

The Story of StoryTree

My name is Daniel Wilson, and I'm one of the faces behind the creation of the StoryTree App, and I'd like to briefly share two influences related to its origins...

As mentioned in other places on this site, our family chat app and message board "WhatsApp" greatly influenced the creation of StoryTree. After getting so many great pictures and stories from family members day after day, year after year on that app, it started to feel like a terrible waste that those shared memories seemed mostly "here today and gone tomorrow" as they say. I wished there was some way to save all those cool photos and stories into a memory book of sorts—and that helped inspire the idea behind our app and website StoryTree.com.

A second strong influence was from a family reunion my family had a few years ago at a camp in rural Alabama. At that reunion one night the adults played a game after the kids went to bed. Sitting in a circle, each person took a turn telling a story or fact that no one or few people knew about them. It made me think of all the experiences in my life that I had not shared or recorded. There were so experiences that even my own family knew little to nothing about, and so many I was sure they had never shared as well. I thought about how of all my ancestors my mother's father was the only one I knew much about, only because he had written a simple informal personal history before he passed on. And as I pondered this, I wished we had all done a better job of recording and sharing our life stories.

Anyway, as this "get to know you better" game was played, I also thought about one particular story in my own life that I thought was strange I had never shared, because it was so powerful to me when it happened.

When I was in high school, my friends and I really into old hot rod cars. I saved all my money working nights as a restaurant dishwasher and weekends at an auto repair shop and gas station. I was saving to buy my first "from scratch" hot rod project car (I had earlier lesser projects). Anyway, I ended up buying just the shell of an old 1955 Chevy Bel-air with no engine, transmission, interior, etc.

In all my free time and summers, I worked hard to build that car out of spare parts and components found in the classified ads, and to earn the money to do so. I put in a used high-performance motor, and transmission. I cut out lots of rusted metal and with another man's help welded in new floorboards and quarter panels. I installed bucket seats and customized the interior. I worked for over a year to get the car to pass the state safety inspection, while at the same time prepared the body for a custom paint job. I finally got it ready and licensed to drive. My first dream hot rod was almost complete. I just lacked the paint job.

Then late one weekend night, I was fast asleep in the basement when my father came down to wake me up. "Danny, Danny," he said urgently, "wake up, there's been an accident with your car!" My glorious '55 Chevy was safely parked in front of the house so I couldn't fathom what he was talking about. Being half-asleep I thought it must be some misunderstanding, or just a nightmare.

I threw on some clothes and stumbled out onto the front yard and there in the streetlight could see my dream car all smashed up and straddling the curb, with pieces strewn all over. A drunk driver had lost control of his car and plowed straight into my car at a high speed and destroyed it. I can't even recall if they ever caught the guy -such was my shock from the whole episode that night.

Fortunately, the story had a happy ending. The insurance company soon paid me twice the amount of money I had invested in my car to that point. I took that money and bought an even more beautiful 1957 2-door Chevy Bel-air hot rod someone else with more experience had built, in much better condition, with a much nicer interior and expensive chrome rims. In addition, I ended up taking the powerful motor out of my smashed-up '55 and putting it in the '57 Chevy. I also painted the car according to my original plan, Candy-Apple red with a white accent, and beautiful, barely visible flames climbing the hood. And I came to love that car just as much, maybe even more! The grey and red cars in the pictures below are similar to what the two cars in my story looked like.

The point is—this was a story from my life worth sharing and recording -at least in my opinion. And there were so many more—mine and everyone's—that too often were not generally known by those we love, and we in turn did not know enough of their life stories, for whatever reason. They just needed some way of getting out of our heads and phones and into a lasting record. That's a big part of how and why StoryTree's Automated Memory Interview (A.M.I.) came about.

