

one person cabaret let's just be clear I was not in it. I just have to Kate shape and direct the show. So again, one person I'm just kind of like no, I want to make sure we're acknowledging How was about solo voices. So we'll work on stage

28:45

solo voice also. I will say this Brian, the cabaret. Recently I went to our friend Steph echecks house and I played the piano there and I came home I haven't played the piano in years but I used to play very seriously impulse bought a keyboard Ada keys in my home weighted keys I just did it this is not me. You've known me for two decades is not a

29:06

kick tells you to do weeks to make that decision. Yeah. years.

29:09

Yes to make that decision. Are you kidding me? I've got dependent children to feed. So I then I went into my basement and opened up my suitcase of music and I found my book. My 16 bar cuts are all there. The arrangement the piano arrangement if it's raining men that Stephen Silverstein did for the finale, the curtain call of my cabaret? Yes, all there I am living right now. It is so amazing. Anyways, we did this cabaret. But while all of this is happening, I'm working at the acting studio then I left the acting studio It was too much to to emotionally take on other people's acting dreams while I was going in mind so I was like I'm gonna wait tables like where they are. Someone says I want a sandwich. I'm gonna give you a sandwich. But then people are coming to me and being like, I want to change my life as an actor and I was like it's too much I want to teach my lips and stuff. So anyway, I did that then I worked in an advertising agency. So I had a job I was doing, you know, a lot of comedy, a lot of Black Black Box Theatre, so I wasn't living exclusively off of that. In the meanwhile, my mother is sick and she's getting progressively worse and so I'm you know, and I was very close to my mother. So I'm like spiralling into this like Who am I? What am I What am I doing on this earth? Why am I here? I remember one time I was doing the reindeer ate you remember that show was monologues of all of the eight reindeer because Santa had sexually harassed vixen. And we were doing it in the basement of a bar in Chinatown. And my mother was sick. My sister was going back, I was going back here and there. And I was like, Mom, I have to come home. And she was like, the work you're doing is important. And I was like my mom wearing antlers in the basement of a bar in Chinatown. But what she meant and what it was a great gift to me was like, but Kate, but this is who you are like, this is the way you create the way you communicate. This is the community. She knew the community that was gonna be with me when she died. She was like, these are the relationships that you keep and build and foster. So anyway, my mother dies and I'm in this fall like Who am I? What am I But really, the two questions that came up were what am I doing with my time? Why am I spending so much time like temping in an ad agency and what's the legacy I'm leaving after I go and I also I had been doing comedy than for several years I was really frustrated with like the manipulation of setup punchline I mean stand up now is very different than stand up when I you know, back in 2007, or I was doing probably before that, but I just was like this is an honest I'm telling the same joke over and over again and I'm sharpening it so that I

can get the exact same reaction every time. That's not doesn't feel like it feels like manipulation doesn't feel like connection. So I heard a moth story on This American Life This was pre podcast pre radio, and at the end it said there's a live event in New York City beginnings. I walked into the New York and poetry cafe September 11 2007 with my cousin who's not vindictive bitch she's just so we're not getting cousins confused that was a made up person before and you know, people are standing up as an open mic and sharing their stories and the whole crowd laughs together the whole crowd cries together I always say it was like we were all breathing the same breath and like three stories and I was like, this is it this is exactly what I want. We found recently a cover letter that I wrote to be an intern and it's so dorky Why did I help you write this cover letter now Brian because in it I say I'm handy with a stapler and you never would have let me say that also i'm not handy with it like let's be honest, like my freaking admin skills are limited so anyway, so I like intern and I happened to be they just had this idea to do a podcast and I happened to edit it in GarageBand the free software we went to number one on iTunes we beat This American Life and everyone was like I remember executive director coming out and being like you know we're number one on iTunes I'm taking you out to celebrate and I was like I literally do nothing but drop audio files and regimen anyway so then I stayed and I produce shows and I directed shows and I you know really took off with this programme and then where a lot of my focus has been since then, but it was always that like, I always love the connection that I felt with an audience when I was doing like the best theatre the best comedy, The Best Music Theatre and I was always interested in personal narrative my mom gave me a Studs Terkel book when I was like 16 years old and was like you'll love this and I studied in theatre I designed my degree was drama and anthropology I combine them as a two thirds drama 130 anthropology because I was interested in the authentic representation of people on stage that's all you know, that's you know, the type of theatre I've been attracted to outside of music theatre it's like kitchen sink, you know, like, what's the frickin gritty seamwork that's always what I've loved.

33:32

What's I think what's so I think for me You know, I've never heard that exact story that American poets cafe I've never I've never heard that story before. I didn't know that so that was really exciting to hear and the other part of it for knowing you for so long the other part of that I think was really exciting for me and I think also for the listeners here is you know, a lot of times you know I have the same journey where I was an actor and I was like oh no, no, this is what I meant to do and I can just hear in all of this how the actor part of yourself has informed everything that you've been able to accomplish it wasn't like the extra part of you had to die and this other dream had to arise there was actually this do you feel like the reason you are so good at what you do? Or like how do you how do you mentally connect the dots to the actor to what you're doing now?

34:09

Well, a lot of like a lot of what I do is you know, when I'm teaching I'm presenting and when I'm hosting I you know, there's a lot of just like, essential ability to communicate and be comfortable in your body on stage. That's all an acting thing. A lot of it is improv like I'm very comfortable you can throw any shouldn't say that because now it's just gonna be a challenge. But like I hosted a show where you know someone like passed out and screamed during one of the stories need to come up on stage after that I've I've gone I've been on stage at corporate events where it's like you're on stage for hundreds of people this people have sunk 10s of 1000s of 1000s of dollars 1000s of dollars in this and like oh wait Kate we told you about 30 minutes now you have 20 you know and like that and this is not a brag This is just like there is all of those skills are things that I'm immediately like, pull it up like whatever improv skills what what are the beats that You need to know how do you understand what's your emotional connection to your material, like all of that completely translates. And I think also, you know, when you're, this is so basic, but when you're comfortable being in front of people and entertaining people, you make your audience comfortable. And then they listen. It's as simple as that. So that goes to like teaching present, you know, it's like all those, what they call soft skills and business, which I would argue they're not soft skills, but that's fine.

35:23

That's what I was actually, that's what brought to me is like so much I think of a, an actor or performer can say, yeah, everything that I do doesn't matter unless it's exactly acting. And actually, you have what some from the outside might say, is a very, like creative and also works in corporate circles job and like, all of the skills that you have are so you would not be able to do that job without that great background in what you've done already. And I think that actors can be very quick to creative people get very quick to say, Well, yeah, I only know how to paint like this. So what I can do cannot be applicable anywhere else. And I rights off, I think the ability to say, I'm allowed to make money doing something else, I'm allowed to be validated for news, I love to be proud of doing something else, right? And I think that if there's something else suddenly goes away, when you say like, Oh, this is what I'm meant to do. The LCS, the otherness of the other dream, I think shows up, which I think is really powerful when you talk about that. So I have a question for you. Thanks for letting me really go in here with all this up. So wait, something you shared a few minutes ago, I've got 1000 questions, but the one that's coming up right now is when you share the stories of like PTSD and losing a child at a very young age like these can sound very extraordinary to the people who are listening right now. And that we talked earlier about like, actually ordinary things are enough, it is your internal journey around them that makes it like you could be like, and then Ladybug landed on my windowsill. But there was all this other stuff going on that had to do with about this, right? So you have to fight that urge from people, I'm kind of asking a question I asked earlier, maybe in a different way. But just to fight that urge from the person to always choose the extraordinary, I'm

going to talk about the death of my dog. I'm not talking about the time I got really sick and almost died. I'm gonna I'm gonna only pick the Jeff to kind of pull people I know, I know. It's easy to No, you said a lot. I'm sure that in the environments where people want to choose, like, when I ran the marathon or when I achieved this, like that's, I want my gold star moments. So is it hard? Is that a difficult conversation? like where do you even begin to get them to get out of that mindset?

37:11

Yeah, I mean, it's a difficult conversation. And I think like, the important thing isn't that your story is life and death. It's that it should feel life and death to you. And you know, like, I'm always like, gosh, anxiety is so good for storytelling, because everything can feel like you have anxiety, you have stories.

37:32

everyone listening, we all qualified storytellers. We just got it.

37:36

I mean, you are all storytellers, regardless of what your relationship with anxiety is, anyway, yeah, certainly. And I think the other thing is, you know, you don't want to like there's this classic example. And it's in the book, I hope I'm allowed to say what's in the book. You heard it here first. You heard it here. First people you know that the book has an I don't know. Well, anyway, here's an example that we talked about a lot that may or may not be in the book, okay. We have this astronaut who tells stories of the moth now it's most of us have never been to space. We've never trained as an astronaut. And we may not have a job with the procedure, but like it's just so unreliable and relatable, but he has a story about going on a mission and being floating in space working on his vessel, and he strips the screw. And he's like, I can't do the job that like, literally millions of taxpayer dollars have sent me here to do because I just effing script a strew strip the screw now everyone can relate to if not stripping a screw something like that, except for the he's in space. Like he can't go to his toolbox. Anyway, it all works out. But it's like you have to even in those big stories, find the smaller moments and you know, if you go back to the story about my mom, the story about my mom deals with the night of her death specifically, but then like build sort of the emotional world around that so that we understand what walking into a room at x time what that actual loss felt like, like you have to ground even those big stories in like real specifics, to create the world that your audience can then come into and relate to even if the experience isn't the same. Yeah, that's

39:11

really, really powerful. And I really will everyone we're linking to Kate story in the show notes here. And I really encourage you to listen to not just because I'm a huge fan of Kate, but also



because I think you're really illustrated what she's just said beyond the fact that we take it on a beautiful journey inside of her story in all the work that you do. Kate, what is the thing that? What does it taught you the most? Maybe it was a surprise even though what do you learn every day or?

39:33

I mean, I think storytelling is the great equaliser and I have been in the presence of famous people with very influential people with people who schedule their lives in 15 minute increments, which now I understand a little bit more and you probably at this point do Brian, but you know what I mean, like, but you get in a room with them and you talk to them about their stories and it's like that all goes away. Everybody's insecure. Everybody has moments of their lives that they don't think are interesting that may be really interesting. Everybody wants to be seen everybody wants to be heard. You know, we have all of our different ways of getting there. But I think it's truly to me like humanised humanity. If that doesn't say it's like kind of ridiculous, but you know what I mean? Like, I'm no longer like we had a gala and we had a celebrity that everyone was going, going just really like, Oh my gosh, they're going to be there and their people and their agents in there, whatever. And they came out of the limo, and they put me like on front because they know that I don't get weirded out by celebrities. And I was just like, okay, what's up we just had the nicest report I'm not saying that I'm like great at this I'm saying that like I was delighted to meet another human and I didn't let like the nerves of the fact that this other human has a million awards is like a household name. Throw me in that way and that's delightful that I feel like I can see people as humans and not titles even though titles is good.

40:53

Titles is good, but yeah, I love what you just said because I would say that it's one of the things that that at least the listeners to this show, I think really believe in which is there's no matter what business you're in everyone's a human being and that I do believe that kindness can be the way that you hate to say this but get what you want. There's no reason that that kindness cannot be the distinction behind all of your actions that you take and that seeing someone as a full human being which is what you're doing is like I'm so glad you have all these awards and you're a human being and that's even better than that like there's some like the best thing about you is that you're a human being like I think that that is the part that is exciting when you say it that way so you've worked a lot to famously so lots of famous businesses, the State Department Nike Spotify all these fancy places so in all that work has there ever been What's your favourite kind of work to do? Is it corporate stuff? Is it with this kind of Is it someone who's really hard to work with like when are you like the most like I am digging this right now? Like I don't want to go to lunch I don't care lunch is coming up like I'm having fun right now. What does that happen for you?

41:52

Oh, it's the hosting for sure. Yeah, and the hosting happens you know, either on the mainstage or in the work that I do with companies it's the being able to be like the person in the room. That's like setting the room that's priming the room for the other tellers that's listening to it and then responding it you know, responding to it that's either making people laugh or holding space like I love that I mean, I love that in my personal life is you know, I love to host dinners I love to bring people together. Lois Weisberg is my freaking idol I cannot believe I didn't name my daughter Lois. But I'm like I love that connection and I love to use any ability that I have like any skill that I have to make those connections between people that wouldn't otherwise be connected. And you know the my like medium for that is storytelling and you know whether that's in a workshop and a show and a showcase in or whatever like it's just such a thrill to see to be a part and be an agent and taking people from strangers to like people that under that see each other in a different way.

42:52

That's awesome that is so and it's also what I hear inside of it is it starts with storytelling storytelling is the river you're setting the tone for the room I just love the way you describe that and we're getting towards the end here so I don't want to take too much your time so I would appreciate you for all the time you've given us already. And I want to ask you another question around what you just described of like being this host and setting the tone and in keeping us moving when we're telling a story like that. When does Kate break sweat? You seem like a real cool cucumber about all this stuff. Is there ever a time of like I don't want to say I get stuck here particularly around this work?

43:22

I would say I almost wish I got more nervous at this point I don't really get nervous I mean I definitely like I have enough between before any time that I'm going to be in front of people I don't do like I don't like breathe you know what I mean? Like I don't do the acting stuff that we used to do I'm not to remember with Joan, we would like throw ourselves halfway in the ground and be like, Huh, like I do not see

43:44

Lauren doing Alexander Technique.

43:46

No, I mean I have stuff on a day if I'm going to do a big show I definitely make sure that I move my body because that works really well and I often get a manicure because it makes me sit still and because I'm a hand talker and then it like gives me a little confidence.

43:59

That's a good trick. I think we should that's a great one.

44:02

that's a that's a trick. Yeah, I've been doing that. Since I was an actor I would always remember you always get a manicure for my characters. And then yeah, that's my thing, because I don't sit still ever I mean, I think you know, so I need to literally have someone be like I'm putting paint on your hands. You can't move you'll ruin it. Anyway, but what makes me break a sweat is if I ever feel like I didn't honour hear a story. Like if I feel like Oh, I didn't, I miss read the way the audience felt or I responded in a way that assumes something that in hindsight, may not have been what that person said, or I said something that made someone lock up instead of bring them out. And so it's not like I don't have the nerves about it before but I think like and I think the beauty of this work is that it is very human and very personal. And there's a lot of vulnerability and risk involved. But that's the stuff that I like lay in bed at night and I'm like, did they feel heard that they feel loved? Did they feel seen?

44:58

And this is why I love you and why you're my friend I am sure that a lot of people who are listening are very like, Okay, how do I see a Moscow? How do I learn more about this? Obviously we're all going to buy the book in April. But and I cannot wait to see your name on this book. Can you tell anyone who's listening how to get involved? Or where the best place to start us?

45:15

Sure. I mean, obviously, there's our website, the math.org. And you can link through to the podcast and radio show to hear stories. If you want to tell stories. You can go to open mic now we're back live I hosted the first live New York slam.

45:28

What was that? Like? First of all, what was it like to be back for the first time?

45:31

Honestly, like I was high for days, like, it's so uh, man. I mean, the slams are open mic. So it's just like you don't it's just people in the audience being called the stage and sharing and the crowds. I mean, we just like, at one point, I laughed so hard, I was like, I'm like, wiping mascara from my face. And I was like, at some point, like, and I was speaking, I was talking to people, I was like, responding to something. I was like, I need to get it together, because I'm supposed to keep this moving. But I mean, I just love to be in community with people. I think I've said it 100 times. So anyway, she can go to an open mic, you can find them. We're in cities all over the

country, LA, New York, I'm sure is probably where a lot of your people are. And we're there if you have a story that you want to tell, you can call our pitch line, which is also on the website. And we listen to every pitch and we you will get a response. And you can obviously read our books, you know, I always say like stories beget stories,

46:27

you'll just get better and better. But the audience of the month is the best teacher because they'll give you a laugh, or they'll give you when they when you hit and then you know, when you feel like that. You're like, Alright, I should probably edit that detail out.

46:40

And the best place to start is the mouth podcast where you can hear Kate's story, I have to say it again. And again, I can't stop saying it. Okay, I'm so grateful for you bringing your heart and your art to this conversation today. I know that I would talk to you about a million other things besides this, but I just want to compliment you on how great it is to see you, you know, own this. I remember when he would walk over to the building on 37th Street and was like your new job, right? And that now you're like running a huge department and go to many businesses all around the world and teach so many people storytelling, and I have zero doubt that you're making an impact in people's lives every day. So I'm so grateful you gave us a little time to witness that. So thank you so much for being here.

47:17

Well, thank you and it's been a great joy to be your friend through all of these years.