



Everyone has a story. Places do too. Stories matter for what they tell us. They also matter for how they connect us to each other. Sometimes, in the telling, the distance between us collapses and we become one. This is the political possibility in sharing life stories.

Steve High, Co-Director of the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling



GOING PLACES: **CONNECTING PERSONAL STORIES TO PUBLIC SPACES**

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CONNECTING MEMORIES TO PLACE

What is a personal memory? How do places trigger memories and stories? Do we inherit memories from our parents? How can we keep our family histories alive through storytelling? How can knowledge of the past inform our understanding of ourselves and our family histories? We all have memories and many are connected to places that mean something important to us as individuals, as families, or as community members.



GOING PLACES: CREATING A MEMORYSCAPE OF MONTREAL

Liz Miller

OVERVIEW

Over a two-month period, Mapping Memories, the Refugee Youth Group of the Life Stories Project, and the YWCA of Montreal organized *Going Places*, a participatory media project involving seven youth with refugee experiences. The project began with a twelve-week workshop in memoryscapes, a method of connecting personal stories to public places. In this workshop participants wrote stories and developed them into story soundscapes, which were shared on a city bus tour. As tour guides, the youth connected the past to the present, personal stories to public spaces, and offered insights into refugee youth experiences.

The YWCA of Montreal is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of women and girls by reinforcing their self-esteem and autonomy. Through workshops offered in schools and after-school programs, the YWCA aims to encourage the development of leadership skills, prevent the manifestation of potentially violent situations, and reduce the social inequalities that women and girls face.



PLANNING A PROJECT AROUND A BIG EVENT

One way to launch a participatory media project is with a specific event in mind. This is how our *Going Places* course and bus tour took shape. Nine thousand academics from around Canada would be visiting Concordia University to participate in the 2010 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the university was interested in showcasing research initiatives.

Often immigrant, migrant, and refugee children bear witness to the suffering of their parents, as well as their own suffering. It is difficult to isolate hardship to any individual psyche; it spills, so to speak, onto the fabric of the diaspora. A child, being at once removed and part of what his or her family has endured, may be in a unique position to make new sense out of what has happened. The passage from silence to voice may be achieved through intergenerational storytelling (Campano 2007, 56).

Under the auspices of Mapping Memories and Montreal Life Stories, we proposed a memoryscape in the form of a city bus tour that would feature the recorded stories of youth with refugee experiences.

By connecting their personal stories to significant places throughout Montreal, the tour would offer a unique perspective on the city, sensitizing visitors to the diverse concerns of youth with refugee experience. For our group of facilitators and participants, having a concrete goal and a 'finish line' was an exciting parameter. At the same time, planning such a high profile event meant we would have to ensure that the end goal did not overshadow either

the process or the individual goals of the workshop participants leading the tour.

PARTNERS AND GOALS

Going Places began as a collaboration with the YWCA of Montreal, the Life Stories Project, and Mapping Memories. Haitian, Cambodian, and Rwandan collaborators of the Life Stories Project had emphasized that one important reason for their ongoing involvement in the project was to ensure that their children and future generations would know about the genocides they had survived. In order to build on this objective, we opened enrollment for the workshop to any young person aged 20 to 30 years who had been impacted by a refugee experience. This might include a sister, a brother, a daughter, or another family member of a refugee.

By broadening the enrollment to several participants with refugee experience as well as those impacted by a refugee experience, we hoped the course would facilitate intergenerational exchanges in the creation of the memoryscapes.

We also wanted to explore ways of using media to foster leadership skills and to provide a space for young women with refugee experiences to express themselves. Rania Arabi, of the YWCA of Montreal, helped to coordinate the course, and she developed her story about her family's refugee experience alongside the other participants. Describing her role she explained, "Our intention was to establish a context of trust and safety, which are integral for the participants who come from vulnerable backgrounds.



*Rania's Story,
Dear Gabriel*

This intention fed all the sessions and the bus tour (even when things appeared not to go smoothly). I believe that my presence, though I was learning at the same time, gave credibility, as I have lived that experience myself, and it helped in creating a safe place. Co-facilitating a group is a delicate matter, and the details of how it is done and who assumes what responsibilities need to be clear from the start.”

MEMORYSCAPES

To develop this project, we began by organizing a twelve-week course in creating memoryscapes, the mapping of stories and soundscapes to places in the city. A memoryscape can be a walk, a bus tour, or even an immersive website, where physical locations trigger a story or memory. It can involve passages of time and changes in perception, asking the audience to walk in the footsteps of someone else.

The term ‘memoryscapes’ was coined by scholar Toby Butler, who has organized audio walks in London around various oral histories of the city. Butler is one of many historians, geographers, artists, and educators exploring how the technologies of mobility (mobile phones, music players, etc.) might help to illuminate connections among history, memory, and place.

Similarly, our objective for the *Going Places* tour was to immerse bus passengers in the lived realities of the youth involved, while moving through the city. As we passed the locations evoked in the stories, the bus would stop for the youth tour guides to introduce and then play their recorded stories. To explore

how this immersive experience would then translate to a virtual tour, we then mapped the stories to an online route using Google Maps.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Our group consisted of six young women and one young man, who were from Zimbabwe, Palestine, Congo, and Rwanda. Participants needed no previous media experience and we met once a week for four hours at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University. We invited Concordia Communication students to help with hands-on media training in photography, sound recording, and editing.

With our partners and participants in place and an end goal in mind, we were ready to explore the ethical and creative challenges this project might present: How would a consideration of place impact the telling of the stories? How could we ensure personal memoryscapes would have relevance for a larger public? How could these media projects foster confidence and leadership capacity for young women with refugee experience? And most importantly, how would we balance the public and private nature of the stories and ensure that a tour did not place participants in a vulnerable position?

BUILDING TRUST AND ENSURING A SAFE SPACE

Our first challenge was to establish trust and get to know each other. One way we did this was to begin the workshops with a shared meal. Each week, a different participant prepared a dish that reminded him or her of home. By preparing the



meals, participants had a concrete way of contributing to the course. Our shared ritual was also an important step in establishing intimacy and ensuring a safe space for the group.

In addition to preparing the food, we asked participants to come with a story connected to the dish, and we recorded these stories on a digital audio recorder. The cook of the day might describe the person who shared the recipe with them, a special moment when they had enjoyed the dish with others, the origins of the dish, or the challenges of making the dish here in Montreal.

The dishes and stories ranged in flavors and complexity. Participant Rasha Samour, for example, brought Ma'aloubeh, an elaborate Palestinian dish that her mother had helped her to prepare. She explained the history of the family dish and its

trajectory first to Palestine and then to Montreal. Leontine Uwabyeyi, another participant, prepared plantains, an essential part of meals in her home country of Rwanda.

Recording the food stories was a practical decision, which was intended to develop technical skills and to foster confidence in working with recorders and other equipment. It was also a way to create an initial set of stories for the tour. Since participants were simultaneously developing personal stories, we wanted them to have a back-up story in case they felt too vulnerable sharing their more intimate stories with a larger public.

Of course, the flip side of this safety net was that producing digital versions of our food stories involved more work for all of us. And, while we wanted to ensure that technology did not get in the way of a

meaningful exchange, it would also have made sense to simply share a meal together.

The challenge of balancing a meaningful process with the practical need to produce public stories is often present in participatory media projects. The difficult nature of the stories, coupled with the big public event we were planning, made this challenge especially daunting, and we proceeded cautiously to ensure that the benefits of the experience outweighed any risks or discomfort.

BALANCING COURSE OBJECTIVES WITH PERSONAL GOALS

As facilitators working with difficult stories, it was especially important for us to understand each participant's motivations for being involved in the course. To do this, we first asked everyone to draw a map about his or her new 'home community' in Montreal. We had used a similar drawing exercise in our work with Project Refuge (Chapter 1). This time, we asked participants to draw places that make them feel at home, which might include a store, a community centre, a community garden, a café, or a place of worship. We shared a few examples from past workshops, and then participants drew maps with magic markers on 11"x17" paper.

On the back of the map, we asked participants to write their motivation for sharing a story and joining the course. The mapping exercise helped participants to identify stories that mattered to them, and we then shared both the maps and the goals as a group. Both facilitators and participants took part in the exercise, which was the first of many

steps in clarifying our individual and collective goals. The collective goals included developing leadership skills and raising awareness around youth refugee experiences with the general public. While individual and collective goals could differ, we wanted to respect both sets of objectives and explore creative ways of bringing them together. For example, Leontine Uwababyeyi wanted to share her story of losing her family during the Rwandan genocide. Her personal goal in telling the story was to honour her family and to ensure her experience was part of a historical record. It was important to understand Leontine's personal motivation and support her throughout the creative process.

SHARING CREATIVE RISKS

A method we have developed throughout our workshops is to approach the workshops as a mutual exploration. Taking creative risks with participants helped to establish trust by lessening the formality between the role of 'facilitator' and that of 'participant.' For example, everyone, including the facilitators, took part in the introductory mapping exercise and shared what emerged. By doing the exercises ourselves, we also strengthened our practice as facilitators because we experienced what was working and what was not working.

Another instance of mutual exploration occurred when Rebecca, a media facilitator, inspired by food stories and intergenerational dialogues, decided to create a short video with her grandmother. In her video, *Mehshi Kusa*, her grandmother of Syrian descent teaches Rebecca a family recipe that has



*Rebecca's Story,
Mehshi Kusa*

never been written down. Rebecca described her motivation for using a recipe to explore her family history: "As the product of immigration and displacement, our family uses food as one of the main ways to celebrate our roots." Rebecca's project then became a useful model for the other participants to understand what a finished piece might look like.

DEVELOPING THE STORIES

Writing was the starting point for shaping the stories. Writing teacher Penny Kittle has developed a useful list of "ten quick-writes" in her book, *Write Beside Them*. One example is "A Place in Time," a quick-write exercise where she asks students to "Remember a place from your childhood that mattered to you and list what you remember about it. Go for the finest details of that place – sensory details – and see what surfaces" (Kittle 45). Quick-writes were a great way to get started, and we used them at the beginning of

each session. We also allocated time for individuals to work on their stories individually and with the support of a facilitator. We invited Stephanie Marteli, a writing instructor, to come to several sessions to offer her expertise and to review drafts of the stories.

Participants were encouraged to experiment with a variety of styles and genres when telling their stories, including a letter, a poem, an obituary, a definition, a text message, an email, a recipe, a list, a journal entry, a song, a script, or a series of questions. In his book, *Blending Genre, Altering Style*, Tom Romano describes how multigenre text is a powerful means to explore multiple perspectives on any topic or theme.

Because our group was small and we had several facilitators, we were able to be flexible and accommodate diverse approaches to the project. For example, several participants wanted experience conducting a

life-story interview and based their stories on interviews with a family member (see Chapter 3 for Life Story Interview techniques). Rasha Samour conducted an audio interview with her mother about leaving her home in Palestine. She then wrote a short voiceover to help frame the interview. Stephanie Gasana conducted an interview with her sister, and based on that interview she wrote her own story.

BEING SENSITIVE TO DIFFICULT STORIES

Throughout the course we discussed the challenges of sharing personal stories. We emphasized that all creative work involves taking risks. We also explained that sharing personal stories means revisiting past events and as a result may trigger difficult emotions. Stories emerge when an individual is ready, and we reinforced our belief that whatever story each participant was ready to tell was valuable.

Dealing with difficult stories was challenging for the participants, as well as for the facilitators. For example, when I first read Leontine's account of losing her family in the genocide, I was immediately struck by the intensity of the story. I noticed her calm demeanor while sharing, but was not sure if I should address how she felt about her experience or focus on providing feedback about the story's structure. I asked her how I could help, and she replied, "I need you to help me to correct the English," and so that is where we began.

Early on, Leontine did not know me well enough to ask for more, and as a creative facilitator, I could not assume to know what she needed.

The context of our media workshops was self-expression, not therapy, and I needed to follow her lead. As she came to know me better, we were able to discuss the context, content, and structure of her story.

It was important to be observant during sessions, and to check in during the week to inquire about participants' support networks outside of the

Providing opportunities for students to narrate some of the more difficult aspects of their lives may serve a number of important purposes. Storytelling is one way in which students can begin to understand and perhaps gain a degree of control over past experiences that may not have been fully intelligible at the time of their occurrence (Campano 2007, 52).

class. We also provided the group with a list of psychological services that had been developed by the Life Stories Project in case a participant needed professional support. There was always a possibility that a participant would drop out for emotional or for practical reasons as they were juggling jobs, studies, and other responsibilities.

As facilitators, we had to take into account the cultural, social, and political backgrounds of each participant. For example, as Leontine and I came to know each other, she took time to make sure I understood the nuances of what had taken place in Rwanda. It was important to her that I not only understood her personal story, but that I understood the story's context. That context was important for me as well as for anyone else reading her story.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFICULT STORIES:

- » *Warn participants before a workshop that creative projects using personal stories can bring up difficult emotions.*
- » *Offer participants resources they can turn to should they need additional support.*
- » *Explain to participants that as a facilitator it is your responsibility to seek additional support if you feel the individual is at risk in any way.*
- » *Be respectful of participants' privacy and be sure to offer a range of exercises and themes for them to explore.*
- » *Explain that they are not obliged to share a story if they are not ready.*
- » *If any individuals are in the midst of refugee application processes, have them consult with their lawyers before sharing their stories with a wider public.*

What was also important was helping participants to emphasize their resilience in the face of adversity. One way we addressed this with Leontine was to highlight places in her story where she had been a leader to others. For example, instead of finishing her story with the devastating loss of her family in Rwanda, Leontine continued her story describing her second family, made up of university students who were also orphaned by that genocide. In her new family, Leontine explained how she was the 'mother' of sixteen adopted 'children,' some of whom were even older than herself. With a slight change of emphasis, Leontine's story did not end on a tragic note, but rather with her powerful example of leadership in her role as an adoptive 'mother.'

PEER SUPPORT

It was especially rewarding to watch the support network that developed amongst the participants

themselves. Perhaps one of the biggest motivations for staying involved in the project were the friendships that developed and the support the participants gave each other. For many of the participants, this was the most valuable aspect of the project. Sharing personal stories together offered the opportunity to reflect upon a past event in the context of a supportive group. At the same time, sharing a story in a closed environment of a workshop and sharing a story on a bus tour or on the Internet implied different degrees of exposure.

PERSONAL STORIES, PUBLIC STORIES

Throughout the course, it was essential to create opportunities for participants to consider any potential privacy or security risks incurred by sharing their stories with the public. One way we addressed the

challenge of ensuring that participants felt comfortable in taking their stories public was to have ongoing discussions regarding the difference between *private stories* and *public stories*.

Early on we agreed that private stories originated from a *personal memory* or lived experience, and these could take shape through participants recording conversations with a family member, writing down memories or past dialogues, or recalling a pivotal moment in their lives. Some details regarding private stories would remain in their journals, while other details would be shaped to share with the larger public. With private stories, we emphasized that it was important to consider if any personal details might make a participant feel vulnerable later. It was especially important to be sensitive to any details that might compromise a participant's safety or asylum application.



Public stories, on the other hand, were focused on collective memories, public events, or places important to a larger community. One example of a public story was the Rwandan Commemorative Walk to the St. Lawrence River in Montreal's Old Port to remember the Tutsis who were murdered during the 1994 genocide. The event was organized by Page-Rwanda, a group formed by the parents, family, and friends of the

By introducing the notion of public and private stories, we wanted to provide participants with a range of ways they might share their experiences. It was important to reiterate that all of their stories mattered and that ultimately, they were in charge of what story they would tell and how much they would share.

KEEPING STORIES CONVERSATIONAL



One challenge we faced in developing the stories was how to ensure that they were also conversational and could be read aloud, given that the final product would be an audio recording. Listening to examples of audio projects and reading the stories aloud helped participants distinguish between the formality of a written story and the more conversational tone of an audio narrative. Writing scripts for the soundscapes was like writing for a radio show; if it didn't *sound* right, then it wasn't right. The bus passengers would only be able to hear the story once, so the sentences had to be concise and punchy. Anything that would be difficult for a passenger to understand easily had to be edited out. Participants were encouraged to write in the present tense, to use active verbs, and to directly address the audience. To ensure the stories were not too long, we also set a word limit of 800 words.



victims of the genocide now living in Montreal. Leontine and participant Stephanie Gasana, also from Rwanda, worked together on this public story. On the bus tour, they led passengers on a re-creation of the walk. It was one of the tour highlights.

ADDING SOUND AND PHOTOGRAPHS

After writing the stories, the next step in creating our memoryscape was to record the stories and add sounds. We invited a soundscape artist to discuss sound design with

the participants and share examples of sound projects around the same length as those that we were producing. Listening to projects sparked ideas and the visit helped move the stories forward. We provided digital sound recorders for participants who wanted to record sound effects and narrations on their own.

For those doing their own recordings, we reminded them to speak clearly and slowly, to be energetic, and to do their voice recordings in a quiet place. A good place for a sound recording is in a closet because the clothes 'warm' the space and prevent echoes. We asked participants to bring their recordings to class to review together. For those participants who did not have time to do their own recordings, we recorded the stories during class time. This was helpful for participants, because instead of worrying about the technology, they could focus on their delivery.

And, while the emphasis of the workshop was on creating audio stories for the bus tour, we also had participants illustrate their stories with photos, either by taking new photos or by sorting and scanning photos of family, friends, or artifacts. We led a photo workshop in composition and basic camera techniques and created space in the workshop for participants to sort through the photos they would use in their stories.

EDITING

Once the participants had gathered all of their elements together, student media facilitators used Audacity, an

open-source editing system, to edit the best 'take' of their narration and to add selected sound effects or music. Final Cut Pro, an editing software package, was then used to integrate the photographs, add titles and subtitles, and compress the stories for the website.

The editing process is usually the most time-consuming part of any media workshop, and we did not have time to teach this software to the participants. Instead, we had them work closely with the student media facilitators to ensure they were happy with the final result. While they did not learn hands-on editing, participants did have creative control over the final product. The illustrated digital stories were then uploaded onto our website. The stories were also featured in an accompanying exhibit that was on display at Concordia University during the same week as the bus tour.



[Online
Sound Resources](#)



[PowerPoint on
Composition](#)







PLANNING THE TOUR

The final step was to link the stories to locations around the city for our bus route. Place could serve as the inspiration for a story, or in other situations, place was determined once the story had already been written. For example, participant Marie-Francoise Ilunga Sitnam found inspiration by starting with a concrete location, the Kim Phat grocery store in the Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood, where she had found authentic ingredients to make her favorite Congolese dish. Conversely, Leontine's story of losing her family in Rwanda had no obvious Montreal marker. She decided on St. Joseph's Oratory as her place, because this is where she found solace when she first arrived in Montreal.

the tour. This allowed for the participants to see how all of the pieces fit together. For the dress rehearsal, we invited a Concordia University photographer and videographer to join us. We wanted to document the process, and we also needed promotional materials to use in media releases. We developed a press release, a radio spot, and a four-minute promotional video and made the rehearsal footage available to television stations interested in covering the tour. Working with the photographer and videographer helped our group gain confidence in presenting the *Going Places* project to an outside audience. It was helpful to be in front of a camera before meeting the media.



Organizing a public event is an essential part of a participatory project, regardless of the scale, because it offers a chance for individuals to experience the collective impact of their work.

Liz Miller

Once we had mapped out a rough sketch of the tour, we did a trial run by car and timed how long it would take to get to each location. This helped us determine what could happen in between the stops and their respective stories. For example, we decided that after each story, the tour guide would play a song from home. The music would provide a break from the intensity of the stories. The guides also prepared introductions for their stories and anecdotes to share along the route. Two weeks before the tour, we did a dress rehearsal on the same university shuttle bus that we would use for

We made the decision to run the tour twice. We hosted a reception after each tour at our exhibition space to celebrate and to offer passengers the opportunity to meet with the guides. The accompanying exhibition provided an opportunity to project the stories in a small gallery space for Congress members who would not be on the tour. It was also our contingency plan in case the bus tour attracted more people than we could accommodate. This did prove to be the case, and we were relieved that we had also organized alternative tour guides to walk people through the exhibit.

A COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

"The stories may be personal but the emotions they convey have social import, reflecting readings of the world that are embedded in collective history, and group experience." (Gerald 2007, 60)

To help participants face the challenge of taking stories public, it was helpful to discuss as a group how the stories might be used, and to refer back to each of their original motivations. The dress rehearsal was the first time we had a chance to understand the power of the stories as a collection, and it forged a new intimacy with the group. Our emphasis shifted from individual process to collective experience, and we explored our mutual goals for the tour.

Rania explained, "What was shared was the desire to create a deeper understanding of the refugee experience – of exile, of home, of finding home. We wanted to build compassion around a human experience that is many times marginalized, forgotten, judged, or avoided."

Our collaborative goal was to use these personal stories to get past limiting stereotypes about refugee experiences. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the tragedy of any one individual, we wanted to emphasize that while the lived experience of a refugee is unique, the refugee experience is broader and impacts families, classrooms, communities, and society. We kept these goals in mind when dealing with the media.

I want passengers to look past the individual stories and see how the experience of being a refugee affects the fabric of Montreal, our society, and our communities.

Marie-Francoise Ilunga Sitnam

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THE PRESS

Our tour captured the attention of the press and was featured in several newspapers, radio programs, and on television. The attention we received was, in part, due to the immersive and engaging approach of a bus tour. It was also a result of our connection to a *big event* (Congress) and the support offered by Concordia University, which dedicated media relations staff to the project.

Because the stories were produced in a supportive group context, we wanted to bring some of that approach into our dealings with the press. To prepare ourselves for the challenge, we started local and then

We made sure to rotate speakers and often worked in groups of two to three to present ourselves as a collective, which also served to avoid placing too much spotlight on any individual. When questions became too personal and participants did not want to answer directly, we encouraged our press representatives to prepare non-specific answers such as, “the refugee experience impacts all of us in different ways.”

For those participants who were hesitant, we reiterated that saying no to the press was also a form of empowerment. For example, one reporter was quite keen to interview a participant who had decided that she did not want to be interviewed on the radio. The reporter was persistent, but we held firm, and insisted that the journalist respect the participant’s decision.

For all of our best intentions to prepare for press interviews in advance, the real learning happened on the spot and the process grew easier over time. We made sure to check in with participants before and after any press interviews, which



The press exposure was overwhelming. I am shy and being the centre of attention was definitely a challenge. Looking back, what is important is being really prepared, even practicing responses, because the questions were very similar.

Stephanie Gasana

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TIPS ON DEALING WITH THE PRESS

- » *Identify reasons and goals for getting press attention, and make sure to keep the participants' best interests in mind.*
- » *Before agreeing to a press interview, research who you will be talking to. How have they covered the issue in the past?*
- » *Inquire about the length of the segment and prepare accordingly. Are they looking for a sound bite or something more in-depth?*
- » *Explore worst-case scenarios regarding press exposure in order to prepare participants and to assess if the press is beneficial to the individual.*
- » *Rehearse questions the press might ask.*
- » *Ensure that participants are accompanied by team members and a facilitator, whenever dealing with the press.*
- » *Respect an individual's decision to decline to be in the media spotlight.*
- » *Don't let the press attention distract you from your goals.*
- » *Write a strong press release and identify images, video, or audio that will attract attention across different media platforms.*

THE TOUR

One of the most satisfying aspects of the actual tours was the interplay of the pre-recorded audio stories in combination with the live presentations of the guides. Crammed into a bus, there was an unexpected intimacy between audience members.

As we traveled through the city, we journeyed through a range of emotions. People cried during Leontine's story and then clapped and laughed when Rania spontaneously invited her 70-year-old father to dance with her as a Palestinian song played over the loud speaker. We hoped that the bus itself was a vehicle for reflection for our passengers. When you ride a public bus, you never know who you will sit next to and what you might learn.

Another benefit to the live component of the tour was that we could connect the stories to the larger context of immigration rights and bring up legislation that was under debate at that time. By bringing to light legislative changes, we made personal what would otherwise be a dry or abstract shift in federal immigration policy. At the time, for example, Bill C-11 was under consideration, a bill that would change Canada's refugee determination process for individuals from certain countries. We reinforced the important message framed by the Canadian Council for Refugees and other concerned advocates that decisions need to be taken based on an individual's story, regardless of where they are from.



STAYING CONNECTED

After such a meaningful project, our challenge was how to stay connected as a group. Inspired by the stories produced for the bus tour, a member of the Life Stories team offered to play the stories on the radio and to run a follow-up workshop in radio production. We opened the invitation to participants from other Mapping Memories projects, and the workshop was an ideal way to stay connected. We have also made a point of checking in with participants when new opportunities to showcase the work come up. When I consulted with Leontine recently about an opportunity to share her story, she replied, “you don’t have to ask me permission to use my story because it is now a public story.” That one line meant a lot to me. She had taken a creative and personal risk to share her story and it could now travel on its own. We had created a safe space to accompany her in the challenge of *taking personal stories public*.

IT’S ALL CONNECTED

Important changes to the refugee determination system were introduced in Canadian Parliament and approved in Bill C-11 in June 2010. At the time of printing, many details regarding how this new law will be implemented still need to be finalized. What is clear is that Parliament-approved, short timelines will have a significant impact on refugees who are more vulnerable, such as survivors of torture, children, and people making refugee claims on the basis of sexual orientation. For many refugee claimants who do not trust authorities or who hesitate to tell their story openly, telling their story to Canadian authorities is extremely intimidating. These tight timelines are also too short for refugee claimants to gather supporting documents and to prepare themselves.

For more information, see:
www.ccrweb.ca/en/refugee-reform



LEONTINE UWABABYEYI, Rwanda



Leontine left her homeland of Rwanda as a refugee and arrived on her own to Montreal. She is always smiling and finds her home with many families of different origins. She is currently studying and has great hopes for the future.

MY TWO FAMILIES

I want to tell you a story, a true story, my story.

It's about how quickly your life can change in just three days, and then three months.

Day one – April 9, 1994

It is dark out when my story begins. My father tells us to put on our jackets because it is cold and rainy, and we must leave the house and go to sleep at our neighbours. I don't understand what is going on, but I am happy to go to sleep at my friends.

Day two – April 10, 1994

In the morning we return home. Nothing is left in the house. Windows and doors are broken. There are many people around talking to each other. I am eight years old, and for me it is exciting. Everyone is wondering what happened. My mother prepares something to eat. My brother and I are sitting outside. The rest of my family – my father, mother, sister and brother are inside. A lady comes running towards us. She seems crazy. She tells us that they are killing people. We start running. I follow my brother. We go into the woods. We stay there for hours. Then we move to another forest, and there we find our father. But he tells us to leave. It is not safe. When we return, we try to find him but we cannot find him. We stay there the whole night, awake.

Day three – April 11, 1994

In the morning we move again. We meet someone who tells us that our mother has been killed. I start crying. I tell my brother that I want my mother, and he tells me that if I continue crying they will kill us. So I stop.

“ *This is the first time I am sharing this story, and this story is for both of my families. In our family we say, it is better to live twice than to die twice.*

Leontine Uwababyeyi



A HOME FOR THREE MONTHS

My brother and I, we find a banana plantation where we hide in a bush for three months. This bush is our bed, our salon, our toilet; it is everything. For the first few days, a person brings us food twice a week but then he stops. I ask my brother why are we here. He tells me it is because we are Tutsi. I ask him, "Why are we Tutsi?"

Then I ask him, "Why can't we go home?"

"Our home is demolished," he answers.

"Why we can't go to our neighbours?" I ask.

Some times he has no answer. I have so many questions.

One day, the owner of the plantation comes and tells us that now the killers are hunting with dogs. That it is better to go away. Each night we try to leave. We start and then come back because we see lights, or we hear children crying. On the fourth day, we manage to leave. But on the way we meet a man with a bowl of blood and a knife in his hand. He sees us and screams out to the others, to the Interahamwe. They have knives. They chase us. I fall down, they chase my brother... and three weeks later he is also gone. Three days, three months, three weeks. So much has changed. I have found myself alone. I am the only survivor of my family.

A NEW FAMILY

But I am a survivor and today I am 22 years old. And I am no longer alone. I have a new family. I am the mother of this family, and I have 16 children – girls and boys. Some of my children are older than me. You may ask yourself, "how is this possible?" This family grew because of the genocide, because of our need for family. We were the survivors. This is my adopted family, the family who adopted me. My family is made up of orphans, of students at my school who are also trying to fight loneliness.

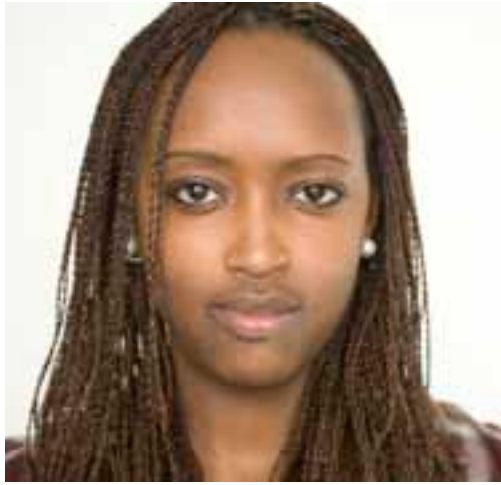
Together we make groups and choose a father and a mother. When you are chosen as a mother you can't refuse, even if you are shy. I was once shy, but over time I have learned how to be a mother, to take care of my children. I love my family because if you are in a family like this, you share a lot and you are not alone. We visit each other often and share the problems that we have.

When one of the family members is happy, we are all happy. If one is sad, we are all sad. You have a lot of things inside that you can't just share with anyone – but they understand, even without words. In our family we say, it is better to live twice than to die twice.

This is the first time I am sharing this story, and this story is for both of my families. In our family we say, it is better to live twice than to die twice.



STEPHANIE GASANA, Rwanda



Stephanie is familiar with the refugee experience through her family's flight from Rwanda. She is passionate about cultural studies and the effects of media on societies. She is inspired by the Life Stories Project and is a regular volunteer at the oral history centre, both conducting and editing videos. She hopes to learn the skills to use all types of media tools and integrate this knowledge to fight against discrimination, passing on her expertise to future generations.

MY SISTER SOLANGE

The president of Rwanda once suggested in one of his speeches that the Tutsis should put their memories and pains in a box, lock it and put it away, move on, look forward and focus on the future... is this the answer? Is there a way to connect the past to the present? Without your past, who are you? And does it matter if anyone knows?

My family has tried to protect me from their story, especially my sister Solange, who has always been my protector. We were born to the same mother and father, who are from Kibuye, the capital of the western province of Rwanda. But my life story is so different than my sister's. To begin with, we are 15 years apart.

One thing Solange and I have in common is that we both keep journals. I have asked myself, if you looked at journal pages from when we were both 15, would you know that we came from the same family? That we were sisters? If I had been born at the same time as my sister, how would my life have been different? Sisters, silences, secrets: I am on a quest to discover my family story.

If my sister and I were to write about home in a page of our journals, could you recognize us as sisters? We do share the same parents, dad is a dreamer who loves adventure and mom is more protective, looking for stability and home when and where she can find it.

I have grown up in one place, always lived on the same street in Ethiopia. I feel so attached to that particular place. It's where I have all of my memories, it's

my ground, my playground, where I feel grounded, where I yearn to be, and where I know I will ultimately end up.

She, on the other hand, never knew how long she would stay in one place, she has moved with my family to Congo, Burundi, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Lybia, Tunisia, France, and finally Canada, which is the place she has been the longest; it has become her home. She has many memories attached to many different places. There is not one country she would call home.

And if we were to write about what family means to us, could you recognize us as sisters?

I was born in 1990, a new era for Rwanda, full of hope and reconciliation. It was a new era for my parents as well. They had decided to have a fourth child. I am much younger than all my other sisters. I was born at the best and worst moment; my parents eventually decided to go their separate ways, and forget about the past, live their dreams, and do what they were never allowed to do. My father wanted to make up for lost time. My mom devoted her life to taking care of me. And so I grew up with a single mother, and the rest of my family spread all over the world.

Solange, my sister, on the other hand, was born at the beginning of my family's story, when my parents were first coming together. She was born into a big community, surrounded by all my family members, cousins, aunts. And then, everything ended tragically with the genocide, and we lost that extended family, and lost our family at the same time.

If we were to write about what identity means to us, could you recognize us as sisters?

I am originally from Rwanda, but I don't speak the language, never lived there, and was never really able to visit for more than a week, simply because we have don't have any family members left. And so, having grown up in Bole, Addis Ababa, I feel Ethiopian. I am happy when I speak the language, eat the food, listen to the music, and recognize Ethiopian people.

Solange, on the other hand, has trouble defining her identity, calling a country hers. She remembers being told that she had no identity, that our family was



stateless. "Don't tell anyone we are from Rwanda," my dad once said to her. And she says to me, "Telling a kid to keep something from someone is as if you showed her candy and told her not to touch it." And, "If you only knew how hard it was," my sister tells me.

Well I want to find out. Our past experiences define who we are, and it is time for me to find my definition through my family's definition.

I have so many questions for Solange: How do you build a home when you are moving all the time? Would you call yourself a refugee? Do you want to forget all about it, or will you ever share it with your children? Could your story make a difference? Some questions are left unanswered, and so I ask myself, how much do I want to know? How much should I know? How much will she allow me to know? I want to move past the secrets, understand the unspoken in all of the ups and the downs, financially, socially, and emotionally.

My sister knows the secrets, and I am trying to uncover them. She is my lead, my guide, and I will know just as much as she wants me to know.





MARIE-FRANCOISE ILUNGA SITMAN, Congo



Marie-Francoise Ilunga Sitman was born in Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo. She is passionate about food, politics, and African history. She has worked at the YWCA as a project coordinator for Girls Leading Change, which seeks to promote the involvement of women of diverse origins in decision-making bodies.

A TASTE OF HOME

When we arrive in a new place, we try to find our bearings. Familiar sounds, faces and foods that help us feel like we belong. Kim Phat is one such place. Stand on the corner of Boulevard Côte-des-Neiges and Goyer street, see the red-topped building with the big white writing... yes, opposite the Plaza... that's the one! Montreal's very own cosmopolitan supermarket, as I like to call it. Why, you wonder? Well, step inside and see for yourself.

French, Vietnamese, Lingala, Spanish, Cantonese, Pakistani, English, Wolof, Quechua... any one of these languages can be part of what you are hearing from the patrons and the merchants picking, browsing, shelving, weighing the variety of products in the store. The main thing that they have in common is that they are all so different from each other... and yet, they all find what they are looking for under the same roof. Many foreign students from the nearby university flock to Kim Phat to get their hands on the key ingredients to make the dish that will remind them of home, warm their heart, and feed their souls. Anything from cassava leaves to pickled duck eggs, mate and palm oil, red bean ice cream, fresh tilapia or fufu flowers, a gold mine for the homesick, the hungry, or the curious.

If you take a moment to look around you, you might notice the couple stocking up to feed a family of four and the student wondering if he (or she) can afford himself (or herself) a taste of home. If however, you come upon someone with a look of complete awe and amazement slowly making their way around the store, do not stare... that would be rude! Instead, understand that they are, for the first time in a long time, coming face to face with food that is triggering memories of childhood, of joy, of family... items that they never imagined to find in Montreal. Of course some, like you, are just amazed by the variety of food they see: plantains, dried fish, frozen banana leaves, cheese curds, etc.

Kim Phat is a meeting of different worlds under one roof, a reflection of the very diverse neighborhood that surrounds it, and I think even a metaphor for Montreal. One city with panoply of tastes, textures, packaging, and stories. Pretty tasty if you ask me...

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FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITS
BUS WHILE ANYONE IS
ARD OF THE WHITE LINE



TEN-WEEK MEMORYSCAPE COURSE

Tool box:

Pens, 11"x17" paper, digital still cameras (1 to 4 ratio), sound recorder, laptop, projector, screen, USB keys, card reader, editing software, mp3 player, amplifier (Roland Micro Cube)

Level of difficulty:

Advanced

Time:

10 weeks (4 hours a week)



PowerPoint on Composition

WRITE AND RECORD STORIES

- » Have participants draw a map of a place or places that make them feel at home, which might include a store, a community centre, or a community garden.
- » Show model texts from similar projects and listen to audio examples.
- » Discuss how the final projects will be shared (website, book, audio tour).
- » Use quick-writes to get participants writing in class.
- » Have students choose a topic and draft and revise their stories.
- » Have students read stories out loud to make them more conversational.
- » Cover the basics in sound recording (refer to recording sound worksheet).
- » Record stories and make sure the delivery is energetic and not rushed.
- » Have students record or choose sound effects that enhance stories.
- » If students are using music, make sure they record it themselves or use copy-left work, which means they can use it as long as they credit where it came from.
- » Cover the basics in photo composition and layout (refer to PowerPoint on Composition and taking photos worksheet).
- » Add images and sound effects to each story (Final Cut, Premiere, iMovie, etc.).
- » Be sure to hand out course evaluations to get feedback.

PLAN THE TOUR

- » Identify a key event or date to showcase the work.
- » Determine a bus or walking route based on the places identified in the stories.
- » Export sound as MP3 files to play off a digital player on the tour and find a means to amplify the stories.
- » Map out and time the route.
- » Identify songs to play during the route when participants are not talking.
- » Create promotional materials for the tour.
- » Do a dress rehearsal.
- » Plan time for dealing with the press and practice giving interviews.

RELATED ACTIVITIES

DRAW YOUR OWN MAP

- » Draw a map of your community. Mark at least two places that make you feel at home, such as a store, a community centre, a community garden, a café, or a place of worship. Is this place unique to you, or is it a location that involves a group or an annual event? Consider if the places you draw are places of gathering, places of shared or collective memory, places of healing, or places of conflict.

SHARE YOUR STORIES

- » Rebecca asked her grandmother to share a family recipe and filmed the process. Is there a family recipe that reminds you of home? Write about that dish. Is it a dish for special holidays or an everyday dish? Does someone in your family make the dish? Does it involve special ingredients, and if so, where can you find them? Do you remember the first time you tried it?
- » Is there a store like Kim Phat in the Côte-des-Neiges district of Montreal? Write about a place that reminds you of home. Who and what do you see when you are there? When do you go? What do you hear in the store?
- » Stephanie's story is about wanting to uncover a story. She knows the basics but she wants to understand the full story. Write about a story you would like to uncover – is it personal or public?

MAP YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Marie-Francoise talks about the diversity of the Côte-des-Neiges neighborhood. What is the neighborhood like where you live? Map the places that contribute to making your neighborhood a diverse and exciting place. These can include places for learning, for eating, for praying, for sharing cultural events, or simply places you enjoy that newcomers might not easily find on their own.

MAKE YOUR FAMILY TREE

Leontine talks about having two families, a biological family and a chosen family. Do you have a chosen family? Create an alternative family tree and include people who are not tied to you by blood, but who you consider family. Who would you include in this tree and why? How do you define family? In this family, do you have a different role than you would in your biological family?

CREATE YOUR OWN MEMORYSCAPE

Think about significant places from your past. They might include a classroom, a hospital, or a room in your house. Using all five senses, try to recall the details of that place – what you heard, what you observed, the mood. Use these stories to create a memoryscape by yourself or with a group.

- » What are the most telling details about this place?
- » Is this place distinct at different times of the day?
- » Who else has experienced this place?
- » Did a turning point or big event happen here? What did you learn? How were you different before or afterward?
- » Has this place changed over time?
- » Is there someone who has made a difference in your life that knows this place?
- » Is there music connected to the place, a song, other sounds?
- » Are there photos connected to the place, or can you take photos of it?



TIMELINE ACTIVITY

Timelines are excellent tools for organizing and visualizing historical events over time. They help situate events and individuals in relation to each other. A timeline can be used with a community group or in a classroom.

Tool box:

Pens, small coloured square cards, pins, cardboard panels.

OBJECTIVES

- » To create a visual record of chronological historical details.
- » To reflect on how trends, ideologies, or themes in history develop over time.
- » To promote critical thinking about the construction of history and how that history is not about one past but about multiple pasts.
- » To make history personal by exploring our own connections to historical events.
- » To encourage community building or intergenerational exchange by bringing together collective experiences of a historic event. In other words, to explore a group's collective memory.

MAKE A TIMELINE

- » Divide your participants into working groups and assign a place and a historical time period.
- » Determine the range of time you plan to cover on the timeline, and then divide this into units of measurement or periods. For example, in a community timeline created about the Rwandan genocide, they focused on the following:
 - 1950-1970 (emphasis on 1959, 1st wave of violence)
 - 1970-1990 (emphasis on 1973, 2nd wave of violence)
 - 1990-2010 (emphasis on 1994, the Genocide of Tutsis)
- » Ask participants to fill out a card/s with a memory or a significant event.
- » Have them include the year, month, and day in which the event took place.
- » Explain that they can include their names, initials, or remain anonymous.
- » Have participants pin their memory or event card/s in the appropriate time period.
- » Facilitate a group discussion. Explore new insights regarding the collective events of the timeline.

Exercise adapted from the Rwanda Life Stories working group.

A COMMUNITY TIMELINE

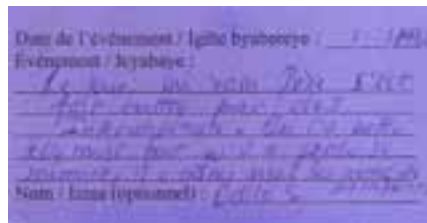
UNDERSTANDING THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE

The Rwandan Working Group of the Life Stories Project held a day of reflection and inter-generational dialogue in April 2010, bringing together over 100 people. They used a timeline exercise to reflect on the past, to broaden their understanding of what took place in Rwanda, and to integrate personal experiences into a historical record.



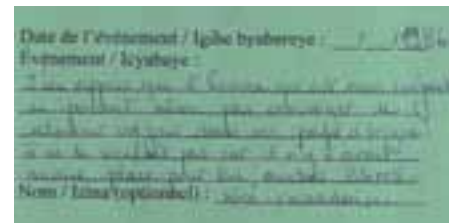
Date of event: 1983 through 1989

Event : Humiliation during all of secondary school, as our classmates from the northern region made sure they made our lives miserable.



Date of event : 1992

Event : It was the day my father was beaten up by the Interhamwe, he was beaten up so badly that he lost his memory, he could not remember our names, he could not remember his children names.



Date of event : 1986

Event : I learned that my husband could not even consider going back to his native country, as there was no place for him, there was no freedom whatsoever.

Written by a non-Rwandan.



I wrote about the first time I heard about the word genocide, which was during a history class; I was 10 years old, and my French teacher said to me that I came from a country where there had been one of the greatest genocides of the 20th century. I was not sure what it meant, but from the sound of his voice, I knew it wasn't good. It was a deep and unforgettable experience.

Stephanie Gasana, Rwanda Working Group, Life Stories

Rwanda is situated in the Great Lakes Region of Africa and is neighbored by Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Uganda. Originally inhabited by two indigenous groups, the Hutus and Tutsis, tensions between these two groups crystallized with the arrival of colonization; Rwanda became a German and then a Belgian colony. Anti-colonial and anti-Tutsi sentiment mounted, and in 1959 the majority Hutus overthrew the Tutsi king. The country gained independence in 1962, but tensions between the Tutsis and the Hutus continued to develop over the next 30 years.

The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front defeated the Hutu regime in 1991, but the country's prolonged conflict was not over. Tensions and chaos culminated in the 1994 genocide, where extremist Hutu militia killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis and moderate Hutus. There is much debate over the muted international response to the genocide. Rwanda held its first post-genocide presidential elections in 2003 and the Hutus are still a majority at 85% of the population, while the Tutsis make up 15%.



To me the timeline we created was like a history book with pages full of what our grand parents, our parents, our older brothers and sisters witnessed and lived through. I learned new ways to explain how the Rwandan Genocide began. Before attending the conference I would say that the Genocide began in 1994 but the timeline showed the events leading up to this.

”

Leontine Uwababyeyi, Rwandan Working Group, Life Stories

RECORDING AND USING SOUND TO TELL STORIES

WHAT KINDS OF SOUNDS ARE YOU USING?

- » **Voice:** narration, conversation, interview, etc.
- » **Music:** instruments, arrangements, vocals
- » **Sound effects:** ambient sounds
- » **Silence:** the absence of sound (room tone is the sound of a room)

HOW ARE YOU USING SOUNDS?

The meaning of a sound:

Ask yourself why you are using this sound and what thoughts or emotions it triggers. For example, someone crying or a violin playing are often used to communicate sadness or loss. The meaning of sounds varies depending on location and context. Honks may indicate traffic, frustration, and overcrowding in one context, and in another they may indicate a busy and thriving location.

Duration: How long will the sound last? Will it be sudden or continuous?

Repetition: Is the use of repetition stressful or soothing?

Intensity: Should the sound be far away and faint? Or close and loud?

WHAT ARE YOU RECORDING WITH?

Selecting a recording device: There are many good digital recorders, but make sure you check that your recording device has a microphone and headphone input.

Selecting a microphone: A *lavalier* (tie clip) is a good microphone to use for interviews because it is close to the person speaking and helps isolate his or her voice from other sounds. A directional microphone is also useful for interviews, while an omni microphone records environmental sounds well.

Microphone handling: If you are using a directional microphone, hold it carefully and use your headphones to listen for your own handling sounds. If you attach a lavalier microphone to your subject, make sure they don't hit the microphone by mistake with animated hand gestures. It is a good idea to get some practice recording and listening to your recordings to find out how much handling sound you make. Some unwanted noises can be edited out later, but the fewer you start with, the better.

Wearing headphones: You always need to wear headphones when recording sound to monitor what you are recording. With headphones, you will know if your battery runs out or if the microphone is not working properly.

Unwanted Noises: One of the best places to record narration is in a sound studio or closet. These locations are insulated from outside sounds. If you are in a noisy environment, try moving away from the noise source and placing the microphone as close as possible to your subject. It is hard to record when there are heavy winds, so the best option is to go inside or find a way to cover the microphone.

Levels: Make sure you are recording at consistent audio levels. If the sound levels are either too high or too low it can sound distorted.

FIND YOUR KEY CHAIN EXERCISE:

Collect the keychains of everyone in the group. Have participants close their eyes. Shake each key set and ask participants to raise their hand if they identify their key set. Discuss the relationship between sound and memory.

LISTENING EXERCISES:

Write down all the sounds you hear in the room. As a group discuss what you heard. Next to each sound, be sure to note:

- » The actual sounds – honking, chirping, coughing, sniffing, shuffling papers
- » The sources of sounds – radio, television, street
- » The qualities of sounds – muffled, loud, sudden, continuous

SOUND EDITING TIPS:

- » Use music sparingly since it can be distracting
- » Make sure the levels are mixed so that the volumes of the voice, sound effects and music permit you to hear everything clearly. Use audio fades for smooth transitions.

SOFTWARE TO EDIT SOUNDS

Audacity: www.audacity.sourceforge.net

RECORDING EXERCISE

- » Select a theme for a recording exercise, such as 'my favourite singer' or 'my first pet.'
- » Write a short narration of at least five lines, and record this narration in three different locations, such as a closet, a kitchen, a back porch, or a coffee shop.
- » Make sure to keep the microphone at the same distance while recording.
- » Now listen to the recordings in a different environment like a bedroom or office. Compare the three recordings.
- » Take notes of any sound effects or music you might want to include if you were to add to the narration.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND SOUND EFFECTS OR MUSIC:

Music Sites

www.publicdomain2ten.com
www.musopen.com

Sound effects

www.freesound.org
www.ccmixter.org
www.partnersinrhyme.com
www.audiomicro.com/free-sound-effects
www.soundjay.com

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- » Where will these personal stories be shared? In a closed setting like a workshop, or will you publish them online for a wider audience?
- » What are the benefits and risks of sharing personal experiences with a larger audience?
- » Are there any privacy or security risks to consider?
- » Who is the target audience? How will you work to make the stories relevant for different audiences – policy makers, educators, community members, or academics?
- » How will you support the group to stay connected to each other?
- » Do you plan to reach out to the press, and if so, why?

FILM RESOURCES

Shake Hands with the Devil (2007)

Sometimes in April (2005)

Hotel Rwanda (2004)

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