

Stories

31 May, 2020

I'm reading Dave Isay's *Listening Is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project*, which as the title suggests is a collection of Story Corps transcriptions. For those of you who aren't into public radio, StoryCorps is a project in which folks are recorded telling stories from their own lives and times. Some are interviewed by a facilitator, some by a friend or family member and some just start talking.

The thousands of folks whose histories are recorded form an archive not unlike the folk music archives kept by the Library of Congress but with a difference. While the collected songs of the American Folklife Center come from sources that have been shared and remembered through generations, StoryCorps captures stories that in many cases have never been shared with or by anyone other than the folks who lived them.

Many of these transcriptions end with a daughter or son or longtime friend expressing some version of 'I never knew that about you' and others end with 'I never knew you knew that about me.' Reading them, I feel I know each of the people and that I share a common... something... with them. So many of them have lived – are living – lives so different from mine and yet, so familiar. Our struggles are diverse but struggle is struggle.

I'd encourage anyone to read this book. You can also go on the StoryCorps website to read a plethora of transcripts. The book, being by nature a carefully juried sampling, covers the widest possible range of human experience and emotion, mostly recorded in the 2005-2007 range. The website seems to be more current in its focus so just now, you'll see lots of COVID stories among the wider selection of 'my story' recordings.

This is oral history of both a personal and a universal nature. In framing one of the chapters of the book, Isay says, "History is often told from a top-down perspective – focused on the experiences of politicians and the privileged. StoryCorps will instead create a bottom-up history of our country through the stories and voices of everyday Americans."

No matter the topic, every story I read here has something to say to me and the profundity lies in their commonality. And also in the fact that in sharing their most personal stories these folks are sharing truths that apply to each and all of us.